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Postmodernism in Hungary

The example of Péter Esterházy - against the background of analysing John Barth's later fiction

Like many of my Hungarian colleagues, I ventured into the territory of Hungarian literature only when I felt comfortable in discussing foreign, in my case mostly English and American literary works. Since the study of literature in Hungary has traditionally been political in its orientation, it seemed to many of us that a more disinterested, more detached, and more aesthetically oriented, if not objective, approach to literature is more likely to be developed in a neutral territory, and then it can be applied to our own literature. This paper, therefore, is comparative primarily in the sense that a Hungarian critic educated in Hungary in the Anglo-American tradition will discuss a Hungarian work.

The work in question is *The Book of Hrabal* by Péter Esterházy, arguably the leading postmodernist author in contemporary Hungarian literature. Since most of my recent work, however, has focused on the American John Barth and the special brand of postmodernism present in his works of the past two decades, I approach Esterházy with the assumptions and tools developed while analysing works by Barth. The second level of comparativeness is, therefore, the transplantation of literary trends and analytical frameworks from an English speaking, mostly American, context to a Hungarian one.

A complementary level of comparativeness will be added by the fact that I will discuss Esterházy's work in its translation into English, and while my original analysis of the work was done in Hungarian, certain features change their significance in translation.

POSTMODERNISM IN HUNGARY

Postmodernism as a literary and cultural phenomenon has been discussed in Hungary for the last 10-15 years in various periodicals, some of which also produced thematic issues or introduced series of argumentative articles.¹ There have also been debates as to the validity of the term "postmodernism" in Hungary, or, if it is to be accepted, whether Esterházy's works can be categorised as postmodernist.

Some critics claim that postmodernism as a general cultural trend has its specifically Hungarian variety. This is called, tongue somewhat desperately in cheek, "posztmagyar"² by Ferenc Odorics,³ while features in Hungarian literature similar to those of postmodern literature in Britain or the United States are described as "neo-avant-garde"⁴ by Sándor Mészáros and István Szerdahelyi. Szerdahelyi, for example, claims that postmodernism is a term for American architecture in the 1960s and has no relevance for contemporary Hungarian prose fiction.⁵ This position indeed has historical foundations, since the phase of Hungarian literature contemporary to High Modernism in Britain was called "avant-garde" in Hungary, and it is mainly the hindsight of colleagues well versed in European Modernism that directs the process of relabelling the works of poets and artists, such as Lajos Kassák, as Modernist.

Other, mainly non-Anglo-American critics also discuss postmodernism in its relation to the avant-garde.⁶ Achille Bonito Oliva, for example, uses the term "trans-avant-garde" rather than postmodernism,⁷ yet his article is included in Thomas Docherty's representative volume *Postmodernism: A Reader*, proving the vanity of attempts to narrow down the scope of this term, even if a unified terminology is more a result of cultural colonialism than that of a genuine similarity of contemporary phenomena "home-grown" in different countries and continents.⁸

1 For a representative list, see Eszter Babarczy's bibliography in *BUKSZ*, 1994, summer issue.

2 "Magyar" is the Hungarian word for "Hungarian".

3 Odorics 5-7.

4 Mészáros 124-150.

5 Mészáros 139.

6 See Huyssen, Bürger, Lyotard and Oliva.

7 Oliva 257-262.

8 Cf. Friedrich 58-59.

POSTMODERNISM - A COMPARISON OF ESTERHÁZY AND BARTH

Accepting the term postmodernism for approximately equivalent phenomena in Hungarian literature, whether lately borrowed or developed from earlier forms, I will now concentrate on specific features that seem to qualify Esterházy's work as postmodern. The features in question will be selected with special attention to Barth's later fiction, since both authors seem to foreground techniques and notions that seem to lie at the core of various definitions of postmodern fiction, that is, the multiplication of possible worlds within any individual work of fiction and the undermining of the difference between the biographical author and the fictionalised image of the authorial self.

Definitions of postmodernism that draw attention to the principles underlying these features include "the Many asserting their primacy over the One" and "the capacity of the mind to generalise itself in the world ... to become ... its own environment" - as stated by Ihab Hassan, perhaps the most devoted and faithful theoretician of postmodernism, who also suggests that indeterminacy and immanence are the two main characteristics of the postmodern world.⁹ According to Geoffrey H. Hartman and Hassan, postmodernism is an all-embracing category not only exceeding literature but also one that transcends the distinction between life and art, to which Douwe Fokkema adds in his "Preliminary Remarks" to *Approaching Postmodernism* several other traditional distinctions, such as those between highbrow and popular literature, fiction and non-fiction, literature and philosophy, and literature and other forms of art.¹⁰

Alan Wilde, on the other hand, finds the postmodernist core in "a radical epistemological and ontological doubt",¹¹ an approach that is phrased somewhat differently by Brian McHale, one of the most important theoreticians of postmodernism,¹² who emphasises the dominance of ontological questions in postmodernism as opposed to the dominance of epistemological questions in Modernism. According to McHale, there is a shift of emphasis from problems of knowing to problems of modes of being, and the description of the universe is

9 Bertens 27-29, quoting Hassan, esp. (1983) 29.

10 Fokkema 1-2. Fokkema here refers to Hartman's article in Hassan and Hassan, 87-91, and to Hassan (1975) 58.

11 Quoted by Bertens, 35-36.

12 McHale (1986) 72-74 and (1987) 3-11.

replaced by that of a particular universe, implying a possible plurality of universes, leading to the question of "Which is the real world?"¹³

These questions and doubts seem to be painfully present in the oeuvres of both Esterházy and Barth, especially in terms of writing, or rather, in the interaction within their books of their own writing and various forms of other fiction, and in the tension arising between fiction created by, and life lived by (or is it the other way round?) the authors.

Writing is presented as the core of identity and the source of immortality in both authors' works, although they are concerned with other issues as well. For Barth, these other issues include toxic waste and the CIA as well as the interrelation between discourse and sexual intercourse, or the various forms of sexuality. Esterházy is interested in the dichotomy of the old, pre-World-War II Hungary and the Hungary of the communist period, himself being a representative of what György Gömöri called a "politically macho" Hungarian postmodernism in his lecture in June 1989 in Oxford, just before this particularly Central European version had become extinct.

The epithet "politically macho" is applicable to Hungarian or Central European postmodernism inasmuch as this variety seemed to have more of a direction or force to it, having concerned itself with political evil perceived as something that could change for the better, unlike Barth's Tragic View of the CIA, for example, which accepted the fact of being American as imperfect but something that would not and could not be changed for the better.

That there was a general hope of Central and Eastern Europe bringing about some positive change, some new energies, perhaps some more acceptable models for social development, seems apparent from such references as the choice of Prague for Bruce Chatwin's *Utz*, a book published in 1988, or the choice of Prague for many American expatriates in recent years. This hope is considered somewhat ironically in the choice of Hrabal, the Czech author, by Esterházy in *The Book of Hrabal* in 1990. The ontological doubt of identifying the real world is set up in this book between the perceived realities of our Post-Communist Central or Eastern Europe and the alternative ways of past and future "market-economies" played out against a largely unspecified backdrop of the Western World. One reason why the title of this work is *The Book of Hrabal* may be that, whereas the mode of writing employed may be influenced by the West, the avowed affiliation in terms of the

13 Cf. McHale (1986) 60.

common doubts concerning the reality value of what is being described is to the fellow Central European writer, the Czech Bohumil Hrabal.

THE AUTHOR'S SELF - WRITING

It still has to be explained, however, why Esterházy's book is named after another writer. We know now why a Czech, perhaps, but why a writer? The thematic answer is, that one of the central characters of the book, called "the writer", "was supposed to write about Hrabal",¹⁴ and this is his work-in-no-progress-at-all throughout the book; while the other central character, Anna, "the writer"'s wife, is writing a mental love letter to Hrabal, which is the body of the second chapter, "The Chapter of Infidelity". Hrabal himself also appears briefly in the third chapter, called "Chapter Three", in conversation (partly in Czech) with The Lord, and there are other, more conventional references to writers in the form of quotations and epigraphs.

On a deeper level, however, the choice of the name of another writer in the title is even more significant. One of the most obvious common features of Barth's and Esterházy's writing is the introduction of one or more characters who strongly resemble the authorial self - and who are introduced as writers or storytellers themselves. These characters reappear in several novels in various forms. In Barth's *Chimera* (1972) we have the Genie; in *Sabbatical: A Romance* (1982) there is Fenwick; in *The Tidewater Tales: A Novel* there is Peter Sagamore, as well as Fenwick again; in *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991) we meet Somebody's early, earthly, 20th-century incarnation, Simon W. Behler; and when one might feel that the possibilities of autobiographical fiction have been exhausted, in *Once Upon a Time: A Floating Opera* (1994) Barth introduces the authorial self in the first person singular, as well as his counterself Jay W. Scribner, in the form of a fictional autobiography.

Esterházy likewise introduces variations on himself. As a predecessor of "the writer" in *The Book of Hrabal*, we have The Master ("a Mester") in his perhaps most famous postmodern work of fiction, *Termelési-regény (kissregény)* (1979), that is, "A novel of production (lovella)" in an approximate English translation, where production is an ironic reference to a genre in the socialist realist tradition, as well as a playful allusion to the postmodern preference of process to product. In this

14 Esterházy (1993) 11.

work, we are already introduced to the family of the Master, a family that strongly resembles the autobiographical family of Esterházy, complete with aristocratic lineage, a soccer playing brother, as well as several children. Moreover, during the process of political changes, between 1988 and 1990, Esterházy had a regular column in the periodical *Hitel* where he offered his views in a less fictionalised form, in a non-fiction variation of his own recognisable voice.¹⁵ But before discussing his voice, let us concentrate on some other features of *The Book of Hrabal*, namely, the conflict, language, and the figure of Anna.

ESTERHÁZY'S POSTMODERNISM IN THE BOOK OF HRABAL

The main conflict in *The Book of Hrabal* is that of abortion, although not in the general sense: it is the fate of a specific pregnancy of Anna's, wife of "the writer", which is to be decided. Moreover, this is her fourth pregnancy, the other three having duly resulted in children.

The conflict is approached from the outside. Two angels (in the original specified as guardian angels) disguised in a Lada with a state license plates are watching a house. They are sent by the Good Lord, and they are called Blaise (Balázska) and Cho-Cho: "In the house, which the strangers have been staking out for the past two hours, there lived a family (this was a family house!), a married couple with three children, the woman's name was Anna, and the man was a writer."¹⁶

As it turns out, Anna does not want this fourth child, hence the necessity of the angels whose job it is to prevent the abortion. Interestingly, however, while the Good Lord takes the trouble to involve himself in the decision, Anna and "the writer" never quite discuss the problem themselves. "The writer" is trying to write about Hrabal, and Anna is mentally writing to Hrabal too, both attempting to escape the problem by displacing it onto a level of abstraction where it can never be solved.

The Good Lord seems to enter the story in the manner Barth juxtaposes the worlds of Greek mythology or the world of the *Arabian Nights* and late 20th-century United States campus culture. In *The Book of Hrabal* this is a way of contrasting the alternative worlds of Roman Catholicism and State Socialism, yet another way to introduce a multiplicity of mythical worlds, from that of the creative writer to that of the creative Lord.

15 Published as a book: Esterházy 1991.

16 Esterházy (1993) 5.

The emphasis on the characters of the authorial-looking writers and storytellers also results in a strong focus on language and communication. Language as the art of the surface has a special role in postmodern writing, as the interplay of referents as well as the medium of an almost baroque predilection for splendour and proliferation, while there is also an underlying mistrust of communication to be balanced. The pleasure of verbal texture is combined with a Tragic View of Communication, as represented by the empty bottles and other aborted missives in Barth's works.

The most telling signs of a concern with communication in *The Book of Hrabal* are the lack of communication between the couple as to the solution of the conflict, and their devotion instead to writing about, and to, Hrabal, as well as the comparatively easy communication with God.

The first sentence of the first chapter, "The Chapter of Fidelity", already centres our attention on language: "The two angels spoke to each other in the language of (what else?) angels."¹⁷

The angels, however, do not speak the language of the Good Lord, as we are told,¹⁸ therefore the Lord has to address them in their own language, which sounds rather colloquial with a rich vein of slang: "Look here, Cho-Cho, you'd better go and check out what in God's name, if you'll pardon the expression, they're up to down there... Straight to the point, minimum of fuss, but plenty of circumspection, you know how it is... free will and tact and all that jazz."¹⁹

The first chapter is preceded by an epigraph in Latin and in Hungarian (in this translation in English) "from a medieval devotion in Milán Füst, *The Story of My Wife*". Beside foregrounding language, this epigraph also draws attention to the special position of the character of the wife in the book. This position is so special that the Hungarian film based on *The Book of Hrabal* was called *The Film of Anna*.²⁰

While the writer is identified variously with the Good Lord, with Hrabal, or with an old woman, Anna seems to be the same. Discussing her character in the book would offer a feminist reading, but now let us stay with the way Anna is seen in the book.

17 Esterházy (1993) 1.

18 Cf. Esterházy (1993) 2.

19 Esterházy (1993) 1.

20 *Anna filmje* 1993.

The author presents her by name, unlike the presentation of her husband by profession. Her name, Anna, is that of the mother of the Virgin Mary (in the gospel according to Jacob), with a strong acoustic reference in Hungarian to the word “mother” (anya). If she is not referred to by name, she is called “the woman”²¹ (az asszony), more likely to be simply translated into “she” in English. Other characters also perceive her mainly as a woman excellently prepared for procreation, rather than a person or personality. Cho-Cho, for example, exclaims as he looks at her: “Just look at that ass!”²² (“De jó segge van” - in strict translation: What a great ass she has!) The angel Cho-Cho’s comment, however, is fairly disinterested, since he is personally more inclined toward angel Blaise, while Blaise is genuinely enthusiastic about Anna in a rather un-angelically sexual way: “Oh that woman, that Anna, she’s an angel.”²³

Anna also presents herself in several ways, such as a kitchen-sink angel (dézsatündér, in strict translation “a kitchen-sink fairy”, rather than angel):

I happened to hear them from the kitchen. If the European tradition, whose custodians are the men, is in trouble, and even before the dessert comes they conclude that value is something that has to be *created*, something new, then the situation of a kitchen-sink angel like myself is congenial, after all. I hum a song and think of God, about how things are.²⁴

a twentieth-century Virgin Mary:

The car’s wheel were already in drive, too, when by way of an answer, the older of the two brothers cockily said it’s no use worrying about questions of life and death, [in strict translation “there is nothing to be considered about questions of life and death”²⁵] while I just grinned, a twentieth-century Virgin Mary, (coloured lithograph). The question that my brother-in-law had posed in his unsparing and rather blatant manner was: what are

21 Esterházy (1993) 6.

22 Esterházy (1993) 5.

23 Esterházy (1993) 79.

24 Esterházy (1993) 83. “A konyhából hallgattam őket. Ha az európai gondolkodás, melynek a férfiak a letéteményesei, bajban van, és még a nahspejze el tt úgy véli, az érték az valami olyasmi, amit teremteni kell, valami új, akkor egy *dézsatündér* helyzete mégiscsak kedvező. Énekelgetek és az Istenre gondolok, hogy hogy is van ez.” (Esterházy (1990) 97).

25 “[A]mikor a bátyja válaszul hetykén azt fejtegette, hogy életlen-halálon nincs mit gondolkodnia” (Esterházy (1990) 109).

we planning to do, should I, to put it bluntly, in spite of everything, get knocked up again.
Now I am really scared, possibly for the first time in my life.²⁶

a wife:

“I am a wife, emphasis on all four words.”²⁷

the Great Substitute:

I see, I can see that I am needed here. Except that sometimes I think it's *somebody* that's needed, and not me, an anonymous jack-of-all-trades, lover, wife, a family, a secretary, a mother, a mother-surrogate ... I am the Great Substitute, a great honour, no doubt, everything that is not, is what I am. But I am.
The decision was mine to make. I am free and I am tethered, that is my state of being.²⁸

We also learn Anna's opinion about her current pregnancy:

Pussy-blues, that's what it is. I don't want any more children. As far as wanting goes, I did not want anything up till now either; my children, too, I did not *want*, after all, there was never any question of me *not* wanting them, while *sober* reflection will never result in children; bringing children

26 Esterházy (1993) 94. “Ugyanúgy pörgött már a kocsi kereke, amikor a bátyja válaszul hetykén azt fejtegette, hogy életem-halálom nincs mit gondolkodnia, én pedig vigyorogtam, mint egy XX. századi Szűzanya (színes litográfia). A kérdés, melyet a sógorem a maga kiméletlen, valamelyest ordenáré és valamelyest őszinte módján fölített, az az volt, hogy mit csinálnánk, ha én, úgymond, bekapom mégis és újra a nokedlit.

Most félek, életemben talán először.” (Esterházy (1990) 109).

27 Esterházy (1993) 129. “Én feleség vagyok, hangsúly mindhárom szón.” (Esterházy (1990) 147).

28 Esterházy (1993) 132-133. “Azt látom, belátom, hogy szükség van itt rám. Csak néha azt hiszem, valakire van szükség és nem rám, egy névtelen ezermesterre, aki szerető, család, titkárnő, anya, anya helyett anya... Én vagyok a Nagy Pótlék, igen megtisztelő, minden, ami nincs, az vagyok én. De én vagyok.

Én választottam. Szabad vagyok és kötött, ez az állapotom.” (Esterházy (1990) 151-152).

into the world in this place is, to say the least, not logical.
I don't want to. I don't want to. I don't want to.²⁹

To sum it up: Anna does not want this child; is writing love letters to Hrabal; is praying to God; and does not discuss anything with her husband whom she loves. In terms of the decision to be made, she is on her own against a host of opponents: the Good Lord, the angels, possibly “the writer”, although he does not explain his views yet, and all the external determinants the author used in creating her character, including autobiographical references such as the house and four children of Esterházy himself.

Why is this overpowering force to be listed against Anna? And why is she not given a chance to participate in the decision?

What is there, in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that reduces social anguish and gratifies a male being; what is there that also satisfies a woman so that a commonality of the sexes is set up, beyond and in spite of their glaring incompatibility and permanent warfare? [On the other hand, what is there in the notion of the Maternal that somehow still disregards what the woman says, or wants, to the point where today, when women are beginning to have a voice, this is exactly where their discontent is directed towards,] Beyond social and political demands, [taking] the well-known ‘discontents’ of our civilization to a level where Freud would not follow - the discontent of the species[?].³⁰

Considering Julia Kristeva's similar question in “Stabat Mater” concerning the values attached to the mother figure in Western culture is revealing, although the answer to the specific question raised by *The Book of Hrabal* may be found in the more direct context of the work itself. As one element of that context, the iconography of the figure of the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition might be helpful, as it reveals that the pregnant Mary is to give birth not only to a baby but to *logos*, the divine word incarnate.³¹ In the country depicted in *The Book of Hrabal*,

29 Esterházy (1993) 99. “Pinabú, ez most az. Nem akarok több gyereket. Akarni eddig sem akartam semmit, nem akartam én a gyerekeimet, hiszen föl sem vetődött hogy *ne* akarthattam volna őket... Fontolásból pedig valóban nem lesz gyerek, *ide* gyereket szülni, az, finoman szólva, nem logikus. Nem akarom, nem akarom, nem akarom.” (Esterházy (1990) 114, is worth reading on.)

30 A somewhat edited English translation of Kristeva by Roudiez (163) complemented by my translation from the Hungarian translation (492-3) of the French version.

31 Cf. Hübner.

in 1988, at the time specified there as the setting of the story,³² a new order was also to be born, against all odds. 1988 was a year before the political changes of 1989, and the book was published in 1990, a year after. Although by today the trinity of God, country and family has been degraded to an empty election slogan, the urge for a new chance to be brought to life was explicable by the context, even if the work's imagery is in questionable taste or politics.

CREATION OR PROCREATION?

The conflict of abortion typically represents conflicts that cannot be solved, only arbitrarily decided upon: it is a matter of life and death about which "there is nothing to be considered" by mere mortals. As such, this conflict presents a wealth of possibilities for writers. Barth avoids solving the conflict in his twin-novels *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* by aborting twin pregnancies in the former and finishing the book with twin births in the latter case. The conflict in *The Book of Hrabal* is not solved, either; although abortion will not happen, neither will a happy ending. The words are bitter,³³ Anna is unhappy, and the only consolation "the writer" can find is to offer to give birth to this baby himself.³⁴ The Good Lord is not any more helpful; he decides to learn to play the saxophone,³⁵ since he knows Anna likes blues - but "he had no ear for music,"³⁶ and he was doomed to failure in cheering her up, "because only humans can reduce the suffering of humans,"³⁷ and in this respect the Lord is helpless.

So are, it seems, our authors. The Tragic View of Postmodernism combines a clear perception of there being no final solutions for humankind's fundamental problems with an optimism that life goes on offering pleasures nevertheless. Postmodernist authors seem to celebrate the survival tactics of the individual facing a System. They do not offer solutions - they offer pleasures of the text while they write about writing in their metafiction³⁸ and narcissistic narratives,³⁹ finding the final source and end of writing in themselves and in the process of creation.

32 Esterházy (1993) 18.

33 Esterházy (1993) 122-125.

34 Esterházy (1993) 126.

35 Esterházy (1993) 153.

36 Esterházy (1993) 166.

37 Esterházy (1993) 141.

38 Cf. Scholes.

39 Cf. Hutcheon.

THE MASTER'S VOICE

Is it then the author's voice we find overpowering his works of fiction, as well as non-fiction? Postmodernism does not force writers or readers to choose between worlds, autobiographical or other - the multiplicity of possible worlds and world views is one of the fundamental assumptions, as we saw earlier. Yet many of the works discussed, especially *The Book of Hrabal*, show certain evaluative tendencies, strong preferences represented simultaneously by many layers of the book; the multiplicity of world views seems to be limited by the strong authorial presence. Even while we are supposedly reading the words of Anna written to Hrabal, for example, stylistically the text shows a remarkable unity with the different narrative strategies of the other chapters, and this stylistic unity, the constant authorial voice does pose serious limits on the apparent multiplicity of the text.

The notion of ontological doubt and questions concerning the recognition of the "real world" surface in these works in terms of the author's life and his fiction, as well as between the worlds of myth and fiction or religion and contemporary reality. This emphasis on the author, by way of pondering his life and his fiction, as well as the creative process bridging the two, is actually very far removed from the Barthesian notion of the death of the author.⁴⁰ Instead, this type of late postmodern writing very much centres around the author, celebrating the self writing - which emphasis on the existence and importance of the author suggests adding another code to the Barthesian model: that of an authorial code.

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40 Cf. Barthes.

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Terézia Szűcs

The Tree of Orpheus

Rilke - Keyes - Nemes Nagy

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!
O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!
Und alles schwieg. Doch selbst in der Verschweigung
ging neuer Anfang, Wink und Wandlung vor¹.

A tree grows in the first piece of Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus* - the sprout of poetry, indicating the genesis of a revived, attentively listening world. How shall this image be interpreted? Tree is a cosmogonic symbol that contains the promise of recurring leafing, cyclical return. As the tree of the world (*arbor mundi*), it separates, connects and keeps the subterranean, terrestrial and celestial spheres (~ *axis mundi*). In the Bible it is an image with an eschatological connotation: the paradisiac tree of life appears in Revelations as the one that grows under the throne of the Lamb. Yet it is not these representational aspects of the symbol that help us to understand its role in the context of poetry-silence-genesis as it appears in Rilke's poem, but its character: the dynamic complexity by which it comprises both earth and sky, beginning and end, change and permanence. Rilke's tree is an "excess" (*Übersteigung*) - the primordial vitality that lies in the touch of Orpheus's song. The proto-image of poetry: a figure that constantly disperses and collects its meanings.

¹ "There grew a tree. Oh, pure excess! / Oh, Orpheus is singing! Oh, tall tree in the ear! / And everything kept silent. But in the silence itself / there was new beginning, signalling and changing."
Translated by me - T. Sz.

Thus it would not be amiss to examine it further according to the considerations of the discourse on metaphorical language.

Paul Ricoeur points out in his analysis, that the metaphorical motion is multilateral, it interrupts the literal sense of the statement but this is exactly why it is able to perform a "semantic innovation" and thus redefine - poetically - reality:

To summarize, poetic language is no less *about* reality than any other use of the language but refers to it by the means of a complex strategy which implies, as an essential component, a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to descriptive language. This suspension, however, is only the negative condition of a second-order reference, of an indirect reference built on the ruins of the direct reference. This reference is called second-order reference only with respect to the primacy of the reference of ordinary language. For, in another respect, it constitutes the primordial reference to the extent that it suggests, reveals, unconceals - or whatever you say - the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born into this world and who *dwell* in it for a while.²

Deconstruction, exploration and innovation are in progress simultaneously in the metaphorical motion - one might say that it is this tense and forceful nature of language that appears as a high-reaching tree in the *First Sonnet*. Rilke here interweaves the act of listening (referring to reception) with the subsiding into silence triggered by the poetic language that breaks through reality, and with the attentiveness that turns toward the tension and interdependence within the metaphor. We have to hear from its silence what poetry conceals and reveals (or, concealingly reveals) to us.

Nietzsche in his criticism of language (which gave a substantial inspiration to the modern polemics on metaphor) considers those metaphors that are deprived of their freedom, artistry and uniqueness and have "codified" referents as the building bricks of conceptual thinking:

Das Übersehen des Individuellen und Wirklichen gibt uns den Begriff wie es uns auch die Form gibt, wohingegen die Natur keine Formen und Begriffe, also auch keine Gattungen kennt, sondern nur ein für uns unzugängliches und undefinierbares X. [...] Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein

² Ricoeur, Paul: "The Metaphorical Process As Cognition, Imagination and Feeling" in: Mark Johnson, ed.: *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981, 240.

bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden und die nach langem Gebrauch einem Volke fest, kanonisch und verbindlich dünken...³

But there is, according to Nietzsche, an attitude which can keep the freshness of the unique "sensory first impression"⁴ and which does not establish the duality of dream/wakefulness - that of Hellenism. The myth of Orpheus reveals even the danger of sinking into dream, the risk the "artistically creative" individual takes when he/she dares resort to the metaphor and thus is able to get through to the vivacity and fruitfulness prior to canonization. That is why the world germinates to the song of Orpheus.

The mythic figure of Orpheus is, by itself - similarly to the image of the tree - a link between separate spheres. His song binds the nether world with the sky, reconciles the wild and the tame. Moreover, he is the mediator between Apollo and Dionysos⁵. Modernity attached autoreferentiality to the notion of orphic poetry, labelled it as "poetry thinking itself"⁶, which is obviously the matter of language-use - according to Robert McGahey, in Mallarmé's works language itself functions as a myth⁷. In the *First Sonnet* autoreferentiality appears with the metaphor. The song of Orpheus enters the world by the sweep of the metaphor, and this is what the tree marks, the high-reaching monument of the instant when the world found the way to its own beginning through poetry. But what happens to the tree of Orpheus further on? In other words: how, and with what modifications does this concept (comprising language-use, poetry and thinking) appear in the works of two poets, Ágnes Nemes Nagy and Sidney Keyes, who were greatly influenced by Rilke? This essay can be considered as a "reader's experiment", for the idea of comparison was in fact suggested by Nemes Nagy, for whom the English poet was very important,

³ Neglecting the individual and the real gives us the notion, as well as the form, whereas nature knows no forms or notions, and therefore no species, only an X unapproachable and indefinable for us. [...] What is therefore truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, decorated and furnished with figurative sense, and seem, after a long usage to a nation fixed, canonic and binding...". Translated by me - T. Sz. Nietzsche, Friedrich: "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn" in: *Werke*. München-Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1980. 5. Bd. 313-314.

⁴ Nietzsche 315.

⁵ See McGahey's *Introduction* to McGahey, Robert: *The Orphic Moment*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.

⁶ McGahey quoting Sewell's expression in *Introduction*.

⁷ McGahey 4.

not so much for poetic as personal reasons⁸, one of which was that both of them admired Rilke's works. I believe that the experience of such an experiment may also lead to a better understanding of the modes of tradition and influence.

Reading Rilke's *First Sonnet* we did not find an exclusive meaning that could be doubtlessly attached to the image of the tree. It proved to be a more fruitful method to set all our knowledge attached to *the tree* in motion. We have faced a *hermetic* sign, which carries the openness of the meaning all the way to autoreferentiality. Gábor Schein describes hermetic poetry as follows:

[...] a nyelvi jel többértelműségének, meghatározatlanságának és nyitottságának igyekszik az értelmi egységen belül a legnagyobb hatóerőt biztosítani úgy, hogy a nyelv ne a pusztá reprezentáció eszközéül szolgáljon, hanem valódi létfunkcióra tegyen szert.⁹

In other words, hermetic signs start a metaphorical motion (of undefined direction) and thus - referring to something *else* - their meaning is being constantly expanded. Rilke's objective poetry aims to provide objects (*Dinge*) the possibility of this extension through art. The object, as a linguistic entity, receives a share of the wideness, liveliness and veracity of the metaphor. Thus Rilke's poems tighten the connection between seeing and creative artistic vision. The transformation of the object takes place within the endless dynamism of the metaphorical process, as Péter Pór says, during the shift (*Wendung*) into an "orphanic formation".

[...] a materiális létezőnek végig kell vinnie ugyan az átváltozás nagyon is erőszakos aktusát, a folyamat végén azonban mégsem tűnik el (szimbolista értelemben), és nem is mozog és változik tovább korlátlan szabadsággal

⁸ Ágnes Nemes Nagy says in an interview about Keyes: "I first met his name in an English brochure which reviewed English war-time poetry. It immediately struck me, it caught my eyes that his date of birth was the same as mine. It struck me and somehow, half consciously I began to have the impression that I might have something to do with this poet, that - maybe I can word it in such a way - he died instead of me. [...] The fate and figure of Keyes [...] could take upon itself the whole problem of war. It could also take upon itself the survivor's qualms of conscience that I felt, all that one who stays alive undergoes after the cataclysm of the war." Translated by me - T. Sz. Nemes Nagy, Ágnes: *A magasság vágya*. Budapest: Magvető, 1989. 470-481.

⁹ It "tries to provide the biggest impulse for the ambiguity, undefinedness and openness of the linguistic sign within the unit of sense, in a way that language would not serve as a mere means of representation, but would obtain a real vital function." Translated by me - T. Sz. Schein, Gábor: "A hermetizmus fogalmáról és poétikájáról" *Literatúra* 2/1995, 194.

(avantgardisztikus értelemben), hanem léte új megerősítést nyer, és a művi tárgyban beteljesül; látszólagos modell-léte mitopoétikus változáson megy át, és valódi, azaz költői léte jelenvaló marad a végső *orfikus alakzatban*.¹⁰

This linguistic-poetic concept produces also the metaphor of itself, the *Weltinnenraum*, the - literally - world-inner-space of the self, which is the tense metaphorical field. Thus Rilke furnishes the attitude characteristic of Nietzsche's "artistically creative" individual with the idea of space:

Durch alle Wesen reicht der *eine* Raum:
Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,
ich seh hinaus und *in* mir wächst der Baum.
(*Es winkt zu Föhlung...*)¹¹

This space of cognition through the metaphor is, at last, the room of self-cognizance, of meeting ourselves. Facing the hermetic sign, the reader constitutes its meaning out of his/herself, his/her feelings. Thus the interpretation demands a kind of openness from us, which is nearly unaccomplishable for our hearts - says Gadamer in connection with the angelic figures of the *Elegies*.

Es ist also eine höchste Möglichkeit des menschlichen Herzens selber, die hier als Engel angerufen wird - eine Möglichkeit, vor der es versagt, die es nicht zu leisten vermag, weil den Menschen vieles bedingt und zur Eindeutlichkeit und uneingeschränkten Hingabe an sein Föhlen unfähig macht.¹²

¹⁰ Though the material entity must carry out the rather violent act of metamorphosis, it does not disappear in the end of the process (in the symbolist sense) and does not move and change further with unlimited freedom (in the avantgardistic sense) but its existence gains new affirmation and it becomes accomplished in the artistic object, its illusory, model-like existence goes through a mythopoetical change, that is, its poetic existence remains present in the final *orfic formation*." Translated by me - T. Sz. Pör, Péter: "Az orfikus alakzat" *Holmi* 9/95, 1295.

¹¹ The *only* space spans all the existences:/ Weltinnenraum. The birds fly silently/ through us. Oh, whatever I want to grow into/ I look it out and the tree grows *in* me." Translated by me - T. Sz.

¹² It is the greatest possibility of the human heart itself that is being evoked here as an angel - a possibility it fails to realize, one that it is unable to accomplish, because many things make the person dependent and unable to give himself up to his feelings unboundedly." Translated by me - T. Sz. Gadamer, Hans Georg: "Mythopoetische Umkehrung in Rilke's Duineser Elegien" in: *Kleinere Schriften*. Thübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1967. 197.

It is therefore the lack of understanding with which this poetry plays a dangerous game - as full of risk as Orpheus's descent was to the nether world.

Metaphorization in Rilke's poetry leads us to a deeper understanding of *application* - the use and usage of a poetic text, and to the task of "hermeneutic self-purification"¹³, which is the recognition of man's original creativity and of the possibility that lies within the world.

Was haben wir seit Anbeginn erfahren,
als daß sich eins im anderen erkennt?

(*Es winkt zu Föhlung...*)¹⁴

After having the basic features of Rilke's hermetism sketched, let us now seek traces of it in one of Sidney Keyes's poems, *The Gardener*:

If you will come on such a day
As this, between the pink and yellow lines
Of parrot-tulips, I will be your lover.
My boots flash, as they beat the silly gravel.
O come, this is your day.

Were you to lay your hand like a veined leaf
Upon my square-cut hand, I would caress
The shape of it and that would be enough.
I note the greenfly working in the rose.
Time slips between my fingers like a leaf.

Do you resemble the silent, pale-eyed angels
That follow children? Is your face a flower?
The lovers and the beggars leave the park -
And still you will not come. The gates are closing.

O it is terrible to dream of angels.

In the context of unfulfilled waiting, the closure of Keyes's poem (evoking Rilke's *Elegies*: "Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich") with its despairing tone compresses the

¹³ Gadamer 209.

¹⁴ What else have we learnt since the beginning/ than that one recognizes oneself in the other?"
Translated by me - T. Sz.

most that can be said about angels - that one is only able to dream of them, which is a "terrible" and unspeakable experience. Poetry cannot break through the ineffability of the encounter. The text is built on oppositions, this also indicating the impossibility of meeting: the conditional suggests that the gulf between the speaker and the addressee, reality and dream is unbridgeable. This results in the uncertainty and emptiness of the speaker's world - since the Other, who would constitute meaning in it, is absent. It is the Other, who might intelligibly measure the time of the *I*: in solitude such efforts fail ("O come, this is your day" - "Time slips between my fingers like a leaf").

On the level of signs this loss of meaning appears as the dissemination of canonic symbols. The garden cannot represent man's original home any more, and this affects also the title, which thus can be seen as ironic. The traditional concept of man being a gardener is an affirmation of man's creative ability (that of *cultivation*), but in Keyes's poem the creative drive is frustrated. The sense of failure in the text is concentrated in the absence of the tree: there should be a tree somewhere in the garden, a tree of life or time from which the leaves so dominantly present in stanza two must have fallen. But the poem stresses not only those potentialities of hermetism that result in the interruption of the meaning-formation but also the ability of the poetic sign to widen its sense and thus open new ways for the interpretation, as it happens, most outstandingly, in stanza three, in which the ungraspable nature of the angelic *Thou* is highlighted by questions organized around metaphors containing hermetically functioning signs.

What we have got to know is that angels no longer give us the possibility of recognizing the highest potentiality of our hearts. The closure makes it evident that the poem presents a post-Rilkean, interrogating, seeking, lamenting state of existence. Dissemination remarks on the final loss of a central poetic vision as well as the loss of the artist's mission, and thus it reinterprets the tradition dedicated to the creation of an organic world. Apart from Rilke there was another poetic mode that influenced Keyes's poetry: Keyes in all probability managed to redefine the Rilkean heritage from the viewpoint of Yeats's mythical symbolism. Its most outstanding example is *The Wilderness*, a long poem Keyes wrote two months before his death. This piece is about man's way into his interior, into a deserted land, where the void is produced by the consuming fire. And - in what can be seen as a reflection on Yeats's *Byzantium*-poems - poetry emerges in the fire as a "metal bird" singing in the flames. It is in the very heart of the absence where Keyes places the symbol of immortal art. This speaks again about the emptiness that removes art

from the artist and tells us that the god-like creator of the "artifice of eternity" has fallen out of his role. The Nietzschean creativity functions here only in the dream, in the vision; dream and vision are "terrible", however, because they cannot be articulated.

The closure of *The Gardener* also contains a reflexion on the Yeatsian tradition. The text suggests that dreaming is the only possibility for existing within the reach of angels and then, at this very point, the poem comes to an unexpected halt. The promise lying in the dream is not being fulfilled and this makes poetry become mute. That is, art has lost connection even with the inspiring, revelative trance, with the concept Yeats worded as follows: "I think that in the making and in the understanding of a work of art [...] we are lured to the threshold of sleep"¹⁵, or, "I believe [...] in the vision of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed"¹⁶.

Yet, the wonderful third section of *The Gardener* with its choppy questions predestined to remain unanswerable presents the final potentiality of poetry, a fragile lyric music, able to - as Keyes puts it in *The Wilderness* - "speak for all those who have lost the gardens,/ Forgotten the singing, yet dare not find the desert" (*The Wilderness*).

Nemes Nagy Ágnes: *Fák*

Tanulni kell. A téli fákat.
Ahogyan talpig zúzmarásak.
Mozdíthatatlan függönyök.

Meg kell tanulni azt a sávot,
hol a kristály már füstölög,
és ködbe úszik át a fa,
akár a test emlékezetbe.

És a folyót a fák mögött,
vadkacsa néma szárnyait,
s a vakfehér, néma éjszakát,
melyben csuklyás tárgyak állnak,

¹⁵ Yeats, W. B.: *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1974. 157.

¹⁶ Yeats 28.

meg kell tanulnunk itt a fák
kimondhatatlan tetteit.¹⁷

Nemes Nagy's poem is built on a net of ethical imperatives ("Tanulni kell" - "Meg kell tanulni" - "meg kell tanulni"), and this would - on principle - imply a modality with fixed referents based on dualities. But this modality does not come into being in the text, it is crushed already in the first line by the incongruence between the two sentences ("Tanulni kell" - "A téli fákat."). How can the poem still present a demand for positive ethical quality? The image of the winter trees goes through a gradual change in the opening stanza: first it is furnished with an adjective ("zúzmarásak"), and finally in the third line it reaches metaphorization: "mozdíthatatlan függönyök". The object of the ethical ambition is therefore the metaphor itself, which, as a modality, aims at affinity and communion, but these - according to the closure - belong to the sphere of the inexpressible. The heroism of this attitude is that it tries to speak about the unspeakable and see the invisible (the "whiteblind" night and the "hooded", that is, *covered* objects). Though the cognitive mind fails, it does not give up and this behaviour supplies it the metaphor. "E költészet számára a világ egyfelől mozdíthatatlan függöny, amely elfedi a lét igazságát, másfelől benne nyilvánul meg a tapasztalhatatlan igazságból fakadó etikum."¹⁸ In this paradoxical situation "learning" does not mean an accomplishable activity but constant labour, endeavour and concern.

The second section of the poem evokes the Rilkean *Wendung*. It is the process of metaphorization, the dynamism of the transsubstantiation is where the truth of existence reveals itself; here, however, revelation is simultaneous with the threatening eventuality of dissolution. This poem seeks and learns revelation on the border of Nothing. ("Meg kell tanulni azt a sávot,/ hol a kristály már füstölög,/ és ködbe úszik át a fa,/ akár a test emlékezetbe.") Learning - in the words of Rilke's Malte - is the studying of seeing in the physical sense - the insight into the Rilkean communion of those which exist. But this communion comes into being only in the last, beautiful moment, when the steaming crystal, the tree swimming into mist and

¹⁷ One must learn. The winter trees./ As they are hoarfrosted to the sole./ Unmovable curtains./ One must learn the zone/ where the crystal steams/ and the tree dissolves into mist/ as the body into memory./ And the river behind the trees/ the mute wings of the wild duck/ and the whiteblind, blue night/ in which hooded objects are standing,/ one must learn here the trees'/ inexpressible deeds." Translated by me - T. Sz.

¹⁸ For this poetry the world is, on the one hand, an unmovable curtain that conceals the truth of existence, and on the other, it is where the ethics arising from the inexperienceable truth is manifested." Translated by me - T. Sz. Schein, Gábor: *Nemes Nagy Agnes költészete*. Budapest: Belvárosi, 1995. 70.

the perishing body of the person blend into one, unifying metaphor. The fragile, glimmering, misty text regains a territory from the unspeakable.

Applying tradition to their own life-world (*Lebenswelt*) Nemes Nagy and Keyes produced different interpretations of Rilke's poetry. Keyes's poem presents a reception of the heritage that emphasizes the artistic cosmos and the role of its creator by reflecting on the absence of these entities with the means of hermetism - by indicating the limits of the speakable. The tree of Orpheus, that holds the firmament of poetry, does not appear in *The Gardener*, only its falling leaves. The poem explores its own borders - to "caress/ The shape of it and that would be enough".

For Nemes Nagy, Rilke's poetry offers a possibility of bridging man's separatedness from the world. Her poem exalts the metaphor as the means of it because of its potential for exploring reality. Her winter trees become the trees of poetry through their physical reality, in the ethics of the human glance and through the creative ability of language.

Both interpretations of Rilke's poetry are justified by the manner the hermetic tradition applies the metaphor. The divergence between the two, however, seems to represent a split of the unified vision offered by Rilke: it might be said that while Rilke's Orpheus was sure that he could realize the opportunities of both gods combined in him, Keyes inclines to explore his Dionysian features (dream, vision, poetic ecstasy) and carries them to their utmost limits, while Nemes Nagy's poetic temperament defines his Apollonian aspects (cognition, ethics, poetry of the open eyes) and thus appoints poetry the way of authentic existence.

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Ákos Czigány

**The Discourse of Deep Tautology:
Homecoming as the Code of Pilinszky's Writing**

*The only possible direction of movement is [...] -
out of the flesh, and that he rejects*
Ted Hughes: "Introduction"¹

INTRODUCTION

When reading, side by side, an authors artistic *oeuvre* and his other works on, or outside, the periphery of aesthetic judgement, both the analysis and its subject matter undergoes a recontextualisation. The deficiencies of such a recontextualisation are increasingly more pressing in the case of a poet as important as Pilinszky, who in addition to a volumeful of poetry, also left behind a wealth of essays, not to mention writings in other genres, all of which also merit careful attention. The overwhelming majority of the interpretative texts that are available on Pilinszky were born against a background of obtuse Marxism or a religious feeling hungry for spiritual food (with the latter possibly being, in Hungary, partly a symptom of the power of the former), and thus they hardly offer anything else than criticisms of the poet's *Weltanschauung*, or more or less disguised confessions. Treatments of Pilinszky in recent literary histories using the ideology or rhetorics of newer trends

¹ Hughes 11.

of critical thinking are bound to resort to a repetition of the interpretative information, scarce and mediocre even in the best case, which these texts provide.²

This essay is an attempt at moving beyond the practice that is only able to contrast different species of texts on the level of corresponding motifs, in order to explicate what the poem or the poet has to say, to make the contemplation sensuous or emblematic, or to re-enliven the experience that served as a common inspiration for works in both verse and prose. It is, however, no exaggeration to claim that Pilinszky developed a prose essay of such uniformly high standard and sensitive meditateness, that many of these pieces became primary texts, while his poetry was relegated to the status of some kind of an illustrative *gospel of aesthetics*.³ I do not wish here to either draw from or add to the achievements of the few critics who, like Antal Kuklay, Péter Balassa, Sándor Radnóti, and, lately, Gábor Schein, have been successful in treating the differences of poetry and faith, although much of this essay is involved in an indirect dialogue with their works.

Before a detailed view of such an *oeuvre*, we can hardly anticipate more than assume that its internal structure can most fruitfully be interpreted from a structural, poetic and reading-based point of view, and the ambition of this essay does not go beyond trying to put such a method of analysis into practice. Since I am in no position to show, even approximately, the proportions of a lifework, I decided to start from the essays, and only bring poems into my scope very cautiously. For if one succeeds in accessing these interpretative spaces, then it becomes possible to grasp tendencies that are *not necessarily bound to genres*. The main landmarks of my reading will be as follows: Pilinszky's peculiarly *geometric* imagery, the idiosyncratic use of punctuation, especially parentheses and quotation marks that constitutes his orthography, and his paradoxes, which in my view are not imitations of some kind of a gospel style (as that only belongs to Pilinszky's own reading, but not to the readings to be given about his works) or rhetoricised mediators of religious contents. It is, of course, true that Pilinszky refreshed the (publicistic) mother tongue of his inherited Catholicism with an almost puristic sensitivity and patience, drawing upon, above all, the gospels and great figures of French Catholic writing. Still, as Proust writes, "Les beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère" ('Beautiful books are

² Cf. Kulcsár Szabó 73-77.

³ Perhaps the most absurd case of this loss of balance is Miklós Hornyik, who introduces the "epistolary interview" he made with the poet by saying that "Tersity makes up for the curtness of his answers: they convey Pilinszky's poetic creed and world to even those who have not read his poems" (B 24).

written in a sort of foreign tongue').⁴ If we can accept Gábor Schein's parenthetical remark that "the phenomenological view of Pilinszky's articles and essays often does not follow that of the poems, and metaphysical dichotomies are often made more acute in the articles,"⁵ then special care is needed to prevent us from getting stranded, when considering this conceptual mother tongue, at the level that Pilinszky calls "*szóhasználat*" ('us[ag]e of words,' 'wording') in a disarmingly candid piece of self-reflection: "As my *use of words will readily betray*, art is of a fundamentally *religious* origin for me" (TK 75, my emphases).⁶

The foreign tongue of the points listed marks out a train of thought, hitherto not explored, that is implicit in the essays. This is what is called, borrowing Pilinszky's own words and inverted commas, the "aesthetics of the gospel" (TK 78; E1 182-184; E2 234-5), which is not the *kerygma of the aesthetic gospel* (as maintained in some, however systematic, summaries, of Pilinszky's thought), but a floating, meticulously articulated reading, a "narrative interpretation of a narrative, a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narrative."⁷ In particular, we are here dealing with a misreading of the parable of the prodigal son, which is interrupted by ruptures, digressions, and recourses, and whose hero is not so much the son as the Son, or indeed the concept of *imagination*, already divided and differing/differing within itself ("creative imagination"/ fancy).⁸ Thus, this essay is not an investigation into the motif of the prodigal son, which is found in many more places in Pilinszky's *oeuvre* than will be discussed in what follows. Rather, our task will be to attempt to provide an approach to this body of poetic thought in its dubious status, dividedness⁹ and originality, a body not in the least diminished by its interpretative nature and the fact

⁴ "Contre Sainte-Beuve," quoted by Deleuze as a motto to his book *Critique et clinique* (Deleuze 7).

⁵ Schein (1995) 90.

⁶ For a more detailed reading of this passage, see the section called "Corpus" of this essay.

⁷ Kermode xi.

⁸ "When parable stretches out into short story commentators sometimes say that it has escaped from the genre altogether; so they call *The Good Samaritan* and *the Prodigal Son* 'example stories.' But that, in my view, is dodging. They are indeed parables, though as far from the pole of maxim or riddle as one can get; they are about to merge into long narratives, which may also retain some of the qualities of parable." (Kermode 25)

⁹ By this I do not only mean the dividedness in the essays, but also that peculiarity of the latent train of thought which fragments even forms intended for a more orderly performance. Pilinszky himself called attention to this at the very beginning of his essay "A 'teremtő képzelet' sorsa korunkban" ('The Lot of "Creative Imagination" in Our Time'): "The task I got with the title of this lecture surpasses my powers. I cannot undertake more than *a series of reflections, without a knowledge of deeper connections.*" (TK 75, my italics)

that it is precisely through finding its two Muses, Simone Weil and Sheryl Stutton that Pilinszky's art of essay writing *finds itself*, and becomes, with more and more perseverance and fertility, a re-visionary self-reading. As Harold Bloom writes, "really strong poets can only read themselves."¹⁰

0. KRISIS

... to speak about biblical relevance in works of art
is - tautology
Marcell Mártonffy, "A bohóc evangéliuma"¹¹

It is a misjudgement so say that the geometrical figures that play such an important role in all of Pilinszky's genres, in their emotional, cognitive and pictorial structures would represent givenness and rigidity, or in other words the already existing order of creation. Likewise, it is imprecise to regard them as analogous pictorial features, which are meant to order and classify meanings. Rather, their forming a sensitive and labile system and their trying to fend off mere repetition, are mainly the results of the dynamics of *homecoming*, a concept that was incessantly engaging the poet's mind and is much more than just a motif.

A much greater crisis than this is caused by an intertextual tension that touches upon the general possibility of the text: the previous existence of the Bible, which contains the stories of creation and the return of the prodigal son. This is, by necessity, concomitant with the crisis of the kind of criticism that considers works in the light of some previous work, and with the lapse of interpretative discourse into tautology, which repeatedly limits us to a perspectiveless regression and a hunt for marks of originality which could counterbalance tradition ("the same thing is already there in the Bible, in Homer etc"). Harold Bloom suggests that criticism could, by pursuing not the meaning of the works of art in themselves, but rather the techniques of "revision" with which they oppose the overwhelming weight of already existing masterpieces, find a way out of the dead ends of philology, boundless intertextuality and extratextual reference (which, ultimately, merely hunts for verbatim textual correspondences). *Revision* (re-vision) in this context simultaneously refers to the re-evaluation of the inherited and the act of (mis)reading.

¹⁰ Bloom (1973) 19.

¹¹ Mártonffy 13.

All criticisms that call themselves primary vacillate between tautology - in which the poem is and means itself - and reduction - in which the poem means something that is not itself a poem. Anthitetical criticism must begin by denying both tautology and reduction, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but *another poem - a poem not itself*.¹²

Not even Bloom's argumentation can, however, escape vacillation, when, revising the dismissal, he finally endorses tautology:

The meaning of a poem can only be another poem. *This is not a tautology, not even a deep tautology*, since the two poems are not the same poem, any more than two lives can be the same life. [...] *Criticism is the discourse of the deep tautology* - of the solipsist who knows that what he means is right, and yet that what he says is wrong. Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem.¹³

This pragmatical dilemma is obviously also pertinent to a revision in modern philosophy of the concept of repetition which goes back to, among others, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Freud, but a meaningful consideration of this would far surpass the limits of this essay. Careful criticism, the roads of deep tautology from text to text do not, however, necessarily require such theoretical preliminaries.¹⁴ The question is, what kinds of interpretative processes does that "narrative interpretation of a narrative" inscribe in the programme of the "aesthetics of the gospel," in what sense is there repetition in it - and what is being repeated at all.

1. ITERATIO

Such iterability - (iter, again, probably comes from itara, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures

¹² Bloom (1973) 70.

¹³ Bloom (1973) 94, 96. My italics.

¹⁴ "I am nothing but a critical pragmatist, [...] and any hypothesis is good enough for me." (Bloom [1989] 3).

the mark of writing itself
*Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context"*¹⁵

It is my assumption that answering these questions about poetics does not fundamentally require more than a detailed interpretation of Pilinszky's following statement: "I believe that all true works are, implicitly, repetitions of the story of the prodigal son" (E2 114).

It was Antal Kuklay's meditatively composed book that showed most clearly that Pilinszky's life work can be read with reference to the full arch of salvation history from the Exile to Homecoming, where the story of the prodigal son not only closes, but, when repeated, spans the whole arch. This parable of Jesus serves as a code, from a biblical-theological point of view, to both the entire biblical salvation history, and the New Testament, as a sort of "gospel within the gospel".¹⁶ It is not, however, just the self-reflection, or repetition, of a larger whole (say, the Holy Scriptures), but it is the repetition itself, insofar as it is a story of returning to the - partly - known, inhabited, homely, familiar. If repetition does not come from outside (for instance, as a result of the exhaustion of the imagination forced to take up ready-made clichés under the pressing requirement of innovative artistic creation, or as a result of some fashionable intellectual trend), but is inscribed in the structure of the New Testament parable, and if the outline of epics - or in general, of Aristotelian *mythos*, is shaped, since the Greek tradition and Homer, by the recurrent line of *homecoming*, then repetition is not only a topic, but also a mode of existence. *The subject of repetition, then, is no other thing than a repetition, that is, formally, itself.* Hence we can derive the formula that "*repetition has itself repeated,*" which finely displays the two definitive features of the economics of tautology, namely causativity and reflexivity.

The "true work" is then tautological, or rather, with an extension to include style as well, monotonous: "in art, as a rule, it is the meanest elements that are the best suited to evoke the happiness which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard'.¹⁷ Monotony, for instance. [...] This means that all our states, without our altering them in any way, include the possibility of a decisive transformation or metamorphosis. What is more: the meaner the instrument, the more decisive the transformation.

¹⁵ Derrida (1977a) 180.

¹⁶ *Újszövetségi Szentírás* [The New Testament] 295.

¹⁷ *Isaiah* 64,4. "men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen," and *1 Cor* 2, 9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" (author's note).

"Blessed are they that mourn" - this is not only a religious truth, but also an aesthetic norm, a fundamental law of all great art" (E2 113). Among the Old Testament precedents of the overvalued stylistic scandal of monotony, one of the key concepts of the "aesthetics of the gospel," we find, for example, the monotony of genealogies - which is also the mnemotechnical frame of iterability - as well as the purer, more archaic form of tautology. And in no insignificant contexts. First of all, the biblical genesis of the aesthetic, the first poem of creation is a perfectly tautological word-play: "And Adam said, This is now *bone of my bones*, and *flesh of my flesh*: she shall be called *Woman* [isa], because she was taken out of *Man* [is]]." (*Gen* 2, 23; my emphases).¹⁸ "Man" speaks about the other in the language of the self (or the Freudian bodily ego), and this is presented by the text as *par excellence* poetic speech, since this is the first opportunity for man to not only give names to created things (as after the creation of animals), but also express the process of creation itself, and that addressed, probably, to the Creator in gratitude (this would explain using the third person for his partner), while granting the other one the gift of being the first eye and ear witness of such an event. Second, the self-definition of the Lord is tautological as well: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you" (*Exodus* 3, 14). In opposition to the reflexive demand for truth of *theology* ("discourse about God"), this is the figurative and fictitious discourse of primary *theo-logy* ("God's discourse"), as far as this is possible in the tongue of men.

The innermost core of the parable of the prodigal son is the talk of the ego about and toward itself, a theo-logical *monologue*.¹⁹ The first moment of his return/conversion is that "when he came[went, travelled, arrived] to himself, he said" Coming home to the father is the metonymic extension and repetition of a motionless metaphoric movement towards the self. It is the reclaiming of the moment in which "with our rebel desire, we, as it were, split and moved off ourselves" (E2 13). The second moment is a monologue, the preliminary half of an imaginary dialogue, which, however, operates as a speech act: it performs the conversion already at the rehearsal, which has no audience (father) or action (homecoming). His words

¹⁸ All Biblical quotations will be taken from the *Authorised (King James) Version*.

¹⁹ The reflexive pronoun of Hungarian, *maga*, is thought to have derived from the noun *mag* (originally 'body,' now 'core,' 'grain,' 'pip,' etc.) through the affixation of a third person possessive suffix, and so the word would originally have meant 'his/her/its body.'

reveal that by “going” to his bodily self, he also repeats his sinful split-off (“riotous living”, v. 13):

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
 19 And I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

(Luke 15)

For out of his three sentences, all but the second speak about hunger and its extinguishing, and only the second seems to incline towards a moral self-judgement *as well* merely in order to obtain food. What is more, is there not a darker tone lurking in the slogan of “am no more worthy,” the tone of naked despotism: “I have sinned, therefore I do not want to be your son any more”? Rather than rendering the parable of the prodigal son a fulfillment that translates the Old Testament *typos* of the sin linked to eating (*Gen* 2, 16-7; 3, 1-13), this reading is a *stigmatisation*.²⁰ What makes Pilinszky's “midrash” of the *Genesis* ambiguous is precisely the fact that, although he does not of course rehabilitate the superfluous luxury with which Eve desires the forbidden fruit, he is still enchanted by the savageness with which the hungry man, like a prodigal son, grabs the bread. “Food is most material on the tongue of the man who eats, even in a sophisticated way, sated, out of gourmandship. In the mouth of him who is starving, on the other hand, food radiates out almost immaterially as pure energy or clear sunshine, even if the sight shows just the opposite, some very material picture: two hands clinging to the mouth, and a face and body paralysed into the spasm of eating” (E2 13).

The third moment is the actual meeting - or it *would be*. The father does not even hear his son out, who is only able to utter one sentence and gets no response; the father refuses to speak to his prodigal son, as his is the power of vision and action - prevention, speed, movement. On the other hand, the son's previous monologue is rendered truly strong precisely by its relegation into a preposed quotation, a repetition, whose subject (original) is on the wane (as only half of it is uttered), but its effect far surpasses the dimension it originally aimed at. The solution, I think, is

²⁰ Something similar happens to Judas in Christ's passion story: “As Judas eats the morsel, he receives Satan into him, so that the eucharistic bread appears in a demonic inversion, and Satan, the Opponent/Helper, is incorporated into the human agent.” (Kermode 92)

simple, and all the more ambiguous: the father's vision and acts respond to the son's monologue. The parable thus assumes a chiasmic structure: the son's monologue is evaluated as a ghostly, spectral dialogue that rounds off a string of events due later, while the string of events itself is perceived as the father's individual *tour the force*, an attraction.²¹ This structure is then solved or exploded by the virtual union and consubstantiality of the two persons: the parable is about two, adjacent but moving aspects of one figure, about a filial aspect, insofar as he sets out towards himself or his body, and a paternal one, insofar as he arrives there. This fundamental figurativeness seems to exclude from the parable any facile allegoresis of the relationship of man and God, while retaining another one: the figure of the other son might, in its relationship with the father, be an allegory of just such a reading,²² relying on linear correspondences and considering moral or salvific portions, an allegory to whose creation the father contributes with a self-explanatory naturalness: he has a good *conversation* with his other son. Whether the conclusion he draws will draw us into the feast of intellect, or will exclude even more (as parables are wont, we could add with the malice of Frank Kermode, who dedicated a book to this dilemma), does not become clear.

In this parable we encounter a work that, in its deep structure, is no longer a figure, but not yet a fable, and derives its poetic and aesthetic strength precisely from this fact, in spite of all other interpretative processes (placing "lessons," insertion into the chapter, the gospel). By "figure" here I mean an intertwining of God's enigma and of the metaphor of the body, the uttering or telling of which is ripened by an experience - Jesus's, the teller's - which, although never at home, will take, or drag along, snail-like, a certain familiarity, a homeliness directed solely towards the individual.²³ (This is in opposition with the communal experience of the Old Testament, which was kept alive by the poetics of tautology in the context of the home which had only been promised yet, the home to be conquered, to be in danger or to be recovered, but which can by all means be found and furnished.) But as Pilinszky, contemplating the Last Supper, says, the ability of this "bodily history" (E2 134) to be articulated is constantly opposed by its own "thickening"

²¹ Let us keep in mind the primary meaning of the word *attraction* as 'something that attracts.'

²² The motif "I am no more worthy" could serve to justify my claim. The fact that the incomprehension of the envious brother is no wonder, as he could not have heard this, nor did his father tell him, expresses that he *cannot read* this sentence at all.

²³ Schein (1995) 94. Cf. Kafka's modified version: "He is always ready to go, his house is portable, he is everywhere at home" (Kafka 41).

(*Dichtung*), whose strength is manifest in the fact that the paternal aspect has the power to act, to rejoice in the sheer existence of one of his sons, and to talk to the other, as if no sin has been committed.

And the reader - the latter son. Or at least the reading of "Apocrypha" ("Apokrif"), the poem that in itself serves, according to Pilinszky's own interpretation, as a code, is still in this phase, and it is questionable whether it can ever step further, as it is almost impossible to regard the poem as anything else than a paraphrase of the parable of the prodigal son. This poem, which, according to the testimony of the title, is resolutely destined to stay outside all sorts of sacred, profane and non-profane canons, is still understood to be a valid and "up-to-date" version of an eschatology canonised in its parabolic nature, if coded heterogeneously. According to this view, in the axis of the poem there is a linear narrative that can, although with meticulous effort, be explicated, and whose progress supports intricately coded visions and metaphors, whose basis is the Bible, and whose frame of reference is the experience of twentieth century history. Thus its apocryphal nature only becomes apparent when it reflects on experience that necessarily "falls" outside the scope of the Bible (or its apocalyptic boundaries). Consider the "fallen fields at the world's end".²⁴

I do not, however, undertake an analysis of "Apocrypha" here. Rather, I would like to discuss, with the help of a step-by-step reading, through what confusion of the "hidden roads" from text to text a biblical eschatology reaches Pilinszky's poem "Confusion," and how it joins at one point the repetition of the parable of the prodigal son.

Thus speaks the prophet in Isaiah's book to the promiscuous woman, symbol of Babylon:

Therefore hear now this, thou art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that *sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and*

²⁴ Neither Tótfalusi's ("prostrate pastures at the world's end"), nor Csokits and Hughes's ("the broken-down fields of the finished world") versions seem to adequately translate this line of "Apocrypha." Closer to the mark would be "fallen fields at the world's end."

widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy *sorceries*, and for the great abundance of thine *enchantments*. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: *thou hast said, None seeth me*. Thy *wisdom* and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast *said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me*.

(*Isaiah 47, 8-10; italics mine*)

At this stage, sin has a decidedly linguistic nature: the necessarily monologic utterance of exclusive existence, in other words, solipsism (*solus ipse sum*, 'solely I exist'). What makes it threatening is not its exclusivity, though, but the fact that its solipsism is, strangely, not diminished even as it mates and multiplies. This is the real threat, the multiplication and repetition of the *solely-I-exist*. It is framed in the darkness of invisibility (cf. Wells), which only the voice of the word ("now hear this") is able to penetrate.

In his *Revelations*, John has this woman seated on a red beast with seven heads and ten horns, a beast which in chapter 10 sets out to chase the woman who gives birth to a son, and which is helped and raised to power by a dragon. The heads of the beast bear the "name of blasphemy" (13,1), while the woman's forehead has "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (17,5). John's woman does not speak any longer; she turns from invisible into visible, legible, while the sin of speech is automatically taken over by the beast.

and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world *wondered* after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a great mouth *speaking great things and blasphemies*; and power was given unto him to continue [...] And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou *marvel?* [...] The beast that thou savest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall *wonder*, whose names were not *written* in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they *behold* the beast that *was, and is not, and yet is*. And here is the mind that hath wisdom.

(*Revelations 13, 3-5; 17, 7-9; italics mine*)

John, who can see and hear at the same time, can only read, more or less, the woman, but not the MYSTERY of the beast, the enigma of "*was, and is not, and yet*

is". This is probably because the two are linked. The woman *is, and is not, what it is/was*: the doubling of the parturient woman, whose vision is a pagan mythologeme in the *Revelations*, is thus a blasphemy for biblical faith, just like the power of vision (in both senses) itself.

We find ourselves facing the task of filling in a monstrous time stretched between Death and the End, Death and Eternity. It can only be filled in with visions: "I watched and behold...", "and I saw" Prophetic *speech* is replaced by apocalyptic *vision*, projection and action by programming, the prophets' action and Christ's passion by a whole theatre of phantasms. [...] In chapter 12 of the *Revelations* [...] the pagan myth of divine birth fills in, with the astral Mother and the big red beast, the void of Christ's birth. [...] Her child is taken from her, "caught up unto God"[12, 5]; she finds herself in the desert from where there is no return for her any more. She only returns in the inverted form of the whore of Babylon: radiant again, sitting on the beast, ready for destruction."²⁵

The blasphemic wisdom of Jeremiah's Babylon wreaks its vengeance on John here, in the exact moment when, invoking the "wisdom," he starts explaining the vision. The angel learns a lot more about John when he sees that John, too, is surprised, if not captivated, by the beast, just like those whose names are not written in the book of life. It is precisely there that *John* wants to write himself with the help of his book, albeit he at the same time writes himself *out of* it, when he is admonished to do the opposite by his muse, the angel.

This is the deviation (*clinamen*) that János ('John') Pilinszky attempts to set right with his poem "Confusion."²⁶ While rearranging Isaiah's and John's visions into an absurd series that step by step defies all exceptions, a real sequence, Pilinszky retrieves the possibility of seeing through the trope of the beast's (monster's) blindness:

Through a non-existent slit
the monster's watching but does not see heaven.

²⁵ Deleuze 56-7, 63.

²⁶ Meeting St John for the first time was, in all probability, one of the fundamental scenes of Pilinszky's work, since he closes his first typical essay, published in late 1942, with the question: "And what has become of John's signs, which he, lonely, drew in the sand of the beach on Pathmos?" (E1 26). The influence on Pilinszky of the "woman covered with signs of blasphemy" was probably mediated and amplified by Simone Weil, whom he translated. (Cf. Weil 39 and 152.)

In vain it's peeping
 through the keyhole of the undone moment.
 That's why it's growing heavier
 and lighter day by day.
 Its seeing nothing
 stabs into the heart, even though the monster
 does not exist at all.
 None exists but me. Me, you and it [/he/she].
 My God, have mercy!
 (transl. István Tóthfalusi, slightly modified)

The sin projected unto the woman/Babylon, and the beast, the utterance of the solipsism and the visionary projection reinterpreted as the narrowness of the vision of heaven, are loaded, projected on the self. *The confusion of the language deprived of vision sends the (re)reader of this language to rely on himself.* The monster of "Confusion," Pilinszky's counter-Sublime can only be an allegory of this. The two closing lines rewrite one of the basic statements of existentialism, a constant challenge to Pilinszky, roughly along these lines: I am the monster (hell), and the others: multiplications of my solipsism. (And vice versa, "If I'm not the monster, nobody is." N 79) Present in this is also the violently paradoxical insight that the second and third persons can only gain clear space by uttering the solipsism and excluding the others. They only become prayer insofar as they assume the judgement that awaits the beast. The monologue of the bodily self turns within itself to its other, God, as transparently as the monologue of the prodigal son. Kuklay Antal provides a reinforcement of this interpretation by having placed this poem in the chapter called "Exile" of his book, just like a fragment of Pilinszky's journal from the same period, which can be regarded as the narrative-meditative framework of the poem (N 139).

In his volume of poetry, Pilinszky placed "Confusion" before his poem "Difference," which reads as follows:

Between a centipede and a flamingo,
 between an electric chair and the marriage bed,
 between the crater of a pore
 and the brilliance of a gleaming forehead
 there's no difference. The only difference is
 if someone says, 'I am good,'
 or - which is rare - someone says 'You are good,'

but this is only such a difference that God says to himself:
both the same.

(Transl. Peter Jay)

Kuklay argues that on the basis of *Mark* 10, 17-8, the predicative “good” in the theomorphised grammar of “Difference” can only bear the third person inflection of the god that alone is good. The discourse of the first two persons, the narcissism of the first person and the eroticism of the second are alike misdirected, and the difference of monologue and dialogue disappears in an unconscious and impossible form of communication, the prayer: “*every human word is a calling of God. Because he alone is good, and towards him all feelings are directed, love and self-love alike.*”²⁷ Me and you: “*both the same,*” that is, tautology, we read here, in one of the rare italicised lines of Pilinszky’s poetry.

It is hardly possible to exclude from this formula the blasphemous arguments of mysticism: “*God alone is good. Therefore the true man is god,*” and “we can also serve God with evil instincts, if we direct our flaring up and the heat of our desire towards God. And there is no perfect service without evil instincts.”²⁸

A further consequence of Pilinszky’s first italicised sentence above is that the causative and reflexive force working in the repetition that has itself repeated is, as suggested also by the title of one of Northrop Frye’s books, the privilege of the biblical word: “And they were astonished at his [Jesus’s] doctrine: for his word was with power” (*Luke* 4, 32). The original text, however, reads as follows: “his word was *in* power.” This means then that we are dealing with a *field* of power, in which the story, “true” and “unsaid” at the same time, can happen. Parable can be the code of art insofar as it is the irreducible formula of literary meaning as power.²⁹ The Freudian analysis of the dynamics of suppression is the theory most applicable to the structure of the power of repetition. Comparing Freud’s and Kierkegaard’s concepts of repetition, Antal Bókay says:

²⁷ Kuklay 232.

²⁸ Lukács (1992/3) 148, 157.

²⁹ Both Greek *dynamis* and Latin *vis* mean ‘force’ and ‘meaning’ alike.

For Freud, the individual is constructed out of a curious paradox. The essence of this is exactly repetition, the fact that the individual is identical and changing at the same time, and simultaneously acts on ancient patterns and lives a new life that has never existed before. This paradoxical life could perhaps be defined as a repetition in the ethical stage of Kierkegaard, a repetition which *finds something simultaneously new and ancient, bodily and spiritual within the personality*. The Berlin way is therefore repeatable for Freud; moreover, it is sometimes repeated against our will.³⁰

The suppressed, like an uninvited, spectral guest returns and happens also, or rather precisely, if it remains “unutterable,” “inaudible,” or, as we read in Pilinszky’s biblical quotation, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.” As metaphor can operate towards the re-casting or seeming removal of the unconscious, and against literal sense, through its operation it strengthens that against which it turns. Monotony, silence, meditative concreteness - constant points of Pilinszky’s esthetic thinking - are all forms of this unconscious inperceptibility, in which there is no complete knowing what exactly is repeated.

Pilinszky continues his ponderings on the work of art: “The moment of grace in that turnabout of the world, which always happens standing still, leaving externalities unchanged.” “Standing still” in this context is then a synonym for the repetition that alters itself unperceived. But how do we explain the statement that suddenly talks about the “world,” instead of the “work of art” or the “prodigal son”? As obvious from the section of “Bölcsőtől a koporsóig” (“From Cradle to Coffin”), the world is not a real counterpoint to the fictitious work - if anything, life is that. This latter text, the argumentation of which is reversed (in that it goes from life to art) starts out from a questioning of the “frequent metaphor” of circular time: “If it does make a circle, how so? Would our waning life return to the lost paradise of lost childhood? I don’t know. Hardly on the level of life. But on a higher level of existence? Many signs suggest yes. It suffices to think about the “closure” of great novels, which is partly a consequence of the fact that the ‘internal time’ or duration of novels gets gradually bent in the mysterious field of real events, and returns to the origin of its (hi)story without that happening literally. In a hidden way, great novels always follow the steps of the prodigal son, and lead from source to source and cradle to cradle.” Thus the field, or space,³¹ of the work, of the nonliteral event

³⁰ Bókay 47 (my emphases).

³¹ This is how Pilinszky describes his repulsion from a literal return in a real space: “Rotterdam was built ‘in one stretch.’ One does not immediately notice this, only after a couple of days. Which way to

is constituted, in contrast to the plane of life, by a higher level of the world or existence. Fiction and the novel move away from literalness as the world moves above life: the vertical expands and distorts the horizontal. Viewed from here, tautology, whose role in the last sentence quoted (“from source to source, from cradle to cradle”) is by no means accidental, is a parody of literal meaning.³² The track of the prodigal son returning home is not a full circle, but rather a curve, the curving of the linear time of life. Verticality and curving are united in the image of the “ascending circle” (in inverted commas), that is the spiral. The spacetime of the work is drawn by the track of the wonderings of the individual, solipsistic prodigal son. “This is a ‘circulation’ whose description leaves all languages and words stuttering.” Pilinszky’s poetic discourse is best described less through the (alleged) completeness of its metaphors or the sureness of style, than the “stuttering” of fragmented structure. This is why he talks about “imageless imagination” at the end of “A teremtő képzelet sorsa korunkban” (TK 79).

Pilinszky says this about “Apocrypha,” written - also - in the curve of homecoming: “The only basic formula, structure of the poem, which was instinctive at first, and then I became aware of it, is the discus held back. Turning. Revolving more and more wildly, and at the same time holding the increasingly heavy weight back.”³³ The imagery of the argumentation here draws the spiral in the conjunction of the circular revolution and the (vertically oriented) weight. The balance broken by the increasing (*field of*) force, the acceleration cannot smooth into a full circle (a homecoming), it can only interrupt the poem; “Apocrypha” ends, instead of a literal homecoming, on the note of the fragmented unity of frozen vertical happening: “a good handful of rubble [...] I am standing [...] trickling, the empty ditch trickles [is

go? The same ‘luxury’ everywhere, the same streets. I come and go, as in a splendid mouse trap. Like someone who sets out for *some place*, but always returns *to the same spot*. It is better to sit down and have a coffee. That way you can at least walk about, if only in your imagination, in your head” (E2 288). What Pilinszky objects to is the timelessness of the city, where luxury and *prodigality* prevent time from getting ‘bent.’ At another place he quotes Anne Hébert: “How many conversions sound forced in certain Catholic novels, because the internal logic does not justify them! [...] Poetry is not the rest on the seventh day. It has the bulk of the first six days of the world, it works there in the confusion of earth and water, on the battle field of life looking for food and name. Hunger and thirst, wine and bread.” (E2 103-4)

³² It is also the parody of the entire figurative language of poetry. Angyalosi describes the sentences of Pilinszky’s poem “Poem” (to be discussed later on) as “metaphor-caricatures, tautological statements” (Angyalosi [1991] 860).

³³ Lator - Domonkos 343. The statement is Pilinszky’s. Quotations from “Apocrypha” will rely on translations by both Tótfalusi and Csokits-Hughes, the choice depending on which version I feel more accurate for the particular passage.

trickling] down.” This closing interrupts: before or after the unfeasible return, the restoration of the beginning (“Once Paradise stood here”), between belatedness and waiting, or rather at a point that cannot temporally be connected with the beginning, we are facing the pattern of time curving between the sheer self and the created world: “I am standing” - “I am” - “creatures” - “wrinkles” - “ditch” (these words all end in -k in Hungarian and, with the exception of ‘creatures,’ also rhyme). Createdness (*creatura*) is the omega and alpha, between which the curve of time is being incessantly drawn and modified by the force and attraction of real happenings and (unattainable) creation. This mainly refers to the time of the poem’s reading, insofar as the relative ‘then’ of the beginning of the poem is at the same time pointing out the closing, which allows the closing to return to the beginning, forcing a spiral-like reading on the reader. According to the great code of the parable, “creative imagination” finds its way back to the figure of the self, which becomes increasingly uncertain and commanding. The self is the beginning and the end, this almost impersonal, dead, but still created material (clay, stone), which urges to write new works (to further bend the curve that divides space) and to read more, and to re-read the already written (to further bend time). This parabolical concept of the self might explain Pilinszky’s repeatedly postponed,³⁴ but increasingly stronger attraction towards intimate literary genres, towards the confession, the prayer, the journal (cf. his series of essays under the title “Egy lírikus naplójából” (“From the Journal of a Lyricist”)),³⁵ the note (cf. his “marginalia”), the autobiography, travelogue, the letter (cf. his “postcard” reports), not to mention a substantial part of his prose experiments (“Beszélgetések Sheryl Suttonnal” (‘Conversations with Sheryl Sutton’) and “Stabadesés” (‘Free Fall’)). The economy of the figurative power which was, in the parable, able to pretend that going away was not what it was (in the eyes of the son), i.e. sin, forces “Apocrypha” to pretend that there can be no homecoming.

Another technique to thicken closure into an unexpected happening is the apparently superfluous, tautological announcement of the ending, as in the case of his

³⁴ “Now I am turning over twenty or thirty pages of my intermediary life. The rest I will try to tell hidden behind cover terms.

[...]

- : Tell me, Sheryl, may I now say, at last, who I am?

SHERYL STUTTON: You may. But never write it.”

(P 123-133. This “novel in dialogues” ends with Sheryl *returning home.*)

³⁵ “in the case of ‘Egy lírikus naplójából’ [‘From the Journal of a Lyricist’] we are not dealing with a separate series, [...] - the whole of Pilinszky’s publicistic work can be read as a journal,” Hafner Zoltán, the editor of the new collected works, parenthetically remarks in his afterword to the essays.(E2 232).

poem “Címerem” (“My Coat of Arms”): “To complete / the sentence.” A parallel example among the prose works is the closure of “Szabadesés,” which seems to invoke “Apocrypha”: “And I am weeping with an open, stone-dry face. My weeping is millions and millions of years old, millions and millions of tons of water. This is the ending” (P 211).

The motif of weeping enables us to get closer to an understanding of Pilinszky’s poetics, which is conceived in terms of works relying on biblical texts. In his essay “Hogyan olvassuk a szentírást?” (‘How to read the Holy Scriptures?’), he writes: “I was pondering on how I read the Holy Scriptures. Not *interpreting*, I must confess. [...] Not interpreting, but contemplating” (E2 228). As the first example of this method of reading, he again cites: “Jesus said, ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’ If I start interpreting or explaining this sentence, in no matter how open a way, I will inevitably rob it from that for which Jesus on the mount uttered these words and gave them to me in eternal bequest” (289). By the example of weeping and mourning, Scripture-weeping,³⁶ the mode of existence of the Scripture as a text indicates the end of meaning-attribution and the eternal looping of reading. This modification of the concept of reading is metonymically concomitant with that of vision and eyes: “The most supreme beauty of our eyes is perhaps not that we can see with it, but that through them is given us the mercy and grace of mourning. It is not our eyes, though, but the eye sockets that weep, as if indicating that our weeping is the more ancient, the more primary, and that our eyesight was born out of the sea, and all our light is founded on weeping.” The emphasis that is placed on passivity (contemplation) and weakness (weeping) rather than active seeing liberates the difference of power between these two, which sends us, through a reading stronger than interpretation, to the event of a “blind” (cf. “our eye sockets”) rewriting of biblical texts.³⁷ “What we write is not really writing - only a more or less adequate reading of the pages in front of us” (E2 264). Likewise, the passage about the water of weeping is a more or less adequate reading, that is a misreading, of the parable of the prodigal son: “the sea is the ‘father’ among the elements. All water, rain and weeping are prodigal sons to the sea. The sea is God’s weeping, the infinite tear of creation.”³⁸

³⁶ This is an untranslatable play on the Hungarian words *Szentírás* (‘Holy Scripture’) and *sírás* (‘weeping’), which can be collapsed into *S(zent)írás*, or (roughly) ‘Scripture-weeping.’

³⁷ “A single drop of tear surpasses the most learned *interpretation*.” (E2 289).

³⁸ See also Pilinszky’s essay “Én Jézusom” [‘Jesus Mine’], at E2 294.

Returning now to the twin closings of “Apocrypha” and “Free Fall,” we can say that the self in the former, which “freezes” in the sun into immobility as a vision of God, corresponds, in the latter, to the way in which its photograph, fallen to pieces, assembles again in the moment when time stops. “Free Fall” has a dual arch: the coming home to himself is accompanied by a gender transition from girl into boy, or androgynous child. The same dichotomy is encoded in the stopping of the clocks before the metamorphosis: what Áron Simon, the watchmaker, “put together, was always different from what he had taken apart” (“Free Fall,” P 210). The mutually diversive networks of homecoming and sexuality can also be seen reflected in the poem “The Prodigals,” which ends as follows:

There’s a draught. Your father has forgotten you.

Boys return home.
Girls never.

(Transl. Peter Jay)

Kuklay has a twofold question to ask about “The Prodigals:” “*What would the parable of the prodigal daughter be like? Or that of both of them, the story of the prodigals?*”³⁹ The female principle of causative force becomes reflexive: in “Free Fall” it projects itself into a male photograph (by Klösz) and an animal mirror image (an antelope), reflecting, in this duality, the inseparability of eroticism and narcissism and the force and darkness of *eros*. Although the girl “*never returns again, because the force that carries girls, love, once squandered, vanishes,*”⁴⁰ the force beyond love is mightier than those who squander it, and, home-like, surrounds the prodigal squanderer. What else could prodigality be than, as in one of the apostolic epistles, overflowing abundance, or as Pilinszky says, the other, dark side of the excesses of divine love?

A simple juxtaposition of selected passages from Pilinszky’s six-line poem “Pupil” (“Pupilla”) from 1975 (which also provides the title poem of the last cycle of poems in his last volume) and Ferenc Juhász’s visionary epic from two decades earlier, “A

³⁹ Kuklay 26.

⁴⁰ Kuklay 26.

tékozló ország” (“The Prodigal Country,” 1954) should now serve to illustrate my point, that alongside a poetic repetition of the prodigal son and a restriction of vision and seeing, Pilinszky also attempts a revision of this influential predecessor of his.

Pupil

In the telescope a cavalry charge.
Stamens, stigmas under the magnifying glass.
But in my eye the yellow face
and plunging in the bolstered bed,
because to be human is
to see with a pupil focused onto hell.

(transl. Peter Jay)

from The Prodigal Country

and the runaway is turning in the dog-steam whirl of wide pupil-hells, tongues.
[...]
and his(her) mother bends over him(her), how strange, air and light are running out.
[...]
And once more vision rushes out on the pupil in a thick sheaf:
he/she/it sees, above him flashingly trembles the green carpet of fluffy-bellied flies.
[...]

Thus signalled Dósa's glance backwards to the indignant lord of the castle.
Oh, this glance, the pupil-void, in it the universe trembles, its deep hell smoking, [...] horses run in it, metal horse-shoes flicker, its dark feet-music thunders.
[...]
in the mane of his beard a little red-mosaicked butterfly struggles, spreading pollen.⁴¹

⁴¹ Juhász 23, 24, 31. [Translator's note: this is meant as a fairly literal transcription of the Hungarian, rather than a proper translation.]

2. INCARNATION

The very aesthetics of the death wish seems to make of that wish something incorrigibly lively. [...] via negativa, [...] craving for [...] a kind of counterviolence, [...] presenting models of "sensual speech."
Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence"⁴²

If we want to clarify how and why the family saga of divine persons gets confused in Pilinszky, then we reach the most difficult, most paradoxical and most blasphemous parts of his gospel aesthetics, and when interpreting these, we in fact must repeat and revise our previous readings. To this end, we must follow the confused family saga of certain texts (Genesis, the parable of the prodigal son, Pilinszky).⁴³ Pilinszky himself sensed how uncertain the territories he was covering were, when, sitting at his desk, he committed to paper the most important points of his poetics: "August was very empty and difficult. I had to write an essay on 'poetic imagination,' and my chief difficulty was that all along the time, I did not feel where the chair that I was sitting on was ...!" (PL 86).⁴⁴

According to the point of departure of this study, it is the task of "*creative imagination*" (in inverted commas), which is sharply distinct from rhetorical and combinative fancy,⁴⁵ to contribute to creation without wanting to create. "Artistic creation, in the strict sense of the word, does not exist" (TK 75). While "fancy is an errant prisoner in the thinner medium of the surface, in the libertine combinations of daydreaming," creative imagination finds its way home, going the way of the prodigal son. From this it follows, in the light of our previous analysis, that the

⁴² Sontag 12, 4-5, 22.

⁴³ In another great novel entitled *Emlékiratok könyve*, Nádas, who also wrote *Egy családregény vége*, says about the relationships of the protagonists that none of them can embrace the other in themselves, only a third one in the other. Bloom recognises a similar connection between texts, as he writes about Thomas Mann, Nádas's precursor: "Mann's Tamar knows instinctively that the meaning of one copulation is only another copulation, even as Mann knows that one cannot write a novel without remembering another novel. [...] Just as we can embrace (sexually or otherwise) a single person, but embrace the whole of her or his family romance, so we can never read a poet without reading the whole of his or her family romance as a poet" (Bloom [1973] 55, 94).

⁴⁴ The image is from Pascal originally, see Török 43.

⁴⁵ Pilinszky took this distinction of the two kinds of imagination from T S Eliot and Baudelaire. (Cf. E2 114, E2 170 and TK 75).

“unanalysable simplicity” aimed at, which engendered so many misunderstandings, does not mean literalness “in the strict sense of the word,” but its diametric opposite, but not even imagery, which is linked to fancy. Van Gogh’s paintings serve as primary examples of this: “on the one a chair, on another an apple tree, on a third a pair of shoes [...] . All of them are miracles of the ‘transfiguration’ of silence and monotony, boundless conflagrations and floods of standing still.” (E2 114). Such paintings correspond, in language, to names, and, in literature viewed as speech act, to the giving of names. For the poet, writing is the speech-act of the prodigal son, a motionless, monotonous, inaudible homecoming, whose main rhetorical characteristic is the hyperbole (cf. “boundless conflagration, flooding”). By *not* creating *literally* through giving names, the son institutes himself as a Father, the figurative sense of the Father. The one who returns “came to himself:” he returns to himself (“his body”) as his bodily origin, as his Father.⁴⁶ The beginnings of this turn are to be found already in the Gospels, since Jesus alternates in identifying himself with the Father and differentiating himself from him as the son; this figural (figurative) vacillation contains the possibility of (mis)reading the parable of the prodigal son as the story of Christ.⁴⁷ Pilinszky abandons his own explicite premises when he finally decides to treat the son, or the poet, as the repository of creation, while, imperceptibly but firmly, attributing a mere “*passive creation*” to the Father: “The maturity of the father is in renouncing all emphases, surpassing all that is still personal,” “obedient imagination can find contact with the absolute freedom, love, presence, homeliness and familiarity which which God chose the world” (TK 75); “it was the withdrawing Father who handed creation over to the son” (E2 233).

The task of artistic creation is then to continue the cosmic creation interrupted by sin, which can only happen, according to Pilinszky, through an aesthetic and poetic repetition of the *incarnation*, which is the birth of the Son, sin’s only adversary. According to Saint Paul, the incarnation, from the point of view of the Godhead, is an emptying, a *kenosis* (*Philippians* 2,7). This is interpreted in Pilinszky’s argument in such a way that *the kenosis accompanying the incarnation is enacted on the Father by himself*, that is, the Son is identical with the Father who empties

⁴⁶ “A strong poet, for Vico or for us, is precisely like a gentile nation; he must divine or invent himself, and so attempt the impossibility of *originating himself*. Poetry has an origin in the body’s ideas of itself, a Vichian notion that is authentically difficult, at least for me.” (Bloom [1976] 11).

⁴⁷ “The body, now gone cold and heavy, was at last taken off the cross and put into his mother’s lap. The fruit of her womb now lies dead in the maternal lap. The Prodigal Son could return home alive, but not he, the Beloved Son, who gave *his life* for all of us.” (E2 295)

himself and gives birth to himself as a Son, a Father who in order to become a Son creates a Father, a father-figure for himself. This induces a tautological duplication or repetition within the figure. "Psychologically, a *kenosis* is not a return to origins, but is a sense that the separation from origins is doomed to keep repeating itself."⁴⁸ According to Bloom, the equivalent of *kenosis* among the figures of speech is the metonymy; it is no wonder then that Pilinszky talks about the "adjacency" of obedient imagination, when it gives itself over to the mere giving of names.

Although I cannot expand on this here in any detail, it is highly probable that a key role is played in this phenomemon by the influence on Pilinszky of Simone Weil, who was filled with an anxiety about the impact of the Old Testament legacy.⁴⁹ "She handed us the keys to a new *aesthetics*, a new humanism, and a new, everyday, but still profound mysticism, which can be translated into everybody's life. ("Simone Weilről" 95; my emphasis). It has been argued from the side of Christian theology that Weil misreads the gospel in terms of the *kenosis*. A significant role is granted, in two of Pilinszky's fundamentally important writings, "A 'teremtő képzelet' sorsa korunkban" ('The Lot of "Creative Imagination" in Our Time') and "Ars poetica helyett" ('Instead of an *Ars Poetica*'), to the parallel of the eastern problematics of man denying god (Dostoevsky), and the western problematics of god denying god (Weil). The theologian points out that Weil's radically tautological problem constitutes a much graver scandal than the Dostoevskian one, who finds his way back to the Christian faith somewhat more smoothly. He "made up a certain 'dolorist mysticism' (F. Tillette's term). ... Undoubtedly, Simone Weil one-sidedly exaggerates the theology of the Cross, of *kenosis*, ... but ... she saw (experienced) Christ's love, which surpasses all knowledge and goes as far as the ecstasy of *kenosis* and the forsakenness of the Cross. [...] As she chiefly saw the negative in creation ('decreation'), likewise she only contemplated one side of the mystery of salvation."⁵⁰ Szabó also evokes a curious idea by Origenes, which does not seem to be far from Pilinszky's views either, and which claims that the suffering of the Son revises the figure of the Father in such a way that it retrospectively (cf. "the curvature of time") designates him also as suffering; the Son's death defines the concept of God as ecstatic. The reconceptualisation, in Pilinszky's essay "On *Luke's* Margin," of the sacrifice of the Cross as the tautology of the divine person

⁴⁸ Bloom (1995) 99.

⁴⁹ "Simone Weil, you never understood anything in the Torah," Lévinas says heatedly. (Lévinas 204; see also "Simone Weil contre la Bible" at 189-201.)

⁵⁰ Szabó 91-2.

denying god goes back to Weil. Along these lines, the dual symbolism of Jesus as Shepherd and/or Lamb leads to the “shepherd finally killing the lamb that he raised” (E2 134). The victim’s death, Pilinszky says, “dissolves” the vexing contradiction, and referring to the dimension of time, he writes that the words of the last supper are “the unanalysably profound and rich words of divine love and the ‘bodily history’ of man” (E2 134). The retracing of the narrative interpretation of the parabolical figure, which we have seen to be the intertwining of the enigma of the Godhead and the metaphor of the body, to the suicidal present/scene⁵¹ of the *corpus* is a tautologicval reduction that will not solve anything, on the contrary, it looses and opens up the semantic burden of the *corpus*’s self-contradictions. This also illustrates why the necessary precursor of the easthetic and poetic misreading of the prodigal son (and of course, of “Apocrypha”) had to be a poem entitled “Stigma.”

I believe that the key to the latent argumentation that unconsciously errs in blasphemy can be found in a self-revisionary parenthetic remark: “(Beside it [viz. beside “creative imagination”], fancy is the venial sin, the eternal infantile disease of imagination)” (TK 75). Fancy, which has been ushered out, returns through the hiding place of the suppressed, of the parenthesis; “creative imagination” cannot cleanse itself from the filth of fancy, if that is its own *venial* sin, a disease it can *never grow out of*. Pilinszky only has to refer to the handy doctrine of the original sin in his justification of the permanent “sin,” and “disease.” “With the Fall of Man [...] *our imagination fell too*, impairing the *world’s* reality, its *incarnation*, that final fulfilment and ending that was originally entrusted to our imagination within creation. Our fall reduced the reality of creation to the irreality of *sheer existence*. *Since then*, art has been the *morality of imagination*, the contribution and onerous work of the reality of creation, the fulfilment and restitution of its *incarnation*” (75, partly my emphases). But why fancy should be an *infantile* disease is answered by Freud:

When a child hears that he owes his life to his parents, that his mother gave him life, the feelings of tenderness in him mingle with the longing to be big and independent himself, so that he forms the wish to repay the parents for this gift and requite it by one of a like value. It is as though the boy said in his defiance: “I want nothing from father; I shall repay him all I have cost him.” He then weaves a phantasy of saving his father’s life on some dangerous occasion by which he becomes quits with him, and this phantasy is commonly enough displaced on to the Emperor, the King, or any other great man, after which it can enter consciousness and is even

⁵¹ Untranslatable word play on *jelen* (‘present’) and *jelenet* (‘scene’).

made use of by poets. So far as it applies to the father, the attitude of defiance in the "saving" phantasy far outweighs the tender feeling in it, the latter being usually directed towards the mother. The mother gave the child his life and it is not easy to replace this unique gift with anything of equal value. But a slight change of meaning, which is easily effected in the unconscious - comparable to the way in which shades of meaning merge into one another in conscious conceptions - rescuing the mother acquires the significance of giving her a child or making one for her - one like himself, of course ... all the instincts, the loving, the grateful, the sensual, the defiant, the self-assertive and independent - all are gratified in the wish to be *the father of himself*.⁵²

"Creative imagination" fulfils, then, a missoin similar to that of the Son who saves. The *ars poetica* of the incarnation as Pilinszky's *saving fancy* can be transcribed as follows: "creation did not turn out to be strong (immune) enough against sin, but since it gave birth to me, I repay this by trying to perfect it with the help of 'creative imagination.'" Summing this up, then, we can say that Pilinszky's argumentation turns against itself at two points: first, *it is not "creative imagination," but fancy that returns home, insofar as it is a "venial crime;"* second, *in the tacit realisation that the concept of "creative imagination" is born of - fallen, but since venial, surviving - fancy.* Fancy, in the Freudian sense, is *unheimlich*: too *heimlich*, homely, familiar, which is why its presence is imperceptible.⁵³ Let us read this again: "obedient can come into contact with that absolute [...] presence and *homeliness*, whith which God chose the world" (TK 75, my emphasis). The ultimate goal of homecoming would, of course, be Paradise, where Adam's "creative imagination" contributes to the work of creation through the sheer giving of names - "(According to Boehme, Adam spoke a language different from all known languages. It was 'sensual speech,' the unmediated expressive instrument of the senses, proper to beings integrally part of sensuous nature - that is, still employed by all the animals except that sick animal, man. [...])."⁵⁴

⁵² Quoted by Bloom (1973) 63-4.

⁵³ Bloom (1973) 77.

⁵⁴ Sontag 22. The relevant passage of *Genesis* reads as follows: "God [...] brought them [viz. every beast and fowl] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." (Gen 2, 19)

We may now attempt to set up the series of revisionary processes, with which Pilinszky is trying to secure his own poetic existence against the oppressive weight of the Bible. Through the concepts of the Bloomian “map of misreading,” in Susan Sontag’s words, “outworn maps of consciousness are redrawn.”⁵⁵

1. As, in Lucretius, the declination (*clinamen*) and meeting of vertically falling atoms causes new worlds to come into existence, so the new work of art is born through a divergence from, or misreading of, the predecessor. In Pilinszky, the prodigal son (imagination) does not return (to literal meaning); its track is bent and declined in the time of “novels.”

2. In antique mystery religions, the whole can be reconstituted from a tiny fragment (*tessera*) of a vessel. The task of “creative imagination” is to restore and perfect, despite its own fragmentariness, (biblical) creation.

3. This can be done, paradoxically, through a radical acceptance of fragmentariness, through *kenosis*, the poet’s self-emptying, so that by emptying poetry into “*passive creation*,” or into the service⁵⁶ of repairing the irreparable, poetry would, by virtue of its passivity, weakness, contemplation and sympathy to those who suffer, help incarnation to come to a conclusion.

4. The homecoming of “creative imagination” is engulfed by its own hyperbolicity; it turns out that the Son is the return, doubling (*demonisation*) of the repressed figure of the Father. This also delimits the originality of *kenosis*. The Son’s text, the power of the gospel, which intrigues Pilinszky foremost, fades.

5. The poet exercises *asceticism* on himself: exposing his poetry to the danger of silence, he would let the gospel have its say through sacrificing literature - but *only* insofar as he immediately stresses that silence is the essence of the gospel as well. Whether one silence amplifies, echoes, conceals or simply repeats the other is increasingly more uncertain. Pilinszky takes advantage of this when he traces back the continuity of namelessness, unwrittenness to the gospel. “True, this unity and continuity is only occasionally called art or literature. What does that matter? In the real history of imagination, silence is sometimes more important than any written sentence.” (TK 79)

6. The poet leaves his work open to the Bible to such an extent, that it seems to be written by the (“author” of the) Bible. It turns out in connection with the time-curvature that constitutes the work’s world that “time is being written by an eternal

⁵⁵ Sontag 4.

⁵⁶ One of the descriptions Paul uses in his hymn on *kenosis* says that Christ “took upon him the form of a servant” (*Philippians* 2, 7).

hand, whose style far surpasses ours" (E2 263); "It is God, and God only, who writes: on the texture of whatever happens, or on paper" (TK 78). What is more, his poem "Introitus," following the *Book of Revelations*, also concedes reading to "the Lamb." The return of the resurrected dead man (*apophrades*) is, however, inseparable from necromancy, or, on the textual level, from the reversed imitation that the Bible is the poet's work.

It is the latter two phenomena, the motifs of silence and the dead man, that are left to be considered in what follows. I will start with the second, although the two are organically linked in the semantic fields we attribute to the *corpus*. In this context, the meaning and function of the *corpus* cannot be reduced to the *body*, which can be contrasted to the spirit and does not therefore permit a metonymical extension, or to the symbol of redemption, or any other simple rhetorical operation. Rather, it is so dynamic (*in-force*) a word that not only does it include its own distribution, but it also embodies its own interpretation; a methodological concept which cannot become pure metalanguage because it preserves and extends its two original meanings, referring, on the one hand, to the body of the crucified Christ, and on the other, to the whole of a work of art, book or life work. In other words, it is a *mana-word*, whose "domain of interpretation is many-faced, ungraspable, 'quasi-sacred,' and gives the illusion that it can be used for almost all purposes."⁵⁷

If "'creative imagination' [...] tries to attain an ultimate, unanalysable simplicity," and finds it, through its homecoming and iteration, unknowingly, in itself (its 'body') as its own father, we can talk about *sensuous* experience: "it can come into *contact* with that [...] with which God chose the world"(TK 75, my emphasis), i.e. with creation. We have seen that "world" means the internal extension of the work, the figurative space marked out by curved time. On this level of abstraction, however, the embodiment of the creation is "of a spiritual nature, and, like prayer or love, freely enters the diverse stages of time. It has a predilection for the past, and within that, the tragic, the irreparable, the scandalous and the 'insoluble.' It prays for its dead by incarnating them" (TK 76). The paradox of the *spiritual contact* induces, within incarnation, a strange constellation of abstraction and sensuousness, which makes up a *spectral, ghostly* quality. For the price of such a curving of time is that literature as (parenthetical) 'communication' (TK 77), which thus dresses itself up in the ever expanding genre of the prayer, turns into 'concreté' necromancy

⁵⁷ Angyalosi (1992) 41.

and magic. This blasphemous swing is again the result of a (parenthetical) hyperbole, the striving to establish the connection “beyond the gloomy illusion of memory” (AP 81). *Prayer as metacommunication*: “dialogue with the whole of existence, with each and every, living or dead, human being” (AP 82).

This could then dissolve the widespread misunderstanding, which then serves as a basis for some weak misreadings of the poet’s concept of the “tragic,” that we are dealing with a static view of the past in Pilinszky’s case.⁵⁸ The immobility of the disciples, which is otherwise not necessarily a Christian notion (a translation of the petrifying effect of the Gorgon or the Medusa),⁵⁹ is the figure of the position of the *poetic subject* in the tension of the uncertain, spectral experience that bewitches him (or is interpretatively projected by him). Pilinszky’s “Auschwitz” is first and foremost a name for the context in which the mutual interdependence of the sacred and blasphemy (“a scandal, insofar as it *could happen*, and sacred, without exception, insofar as it *did happen*,” AP 81) is described in terms of the intertext of the multifaceted biblical *corpus*-interpretation of their connectedness (cf. “Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness,” *ICor* 1,23). An incessant reading of this text is severely ambivalent. On the one hand, it is compulsively attractive: “The dead no longer need anyone alive, and still they are calling us, one after the other, more obstinately than anyone else” (AP 81). The equivalent, in his poem “Frankfurt,” of this attraction is the terrible eroticism of hunger (“but not even has their pleasure come yet”).⁶⁰ On the other hand, it is repulsive, because the incarnation of corpses makes a home for death, the absolute *unheimlich* among the living.⁶¹ The complete surrendering of the self, “*passive creation*” is dangerous. The horror of this ambivalence already appears in the early poems “A francia fogoly” (‘The French Prisoner’) and “Frankfurt,” as well as in another poem entitled “Fokról-fokra” (‘Step by Step,’ ‘Gradually’), whose inverse

⁵⁸ Kulcsár Szabó’s interpretation, which reduced these connections to “the tragic quality of irrevocable experience,” was bound to fall into the superficiality of identifying in these cases a “need to resolve” this tragic quality and even “some kind of an internal *pietas*” (Kulcsár Szabó 76).

⁵⁹ “And like one who looked into the Gorgon’s face, Pilinszky seems to have been petrified by the sight, and has not been able to take his eyes off it: this is what the ever growing line of KZ-writings indicates.” (Maróti [1965] 301.)

⁶⁰ Csokits and Hughes’s translation (“but before their joy could be consummated”) fails to convey both the blunt sexuality and the redundancy, or tautology of the original line. (Usually, it is not pleasure itself that “comes.”)

⁶¹ “There are taboos which apply to living Death: we are silent about it, because it is horrible,” R. Barthes says in connection with E.A. Poe’s short story “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar. (Barthes [1994] 1659. See also sections (9)b- (10), pp. 1662-3.)

seems to be provided in the following excerpt from one of the poet's essays: "Unnamed and unwritten, [...] in the way codified by the gospel, what else could the history of the poor be among us, but this? It is they, the poor, who have, so to speak, incarnated and carried, from time immemorial, directly in their blood and flesh and limbs, their essentially insupportable and gradually annihilating share of the world's burden" (AP 82, my emphasis). In the sensuousness of the incarnated corpse, its spirit, the returning death becomes palpable. The general poetic project of direct sensuousness (meditative concreteness, the first naming, lack of artifice, anti-romanticism, the rejection of any sureness of style) is expressed in Pilinszky's essays within the rhetoric of a defence against literariness, against "mere literature" (E2 119, E2 157), which of course, in turn, produces its own tropes and metaphor(m)s (to borrow Antal Kuklay's coinage). "This purgation of the interpretive mind resembles literary's constant flight from literariness: its wish to dissolve as a medium or, at the very least, to renounce romantic props and to intuit things directly. That truth is found to be stranger than fiction, that to tell things as they are produces a highly mediated art, simply renews the condition which started the protest."⁶² Pilinszky's political resource is the repulsively equivocal taboo of survival; his lot, as Jesus's mother's, is "the pain of survivors, the kind of pain of which human *imagination* is most afraid, and backs away frightened, not daring to approach it" (E2 295, my italics in "*imagination*").

"If death ultimately represents the earlier state of things, then it also represents the earlier state of meaning, of pure anteriority; that is to say, repetition of the literal, or literal meaning. Death is therefore a kind of literal meaning, or from the standpoint of poetry, *literal meaning is a kind of death. Defenses can be said to trope against death, rather in the same sense that tropes can be said to defend against literal meaning.*"⁶³ The unusual liveliness and ghostliness of the conception of love is precisely a consequence of its shifting away from its literal meaning. From a rhetorical point of view, its return is similar to that of the prodigal son: "we also live vertically, and I think we are dead precisely when we can write, only death for me means more of an ecstasy than an annihilation" (B 247), he says, after bringing up the contrary example of what he had said about linear time in his essay "From Cradle to Coffin." This also testifies that the wiry rigidity at the end of

⁶² Hartman IX. Cf. "In the light of the current myth, in which art aims to become a 'total experience,' soliciting total attention, the strategies of impoverishment and reduction indicate the most exalted ambition art could adopt." (Sontag 14.)

⁶³ Bloom (1975) 91.

“Apocrypha” is not (simply) the final consequence of annihilation or “creature-like existence,”⁶⁴ but the starting point of writing, of strong reading. The form of openness is the spectre of death, its nonliteral meaning is writing in its own ecstasy. *Ex-tasis*: moving out, ‘standing outside.’⁶⁵

I am tired. I jut out from the earth.

3

God sees that I stand in the sun.

(transl. Csokits - Hughes)

A compulsory element of the blasphemy of this poetics of death is the *metalepsis* (*transumptio*) that the incarnation which is turning into death becomes, stepping back beyond the “characters of the resolution” (AP 83), into an antecedent of sin, the resource of sin. From this point on, the suffering of the innocent is no more a consequence, but the inevitable source of energy for ruthless events” (AP 83).⁶⁶ Death, conceived of as ecstasy, that is the ecstatic movement which precedes sin and its consequence, which is death as annihilation, is regarded as a resource or power. Rhetorically: literal meaning is the secondary and derivative repetition of figurative meaning. This yields a retrospectively inscribed genesis, where death regarded as ecstasy provides a chance for man to “get outside his own internality as truth, [...] to be transported [...] so that in this ecstasy he could passionately repeat himself as the other.”⁶⁷

To indicate this getting outside, Pilinszky uses the term ‘*exchange of places*,’ interpreted on the basis of the gospel. “Appearances and reality exchanged places” (AP 83). The deadly logic of the forbidden meal is replaced by the ecstatic hunger. “We have seen the satiated man eat behind his fastidious gestures, and the starving man take in swill as an immaterial substance” (AP 83). Consequently, “positional sacrality” is an event of “perverterdness,” of a turn in which liberation arrives “like the first childhood fall (of man).” This is how the return of *fancy* looks like in the

⁶⁴ Kulcsár Szabó 76.

⁶⁵ Cf. Schein (1995) 89.

⁶⁶ Cf. Weil 130, 132, 142.

⁶⁷ Bacsó 90-91.

fantasy of homecoming, since the elements of childhood and the fall are to be found in it just as in our analysis above.

God mostly appears in this deformation as viewer or seer, as, for instance, at the end of "Apocrypha." This, rather than indicating passivity, however, represents God in that manifestation of his power, that he alone can endure the sight of his solipsistic human self ('body') shifted off himself, deprived of his ego, the sight of naked poverty. But in the figurative sense of the sentence, often taken out of its context, "From time to time God, ousted from behind facts, bleeds though the texture of history" (AP 83; cf. N 22), this "*man*" is the metonymy of God, based on bodily selection (bleeding), and this is why the volatility of this trace "not so much peratins to poetry as it obliges *the poet himself*" (AP 83; my emphasis) to meet the challenge of silence. Pilinszky's aesthetics of silence is then, first and foremost, *self-stylisation*, which fits in well with the volatility of the temporal "texture," while also ensuring the rescue of the right of the poet to be heard. Thus two narratives are here intertwined: one is about the figurative division of "God," the other about poetic origin, where the categorical imperative of leaving traces, or writing,⁶⁸ is justified by the ousting of God from behind facts, i.e. from reality.⁶⁹ A *poetic exile*, since it is based on a trope in which God's *kenosis*, his self-emptying, self-ousting incarnation is identified with the prodigal s/Son's voluntary exile, which is its inverse. In this scheme, return (conversion) is a redundant - even sinful - element; we can find the source of this realisation in Kafka's short meditations on the road back to Paradise as well as in Attila József,⁷⁰ while its sharp logic can be illustrated by this passage: "And long millennia had to pass in order that Jesus would again say the sentence *for which* man once *left* the original purity of his heart behind. 'Be ye perfect, as is your Heavenly Father.'" (N 151; my emphases).

⁶⁸ Cf. It is God, and God only, who *writes: on the texture of events* or on paper" (TK 78, my italics). The metaphor of texture has a more concrete *textual* application: Veronica's veil (N 138, 152), without which it would hardly be possible to adequately reveal the poetic proceeds of the Van Gogh-interpretations which transcribe the parable (cf. "Szeretet, igazság, igazságosság" E2 332).

⁶⁹ This sentence is Pilinszky's radical transcription of his favourite passage from Rilke, which he quotes frequently, in various versions, and which is a complaint about facts hiding reality. (Cf. E1 187, E2 120, E2 138, E2 229, E2 282, E2 335, B 231.)

⁷⁰ "Redemption happens in sin itself, ... The parable of the prodigal son reversed" (Beney 94, 99). Maróti's review of Pilinszky, with its pair of parentheses, and Pilinszky's journal entry quoted below were both written in 1964: "(... the Church cries out in the liturgy on Easter eve: 'Oh felix culpa ...' - o, happy sin! ... Because even sin is happy: for it gave an occasion to God to have mercy on human kind)" (Maróti [1965] 286) - "Blessed sin, blessed destruction! ... The prodigal son returns to the bosom of the father. ... There is only the Father" (N 58).

3 CORPUS

Man can put anything into God's mouth that he wants.

*Sartre: Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*⁷¹

the heresy of paraphrase

*Cleanth Brooks and W K Wimsatt*⁷²

The technical term Pilinszky uses for reading as misreading is *paraphrase* ('saying again/wrongly'). In 1968, two years before writing down the enigmatic thesis quoted at the beginning of this essay, Pilinszky phrased the principle of paraphrase as follows: "As my use of words will readily betray, art is of a fundamentally religious origin for me, and this is perhaps why I feel all expressly religious works - including masterworks - to be, in a sense, paraphrases"(TK 756). The parentetical sentences that follow and revise this statement render, first of all, the qualification "expressly religious" redundant. "(More specifically: if all art is rooted in religion, religious art does not really exist, least of all religious literature, in the proximity of sacred texts.)" "In some sense," then, all - but first of all literary - works are paraphrases of sacred texts. Therefore the attribute "religious" does not so much refer to the content, as the language, the "use of words" in this argumentation. Thus we can set up the following slightly lame syllogism: all ("expressly religious") works are paraphrases - all works are religious - all works are paraphrases, *but ultimately, religious works do not exist*. Through the use of words provided ready-made by the Church, Pilinszky breaks his way towards the paradoxical realisation that it is exactly the existence, proximity, assimilating superior force that cancels or brackets the "religious" nature of art, and first of all, literature. In other words, this is not saying that profane literature would be standing beside sacred texts as a battle line ready to attack; it is much rather arguing that *the sanctity of the text, which is always already literature, empties, profanes and disperses itself, and it has the power to do so because it carries within itself this ability in the force of blasphemy and the frame of iterability, and it can only be holy insofar as it is blasphemous, as it includes the forms of being threatened by the creatures of the supreme order of being,*

⁷¹ Sartre (1975) 322 (Act 2, Scene 4).

⁷² Quoted by Kernan 6.

from blasphemy and atheism to the finest textual workings. Theology (Claude Geffré's) concerning itself with secularisation, which appears to be a historical parallel, points out that it is precisely through the *incarnation* of God in Christ that the opposition of the categories of holy and profane have to be given up: "I myself do not believe that secularisation is itself a literary process. The scandal is the stubborn resistance of imaginative literature to the categories of sacred and secular."⁷³

With the slackening of the ideological pressure, the consequence of the deconstructive turbulence of writing (of the Scripture) becomes ever more apparent, which was so closely approximated earlier by mystic experience: "heresy derives from the letter of the Scripture. ('Therefore nothing is more contrary to the sense of the Scripture and is less the Word of God than the Scripture itself, as we would understand it according to its dead letter,')." ⁷⁴ This code of Pilinszky's poetry is provided by his poem "Paraphrase" at the front of his classic volume *Harmadnapon* ('On the Third Day') (1946-58). This poem is an erotic paraphrase of the parable of the prodigal son and the story of the last supper, and Pilinszky also gives a prose transcription of it in a late essay from 1977: "Before you die, you deal yourself out as food, the bloodily precise *image and counterimage* of which is the living world that hierarchically devours each other, and the highest expression of love is when we would like to consume and devour the other" (E2 294, my emphasis).

In connection with the decisive role of the title in the textual process of paraphrase, let us now consider the poem entitled "Költemény" ('Poem'):

Earth is no earth.
Number is no number.
Letter is no letter.
Sentence is no sentence.

God is God.
Flower is flower.
Tumour is tumour.
Winter is winter.

⁷³ Bloom (1989) 4 ("The Hebrew Bible").

⁷⁴ Lukács (1992) 148.

Concentration camp is an encircled
territory of uncertain shape.⁷⁵

In his excellent analysis, Angyalosi Gergely does not, of course, fail to point out the last sentence, which firmly steps out of the tautologies of the title and the structure. After demonstrating that the closure is linked, in its connotations, to the previous two lines as well as, through its soullessly bureaucratic style, to the lethal irony with which the poem destroys language, Angyalosi leaves the problem of the concentration camp open, saying that a hurried answer could easily lead to a common place, whereas an elaboration would have to go into a “dissection of the relationship between *Weltanschauung* and the poetic view of the world.”⁷⁶

My opinion is that “Poem,” which is generally thought to be based on the experience of the forceful collection of the Jewry of the Diaspora by the Nazis, can be fruitfully contrasted to an intertextual relationship with a section of Lajos Maróti’s novel *A kolostor* (‘The Monastery’),⁷⁷ which is set in the period of the dispersion of Hungarian religious orders (cf. “Earth is no earth/Land is no land”), when Christian communities that had gathered together for a sacred purpose were crushed by the Communist rule. In the first scene that concerns us here, a monk with a bad speech defect of uvular r’s and a nostalgia for the Nazis, has the novices pack up his books (cf. “Letter is no letter. [...] Sentence is no sentence.”) he would like to rescue. The novices then solace themselves by evoking the humour of a friend of theirs who had just left, and recall his most “classic” joke, in which

lunatics are telling jokes, but they know all of them so well that they only call the numbers, and that’s enough to make them laugh.
“We were laughing for weeks, too,” says Gergely merrily. “Seventy-six. This was the joke that the lunatics hadn’t known, remember? For weeks we only had to say “seventy-six,” and we all laughed ourselves sick.”

Pilinszky’s poem only retains the mere outlines of the mad logic of this meta-joke which substitutes numbers for the jokes that do not get told: “Number is no number. [...] Sentence is no sentence.” The two novices of the novel, Béda and Gergely, also immediately realise that the joke is a dark parody of their situation in the monas-

⁷⁵ [Translator’s note: again, this is a rough transcription only.]

⁷⁶ Angyalosi (1981) 863.

⁷⁷ Maróti (1979) 288-296.

tery. Their conversation turns serious: what becomes of them if they, too, are carried off and interned by the Communist dictatorship?

‘Listen, Béda, what do you think an internment camp is like?’

Béda stops, too, and ponders.

‘Haven’t the faintest. I guess it should be encircled with barbed wire.’

‘And?’

[...]

‘An internment camp is a territory encircled with barbed wire, where several hundred or possibly thousand people live together. Well, living together is something we have great practice in.’

The question and the guesswork (ellipted here) preceding the definitive answer is, then, omitted by Pilinszky (decontextualisation), and he thickens the ironical self-reflexions into tautologies.⁷⁸

In Maróti’s novel, Béda fulfils the function of answering the question about internment camps. His most concise achievement, the definition, is, however, but a parody of the formality of all definitions, whose indeterminacy only shows a slight difference from the emptiness of Pilinszky’s closing lines, as it is only one definable, formal feature of the camp, namely its delimitability that becomes more and more indelimitable. While the definitions in “Poem” and “The Monastery” can be seen as each other’s paraphrases, the method and subject of definition becomes increasingly inseparable: a “camp” can only be described with its uncertain *periphery* (*periphrase*).⁷⁹ Thus *the tautology of the duplication of “peri” (‘around’) becomes the structure.*

The difference in the vacuity of the definitions is matched, at the same time, by an increasingly strong difference or *demotion*. The guesses of Maróti’s novices about the world of pure profanity are made tentative by their cloistered, and in this respect, sacred, viewpoint at the moment when the mingling of sacred and secular becomes inevitable; this is expressed by the chain of metaphors linking monastery, lunatic asylum and internment camp. The viewpoints, situated hierarchically on a vertical axis represented by the monastery hill, still (or already) defy separation

⁷⁸ The irony of this is amplified by the fact that it is precisely this order, that of the Benedictines of Pannonhalma, that does *not* suffer persecution, and this soon becomes a source of tension, as well as a delaying factor that aggravates the problematics of *homecoming*.

⁷⁹ Pilinszky deals with the (con)fusion of definition and circumscription elsewhere as well (cf. E2 332).

even more in "Poem." "God gets *on the same level* with the most simple and most realistic things in an everyday sense, he comes under one qualification with everything else,"⁸⁰ which means that the text written through decontextualisation is partially provided by a process of *desacralisation*, whose goal cannot even be the profane any more.

"God is God:" as a parallel to the "image" of God closing himself in the tautological self-identity of the mere name, Angyalosi mentions the final lines of Pilinszky's poem "Revelations VIII. 7." ("Jelenések VIII. 7."): "but God sees there is no way/ or road or hope to break from this vision!" (transl. Csokits-Hughes). The title of this poem is shaped by an indirect tautology, since *the (title of) the poem (verse) is simply a (biblical) verse*. This visual loneliness of God is defined, in his poem "Meghatározás" ('Definition'), as the bestially desired mixture of narcissism and clear sight:

What is it to be a worm?
To desire a glance,
one of those long, open encounters,
with which only God looks at himself. [...]

This image of God, rooted in the mystic tradition, is an introduction of the blasphemous sacredness evolved in desacralisation, of the instinctive desire to become God, the peak of which is looking. "*An epistemological argument in support of man's turning into god: [...] 'Nobody knows God, outside God' [...] 'You alone know yourself, Greatest Spirit.'*"⁸¹

Besides and despite the complexity of the poetic (mis)reading of the Bible, we repeatedly encounter the unarticulated notion of *silence*, which has so far been uncritically mystified in most critical works on Pilinszky. Silence seems to constitute, ultimately, the essence of the created world, nature and the gospel (i.e. God's message), and hence, of art and life, the signified of all signs, so that it could become, declared or slyly undeclared, God's signifier. Let us now quote two texts which can, if read hurriedly and without due attention, only add to the commonplace mystique

⁸⁰ Angyalosi (1981) 861.

⁸¹ Lukács (1992) 148.

of silence: "Silent Theatre: that which speaks the common language of silence, the words of God's silence, the universal language of great poetry that returns to God's silence." (E2 192) "But there is silence dwelling at the bottom of all speech. God's silence, which surpasses all speech, that most supreme and unutterable speech which forever wants to be incarnated, in a way similar to how God assumed a human body among us" (E2 119). I believe the system of references linking God's telling silence, the incarnation and the evocation of the famous prologue of the gospel according to John provides an opportunity for consequences that might be fertile from the points of view of both poetics and literary history.

I want, first of all, to evoke Susan Sontag, who says that silence inevitably becomes a trope in a work of art that uses language, since - how could we take it "literally"? Armed with Adorno's quasi-historical analysis,⁸² interpretative attempts to materialise or understand silence are determined to take advantage of silence as the camouflage or else the showing off of the distrust of language. By referring back to the dialectics trying to preserve the denied language, Sontag indicates that this language does not weaken, on the contrary, it becomes more reflexive and sensitive to sensuousness, of which it becomes the substitute, and to the elements of seeing (contemplation, attention, blindness, reading, or a similarity to films, photographs or icons etc) or carnality - to emphasise only those elements of the treasury of the "aesthetics of silence," which are also indispensable in Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the gospel." The internal boundaries of perception or "*aisthesis*" induced in Pilinszky a desire for the transformation or "schooling" of the attention towards questions (of boundaries). What, then, are the questions that Pilinszky's silence raises? His penname could have been "Johannes de Silentio (John of the Silence - the evangelist of God's silence?)."⁸³

First of all, the question of the iterability of the silence of the gospel, of the "word made flesh." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. And Jesus was silent. And why?" (E2 331). Here we have to make the preliminary remark that this question of Pilate's is only to be found in *John's* gospel, the gospel of the "*word made flesh*," whose beginning is the well-known assertion of the priority of the word to the body. This priority does not remain an abstract speculation, but is embodied, in accor-

⁸² "he who wants to be silent 'at once,' is forced to stutter, and use, reflex-like, half-baked categories" (Lukács [1975] 543).

⁸³ Balassa (1995) 94. In 1986, Balassa devoted a full essay to Johannes de Silentio, penname of Kierkegaard when writing his *Frygt og Bæven* ("Utószó Ábrahám hallgatásához," in Balassa (1995) 63-89).

dance with the curious dramaturgy of chapter one, in the figure of St *John* the Baptist, who is nothing but a crying *voice/word* (*John* 1, 23),⁸⁴ one that prepares the way for the incarnate Word that comes after him. This is interesting here because the structure of priority advocated by the “Johns” was so important for *János* (‘John’) Pilinszky, that he extended it to cover the whole of the Bible, as shown by one of his notes to the *Genesis*: “This *preliminary incarnation of the Word in words* will forever remain a true image of every search for God”(E2 49, my emphasis). When drawing, on the basis of the aesthetics of the gospel, my conclusions from Jesus’s silence before Pilate, I will therefore keep John’s gospel in the foreground.⁸⁵

What is the truth then in the matter of the silence? Pilinszky’s approach is dual. On the one hand: “We answer Pilate every day. Jesus was silent for us as well.” (E2 332). This substitute silence is an interruption and parody of a communication predicated on obtaining and possessing truth. In this it can also be regarded as the critique of the question asked, or as, so to speak, a piece of Jesus’s gallows humour. Moreover, the argument allows us to conclude that Jesus is also *silent for the readings of the gospel which condemn Pilate*. I think this very powerful insight lead Pilinszky to call Pilate, at worst, simply a “petty bourgeois” or an “ordinary man” (N 180), or at another place a “superficial and bad psychologist” (E1 265). The irony of the silence that Jesus gave in lieu of an answer is not an isolated poetic quality in the scene, since Pilate’s situation, the incommensurability of verdict and responsibility is already ironic, which leads to a separation of gesture and word. “His gesture: he washed his hands. His word: *Ecce homo*. Behold the man. - And he points at Jesus.” He points at him *with clean hands* - this is a singularly synoptic version, since the washing of hands is not mentioned by John, but only by Matthew (possibly in order to bring out a parallel between Judas and Pilate). “And still, perhaps nobody else fished so many souls for Jesus as Pilate through this mistake,” while he is merely trying to delay, again and again, the moment when his public and personal responsibilities suffer a split. Pilate’s mistake with which he draws the condemnation of posterity upon himself is the hesitation of passing a sentence,

⁸⁴ [Translator’s note: “*vox clamantis in deserto*” in the *Vulgate*; “voice of one crying in the wilderness” in *The Authorised Version*.]

⁸⁵ According to Schein, it is true of Pilinszky’s early period already that his “conception came closer and closer to the long interpretative line of those words of *John’s Gospel* which provide Dostoevski’s motto to *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit’ (12, 24).” (Schein (1994) 34.)

which might simply be a consequence of his trying to take his ironic situation seriously.

When considering Pilate's utterances in the context of his dialogue with Jesus, the question of "What is truth?" can hardly be reduced to the utterance of an incorrigible rationalist or Sophist, a chatting executioner, a civil servant suffering of a role crisis, or an ur-Hamlet. Though witty and attractive, Kermode's interpretation does not fit the ironic conception outlined here: "Pilate is now a thoughtful, philosophical figure; it was Bacon, in a later midrash, who said he was jesting, and did not stay for an answer."⁸⁶ No, "this question can only be answered with another question" (E1 26). For Pilate's first question is that of the accusation, whether he is the king of the Jews, and Jesus's enigmatic reply, "Thou sayest it," is followed, in Matthew and Mark, by dead silence, which only loses some of its weight in Luke's version because of the discussion of the Herod plot. In John, Pilate has to ask twice, because the two of them get entangled in a virtual duel of questions and answers: Jesus answers question to question, and so does Pilate. "I can see you have taken my advice and write in questions rather than statements," Pilinszky makes Dostoevsky's Stavrogin say in a fictitious letter (N 211). What follows from this is, at this point, only the rather dubious answer: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (*John* 18,36). Jesus's curt answer to Pilate's repeated question prompts a surprisingly new discourse: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (*John* 18, 37). Since here Jesus refers his kingdom not to the slightly fantastic non-of-this-world host, but to the truth, Pilate's famous question appears to be the natural response of an attentive listener. Why does he not get an answer? According to the evangelist, this is because Pilate went back to the accusers immediately after this; according to Pilinszky, because Jesus remained silent. *Pilinszky, then, reads the element of silence into John from the synopticals, with whom silence is the reply to the previous question, "Art thou the king of the Jews?"* I think Pilate did not wait for Jesus's answer because on hearing his own question, he immediately replied to himself that the truth - for him, about the legal process, of course - is that Jesus is innocent, as proved by what he had just said, - or at least he was not guilty just because he makes hardly decipherable statements -, therefore he

⁸⁶ Kermode 96.

rushed out to assert his opinion before the accusers. Although Jesus does remain silent in answer to the question Pilate asks on his return, this is an answer to a third question: "Whence art thou?" (*John* 19, 9). For while he was outside, Pilate heard that the accused made himself the Son of God. His new question about Jesus's provenance indicates that on hearing the new accusation, Pilate got a lot closer to a unified interpretation of Jesus's utterances, and so he could ask a much more specific question to clear up the missing link. He could then reconstruct that the not-of-this-worldness refers to divine origin, that his (perhaps divine) mission had been, from his birth, to bear testimony to the truth, which could be heard by those who were of the truth. Consequently, Jesus cannot be one of those *of* the truth, so the question is logical and precise: *where else is Jesus from, that he can bear testimony to the truth to those who are of the truth, and from what basis does he derive his testimony and existence? John's Jesus offers silence in answer to a question about not "the truth," but the credibility and nature of the testimony about it.* And this is because Jesus should have talked about the Father, but since the evening of the last supper, "an enormous shadow had fallen on Jesus's divine nature. The Father, too, seemed to be silent, and turn away from him" (E1 264). But owing to the composition of the gospel story, Pilate, who is indubitably "moved by the mysterious power of his prisoner, and even discusses religion and ethics with him,"⁸⁷ cannot hear what and why Jesus keeps secret, since he cannot know the parable of the prodigal son in *Luke*, or Jesus's important farewell speech from the previous night given in *John* 14-17. He who, according to our analysis, gives such a meticulous attention to Jesus's words, can hardly be blamed for not asking *who* the truth was.⁸⁸ It is with an obstinacy stronger than sarcasm that John's Pilate continues to claim, and *has it written in the cross in three languages*, as an affirmative answer to his first (and synoptic) question, that Jesus is the king of the Jews. "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (*John* 19, 21-2).

The other half of Pilinszky's answer to Jesus's silence is as follows: "Because he himself is the truth. I am (the way,) the truth (, and the life)" (E2 331). Silence in this sense is an absolute answer, a solution to a puzzle similar to that of Poe's "The Purloined Letter:" what we are seeking is right there in front of us; Jesus offers

⁸⁷Kermode 97.

⁸⁸Balassa (1987) 140.

himself, his silent “body,” his sheer presence as an answer. In which the rub is that it is *not* a nonverbal reply, since Pilinszky interprets his argument through one of Jesus’s fundamental statements, which is in turn unknown to Pilate, which means that he uses and fills, in his own way, a narrative gap. *Jesus’s, or Pilinszky’s silence can, then, be derived not only from the synoptic misreading of the three-plus-one gospels, but from the metaphoric rearrangement of the plot of the “plus one,”* St John. The function of Pilate’s figure is, therefore, to break John’s scheme of *the word before the body*, whose unfeasibility is manifested precisely in him, a much more perceptive listener of Jesus’s words.

But the fact that Jesus (his body, his silence) is truth itself, has a significant retroactive effect on his Son-ness, on the family saga of the divine persons. Pilinszky’s words are rather hesitant on the subject of God *and/or* Father and Son. God alone knows the truth, or more precisely, he himself is the truth (from this we can again syllogistically conclude that *nobody knows God except for God*). The notion of “truth” retains here a prevaillingly legal, juridical sense: “all jurisdiction is a dethronement of the living God, of the Father. He who judges, [...] identifies himself with truth, making the Father redundant, and substitutes himself for the person of the living God” (E2 331-2).⁸⁹ It is therefore only instead of man, who usurps truth, but also by substituting himself for the person of the Father, and thus, ultimately, by making him redundant, that the Son retains silence in his incarnate capacity. This constellation of figures displays several similarities to the parable of the prodigal son, and precisely in that unreadable, or only misreadable (paraphrase-generating) texture, which is constituted by the aenigma of the Godhead and the metaphor of the body.

Let us now juxtapose the parable from *Luke*, and the triple metaphor from *John* (*John* 14, 6), which Pilinszky studded with parentheses in order to enhance the intactness of the argument, and the emphasis on the middle metaphor (*thruth*), and the clarity of the reference. The broader context of this is provided by Chapter 14, where Jesus launches into his long farewell speech. The story of the master and his disciples will soon come to a conclusion, a story which started with the two disciples of John the Baptist asking Jesus where he lived. “He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it

⁸⁹ This is equivocal in the gospel already: “Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgement is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me” (*John* 8,15-6). Weil, however, offers a reading in John’s vein for a synoptic passage (*Matthew* 7, 1; *Luke* 6, 37): “Not even Jesus judges. He himself is the judgement” (Weil 132).

was about the tenth hour" (*John* 1,39). John seems to have devoted Chapter 14 to the task of dissolving the obscurity surrounding this sentence and the primary point of the meeting of the disciples and Jesus, i.e. Jesus's dwelling place. The farewell instruction, as we know, claims that Jesus goes forth and prepares a place in his Father's house for those who are his own, and will return to take them with him so that they could be together. This is the point at which Thomas, Jesus's greatest interrogator besides Pilate, interrupts: "Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whiter thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (*John* 14, 5-6). Frye has the following comment on this passage:

Jesus' answer "I am the way," explodes, or, perhaps, deconstructs, the whole metaphor of journey, of the effort to go there in order to arrive here. The metaphor of a journey modulates into a metaphor of an erect human body, with a head on top and feet underneath, with which we identify ourselves. Philip asks to be shown the father, and gets the same type of answer: there is nothing there; everything you need is here. *In the synoptics* Jesus makes the same point in telling the disciples that the kingdom of heaven, the core of his teaching, is among them or within them. Nothing Jesus says seems to have been more difficult for his followers to grasp than his principle of the here-ness of here. [...] *Once we form part of a body which is both ourselves and infinitely larger than ourselves, the distinction between movement and rest vanishes: there is no need for a way when the conception "away" is no longer functional.*

I am not connecting Jesus' metaphor here with a structure of belief, but with the response of a reader to a verbal structure. Following a narrative is a metaphorical journey,⁹⁰ and the journey is metaphorically horizontal, going from here to there.

As we have seen, the framework of Jesus's life also displays the scheme of "word first, body second," which spreads from the prehistoric silence of the word which is to become incarnate ("with God," *John* 1,1) to the taciturnity of the incarnate word (before Pilate). These two points frame the time spent with the disciples. Still, we here witness how Jesus suspends John's scheme himself, in that he answers the ultimately synonymous questions of the two disciples, then Thomas and Philip, and finally Pilate, differently, but still in the same way, i.e. by demonstration. In

⁹⁰ Frye 94-5, my italics.

the first case we are simply told about this happening, while in the other two, Jesus - through words or silence - points at himself, at his own body. A very similar case is *life*, the last word of the self-declaration, which, through John's metaphors of the eucharist and light, also refers to Jesus himself, (6, 47-58; 7, 37-8; 8, 12 etc), and which is also in a strong connotative relation with *way*.

Jesus's triple self-declaration is then partly an incarnate, or *corporal*, reading of God's tautological declaration of himself in the Old Testament, and partly a methodological extension of his body, or *corpus*, which also serves as a deconstruction of the circle of the homecoming and the circularity of the interpretation: "The absolute solution to the hermeneutic circle is the transformation by the incarnate *Logos*, when we no longer explain something, but we ourselves become the living explanation, the *logos*."⁹¹

A classic restatement of this transfiguration is provided by Kierkegaard, who maintains that "if we do not become that which we understand, then we do not understand it."⁹² If, however, we cannot interpret this identification of the textual level, then the potential anti-literariness of this mystic thesis⁹³ dooms the clarification of our question about repetition to failure. Taking advantage of Deleuze's view, we can therefore say that the ability of understanding to become its own subject matter is carried by *writing*,⁹⁴ in that, as Sartre says in his interpretation of Kierkegaard, the poet is "different from *everybody else*, from himself, from that which he writes down." This, Pilinszky writes, is because in literature we do not even know "our own selves, only the writing that issues from under our pen" (N 49).⁹⁵ Sartre measures the possibility of interpreting Kierkegaard in the proportion of a reading's ability to become a sign repeating the *corpus in its own taciturnity*:

If we insert its *words* into our language, translating them *with our own words*, will knowledge find its limits, and by some kind of a paradoxical inversion of meaning, will it indicate that which signifies as its own taci-

⁹¹ Kardos Daróczy 212.

⁹² Quoted in Kardos Daróczy 212.

⁹³ Their [the mystics'] central axiom is normally something like '*One becomes what one beholds*,' that is, consistent and disciplined vision ends in the kind of identification we have been associating with existential metaphor. Such people normally show *little interest in literature*, though there are literary affinities in some religions [...]" (Frye 86, my emphases).

⁹⁴ Deleuze 11-17.

⁹⁵ Sartre (1976) 317.

turn foundation? [...] We have to question *that which remains* of Kierkegaard, his word-corpse. [...] We asked: what hinders the late Kierkegaard from becoming the subject matter of cognition? [...] his answer is [...]: the progress of that which is signified back to that which signifies cannot be the subject matter of any kind of mental cognition. [...] His first answer is that man understands that which he becomes.⁹⁶

Pilinszky, who was equally influenced by the writing of the Kierkegaard of *The Repetition*⁹⁷ and the writing of the Sartre of *La nausée*, does the same in his blasphemous and alarming attempt to become the body of the prodigal son or the Son, and repeat their “word-corpses.” Jesus’s figure, his body, text and the book, the verbal body gathered around him by the belief in him, could not, however, become a *corpus* without being repeated in a stigmatised state, that is without being seen after its resurrection. At this point John’s gospel summons up Thomas again, who ties the testimony of Jesus’s resurrection or the return of the former Jesus, to the sensuous experience of the stigmata. Jesus, however, only permits this after his visit to his Father (*John* 20, 17). Thomas’s figure, called ‘*doubting*’ in the tradition, but *Didymos*, or ‘double’ by John, “is like the *stigma* of every mark, already split.”⁹⁸ The stigma of repeatability on the corpus of the text.

From this point on, whenever, scattered in space, the writing of the *corpus* becomes a real Book (incarnation), it gives a new stillborn life to itself amidst the dispersion of its divinity (*kenosis*). This renders Frye’s statement that “the word, which points toward a spiritual understanding of itself, can be succeeded only by the spiritual form of itself”⁹⁹ particularly pertinent to the gospel according to St John, which inscribes the hermeneutics of testimony in the poetics of the possibility of writing on.¹⁰⁰ This, in Pilinszky’s reading, could sound like this: the Word, which points towards a spiritual reading of itself (its “body”), can only be

⁹⁶ Sartre (1976) 288, 299, 318-9.

⁹⁷ “If someone asked me how Kierkegaard wrote, there’d be no doubt: in well-linked, tall letters with a tilt forward. This is certain, although I’ve never seen his handwriting” (E2 302). In my non-expert opinion, this describes Pilinszky’s hand just as fittingly as Kierkegaard’s.

⁹⁸ Derrida (1977b) 185.

⁹⁹ Frye 258.

¹⁰⁰ “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (16, 12). “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book” (20, 30). “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world could not contain the books that should be written” (21, 25).

surpassed by its spectral form - where surpassing refers to the series of vestigially traceable steps between the dead body and the body after death.

Thus, in answer to Zsuzsa Beney's parenthetical question, "(It is worth mentioning and it would be interesting to investigate why Pilinszky invokes several of his favourite authors in his poems - Dostoevsky, Van Gogh, Emily Brontë, Mozart etc. What sort of a *personal relationship* could be evoked and? or? be *substituted for the resurrection* and the secret turn towards the dead?"),¹⁰¹ we can briefly propose that the poet's relationship to his precursors is likely to be closely connected to that relationship of narrative misreading which takes place between Pilinszky's "imagination" and Jesus's words, Jesus as corpus, i.e. text, and the dead of the "texture of history."¹⁰² Jesus was more abandoned than the dead of Auschwitz. But his poetic imagery makes a more faded impression.

At the same time, the liturgy of the dead is also waiting to be created.

"This cannot be the fruit of beautification or a simple borrowing of imagery" (N 138; my italics). Among the working papers to the "KZ-oratórium" ('Concentration Camp Oratorio') we do have extant the sketch of such a liturgy of the death which follows the structure of the mass and contains the telling reference: "Ending (John's gospel)" (N 20-22).

When Pilinszky asks his direct question about the identity of Christ, echoing the Pilate of John's gospel, then he simultaneously links this to repeatability. "Who are you? - whom we can follow without the danger of the slightest shadow of being epigones falling on us?" (E2 294). If we add his statement "He [Homer] is one of my most beloved authors. And Jesus. He would be even if I wasn't a believer" (B 229), and another question, "But when will our use of words coincide with Jesus's?," then this reveals the poles of the paradox as the ambivalence of an anxiety of Jesus's influence, insofar as repetition, which is the constitutive imperative of the "aesthetics of the gospel," carries the menace of the haunting sceptre of epigonism. And indeed, one of the highest peaks of

¹⁰¹ Beney 97, my italics. Following the trace of this parenthesis, Schein concludes that Pilinszky's view of reality is "best revealed in the ways he relates to some definitive figures of modern art (Dostoevsky, Van Gogh, Kafka, Simone Weil, Attila József, Beckett, Wilson etc.)" (Schein [1995] 90). Cf. Ted Hughes's statement: "It is characteristic that his affinities are not with other poets, but with such figures as Van Gogh, certain of Dostoevsky's characters and above all, perhaps, with Simone Weil" (Hughes 12).

¹⁰² According to Balassa, Pilinszky "*experiences, narrates and interprets scandal, too, as the passion of the Son, whereas this would be the passion story of the adherents of a religion of the Father*" (Balassa (1995) 97, my emphasis).

Pilinszky's powers is his reading of Jesus's silence before Pilate, in which he performs a revision of his own rhetorics of silence which only reports of the fatally superior force of the returning dead man. Which of course brings repeated crisis to the weakness and one-sidedness of the interpretations which regard the rhetoric and poetic dynamism of the averting of anxiety as a mere springboard to an uninhibited and unbounded spiritualisation. Often enough, it is precisely the most seminal texts that serve as bases for this, for instance the tropes of the uninterpretability of the gospel, which are so easily regarded as gestures of a mystic respect and practice (mystery: 'closing the eyes'). "Great truths are uncircumscribable, incalculable, and only warm us in the humility of contemplation. [...] let us close our eyes and cry [...] The gospels were written for eyes that are wide open with happiness, closed with weeping and stuck together with agony" (E2 289).

However, reading on this passage, keeping in mind our previous interpretation of weeping and Pilinszky's "Letter" to the gospel, we come across a new defensive method. This is the deprivation of the Scripture, i.e. the Writing, from being writing. "Jesus only wrote in the dust and on the face of the water. Why is that? Because dust and water will timelessly preserve that which makes paper tire and moulder away. [...] Because the decipherable letter is of man. And the indecipherable message is solely of Him, who wrote in the dust and died in agony for us between the two thieves" (E2 289). Shortly afterwards, Pilinszky wrote, with the title "Én Jézusom" ('Jesus Mine') and in the second person, "what then are you like? According to the testimony of the gospels, you never wrote, only once, in the dust. Still, you are the only one who wrote, and it is we who write in the dust" (E2 294). Let us note here that this is not according to the gospels, only to *John* 8, 6-8, where writing on the ground serves to fill in the silence that replaces an answer: the scene where this takes place is a version of the process of the passion, only here it is Jesus who finds himself in Pilate's later situation. Pilinszky's Pilate-like question is answered, this time, by John's overpowering writing, which in turn is answered by the poet's typically notorious "synoptic" misreading of the three *synoptic gospels* and *St John*, and his reclaiming the writing of the Scriptures. "I would like to write a synoptic gospel once, because there are things that I do not understand, and things which are contradictory," he says in a conversation (B 229), and his plans included the writing of what he called a "Book of Jesus" (N 144), as well as a journal in dialogue, entitled "Szinopszis" ('Synopsis'), which would have been a major

work and (in) which (he) would *speak at last* (N 200-201). "Synopsis" would have been co-authored by Bébi, the poet's actual aunt who had a severe speech defect, and about whom he writes, at the same place, "Later - half consciously, half unconsciously - I borrowed my whole poetic creed from her. The heavy joy of having managed, step by step, to name each subsequent object." She is not simply a muse, but also the figure of Pilinszky's *Sublimé*, who unites all tropes that the poet uses for the language of the gospel, as well as the mother tongue's instance that excludes all textual - and thus, by necessity, biblical - antecedents, and whose description contains several poetic allusions that we are now sensitivised to through our previous interpretations:

Should someone ask what after all is my poetic language, in truth I should have to answer: it is some sort of lack of language, a sort of linguistic poverty. I have learned our mother-tongue from my mother's elder sister [whose nickname was Bébi], who met with an accident, was ill, and got barely beyond the stage of childlike stammering. This is not much. No doubt the world has added this and that, completely random, accidentally, from very different workshops. This I *received*. And because the nice thing about our mother-tongue is exactly this fact, that we receive it, we do not want to add anything to it. We would feel it detrimental to do so. It would be as if we tried to improve our origin. But in art even such poor language - and I must say this with ther pride of the poor - can be redeemed. In art the deaf can hear, the blind can see, the cripple can walk, each deficiency may become a creative force of high quality. (B 64-5)¹⁰³

The self-evident statement that these plans remained mere plans is as futile and deceptive as saying that Pilinszky's life work is nothing else but a carrying out of these gospel-based projects. Rather, our analysis seems to support Péter Balassa's finely tuned opinion according to which "*Pilinszky's oeuvre is: an - almost bodyless - corpus*, which [...] requires a gospel-like reading."¹⁰⁴ *Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the gospel," which is applied to imagination through the repetition, which is to say the somewhat blasphemous strong misreading, of the parable of the prodigal son, can be opened up through a synoptic reading, covering all of the author's corpus or "word-corpse" (Sartre), of the dialectics, endeavours,*

¹⁰³ Translated and cited by Hughes 8.

¹⁰⁴ Balassa (1987) 144.

contradictions, (enforced) silences of an anxiety of the gospel's influence and a desire towards it. I am aware of the contestability of an approach that regards an *oeuvre* as a territory to be explored in all directions, but interpretations following the temporal order of the evolution of the life work (a strict chronology, the sequence of the publications, poetic periods and development) likewise have their weak points; the balance of the former possibility is here meant to be assisted by a discussion of the narrative nature of a latent poetic construction “in lieu of an *ars poetica*.”

It is Baudelaire who, as a forerunner of Pilinszky, portrays the once masked or hidden, once differing/deferring protagonist of this narrative, the inventor of all tropes, that is “creative imagination” with the help of subsequent *acts* of analysis and synthesis (in Bloom’s terms, limitation and representation),¹⁰⁵ Old and New Testament *allegories* of fertility, and the *example* of soldiers of different ranks. (It is worth paying attention to the parentheses here as well.):

You can easily spot those whom it avoids from a distance, since they carry the corruption of some secret malediction, which makes all their works turn dry, like the fig-tree in the gospel.

It is the analysis and the synthesis. [...] It created, at the beginning of our existence, analogy and metaphor. It decomposed creation into its elements, and created, out of the obedient material thus accumulated, a new world according to new laws, whose motives dwell in the very depth of the soul; it created the feeling of the new. And since the world was created by it (I think we can safely say this also in the religious sense), it has a right to govern it as well. What do you think a warrior would be worth without imagination? He could be an excellent member of the rank and file, but faced with the task of commanding armies, he would not be able to make conquests.¹⁰⁶

When Pilinszky uses similar military metaphors to encode his relationship to Attila József, his most immediate precursor among Hungarian poets, - “He had the profoundest influence on me,” Pilinszky says towards the end of his life (B 222) - the stakes of the contest are not less than the possession of “creative imagination,” which is far superior to the merely combinative fancy, which, like a *bricoleur*, takes apart and puts together, toiling away dreamily, and the division

¹⁰⁵ See his map of misprision: Bloom (1975) 84.

¹⁰⁶ Baudelaire 114.

and capture of poetic power, the *Sublime*, along the lines of the third, intermediary Bloomian act of *Substitution*.

In 1964, influenced by a new publication of Baudelaire's cited writing, Pilinszky comes to the conclusion that imagination can, at the best, only be a re-creation in some relationship with already existing creation, and that the strength, or relative originality, i.e. the meaning of this re-creation can only be guaranteed by the radicality of the destruction of the antecedent, the radicality of a negative creation. "We do not yet clearly see the role of literature. It might serve to pull down the world, and thus prepare the way for a new genesis. ('Heaven and hell shall pass, but my Words ...') "(N 49). This is why "creative imagination" is put between inverted commas in Pilinszky's 1970 lecture on the "lot" of creative imagination, where, according to our analysis, it is already seen as a development - defying vain attempts at its devaluation - of combinative fancy, in the same way as the inventor is a development of the *bricoleur* who just puts things together. "If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it "out of nothing," "out of whole cloth," would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea., and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*.¹⁰⁷

Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the Gospel" repeats the Bible with a dual and equivocal gesture. On the one hand, it revises the father's creation through the idiosyncratically misread parable of the prodigal son; the narrative thus provided is the allegory of the lot of "creative imagination" - or that of "The Lot of 'Creative Imagination' in our Time." On the other, the (at least linguistic) uninterpretability that is singled out as the essence of the gospel returns as a negative quality experienced through the pangs of contradictory and unintelligible points that urge him towards a new synoptic writing. The economy of Pilinszky's witing is hard to imagine without his probably unconscious inclination to

¹⁰⁷ Derrida (1978) 285, transl. Alan Bass.

discover, “synoptically,” rupture, contradiction, question or, as in the analysis of Christ’s silence, silence where there would perhaps be none without him. The internal in- or perversion of the divided imagination, Bloom’s Substitution, can be caught in the action here: “creative imagination” operates as its own negation, looking for errors and gaps, and is in fact destructive, solely in order to provide sufficient material for the “neogenesis,” fancy’s activity of recombining the rubble. Pilinszky’s revisionary force is capable of taking some edge off the blasphemy of the anxiety that mourns over the tautology of the uncreatability of creation; one could say he finds a pre-text for this in the parable of the prodigal son, or in the pressure, sublimated into an aesthetic imperative, for its repetition. “[T]here is no way / or road or hope to break” (Revelations VIII. 7, transl. Csokits-Hughes), though, from his blasphemic re-vision or misreading that it is precisely the success of destruction that he calls grace in the course of writing, this two-phase operation of imagination. Thus Simone Weil’s sentence, “Imagination is always ready to fill in, immediately, all gaps that grace makes,”¹⁰⁸ which Pilinszky translated in 1964-5, could, in a poetic transcription by the poet, sound something like this: fancy is always ready and is always compelled by necessity, to immediately fill up all gaps made by “misreading-creative” imagination.

I could say little, within the limits of this essay, about my opinion that Pilinszky’s writing probably also strikes *itself* with this ‘grace.’ I would now still venture the statement that its self-revisionary force reaches its peak precisely with the *coup de grace* given to his “aesthetics of the gospel:” in one of his last interviews in 1980, when he only thought of Baudelaire whom he was “constantly reading at a time,” having called Jesus his most beloved author and having mentioned the plan of the synoptic gospel, Pilinszky says this about Jesus, or “him who invented this: the world’s greatest writer,” that “[h]e had no words for the creation of the world”(B 229). To bring out that this might well be Pilinszky’s most serious attempt(ation), conscious or unconscious, to contradict his Jesus and himself, it suffices to recall that Pilinszky quotes Jesus’s parenthetic word(s) followed by the dots of ellipsis: “(‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words...’)” (N 49, cf. Luke 21, 33), when he tries to illustrate that literature “prepares a neogenesis.” It is only grammatically that Pilinszky’s unselfconscious imagination negates itself, since fancy, which thus had “creative imagination” do

¹⁰⁸ Weil 77 (“L’imagination combleuse”).

the work of destruction for it, does not have to do a lot of combination to come up with the question of *why* it has no word for creation, and the answer, which is provided by the sentence of the “there is no word,” the silence after Pilate’s question: because that word, or sentence, is itself.

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Judit Baróthy

The Androgynous Mind

A Contrastive Analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Boris Pasternak's *Zhenya Luvers' Childhood*

One of the main concerns of modernist novel-writers was, as that of their predecessors had been, the representation of reality; only the answers given to the 'question of questions', "What is reality in the novel?" (Hugh Walpole) changed. By 1932, when this question was asked, the writers of the age had all tried to give an appropriate reply in their novels or 'self-commentaries'. As early as 1919 Virginia Woolf expounded her view of reality and the principles of representation of the new novel in her 'manifesto', entitled *Modern Fiction*. In this essay, like in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), she repudiates the methods and aims of the writers whom she calls 'materialists' and defines those of her own by this opposition. Traditional mimetic realism, represented by such 'materialists' as Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells, did not live up to the expectations of the age any more for "in or about December 1910 human character changed".

New conditions in modern experience needed a new mode of representation, but the changes in art were also motivated by a partly unconscious desire to compensate for the collapse of social and moral value systems. The function of art was not to represent 'objective' reality but to create a reality which is again in harmonious unity with the world, with the universe.¹ The efforts made to re-

¹ Roger Fry in his introduction to the catalogue for the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, 1912 writes: "These artists ... do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. ... In fact they aim not at illusion but at reality." (Fry 239)

establish the primordial unity of life could only be realised on the conceptual plane, in the artist's consciousness. Within the modernist paradigm this ambition takes shape most conspicuously in the rebirth of the androgynous principle.

In the archaic state of culture opposing poles, like male and female, represented the different sides of the same principle and the idea of androgyny appeared quite natural. As a result of the differentiation of principles in the course of cultural development, the two members of this binary opposition became independent from each other. It led to the appearance of two gender-specific modes of perception on the basis of which two gender-specific languages sprang and penetrated the literary genres as well. In the early 20th century, in this age of final and fatal differentiation, the crucial task for art was to satisfy the desire to regain the sense of unity and to create the age of a new 'synchretism'.² The artist's main dilemma in the age of modernism is manifested in the different ideals of immortality represented by the two sexes. Béla Hamvas in his article about the 'androgynos' defines them the following way: "A férfi tevékenysége halhatatlannak lenni az örök monumentumban; a nő tevékenysége halhatatlannak lenni a mulandóságban."³

Hamvas emphasizes that man rejects to live life, rather he creates an 'object' that can be preserved in eternity; woman lives the moments of life to the fullest which then, by themselves, add up to become eternal. The gap between the two can only be bridged in the androgynous mind.

Both in Virginia Woolf and Boris Pasternak's idea of androgyny the two types of creation are harmonised and brought to a synthesis. In their essays and novels they are concerned with the possibility of preserving primary sensual impressions in art (the

Boris Pasternak in his article "Some Propositions" ("Nyeskol'ko polozheniy", 1919) defines his theory of reality in the following way:

Живой, действительный мир - это единственный, однажды удавшийся и все еще без конца удачный замысел воображения. Вот он длится, ежмгновенно успешный. Он все еще - действителен, глубок, неотрывно увлекателен. В нем не разочаровываешься на другое утро. Он служит поэту примером в большей еще степени, нежели - натурой и моделью. (112-113)

The real, living world is the only plan of imagination which has once succeeded and which goes on being endlessly successful. Look at it continuing, moment after moment a success. It is still real, deep, utterly absorbing. It is not something you are disappointed in next morning. It serves the poet as example, even more than as model or pattern. (Livingstone 31/6)

² cf. O. M. Фрейденберг, *Миф и литература древности*. Москва, 1978. А. Белый, "Будущее искусство" в: А. Белый, *Символизм как миропонимание*. Москва: "Республика", 1994.

N. Frye: *Myth and Metaphor. Selected Essays 1974-88*. ed. R.D. Denham, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

³ Hamvas, 12. "Man's pursuit is to become immortal in the eternal monument; woman's pursuit is to be immortal in evanescence." (J.Baróthy)

child's or woman's type of perception), of grasping and including the fleeting moment in universal human experience. It appears quite explicitly in Virginia Woolf's seminal essay *A Room of One's Own* where the author describes the androgynous mind as an essential condition for the forming of the creative consciousness.⁴ The main theme of both Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Boris Pasternak's *Zhenya Luvers' Childhood* is the birth of the artist through the stages of uniting feminine and masculine traits within the creative mind. In the present paper I would like to follow up some of the stations of this process by looking at the relations of Lily Briscoe to the Ramsays, and those of Zhenya Luvers to Tzvetkov and her parents.

The first part of Virginia Woolf's novel, 'The Window' centres on the figures of Mr and Mrs Ramsay. Mrs Ramsay symbolizes the female principle in life, we see her as caring mother, devoted wife, attractive woman, goddess and housewife. She draws almost everybody she meets under her spell, and they all want to unravel the mystery surrounding her. The only one who does not seem to admire her enough is Augustus Carmichael, the poet. Although Lily Briscoe resents Mrs Ramsay's social practices and her ideas about a woman's duties she cannot withdraw herself from her influence. Mrs Ramsay's ultimate femininity is also underlined by the symbols of fertility and womanhood associated with her personality: trees, flowers, plants, the sea, the moon, etc. Mr Ramsay's figure bears all the attributes of a purely masculine image. Mrs Ramsay's intuitive creativity is counterpointed by his dry intellectuality. He has no eye for everyday practicalities, he is "timid in life", in his relationship with his children or Lily Briscoe. He is a philosopher; his books are about "subject and object and the nature of reality." Thinking of his work Lily always imagines a scrubbed kitchen table - something simple, clear and real. His thinking is very rational; it is demonstrated through the description of the linearity of his mind's working:

For if thought is like ... the alphabet ranged in twenty-six letters, all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q.

(40)

⁴ "... in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; ... The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have an intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties." (96-97)

Though he reaches Q he cannot get to R. He is driven to his wife by the feeling of failure to ask for her sympathy. There are many other references to his intellectual barrenness, and the imagery associated with him, despite his many books and children, implies sterility. He must resort to female creativity, symbolized by the image of the fountain, which suggests not only Mrs Ramsay's fecundity, but also her fertilising capacity. The dichotomy between female fertility and male sterility is further emphasized by the sexual imagery of the passage, which, in the description of James's partaking in this social-sexual intercourse, is not free from Freudian overtones, either:⁵

And James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy.

(45)

However, the archetypicality of the figures of Mr and Mrs Ramsay is treated with an ironic stance and the descriptions are sometimes more reminiscent of the stereotype than the archetype, which is probably also due to Woolf's inherent feminism. Mrs Ramsay's declared ignorance ("Books, she thought, grew of themselves. She never had time to read them.") underlines her husband's intellectual superiority, and thus the stereotypes of the insensible, but lovely woman and the knowledgeable, but impractical man come into prominence.

And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful.

(130)

And Mrs Ramsay, leaving the argument entirely in the hands of the two men, wondered why she was bored by this talk, and wished, looking at her husband at the other end of the table, that he would say something. ... For if he said a thing, it would make all the difference.

(103)

⁵ cf. Kaivola 31-31, Blotner 184-186 and Pratt 143-153

The description of the different ways of striving for immortality, as it has been mentioned above, is also gender-specific. Mrs Ramsay tries to realize her ideal of eternity by making "the moment endure," to create a sense of unity for a moment, at least. Mr Ramsay yearns for lasting fame, and wants to achieve it by his books. B,la Hamvas describes man's ideal of immortality as something that wants to break into timelessness, but instead of transferring himself, man creates a substitute, e.g. pyramids, symphonies, military campaigns (the poetic variant of the same idea can be found in Osip Mandel'shtam's 'Tristia' of 1918 ⁶) that he transfers, but not into eternity, only time lengthened. Instead of dissolving his existence he raises a monument into which he builds himself and by that he wants to become eternal. Mr Ramsay suffers from the thought that he will not be remembered and, at the same time, he is aware of the impossibility of his desire:

His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years? (asked Mr Ramsay ironically, staring at the hedge). ... The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare.

(42)

According to Hamvas, woman's ideal of immortality is just the opposite of man's ambition. Woman's immortality lies in the transitoriness - to become immortal in the irrevocable disappearance of the passing moment. That is why, he writes, singing and dancing, fruits and flowers, food and clothes, moods and emotion and thought and society and body are female. Everything that disappears without trace, that happens only once and is impossible to reproduce is, paradoxically, eternal. Man's ideal of immortality is in remembrance, woman's is in oblivion (this idea, which is the basic dilemma of the Russian acmeist movement, too, finds its resolution in the poetry of O. Mandel'shtam.)⁷ During the dinner party Mrs Ramsay is fully aware of the experience she undergoes:

⁶ Не нам гадать о греческом Эребе,
Для женщин воск, что для мужчины медь.
Нам только в битвах выпадает жребий,
А им дано гадая умереть. (124)
... We cannot foretell the Greek Erebus,
Wax is to women what bronze is to men.
In battle alone does fate confront us,
But they are telling fortunes to the end. (J.G. Harris)
⁷ see Hamvas, 9/24, 25, 10/27

There is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.

(113-114)

Lily Briscoe's vision at the end of the book unites the two types of creation. But not till she is able to cope with the figures of Mr and Mrs Ramsay can she finish her painting.

The second part of the novel, briefly and impersonally describing ten years' time of destruction, marriages, births, and deaths inscribed in parentheses, serves as an axis between the first and the third parts. Certain symbolically significant motifs turn up from 'The Window' (e.g. the 'bed', the 'shawl'), others anticipate the most important images of 'The Lighthouse': e.g. the 'sleeper', asking the ultimate questions of the sea, refers to the artist, and her vision. In part 3 phrases, sentences from part 1 are repeated, comparisons are constantly evoked (between Lily's painting and Mrs Ramsay's creativity, e.g.).

The two major symbols, Lily's painting and the voyage to the lighthouse are developed in parallel, in alternating sections within 'The Lighthouse'. The memory of Mrs Ramsay connects the two, and the *sine qua non* of the completion of both is the unravelling of her mystery. Both the painting and the idea of the voyage originate in the first part; they are not only compared to each other, as two ways of expressing creativity, but they also co-exist with their first-part versions. The intricate system of relations - of people to each other, to their earlier selves, or to objects and inanimate things - interweaves through the book. The problem in Lily's painting, after ten years of abandonment, is still the same: "how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left." She has to find the appropriate form to fill the 'glaring' space in the centre of the picture. In part 3, section 5, when she begins 'to model her way into the hollow' with the help of memories, for the first time she is able to formulate what it is exactly that she wants:

Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but

beneath the fabric must be clamped together with the bolts of iron.

(185).⁸

The surface is associated with feminine attributes, but in its deep structure the picture must be masculine; the metaphor recalls Mrs Ramsay's train of thought about

the admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world.

(part 1, 114)

Lily realizes that the picture is to be the product of an androgynous mind. While working on the last phase a series of scenes appear to Lily Briscoe from the past: Mrs Ramsay sitting silent, 'looking out to sea'; the lives of the Rayleys in cinematic episodes and also an imagined scene when Lily 'would feel a little triumphant, telling Mrs Ramsay that the marriage had not been a success' and that all has gone against her wishes; and Mrs Ramsay's shape at the age of twenty through William Bankes's eyes. Lily reaches a state of mind in which all her memories of Mrs Ramsay blend into one and remains 'that abstract one made of her,' in which she feels the emptiness left by Mrs Ramsay, and that enables her to mourn for her and at the same time, to come to terms with her own creation:

'you' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. ... One might say even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it 'remained forever'.

(194)

With that last, silent utterance, which recalls Mrs Ramsay's thoughts during the dinner party, (see above) the two types of creation mould into one, and for a moment the two personalities unite as Lily wished a long time before:

What art was there, known to love or cunning, ... ? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs

⁸ The descriptions of the picture and Lily's views of art point out the most important problems of contemporary painting, especially the role of impressionism as source of the post-impressionist movements - for further analysis see R. Fry and A. Gehlen

Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, ...
nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy
itself, which is knowledge

(58)

From the 'waters of annihilation' she emerges triumphantly - she has internalized Mrs Ramsay's figure. Empowered by this epiphanic moment she continues her painting until 'something incongruous' catches her sight: Mr Ramsay's boat.

Mr Ramsay; the man who had marched past her, with his hand raised,
aloof, at the head of a procession, in his beautiful boots, asking her for her
sympathy, which she had refused.

(196)

Her thoughts and senses turn towards him. She realizes that she has not solved her problem as she thought: "for whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary" (208).

The image of the 'razor edge of balance' suggests that it can only be achieved for a very short time, for a moment, perhaps. Her hostility towards Mr Ramsay is not actually resolved until she feels she is able to give him "whatever she had wanted to give him, when he left her that morning." (224) With the 'act' of giving Lily becomes capable of completing her picture. The vagueness of 'whatever' leaves room for doubt, but it should be something more than the sympathy Mr Ramsay had demanded. It enables both of them to complete their quests; for Mr Ramsay it means harmony in his relationship with his children, with the memory of his wife, and it holds out hopes for him of getting rid of his fatal sterility. At the same time it endows Lily with the capacity to reconcile the feminine and the masculine principles in herself, shadow and light, life and death, ephemeral and eternal in her picture. The moment is crowned by her mystical connection with Carmichael, an independent poet, who has submitted neither to Mrs Ramsay's feminine charms, nor to Mr Ramsay's masculine ideas of order. Their spiritual communion suggests that Lily, by transcending the question of sexes, by reaching a state of androgyny, has achieved artistic independence.

In *Zhenya Luvers' Childhood* (Detstvo Luvers) Boris Pasternak examines the process of a girl's sexual and spiritual growth parallel with the forming of her

creative consciousness. The title itself is symbolic of the content. First of all, it reminds the reader of titles of traditional biographies - the use of the surname without the first name, in the original, puts the stress on the future significance of the person. At the same time the name Luvers, because of its foreign origin, lacks the female ending; it is masculine-sounding in Russian. But if it were a man's name it should be declined, then the book would bear the title 'Detstvo Luversa'. The idea of androgyny, which in Pasternak's oeuvre is also closely related to the creative capacity, appears already on the level of morphology.⁹

Since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the theme of the child has frequently been used in literature to symbolize innocence, imagination or sensibility.¹⁰ The modernist artist is still concerned with innocence, but as F. Björling points out, not with moral innocence but with perceptive and cognitive innocence. In the artistic concepts of turn-of-the-century Russian art childhood, on one hand, became a central theme because of this innocent, unprejudiced perceptiveness of the child that helps the artist to get rid of his cultural consciousness. On the other hand, the child's mythological thinking and use of language offered a possible way for the artists to return to the archaic state of human existence, to primordial unity, at least in art. Pasternak imitates the working of the child's mind - first he focuses on a small detail, then he follows his heroine, as she slowly comes to understand what she sees, what is happening to her. For example, in the second section of the first part Zhenya is thinking of the French governess, whose name she has forgotten and can only remember that she first shouted at her, then cut the blood-stained piece out of the bearskin. The meaning of the episode is slowly developed through a series of metaphors (the birth of spring in painful labour; the swollen lamps) until, in a humiliating scene, Zhenya, full of shame and guilt, tells her mother about her menstruation. Her mother does not explain it to her; it is Zhenya's task to come to terms with her own womanhood. This way of perceiving is characteristic of all the important events in Zhenya's life. Nothing is explained to her; myriads of impressions fall upon her and she waits passively until everything finds its place and becomes clear.¹¹ Her natural ignorance

⁹ The girl's first name, Zhenya is also ambiguous - it is the short form of both Yevgenyi (male) and Yevgenyia (female).

¹⁰ For further analysis see P. Coveney, particularly chapter 1 ("The Cult of Sensibility and the Romantic Child"), and F. Björling 130-137

¹¹ Virginia Woolf in *Modern Fiction* expresses a very similar view of the open intentionality of consciousness: "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with sharpness of steel. From all sides

proves to be necessary in the process of reaching maturity; it is reinforced by a passage about life:

Жизнь посвящает очень немногих в то, что она делает с ними. Она слишком любит это дело и за работой разговаривает разве с теми только, кто желает ей успеха и любит ее верстак. Помочь ей не властен никто помешать - может всякий. ... чтобы человек не замешивал своей тупости в устройство своей бессмертной сути, заведено много такого, что отвлекает его пошлое любопытство от жизни, Для этого заведены все заправские религии, и все общие понятия, и все предрассудки людей, и самый яркий из них, самый развлекающий, - психология. (59-60)¹²

Nevertheless, the reader will not get a psychological characterization of Zhenya Luvers, her thoughts and emotions are projected on the surrounding physical world. So all the changes: the journeys, the different times of the day, illnesses, the boundaries: the Urals,¹³ the fence separating their garden from the street, and the meetings with strange people (most importantly with Tzvetkov, the lame man) are symbolic of the different phases in the girl's intellectual growth which, together with biological maturing, represent the grades leading to the unfolding of her creative capacity.

At the beginning of the narrative, identity with the world is still perfect - the connection between the 'signifier' and the 'signified' is natural and essential. The episode described on the first pages of the book takes place at night when the small girl is woken up by the noises of the adults playing cards and gets frightened by the lights of the factory on the other side of the river. Her father tells her very abruptly: 'It's Motovilikha.' The name has a soothing, magical effect on the child; she goes back to sleep at once. The night symbolizes the state preceding the awakening of consciousness, when the name of something is identical with what it refers to.

they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old;" (88)

¹² "Life initiates very few into the secret of what it is doing with them. It loves its purpose too well, and as it works it speaks only to those who wish it success and love life's workbench. No one has power to assist it, though anyone can hinder. ... to prevent ... man from involving his own stupidity in the formation of his immortal essence - several things have been introduced to divert his vulgar curiosity from life, ... For this purpose all decent true religions were introduced, all general concepts and human prejudices, and the most resplendent of these and the most entertaining - *psychology*." (C. Barnes, 160)

¹³ cf. Han 111-114, Jungren 489-500

Pasternak finds this sexless state of mind of the child ideal and although Zhenya grows out of it by the morning she keeps the freshness of the mode of her perception throughout her adolescence, and it plays its part in the forming of the creative mind. The unity of language and consciousness splits up, but the motif of names remains crucial.¹⁴ The maturing girl is no more satisfied with the names of certain concepts (e.g. the Urals, Asia); her sensations, experience have to prove their being, their reality. Her relationship with words is different from that of her brother's, who already has acquired the conventional, adult use of language. From the aspect of philosophy of language Zhenya's use of language is ontological, substantial, concerning the very essence of things, while her brother's is conventional. Answering his sister's question 'Why is it Asia?' he points at the map and explains to her how the Urals were agreed on to separate the two continents. For Zhenya it is incomprehensible - she has to experience this boundary in her own existence, in her own development. The understanding of the sentence 'Mother is pregnant', towards which the plot is moving throughout the narrative,¹⁵ is the longest process of comprehension and is also identified with the understanding of her own womanhood. There is another process developing parallel with it and arriving at its climax at the same time: it is the realization of the meaning of the concept 'stranger'. Looking at the two together helps one to see that the girl, in her special way, has grasped and resolved in herself the dichotomy of 'self' and 'other'. Although the two existing parts of this fragmentary book are called 'Long Days' and 'The Stranger', directly referring to Zhenya's first menstruation and Tzvetkov, the motifs of her likeness to her mother and of the stranger develop together. The child's awareness of other people and her own self evolves from the beginning of the book, step by step. I will look more closely at the most important stages of this process through the story.

The forms of appearance of the 'stranger' are always masculine: the factory, her father, Tzvetkov, the soldiers, her little brother, etc. The lights of the factory, Motovilikha were unfamiliar, strange, but the building with its dim shapes seemed to her exciting, kind and attractive. Many years later, she finds her parents' treatment of their children alien, especially her father seems to her a complete stranger when he is angry,¹⁶ and

¹⁴ cf. Han 107-109, Szöke 29-37

¹⁵ cf. Björling 144-151

¹⁶ Когда он приходил в раздражение, то становился решительно чужим человеком, чужим начисто и в тот самый миг, в который он утрачивал самообладание. (58)

Чужой не трогает. (58)¹⁷

Yet the 'other' father, the insensitive and pitiful one, as his children more often saw him, was terrifying, unlike the merely irritated stranger. After moving to Yekaterinburg, the girl gradually gets to know the house, the servants, and the garden. One day, sitting on a wood-stack, she accidentally catches sight of three women in the neighbouring garden. Judging from their position she thinks they are sleeping. From another chance look it turns out that they have been looking at a map which she now sees in the hands of a crippled man. This is the first occasion she catches a glimpse of him. At this point of the narrative the other motif, her mother's pregnancy, joins the Tzvetkov line. Zhenya, feeling the smell of her mother's medicine, realizes that there is an indefinable similarity between her mother and Aksinya, the janitress, (who, as it later turns out, is also pregnant) something that does not exist between Aksinya and herself, for example. Yet it is a resemblance that all people share; she thinks:

В чем-то совсем неуловимом. Она остановилась. В чем-то таком, - она задумалась, - в таком, что ли, что имеют в виду, когда говорят: все мы люди ... или одним, мол, миром мазаны ... или судьба кости не разбирает, ... (79)¹⁸

She intuitively comes upon truths that foreshadow the coming events, and at the same time drive her closer to the understanding of 'self' and 'other'. The first grown-up who takes the trouble to explain to her something she does not understand in the conversation of adults is a Belgian man, Neygarate, a guest of her parents'. He tells her about compulsory military service and the army and she suddenly sees the regiments as a gathering of individual people in uniform for whom she begins to feel sorry. According to A. Livingstone her feeling pity is "a moral as well as an existential development. The concept of 'person' enters her mind, like other concepts, only when it has become filled with a particular feeling."¹⁹

"But when he was irritated he became a stranger - a stranger totally and at the very instant when he lost his self-control." (Barnes 159)

¹⁷ "And the stranger awoke no feeling in them." (Barnes 159)

¹⁸ "Something quite indefinable. She stopped. Something like ... she paused to think. Maybe something like what people mean when they say 'We are all human', or 'We are all cast in the same mould', or 'Fate makes equals of us all ...'" (Barnes 178)

¹⁹ Livingstone (1963) 81

It is the Belgian from whom she first hears the name Tzvetkov; but the name and the image of the lame man are not yet connected. (In the same episode, there is also a more direct reference to her mother's state.)²⁰ The next section is wholly dedicated to Tzvetkov; it follows Zhenya's train of thoughts about him. On their way to the bookshop she and her brother catch sight of him, and first he seems to be very familiar to her - an old acquaintance from her 'childhood in Perm'. Seryozha tells her that he lives in his friends' house and he is a friend of Neygarate's. Then, as they are walking home, she realizes that the street she saw from the top of the wood-stack in their garden is not at all foreign to her, as she has previously thought; she knows it very well. This cognitive method then is applied to the decoding of Tzvetkov's figure. It suddenly strikes her that she saw the lame man (also from the wood-stack) in a garden, teaching geography to three young women, and that this is the man the shop-keeper called Tzvetkov and thought of him that he was the children's tutor. The name and the image of the man are connected now. This moment is an important stage in the process of understanding the concepts of 'self' and 'other', 'female' and 'male'. From this point on, his image persists in the girl's thoughts and becomes equal with the other person in general: one morning, walking on her own in ominous weather, she sees a cart with a large heap of clumsily arranged furniture on it, and she imagines the unknown proprietor catching cold while unpacking his things.

И она представила себе человека, - человека вообще, валкой, на шаги разрозненной походкой расставляющего свои пожитки по углам. ... А потом схватит насморк, озноб и жар. Непременно схватит. (90)²¹

A. Livingstone underlines the point that Pasternak, by using italics here, emphasizes "the moment of opening consciousness, of a sudden clarity and knowledge and a sort of involvement."²² Her illness, which starts on the following day and lasts for two weeks, is a chaotic period with images whirling in her head in

²⁰ Да, возьмите, это ваша. Я не кончила. Читала и плакала. Доктор вообще советовал бросить. Во избежание волнения. (85)

"... Here, take this. It's yours. I haven't finished it. But I wept as I read it. The doctor advised me to leave it - to avoid getting over-excited." (Barnes 184)

²¹ "And she imagined the man - *any* man in fact, with a shaky and uneven gait - setting out his belongings in various corners of a room. ... But then he would catch a cold, he would catch a chill, and fever. Most certainly he would." (Barnes 189)

²² Livingstone (1963) 81.

a nightmare. Illness is a universal metaphor of change, rebirth, and is also frequently used by Pasternak in his poetic works, together with other metaphors, like 'rain', 'night', or 'fever' (which are all present in this section of the novel, too) to describe the state of mind prior to the act of creation. Zhenya, after waking up, is congratulated by her mother on her recovery and it strangely coincides with her own feelings.²³ She begins to see her mother differently, with more sympathy and understanding. She puts questions to the others and to herself concerning changes:

По-видимому, не изменилась мама. Совсем не изменился отец.
Изменились: она сама, Сережа, распределение света по комнате,
тишина всех остальных, еще что-то, много чего. (91)²⁴

The girl is groping her way towards grasping her mother's state: she tests her mother's accent and is relieved to hear that it is not at all like Aksinya's as she has expected. Nature is once more symbolic of both her and her mother's state: winter promises to come prematurely - it is October, but

Все напряглось и ждет, ... снегом уже вторую неделю полны тучи
через край, мраком чреват воздух. (92)²⁵

On the eve of the tragic accident after her parents have left for the theatre and the snow-storm has blown over, Zhenya is sitting at her desk doing her seemingly endless arithmetic exercise unconsciously. When considering the possibility of her parents' arrival she calms herself with a casual remark that they will not get upstairs soon, as they first have to take off their fur-coats and besides 'mother is pregnant'. This thought is born naturally, with ease after a long gestation period. The events

²³ Вошла мать и, поздравив ее с выздоровлением, произвела на девочку впечатление читающего в чужих мыслях. Просыпаясь, она уже слышала что-то подобное. Это было поздравление ее собственных рук и ног, локтей и коленок, которое она от них, потягиваясь, принимала. ... Вот и мама тоже. Совпадение было странно. (91)
"In came Mama and greeted her on her recovery, producing on her an impression of someone thought-reading. She had heard something similar already as she woke. It was the congratulations of her own hands and feet and elbows and knees, and she received them as she stretched herself. And now Mama was here. The coincidence was strange." (Barnes 190)

²⁴ "Mama had not changed apparently. Her father - not at all. What had changed was she herself, Seryozha, the distribution of light in the room, the silence of all the others, and something else, many things ... " (Barnes 190)

²⁵ "Everything was tense and expectant. ... For a second week the clouds were full to overflowing with snow and the air was pregnant with darkness." (Barnes 192)

following the accident are reminiscent of the first episode in part 1: the girl is woken up in the middle of the night. She hears voices and recognizes them all at once, but it takes her some time to realize that the woman who is screaming is her mother. Nobody explains to her what has happened, but in her 'exile' at her friend's house she works out for herself that her mother has had a miscarriage and feels deep sympathy for her. At the same time it leads her to the realization that she herself is 'terribly similar' to her mother:

Это было ощущение женщины, изнутри или внутренне видящей свою внешность и прелесть. (102)²⁶

The change in her is at once exemplified: before learning about Tzvetkov's death she sees him in a vision through the window hold up a lamp then walk away. The picture of the dead man comes from within, too, she sees him through her mind's eye. He has ceased to be a 'stranger', and has become a part of her own self; however it appears on the conscious level only when she is informed that Tzvetkov was killed in the same accident which caused her mother to miscarry. Although she is not that child any more who was woken up by the unknown lights that night a long time ago, the magic-mythological thinking of the child is preserved in her: she feels guilty for bringing this man into the life of her family by noticing him, and she feels responsible for the deaths of both her little brother and Tzvetkov. For the first time the narrator gets involved directly and interprets the impression the lame man had on the girl as generating the feeling of Christian love and compassion in her:

... и значение его заключалось в том, что в ее жизнь впервые вошел *другой* человек, третье лицо, совершенно безразличное, без имени или со случайным, не вызывающее ненависти и не вселяющее любви, *но то, которое имеют в виду заповеди*, обращаясь к именам и сознаниям, когда говорят: не убий не крадь и все прочее. "Не делай ты, особенный и живой, - говорят они, - *этому, туманному и общему*, того, чего себе, особенному и живому, не желаешь". (107-108)²⁷

²⁶ "It was the inner sensation of a woman perceiving from within her own outward appearance and her charm." (Barnes 202)

²⁷ "And its significance lay in the fact that this was the first time another human being had entered her life - a third person, totally indifferent, with no name (or only a fortuitous one) and arousing neither love nor hate. It was the person the Commandments have in mind, addressing men with names and

With the recognition of evangelical love the process of internalization of the 'other' into the 'self' ends here - and at the same time Zhenya's growing into womanhood is, in all aspects, also completed. As it has already been referred to, the concept of the 'stranger' is closely connected to the masculine principle, and in the case of Tzvetkov, her father, suffering from a mortal disease, and her still-born brother, is also related to death. The female principle in her seems to accept, to engulf the male and give birth to it again in the creative act. The moral responsibility Zhenya feels for Tzvetkov gives her the capability or even the compulsion to recreate his figure in a work of art. On the level of the plot it appears in the above-mentioned vision when the girl can clearly see the already dead man.

The state of mind which produces such visions is prior to the development of the creative consciousness as can be seen in *To the Lighthouse* as well. Lily Briscoe, before she draws the final line in the middle of her picture, sees Mrs Ramsay sitting in front of the window knitting. Sensibility, moral and not only artistic, is one of the factors that allows both 'heroines' to arrive at a state of mind which is necessary for the creative act. Lily Briscoe's feeling sympathy for Mr Ramsay and Zhenya Luvers' feeling of deep mourning and responsibility for Tzvetkov help them to develop their artistic independence. It also explains why female creativity is put in the centre: it is the masculine principle that evokes feminine sympathy, moral sensibility and, paradoxically enough, this non-aesthetic, but ethic category contributes to the accomplishment of the creative consciousness. The routes they follow are very similar. First they come out of their neutral state and face their own femininity (helped by the mother-figures of Mrs Ramsay and Madame Luvers), then they come to accept the 'stranger', the 'other'; the male principle.²⁸ By moulding feminine and masculine traits in themselves they become capable of rising above the biological sexes and attain the state of artistic androgyny. It is the war in *To the Lighthouse* and the Urals in *Zhenya Luvers' Childhood* which play the role of the dividing line in the heroines' individual growth. They also mark the change in Lily and Zhenya's personalities,²⁹

consciousness, when they say 'Thou shalt not kill', 'Thou shalt not steal', et cetera ... 'As a living human individual,' they say, 'you must not do to this featureless generalised man what you would not wish for yourself as a living individual.'" (Barnes 207-208)

²⁸ cf. Hamvas 13/41: "Ha az androgynos nem realizálódik, azért történik, mert egymást nem ismerik fel. Felismerni annyit jelent, mint elválasztani. Ha az elválasztás nem történik meg, nem történhet meg az egyesülés."

²⁹ "the war had drawn the sting of her femininity. Poor devils, one thought, of both sexes." (Woolf (1927) 191)

and at the same time also serve as an axis or even a mirror in the construction of the novel (see above).

The symbol of the lighthouse has frequently been a matter of discussion.³⁰ It is, in my view, besides being the symbol of the androgynous mind (the success of the voyage is the precondition of the artistic act), a final, universal symbol - an axis mundi, from which the entirety of life can be viewed in its oneness.

The Urals, similarly, are a universal symbol. As a natural boundary between Europe and Asia, they symbolize the dividing line between Western and Eastern cultures, and all the other boundaries that are important in Zhenya's growth: those between 'self' and 'other', male and female, child and adult, life and death. From Zhenya's viewpoint the symbolic boundary between these opposing poles is not so much dividing, rather a 'uniting' concept which provides a state of balance she is trying to find.

The study of the major motifs and symbols and the principle of androgyny in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Boris Pasternak's *Zhenya Luvers' Childhood* has made it possible to point out some of the similarities between the two novels.

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³⁰ cf. Cohn 127-36, Daiches, Friedman 149-169, Freedman, Kaehele and German 189-210

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PAPERS PENYEACH

Géza Kállay

“To be or not to be” and “Cogito, ergo sum”: Thinking and Being in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* against a Cartesian Background

Just as comedians are counselled not to let shame appear on their foreheads, and so put on a mask: so likewise, now that I am to mount the stage of the world, where I have so far been a spectator, I come forward in a mask.

- Descartes wrote down in a notebook he began on the 1st of January, 1619¹. In the same year, on the 10th of November, in a “stove-heated room” in a village near Ulm or Neuberg, “where” he “was completely free to converse with” himself “about” his “own thoughts”,² he had his famous three dreams which “revealed to him ... a destiny to create a *scientia mirabilis*.”³

In Denmark, on “the platform of the battlement castle”⁴ where “the air bites shrewdly” and “it is very cold” (I,4;1)⁵, young Prince Hamlet, having met his “father’s spirit” (I,5;9), the “poor ghost” (I,5;4), reminds his friend that “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (I,5;174-75), and announces to him and to Marcellus that “perchance hereafter” he

¹ Descartes (1966) 3

² Descartes (1988) 25. Descartes gives a detailed account of his “wonderful discovery” in Part Two in the *Discourse on the Method* (Descartes (1988) 25-31). Throughout this paper, when quoting from Descartes’ writings, I will use the Cottingham-translation: Descartes (1988). For the autobiographical details not mentioned by Descartes see the footnote on page 25 in Descartes (1988) and Keeling 10-12.

³ Williams 16

⁴ Jenkins 165

⁵ I quote from *Hamlet* according to the Arden edition, (Jenkins).

will "think meet / To put an antic disposition on" (I,5;179-80), i.e. that he is contemplating wearing the grotesque mask of madness.

The disguises of my two heroes may well prove impenetrable, Descartes' presentation of his endeavour sounds theatrical enough, and Hamlet, the single intellectual tragic hero in Shakespeare's oeuvre, will undoubtedly turn out to be exceptionally philosophical. They will both amply dream in and even "against" their respective meditations, as will be discussed below. Still, I am fully aware of the distance between Descartes' overheated chamber and the bitter cold of Hamlet's castle and hasten to acknowledge the perhaps even maddening dangers of putting the mask of literature on philosophy and masking literature with philosophy⁶. Encouraging and impressive the efforts of a philosophical tradition in our century may be, starting perhaps with Heidegger's lectures on Hölderlin's poems, in trying to perform something we might call the animation, the vivification, even the enactment or the narration of certain object-like, defined and delimited (dead?) philosophical concepts in and through the discourse of literature⁷, I do not think that philosophy and literature - for me two equally valid, significant and fond ways of letting truth happen - have settled their affair. Consequently, it is by no means self-evident to put Shakespeare and Descartes side by side. It is so not only because, after all, Descartes was a 'real' philosopher and Hamlet is the product of Shakespeare's imagination, and not only because the playwright and the philosopher were working in remote genres, but also because of the considerable time-gap between them: Shakespeare wrote his tragedy around 1600 whereas the first significant - though unfinished, and in his life unpublished - document of Descartes' rationalist doctrines, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, was written in 1628,⁸ twelve years after Shakespeare's death, and the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the text I will chiefly be concerned with here, was published much later, in 1641.

⁶ It is somewhat ironic that Jaako Hintikka in his famous article entitled "*Cogito ergo sum*: Inference or Performance?" uses the case of Hamlet to illustrate the problematic nature of inferring to existence from thinking: "Hamlet did think a great many things; does it follow that he existed?" (Hintikka 114). The problem cannot be discussed here but for convincing arguments against Hintikka's position see Kenny 61 and Feldman 355 and *passim*.

⁷ An aphoristic way of summing up this turn in philosophical interest (featuring such eminent thinkers from both the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental tradition as Stanley Cavell, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, Paul de Man, Arthur C. Danto or Richard Rorty) may be to say that the fundamental category (in a certain kind) of philosophy has become the *verb* instead of the *noun*.

⁸ Walting 170

Yet the time-gap might turn out to be less 'dramatic' than one would think at first sight. As Richard Popkin, one of the most important authorities on Renaissance philosophy, argues in his *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Descartes' unflinching quest for absolute certainty and his often rather militant attitude can only be understood with respect to the immense popularity of scepticism in his time, undoubtedly with one of its most influential and celebrated masters, Montaigne, whom, in turn, Shakespeare almost certainly knew and read.⁹ Thus, without suggesting in the least that Shakespeare may have been a 'sceptical philosopher' (or that Descartes was, for that matter, a playwright), the idea of arranging a dialogue between them via the silent 'mediation' of Montaigne may sound, even 'historically', not too far-fetched.

However, a by far more important link than the above one has been discovered between Shakespeare and Descartes by Stanley Cavell, a link being a foundational topic in his *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*¹⁰ and a significant step forward in his work on the nature of scepticism as a whole. Here a paragraph from Cavell's book is worth quoting in full:

My intuition is that the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes's *Mediations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare, from the time of the great tragedies in the first years of the seventeenth century, in the generation preceding that of Descartes. However strong the presence of Montaigne and Montaigne's skepticism is in various of Shakespeare's plays, the skeptical problematic I have in mind is given its philosophical refinement in Descartes's way of raising the questions of God's existence and of the immortality of the soul (I assume as, among other things, preparations for, or against, the credibility of the new science of the external world). The issue posed is no longer, or not alone, as with earlier skepticism, how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world. Our skepticism is a function of our now illimitable desire. In Descartes's thinking, the ground, one gathers, still exists, in the assurance of God. But Descartes's very clarity about the necessity of God's assurance in establishing a rough adequation or collaboration between everyday judgements and the world

⁹ Cf. Popkin, especially 159-198 and Kermode xxiv-xxxvi and 145-147

¹⁰ Cavell (1987)

(however the matter may stand in natural science) means that if assurance in God will be shaken, the ground of the everyday is thereby shaken.¹¹

Further, in his essay on *Othello*¹², Cavell takes the tragedy of jealousy to be a paradigmatic enactment of the tragic dynamism inhering in the initial Cartesian despair at the possibility of being finite and all alone in the universe¹³ and he claims that in *Othello*'s case it is Desdemona on whom the Moor dares to stake the whole of his existence, it is she who plays the role of Descartes' God. Thus, the connection between Shakespearean tragedy and Descartes' almost literally stupefying doubt is established through the insight that not only tragedy is "obedient to a skeptical structure but contrariwise, that skepticism already" bears "its own marks of a tragic structure", that "tragedy is an interpretation of what skepticism is itself an interpretation of".¹⁴

Finally, and now specifically with respect to my present topic, Cavell explicitly connects *Hamlet* and the *Meditations* in one of the closing paragraphs of his essay "Being Odd, Getting Even":

Hamlet studies the impulse to take revenge, usurping thought as a response to being asked to assume the burden of another's existence, as if that were the burden, or price, of assuming one's own, a burden that denies one's own. Hamlet is asked to make a father's life work out successfully, to come out even, by taking his revenge for him. The emphasis in the question "to be or not" seems not on whether to die but on whether to be born, on whether to affirm or deny the fact of natality, as a way of enacting, or not, one's existence. To accept birth is to participate in a world of revenge, of mutual victimization, of shifting and substitution. But to refuse to partake in it is to poison everyone who touches you, as if taking your own revenge. This is why if the choice is unacceptable the cause is not metaphysics but history - say a posture toward the discovery

¹¹ Cavell (1987) 3

¹² "Othello and the Stake of the Other", Cavell (1987) 125-142

¹³ Cf. this "universal" loneliness with Descartes' physical or "autobiographical" solitude he likes to emphasise so much. For example, in the *Discourse on the Method* he says: "But, like a man who walks alone in the dark, I am resolved to proceed so slowly [...] that even if I made but little progress, I should at least be sure not to fall" (Descartes (1988) 28), and: "I stayed all day shut up in a stove-heated room" (Descartes, 1988, 25) and in the *Meditations* we read: "So today I have expressly rid my mind of all worries and arranged myself a clear stretch of free time. I am here quite alone. and at last I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions." (Descartes (1988) 76)

¹⁴ Cavell (1987) 5-6

that there is no getting even for the oddity of being born, hence of being and becoming the poor creature it is given to you to be. The alternative to affirming this condition is, as Descartes's *Meditations* shows, word-consuming doubt, which is hence a standing threat to, or say condition of, human existence.¹⁵

I consider this connection of *Hamlet* - as the tragedy of being born - with Descartes' *Meditations* - as the philosophical reckoning with the ultimate condition of human existence - to be highly significant; and it is on this note that I wish to begin. I will juxtapose some aspects of a dramatised, metaphorical display and a systematically argued, conceptualised presentation of the question as to the relationship between thinking and being, while drawing on Cavell's insightful dramatisation of Descartes' universal doubt on the one hand, and on the widely-known (though of course by no means exclusive) conception of Hamlet as the tragic philosopher on the other. I will of course primarily focus on points we may notice when we view one piece with constantly an eye on the other and, my overall preoccupation being more with literature than with philosophy, Descartes will be slightly more in the background.

By way of a starting point, I wish to return to the mask of Hamlet, i.e. to his feigning madness. This stance will prove to be just as strategic as Descartes' universal doubt. In the constitution of the latter, madness is one of the arguments (already connected with the even more famous dream-argument):

As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake – indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just familiar events – that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!¹⁶

In Hamlet's case, in turn, doubt serves first as a step towards strategic madness: "All is not well / I doubt some foul play" (I,2;255-56) - he says when he is informed about the appearance of the Ghost. Here *doubt* of course means 'to fear, to suspect' rather than 'to feel uncertain' or 'not to believe or accept'¹⁷. Fear gives voice more

¹⁵ Cavell (1988) 128. On the burden of existence, birth and proof see further Cavell's "Hamlet's Burden of Proof" in Cavell (1987) 179-191.

¹⁶ Descartes (1988) 77

¹⁷ Cf. Jenkins 197

to the side-effects of the Cartesian disposition¹⁸ than to its content, which is to call all previous sensations, beliefs and opinions into question and to risk that "perhaps just one fact remains true: that nothing is certain"¹⁹.

This radical erasure of all previous knowledge is not alien to Hamlet, either:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there.
(I,5;98-101)

and the only thing that remains is his father's "commandment" (I,5;102) to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (I,5;25). But Hamlet - as it is clear from the quotation - craves for a "tabula rasa" to answer something which, at least at the beginning, sounds as a filial obligation and a moral call: he has to take up his father's cause (which is the duty of the son), and he must free the "royal bed of Denmark" of "damned incest" (I,5;82-3). However, the Ghost at the same time is also demanding that Hamlet's mother, now wife to Claudius, should not even be touched by thought²⁰ but "left to heaven" (I,5;86). This latter proviso renders Hamlet's task practically impossible. The young Prince would have to separate man and wife (Claudius and Gertrude, two bodies obviously happy in the same bed of "incest"), while the private and the public (the Son and the Prince), the tribal and the Christian (the vendetta and Heaven), the Protestant and the Catholic (Hamlet's Wittenberg and the Ghost's purgatory) and illusion and reality (the Ghost's very appearance and Claudius' very real ability to "smile, and smile, and be a villain" (I,5;108)) are hopelessly entangled.

Let us compare Hamlet's resolution and task now with that of Descartes':

I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundation if I wanted

¹⁸ Descartes sums up the experiences of his first step towards universal doubt at the beginning of his "Second Meditation" in the following way: "It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim to the top." (Descartes (1988) 80)

¹⁹ Descartes (1988) 80

²⁰ Cf.: "But howsoever thou pursuest this act, / Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught, Leave her to heaven, / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her" (I,5;84-85).

to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.²¹

At first sight the project Descartes is undertaking seems to be purely scientific (after all, Descartes was a mathematician and a scientist - a “natural philosopher” - and one of the best of his age), but his predicament soon becomes no less complex than Hamlet’s. First of all because in Descartes’ time “there existed no clear sense either of the size of the scientific task, or, on the other hand, of its possibility”²². Secondly, because Descartes wanted to crush all scepticism, from Sextus Empiricus to Montaigne²³ once and for all. His task was even further complicated because he had always hoped that his works would be approved by the Church and would replace the Aristotelian texts in the schools.²⁴ Yet the ultimate source of all complexities seems to be that Descartes was in quest of a *universal* method, which could be applied to the discovery of truth in any field of human knowledge, that he was not “simply” after truth (an ambition we more or less all subscribe to), but he wanted it to be indubitable, to be absolutely and *metaphysically* certain. Indeed, Descartes not only wished to have true knowledge but was interested in the foundations of the very *possibility* of knowledge.²⁵

However, rather paradoxically and very significantly, the quest for universal knowledge in Descartes’ texts is frequently anchored into the first person singular from the beginning: it is embedded into a passionate confession-like narrative in the *Discourse on the Method*, into - as Bernard Williams observes - a kind of “soliloquy”²⁶, while in the *Meditations* it rather takes the form of a “dialogue”, a dialogue of a man in conversation with himself (say, René Descartes with Cartesius²⁷).

²¹ Descartes (1988) 76

²² Williams 25

²³ See further Alexander Koyré’s excellent “Introduction” in Descartes (1966) ix-xvii, and Gábor Boros’s note in Descartes (1992) 40.

²⁴ Cf. Gábor Boros’ note in Descartes (1992) 25.

²⁵ Cf. Williams 35, and *passim* and Altrichter 155, and *passim*.

²⁶ Williams 68

²⁷ Cf. Jaako Hintikka’s interesting footnote: “...Descartes arrives at his first and foremost insight by playing for a moment a double role: he appears as his own audience. It is interesting and significant that Baltz, who for his own purposes represents Descartes’s quest as a dialogue between ‘Cartesius, who voices Reason itself’, and ‘René Descartes the Everyman’, finds that they both ‘conspire in effecting this renowned utterance’, the *cogito ergo sum*, wherefore ‘in some sense its meaning is referable both to Cartesius and René Descartes’.” (Hintikka (1967) 119)

This personal trait has recently been emphasised by the philosopher W. T. Jones in an article called "Somnio ergo sum", especially with respect to Descartes' dream-argument.²⁸ This argument is an important move in generalising doubt: Descartes' first examples to illustrate the possibility of error are in fact instances of sense-perception (e.g. the case when I mistake the shape of a distant tower), yet such instances can hardly be generalised to convince me that I may always be mistaken because I can easily claim that my error applies only to this particular occasion under these particular circumstances. Dreaming, on the other hand, totally takes me in: given that I may dream anything that I perceive, any situation can be a dream-situation and since in dreams I can be absolutely certain about my perceptions, including even the fact *that I am not dreaming*, it is impossible for me to tell when I am subject to an illusion and when I am not. Consequently, I can *never* be certain.²⁹

Here the validity of the argument³⁰ is less important than Jones' highly enticing suggestion that we connect it with the famous three dreams Descartes had in his stove-heated chamber on the 10th of November, 1619. Jones claims that even the *malus spiritus*, the "deceiver of supreme power and cunning",³¹ who will be responsible for the climax of radical doubt, originates in Descartes' dreams,³² corresponding perhaps to the man the philosopher met in the "whirlwind".³³ As Jones relates, Descartes' original Latin record of his dreams has not survived,³⁴ but a late 17th century paraphrase of a portion of his text runs as follows:

He [Descartes] informs us that on November 10, 1619, after going to bed full of inspiration and completely absorbed by the thought of having that very day discovered the foundations of marvellous knowledge [*scientia mirabilis*], he had in a single night three consecutive dreams, which he believed could only have come from on high. After going to sleep, his imagination was struck by the appearance of some phantoms who appeared to him and who frightened him so much that, thinking he was walking through the streets, he was forced to turn over on his left side in

²⁸ Jones

²⁹ Here I am heavily indebted to Williams' extremely lucid presentation of the dream-argument (Williams, especially 51-53).

³⁰ This problem has been widely debated, see especially Malcolm, and the third Appendix in Williams, especially 303-311.

³¹ Descartes (1988) 80

³² Cf. Jones 157, and *passim*.

³³ Jones 163

³⁴ Jones 145

order to get to the place where he wanted to go, because he felt a great weakness on his right side, on which he could not support himself. Ashamed of proceeding in this fashion, he made an effort to stand up, but he felt a windstorm which, carrying him along in a sort of whirlwind, made him make three or four turns on his left foot. So far this did not frighten him. The difficulty he had in dragging himself along made him expect to fall at each step, until he saw along his route an open college and went into it to find shelter and a remedy for his problem. He tried to reach the college chapel, where he first thought he would go to pray, but realizing that he had passed a man of his acquaintance without greeting him, he wished to retrace his steps to address him properly and was violently hurled back by the wind which blew against the church. At the same time he saw in the middle of the college courtyard someone else, who in a respectful and polite fashion called him by name and said to him that if he was willing to go find Monsieur N., he had something to give him. M. Descartes fancied that it was a melon which had been imported from some foreign country. But what surprised him more was to see that the people who joined this man in gathering around to converse with him were erect and steady on their feet, while he, standing in the same place, remained bent and staggering, and that the wind which he had thought several times would blow him over, had greatly diminished. With this fancy in mind, he woke up, and at that moment he felt a sharp pain, which made him fear lest this be the working of some evil spirit which wished to captivate him. Immediately he turned on his right side, for he had gone to sleep and had the dream on his left side. He prayed to God to ask protection against the evil spirit of his dream and to be preserved from all the misfortunes which could threaten him as a damnation for his sins, which he realized were serious enough to draw anathema on his head, although until then he had led a life which men found irreproachable.³⁵

Jones is, I think, completely right in calling attention to the “existential” nature of Descartes doubt-stricken predicament and in emphasising that Descartes did not introduce these reasons for uncertainty only for the sake of a philosophical debate. Rather, he was in a deep personal crisis, terrified by the possibility that he might indeed ‘lose himself’ by becoming the captive of an evil spirit, perhaps, as Jones suggests,³⁶ as a result of his having dabbled in black magic.

³⁵ Jones 162-163. The translation of the text is by John F. Benton.

³⁶ Cf. Jones 158, and *passim*.

I suggest that it is indeed this personal trait which is primarily responsible for the uniquely dramatic quality of Descartes' quest. It not only invites me to "identify myself" with him (as "I-narratives" usually do). It also helps Descartes, the speaker to "split himself"³⁷ and to point with his doubt concerning *existence* first at the world, but then, immediately, at himself:

I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.³⁸

The dramatic, and, I claim, even absurdly dramatic force of the argumentation is that while listening to Descartes one can hear, "clearly and distinctly", the utterances: "Does it now follow that I too do not exist?" and: "he will never bring it about that I am nothing" while one can also hear, equally "clearly and distinctly" a voice saying certain things, for example "I". If, for a moment, one only hears "I do not exist" or "I am nothing", then one might *reasonably* ask who this "I" in the sentences between quotation marks is. Who (on earth) is speaking? The conclusion I am apt to draw is not that the philosopher is talking nonsense (which was reason enough for some positivist circles to discard the argument as it is)³⁹ but rather that if he risks this piece of nonsense then he really is in a desperate situation with respect to his own existence. Descartes' quest is, indeed, a conditionally "first person" and, in all senses of the word, "singular" undertaking, in which one may hear not only the striving for 'metaphysical certainty' but the audacious and forlorn attempt at proving one's own existence as well, and it is precisely the soliloquy, the first person singular position which enables Descartes to present the problem of

³⁷ Jones extensively elaborates on Descartes' "split personality", even in a psychological sense, e. g.: "Below that smooth rationalist surface is a deeply divided self." (Jones (1980) 160)

³⁸ Descartes (1988) 80, emphasis original.

³⁹ Cf. Altrichter 120-123

metaphysical certainty and the question of his (“my”) existence as one and the same matter.⁴⁰

As the quotation from the *Meditations* already indicates, metaphysical certainty is finally found, in the very act of putting forward, “within” thinking the sentence “I am, I exist”. The *Discourse*, in a slightly different manner, finds this certainty in the proposition: *Cogito ergo sum*, originally: *Je pense donc je suis*.⁴¹ The enormous literature on these theses, especially on their validity, clearly indicates how difficult it was for other thinkers, including Descartes’ contemporaries, to find it as certain and self-evident as Descartes did. One of the reasons might be that Descartes was trying to first separate, and then to connect, two things which are too closely related even to make an attempt at driving them apart: we might simply be lacking human words to “get between” *thinking* and *being*.⁴² But neither this question, nor that of the validity of the *Cogito*-thesis can be our concern here. Rather, with an eye already on *Hamlet*, and without the slightest intention to be exhaustive, I will ask what happens when *thinking* is the place where, “of all places”, one feels able to regain one’s *being*.

I take the Cartesian way of connecting thinking and being as the moment of the self regaining itself from the fear of non-existence as the realisation that his being is given in his very quest, i.e. in doubting, asking etc. as forms of thinking, so precisely within the process itself with which he was trying to find himself. Yet it cannot be emphasised enough that it is by no means clear what the “alternative” to being, i.e. “nothingness”, means or would involve. Should we interpret it as a metaphor of something we cannot articulate in human words, as in tragedy, too, where the visible and compulsory death of the hero is “only” a metaphor of an “unsayable” loss? We must further notice that the identification of existence with thinking requires the thinker to give his whole identity in thinking; this is the move Descartes, of course by no means unproblematically, was willing to make:

But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.⁴³

⁴⁰ Here I am particularly indebted to Cavell (1988) 105-130.

⁴¹ On the difference between the two formulations see especially Williams 72-73, and *passim*.

⁴² At least this is what the debate on the *Cogito*-thesis, as being an inference or not, seems to imply. Cf. especially Williams, Altrichter, Hintikka, and Frankfurt.

⁴³ Descartes (1988) 83

However broadly Descartes conceives of thinking, what he enlists are still cognitive processes. He is still "given only to himself," he still has only himself as company. Descartes provides us with perhaps the most extreme formulation of the so familiar and so (in)famous loneliness of the philosopher. Descartes' extremity becomes immediately apparent if we compare this loneliness for a moment with Hamlet's plight, a theme awaiting a more elaborate treatment below. In a sense, of course, Hamlet is the prototype of the solitary hero, yet solitude to him is assigned *with respect to* a family and a Court, where relationships (and dis-relationships) were established well before he even entered the scene. Descartes, on the other hand, is still and literally *totally* alone. But if there is nobody or nothing else he could distinguish himself from, then we must ask once again, whom does Descartes' "I" refer to?⁴⁴

Thus it seems that *being as thinking* is only half of the battle Descartes has to fight in order to regain his existence. The other half is fought by making the absolute certainty of the existence of the self constitutive as to the proof of the existence of God. And it is God who will, ultimately, and, in a sense, retrospectively, guarantee that we may "achieve full and certain knowledge of countless matters"⁴⁵ including God, pure mathematics and, finally, material things, i.e. full and certain knowledge of the *whole* world.⁴⁶ Thus the existence of the world is staked upon the existence of God and the existence of God is staked upon the existence of the self, so the act of finding oneself (regaining oneself from the "bourn" of doubt) is ultimately, and in a peculiar sense, the *self*-same act as regaining the world with absolute certainty.

"Within" the "volume" of Hamlet's brain, what remains, after the radical erasure, is only his father's commandment; and it is on this "tablet" that, as a first observation worthy of note, he puts down a remark concerning Claudius: "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (I,5;108). The iteration may simply be a sign of Hamlet's annoyance, or a reference to Claudius' exceptional ability to dissemble. But this in itself would not make it "meet" to set it down as a starting point. Rather, I take it to be giving voice to Hamlet's penetrating insight that Claudius' smile is no longer a mask covering up a monstrous deed, but that it is an inward smile, shining somehow from the King's "very depth", from his genuine "inside"⁴⁷. This smile,

⁴⁴ Here, once again I am indebted to Cavell (1988), especially 107.

⁴⁵ Descartes (1988) 110

⁴⁶ Cf. Descartes (1988) 110-112

⁴⁷ I owe this observation to my wife, Katalin G. Kállay.

engulfing and absorbing Claudius means that he is not only *pretending* to be content and happy but he *really* is. And the first sentence Hamlet finds worth recording, as a kind of “indubitable certainty” on which one may build further, points in more than one direction.

First, it points to a keynote of Act I, Scene 2, where we encounter Hamlet for the first time, well before his own exchange with the Ghost, and where the first words we hear are Claudius’ “inaugural” speech to the Court. The keynote, at least on Hamlet’s part, is *seeming*. “Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not ‘seems’” (I,2;76) – Hamlet informs his mother rather dryly when she urges him to “cast” his “nighted colour” (i.e. his mourning suit) “off” (I,2;68). Hamlet insists that mourning, which he has “within”, “passes show” (I,2;85), that his “solemn black” (I,2;78) *seems* only in the sense that it is ‘visible’, while its traditional meaning (‘mourning’) is precisely an obstacle to “denote” him “truly” (I,2;83). If Claudius’ beginning is an outward smile which later on absorbs him, Hamlet starts with an inward grief, the outward demonstration of which is only a conventional act of remembrance, whose chief duty, in turn, is to remind the Court of a too early forgotten death which “a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn’s longer” (I,2;150-151). It is this inward and outward “inky cloak”(I,2;77) which marks Hamlet off from the rest of the Court but which - as we have seen with respect to Descartes’ position - also ties him to them, to the Family, where something terrible has happened which nobody else wishes to acknowledge, and where his roles as “chiefest courtier, cousin” and their “son” (I,2;117) are totally mixed up. (And why not King after his father? This is one of the things Claudius’ swift inaugural speech fails to touch upon.) No wonder that instead of “sitting by the fire”, “holding a piece of paper in his hands”⁴⁸ *à la* Descartes, Hamlet will be mostly *standing*, holding a table and a book, but later also a skull and a rapier in his hands.

What is left for Hamlet to do in this equivocal situation? To adapt to it, but also to hold it apart, to incorporate the equivocality of the space in which he might be able to act, to conceptualise it, to reflect on its ambiguity in ambiguous terms: “A little more than kin, and less than kind” (I,2;65), is the first sentence Hamlet utters in the play, as a retort to Claudius’: “But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son -” (I,2;64). The historical sameness of the root of kin and kind emphasises the identity of Hamlet’s and Claudius’ ancestors, while the ambiguity of the two words

⁴⁸ Descartes (1988) 77

communicates that Hamlet is neither a distant relative, nor is he a member of the "Claudius-species" and, therefore, he does not *really* like his uncle-stepfather.

Hamlet creates one pun after the other ("I am too much in the sun" (I,2;67),⁴⁹ and the ambiguities strike another note in the significance of "smile, and smile, and be a villain": the double repetition of smile and Hamlet's having two (or more) meanings in one word (or the same meaning in two words) find a resonance in fact in the whole play. To mention just a few: there are two kings and two husbands, and, in a sense, two fathers (Old Hamlet and Claudius) and when, in Act III, Hamlet juxtaposes them, the Queen claims that he has "cleft" her "heart in twain" (III,4;158); Polonius blesses Leartes twice because a "double blessing is a double grace" (I,3;53); Claudius, in his prayer, describes himself as a man who is "to double business bound" (III,3;41) and wishes to rely on the "twofold force" of "prayer" (III,3;48); there are the two gravediggers; there is Rosencrantz-and-Guildenstern, a double "zero"; there is the Mouse-trap scene, enacting Claudius' murder twice (once in the dumb-show and once "dubbed", when the King rises at the end); and there is also the King himself, whom Hamlet kills twice (once with the poisoned rapier and once with the poisoned cup).

In the play, there are various attitudes to these different kinds of duality: Claudius, for example, tries to reconcile some of them in his oxymorons: "with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage" (I,2;12) he has taken Gertrude to be his "imperial *jointress*" (I,2;9, my emphasis), most probably meaning that they are going to rule together, whereas Hamlet, always in opposition to Claudius, will later claim that "time is *out of joint*" (I,5;169, my emphasis). Polonius, another example, wishes to scurry between two extremes, trying to find the "golden mean" with his "Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar...", or "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be" (I,3;61, 75).

By contrast, then, Hamlet's attitude to ambiguity throughout the play is to sustain it, to intensify it, to make it even more complicated. A test-case could be – now also with an eye on the Cartesian *dubito* – the examination of the word *doubt*, which occurs – as it has already been noted – not only in Hamlet's response to the news of the Ghost's appearance ("I doubt some foul play" (I,3;256)), but in another significant context as well: in the letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia, as another

⁴⁹ „In "I am too much in the sun" there is a fair retort to Claudius' "How is that the clouds still hang on you?" (I,2;66), and – with a pun on the homophonous son – to his "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—" (I,2;64). Hamlet seems to suggest that he is too much in the centre of public interest and that Claudius is "making him more his 'son' than he really is." (Jenkins 435-436)

instance of the Prince's famous inscriptions. This is the letter which Polonius took away from his daughter and reads out to Claudius and Gertrude:

*Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.*

(II,2;115-118)

The little poem, (metrically not a masterpiece, as Hamlet himself admits⁵⁰) is built on the contrast between the first three lines and the last one. In the first two lines the clauses complementing *doubt* cunningly contain propositions which Shakespeare's age had just started to doubt⁵¹: the Copernican hypothesis put huge question marks after the Ptolemaic certainty of the stars being fire or the sun being on the move. Thus the first two lines significantly imply that if somebody (Ophelia) obeys the imperative, her doubt is not totally unreasonable. So it is after having done a little bit of 'real' doubting that we reach the third and the fourth line: "Doubt truth to be a liar, / But never doubt I love". There seem to be at least three ways to interpret the two clauses.

First there is a "communicative"⁵² or "rhetorical" meaning, suggested especially by the contrastive conjunction *but* and by the genre of the love-letter where the use of hyperboles is anything but uncommon. Under this rhetorical interpretation, the last two lines might be paraphrased as follows: "you may even call the validity of truth into question, still never be uncertain about my affections". The implicit, yet rhetorically by no means absurd claim is, of course, that truth has ceased to exist because it has turned liar. This reading also requires *doubt* to mean 'suspect' or 'fear' (as in Hamlet's "I doubt some foul play"), in contrast to the first two lines, where, against the backdrop of astronomical debates, *doubt* is most probably in the sense of 'to be uncertain about'.⁵³

Yet another reading is also possible, in which *doubt* still means 'suspect' or 'fear' but then we must set our rhetorical considerations aside and take the above-

⁵⁰ Cf. with the words right after the poem: "O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers, I have no art to reckon my groans" (II,2;119-120).

⁵¹ Cf. Jenkins 242, and Salinger 25-27.

⁵² The communicative meaning of a sentence comprises not only its literal (compositional) meaning but the meaning which gets generated by the particular situation in which the sentence is uttered as well. Cf. Levinson 14.

⁵³ Cf. Jenkins 242

mentioned absurd possibility seriously, reading the sentence as a call to count with the *real* likelihood of truth being a liar, i.e. as an imperative telling Ophelia not to be sure that truth is true. This interpretation of course undermines the truth of any statement made from now on, so the truth of "never doubt I love", too.

But if, as a further alternative, we take *doubt* in the modern sense of 'to be uncertain' or 'not to accept', as the syntactic parallelism established by the first two lines also suggests, then we arrive at a third possible interpretation, namely: "don't accept truth to be a liar" i.e. "don't believe that truth is a liar", or "allow for the possibility that truth is true" (and, therefore, that "I am true", too). Thus truth may equally be identical with itself and with its direct opposite, depending on the two meanings of *doubt*. In Hamlet's letter the double meaning of *doubt* enacts the very meaning and the very mechanism of doubt itself, while the dualities extending over the whole play dramatise not only the duplexity of meanings in the Hamletian usage, but the hesitation (the two ways) inhering to any kind of doubt as well. This is how, in the play called *Hamlet*, *doubt* and *double* rejoice over their etymological kinship.

Hamlet's letter pointedly expresses how much his conception of doubt differs from that of the Cartesian one: Descartes introduces methodical doubt, Hamlet's puns verge perhaps even on real madness, still - in Polonius' words - "though this be madness, yet there is method [a "discourse on the method"?) in't" (II,2;205-206). However, the significance of the difference carries us even beyond my own puns. Descartes' doubt, as we have seen, is the most radical one possible:

Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt.⁵⁴

For Descartes, the slightest doubt concerning the truth of a proposition is reason enough to discard it *as if it were false*, so to reject it as something totally useless. For Hamlet, doubting the truth of a proposition is sufficient reason for keeping it, treasuring it, even for playing with it, because for him *uncertainty* does not imply *falsity* but - and this is the important difference - *possibility*. Since Descartes wants his system to be completely error-proof, what he cannot tolerate is

⁵⁴ Descartes (1988) 76

precisely Hamletian indeterminacy. For him what (only) might be true might equally also be false and what might (even) be false should not be given any chances but should be rejected right away. For Hamlet, what might be false might equally be true and for this reason both should be given equal chances, without deciding on the matter, because there is simply no ground on which we could make the decision. According to Hamlet, one should stop at the point where something and its opposite are equally possible: this is what we may call Hamlet's *principle of possibility*.

This is the principle with which Hamlet approaches everything around him. While for Descartes the "catharsis"⁵⁵ of doubt concerning even his own existence ultimately serves the purpose of establishing a firm foundation for "clear and distinct" *thoughts*, Hamlet has to apply his principle of possibility working in his mind to the question whether to act or not to act because the crime and the family drama would require *immediate action*.

With the question of "thinking versus action", we have arrived at one of the most famous cruxes of the play, known as Hamlet's "hesitation". Why doesn't he kill Claudius right away? But *where* is Claudius' crime? In the testimony of the Ghost. It is possible that what he is saying is true but, as Hamlet observes, the Ghost "May be a devil" (II,2;595), too, playing the role of Descartes' *malus spiritus*, the "deceiver of supreme power and cunning"⁵⁶. Hamlet will never decide whether the Ghost was really telling the truth or not. The famous "Mouse-trap", the play Hamlet directs - and partly writes - to catch "the conscience of the King" (II,2;601) serves this purpose, yet Hamlet cannot separate the victim from the murderer there, either, and, in his running commentary on the play, he identifies the assassin with himself, saying "nephew" instead of, as we would expect, "brother": "This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King" (III,2;239). Thus, it is difficult to tell why Claudius runs out in the middle of the performance: because the play has struck home and he feels more than implicated, or because he believes that this is Hamlet's rather impolite way of communicating to him his death-sentence. One might claim that killing Claudius at the end of the play is a convincing enough sign to indicate that Hamlet finally believes the Ghost; yet then Hamlet already has the poison in his blood and, in a sense, he is a Ghost, too.

So, while the game of "who will catch whom first" is still going on between Hamlet and Claudius, Hamlet does know that there is at least one "place" where the

⁵⁵ Alexandre Koyré's apt expression in the footnote of Descartes (1966) xxv.

⁵⁶ Descartes (1988) 80

crime has left a trace behind: it must also be in the insides of Claudius, as the "inward" smile in the double repetition of "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain", pointing towards the "depth" of Claudius, has already suggested. Hamlet, like a good detective, should start to think as the murderer does: it is more than ironic that Claudius dismisses Hamlet after their first encounter in the initial court-scene with: "Be as ourself in Denmark" (I,2;122). Hamlet has to *become* Claudius - a task he perhaps performs too well, as the famous "slip of the tongue" in "nephew" instead of "brother" may really indicate. His identification with Claudius, however, involves at least two unresolvable paradoxes.

First of all, he should, according to the Ghost's commandment, act, but in order to act he must think, using Claudius' head, yet while he is thinking, it is precisely acting which he cannot perform. No wonder that for Hamlet thinking not only interrogates the possibilities of action but becomes a form of action itself. Yet the scrutiny of Claudius' mind, which is identical with contemplating the possibilities of action, i.e. revenge, leads Hamlet into a further paradox. If he succeeds in making his mind work as the mind of the murderer does, is he any better than Claudius, i.e. is he not a murderer himself? Descartes' "provisional moral code", which he advances in the *Discourse on the Method* "lest [he] should remain indecisive in [his] actions while reason obliges [him] to be so in [his] judgements"⁵⁷ is respectable indeed, and it may very well be true - as the excellent Descartes-scholar, Gábor Boros has recently argued⁵⁸ - that the philosopher ultimately wished to lay the foundations of an ethics with his metaphysical and epistemological works, yet Hamlet has no time to call, as a first step, the bare existence of the world into question by the fireside, because he is to perform his duty right away in a world which first and foremost turns towards him with its moral side. Hamlet has no chance to doubt the bare existence of the world or of himself. And for Hamlet, his identity cannot be given, as for Descartes, in *thinking*, in the very medium of his quest, because Hamlet is faced with *two* identities, one of them "ghastly", the other very real, and he, as the paradox shows, should identify himself *both* with his father *and* with Claudius, and *at the same time*.

Moreover, the problem, as we have seen, also gets entangled with the problem of the non-identities of the two husbands in the Queen's bed, in the bed from which

⁵⁷ Descartes (1988) 31

⁵⁸ Cf. Descartes (1992) 22. This provisional moral code includes that he was to obey the laws and customs of his country, that he should follow even the most doubtful opinions with constancy once he had adopted them, that he should try to be a master of himself rather than of fortune and that he was to choose the best occupation in life man can have, cf. Descartes (1988) 31-34.

Hamlet originates. For Hamlet the principal question is not “do I exist?” or “am I nothing?” but “who am I?”, both in the sense of ‘how did I come about?’ and ‘what will I become?’.⁵⁹ “This is I / Hamlet the Dane” (i.e. the ruler of Denmark; V,1;250-251), shouted before jumping into Ophelia’s grave, is a fair and straightforward answer, but even earning this title, obviously only a fragment of his programme anyway, will demand his life (i.e. at least one “form” of one’s “bare existence”).

Thus I read the famous line “To be, or not to be” (III,1;56), roughly in the geometrical middle of the play, as giving the conceptually most crystallised version of all the questions Hamlet has to face, including action versus non-action just as much as identification versus non-identification. I take “to be, or not to be” as presenting, on the highest level of abstraction and generality, Hamlet’s principle of possibility, the principle that *two opposites should be given equal chances*. The generality and impersonality with which Hamlet introduces us to the great questions of human existence stand in striking contrast to the passion radiating from Descartes’ narrative in the first person singular. Let us hear Hamlet’s monologue in full:

To be, or not to be, that is the question
 Whether’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 And by opposing end them. To die – to sleep,
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to: ‘tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep;
 Perchance to dream – ay, ther’s the rub:
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause – there’s the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life.
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
 The pangs of dispriz’d love, the law’s delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of th’unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make

⁵⁹ Cf. Cavell (1987) 187

With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to other we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pitch and movement
 With regard their currents turn awry
 And lose the name of action. 33

(III,1;56-88)

The soliloquy, at least at first sight, suggests the direct opposite of the principle of possibility (i.e. the strategy of giving two alternatives equal chances): the question of being and non-being is formulated in two co-ordinated clauses connected by the exclusive co-ordinator *or*,⁶⁰ so, rather, as a matter of *choice*. The next four lines give the *content* of the choice, as the syntactic opposition,⁶¹ constructed through the parallel between the *or* of "to be *or* not to be" and the *or* of the following two clauses, indicates. But from the second line on - with the "slings and arrows" - we leave the level of generality and enter the realm of metaphor. This is of high significance because, from now on, Hamlet's train of thoughts will be conducted not so much by abstract concepts as by well-elaborated images: the argument will follow less the rules of logical induction or deduction than the "rule of metaphor,"⁶² where it is some components of an image that bring about the next step in the process, implying another image of a different, yet in many ways similar constellation. Another way of putting this is to say that Hamlet's thinking in the

⁶⁰ "Usually *or* is exclusive, expressing the idea that only one of the possibilities can be realized: 'You can sleep on the couch, or you can go to a hotel, or you can go back to London tonight'. [...] Sometimes *or* is understood as inclusive, allowing the realization of a combination of the alternatives, and we can explicitly include the third possibility by a third clause: 'You can boil an egg, or you can make some cheese sandwiches, or you can do both' (Quirk 258).

⁶¹ Jenkins' interpretation, Jenkins 490 and *passim*. I am indebted to his understanding of the soliloquy on many points and he also gives an excellent summary of the enormous literature on the subject, cf. Jenkins 484-493.

⁶² My phrasing of course recalls the title of Paul Ricoeur's famous book in the English translation, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur.

great soliloquy takes place more “in front of the eye” than “on the level of reason.” Thus Hamlet’s metaphors are by no means mere embellishments, external to his thinking, but organise the very body of his thoughts from the inside.

The metaphors reformulate “to be” as: “in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and “not to be” as: “to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them”. *Being* is shown as “suffering”, as something passive, and, since it takes place in the mind, as akin to *thinking*, while the metaphorical paraphrase of “not to be” helps Hamlet to view non-being in terms of its direct opposite, i.e. as *action*. However, action does lead ultimately to non-being, because the “sea of troubles” puts an end to “the arms” with which these troubles were supposed to be defeated. So far the choice between being and non-being has been interpreted as a choice between a contemplative life without action and an active and pugnacious one, necessarily ending in death.

The important thing to notice here is that the very terms in which the juxtaposition takes place help Hamlet to view being and non-being as having more in common than the initial brute confrontation seemed to suggest. Hamlet’s very rhetoric seems to contain the insight that absolute oppositions exist only on the level of *concepts*. The very meaning of *action*, relegated by Hamlet to non-being, bears the marks of being, while *thinking*, given as “suffering in the mind”, devoid of all deeds and activities other than thinking itself, rather seems to be a form of non-being.

Hamlet’s mind gets now anchored in the problem of death, presented so far as a result of *activity* and as the interpretation of non-being. And it is here that the “rub”, the decisive turn in the soliloquy, occurs⁶³. If we were really free to interpret death as completely coinciding with the concept of non-being – Hamlet suggests – then for someone, amidst “a sea of troubles”, including tormenting thoughts, death would be a welcome and, most importantly, an *absolute* alternative. Yet, as the argumentation implies, there is no compelling reason which would force us to identify non-being solely with death in the first place, or not to conceive of death metaphorically, in the second. And if, in line with the Renaissance commonplace,⁶⁴ we think of death as a sleep, then, by the implication of the metaphor, it is also *possible* that we dream in it. We should also notice that Hamlet does not say that we

⁶³ For an interesting and detailed treatment of the monologue, especially from the perspective of theological debates in Shakespeare’s age, see László Kéry’s scholarly essay „Talán álmodni: ez a bökkenő” [“Perchance to dream - ay, there’s the rub”], in Kéry 11-46.

⁶⁴ Cf. Jenkins 489

necessarily dream in death but that "to sleep" "perchance" implies "to dream", and he further says that we do not know "what dreams *may* come", and it is *this* which "must give us pause" (my emphasis). Hamlet puts forward a "dream-argument", too, but whereas for Descartes it serves the purpose of intensifying and universalising doubt by providing him with a fair amount of *uncertainty*, for Hamlet the uncertainty of the *fact* of dreaming is immediately interpreted as the *possibility* of dreaming, which is a factor one *must* take into consideration.

Consequently, it is significant enough that Hamlet's "reasoning" (II,2;265) on dreaming with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, well before the "to be, or not to be"-monologue, takes place in the context of the Prince's famous aphorism: "for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (II,2;249-250). Here Hamlet, pressed by Rosencrantz on the topic of ambition and complaining of "bad dreams" (II,2;256), calls a dream a "shadow" (II,2;260). Yet the principle of possibility is in operation at that instance, too. Ambition, as Rosencrantz claims, might indeed be "of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow" (II,2;261-262); yet Hamlet immediately finds the metaphorical pattern to communicate that kings and heroes (undoubtedly including Claudius as well) are, if "thinking makes them so", the real shadows while beggars, devoid of ambition, are the only *real* beings, given that at the same time beggars count as the shadows of kings and ambition as the shadow of dreams: "Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows" (II,2;261-262). The reasoning is complex, yet by no means 'illogical' or 'irrational', and it precisely turns on the metaphorical exploitation of the ambiguity of the word outstretched: elongated shadows stretch out as ambitious people "reach over". It is thus that metaphors themselves "stretch out" and, if "thinking makes them so", take the discussion from Hamlet's own ambition - which he neither confirms nor denies - to the "shadowiness" and "nothingness" of Claudius. In thinking everything is possible, even that "The King is a thing - [...] Of nothing" (IV, 3;27-28), however - and this is the moral of Hamlet's little banter - "shadows", "dreams" and "nothings" might, as the principle of possibility allows it again, be more 'substantial' and 'real' than reality 'itself'.

So in the "to be, or not to be"-monologue, too, the principle of possibility does lead Hamlet to something definitive or substantial, perhaps even with the force of necessity, depending on the interpretation of *must*. Yet here this definitive conclusion is the ability to see *to be* (i.e. dreaming, the presence of consciousness, thinking) in *not to be* (i.e. in death) and, in turn, to see *not to be* in *to be*. *Not to be* is

seen in *to be* in some of the concluding lines of the soliloquy: "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, / And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought". Here all the images of illness and of 'ghastly' paleness and of death (i.e. of 'non-being') are given to thinking, to "conscience", i.e., to 'being'. And what lies in the personification of thought here as death and in the implied personification of interpreting death as a human being's sleep in which dreams may come, is, I think, the acknowledgement that the presentation of the problem of existence as "to be, or not to be" is doomed to failure from the start. It is doomed to failure from the start because it could be made a real alternative only if we had, again, some basis of comparison, if it was not thinking which makes things good or bad. But since we are unable to take a journey in the "undiscover'd country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns", we can only pose the problem from *this* side, i.e. from the side of thinking ("being"), so we can hardly expect to see non-existence in any other terms than human. The human trait in the metaphors warns us that it is our very stance (be it sitting or standing) which deprives us from being able to see *to be* or *not to be* as real alternatives. All we may do is to retain both with equal force and to acknowledge that the *or* expresses not an exclusive but an inclusive alternative. Thus we reach the "credo" of the hero of tragedy again, whose failure is always his success and whose success is always his failure: to be *is* not to be.⁶⁵

To sum up: for Descartes thinking ensures the fact of his existence, and, further, the existence of God, who will, in turn, ensure the existence of the Universe. Hamlet uses thinking not so much to settle the question of "what exists and what does not", but to give its extent, to mark out its "bourn", the frontier dividing being and non-being, only to see one always in terms of the other. The major reason for Descartes' and Hamlet's different approaches is, of course, that in Hamlet's world there is no final and absolute guarantee: in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* God seems to interfere neither with thinking, nor with being.

But then where should we put Hamlet's assuring (though not necessarily *ensuring*) words to Horatio, spoken towards the end of the play: "There is a divinity that shapes our end" (V,2;10) and "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V,2;215-216)? Are these words the ones that give Hamlet strength to enter the fatal duel? Or do they express the further irony that one is unprotected

⁶⁵ Here I am especially obliged to István Géher's brilliant interpretation of *Hamlet*, Géher 200 and *passim*.

precisely when one is able to give voice to such convictions, protection always coming when one is *not* aware of it?

First it is of great significance that these words are heard at the end of the play. Hamlet seems to be saying that if we disregard the moment *for a moment* then it is also *possible* to see everything that has previously happened as an integral and meaningful part of a larger and longer narrative or plot, whose Author is somebody else than us. We might exist because we think, yet it is equally possible that we exist because we are *thought*. Hence I take the above words of Hamlet as signs of his principle of possibility in full operation, paraphrasable as follows: 'It is indeed doubtful to count with God as an absolute guarantee. But this uncertainty should not make us discard the *possibility*. It *might* be the case that he is even willing to ensure and assure us through his bare existence or otherwise, so we *must* give both alternatives equal chances.' "The readiness is all" (V,2;218) and readiness is more than standing, it is precisely to *exist* "between earth and heaven" (III,1;128-129), to *be the constant thinking* of this impossible tension, to participate in the unbearable *force of the alternatives*, the duality of "mighty opposites" (V,2;62) that inhere in each moment.

Is this, in the 20th century, enough to "*think our being*"? Or, even in the century of Samuel Beckett, might we wait for more?

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Shall We Strive to Be Pleased with Transcending the Persistent?

Repetition versus responding in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

Persistent is what notoriously repeats itself, with no consideration for any other aspect or circumstance, except for its own pattern to be accomplished. Time which "travels in divers paces with divers persons" (*As You Like It*, 3.2) is such an obstinate phenomenon, transporting mankind from one age to the other. (*As You Like It*, 2.7) In *As You Like It* there is still, as Shakespeare has introduced, a whole ideal counterworld defending eternal values from the harms of limited social and spiritual existence. The forest of Arden contains all that is essential in human life on the one hand, and it contains only what is necessary in the same human life on the other hand. Freedom and happiness coincide, as well as plenty is enough for the characters here, surrounded by trees "mistaken" for volumes of love poetry. Natural and artificial cannot be separated. The opposed two notions of good and bad lose ground and disappear, since nothing and no one can keep being bad in the idyllic forest where even time loses its absolute control over people.

In his very next play, Shakespeare did not create an alternative sphere where happiness may be achieved. Instead, he offers his characters the last night of the "season of high revels,"¹ i.e. the twelve holy winter days from Christmas till Epiphany, as the only chance for some revelry and mirth. Subjects of this "closing time"² go through

¹ John Dover Wilson in his notes to *Twelfth Night*, second edition, Cambridge University Press 1949, 103.

² *Closing Time*, written and composed by Leonard Cohen, 1992 - some of this modern poet's verses quite dramatically suggest the absurdity behind our "last minute" sense of hasty life: "So we're drinking and we're dancing...and it's partner found and partner lost and it's hell to pay when the fiddler stops...We're lonely, we're romantic and the cider's laced with acid and the Holy Spirit's crying,

and, with the exception of two of them, all graduate from the school of deception. This schooling aspect, generously mingled with the holiday atmosphere does not necessarily mean that the characters in *Twelfth Night* (without Sir Andrew and Malvolio) acquire true knowledge and clear insight of themselves and others through their education, i.e. experience. Actually, the comedy works well and ends, in some conventionally expected ways, happily because acts of deception and illusion flourish and multiply around the protagonists. Among them, the most skilful ones learn how purposes are transformed by chance when rooted in illusions of the self. But whose illusions and what purposes are more real than "the rest" of intellectual fixities? - thus the Shakespearean puzzle rises. Interpretation cannot dissolve these ambiguities, only share the experience of reconciliation between objective and subjective time, that is between what happens and what is understood by what happens.

Holiday time in *Twelfth Night*, like all the special cases of allowed time-wasting in the Shakespearean comedies, is abundant in love-stories and intrigues as well. A comic time-vacuum generates love-stories, and love stops real time. On the plot level, this time through many obstacles leads to "lovers meeting" ("Journeys end in lovers meeting" Feste's first song 2.3.), and also to the unrestricted full manifestation of the various fancies, wishes, claims, dislikes and interests, nourished silently from the beginning in the dramatis personae divided thus in opposing and even self-contradicting groups. Dramatic "journeys end" when conflicts burst out and passions are consumed. With this we move on further, beyond or above plot level in a transdramatic dimension, to the special realm of witnessing (watching and feeling compassion, like in martyrdom, since martyr originally meant eye-witness). In the final act we as spectators become more present than Malvolio and a few other characters, since we share the full knowledge of the events acted out in front of us. In fact, we are bound to be so very present from the beginning, while in the end certain characters are refused by the author to take part, therefore they "miss" the resolving scene. Moreover, Malvolio is set free only by chance,³ and he "deliberately" remains fixed to his idea of revenge. He has to, as he is the odd-man-out of the farce plot.

The end does not bring general and hundred-percent happiness, no wonder since *Twelfth Night* dates back to the same year 1601 as *Hamlet* does and one year before *Troilus and Cressida*, and the author must have been already thinking ahead. Yet no doubt we are "transported" by sharing the performance time as opposed to real time.

'Where's the beef' ...with a mighty expectation of relief...looks like freedom but it feels like death it's something in between, I guess it's CLOSING TIME".

³ Lois Potter: *Twelfth Night. Text and Performance*. Macmillan, 1985, 27-33.

In this sense, the scenes of wordless communion in music (no matter who sings and what kind of music) constantly carried on through the whole play have a go-between effect on us. We may feel quite up-to-date with those ambiguities and the somewhat ridiculed happy ending. The epilogue-like song of Feste the clown concludes on a dark tone of *vanitatum vanitas*, and yet it satirizes the self-same melancholic attitude.

The final change in the refrain lifts the play, places its attendants into the sphere of artistic work and evidently, of human efforts in general. Literally, the hopeless weather forecast is replaced by the promise of daily recreated direct satisfaction in theatre. The jester's song concludes the series of variations on the basic theme of linear versus cyclic time.

With a slight exaggeration, one could argue that had Feste read Jacques Derrida's essay on the "cruel theatre"⁴ he would certainly have recognised an apt theorist for his company's practice. Derrida states that no piece of art, written or performed, should ever be repeated, since artistic creativity is abused when one particular artistic moment is applied for filling another such moment which by nature must contain its own validity. A poem once told or read should be forgotten or thrown away, similarly two performances of a single play are more than enough. If time and our life's moments cannot be stopped or turned back, why should we assume that we keep the world under control through artistic communication. If it is death that gives life any value, then similarly it must be the full stop of self-expression that might set the price of the expressive self. The traditional distinctions between art and non-art, high and low, form and essence lose ground, and the remaining questions sound like these: whether an act of communication is valid, intense and total, whether it involves the proper source of feedback or it does not, consequently is it going to hold on or to perish.

No doubt, *Twelfth Night* has been and may still be interpreted in many other ways. I feel inclined to see this play as the twofold story of growing definitely and with no hope to return mature on the one hand, and of remaining a never enough self-contained (and constrained) child forever on the other hand. The "story" is twofold; the presence of the characteristic Shakespearean twins echoes its relevance and meaning.

Whatever happens, it involves and affects two different attitudes, and leads on to consequences of two kinds. There is an open-minded generous creative spirit on the one hand, and a self-indulgent limited maniac "less (than) spirit" on the other hand, and the two with different variants and quantities are all exposed to the very same

⁴ Jacques Derrida: *Writing and Difference*. trans. by Alan Bass, Routledge, 1990 two chapters: "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", and "Theatre and its Double".

manifestations of existence. Dramas always sharpen things to the extremes, so there are these two clearly opposed modes of reacting, either acceptance, or refusal. The first tolerates and adjusts itself to circumstances, and in the meantime invitingly gives providence a chance to be favourable. The second neglects and denies facts, thus becomes abandoned and empty in front of the best occurrences of life. These two main attitudes draw the lines of the plot and move the characters in the play, and they are functional in the whole drama-structure.

Referring to the double title, we might feel perplexed a little: if the dramatic time coincides with the twelfth night of the winter festival season, how is it possible that in 1.4 Viola (Cesario) has already spent three days in Duke Orsino's service, and more strangely, how come Antonio has spent, within the same time-span, starting approximately from the same moment - the shipwreck - three months with Sebastian (5.1). Now, if we calculate well, between 1.4 and 5.1 three months minus two days pass. There is another motive, more serious one for us not to think we enter a real feast: Olivia's servants want and plan out for some revelry time as something missed and longed for, and when Malvolio scolds them for making noise, they do not justify their entertainment-practice with mentioning the properness of time for merriment and "misrule."⁵

So time in *Twelfth Night* is only like a holiday. This likeness explains the sub-title: celebration, stage drunkenness and madness are not permitted, therefore you do what you will. It is no holiday, so let us imagine we are free to do any thing. The sub-title "or what you will" as a recurrent pattern of the text first appears in the play when mourning Olivia in 1.5 tells Malvolio to send Orsino's love messenger away by all means, finding any kind of excuse. By fate's irony, some moments later the same self-willed rational lady, hurt by love at first sight, cannot help but admit that "must" is sometimes a greater authority than "will":

I do I know not what, and fear to find
 Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind...
 Fate, show thy force - ourselves we do not owe -
 What is decreed, must be: and be this so.

1.5.312-316

Olivia, representing a peaceful authority (olives - the symbol hidden in her telling name) learns the lesson quite quickly. From the end of 1.5 her house gradually

⁵ Potter, 14-20.

opens and at the end she is the warm hostess who invites everybody to be her guest. Olivia's sudden change almost provokes things, foolish or wise, to happen in her environment (her rooms, her garden, the street in front of her house).

But it is only Olivia who is transformed by the magic of love. Malvolio, the official "master of revels" will never accept such an irrational turn in the "court policy". Malvolio is worse than the models Shakespeare took when creating his figure. Historical documents tell us winter holidays were officially celebrated by the Elizabethan court. Moreover, even in the strictest "puritanical" years when many theatres were closed, performances were allowed to be held in great number on holidays.

The time given is like a holiday, but a simile is exactly the thing Malvolio, who is "worse than a Puritan being like a Puritan"⁶ will not understand. Truly, it is not only Malvolio who has false concepts and errs. It may be easier to see who is not misled all through the play. Perhaps the clown, for even Viola suffers from not knowing what fortune has prepared for her, i.e. her twin brother Sebastian saved and thus her own complications to be solved by happy match-makings. If only Malvolio remembered to set the sailor free and thus help Viola back to her maiden clothes. As the meaning of his name suggests, Malvolio is far from doing favours for anyone. It is absurd that he thinks he is in love and aims no lower than at wooing Lady Olivia. He is just a little more absurd than the other pretended conventional lovers, ranked high (Duke Orsino, Lady Olivia) or low (Sir Andrew Aguecheek). The four of them exemplify the paradoxes of love as the neoplatonic love concept versus everyday's trivialised commonplace. I am going to call these four characters "the repetitive ones", who represent the disregarding attitude. Viola and Feste, on the other hand, stand for understanding and tolerant intelligence, let them be called "the responding ones". Between their sharp extremes there are some able ones who understand one or two jokes and double meanings.

There are situations in different scenes, similarly there are sentences and words on the textual level which appear several times as challenging as they can, and meet a character bearing the marks of one or the other attitude. Then these "catches" are either merely repeated or creatively altered. Shakespeare has already used a conversing technique resembling our case, specialists call it stichomythia.⁷ It is the main structural element in Katherine's and Petruchio's first dialogue 2.1 *The Taming of the Shrew*, and in the two wooing scenes 1.2 Richard with Ann, 4.4 Richard with Elizabeth, or the ghost-scene at camp 5.3 *Richard III*. But the rhythm of recurring elements,

⁶ Potter, 14-20.

⁷ Potter, 14-20.

so basically important in musical composition and also in the way of manifesting rituals, traditions and conventions appears more powerfully in *Twelfth Night* than ever before. It links euphuistic wordplay and ironical wittiness with some deeper sense of communion. It tests the utterable part of any human bond, as selfish or devoted as possible and imaginable between “fools of love” with mistaken or disguised identities.⁸

On the one hand, the word-by-word repetitions represent selfish and self-deceived personalities who only think they are in love but in fact they do not know how to love. To exemplify what I have said, I would refer to Olivia’s three absurd wooers. Orsino’s, Aguecheek’s and Malvolio’s love are equally and all timeless because they will never get fulfilled. The irreality of the fourth wooer’s love is due to the fact that it comes too fast. On the other hand Sebastian is more spontaneous when “invited” to fall in love at first sight, and in fact there is neither time nor any need for him to pose.

Duke Orsino obstinately cries out for music. Music for him is a compensation for his unrequited love. Being in love with the mere idea of being in love, the duke feeds his senses with melancholy music with “dying falls.”⁹ He constantly mentions the sea as the metaphor of his tormented soul, and punning upon the words “heart” and “hart” he almost enjoys the idea of his heart broken or, to be more precise, torn into pieces. He twice sends Viola as his messenger to Olivia but he does not bother to go and never tries to directly woo and conquer his fictionalised, idolised love.

Andrew Aguecheek is more profanely absurd, entirely lacking self-knowledge and any sense of reality. He is no better than the gossip we learn about him before his first appearance 1.3 He is perhaps the slowest “wit” in the play, and he pays for it dearly. But in fact he has no bad intentions at all. His suggestion of setting about some revels makes him sympathetic although he, “the thin man”¹⁰ is permanently and

⁸ Northrop Frye in *A Natural Perspective*, 1965, speaks about Shakespearean comedies as the journeys towards obtaining personal identity.

⁹ John Dover Wilson’s *Notes to Twelfth Night*, 105-6.

¹⁰ Bob Dylan: “Ballad of a Thin Man”: “You try so hard / But you don’t understand / ... / Because something is happening here / But you don’t know what it is / ... / You raise up your head / And you ask, ‘Is this where it is?’ / And somebody points to you and says / ‘It’s his’ / And you say, ‘What’s mine?’ / And somebody else says, ‘Where what is?’ / ... / You hand in your ticket / And you go watch the geek / Who immediately walks up to you / When he hears you speak / And says, ‘How does it feel / To be such a freak?’ / And you say, ‘Impossible’ / ... / And he says, ‘Here is your throat back / Thanks for the loan’ / ... / There ought to be a law / Against you comin’ around.” In: *Blowin’ in the Wind*, Budapest, 1989.

gradually more severely ridiculed by his so called friend (“the fat man”) Sir Toby Belch.¹¹

In sharp contrast with the dying (somewhat morbid and somewhat perverse) mood of hopeless longing, these two men, sometimes joined by Mary, Fabian and Feste form quite a robust drinking and laughing company. Their time-wasting in 2.3 is an “excellent” pleasure, although a little too thick and dense with vulgar remarks and heavy drinking. Finding Malvolio disgusted and shouting angrily at the scene, we definitely prefer the “rogues”, and put our fingers crossed for the successful fooling of the hypocrite.

Malvolio never understands a joke and hardly ever considers anything except his own personal manias. His first appearance (1.5) is a preventive allusion in the sense that it is much like Hamlet’s first coming on stage (*Hamlet* 1.2) in a satirical variant. Both characters, dressed all in black, linger there on stage long before they speak a word, and finally they are forcibly drawn into conversation.¹² But Malvolio has more in common with Polonius the status quo man in a rotten world. Malvolio the aging man adores an excessively mourning young woman, and does so not only with his perverted and weakened senses, but also with his self-sufficient boastful pride and cruel ambition. From the very first answers he gives to Olivia in 1.5 Malvolio proves a deceitful courtier and a bore who changes his opinions when his mistress changes hers. Due to this limited cunning he may fall victim to Sir Toby and his company. His matter-of-fact mind can enjoy neither a love song, nor a “song of good life” or “of good manners” (2.3). Reading the ominous letter in 3.2 he scents no cheating but takes everything literally, which is not so characteristic of someone who is in love. He follows the stupid instructions word by word reproducing a Malvolio more disgusting than mild Olivia can endure (3.4). When closed in the dark cell in order to be cured from madness by the clown disguised into Topas the exorcist-priest, in 4.2 he cries for help and does not notice the improbability of the whole staged ceremony, he pitifully laments, repeating over and over the whole story which is not sad for anyone else but himself. He cannot think or act otherwise than suggested, therefore he repeats the letter-writing pose.

Our acquaintance with this letter comes in two phases. The scene - part of the hectic final accusation scene - mirrors how Olivia is gaining back her rational self. Love’s foolery cured by a husband, Olivia does not appreciate her old clown’s pres-

¹¹ Potter on p 35 writes: “Sir Toby and Sir Andrew must be the Fat Man-Thin Man team so dear to comic writers”

¹² Potter 35-6.

ence so much any more. The fall-away of her favours is foretold by Feste in 1.5. So here we meet a shrewd case of either a repetition or a variant. The question one might ask, however, is not so “technical”: Does Olivia simply perform here or does she really mean she has changed again, turning serious? We might presume, much to our fancy’s content, that the question need not be put and the answer need not be given, since for the happy ending visible there is still one condition open.

This open condition might be the sailor’s appearance with Viola’s clothes, but it might well be something else which is more difficult to verbalise or articulate. It is only Feste the clown who can do something about the matter: pretending to reach as high as where the mystery of our good or bad fortune is taking shape, he makes preparations for leaving. He introduces the stage, set for the last “measures”, to “the whirligig of time” that sometimes over-repeating, some other times recreating itself “brings in his revenges” for our mortality.

Malvolio meets nothing but his own fury. Taking the word revenge from the mouth of someone he has disappreciated the most, he refuses to hear and to see what happens around him when by chance he escapes, and he sticks to this last word before running off-stage (5.1), slightly as a precedence to Iago’s refusal to tell anything more in the final scene of *Othello*.

In the comedy, of course, the world will not be ruined by such potential villains, not even in the case of this darkening comedy. In 2.2 we find Malvolio and Viola, the two opposing attitudes face each other. When Viola is “chased” by the frozen-hearted, however suddenly awakening Olivia, she answers to the gasping Malvolio with some hint of irony, repeating his words.

Viola transforms Orsino’s absurd love messages one after the other (1.5 and 3.1) by talking directly to Olivia, eagerly to know her, and appreciating or scolding her in turn. Her sincerity breaks through the wall of mourning and self-indulgence, and Olivia falls in love with her non-aggressive and non-conventional being, that kind of a personality men by conventional manly behaviour do not even pretend to have in front of her. Defending Orsino’s point of view Viola in fact confesses her own feelings, thus again she cannot be rigidly following her master’s lines, although she mentions she should do so. No wonder she is charming both in the Duke’s and the Lady’s company. Just like Feste, she immediately gains access to both houses.

Her alternative responses stand for the “better” kind of personality, who can give up selfish ideas, boring or self-torturing as they can ever be, and replace them with “readiness” to know “the other”.

In neoplatonic love theories the beloved should respond to the lover's love as if it were an absolute imperative. It is also true that neoplatonic love is a voluntary death, a change of souls, which in case of responded mutual love is returned and doubled by two rebirths, those of the two self-abandoned and substituted souls.¹³ I would just mention two distant interpretations echoing Ficino, therefore close to relate them with Shakespearean plays around the theme of love. In the Ovidian sense metamorphosis stands for the personal involvement which in modern ethics coincides with the concept of substitution.¹⁴

All in all, nothing is more evident than the secret of love which, if going to be meaningful, ought to be responded and thus accomplished by communion. Total (ideal) communication is, in all cases, the (transcendental) solution which might free us from the persisting limits of our one-way existence.

¹³ Marsilio Ficino: "A szerelemről", in: *Reneszánsz Etikai Antológia*, Budapest, 1984, 191-212.

¹⁴ E. Lévinas: *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, chapter 4: "La Substitution". Translation by A. Lingis: E. Lévinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 1987.

Gábor Ittész

“Till By Degrees of Merit Raised”: The Dynamism of Milton’s Edenic Development and Its Theological Context

Since 1823, when the manuscript of Milton’s *Christian Doctrine* was rediscovered, it has been customary, if not required, to read it as a commentary on *Paradise Lost*. Relevant passages from the epic appear, in turn, in the footnotes of the editions of *De doctrina christiana*. Theological treatise and poetry have thus become nearly interchangeable. In this paper I want to both honour and implicitly criticize this practice. I shall indeed devote much of my attention to various theological interpretations of the Eden story, examining Renaissance exegetical lore against the background of early Christian biblical interpretation, both canonical and apocryphal. On the other hand, however, I will try to suggest that *Paradise Lost* as a piece of literature with its own narrative concerns goes far beyond usual theological interest in depicting the dynamism of Adam and Eve’s paradisaical happiness.

I

Andrew Willet’s *Hexapla in Genesin* (1609) may serve as a starting point. Rather than an original commentary, the *Hexapla* is a compilation of various critical opinions, arranged verse by verse, organized around exegetical difficulties and brought into discussion one with another. In that, it is not altogether dissimilar to Jewish Midrash. However, unlike his Rabbinic colleagues, Willet is determined to settle the issues and come up with a clear solution to each and every crux. In fact, at the end of each chapter he goes on to draw out doctrinal points and establish the true Christian teaching from scripture. The main value of *Hexapla* to Milton criticism lies precisely in its composite nature and unoriginality. Reflecting numerous

critical opinions, it can serve to illustrate the contemporary exegetical context (both consensus and debate) of Milton's subject matter. Genesis 1-3 receives a fifty-page treatment from Willet. The questions around which the material is organized include "Whether Paradise were terrestrial" and where it "was situate" (22), the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (23), "Whereof Adam was made, and of the excellent constitution of his body" (25), "Whether Adams soule was created after his bodie," "Wherefore Adam was placed in Paradise" (26), "Of the excellent knowledge and wisdom of Adam" (30), "How many ribs, and whence taken" (31, italics deleted throughout), etc. Adam's original immortality is asserted, and the idea that eating the fruit of the tree of life would have produced such effect is dismissed. "[M]an had by his creation power given him [not]¹ to dye, if he had not sinned wherefore immortality was the gift of his creation, not effect of the eating of the tree" (22). Also vindicated is the point that Adam had to work in Eden and had some kind of hunger, though never unpleasant, otherwise he could not have enjoyed food (26f). But there is no speculation on what might have happened without the fall.

Milton's own theological work, though by no means a Genesis commentary, can also be noted here. He devotes book I, chapter x of *Christian Doctrine* to "the Special Government of Man before the Fall; including the Institutions of the Sabbath and of Marriage" (296). This is a somewhat misleading chapter heading: it is no overstatement to say that the forty-page text is Milton's sixth divorce tract, throwing in, for good measure, the legitimacy of polygamy and capital punishment for adultery. Again, there is no sustained discussion here of the unfallen world.

The Common Expositor, Arnold Williams's study of Genesis commentaries between 1527-1633, yields similar results, drawn from a more diverse body of sources. Over a hundred editions are listed among the primary texts and some two dozen of them are actually quoted throughout the volume. Of the thirteen chapters of his book, Williams devotes two to "Adam and Eve" and "Paradise and the State of Innocence." The topics discussed in these chapters roughly correspond to those Willet concerned himself with. The chapter on "Adam and Eve" is occupied mainly with matters like their creation, relative status, marriage, the excellence of the human body, the origin and nature of the soul, and Adam's knowledge. Chapter V

¹ A curious printer's error, the key word (*not*) was left out and the correction is entered only in handwriting. However, the larger context precludes all doubt of Willet's intended meaning. Cf. also 46: "Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt returne: hence it is gathered, that death was not naturall to man, but hapned because of sinne: ... it was never said to man before he had sinned, that he should returne to dust."

chiefly deals with the location of Eden (once a purely allegorical interpretation is dismissed), its geography, the two trees in its midst, their (potential) effect and thus Adam's immortality. Only the last four pages (of seventeen in this chapter) focus on the state of innocence. Even here, the crucial issues are Adam's property rights with respect to the Garden and the commission to work. Moreover, a good many, if not all, of the actual descriptive quotations are taken from *Paradise Lost*, not from the commentaries proper.

The point I am trying to make is that contemporary theological interest in the state of innocence, as opposed to its constituent parts, was limited. And what there was was properly an interest in the *state* of innocence. That is to say, static pictures of paradisaal bliss were sometimes painted, but hardly any attention was paid to the (potential) dynamism of the prelapsarian universe.

I think three major reasons can be advanced to explain such silence. First, the fall was a given and created its own concomitant theological problems. The most prominent of them was probably God's foreknowledge which, combined with his omnipotence, caused a major crux for human freedom. Renaissance theologians dedicated their exegetical ingenuity to solving 'real' problems, rather than to hypothesizing new ones: the age of Scholasticism was over. Second, and this pertains especially to commentaries on Genesis, which were inevitably influenced by Humanistic literary critical methods, the biblical text does not provide material for a detailed picture. The point may be pressed a little further, though, beyond its overt anachronism, its applicability for the Renaissance exegetes is at best debateable. However, Milton and his predecessors apparently honoured the mimetic principle of Genesis which H. H. Schmid came to identify some three or four centuries later.

When Homer wants to describe Odysseus' raft, the biblical authors Noah's ark or Solomon's Temple, they do not actually provide a description but narrate how Odysseus built his raft, Noah the ark or Solomon the Temple. Antique authors describe by narrating. The biblical story of creation is thus not simply a narration of an act that took place long ago: it is primarily a description of the existing world.²

² Schmid 29.: "Amikor Homérosz le akarja írni Odüsszeusz tutaját, a bibliai szerzők Noé bárkáját vagy a salamoni templomot, akkor voltaképp nem leírást adnak, hanem elbeszélnek, hogy építette Odüsszeusz a tutajt, Noé a bárkát vagy Salamon a templomot. Ókori szerzők úgy írnak le, hogy elbeszélnek. Így valójában a bibliai teremtéstörténet sem egyszerűen egy régen lejátszódott teremtési aktus elbeszélése, hanem elsősorban a meglévő világ leírása." Though written in German, the article first appeared in Hungarian. The translation in the main text is mine.

Third, and this is most evident in Arnold Williams's repeated reference to Adam and Eve's *brief* period of innocence,³ the fall was supposed to take place only hours after the end of the creation. The Genesis narrative does not (fully) warrant such an interpretation. In fact, it is silent on the chronology, which, simply by not contradicting it, leaves enough room to argue practically any temporal scheme as the adequate explanation. God's consecrating of the seventh day in Gen 2:2 may suggest that the fall had not occurred until at least the third day of Adam and Eve's life, i.e., until the day after the first Sabbath, themselves having been created on the preceding 'Friday.' The second creation story beginning with 2:4 undermines any such computation, for the events therein enumerated clearly fell within the scope of the first six days, given the consensus that the two accounts of man's creation shared a single referent.⁴ On the other hand, God's walking in the garden in the cool of the day (3:8) invites a same-day interpretation. Similarly, the penal clause of the interdiction "in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17)⁵ supports this view. Of course, even if it is conceded that the judgement scene took place the same day as the first transgression, it need not follow that both happened on the sixth day of creation. If nothing else, the gap between 2:25 and 3:1 effectively prevents such reasoning from being conclusive.

In a passage, significantly longer than average, "At what time Adam fell," Willet lists a number of calculations for the length of Adam's stay in Paradise, ranging from one day (until the Sabbath) to as many years as Christ lived on earth. "[B]ut the most approved opinion," he goes on to say, "is, that *Adam* fell the same day of his creation."⁶ Willet gives ten reasons why this view should be accepted. The most ingenious, if not the most convincing, of them is the eighth.

What became of Lions and Beares, that lived of flesh, all this while of *Adams* being in Paradise? they could not fast so long, and flesh they did not eat, because there was no death before mans fall: and they did not feed on

³ Willams, 94, 108

⁴ In the first century and a half after the Reformation, it would be grossly anachronistic to mention two different traditions, the distinction between the P and the J sources, form and redaction criticism.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, primary Biblical quotations are taken from RSV. Though not all modern translations preserve *day* and have rather a simple temporal *when*-clause, the expression *in the day* appeared in all major antique versions including the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint (LXX), Old Latin, Vulgate, and Syriac translations. Willet quotes two variants of the verse, but they only differ in the verb and pronoun (LXX has plural to show that the command was given to both Adam and Eve while the Vulgate, following the Hebrew original, has singular) and they both have *day* ("in what day" and "in the day that," respectively; 27f).

⁶ Willet 45

grasse: for then their nature should not so soone have beene changed to devoure flesh.⁷

The key scriptural proof is reserved to be the last item on Willet's list. The *locus classicus* is the literal translation of a Psalm verse. "10. That place lastly maketh to this purpose: Psal.49.13. *Adam lodged not one night in honour: for so are the words if they be properly translated.*"⁸ It was taken to mean that Adam's transgression and expulsion took place on the day of his creation: he did not spend a single night in paradisaal bliss. Not insignificantly for our purposes, Willet lists, among others, Ephrem and Irenaeus as representatives of this view.

To take a short excursus, the verse which runs "Man cannot abide in his pomp, / he is like the beasts that perish" in RSV (Ps. 49:12)⁹ featured prominently in early Christian exegesis. St. Ephrem the Syrian, who, though himself never a bishop, was probably the most influential theologian of fourth-century Syriac Christianity, wrote in "Hymn XIII on Paradise" that "David wept for Adam, / at how he fell / from that royal abode / to the abode of wild animals" (v.5). The parallel between Adam and the beasts propels Ephrem to the further identification of Adam with Nebuchadnezzar, the famous Babylonian king of Daniel 4, who "was driven from among men, and ate grass like an ox" (v.33). "In that king / did God depict Adam" (Ephrem XIII.6). Basil the Great, Ephrem's contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa's brother and himself a prominent fourth-century bishop of the Eastern church, explores the same theme in "Homily IX" of his *Hexaemeron*. "Thy head, O man! is turned towards heaven; thy eyes look up. When therefore thou degradest thyself by the passions of the flesh, slave of thy belly, and thy lowest parts, thou approachest animals without reason and becomest like one of them" (IX.2). The editorial gloss is again to Ps. 49:12. Basil's point is the contrast between man's upright stature ('celestial growth') and the 'terrestrial form' of animals whose "head is bent towards the earth and looks towards their belly" (IX.2). St. Augustine also quotes the same Psalm verse in *The City of God* but to a different purpose. "God ordained that infants should begin the world as the young of beasts begin it, since their parents had fallen to the level of the beasts in the fashion of their life and of their death" (XIII.3). Augustine declares, and I shall return to this point, that Adam and Eve were never

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Man* in the Hebrew original is *adam*, the literal meaning of *abide* is 'stay a night.' Cf. Willet 45. LXX and Syriac have a textual variant reading "a man who has riches without understanding." This may be a further key to Ephrem *below*, cf. Dan 4:34-36.

reduced to infancy by their sin or its punishment. The sentence pronounced on them was mortality, not “infantine and helpless infirmity of body and mind which we see in children” (XIII.3). In patristic exegesis, then, the second half of the Psalm verse is given greater emphasis—the animality attendant upon man’s first sin, not the brevity of paradisaic bliss, though there is no general consensus as to what exactly this beastliness means.

Yet that the brevity of prelapsarian human existence was a standard Christian notion is clearly indicated, beyond Willet’s evidence, by a number of references to it. The examples I examine in the following paragraph come from the early centuries of the Christian era and remained influential throughout the Middle Ages. In book XIV, chapter 26 of *The City of God*, St. Augustine explains that the only reason why there was no sexual intercourse in Eden is that “sin and its merited banishment from Paradise anticipated this passionless generation.” As “the honest love of husband and wife” (XIV.26.) is part of Augustine’s prelapsarian vision, the obvious implication is that sin came before the consummation of Adam and Eve’s marriage, i.e., before their first night. In Pericope 10 of *The Life of Adam and Eve*, an apocryphal piece from (late) Antiquity which became highly regarded in the Middle Ages for its explanation of Jesus’ descent to hell¹⁰ and of the origin of the wood of his cross but whose roots and date of composition are much debated,¹¹ Adam relates the story of the fall to his son Seth.

Son, when God made us, me and your mother, through whom also I die, he gave us power to eat of every tree which is in paradise, but, concerning that one only, He charged us not to eat of it, and through this one we are to die. And the hour drew near for the angels who were guarding your mother to go up and worship the Lord, and the enemy gave it to her and she ate from the tree.
(Greek 7:1-2)¹²

¹⁰ In fact, the relevant material is incorporated from the Gospel of Nicodemus, but acquired wide circulation through this transmission. Stone notes, “Meyer had observed that the original portion of the Latin *Vita Adam et Evae* is replaced in the present version of this event in the Latin translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*... . Certainly, here is a hint that something unacceptable may have stood in the underlying documents” (37). Cf. Anderson (Latin) 41:1-42:4.

¹¹ Cf. Stone 1-74 and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (= *ABD*; see Freedman for bibliography) I.64-66.

¹² Trans. Gary A. Anderson. MS, forthcoming. The relevant verse from the Slavonic text reads in German translation: “Als nämlich die sechste Stunde kam, sah Eva den Satan und verehrte ihn.”

Temporal reference by the hour clearly indicates the appropriate scale of time. Surely, all events recalled had taken place on the first day. *The Cave of Treasures*, another apocryphal writing originally in Syriac which Stone dubs "one of the most significant of the secondary Adam books,"¹³ could not be any more explicit. Its section on "Adam's stay in Paradise" begins like this. "At the third hour of the day Adam and Eve ascended into Paradise, and for three hours they enjoyed the good things thereof ; for three hours they were in shame and disgrace, and at the ninth hour their expulsion from Paradise took place."¹⁴

It is also worth briefly noting a couple of Jewish parallels. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, the most elaborate of the Aramaic translation-interpretations of the Hebrew Bible rendering the Pentateuch at twice its original length,¹⁵ gives Gen 2:25 as "And they were both wise, Adam and his wife, but they did not remain in their glory." To the latter clause, translator-editor John Bowker appends a footnote. "Cf. Ps. xlix. 12 (13): *Adam did not abide in glory* (the same root as the Targum here)."¹⁶ Here is again the *locus classicus* which served Willet well above. The implication for the brevity of Adam's Edenic stay requires no further comment. However, the suggestion may now be risked that this interpretation of Ps 49:12, with the emphasis on the first part of the verse, found its way into Renaissance Christian exegesis, especially given its interest in the Hebrew original, from Rabbinic and not patristic sources. *The Book of Jubilees*, in contrast to *Ps.-Jonathan*, views matters rather differently. "When the conclusion of the seven years which he [Adam] had completed there [in Eden] arrived — seven years exactly — in the second month, on the seventeenth, the serpent came and approached the woman" (3.17). The serpent was in no hurry and let Adam linger in Paradise for quite a while.¹⁷ The discrepancy between these views begins to make more sense if we realize that *Jubilees*, a retelling of the Bible (Gen 1 - Ex 20) originally in Hebrew though the extant full versions are all in Ethiopic, is an early piece of Jewish exegesis, written around 170-140 BCE.¹⁸ As such, it predates *Ps.-Jonathan* by some

¹³ Stone 91

¹⁴ Budge 66

¹⁵ Cf. *ABD* VI.322 and Bowker 26f.

¹⁶ 112 *note e*

¹⁷ As the title suggests, *Jubilees* is preoccupied with the 49-year periods (seven 'weeks of years') into which it organizes the entire history. This may explain the emphasis here on "seven years exactly," but that in itself does not explain why Adam was not expelled from Paradise on the first day.

¹⁸ *ABD* III.1030. Hick, apparently relying on some earlier scholarship without the evidence of the Qumran findings, dates it "somewhere between 135 and 105 B.C." (209).

three or four centuries.¹⁹ In the meantime, the understanding of the origin of sin underwent an important development.

II

In his *Evil and the God of Love*, John Hick identifies two basic types of theodicy that evolved throughout the history of the Christian church. One he calls Augustinian, the other Irenaean. My concern here is not with theodicy, but the framework is significant. I wish to outline what appear to be the two paradigms of evaluating the fall in Christian thought. Their cardinal importance for us lies in the larger patterns that serve as the framework for evaluation.

In chapter IX, Hick traces the development of Jewish and early Christian theological understanding of the origin of evil.²⁰ The evolution of the basic setting culminated in Gen 1-3 being canonized as the key text.

[I]n the mid-second century, in the course of the Church's mortal struggle against Gnosticism, the New Testament canon was formed, with Paul's letters as part of it. From about this time onwards his teaching about the fall was regarded as authoritative, and virtually all subsequent Christian

¹⁹ Cf. *ABD* VI.322: the present form of *Ps.-Jonathan* dates from the seventh or eighth century, but the material goes back before the fall of the Parthian empire (224 C.E.).

²⁰ Although the first steps of this development concern us only marginally, they surely deserve a brief outline, especially as it will bridge the gap between *Jubilees* and early Christian and Rabbinic views. In fact, Hick notes that in *Jubilees* "the Adamic story alone reveals the origin of sin" (209). This is a big step towards the Pauline climax, and it was preceded by a major shift from Gen 6 to Gen 3. The first destruction of the created order was caused by the flood. It was seen as God's response to human sin, which was thus first located in the marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men (Gen 6:1-8), leading to abundant human wickedness. Humankind, on this view, fell gradually from Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit through Cain's murder of his brother into total corruption. Although this view was further developed in (to) the story of the Watchers in I Enoch, by the first century C.E. the Adamic myth had replaced it. "From the Book of Jubilees onwards, during the course of the first century B.C., it is possible to trace the gradual suppression of the Watcher-legend by the Adam-story" (Norman P. Williams 29). An originally morally neutral doctrine of 'evil imagination' (*yecer ha-ra*) coalesced with the Adam story, resulting in the rabbinical teaching that Adam's sin bore consequences not only for himself but for the entire human race. Death became linked with sin. This theme was taken up by St. Paul.

This note is based on Hick 207-14, which in turn summarizes the consensus established mainly by the work of Julius Müller (*The Christian Doctrine of Sin [Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde*, Breslau: 1839-44), 5th ed., trans. William Urwick, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), F. R. Tennant (*The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1903), and Norman P. Williams, esp. 12-91. On the Jewish linking of sin and death, see also Gardner 91f.

thought concerning sin and evil has been set within the framework of the Adamic myth. But within this framework two significantly different developments have taken place, the one ... going through Augustine and the Western Church, the other going through Irenaeus and the Eastern Church.²¹

It was in this Pauline framework that the primitive simplicity of the pristine human condition came to be viewed as an exalted state of 'original righteousness.'²² In fact, it is part of Hick's thesis that even after the establishment of the basic framework, this development was not uniform throughout Christendom, nor need it have been. Without further elaborating the evolution, I simply want to outline three patristic views of Paradise, hoping that they will help us better appreciate Milton's treatment of the subject.

St. Augustine's view is best presented in the *City of God*, especially in books XI-XIV. There he declares that in Paradise, Adam

lived without any want, and had in his power to live eternally. He had food that he might not hunger, drink that he might not thirst, the tree of life that old age might not waste him. There was in his body no corruption, nor seed of corruption, which could produce in him any unpleasant sensation. He feared no inward disease, no outward accident. Soundest health blessed his body, absolute tranquillity his soul... . No sadness of any kind was there, nor any foolish joy; true gladness ceaselessly flowed from the presence of God.

(XIV.26)

It is perhaps best to note the superlatives—both grammatical and conceptual—to appreciate Augustine's concept. His "beliefs as to the Paradisal state of unfallen man represent the culminating point of that tendency to exalt it to the highest pitch of 'original righteousness' and 'perfection'."²³ And he was certainly not alone with his view. Basil the Great outdid Augustine in singing the praises of Paradise.

How could you find a way to represent the degree of pleasure there [in Paradise]? If you compared it with anything in this world, your comparison would be absurdly inadequate to convey a true picture of the original.

²¹ Hick 216

²² Hick 209

²³ Norman P. Williams, 360

Everything there is perfect and fully completed. It did not grow gradually, slowly coming to maturity and then flowering in the course of time, but came into existence in an instant at the highest peak of perfection and power, not requiring human help.

(“On Paradise” 5-6)

And he had good reason to do so. As the Book of Revelation did not enter the canon of the Eastern church until much later, Eden was “understood as representing both the primordial and the eschatological state at the end of time.”²⁴ Augustine’s motivation, however, was different. His context was original sin, a doctrine that had not been systematically considered before him. “The more glorious man’s original state and endowments are made, the deeper, by contrast, became the criminality and guilt of the Fall.”²⁵ Historically, Pelagianism prompted the doctor of grace to paint a gloomy picture of man’s fallen state, against which background God’s mercy could be depicted all the more glorious. Theologically, Augustine considered the created order perfect in its entirety and parts.²⁶

Yet there is another side to Augustine’s view. With all its splendour, the Edenic bliss was not the *non plus ultra* of God’s plan with man. It was only the beginning. Augustine draws a careful distinction between the state of angels, who were incapable of dying (*non possunt mori*), and that of Adam and Eve, who were capable of not dying (*possunt non mori*). Adam was created in an animal body, not in a spiritual body, but had he stood and not fallen, his body would have been turned into a spiritual body and he would have become like an angel, incapable of sin and death. This was the grand design of human development, and although the fall cannot ultimately prevent its fulfillment, humanity must reach its goal through a much more painful course.

For God had not made man like the angels, in such a condition that, even though they had sinned, they could none the more die. He had so made them, that if they discharged the obligations of obedience, an angelic immortality and blessedness might ensue, without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, death should be visited on them with just sentence.

²⁴ Brock’s “Introduction” to Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*, 49.

²⁵ Norman P. Williams 360

²⁶ Surely, there was “gradation according to the order of nature” (XI.16), but whatever existed was perfect with regard to its own position.

(XIII.1)²⁷

Irenaeus' understanding is substantially different. To put it bluntly, while Adam represents perfection for Augustine, Irenaeus can only see a child in him. This view is most unambiguously expressed in chapters 12 ("Paradise") and 14 ("Primal Innocence") of *Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*.

12. ... They [the angels], however, were in their full development, while the lord, that is, the man, was a little one; for he was a child and had need to grow so as to come to his full perfection. ... 14. And Adam and Eve ... were naked and were not ashamed, for their thoughts were innocent and childlike, and they had no conception or imagination of the sort that is engendered in the soul by evil, through concupiscence, and by lust.

This is a far cry from Augustinian perfection where the only reason preventing sexual intercourse in the Garden is the brevity of time. Irenaeus expresses and further elaborates the same notion in *Against Heresies*. There is a curious suggestion in IX.xxxviii.1 that God could "have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant": as though man receiving God's gifts existed somehow independently of man created by God. The point probably should not be pushed too far (Irenaeus also had his theological agenda), but the fundamental pattern of intended growth ought to be recognized.

Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God.

(IV.xxxviii.3)

This suggests, first, that immortality was to be achieved at the end of a long development. Secondly, no mention is made of where sin entered the system, only

²⁷ Cf. also XI.12, XIII.19-20, XIII.22-24, XIV.1, XIV.10.

that at a certain stage sin should be left behind.²⁸ At the heart of the Irenaean paradigm is the view of human history as analogous to “the development of an individual human being as a growth from the innocence of childhood to adult maturity.”²⁹ Sin, then, is an inevitable, though not therefore the less disastrous, part of this process: a key difference from Augustine.³⁰

St. Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* fall somewhere between the two views outlined above. Ephrem agrees with Irenaeus that Adam would have become immortal at the end of a long development, but sides with Augustine in that the fall rather perverted the original plan than was an inevitable part of it. The two trees were the prize that Adam could have won had he not fallen. Their significance is physical (another non-Augustinian trait), the eating of their respective fruits confers knowledge and eternal life.

Two Trees did God place
crown
in Paradise,
the Tree of Life
and that of Wisdom,
a pair of blessed fountains,
source of every good;
by means of this
glorious pair
the human person can become
the likeness of God,
knowledge;
endowed with immortal life
from
and wisdom that does not err.
[harm

[unshakable.

For God would not grant him the
without some effort;
He placed two crowns for Adam,
for which he was to strive,
two Trees to provide crowns
if he were victorious.
If only he had conquered
just for a moment,
he would have eaten the one and lived,
eaten the other and gained
his life would have been protected
and his wisdom would have been

(XII.15, 17)³¹

²⁸ Although the verb *recover* in the Iren’ean text is far more suggestive than this simplified interpretation.

²⁹ Greer 167

³⁰ Cf. Greer 167f, Hick 220f.

³¹ Ephrem makes the same point in his commentary on Genesis (II.23). Cf. p. 214 of *Hymns*.

A crucial model for Ephrem's Paradise is the structure of the Jewish Temple. At the creation Adam is placed in its precincts. The tree of knowledge of good and evil represented the sanctuary veil, and the tree of life the Holy of Holies (III.5). The interdiction of the former meant that Adam was not to go beyond it more towards the centre of Eden where the other tree stood.

Two things did Adam hear
 in that single decree:
 that they should not eat of it
 and that, by shrinking from it,
 they should perceive that it was not lawful
 to penetrate further, beyond that Tree.

(III.3)

Adam was to enter it later though it was not yet revealed to him.

Nor did He [God] show him [Adam] the Holy of Holies,
 in order that, if he kept the command,
 he might set eyes upon it
 and rejoice.

(III.9)

The potential development is less drastic than in Irenaeus, but perhaps more so than in Augustine. Perfection should have been reached in Eden, but the fruits with their real effects and the corresponding increase in Adam's freedom of movement signify more room (even literally) for advancement than Augustine's model would permit. On which all three fathers agree is the ultimate bliss in store for humanity.

The state of theological speculation on Paradise, which provided Milton's context, was, then, the following. There was a well established patristic tradition in both Eastern and Western Christianity - indeed, it was the orthodox concept - that Adam's Edenic bliss stood at the beginning of a long development which would ultimately have led to a considerably higher state of humanity. There seems to have been no agreement as to the precise details of this progress, though its terminal point (sinless eternity without further danger of lapse) was identical according to the various views, and none of the Fathers "approved" of sin. The key element is, however, the notion of progression, and that potentially without the fall.

There were, however, some significant counterforces opposed to the basic principle. First, as the locus of sin's origin was gradually focused on Adam and

Eve's eating of the forbidden tree, their stay in Paradise became proportionately shorter. Consequently, less and less time remained for genuinely Edenic activity. By Milton's time the consensus of a (very) short stay had been established, and the dominant view probably only allowed the first couple a few hours in their state of innocence. (The bears and the lions were not to grow hungry.) Moreover, it was obviously assumed that whatever happened in Eden was narrated by Genesis. Thus the biblical text was scrutinized, but the temporal gaps were rather closed (passed over in silence) than explored. Second, the Augustinian 'maximalist' conception of Paradise that became predominant in Western Christianity³² effectively reduced the room left for development. Though even this view postulated more than a mere return to Adam's prelapsarian happiness after the second coming, the key difference between the two states was seen in the impossibility of death and sin after the resurrection. As the potentiality implicit in Adam's pristine condition became a dreadful reality with the fall, not much remained to be said about the original state. It was all too clear what it had actually led to. Finally, sixteenth and seventeenth-century exegetes apparently lost interest in what might have happened without the fall. Being deprived by the text's silence of positive material (as represented by, for example, the names of the four Edenic rivers, which indeed sustained a long quest for the Garden's location³³), scholars focused attention on other issues. This was the age of humanistic literary critical methods, not of scholastic speculation. By consensus, the *via activa* had gained the upper hand over the *via contemplativa* - even in such practical matters as textual interpretation.³⁴

III

That Paradise is only lost in book IX of Milton's epic has long perplexed critics. The structure and proportions of *Paradise Lost* are so very different from those of Genesis 1-3 that the discrepancy has often invited the 'predating' of the fall. Many critics have contended that Adam and Eve fell before actually eating the

³² Norman P. Williams identifies as the first characteristic of the Augustinian view the "exalted conception of Adam's original righteousness and perfection" (400). Tracing the subsequent development of Augustine's doctrine of the fall in medieval Europe, especially Scholasticism, he asserts that "[i]n essence the Augustinian conception of man's original state [was] left unchanged" (*ibid.*).

³³ Arnold Williams 100-02

³⁴ Discussing Adam's state in Eden, Arnold Williams notes, referring to the dean's Sermon XIX, that "Donne construes the dressing and keeping of Paradise into a reason for the active against the contemplative life" (110).

forbidden fruit.³⁵ They consequently ransacked books IV-VIII for either evidence of fallenness or in search of a suitable location where the 'real' fall had occurred. This notion did not go unchallenged. In fact, the ensuing debate has probably been one of the most significant in post-war Milton criticism.³⁶ Although the agenda had been largely set by the first group, the reaction resulted in some important studies, reevaluating Milton's Paradise.³⁷ With the help of this new awareness, I wish now to examine some features of Milton's Eden against the theological background outlined above.

Milton preserves the basic Christian notion of development. The paradisaical state of Adam and Eve is not the end but the beginning of a long evolution. Raphael's answer to Adam's enquiry concerning angelic digestion includes, though somewhat tentatively, the outline of a possible future without sin:

[T]ime may come when men
With angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare:
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal, as we, or may at choice

³⁵ Cf., e.g., Ricks's parenthetical remark, "if they [Adam and Eve] could fall, were they not already in some sense fallen?" (99). Mustazza 91: "[Eve's] deed of plucking and eating the fruit is simply overt confirmation of her inner corruption... . Not only does the inner corruption come first; it is the more important of the two." Merrill 107: "To put the issue bluntly, it seems plausible to assume that Milton calculated a *linguistic* fall for Eve prior to her actual lapse." (For a more refined view on Merrill's part, see 103f.) However, the paradox was expressed most radically by Millicent Bell when she said, "from the very first we are after the Fall" (867). E. M. W. Tillyard (*Studies in Milton*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1951) and A. J. A. Waldock (*'Paradise Lost' and Its Critics*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1947) were also prominent representatives of this view, though they qualified it somewhat more than Bell.

Incidentally, St. Augustine arrived at the same conclusion - but his text was strictly biblical, not Miltonic: "Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted" (XIV.13).

³⁶ For a helpful summary of positions see Tanner 19-28. From a different though not altogether unrelated perspective, Stanley Fish also provides a valuable analysis of critical development between the war and the early 1970s in "Transmuting the Lump: *Paradise Lost*, 1942-1979." *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*. Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 1989. 247-93.

³⁷ E.g., Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, Lewalski, Danielson, Leonard. Though none of these books are exclusively dedicated to this single issue, they all make important contributions to the debate.

Here in heavenly paradise dwell.

(V.493-500)³⁸

The Father is not only a greater authority on such matters, he also gives a more unambiguous description of the goal of the created world.

[I]n a moment [I] will create
 Another world, out of one man a race
 Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
 Not here [in heaven], till by degrees of merit raised
 They open to themselves at length the way
 Up hither, under long obedience tried,
 And earth be changed to heaven, and heaven to earth,
 One kingdom, joy and union without end.

(VII.154-61)

This is clearly an echo of the Augustinian notion of the 'animal body,' though Milton does not use the term, turning into spiritual body. Moreover, the ultimate achievement of sinless history coincides with that of the eschaton of sinful time. Michael gives a sweeping description of the last aeon of the world ending with the return of the Son, who shall

then raise
 From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined,
 New heavens, new earth, ages of endless date
 Founded in righteousness and peace and love
 To bring forth fruits joy and eternal bliss.

(XII.547-51)³⁹

This view is apparently biblical, as is clear from the parallel in Revelation 10:6: "[The angel] sware by him that liveth for ever and ever ... that there should be time

³⁸ All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from the Fowler edition, whose notes I have also made extensive use of.

³⁹ Cf. also Adam's reply: "How soon hath thy prediction, seer blest, / Measured this transient world, the race of time, / Till time stand fixed: beyond is all abyss, / Eternity, whose end no eye can reach" (XII.553-56). It is true that Adam's reactions to Michael's pageants are, by and large, not normative, but this instance is part of his last comment, which the archangel finally approves of (XII.575ff).

no longer."⁴⁰ We have little knowledge as to what comes after doomsday, and Milton unfailingly depicts that realm as static: "hell her numbers full, / Thenceforth shall be for ever shut" (III.331f) and "God shall be all in all" (III.340).⁴¹ The implication of both time's cessation and hell's closing for good is, again, Augustinian. Sin and disobedience will no longer be possible. Human immortality will no longer be threatened. The change from *posse non mori* to *non posse mori* will have been completed. Whether with or without fall, at the end of time's teleological line stands God, into whom and into whose eternity all is to collapse.

The notion of human maturation is, as we have seen, by no means unique to St. Augustine. Milton's adherence to it, outlined in the previous paragraph, is a minimal requirement, as it were, for writing the all-comprehending human history that *Paradise Lost* is, reaching from eternity to eternity. The critically more rewarding enquiry awaits the reader in examining how Milton elaborates this basic theme.

It is a well-known fact about the Miltonic universe that there is time in its eternity. The *locus classicus* is Raphael's parenthetical explanation to Adam in his introduction to the story of the war in heaven:

As yet this world was not, and Chaos wild
Reigned where these heavens now roll, where earth now rests
Upon her centre poised, when on a day
(For time, though in eternity, applied
To motion, measures all things durable
By present, past, and future) on such a day
As heaven's great year brings forth...

(V.577-83)

In critical literature this is usually supported by another quote from *De doctrina* where Milton declares that

there is no sufficient foundation for the common opinion, that motion and time, (which is the measure of motion) could not, according to the ratio of priority and subsequence, have existed before this world was made; since Aristotle, who teaches that no ideas of motion and time can be formed except in reference to this world, nevertheless pronounces the world itself

⁴⁰ Noted by Fowler 636. KJV. RSV renders it "that there should be no more delay" meaning no delay "in the accomplishment of God's will" (note in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*).

⁴¹ See also VI.732, the Son to the Father: "Thou shalt be all in all."

to be eternal.⁴²

(246f)

This granted, we can turn to the uses Milton put his time to.

Milton did not strictly adhere to the contemporary consensus of a short paradisaical period, i.e., one day, for Adam and Eve. It can be argued that allowing them to stay one night was a necessity provided that he wanted to express his opinion on the problem of sexuality and fallenness unequivocally. There had to be enough time to consummate the marriage physically - not only potentially as Augustine argues. Sure enough, the scene is described with perfect clarity (IV.736-43), and in case that proved insufficient, the narrator comments on it (746-49) and sings an epithalamium (750-73). On the historical plain, Milton sides with Augustine and counters the opinion of the Greek fathers; on the contemporary, he presents the Protestant view and dismisses the Catholic. However, this scene in book IV, though it occurs at the reader's first night in Paradise, is not the first night of the Edenic marriage. Nor is it the first instance of marital love. Some four books later, we learn from Adam's account what we may have suspected from Eve's (IV.488-91). Raphael invites Adam to tell his own story, in the course of which Adam relates his first meeting with Eve. The fullness of the encounter is unmistakable.

I followed her, she what was honour knew,
 And with obsequious majesty approved
 My pleaded reason. To the nuptial bower
 I led her blushing like the morn: all heaven,
 And happy constellations on that hour
 Shed their selectest influence; the earth
 Gave sign of gratulation, and each hill.

(VIII.508-14)

This happened at their first meeting - in the afternoon, if you like. Milton's concern for unfallen sexuality alone would not have been a strong enough reason to keep Adam and Eve long in Paradise. Had that been the point Milton wanted to make, the first couple could have been expelled from Eden before their first day was over.

⁴² Milton's reference is probably to *Physics* VIII/1, esp. 251^b [10-25], but there Aristotle directly asserts the uncreatedness of *time*: "But so far as time is concerned we see that all with one exception are in agreement in saying that it is uncreated... Therefore, since the moment is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it."

Moreover, Milton goes considerably beyond this immediate concern with his Edenic chronology. In the introduction, Fowler devotes an important section to the topic. He figures that the time from the Son's anointing to the expulsion from Paradise comprises 33 days (26).⁴³ Adam and Eve are created on day 19,⁴⁴ and thus spend two weeks in Eden. What is perhaps most curious in this arrangement is the imbalance generated by Milton's uneven provision of details. The events in books I and II account for a day in Fowler's computation (although it is only in retrospect that the reader can work out how they fit in with Adam and Eve's story); Raphael's half-day visit occupies most of books V to VIII; and the crises from the temptation to the expulsion fill another day,⁴⁵ and three and a half more books. Moreover, Raphael's dialogue with Adam (and later Michael's visions vouchsafed to him) open up into another plain of narration and cover a great expanse of time, notably the three days of the war in heaven and the week of the creation. All this information is telescoped into the afternoon of the angelic visit. The week effected by Satan's un-creative circling of the earth, on the other hand, occupies scarcely a dozen lines (IX.58-69). What takes place in Eden or heaven during that time is never specified. Reading time certainly does not closely correspond to narrated time.

By assigning fourteen prelapsarian days to Adam and Eve, Milton allots them considerably more time than most of his contemporaries saw warrant for. By unevenly covering the events of those two weeks, he destabilizes the reader's sense of chronology.⁴⁶ And he goes one step further. Somewhat resembling the famous

⁴³ The choice of this span is, of course, arbitrary to a great extent. Narrative time, i.e., the chronology of events taking place on the primary level of narration (performed by the Miltonic bard) extend from the fallen angels' recovery in hell (day 22 according to Fowler) to the expulsion (day 33). Narrated time, i.e., the sum total of all events described on any level of narration (including the accounts of the epic characters) covers the entirety of world history.

⁴⁴ The uncertainties of Fowler's scheme need not concern us here. If the textual evidence is not altogether unambiguous (e.g., there is no clear indication of the length of Satan's journey through chaos), Fowler certainly makes a compelling case by invoking number symbolism which would probably not work with other sequences (27f).

⁴⁵ I.e., twenty-four hours. Fowler does an excellent job in tracing the meaning of *day* and Adam's growing awareness of it throughout the last books. Incidentally, as I have hinted above, there was great exegetical concern with the precise meaning of Adam's death on the day of transgression. Willet also dedicated two sections to the problems of "What kind of death was threatened to Adam" and "When Adam began to die" (28). — Strictly speaking, only books IV-VIII are my concern here, but the temporal distribution of the non-Edenic scenes may help illustrate the larger pattern.

⁴⁶ Further complicating the reader's time are the epic similes. The simile is a technique, in Rosalie Colie's words, for Milton "to deal across the barriers of time and eternity. In his epic simile ... he often joins superhuman action to human by means of his own and his reader's sense of history" (136). My

double time of *Othello*,⁴⁷ paradisaical time is simultaneously short and long. Rationally we may conclude that a fortnight is, after all, not very long. Noticing that books IV-VIII, the bulk of Edenic scenes, covers but a day and a half, we may indeed feel that the state of innocence was tragically short. There is, on the other hand, textual evidence in plenty to create the feeling that Adam and Eve dwelt long in the Garden. It is interesting to note that the dual time scheme is sustained throughout the terrestrial scenes of *Paradise Lost*. The method of asserting, or rather creating, it is uniform. In connection with a particular situation the speaker makes the incidental remark that it is un/like the first human pair's customary behaviour. The credibility of the pattern is underlined by the fact that it is invoked both relatively regularly and by various characters. Eve often recalls her first awakening (IV.449f) and regularly dreams of Adam or their work (V.31-35). Apparently, according to Eve, they often see inhabitants of heaven (V.55f), and, according to Adam, frequently hear "celestial voices" (IV.680-88). The narrator speaks of their morning customs (V.3, 144-48), and confirms the repeated visits of "God or angel guest" (IX.1-5) whose memory Adam can recollect even after the fall (X.1080-83), and to which God himself alludes (X.104-08, 119-22). "Milton's strength of conception here is to show Adam and Eve at home in Paradise, not transients."⁴⁸

IV

Beyond creating the impression that paradisaical time was not only a fleeting moment, Milton puts the time allocated to the prelapsarian era to good use. He

point lies precisely here: in the reader's sense of history continually aroused by the similes. The effect is practiced on Adam by Raphael on a small scale (VI.253-56, VII.295-7, etc.), and on the reader by the narrator at large (e.g., I.286-95). The effect is again a shifting sensibility. The reader's sense of time is confused by the various temporal plains invoked by the similes.

⁴⁷ For parallels in the representation of time by Shakespeare and Milton, see, for example, Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (1965. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 37, and Gardner 39.

⁴⁸ Stapleton 740. Cf. Gardner 38f: "This time [from the day of the anointing till the fall in *Paradise Lost*] is brief and firmly stated. Yet though the time-table can be worked out from the poem, the effect on our imagination is very different. We have the impression of a long time... Milton ... employs and apparently precise time scheme, yet makes his poem seem to include aeons and the sense of a long Paradisaical time for his sinless pair." Leonard 260: "Adam's lines [IV.677-88] also evoke a sense of timelessness ... yet Adam speaks these lines only a few days after his Creation." In a somewhat similar fashion, Tanner 20, with a reference to Paul Ricoeur, also suggests "the 'twofold rhythm' of the 'Adamic myth'" for the discussion of the fall and its motivation.

establishes a carefully defined educational paradigm that can serve as an illustration how human history would have proceeded without the fall. If the developmental pattern itself is nothing special to *Paradise Lost*, the careful delineation of its details certainly is.

Augustine never specifies how humankind's animal body would have turned into incorruptible spiritual body without the fall. Nor does he explain how Adam, Eve and their descendants would have spent their time in Paradise - apart from the fact that we would have had sex. Ephrem's vision is more particular in this respect, but Milton does not share his understanding of the two trees having any innate power to bestow. Milton again sides with Augustine in taking the prohibition as a clearly religious injunction.⁴⁹ Irenaeus discusses the actual maturation of the human race through four dispensations of God.⁵⁰ His scheme, however, pertains to the postlapsarian world; the fall is an integral (if tragic) part of mankind's education. Moreover, C. S. Lewis's point is well taken concerning Adam and Eve's maturity in Eden.⁵¹ Milton's protagonists are adults, not children like Irenaeus'. To put it more generally, *Paradise Lost* also presents a high view of original righteousness and perfection. The literary conventions of the fall as tragedy require it so. The poetic genius of Milton can, then, be seen in exactly this. Without compromising the perfection of Eden, he gives the reader a full-blooded vision as to what even greater heights that perfection could have led to.

⁴⁹ Augustine: "...that one tree ... was interdicted not because it was itself bad, but for the sake of commending a pure and simple obedience" (XIII.20). Milton, *Christian Doctrine*: "[If Adam] received any additional commands ... respecting the tree of knowledge, ... these commands formed no part of the law of nature, which is sufficient to teach whatever is agreeable to right reason, that is to say, whatever is intrinsically good. Such commands must therefore have been founded on what is called positive right, whereby God ... commands or forbids what is in itself neither good nor bad, and what therefore would not have been obligatory on any one, had there been no law to enjoin or prohibit it" (298f). Fish, *Surprised by Sin*: "The arbitrariness of God's command, that is to say, its unreasonableness, is necessary if compliance is to be regarded as an affirmation of loyalty springing from an act of the will" (242). Gardner 91-93: "The apple is, in itself, nothing. It is everything because God's command has made it so... The command that is transgressed must be an irrational one in order that it may be purely religious."

⁵⁰ *Against Heresies*, III.xi.9: "For this reason were four principal (kaqolikai) covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom." See also Greer 165-68.

⁵¹ "The whole point about Adam and Eve is that, as they would never, but for sin, have been old, so they were never young, never immature or underdeveloped" (116). Cf. St. Augustine's exegesis of Ps. 49:12 above: "To this infantine imbecility the first man did not fall by his lawless presumption and just sentence" (XIII.3).

The central theme of the Edenic books is knowledge. Justifying the ways of God to men entails that Adam and Eve's trial is fair, they not only should but also could resist temptation. The very structure of *Paradise Lost* mirrors this concern, and given Stanley Fish's seminal interpretation focusing on the reader as the poem's hero (*Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*, the title says it all), this is no insignificant point. It is exactly by the beginning of Book IX, i.e., the temptation scene, that the Miltonic bard has worked his way in both directions to the end from the *in medias res* beginning. It is at this point that the entire previous story has been imparted to the reader. It is here that narrative time and narrated time catch up. There are no more missing pieces, knowledge has attained to fullness. The same is true for Adam and Eve: it is at the end of Book VIII that Raphael departs. In the course of piling up all necessary information, God himself takes great pains to ensure that Adam and Eve know all they ought, in order, in the notorious phrase of "The Argument" of Book V, "to render man inexcusable." He tells Raphael to

Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend
Converse with Adam, ...

...tell him withal

His danger, and from whom, what enemy
Late fallen himself from heaven, is plotting now
The fall of others from like state of bliss;
By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,
But by deceit and lies; this let him know,
Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend
Surprisal, unadmonished, unforwarned.

(V.229-45)

This has led critics to focus on the moral education of Adam and Eve, carefully delineating the steps in which they are given as precise indirect knowledge of evil as possible. The key paradigms in this development are the interpretation of Eve's devilishly inspired dream, Raphael's account of the war in heaven, Abdiel chiefly providing the model of righteousness withstanding temptation, and his explicit warning to Adam. This is certainly a theme worthy of careful critical attention. However, there is more in the central books than a simple moral education.

Adam and Eve's Edenic existence is presented in great detail, and many of the particulars are superfluous to draw out a purely moral lesson. Dennis Danielson succinctly presents the case.

Milton ... was insistent that man, not God, caused the fall; that neither man nor God needed the Fall; that therefore neither sexual love, nor culinary arts, nor intellectual conversation, nor virtue itself presupposed the Fall. ... And thus he emphatically did need, and so did present, just such a vision of how things might have been had man persisted in the "long obedience" that the seventeenth-century Calvinist considered of so little avail.⁵²

Perceptive as this summary is, I would like to push it somewhat further. I want to underline the dynamism of Milton's Paradise as opposed to both our usual static notions on the subject and the stationary implications of the above quotation. Barbara Lewalski associates the comic mode with the Edenic state, "since comedy is a mode in which difficulties can be met and happily resolved, in which growth and change are nurtured and privileged, and in which self-knowledge and social harmony are advanced by dialogue."⁵³ Upon his creation, Adam tried to enter into dialogue with the created order, with the sun, "hills and dales, ... rivers, woods, and plains" (VIII.275), and "when answer none returned" (285), he sat down "pensive." Eve, having been led to Adam by, significantly, a voice, turns away from him and is only better persuaded by his address (IV.449-91). Between these two events, God himself engages Adam in a conversation (VIII.292-451). Again, it is in a dialogue that the couple works out the correct interpretation of Eve's dream, and Raphael instructs Adam in a series of verbal exchanges. Dialogue is the prominent mode of Edenic discourse, to which Satan's soliloquies in book IV (32-113, 358-92, 505-35) provide an emphatic counterpoint, and I want to suggest that dialogue can also serve as a metaphor of the prelapsarian state. It is unified and harmonious (dialogue in Paradise is never a pair of parallel monologues) in its outward form yet dynamic in the exchanges between the interlocutors. Edenic life is constant but dynamic in its sinlessness, without the duality of good and evil.

Of the numerous available examples, I want finally take a look at the very end of Raphael's discussion with Adam. I quoted earlier Adam's autobiographical account of his first love experience with Eve. He concludes his story with an exultation in his wife's perfection. To which "the angel with contracted brow" replies

⁵² Danielson 214.

⁵³ Lewalski, 117. Fiore 35: "The gift [of knowledge] did not, however, embrace all those matters outside this realm [of the laws of reason, i.e., moral law], such as science and culture, so they [Adam and Eve] were able, indeed obliged, to inquire and progress in learning." Cf. also 26-28. Tanner 26: "As derivative creatures, humans are created perfect relative to their ontological status in creation; that is, they are perfect as human beings, which is far different from the perfection of the Supreme Being. 'Moving' rather than 'static,' human perfection allows mobility and scope for growth."

(VIII.560), warning him not to get his principles wrong. Eve is “fair no doubt, and worthy well / Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection” (568-70). Yet if Adam did not strike the right balance in praising Eve, Raphael seems to go too far in the other direction.

In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the beasts no mate for thee was found.

(VIII.588-94)

This implies, on the one hand, that the true form of love is Platonic - it is the ideal that Adam should aim at and may in time realize; and, on the other, that bodily love is sub-human. No wonder then that Adam answers it “half abashed.” He demonstrates that he indeed knows his priorities, and values higher than physical beauty “those grateful acts, / Those thousand decencies . . . which declare unfeigned / Union of mind, or in [Adam and Eve] both one soul” (600-04). Furthermore, he counters the angel’s implicit equation of “procreation common to all kinds” (597) and human sexuality.⁵⁴ For this once, Adam has a better understanding of the hierarchy in the created order, “Though higher of the genial bed by far, / And with mysterious reverence I deem” (598f).

The topic then leads Adam to risk a question concerning angelic love. Does it have a bodily aspect? In fact, it is next to impossible for him *not* to ask the question. Raphael commends Adam for loving and warns him to love wisely. Yet he implies

⁵⁴ Adam’s remark upon Eve at her creation after his naming of the animals presents an exegetical crux. “This *at last* is bone of my bones,” he say (Gen 2:23, italics added), and it is not quite clear what this refers to. Eleventh-century French Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi, commonly known as Rashi, commented, “This teaches that Adam went to all the beasts and animals, but was not satisfied with any of them” (Bowker 120). The implication is not difficult to discern: Adam had sex with the animals. Note Milton’s pointed contrast in bringing the animals-before Adam “[a]pproaching two and two” (VIII.350). On a later passage in the ensuing God-Adam dialogue (389-97) comments John Leonard, “As Fowler notes, Adam’s ‘converse’ (396) means ‘associate familiarly’ (‘Fish’ and ‘Fowle’ do not ‘converse’ so well together as ‘Lion’ and ‘Lioness’). Adam chooses the right word in ‘converse’, but he has still to identify verbal conversation as the distinguishing feature of the ‘rational delights’ he is asking for. God will not bless Adam with the cheerful conversation of a meet help until Adam has given ‘converse’ its fully human meaning” (30). In Leonard’s reading, the entire naming scene has linguistic and epistemological, not sexual, significance (25-35).

something that contradicts Adam's experience of true love. Adam is trying to make sense of the world, and here he is presented with a dilemma. Experience, which in Eden is both untainted and a reliable means to knowledge, apparently comes into conflict with revelation granted by God through his messenger. Adam does the most sensible thing, asks a question. That he presents his problem to Raphael, as well as the way he does so, indicates an improved self-understanding on Adam's part. He recognizes where he stands relative to his interlocutor. Though it was the angel who, with his apparently contradictory suggestions, created Adam's dilemma, Adam acknowledges his own juniority by seeking explanation from Raphael. The answer, though kept short by the arrival of the hour appointed for the angel's departure, is unambiguous. Adam correctly speculated that his body was created good, and bodily experience is neither sinful nor to be shunned. What Adam enjoys purely (pun intended) in his body, the celestial beings enjoy in even greater perfection. His conclusion drawn from Raphael's exhortation and his own experience is confirmed. Finally, Raphael returns to the central theme of his mission, and warns Adam again to stand firm. It is worth noting that the angel does this very gently, though the comment on the parting sun breaks the smooth transition, by parenthetically noting Adam's purity and re-asserting the love motif. Obedience surfaces as a corollary to loving God (VIII.623, 633ff).

The larger pattern of the dialogue indicates how the educational paradigm works in Eden. Adam reflected on an experience that he was narrating. Eve's beauty as a topic came up naturally in the conversation. Yet praising her, Adam appeared to be so absorbed in her perfection as to forget the larger context and lose sight of the overarching hierarchy with God at its pinnacle. Raphael, attempting to relativize what was not absolute, overstated his case which led to a dilemma for Adam: experience of happiness originating in the divine will and revelation of divine hierarchy seemed to clash. Having learnt his first lesson and willingly submitting his experience (or his interpretation of it) to revelation, Adam seeks an explanation of the problem. Not only is it granted to him, but his intuition is confirmed and both his speculative and interpretive (as regards his experience) powers are approved. Finally, the original point is repeated by Raphael to an Adam who has now grown in understanding both his own identity and the created order. All this is achieved without any abruptness or force. Dialogue is an organic form of discourse, following its own dynamism. In fact, the chief aim of angelic discourse with humans is to educate them in the right *mode* of making sense of the world. Adam and Eve, summarizes Barbara Lewalski,

have much yet to learn - by speculation, revelation, and experience - about the cosmos, about God and the angels, and about the complexities of marital and social interaction. The Adam-Raphael dialogues provide models for seeking such knowledge and ordering such growth... [They] serve not so much to provide Adam and Eve with knowledge absolutely necessary to their lives, as to exercise them in the right way of meeting intellectual and moral challenges and difficulties.⁵⁵

One more feature of the Miltonic dialogue ought not to go unnoticed. Whether it is an exchange between God and Adam, or Raphael and Adam, or Adam and Eve, hierarchical disparity is always involved in the structure of discourse. This underlines the educational function of this literary mode, but it would be an oversimplification, with the exception of the first model, to assume a strictly one-way flow of information. God's method is indeed Socratic solicitation, but in the other instances the interchange is genuine though not fully balanced. An example has been seen in the above analysis, but the list can easily be extended. For instance, Adam's autobiography is entirely new to Raphael, and it is Eve who "makes the first foray into the realm of astronomical speculation"⁵⁶: "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (IV.657-58) The search for knowledge and answers to the questions that present themselves is a dynamic communal act in Paradise.

Though I must leave the subject at this point of suggestiveness rather than exhaustiveness, I hope to have demonstrated that in dialogue Milton found a form perfectly suited to the task of Edenic education. More important than that, he drew a uniquely detailed and elaborate picture of prelapsarian development. Whether it was his concern for theodicy, as Danielson suggests, or the logic of contemporary poetics and theory of genres, as Lewalski argues, the Edenic vision of *Paradise Lost* is clearly unparalleled in Renaissance or patristic theological speculation. How far it is a result of the literary conventions and necessities that come part and parcel with the epic form, and how singular the Miltonic dynamism of prelapsarian life is in its *literary* context can only be determined after a careful comparison of *Paradise Lost* with other retellings of the Adamic myth in Renaissance literature. That, however, must remain the subject of another paper.

⁵⁵ Lewalski 208-10.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 189.

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Dóra Csikós

Is He the Divine Image?

Blake's Luvah and Vala

*For to be carnally minded is death;
but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

St. Paul Rom. 8:6

Of all Blake's Zoas (and indeed of all the figures in Blake's mythology) Luvah has created the greatest controversy and confusion as he is the „figure through whom Blake primarily expressed his own imaginative breakthroughs, and he embodies all the ambivalence of an initial stroke of vision.”¹ Critics have discussed his genuinely complex character from diverse points of view, ranging from the more traditional historical and political approaches to psychological, psychoanalytical readings as well as to feminist interpretations. Although there is still no settled unitary opinion about about Luvah (and indeed about where in the body of literature Blake belongs) all the different approaches - albeit differently and to a varying extent - contribute to a better understanding of this most elusive figure. My argument will be essentially psychological but I shall use the findings and rely on the support of other critical approaches, be they structuralist, feminist or mythological, as no single reading has yet - and is ever likely to be - sufficient to account for Blake's revolutionary insights.

¹ Altizer 78

Assisted by arguments from diverse critics, Lipót Szondi's theory of mental functioning shall be used as a main framework for clarifying my understanding of Blake and a technique for exploring his psychic preoccupation in the poems. Luvah and his Emanation, Vala shall be analysed with the help of the findings of the Szondi test as Blake's and Szondi's systems show deep affinities and Szondi's detailed descriptions have been found instrumental in complementing the hiatus in the narrative field; his analyses of the character types contribute to a better understanding of the Zoas and their motives, illuminating a number of the interpretative cruxes of the dream vision.

The platform of the analysis will be *The Four Zoas*, the first of Blake's major prophecies, a supreme example of the poet's idiosyncratic cosmology, in which Blake first elucidates his intricate system of fourfold correlations and describes in detail the four main characters of his myth.

The name 'Luvah' is most often regarded as a derivation from "love" or "lover", as befits the Zoa of Passion. Martin Bidney suggests that the name may also imply "lava"² probably referring to the heat and bursting energy of emotions. Luvah's counterpart is Vala, who was originally to be the main character of the poem (as the first title - VALA / OR / The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man - suggests). There have been several attempts at deciphering her name, the most common of which seems to be the notion that it can be traced back to "veil", an implication of her elusiveness. (In *Jerusalem* she is often referred to as a veiled beauty: "Vala replied weeping & trembling, hiding in her veil."³). Alicia Ostriker suggests further associations; she conjectures that the word "veil" as the source of Vala's name is a reference to the membranous "veil" which preserves virginity as well as to the "veil" covering the tabernacle of the Old Testament, as she "stands at the intersection between corrupt sexuality and institutional religion"; she is Fortuna, Babylon, the Great Whore, the chaste mistress and femme fatale, the like of whom is mainly to be found in French literature (in Gautier and Baudelaire) and in the figures of Swinburne and Shakespeare.⁴ The problem with these interpretations (together with the other prevailing explication of the etymology as Vala = vale, the valley of shadow and death) is that they concentrate exclusively on the *fallen aspect* of the Emanation, while in her fallen form, Vala is very often distinguished as "the

²Bidney 106

³*Jerusalem* 20:11

⁴Ostriker 160

Shadowy Female” or “Rahab” or “Mystery”⁵. Much more sophisticated is Northrop Frye’s suggestion - which accounts for both the fallen and unfallen perspectives of Vala - according to which her name is that of the Scandinavian prophetess and guardian spirit of the earth in the *Völuspá* in the Elder Edda⁶.

Luvah is mentioned first in *The Book of Thel*⁷ (“O virgin know’st thou not. our steeds drink of the golden springs / Where Luvah doth renew his horses”⁸) where he represents innocent sexuality, and does not return until *The Four Zoas*, in which we first meet his Emanation, Vala. Under different names, however, they are both known from the earlier poems; Luvah as Orc while Vala as the Shadowy Female.

Orc is the fallen aspect of Luvah. His story is fully depicted in *The Four Zoas* but a great part of it is adumbrated in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, America, Europe* and *The Book of Urizen*. He is “Blasphemous Demon Antichrist, hater of Dignities; / Lover of wild rebellion, and transgressor of Gods Law”⁹, which makes him a chief antagonist of Urizen. All these characteristics explain his name, which is probably derived from ‘orcus’, as his prime identity, his abundant energy, is often assigned to the realm of hell. The name is also an anagram for ‘cor’, heart, which refers to his connection to Luvah.

The Shadowy Female is the fallen form of Vala and her story, too, is sketched in the earlier poems of *America* and *Europe*, but her character is hardly as elaborated as Orc’s, her consort’s. We know that she is Enitharmon’s daughter, sister and lover to Orc, the principle of fertility and an ambiguous woman, in whose figure Blake foreshadowed his nascent concept of the Female Will, but who is also a redemptive force in that she can see the apocatastasis. (This double nature of the female, as destroyer and preserver, will be typical of all the Emanations.) Just like Orc’s, her story, too, is expanded in *The Four Zoas*.

The complexity of this most elusive character is manifested in the fact that he is depicted as three different figures, who are yet one and are simultaneously present in the poem. The unfallen aspect of Luvah seems to be almost completely absorbed by Jesus, the fallen one by Orc, while the Zoa under the name of Luvah may stand for both these aspects. According to Wilkie and Johnson two conceivable explanations for Luvah’s lack of definition as a character suggest themselves.

⁵*The Four Zoas* VII, 93:224; VIII, 106:329-330

⁶Frye 270

⁷He might also be associated with “the prince of love” of “How sweet I roam’d from field to field” of the *Poetical Sketches*.

⁸*The Book of Thel*, Plate 3

⁹*America a Prophecy*, Plate 7

One is the obvious artistic problem of representing love in a way that will appear neither too aethereally sacred nor too earthly profane to a fallen audience. (...) The second explanation has to do with the relation between energy [Orc] and love [Luvah] in Blake's evolving mythology. (...) Whether Blake intended all along to identify Luvah with Orc or whether in reconsidering his own view of Christianity he came to see hatred and lust as perverted forms of love, Blake makes Orc a vivid personage but keeps Luvah's character shadowy, implying that there is something inexplicable about the redemptive action of love.

(Wilkie-Johnson 44.)

In the following pages the actions of Luvah-Orc-Jesus shall be examined with the intention of trying to find an answer to the apparent vagueness of the character. The entanglement of the narrative shall necessitate a somewhat more detailed description of their story.

We first encounter Luvah and Vala in Enitharmon's account of the fall in Night I: "Luvah and Vala woke & flew up from the Human Heart / Into the Brain; from thence upon the pillow Vala slumber'd. / And Luvah seiz'd the Horses of Light, & rose into the Chariot of Day"¹⁰. As we learn later, Luvah's usurpation of Urizen's place (man's emotional life against his intellect) was one of the prime reasons for the sickness of Albion, as the ensuing warfare led to the fall of the Zoas. The messengers of Beulah relate the story from a somewhat different perspective: Urizen wants to conspire with Luvah to gain dominion over Man, offering Luvah his own realm, himself trying to occupy Urthona's domain:

(...) do thou alone depart
 Into thy wished Kingdom where in Majesty & Power
 We may erect a throne. deep in the North I place my lot
 Thou in the South listen attentive. In silent of this night
 I will infold the Eternal tent in clouds opake while thou
 Siezing the chariots of the morning.

(*The Four Zoas* I, 21:489-494)

Although Luvah refuses the pact, he seizes Urizen's chariot thus engendering a bloody war in which the Emanations leaving their counterparts flee to Tharmas and

¹⁰*The Four Zoas* I, 10:262-264

Luvah's seizure of the Sun, a version of the Phaeton myth, was already adumbrated in Blake's poetry 30 years before in "How sweet I roam'd from field to field" of the *Poetical Sketches*.

disintegration begins. Luvah and Vala feel triumphant, unaware that the fall of Tharmas will inevitably bring about their fall as well. For a while it seems that Luvah has managed to gain dominion over Albion, who - mistaking him for Urizen - worships him as God¹¹. But as Albion realizes his mistake, he indignantly puts forth Luvah from his presence and casts both Luvah and Vala out: "And as they went in folding fires & thunders of the deep / Vala shrunk in like the dark sea that leaves its slimy banks / and from her bosom Luvah fell"¹². Their separation is precipitated by the fact that the dying Albion resigns his rule to Urizen ("Take thou possession! take this Scepter! go forth in my might / for I am weary, & must sleep in the dark sleep of Death / Thy brother Luvah hath smitten me but pity thou his youth"¹³), who casts Luvah into his furnaces of affliction and completely melts him (an indication of the repression of emotions by reason) to build the Mundane Shell upon the ashes (of passion). To further complicate the story of the fall of Luvah and Vala, Blake employs a prequel (a unit composed later but relating an earlier part of the story) and it turns out in Night VII that Vala seduced Albion and became pregnant with Urizen:

Vala was pregnant & brought forth Urizen Prince of Light
 First born of Generation. Then behold a wonder to the Eyes
 Of the now fallen Man a double form of Vala appeard. A Male
 And a female shuddring pale the Fallen Man recoil'd
 From the Enormity & call'd them Luvah and Vaia.

(*The Four Zoas* VII, 83:244-248.)

The birth of Urizen, then, seems immediately to bring about the separation of Luvah and Vala, while earlier we were told that Urizen's (thwarted) conspiracy with the then-unfallen Luvah led to the latter's disintegration. Thus Blake seems to suggest that Urizen's birth is coincidental with his existence.

With the division (fall) of Luvah and Vala now consummated, there is a significant change in their character. Once lover and beloved, the Eros and Psyche in Man, now they have turned into their opposite: "I was love but hatred awakes in me"¹⁴. Simultaneously with the transformation of the Prince of Love, however,

¹¹*The Four Zoas* III, 40:48-66

¹²*The Four Zoas* III, 42:102-104

¹³*The Four Zoas* II, 23:5-7

¹⁴*The Four Zoas* II, 27:104

Jesus puts on Luvah's robes of blood, "lest the state call'd Luvah should cease"¹⁵, a motive, whose significance is underlined by the fact that it is repeated several times in the poem like a textual refrain. When in the furnaces of affliction Luvah is melted (and Vala's fire with which she feeds the furnaces die out), the reader would expect that he disappears from the scene. This expectation seems to be supported by the fact that "the Eastern vacuity the empty world of Luvah"¹⁶ is now a horrid bottomless void. Yet, conversely, not only is Luvah's role taken on by Jesus, but - with a Blakean twist in the narrative - he is also reborn as Orc from the heart of Enitharmon (another possible source for the name as the anagram of 'cor'). As his conception - he is begotten immediately after the fall of his parents - so is his birth: "The groans of Enitharmon shake the skies the labring Earth / Till from her heart rending his way a terrible Child sprang forth / In thunder smoke & sullen flames & howlings & fury & blood"¹⁷. The birth of Orc plants jealousy into his father's heart and as child grows up, Los can no longer curb his jealousy, which he so far has tried to sublimate by building Golgonooza. What follows is the most beautiful rendering of the phenomenon, which Freud came to call "the Oedipal conflict", in poetic terms. (It is important to note here that while for Freud the Oedipal conflict is primarily a crisis for the child, Blake adheres to the original myth, in which the aggression starts with the parent's fear of his offspring. In both of Blake's minor prophecies, *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*, where he develops this theme, he is true to the myth.)

But when fourteen summers & winters had revolved over
 Their solemn habitation Los beheld the ruddy boy
 Embracing his bright mother & beheld malignant fires
 In his young eyes discerning plain that Orc plotted his death
 Grief rose upon his ruddy brows. a tightening girdle grew
 Around his bosom like a bloody cord. in secret sobs
 He burst it, but next morn another girdle succeeds
 Around his bosom. Every day he viewd the fiery youth
 With silent fear & his immortal cheeks grew deadly pale
 Till many a morn & many a night passd over in dire woe
 Forming a girdle in the day & bursting it at night
 The girdle was formd by day by night was burst in twain

¹⁵*The Four Zoas* II, 33:264

¹⁶*The Four Zoas* VI, 71:156

¹⁷*The Four Zoas* V, 58:36-38

Falling down on the rock an iron chain link by link lockd

(...)

Calld it the chain of Jealousy.

(*The Four Zoas* V, 60:79-95.)¹⁸

With the chain of Jealousy Orc is nailed to the rock, an interesting motive simultaneously referring to the myth of Prometheus and foreshadowing the death of Jesus in Luvah's robes of blood. Even though Los repents his horrible deed, he cannot free his son as the chain has stricken root into the rock and become one with Orc, a living chain sustained by his life. Just like Luvah before, Orc has been repressed, and thwarted energy rages now in vain in front of his arch-enemy: reason. For Urizen descended into the caves of Orc out of pity with the intention of teaching him his wisdom.¹⁹ Orc passionately rejects him, and in his answer to Urizen he dramatically establishes himself as completely opposite to the Prince of Light²⁰. He is enchained, burning with fierce energy, flaming in fury, young and restless, while Urizen is free yet sitting still, obdurate, aged, hoary and as cold as hail. Orc's defying Urizen is so intense that one is reminded of the notion of "conflictual undifferentiation": "The more our characters tend to see one another in terms of black and white, the more alike they really *make* one another. (...) The more these characters deny the reciprocity among them, the more they bring it about, each denial being immediately reciprocated."²¹

A cogent testimony for Orc's mistake in regarding himself as completely different from Urizen is revealed by Orc himself: "I well remember how I stole thy

¹⁸Based on the above lines Aaron Fogel suggests another possible reading of Orc's name:

Orc's chains (...) are pictured in the *Zoas* as having been created out of Los's sobbing: each sob is described as a *cord* around Los's chest that bursts, each burst band becoming one of the links in Orc's youthful bondage. (...) The name "Orc" itself, looked at as a kind of picture-in-letters, could be drawn as a complete circle followed by two broken or semi-circles: a small chain. (...) Orc's name both as sound as picture-in-letters evokes the abrupt, the truncated, the broken-off. In the story of the chains and their origin, Blake implies that the word "cord" recoiled to form the name "Orc" itself, so that "Orc" contains, represses, in its abruptness, a kind of involuted or twisted grief. Revolutionary anger is described as solidified mourning. (Fogel 223.)

¹⁹Abrahams identifies Urizen's motives as fear because as he says "the state of Orc exists always where art or freedom is suppressed and is thus a constant source of fear to tyrants." (Abrahams 5)

²⁰*The Four Zoas* VII, 78-79:28-89

²¹ Bidney (129-130) here cites from R. Girard, "Myth and Ritual in Shakespeare," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979

light & it became fire / Consuming. Thou Knowst me now O Urizen Prince of Light"²². This speech of self-revelation establishes Orc as reborn Luvah; the Promethean youth is identical with the Prince of Love. The light that becomes fire consuming may be seen as a reference to the myth of Prometheus as well as an ingenious reminder of Luvah's seizure of Urizen's horses of light which led to his consummation in the fires of the furnaces of affliction. What happens here is strikingly similar to what Gaston Bachelard termed as the *Promethean complex*. He pointed out that the *Promethean complex* is an endeavour to know as much as - or more than - our fathers, to apprehend as much as - or more than - our masters, in other words, the *Promethean complex* is the Oedipal complex on the intellectual plane²³. Luvah's intention to usurp Urizen's domain expresses his desire to know as much as him, to become intellect, an eloquent proof that not only does he not consider themselves incongruous, he even wants to become identical with his quasi-opposite. A similar tendency is discernible in the case of Orc facing Urizen in Night VII; Orc is unable to resist Urizen's wisdom: "thou beginnest to weaken / My divided Spirit Like a worm I rise in peace unbound / From wrath Now When I rage my fetters bind me more"²⁴, and (in the process that in psychoanalytical terminology is called "the identification with the aggressor") Orc becomes entirely Urizenic, "turning affection into fury & thought into abstraction"²⁵ to finally put on a Serpent body and be crucified on the Tree of Mystery.

The birth of Orc goes hand in hand with the appearance of Vala as the shadowy female, who cumulatively represents the single vision of Ulro and the double vision of Generation²⁶. The changes that took place in both of their characters (compared to their role in the earlier myths) are significant. We have seen how Orc gradually becomes a complementary figure to Urizen; a similar process is discernible in case of her consort: "Earlier the Vala-figure was the gaoler's daughter of folk-tale and myth, an Ariadne who helps the liberating hero and, becoming his lover, is liberated by him."²⁷ In *The Four Zoas* the 'nameless shadowy Vortex' is the main instrument of Orc's repression. Her motives are clearly stated: "With sighs & howling & deep sobs that [Orc] might lose his rage / And with it lose himself in meekness she

²²*The Four Zoas* VII, 80:147-148

²³Bachelard 26-27

²⁴*The Four Zoas* VII, 80:135-138

²⁵*The Four Zoas* VII, 80:155

²⁶Verma 201

²⁷Fuller 135

embraced his fire”²⁸. Of the passionate lover she becomes a tyrant, and “the constant mixture of military and sexual violence in the poetry surrounding her and her pleasure in violence of which she is the source also associate her with Urizen.”²⁹

We have seen that Luvah has so far been destroyed twice and so by the eighth night, with the crucifixion of Orc (or in other words: his assimilation into Urizen at the end of a process that Frye termed the Orc-cycle) all that Luvah once stood for appear to have been eliminated. Yet, providentially one aspect of his remains: that which was taken on by Jesus.

When Urizen saw the Lamb of God clothed in Luvahs robes
Perplexed & terrifid he Stood tho well he knew that Orc
Was Luvah But now he beheld a new Luvah. Or One
Who assumd Luvahs form & stood before him opposite
(*The Four Zoas* VIII, 101:61-64)

Just like in the previous nights, there is a confrontation between Luvah and Urizen and Urizen yet again manages to win, so in the antepenultimate night Christ incarnated in Luvah is crucified. Simultaneously with the incarnation of Jesus we face the transformation of Vala into Rahab, a member in the Synagogue of Satan.

It would appear that with this third aspect of Luvah eradicated (together with the complete deterioration of his Emanation) we witness the ultimate victory of Reason over Passion, but Blake’s thought is more complex than that. Luvah’s total extinction is prevented - thus his reappearance in Night IX is made possible - by two circumstances. 1. As the climax of the Orc-cycle in Night VII, Orc organized a Serpent body. The fact that Blake chose to depict this ultimate state of Orc as a serpent shows his determination to preserve this state from complete disappearance, since the serpent - a most complex symbol - does not only stand for its most immediate connotation as ‘evil’ or ‘tempter’, but it is also emblematic of immortality, as it can slough its skin and so perpetually regain its youth³⁰. 2. Luvah’s rendering as the incarnation of Christ is also suggestive of transcendence as the crucifixion of Jesus symbolizes the death of his *physical* aspect only, and not the extinction of the totality it represents. The motives of Orc’s turning into a serpent and Luvah’s crucifixion as Jesus, then, explain what otherwise would seem

²⁸*The Four Zoas* VII, 90:127-128

²⁹Fuller 135

³⁰For the positive aspect of the serpent see Raine 236-240

inexplicable: how it is possible for Luvah - after the destruction of all three of his forms - to reappear in Night IX.

In the apocalypse we see all the three aspects of the Zoa of Passion mingled together. Orc now burns in raving fire, but as his rage is no longer curbed by Urizen, who is ordered by the recuperating Albion to "Let Luvah rage in the dark deep even to Consummation / For if thou feedest not his rage it will subside in peace"³¹, he soon burns himself out. As the consummation of Orc is complete, Luvah and Vala take over the place of Orc and Rahab, who no longer appear in the poem (thus the triple aspect of Luvah is reduced to a twofold one, containing only Jesus as an extra layer over the original Zoa). Albion gives Luvah and Vala into the hands of Urizen, who assigns them a new place: "return O Love in peace / Into your place the place of seed not in the brain or heart"³². With the Zoa of Passion in the loins, the brain is re-established as Urizen's domain while the heart is now ready for the reception of resurrected Tharmas. As the human integral is now almost resumed, Luvah and Vala reassume their eternal form as lover and beloved and in a pastoral interlude they are born into Beulah, Vala's Garden of innocence.

Invisible Luvah in bright clouds hoverd over Valas head
And thus their ancient golden age renewd for Luvah spoke
With voice mild from his golden Cloud upon the breath of morning

Come forth O Vala from the grass & from the silent Dew
Rise from the dews of death for the Eternal Man is Risen

She rises among the flowers & looks toward the Eastern clearness
She walks yea runs her feet are wingd on the tops of the bending grass
Her garments rejoice in the vocal wind & her hair glistens with dew
(*The Four Zoas* IX, 126: 385-392)

The bucolic setting and Vala's answer are reminiscent of *The Book of Thel*, but while Thel failed to enter the world of experience, regenerate Vala is more like Oothoon, Thel's redeeming contrary, in that she consciously descends into the valley and plucks its flowers and fruits, symbolic references to resurrected sexuality.³³

³¹*The Four Zoas* IX, 120:142-143

³²*The Four Zoas* IX, 126:364-365

³³ Our understanding of Oothoon's sexuality is in line with the most representative trend in the interpretation of the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, put forth by Erdman, Bloom and Ostriker.

It is customary to look at this interlude as a moment of unclouded happiness. Yet, beautiful and reassuring as this scene may seem among the tumult of the final night, a closer reading of the text reveals that this is not yet the final, ideal state for Luvah and Vala. Vala's Garden is

The land of doubts & shadows sweet delusions unformd hopes
They saw no more the terrible confusion of the wracking universe
They heard not saw not felt not all the terrible confusion
For in their orb'd senses within clos'd up they wander'd at will
(*The Four Zoas* IX, 126:379-382)

Their unawareness of the pain of the apocalypse that surrounds them and the closed senses strongly suggest a state similar to prenatal existence, a reading in which Vala's Garden may stand for *hortus conclusus*, 'closed garden', in medieval works symbolic of the Virgin Mary's womb. "Even when his language recalls pastoral and hymn, even as he soothes us (...) Blake lulls us into a false sense of security. (...) Perhaps in *The Four Zoas*, Vala's Garden, veiled in darkness belongs more to the shadowy dead than the living lovers. Elysian Fields are beautiful, but for all that in Hades."³⁴

Still, the reunion of Luvah and Vala has a redeeming effect, Urizen "Cried Times are Ended he Exulted he arose in joy he exulted / He pour'd his light & all his Sons & daughters pour'd their light / To exhale the spirits of Luvah & Vala thro the atmosphere"³⁵. The reconciliation of reason and passion finally takes place. "Luvah's liberation is precisely what accomplished in Night IX of *The Four Zoas*. As he drinks the 'wine of ages' and sings a new song, 'his crown of thorns fell from his head'³⁶ Luvah has ceased to define himself in opposition to Urizen; he has realized that Urizen is a 'Man' and not a 'God'.³⁷ The falling off of the crown of thorns is also symbolical of the termination of the double aspect of Luvah; he is no longer to be associated with Jesus but has regained his original, undivided essence as one of the Quaternals. The reconciliation of Luvah and Urizen is mutual: Urizen, who has so far treated Luvah as his principal victim, no longer strives to subdue him

Laura Haigwood in her thoughtful essay, "Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*: Revising an Interpretive Tradition" (in Punter 94-107) challenges this reading of Oothoon's sexuality and sees it as much more sinister and sinister than critics claim it to be.

³⁴ Haigney 117

³⁵ *The Four Zoas* IX, 131:368-370

³⁶ *The Four Zoas* IX, 135:709, 710

³⁷ Rosso-Watkins 186

and has learned to accept his fellow Zoa as an indispensable agent of the apocalypse. Luvah's task is to gather the vintage. With an interesting shift in tone the pastoral world of Luvah and Vala now turns into a wild orgy of exuberant joy ("How red the sons & daughters of Luvah how they tread the Grapes / Laughing & shouting drunk with the odors many fall oerwearied / Drownd in the wine is many a youth & maiden") and pain ("But in the Wine Presses the Human Grapes Sing not nor dance / They howl & writhe in shoals of torment in fierce flames consuming"³⁸). The previous aspects of Luvah as a god dying for mankind (Jesus), and demigod suffering for humanity (Prometheus-Orc) are now transformed into a completely different one: Luvah has become a Dionysian wine-god. It seems that instead of atoning for the world, Luvah and his rule now inflict pain on their victims:

They Dance around the Dying & they Drink the howl & groan
 They catch the Shrieks in cups of gold they hand them to one another
 These are the sports of love & these the sweet delights of amorous play
 Tears of the grapes the death sweat of the Cluster the last sigh
 Of the mild youth who listens to the luring songs of Luvah
 (*The Four Zoas IX, 136-137:767-771*)

What we witness here is the result of the repression of emotions in the previous nights. Just like the energy of Orc before, by the end of the apocalypse the passions of Luvah and Vala is consumed in the bacchanalic intoxication, frenzy and violence, and the Zoa, who at first may have seemed the most likely to produce the Messiah, has become "dung on the ground"³⁹ to fertilize the ground before Urthona-Los.

After summarizing the main actions of Luvah and Vala in the poem, it shall now be examined how Szondi's descriptions might help us understand certain ambiguous points. Szondi's fate analysis (commonly known as Schicksal analysis) postulates the presence of four basic drives in every individual, sharing Blake's contention that „Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity / Cannot

³⁸*The Four Zoas IX, 136:743-745, 748-749.* For those who see the pastoral interlude as an ideal - final - state for Luvah and Vala this shift in tone may seem unaccountable but once we accept it as a step in the culmination of error it is intelligible.

³⁹*The Four Zoas IX, 137:791* The death of the corporeal, physical aspect of Luvah must be annihilated before Albion may assume his truly Human form, as "Hell is the being shut up in the possession of corporeal desires which shortly weary the man, for *all life is holy*". *Annotations to Lavater's 'Aphorisms on Man'*

Exist. but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden”⁴⁰. These four drives define four character types, whose particulars show striking resemblance to Blake’s Zoas: the Contact drive with Tharmas, the Sexual drive with Luvah, the Paroxysmal drive with Urizen and the Ego drive with Los.⁴¹ In the mentally healthy, claims Szondi, all the four drives are present in a stable equilibrium and the extreme prevalence of any of them may lead to various psychological diseases - a notion poetically rendered in *The Four Zoas*, whereby the contentions of the Zoas to gain dominion leads to the sickness/fall of Albion.

The category that Luvah and Vala seem to be most apt examples of is the *Category of Dual Unionism* (or in other words: the category of the unsatisfied sadistic impulses⁴²) of the sexual drive. This assumption seems to be substantiated by the Luvah-lava reading of the Zoa’s name as it is then the mirror image of Vala. Just like the members of this category cannot function without their partner, needing his/her continued presence, Luvah and Vala also seem to be inextricably bound to each other:

But Luvah & Vala standing in the bloody sky
 On high remaind alone forsaken in fierce jealousy
 They stood above the heavens forsaken desolate suspended in blood
 Descend they could not. nor from Each other avert their eyes
(*The Four Zoas* I, 13:359-362)

But they are doomed to separation, and as we have seen, their sundering brings about a complete transformation of their characters. Szondi’s investigations have shown that “if the dual union is disrupted, repressed aggressions may be aroused and the person may become vengeful”⁴³. This is exactly what happens to Vala after she is rent from Luvah; when his separated consort is cast into Urizen’s furnaces of affliction, she willingly assists Urizen and feeds “in cruel delight the furnaces with fire” and “in joy she heard his howlings”⁴⁴. She retains this cruelty all through the poem and exhibits violence and malevolence towards all three aspects of Luvah. Luvah himself cannot escape the effects of the breaking up of the original integrity,

⁴⁰ *The Four Zoas* I, 3:4-5

⁴¹ For a detailed description of the drives see Szondi (1952) 180-196

⁴² Noszlopi 99

⁴³ Szondi (1952) 183

⁴⁴ *The Four Zoas* II, 25:73, 26:78

from love he now turns to hate and in a beautiful lament he relates the birth and death of their dual union:

(...) in times of Everlasting
 When I calld forth the Earth-worm from the cold & dark obscure
 I nurturd her I fed her with my rains & dews, she grew
 A scaled Serpent, yet I fed her tho' she hated me
 Day after day she fed upon the mountains in Luvah's sight
 I brought her thro' the Wilderness, a dry & thirsty land
 And I commanded springs to rise for her in the black desert
 Till she became a Dragon winged bright & poisonous
 I opend all the floodgates of the heavens to quench her thirst
 And I commanded the Great deep to hide her in his hand
 Till she became a little weeping Infant a span long
 I carried her in my bosom as a man carries a lamb
 I loved her I gave her all my soul & my delight

(...)

And they have taken her away & hid her from my sight
 (*The Four Zoas* II, 26-27:82-98)⁴⁵

Luvah's song and his brooding over the loss of Vala is very similar to what can be seen in the case of Tharmas. According to the findings of the Szondi test the categories of Tharmas ("everlasting search") and Luvah ("dual unionism") are psychologically closely related.⁴⁶ In the subsequent nights not much is revealed about Luvah's attitude to Vala because it is his dying-god aspect that is emphasized. More is disclosed about Vala; she does not give herself up to depression but, as it is appropriate in this category, she apparently takes revenge by seeking new partners and establishing promiscuous relationships⁴⁷ - or at least this is what Orc is led to believe: Orc was "Silent as despairing love & strong as Jealousy / Jealous that she

⁴⁵Blake provides a striking illustration of the transformation of Vala. "Vala as dragon and as harpy-vulture-mermaid with emphatically drawn genitals depicts the corruption of sexual life into something cruel, brutal, devouring. The partially erased marginal drawings, a woman hugging a bat-winged phallus and a moth-winged woman with abnormally large breasts, make a similar point: the corruption of Luvah signifies the birth of pornography." Fuller 103-104

⁴⁶Szondi (1952) 183

⁴⁷Szondi (1942) 73

was Vala now become Urizen's harlot / And the Harlot of Los & the deluded harlot of the Kings of Earth"⁴⁸.

This degenerated, sadomasochistic relationship that resulted from the separation of Luvah and Vala cannot be ameliorated until their reunion, which takes place in the pastoral interlude of the last night (in which Blake, quite appropriately, gives a detailed description of their now-idyllic relationship)⁴⁹.

We may wonder why Blake chose to depict the fallen Luvah and Vala as characters that are bound to each other in dual unionism. Our contention is that the inextricable relationship of Luvah and Vala is due to a conscious irony on Blake's part, as it shall be proved that Luvah is the historical (physical) aspect of Jesus, while Vala stands for the Church, which - to Blake's abhorrence - came to worship the past and particular body of Christ, and became bound to the mere remembrance of the dead body of Jesus, believing that the literal body that perished on the cross and the sepulcher is the foundation of Christianity⁵⁰ thus turning the Christianity of the soul into the Churchianity of outward religion and ignoring the spiritual aspect of the descent of the Messiah, which is the only valid interpretation of his incarnation. The first part of our hypothesis is substantiated by the fact that Jesus's descent and/or suffering and crucifixion in Luvah's robes of blood is unmistakably emphatic in the poem: "Eternity appeard above them as One Man infolded / In Luvah[s] robes of blood & bearing all his afflictions" (Night I); "And the Divine Vision appeard in Luvahs robes of blood" (repeated twice in the next few lines in Night II); "Saviour (...) / Appearest clothd in Luvahs garments" (already stated nine lines earlier in Night IV); "They vote the death of Luvah & they naild him to the tree / They pierced him with a spear & laid him in a sepulcher" (Night VII); the

⁴⁸*The Four Zoas* VII, 91:136-138

⁴⁹Their relationship is idyllic (as they are reunited), just the circumstances will have to be changed.

It would be tempting to add one more point of analogy to our comparison, as the assertion that "the loss of the partner" in subjects of this category "may be reacted to by excessive drinking" could well correspond to the orgy of the last night, but by the time of the bacchanal Luvah and Vala are already reunited. Another enticing point of comparison presents itself in Szondi's observation that after the disruption of the dual union, members of the category may attempt to comfort themselves by striving for purity and atonement. Purity and atonement, of course, would seem to perfectly fit in with Luvah's Promethean-, and Jesus-aspects but we must remember that Luvah was forced to undergo the afflictions, and his sufferings (which are usually associated with the atonement) were not his conscious choice. (However, to mention a valid parallel as well, we would like to draw the attention to the fact that according to Szondi one of the most frequent pursuits in the category is to be a musician which is in harmony with Blake's association of Luvah with music.) Szondi (1952) 183-184

⁵⁰For a discussion of related matters see Altizer

topic of Jesus assuming a dark Satanic body and putting it off on the cross is reiterated all through Night VIII (nine times):

The Lamb of God descended thro the twelve portions of Luvah
Bearing his sorrows & rec[iev]ing all his cruel wounds
 Thus was the *Lamb* of God condemnd to *Death*
 They *nailed him upon the tree of Mystery* weeping over him
 And then *mocking* & then worshipping calling him Lord & King

until finally in Night IX "His *crown of thorns* fell from his head"⁵¹. The metaphor of Jesus descending in Luvah's robes of blood all too clearly refers to the incarnation as Christ's putting on a *vegetated* body; so also the emphasis on the crucifixion and the cross signify the *mortal* death of Jesus⁵². Another proof for the claim that in Luvah we are presented the physical body of Christ can be found in the fact that the Zoa corresponding to him in Ezekiel is the ox or bull (we have allusions to the "bulls of Luvah" in Nights II, V, VII and IX). With the Luvah-bull association Blake refers not so much to the strength of passions (as for this implication the other Zoa-animal, the lion, would be much more appropriate, being not only mighty but also untamed), but much rather to the notion of Luvah as a sacrificial victim.

Nancy M. Ide's computer analysis of *The Four Zoas* also supports our argument. She claims that

the overall pattern of alternation between areas of high and low image density, affects the reader's perception of the poem. (...) A reduction in imagistic connotations places more emphasis on narrative meaning. (...) The text segments characterized by low image density are, for the most part, more plot oriented than the sections of the poem containing the densest concentrations of imagery.

(Ide 128-129)

As we can see in her graph (Appendix), the image levels reach their lowest point in the middle of Night VIII; here the imagery becomes so sparse that - because of the almost total lack of imagistic meaning - our attention is exclusively drawn to the act

⁵¹*The Four Zoas* I,13:363-364; II,32:247; IV,56:254-258; VIIb, 92:166-167; VIII,105-106:323-327; IX, 135:711 (Italics mine)

⁵²In the 1809 illustration of *The Last Judgement* (Rosenwald Collection) Blake no longer depicts the cross as exulted into Heaven; it is falling headlong - with the serpent wound about - into the abyss.

itself, obviously yielding it a heightened significance. What happens then in the climactic passages of the eighth night. The middle sections of the night are devoted to the description of the crucifixion of Jesus, but even more crucial than that (as Christ's death on the cross was already related in the previous night so this in itself would not account for the increased importance of the passage) is that we learn at this point what happens *after* the crucifixion: his dead body is taken off of the cross to signal the beginning of a mistaken worship of his physical aspect:

Jerusalem saw the Body dead upon the Cross She fled away
Saying Is this Eternal Death Where shall I hide from Death
Pity me Los pity me Urizen & let us build
A Sepulcher & worship Death in fear while yet we live
Death! God of All from whom we rise to whom we all return
And Let all Nations of the Earth worship at the Sepulcher
With Gifts & Spices with lamps rich embossed jewels & gold
(*The Four Zoas* VIII, 106:331-337)

Blake did not deny the significance of the crucifixion, but his idea of it was completely different from that of the Church, whose "cruciolatry"⁵³, worship of death and materialism he could not accept. He regarded the crucifixion as an *internal* event, taking place in every man when he casts out his Selfhood (this is what his final great poem, *The Everlasting Gospel* of 1818 is about) and assumes his true spiritual body. He believed that the Lamb of God descended "To put off Mystery *time after time* & as a Man / Is born on Earth so was he born of Fair Jerusalem / In mysterys woven mantle"⁵⁴. The significance of the crucifixion is precisely in the fact that Jesus had "first to give his vegetated body / To be cut off & separated that the Spiritual body may be Reveald"⁵⁵. This is certainly not a once-for-all event so the Church's confinement to the mere remembrance to the past and particular body of Christ is a destructive error, for when the death of Jesus is known only as an event of the past, it cannot be repeated as an eternal and universal occurrence. The fact that the death of Luvah (whose identity with Jesus is so painstakingly emphasized all through the nine nights) is related several times in the poem may be seen as Blake's ingenious way of expressing his rejection to accept Christ's death as an event that took place once, at one particular time in history.

⁵³Damon 84

⁵⁴*The Four Zoas* VIII, 104:263-265 (Italics mine)

⁵⁵*The Four Zoas* VIII, 104:266-267

Of the many subtle hints scattered in the poem which suggest that Luvah is the historical aspect of Christ one shall be explored that is connected to Luvah-Orc. In Night VII we learn from Vala that Orc (who hides Luvah) "torments me for Sin / For all my Secret faults which he brings forth upon the light / Of day"⁵⁶. This avenger is certainly not Blake's real Jesus, whose religion is the Forgiveness of Sins, but much rather the Son of God, who came to promulgate the Decalogue. For Blake, however, the Ten Commandments were abhorred abstract rules that "no flesh nor spirit could keep"⁵⁷, as they imposed general regulations on the particular individuals, and he saw in them the culmination of materialism:

Thus the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave
Laws & Religions to the sons of Har binding them more
And more to Earth: closing and restraining:
Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete
(*Song of Los* 5:13-16)

The only ethics Blake could accept was embodied in the Everlasting Gospel, and the only Jesus that he recognized as the true Messiah was the Antinomian Christ of this gospel. The idea of the Everlasting Gospel, which lies at the centre of Blake's thought, goes back to the 12th century Italian mystic, Joachim of Flora. He taught that history fell into three great periods: 1. *ordo conjugatorum* (the Age of the Father, Old Testament) 2. *ordo clericorum* (the Age of the Son, New Testament) 3. *ordo monachorum* (the Age of the Holy Spirit). The first period was characterized by fear and servile obedience, the second by faith and filial obedience, while the last, Joachim believed, would be the age of love and spiritual liberty⁵⁸. The visible Church of the second age was to be absorbed by the spiritual Church of the third, and the historical Jesus (remembered by Christendom), the cultic Christ of *The Four Zoas* was to give way to the epiphany of the universal Divine Humanity.

In the coming age of the Spirit the full truth of the Everlasting Gospel will be revealed, not in a new sacred book but in a new revelation of the spiritual sense of the Bible with which God will illuminate the hearts of men. In this age God will be within man and therefore all existing forms of worship, ceremonies, churches, legal and moral codes will become

⁵⁶*The Four Zoas* 94:249-251

⁵⁷*Book of Urizen* 23:25

⁵⁸Cross 727

superfluous. Instead of appearing as a force from without, God will now be within, and the unity of God and man will be fully accomplished.

(Morton 37)

The Four Zoas depicts the transformation from the second to the third age, the sufferings that are inevitable for the historical Christ (Luvah) to be replaced by a truly Antinomian one, Los (or rather: the new integrity of Albion, with Los as *primus inter pares*, not excluding Urizen and Luvah, who had to come first in order that a higher integrity may be achieved). One slight alteration between the ages of Joachim of Flora and the phases presented in *The Four Zoas* needs to be pointed out. Although the Eternity from which the Zoas fell was indeed the age of the Father, Tharmas, it cannot be corresponded to the first age of the Everlasting Gospel, as it appears much more idyllic and free than that. It seems that in Blake's poem Eternity or original Innocence answers the Golden Age of myths, while Experience comprises both *ordo conjugatorum* and *ordo clericorum*⁵⁹. While Joachim called the three periods the Ages of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, the Muggletonians (an English Joachite sect⁶⁰) changed the denomination to the Ages of Water, Blood and Spirit which appear to be echoed in Blake's poem, as the Age of Water is that of Tharmas, a furious sea-god in his fallen aspect, the Age of Blood is that of Urizen, initiator of bloody wars and - as the God of the Old Testament - of bloody revenges, as well as of Luvah, in whose robes of blood Jesus descended so that his blood can be spilled to prepare the way for the Age of the Spirit, presided over by Urthona-Los.

We have previously pointed out that Luvah and Vala belong to the Szondian category of dual unionism and then demonstrated that Luvah represents the historical aspect of Christ. Once we accept these two theses, we can logically infer that Luvah's partner in the dual union is the Church. In the following passages we shall endeavour to substantiate this conclusion.

First and foremost it needs to be clarified that for Blake there existed two types of Church: the Church Universal and the Church of Rome. The Church Universal is the only church Blake acknowledged as "it is composed of the Innocent <civilized> Heathen & the Uncivilized Savage who having not the Law do by nature the things containd in the Law."⁶¹ This church corresponds to the third age of the Everlasting Gospel, while the Church of Rome - with its adherence to the Ten Commandments

⁵⁹This observation is confirmed by the fact that Luvah and Urizen are inextricably bound in the poem.

⁶⁰The sect flourished in the seventeenth century but survived in London until Blake's time.

⁶¹*A Vision of the Last Judgement* 81

and promulgation of conventional moral virtues - belongs to the second one⁶². The two are each other's opposite, as the basic tenet of the first is the Forgiveness of Sins while the second is based on the Punishment of Sins. Obviously, when we say that Luvah's partner in the dual union is the Church, we mean the Church of Rome.

Instead of citing the evident textual references to Vala as Church⁶³, we shall concentrate on some contextual elements that prove their identity. Because of Blake's notion of the essential interconnectedness of the Church of Rome and the Old Testament, upon whose doctrines Blake thought it was based, we would expect that Vala have strong links with Urizen (Old Testament God). And indeed, apart from a few brief encounters with Tharmas and Los, she is associated with Luvah and Urizen all through the poem. Vala's continuous conjunction with Urizen, her revengefulness, cruelty and militancy ("Rahab & Tirzah far different mantles prepare webs of torture / Mantles of despair girdles of bitter compunction shoes of indolence / Veils of ignorance covering from head to feet"⁶⁴) well correspond to Blake's idea of the false Church⁶⁵. Vala assists Urizen in the demolition of all three aspects of Luvah, first by firing Urizen's furnaces, which melt her counterpart (Night II, 26-27), then by curbing Orc's rage which leads to the Demon's crucifixion on Urizen's Tree of Mystery (Night VII, 91 and Night VIII, 101⁶⁶), and finally - as a member in the Synagogue of Satan - by voting for Jesus's death (Night VIII, 105). It cannot be accidental that her role in the murdering of Christ is most

⁶²Blake's rejection of this Church is already formulated on plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

(...) a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental dieties from their objects: thus began Priesthood.

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

⁶³In her fallen form she is referred to as "Rahab / Who is Mystery Babylon the Great Mother of Harlots", who belongs to the "Synagogue of Satan", which "Clothed her with Scarlet robes & Gems / and on her forehead was her name written in blood" (*The Four Zoas* VIII, 106:329-330, 105:281-282), a straightforward allusion to the Revelation 17:4-5 and 2:9.

⁶⁴*The Four Zoas* VIII, 113:218-220

⁶⁵The best summary of this idea is given in *Jerusalem* 52

Man must & will have Some Religion; if he has not the Religion of Jesus, he will have the Religion of Satan, & will erect the Synagogue of Satan. calling the Prince of this World, God; and destroying all who do not worship Satan under the Name of God. (...) Every Religion that Preaches Vengeance for Sin is the Religion of the Enemy & Avenger; and not the Forgiver of Sin, and their God is Satan, Named by the Divine Name

⁶⁶It is also interesting to note that when Orc is born, Vala takes charge over him, just like the Church appropriated Jesus. (*The Four Zoas* VII, 85:332)

emphatic when Luvah's Jesus-aspect is killed; she does not only vote for and then triumph over the crucifixion, but she herself slays him:

But thou O Universal Humanity who is One Man blessed for Ever
Receivest the Integuments woven Rahab beholds the Lamb of God
She smites with her knife of flint She destroys her own work
Times after times thinking to destroy the Lamb
(The Four Zoas VIII,
113:232-235)

We can find further indications of Vala's intricate connection with Urizen in the fact that "she spread herself thro all the branches" of the Tree of Mystery and "The Synagogue Created her from Fruit of Urizen's tree"⁶⁷. But just like Vala is born from Urizen, Urizen is also born from Vala; her seduction of Albion and giving life to Urizen can be seen as Blake's poetic rendering of the process, whereby the Church created a false conception of religion in Man. In the figure of Albion, the whole of mankind has fallen into Vala's trap:

For nothing could restrain the dead in Beulah from descending
Unto Ulros night tempted by the Shadowy females sweet
Delusive cruelty they descend away from the Daughters of Beulah
And Enter Urizens temple
(The Four Zoas VIII, 99:25-
28)

Even Jerusalem cannot escape her influence (the most frequently applied adjective to describe Vala is 'delusive' and 'cruel') whom Rahab takes "A Willing Captive by delusive arts impell'd / to Worship Urizens dragon form to offer her own Children / Upon the bloody Altar"⁶⁸. Rahab's delusion then leads Jerusalem to weep over the dead body of Jesus (mistaking his garment for his essence) and to initiate the worship of death, the ultimate error in the teaching of the Church.

Finally, there remains one element that seems to bear special significance in our analysis. We know that Apocalypse starts immediately after the culmination of error. This climax in Urizen's case is the moment when he embraces the Shadowy

⁶⁷*The Four Zoas VIII, 101:85, 105:287*

⁶⁸*The Four Zoas VIII, 111:598-600*

Female, which is Blake saying that when false religion is completely absorbed by the false Church, the moment is ripe for the regeneration of both.

We have started our investigation of Luvah and Vala with a question: What could account for the apparent vagueness of the character of Luvah? After our analysis the following explanation suggests itself. Because of the dual unionism between Luvah and Vala, the Zoa can only be examined together with his partner, with whom he is essentially one, as the historical Christ can only be understood when studied together with the Church of Rome, which latter is intricately bound with the (traditional idea) of God/Urizen, all three notions being inextricably bound.

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Éva Péteri

William Holman Hunt's Early Work In Relation to the High Church Movement

In the first decades of the Victorian era the Church of England was divided among fiercely fighting parties, each convinced that it represented the only true faith and provided the only possible salvation for the dignity and popular appeal of the Established Church. However, all were agreed on the urgent need to combat the proliferation of what they called "nominal Christianity."

Thomas Arnold and his followers, later to be called the Broad Church party, demanded the restriction of the dogmatic articles of the English Church to a necessary minimum, in order to make it accessible to a great majority of the people. This argument became especially forceful after the astounding results of the 1851 religious census were made public, according to which 44 per cent of the churchgoing population of England and Wales belonged to the main Protestant dissenting churches. The Evangelicals, by contrast, intended to restore the former solemnity of Anglican religion by propagating above all the true fear of God and deep hatred of sin, and calling for the fervent and attentive study of the Gospels. The Tractarians, or High Churchmen, wanted rather to consolidate the Church of England by the revivification of its - as they thought - basically Catholic character: its past enthusiasm as well as its rituals and regalia, monasticism and priestliness. Their renewed attention to the pre-Reformation church and its bygone traditions was coupled with a subsequent interest in medieval art and life, and a longing for the simplicity, devotion, and mysticism of the early Christians.

Though starting from different grounds, the Pre-Raphaelites also became advocates of the principles and appearances of this vanished Catholic age. They were disillusioned by the affectations of contemporary academic painting, and

therefore turned to the legacy of the Early Christians. They felt that the artists of this often-despised age were far more sincere than their Victorian successors, and that their works were manifestations of a profound piety and humbleness unknown in art after the dominant influence of the High Renaissance. As the result of their affinity with 14th- and 15th-century Catholic painting, the Pre-Raphaelites became associated in the public mind with the High Church Movement; consequently, they had to face the same repugnance on the part of the Evangelicals as did any advocates of Tractarianism.

However, some of the Pre-Raphaelite brothers had certain links with the Tractarian Movement in a religious respect as well. The Rossetti family frequented Christ Church on Albany Street, a church founded by the Rev. W. Dodsworth, who fell so much under the influence of Newman and the High Church Movement, that he finally in 1850 converted to Roman Catholicism. Millais is also said to have attended Tractarian services,¹ and James Collinson's early religious hesitations finally ended with his second conversion to Catholicism and his entry into Stonyhurst House as a Jesuit novice

In his early years William Holman Hunt was untroubled by religious dilemmas; he was "a contemptuous unbeliever in any spiritual principles,"² as he later recalled. The change came in 1847, when a fellow student at the Academy Schools lent him Ruskin's *Modern Painters* - interestingly enough with the intention of converting Hunt to Roman Catholicism, for he was convinced that the author was a professed Roman Catholic. He was most probably misled by Ruskin's enthusiasm for early Catholic art, and perhaps also by the writer's Oxford degree. Though Hunt was not converted to Roman Catholicism by *Modern Painters*, the book gave him the first significant impetus on his way to religious belief, and it also greatly influenced his artistic conceptions. In reading Ruskin's impressive analyses of the religious works of the 14th and 15th century painters, Hunt resolved to create a new type of religious painting, accessible to his Victorian audience and - though based on strict realism in presentation - also lending itself to expressing moral messages and the concerns of the spiritual world.

The first picture he worked on in the spirit of this new determination was the unfinished *Christ and the Two Marias*. It presents the scene when Mary Magdalene and Mary Salome meet Christ on their way to the disciples to report on Christ's resurrection after finding His tomb empty: "And as they went ... behold, Jesus met

¹Bendiner, 71.

²Landow, 6.

them, saying, All hail! And they came and held Him on the feet, and worshipped Him." (Matthew 28:9). In accordance with the new principles he was resolved to follow, Hunt tried to envisage the scene as it actually might have happened, thus presenting the Resurrection with as much realism as possible. Therefore he decided to abandon his earlier plan to show Christ with a banner in His hand, which would have been incompatible with his realist intentions, and the symbolic meaning of which would have been incomprehensible to most mid-19th-century spectators. In Hunt's painting Christ appears simply with lifted, wide open arms, a pose traditionally attributed to the risen Saviour, suggesting glorification as well as benediction. (This posture was amplified with new significations by Hunt later in 1870-73 in *The Shadow of Death*, where the cruciform shadow of Christ's body recalls the Crucifixion.) Nevertheless, realism was hard to achieve, especially for a novice painter, in a painting the subject of which was the manifestation of wonder, of divine redemption. Thus Hunt tried to lay special emphasis on the emotional aspect of the scene; he wanted the spectators to "see this Christ with something of the surprise that the Maries themselves felt on meeting Him as one who has come out of the grave."³ But he could not even succeed in presenting the bewilderment that the two Maries themselves might have experienced at the sudden encounter. They are shown kneeling on the ground in front of Christ, one of them bending to His feet and embracing it, the other bowing her head and putting her hands together as in praying. This second figure especially displays something of the humble devotion with which Catholic representations show the piety of the Madonna. It strongly recalls the revivalism of William Dyce, a prominent religious painter of the time, a devout High Churchman and authority on church rituals. So instead of being realistic, the scene visualised by Hunt looks rather affected and theatrical. The painter's intention to represent and evoke genuine emotions has clearly failed. Though unwillingly, his work was becoming reminiscent of High Church revivalism, and it probably seemed impossible to Hunt to avoid it within the context of the given subject. No wonder, therefore, that he abandoned the picture altogether, and turned rather to other themes of religious history more appropriate to his ambitious aims.

In March 1848 the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was formed with Hunt, Rossetti and Millais as its chief members. They all agreed that the mannerism of contemporary painting as imposed by the education and value judgement of the Royal Academy should be rejected, thus they all turned for inspiration to the early

³*The Pre-Raphaelites*, 51.

Christian painters' sincere and naturalistic approach to art. However, behind this common conviction lay different incentives, which became apparent later in the dissimilar character of their mature works. Rossetti's enthusiasm for early Christian art was augmented by his young tutor, Ford Madox Brown, who not only had the rare opportunity to see many of these masterpieces on the Continent, but was also familiar with the art of the German Pre-Raphaelites, the Nazarenes, whose influence can clearly be seen in his works of the 1840s. Rossetti was attracted to the painting of the Early Masters for its brilliant, rich colouring and its mystical character. While Hunt's admiration for 14th, 15th century art originated in Ruskin's, Millais's interest was most probably generated by the strong impression his friends' enthusiasm had on him.

Right from the beginning of their joint work Hunt had fears of a Nazarene-inspired, Romish effect on the art of their association. Therefore he objected to Rossetti's proposal to ask Brown to become a member of the Brotherhood, and he also prevented the adoption of the name *Early Christians*, for in his opinion it was dangerously suggestive of Catholicism.

Preparing for the next exhibition of the Royal Academy, the Pre-Raphaelites' first public appearance as a united group of artists with common aims, Rossetti decided on a religious subject, Millais and Hunt on literary ones. *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* was Rossetti's first completed oil painting, executed under Hunt's tutorial supervision, and very much according with the latter's conception of a new type of religious painting. The picture was finally exhibited at the Free Exhibition in March 1849, and was given considerable praise by the critics. Despite the general appreciation however, accusations of Mariolatry were to be heard, the first signs that Hunt's early anxiety to avoid possible suspicions of Romanism was well justified.

Notwithstanding, at the 1850 exhibitions all three artists were represented by religious works; Rossetti exhibited his *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, Millais *Christ in the House of his Parents* and Hunt his *Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*. Hunt's painting was suggested by the Royal Academy Gold Medal contest on the theme of 'an act of mercy', but as the painting was not completed by the deadline of the competition, it was finally shown at the annual exhibition of the Academy together with Millais's work. Rossetti, again fearing the evaluation of the Selecting Committee of the Royal Academy, sent his new picture to the exhibition of the National Institution, which opened somewhat earlier than that of the Academy. The ensuing hostility towards

Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and the quite justifiable references to its affinity with Catholic art must have caused grave concerns to Hunt. He might have realised that his new painting also displayed certain features which would provoke accusations of Tractarianism. So most probably at this time, just a few days before his own painting was due to be shown, he had obliterated the tonsures of the missionaries in his painting, in order to ward off attacks of High Church sympathy. Nevertheless, Hunt's efforts were to no avail. *The Times*, for example, called *The Druids* "a deplorable example of perverted taste,"⁴ *Fraser's Magazine* reproached it for being "too prone to mannerism,"⁵ and the *Athenaeum* regarded it simply as "a pictorial blasphemy."⁶ Only the Tractarian *Guardian* praised the work.

The supposed High Church attitude of the painter was seen in three features of the painting: in its employment of many early Christian symbols, in the garments of the missionaries, which were mistaken for Eucharistic vestments, and in the presence of the young boy in a fur loincloth at the preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist, which was regarded as a support for the Tractarian view in the so-called Gorham case, a prominent religious controversy of the time on the nature of baptism.

Back in 1847, when reading *Modern Painters*, Hunt realised the importance and inherent potentials of typological - or pre-figurative - symbolism in religious painting. He regarded it as a means by which to effectively combine realism and spiritualism. His first successful attempt at its application can be seen in *The Druids*. Some of these symbols are traditional ones, many of which were re-discovered by High Church revivalism, and thus often used in Tractarian churches as ancient, mystic symbols as well as decorative elements. Therefore, Hunt's employment of the same symbols or types entailed High Church connotations. The burning of candles or oil in a lamp, for example, became part of the High Church rituals, as well as the display of the cross on the altar or on the walls; both symbols are shown in Hunt's painting. The grapevine, the thorn, and the fishing-net are less obviously Catholic symbols, but they are usually associated with the art of the pre-Reformation era. Hunt, however, could successfully create some new, entirely original types. The way, for example, the elder woman supports the missionary recalls the Deposition, or the other woman's act of refreshing the missionary by washing his face with a sponge, obviously refers to the Crucifixion when Christ was

⁴Dobbs, 34.

⁵Bickley, 154.

⁶Dobbs, 34.

given vinegar in a sponge to quench his thirst. The two birds on the roof of the hut recall the parable of the fallen sparrows (Matthew 10:29), in which Christ prophesies the persecution of his apostles.

A bowl of water is shown in the lower left corner of the painting, referring - together with the river in the foreground - to baptism. Behind it, a boy is squeezing grape-juice into a cup, suggesting that Holy Communion is about to be taken, commemorating Christ's sacrifice. The little boy holding the cup wears a fur loincloth which is a traditional attribute of St. John the Baptist, further emphasising the symbolic reference to baptism. But, however well Hunt incorporated the symbols of baptism and Eucharist into the scene, it was an unlucky choice to connect them in this way, as it recalled in the contemporary audience the bitter debate between High Churchmen and the Evangelicals in the course of the Gorham case.

The Gorham controversy started in 1846, between George Cornelius Gorham, vicar of St. Just and Penwith in Cornwall, and Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter. Their fierce fight was launched by Gorham's advertising in the *Ecclesiastical Gazette* for a new curate who should be "free from Tractarian error,"⁷ which obviously irritated the bishop, who was a High Churchman and claimed that the attitude exhibited by Gorham only encouraged unnecessary divergence within the Church of England. Thus when, a few months later, Gorham applied for the parish of Bramford Speke, the bishop, after examining the creed of the candidate, declined to institute him, finding him unsound in the doctrine of baptism. Bishop Phillpotts and High Churchmen in general claimed that man had been unconditionally regenerated in infant baptism, as opposed to Gorham's Evangelical standpoint, according to which regeneration was gained only with the heart-renewal of the already baptised man. In June 1848 Gorham asked the court of arches to compel the bishop to nominate him to the parish of Bramford Speke. The dean of arches delivered his judgement in the case more than a year later, in August 1849, in favour of Phillpotts. He declared that he had no doubt about the infant being regenerated in baptism: therefore Gorham had maintained a doctrine opposed to that of the Church of England, and Bishop Phillpotts had rightly rejected his appointment. This decision was, of course, unacceptable to the Evangelicals. They appealed to the juridical committee of the privy council for supervision. Its final judgement, announced on 15 January 1850, was in favour of Gorham and the Evangelicals, raising doubts in Tractarians not only about the basic nature of the Church of England, but also about the right of the

⁷Chadwick, 251.

non-ecclesiastical juridical committee to deliver judgement in theological questions. So the debate over infant baptism and regeneration went far beyond the original theological problem involved. It induced further arguments about the fundamental character of the Church of England, and it intensified pressure for its disestablishment. And though a schism in the church was yet again avoided, a number of secessions to Rome from the High Church party followed the final decision.

Not much after the ruling was announced, Hunt's *Druids* touched a raw nerve. The presence of the child holding the cup for the grape-juice at the preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist was seen clearly to support the Tractarian standpoint in the debate.

And there was yet another sign of Hunt's supposed High Church attitude: the robes of the missionaries. Archeologically as accurate as ever, Hunt showed the missionaries wearing white dalmatics and red paenulae, that were unfortunately taken for surplices and chasubles, over the use of which fierce debates were held among the Anglicans. Ritual controversies of the 1840s and 50s stirred an even bigger turmoil than the Gorham case in which basically only the clergy was interested. But the questions of whether to place a candlestick and a cross upon the Holy Table, whether to sing hymns or psalms during the services, whether to allow private confessions or require that a priest should wear a surplice - all these were issues affecting common people, and everyday churchgoers as well. No wonder, therefore, that in 1842, when Bishop Blomfield of London introduced new regulations in the ritual of the Church of England and ruled, among other things, that the preacher at morning services should wear a surplice, he provoked considerable opposition. Parochial wars and so-called surplice riots broke out in many parishes, and the bishop was accused of Tractarianism. It was again Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter who further fuelled the tension by requiring his clergy to have a weekly collection and also to preach in the surplice, both of which were hardly acceptable to the Evangelicals. The resistance against these new regulations was so vehement that finally the bishop was forced to withdraw the order. Surplices were mostly regarded as accessories of the Roman Catholic ritual, so with the threat of 'Papal aggression' in 1850 objections to such regalia were still very much on the agenda. In this hostile, anti-Catholic atmosphere Hunt had little chance of convincing the public that the robes worn by the missionaries in his painting were nothing more than the archeologically proper ones.

The Tractarian undertones dissipated Hunt's hope for popular appeal. They won him, however, the support of Thomas Combe, superintendent of Oxford University Press, who was to become the painter's most important patron. Combe, nicknamed by his friends and acquaintances 'the Early Christian' or 'the Patriarch', was a devout High Churchman. He probably first got to know Millais in 1850, being introduced to the young painter as a potential patron by a local art dealer, James Wyatt. It was thus on Millais' recommendation that *The Druids* was finally purchased by the wealthy uncle of Mrs Combe as a present to Combe himself. In the autumn of 1851, when Millais, Hunt and Charles Collins were staying in Surrey engaged in landscape painting, Hunt met Thomas Combe for the first time, and from this first meeting stemmed a life-long friendship and correspondence between the two. The painter stayed with the Combes in Oxford at Christmas that year, and returned on their invitation next June. Through his new friends Hunt got acquainted with several Oxford clergymen, among them Rev. Hackman, chaplain of Christ Church, and Rev. John David Jenkins, curate of the Tractarian St. Paul's. Hunt had a very high opinion of Jenkins despite the fact that he could not share Jenkins's convictions. On Jenkins's death in 1876 he wrote, in a letter to Combe:

I never knew a man more pure in mind and deed than Canon Jenkins. - It was a boon to have known him - not less a gain to those who like myself had in so many points different views than to those who could feel the pride in the thought that he added a lustre to their own school of mind.⁸

Hunt painted a portrait of Jenkins in 1852 on Combe's commission, and the picture was exhibited in the same year at the Royal Academy Exhibition under the title *New College Cloisters*. Corresponding to the High Church convictions of the sitter, the painting contains many allusions to Tractarian belief, several probably suggested to Hunt by Rev. Hackman and Thomas Combe. The setting itself, the cloister of New College, refers to pre-Reformation Christianity, since it was built by the grant of a papal bull as early as 1389. Its architectural features indicate the High Church interest in Gothic art, and because of the monastic associations generally attached to cloisters, it provides an appropriate background to the portrait of a Tractarian priest. Jenkins's garment, a stole of black silk over a surplice, is typical of those worn by the advocates of the High Church party, over which the surplice riots broke out in the 1840s. The precious, gilt-edged Bible in Jenkins's hand may

⁸*The Pre-Raphaelites*, 106.

also suggest the Tractarian taste for more ornament in regalia and church decoration. The ivy in the background has a two-fold symbolic meaning. First of all it refers to the friendship between Jenkins and Hunt, as, according to Victorian flower language, ivy is the emblem of friendship. But as Andrea Rose points out it can also suggest "the tenacity with which High Church Anglicanism was still gripping Oxford."⁹

However, compared to the heydays of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, by the time Jenkins's portrait was painted Tractarianism had lost its earlier appeal. This mainly resulted from Newman's retirement in 1841, after which the party fell into confusion. Newman's successors advocated more extreme, sometimes even fanatical ideas, to the extent of invoking panathemas upon Protestants. This new, arrogant style, and a lack of collaboration between its members, made the party much less attractive to potential supporters than before. The numerous conversions to Roman Catholicism further alienated the party from many of its followers, and the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England together with the appointment of Nicholas Wiseman as cardinal in 1850 had similar affects. These events raised new fears, which created a strong demand for unity within the Anglican Church.

In 1851 Ruskin wrote a pamphlet titled *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds* in which he severely criticised the divisiveness of the Church of England, claiming that

the schism between the so-called Evangelical and High Church parties in Britain is enough to shake many men's faith in the truth or existence of Religion at all ... If the Church of England does not forthwith unite with herself the entire Evangelical body, both of England and Scotland, and take her stand with them against the Papacy, her hours has struck.¹⁰

Ruskin's words show the shift which was to be seen in the focus of public attention from the beginning of the 1850s. The expanding influence of Rome and later the alarming increase in the number of sceptics and non-believers generated more anxiety from that time on than the earlier disagreements in ceremonial or meticulous theological issues.

Accordingly, Hunt's following pictures reflect similar concerns. The subject of *The Hireling Shepherd* was originally suggested to the painter by Edgar's song

⁹Rose (1981), 51.

¹⁰Landow, 40.

about the jolly shepherd in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Act III, Scene vi), but the title obviously carries biblical connotations, recalling Jesus's parable of the good and the hireling shepherds. But as Hunt was familiar with Ruskin's pamphlet, it could also have an influence on the painter's conception.

The moralist point of *The Hireling Shepherd* is described by Hunt as follows:

Shakespeare's song represents a Shepherd who is neglecting his real duty of guarding the sheep: instead of using his voice in truthfully performing his duty he is using his "mimikin mouth" in some idle way. he was a type thus of other muddle headed pastors who instead of performing their services to their flock - which is in constant peril - discuss vain questions of no value to any human soul.¹¹

Hunt's words as well as his painting are usually interpreted in accordance with Ruskin's *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds*, attributing to them references to pointless and divisive church party rows and to the dangerous effect of 'Papal aggression'. On the same basis, Judith Bronkhurst suggests that in the light of Ruskin's firm Evangelical standpoint at the time, Hunt's picture may be interpreted as a manifestation of anti-Tractarianism. She claims that in this case

the shepherdess, attired in scarlet like the recently appointed Cardinal Wiseman, becomes a symbol for the whore of Babylon (Revelation 17) or Roman Catholic Church, with whom the Shepherd is flirting at his peril. The lamb, representative of the vulnerable youth of the country, will die from eating the green, unripe apple, an emblem of dangerous knowledge or seemingly attractive yet ultimately poisonous doctrine. The neglected sheep, representative of the bulk of the Protestant Church, are in this reading symbols of potential converts to Rome, at risk from being allowed to feed on the corn - indeed three animals on the left middleground have already died in this way.¹²

Whether Hunt really wanted to express such anti-Catholic notions by applying these symbols is hard to decide. Notwithstanding, this sort of interpretation of the work implies certain incongruities. Thus, if accepting the shepherdess as the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, we must assume the shepherd to be a symbol of the High Church party; but then Hunt's reference to their discussion of "questions of no

¹¹Landow, 39.

¹²*The Pre-Raphaelites*, 96.

value," as well as Ruskin's point about the schism of Evangelical and High Church parties, becomes irrelevant. The shepherd can be regarded as a representative of the Evangelical pastors, but then the shepherdess must stand for the Tractarians, since his flirting with her as the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church would simply make no sense. Therefore, the most justifiable interpretation seems to be that the two represent nothing more than the Anglican clergy and their engagement in pointless discussions, while neglecting their far more important task of minding the sheep entrusted to them. And in this failure both of them seem equally guilty, as the painter's description of the work also suggests: "My fool [the shepherd] has found a Death-Head Moth, and this fills his little mind with forebodings of evil, and he takes to it an equally sage counsellor for her opinion."¹³ Furthermore, it also seems unlikely that a green, unripe apple would be used as an emblem of the oldest Christian doctrine, the Roman Catholic. In this case again a more general interpretation would be more effective. The green apples, which are poisonous to lambs, together with the swampy, marshy ground that can cause sheep-rot and the dying and straying sheep, simply refer to the dangers the flock is exposed to as a consequence of the negligence of its pastors. But this danger is not unambiguously specified as solely and necessarily the influence of Catholicism, either Roman or Tractarian. It can also be regarded as the spreading of scepticism or complete loss of faith, which is also mentioned in Ruskin's pamphlet, or as the growing popularity of the different dissenting churches.

So just as the application of High Church revivalist symbols in *The Druids* does not make it a manifestation of Tractarian propaganda, it would be an exaggeration to regard *The Hireling Shepherd* as a definite expression of anti-Tractarian publicity.

The same can be said about the next picture, *Strayed Sheep* or *Our English Coasts*. It was commissioned originally as a repeat version of the sheep in the background of *The Hireling Shepherd*, but Hunt finally decided on a different composition. In this painting the shepherd is absent, leaving his flock completely on its own; the sheep are shown stumbling on the rocky coasts of the country. The religious message of the work is basically the same as that of the previous *The Hireling Shepherd*, but because it presents no more symbols than that of the abandoned sheep, the picture suggests an even more general view, a concern for man's disposition to aberration.

¹³Landow, 39

Despite the fact that after his conversion from atheism Hunt's religious conviction was basically Protestant and closest to that of the Evangelicals, his intellect as well as his heart remained receptive to new impressions, his attitude thus never becoming sectarian. In his condemnation of religious controversy Hunt's ideology was akin to that of the Broad Churchmen, and the latter's deep respect for labour was also shared by the painter, which is reflected in his *The Shadow of Death* painted in 1870-73. He also showed a genuine interest in highly individual religious conceptions. His friendship with Henry Wentworth Monk, his help in having Monk's unique interpretation of the Revelation published, and the portrait he painted of Monk in 1858 to publicise his ideas show an exceptional tolerance in religious issues, uncommon especially among the Evangelicals.

However, Hunt acknowledged the Evangelicals' strict moral principles, their literal approach to the Scriptures, and their conviction of personal conversion. And his popular success was finally achieved with paintings that presented solely Protestant qualities. When first exhibited, *The Light of the World* (1851-3) was still criticised for its presentation of the Saviour as a feeble, pompous priest, and for its supernaturalism; Carlyle, for example reproached it as "a papistical phantasy."¹⁴ But the muscular, determined appearance of the youthful Christ in *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-5) won immediate appreciation. Landow regards this work as a Protestant version of the traditional Annunciation theme,¹⁵ for here the moment of Christ's self-recognition is shown as the revelation of His divine mission. Mary's significance is restricted to her role as the earthly mother of Christ; she is even pushed away by her son: Catholic Mariolatry and superstition seem to be firmly rejected.

The basically Protestant character of Hunt's art remained unchanged throughout the rest of his career. And though in his last important religious painting, *The Triumph of the Innocents*, he attempted again to integrate supernatural elements into the presented scene, High Church symbolism or allusions to Tractarian ideas appeared no more in his painting.

¹⁴Bendiner, 69.

¹⁵Landow, 102.

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Joseph Conrad: Lord Jim

The richness of incident and cosmopolitan spirit of Conrad's writing based on perfect harmony of character, setting, narrative technique and variations of the theme have been analysed over and over again. One aspect that still seems to offer new perspectives in our attempts to fully understand and interpret Conrad's art is not restricted purely to his early modernist achievement, but it feeds also on the socio-political and historical environment and the moral-critical statements as dominant factors in the very progression and regression of the plot in *Lord Jim*.

In this paper I argue that Conrad's *Lord Jim* is a masterpiece representative of the dilemmas of the turn of the century, and there is no 'fault line' between the Patna and the Patusan sections of the novel. My intention is to prove that the Patusan section is an altered projection of a myth formulated at the very beginning of the novel, and thus it is as valuable as the other sections of the novel. I also argue that in spite of its often criticised romantic quality, or perhaps precisely by virtue of its romantic implications, the Patusan section contributes to the modernist qualities of the book. I also hope to convince those Commonwealth critics who accuse Conrad of racism, that the return to the 'primitive' world in the Patusan section is based on a different concept, it is rather an expression of the necessity of "solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts"¹ and stems from "Conrad's conviction that: there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away"² than an expression of covert racism.

In *Lord Jim* Conrad recalls and reshapes Christian mythology to chart the mental landscape of a perplexed Victorian hero. The son of Imperial Britain, the

¹The Nigger of the Narcissus, xii

²Almayer's Folly, viii

'civilised' man returns to a 'primitive' state. Patusan that can be equated with the Garden of Eden, where Jim could chieve purity, could return to primeval innocence. The question is whether he can assume and maintain this idyllic state or he is subject to decline and loses the possibility to start again. At this point I rely on Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, who identifies two proto-texts, or identi-fictions underlying the novel. The question formulated above can be comprehensively dealt with only against the more general late Victorian context. The remote countries that were ruled by the British or other European nations were not only mostly populated by people who were entirely different, but for many thinkers of the Victorian period they seemed to offer a glimpse into the past of Europeanism, 'civilisation' itself. The paradox of being prejudiced about the very roots of 'civilisation' was extremely disturbing. Yet, in the context of the European faced with his own European past in a remote country this is a paradoxical situation. The attempt is as absurd and impossible as the Time Traveller's in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, who cannot change the past of the world either in a moment projected thousands of years in the future, or when returning to the past of that future moment, which happens to be his present. Destiny, or rather history cannot be changed under the given conditions in spite of the knowledge, the understanding of the Time Traveller, even though the novel happens to be science-fiction. History cannot be reversed and the European trying to impose his modern concepts onto 'primitive' cultures is doomed to fail. It is, after all, an attempt to return to an earlier stage of historical past, his own history, and change it so as to amend his present.

Cultural assumptions regarding European 'civilisation' are simultaneously challenged and reinforced in the late nineteenth century by various writers belonging to different nations, the basis for this challenge being the value-laden ideas regarding the dialectic between the 'primitive' and 'civilised' cultures in that century. Conrad and his contemporaries, most eminently Henry James among them, are trying to understand their own selves, their country better, by travelling to other countries. This distancing process is necessary because they consider the proximity of the mother country disturbing and distorting. Even so, sometimes they find themselves faced with two unknown countries. Their efforts at understanding and bridging conceptual gaps are witness to the growth of a dynamic intellectual climate in the nineteenth century. The assumptions and scientific discoveries of the age bring about a totally different interpretation of the universe but fail to comprehensively interpret the social, cultural and political changes they have brought about. Bridging conceptual divides is a recurring question in Conrad's

writing. Certainly it is not only Conrad who recognises the difficulties of such transcultural endeavours. "Even D. H. Lawrence, who believed in the possibility of assimilating 'primitive' culture, in his essay on Melville expressed doubt that transcultural assimilation was possible or desirable: The truth of the matter is one cannot go back. Some men can: renegade. [...] There are other peoples, these savages. One does not despise them. One does not feel superior. But there is a gulf in time and being."³ For many Victorians the idea of going back had a well determined meaning, it meant to abandon the acquisitions of 'civilisation' and face the risk of degeneration. From the Congo to Borneo, from South America to Malaysia, Conrad confronted his characters with the conflicts generated by the contacts between the so called primitives and the European peoples. Conrad was himself a notable cultural émigré and his early writings express an anxiety that such cross-cultural contacts would prove dangerous to the members of each society. His Europeans are not able to maintain their cultural identities, or sometimes their 'civilised' reactions lead to disaster in the 'alien' cultures they have to face.

The dilemma formulated by Conrad regarding the regression or progression alongside with the portrayal of the 'civilising' mission in Africa, South America or Malaysia challenged some of the false portraits of the Victorian era as a too self-confident one, which: "For many of its adherents [...] was a compelling set of beliefs precisely because it seemed to express their interests clearly and rationally. It was good to be British and on the top of the world, the member of the most enlightened, progressive, civilised race in history ..."⁴ But Britain in the late Victorian period had its doubts and Conrad's works are also an expression of the late Victorian crisis of faith in cultural advancement although he is certainly not only a critic of the illusion of progress and superiority of his age. "Conrad's intentions can be best illustrated by his words: The only basis for creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so dangerous - so full of hope."⁵

Conrad's experience is based on an awareness of the plight of the perpetual border-dweller himself: "Both at sea and on land my point of view is English, from which the conclusion should not be drawn that I have become an Englishman. That is not the case. Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning."⁶ It seems that

³Lawrence, 51-2

⁴Brantlinger, 14

⁵Conrad, Letter of 2 August 1901

⁶Najder, 240

Conrad is particularly interested in the myth of the 'civilised' man in the 'primitive' world and the agonies brought about by the imminent duality of the situation. We shouldn't forget that in Conrad's time, the 'primitive' occupied an ambiguous place as both the domain of contemporary 'savages' as well as the reminder of the past of Europe itself. Thus the Conradian hero is searching back into the most remote past for an image of himself, and the Victorian society he comes from.

Marlow, Conrad's narrator in *Lord Jim* explores the limits and limitations of the European, and implicitly British society itself, as well as the boundaries between self and society, self and culture respectively. But the 'prehistoric' world Jim jumps into fails to be entirely intelligible for him. Jim's attempt is accompanied by a double sense of dislocation in Patusan since he is the white man who 'went native', but under strain instinctively acts as a white man and ignores the dictates of the 'primitive' reality that seem to have remained for him unknown and alien. In the Patusan section mystery stands for the remoteness of the Garden of Eden for the turn of the century and it generates a predictable end for a young man starting from a pious, quiet parsonage. The collapse of the myths which had postulated the existence of God, the transcendental authority of the moral order, the privileged position of man within the natural and social scheme, has turned him into a victim of his own desires and consciousness. Jim cannot understand the present, or the ways of Imperial Britain, so he decides to surrender to the 'primitive' world of Patusan, reminiscent of the beginnings of the history of his race, which he is tempted to believe he can understand and master. The situation is full of paradoxical elements, but clearly fits into the context of Conrad's idea of the 'primitive' world and the flow of the novel. Jim steps over the edge of Colonial Britain and of his race, but does not shed his 'white' instincts. His aim is to escape the world that in spite of all its earlier promises could not acquit him of his guilt. He virtually jumps into the unknown. Marlow clearly records the situation: "Neither Stein nor I had a clear conception of what might be on the other side when we, metaphorically speaking, took him up and hove him over the wall with scant ceremony."⁷ When Jim enters Patusan, he makes a leap into the unknown. In *Lord Jim* Marlow, in his correspondence with the privileged man seems to identify 'the white man's burden' in a definite feeling of superiority. This feeling of superiority is not virtually granted to Conrad's characters and is subject to doubt in *Lord Jim* as well: "You said that 'that kind of thing' was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially your own, in whose name

⁷Lord Jim, 229

are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress [...] You said also - I call to mind - that 'giving your life up to them' (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute.'⁸ Paradoxically, the privileged man suggests to Marlow that the white man must maintain an identification with his own race while he serves the interests of other people. The 'white man's burden' is clearly stated in the case of Jim, but self-sacrifice is not the only cause determining Jim's presence in Patusan. In Conrad's fiction the 'primitive' world is the mysterious land, where past and present meet, the 'civilised' world is tested against the 'primitive' world and this mysterious challenge seems to purport mythical overtones.

When Conrad is trying to provide a comprehensive interpretation of men and the world, character, setting, narrative technique, variations of the theme are supported by mythical implications. The plot of *Lord Jim*, for example is subject to progression and regression through the mythical reformulation of the dilemmas stemming from the socio-political and historical environment and the moral critical statements that determine Jim's career. Conrad insists on the necessity of reflecting reality without losing on artistic and moral requirements when he writes that: "The danger lies in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose - as, in fact, not good enough for his emotion."⁹ In order to avoid this danger and still maintain his right to personal emotion, Conrad engages a kind of natural detachment. His detachment can be considered natural, since he remained all his life a Continental gentleman who was no doubt extremely devoted to the country that had adopted him. Conrad respects and admires the country that adopted him; nevertheless, he is in possession of a natural detachment prior to his British citizenship. His experience is illustrative of the frustrations of a smaller nation being 'civilised' by an empire convinced of its superiority. The British Empire, though its methods are different, has similar ambitions to civilise the natives populating the British Colonies. To express the 'truth itself' requires adequate technical refinement if the artist does not want to 'lose the exact notion of sincerity'. This in part could explain the complexity of his narrative filters and handling of chronology. Conrad's choice of the narrative technique allows for the integration of the objective and the subjective, of the socio-historical and the imaginative, of the modernist and the traditional in the same fictional material. It

⁸Lord Jim, 239

⁹A Personal Record, 16-7

offers solutions representative of the dilemmas of the modern English novel. The characteristic narrative distance of *Lord Jim* becomes the expression of the moral, psychological, social and historical problems that contribute to formulating the philosophical issues of the book, based on the failure of myth (The Cornwall myth of loyalty and honesty; the Victorian myth of Britain as the omnipotent and benevolent mother country governed by a will to bring the colonies up to the European level of 'civilisation'; the myth of the revisited Garden of Eden; the failure of the myths which had postulated the existence of God) and the alienation problems it causes. The disrupted chronology allows for the free handling of the concept of time, of personal and 'public' history. It certainly is not sufficient to say that Jim's story is illustrative of what happens to innocent, naive people in a world where there are at least two realities at work. This could sound like an oversimplification. In the context of Colonial Britain we have to cope with the official version - quite explicitly dealt with by Conrad - which stresses the importance and positive role played by the exponents of the 'civilised' world in the lives of the 'primitive' peoples of Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Conrad was very much aware of the pernicious effects of the alterations brought about by the otherwise - in some respects - socially and economically positive changes in these areas. It was not Conrad's intention to analyse these changes; instead he focused on the moral aspects of Victorian Britain. The story of the Patna (chapters 1-21) has the effect of extreme ethical relativism and through this, in many critics' understanding, it formulates the open-endedness of the moral dilemmas in the first part of the novel. Jim is the exponent of the officially declared principles of honesty, fidelity and humanism of Victorian Britain, and acts accordingly. He does not want to give up his ideals and is ready to face the board of inquiry. He wants to pay for his 'jump' from the Patna. But the court, the inquiry cannot put an end to his 'case.' Jim insists on the ideals his home provided him with, but the end of the first section does not offer him any valid solutions to his dilemmas. Jim is wandering from port to port hoping that he can discard his sense of guilt, regain his confidence in men and the Almighty. The first section of the novel does not formulate answers to his questions. He can only share his sense of guilt with Marlow. The meanness and cowardice of the captain and his crew, the hypocritical arrogance of the board of inquiry, the tacit acknowledging of his guilt by the white men who provide him with a job, all seem to convince him that he does not belong to that world. It also seems one of the main interests of the novel whether, in the case of Jim, self-knowledge is, or can be acquired. This approach brings about the idea that the only

alternative for Jim seems to be to search for another world. Thomas C. Moser defines Conrad's ethic in *Lord Jim* as founded on the principles of fidelity, stoic humanism, and solidarity with the community in a universe that had lost faith in the Almighty.¹⁰ Jim hopes to get access to this lost world, but outside Britain. *Lord Jim* refers to Colonial Britain, but it never reaches Britain itself, except through the narrator Marlow, and in reference to Jim's childhood and adolescence. Conrad refers to the parsonage that provides Jim with lofty ideals, and to his readings that shape him into a romantic, and even foreshadows Jim's inability to act. The Patna sailing under a white captain also stands for Britain, as does the board of inquiry. The route of the hero shows an attempt to quit the limits of 'civilisation'. This signifies an attempt to break free, to achieve independence that could allow for absolution from Jim's sense of guilt. After the Patna incident followed by the trial Jim does not hesitate to start East. He only stops in Patusan, where he seems to have found peace. As Goonetilleke puts it: "In selecting Eastern milieu, Conrad gave himself the opportunity to show people that they did not know enough about life, certainly, not as much or as deep as he did." "And Goonetilleke does not hesitate to state that: This does not relate only to matters specific to the Eastern context, but to issues important to the Western world and general issues as well."¹¹ The validity of this statement is supported by the mythical implications of the Patusan section.

The last station of Jim's search for a place, a world that could offer him the opportunity to get rid of his sense of shame and guilt and achieve stability of the self, is Patusan. Interestingly enough, he does not go home to try and find reconciliation with the 'civilised' world and himself. The distinct polarity between his dreams and the facts forces him to choose exile. Going farther East Jim follows a scenario intended to single him out. The setting supports a shift from the 'civilised' world to a 'primitive' one, a return to the Garden of Eden. Jim tries to reinstate the moral order under which man has a privileged position postulated by God. The 'civilised' world proves to be inadequate for a romantic young man. He can not handle the difference between his dreams and his abilities and finds himself perplexed in front of the incredible gap between the declared moral and ethical codes of the 'civilised' world and the hypocrisy it is imbibed with.

Jim 'revolts' against the spiritual and ethical illness of the modern world and opts for a desperate attempt to defeat it by regression to a 'primitive' world reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. For Patusan is an idyllic if not altogether ideal

¹⁰Moser, 10-49

¹¹Goonetilleke, 13

setting for Jim, where the moral principles declared seem to be applicable to everyday conduct. In *Patusan* Jim is driven by his ambition to prove mainly to himself that he is capable of good deeds, of heroic attitude, but the impossibility of the task becomes obvious as he creates a kind of state instantly from the initial trade Stein sent him there for.

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan notes: "The 'meaning' of the (first part of the novel) is [...] constructed as the Absence of Meaning, the invalidation of the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical certainties."¹² Jim does not attempt to identify with the factual norms of the 'civilised' world; he attempts to move as far from that world as to reduce it to nothing. While he is adrift, the stations of his journey East show their meanings only to have them questioned and put aside by the young man. The gradual 'regression' from the 'civilised' world into the 'primitive' one can easily be supported simply by tracing Jim's route.

The first recognisable setting is the parsonage, Jim's home environment which "had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably remembered the laying of the first stone. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass plots, flower-beds, and fir-trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of the greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks."¹³ The setting of Jim's childhood and adolescence emanates a sense of everlasting peace and stability. Its naiveté, its decency and its faith are representative of light and order, fulfilling all the requirements of an ideal home. The second relevant setting is the ill-famed ship, the *Patna*, which is a floating coffin. Its rusty deck is a perfect stage for testing the strength or weakness of the moral principles and codes provided by Jim's home-environment. The *Patna* incident is also illustrative of the inability of the 'civilised' world to feel responsible for the 'primitive' world. It is illustrative of the vast and amoral world of imperialism. The panic of the white crew leads to the abandonment of the 'primitive' pilgrims to what they think in the moment of their escape to be sure, unavoidable death. The *Patna* that is towed by the French ship into the Eastern port 'torpedoes' the sense of superiority of the white officialities. The incident is scandalous primarily because it suggests in a sense the moral superiority of the pilgrims whom the captain referred to as 'cattle.' In the moment of crisis on the *Patna* Jim thinks of the Muslim Malay pilgrims and cuts loose the lifeboats whereas the other officers are completely indifferent to their passengers. The way the other officers try to save

¹²Erdinast-Vulcan, 35

¹³Lord Jim, 2

their skins, points up the grossness of their betrayal of their professional code and normal ethics. Jim always distinguishes himself from 'them', the other officers, but the fact remains that he jumps into their lifeboat. The cowardice and the lack of the least sense of responsibility of the captain of the *Patna* and his officers is disgusting, but under the conditions is acknowledged as necessary by the members of the board of inquiry. Jim cannot, does not want to avoid the trial, hoping that an honest and detailed testimony could absolve him of his sense of guilt and shame. The result is a disaster for Jim. At the official inquiry held in the police court of the Eastern port all they want to hear from him are facts. He is not given the possibility to express his thoughts, the very essence of his and their tragedy: "He stood elevated in the witness-box, with burning cheeks in a cool lofty room: the big framework of punkahs moved gently to and fro high above his head, and from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive, spell-bound, as if all these people sitting in orderly rows upon narrow benches had been enslaved by the fascination of his voice."¹⁴ The 'fascination' is generated by his willingness to attend the inquiry, while virtually all the other members of the crew have vanished. But the white community feels uneasy at the idea of a white officer being judged in the presence of the 'primitive' audience. Big Brierly, the English captain on the board of inquiry even offers to bribe Jim to withdraw from the court. The 'civilised' world is not ready to take the blame for the betrayal of the moral and ethical codes of the officers, and is certainly opposed to discussing the real moral and psychological implications of the case in a courtroom crowded with members of the 'inferior' race.

D. Erdinast Vulcan claims that the trial marks the end of Jim's initial identification which was the Stevensonian adventure story and explains the 'problematic structural shift' of the novel, the much criticised transition from the story of the *Patna* to the story of *Patusan* through Jim's choice of the heroic prototext of the *Patusan* episode. Erdinast-Vulcan reaches the conclusion that: "By moving to *Patusan*, Jim becomes part of another story, as it were. This new identification, which is closely modelled on the heroic epic, offers him a new context of psychological and ethical orientation. He turns away from the individualised ethos of modernity, the 'ghostly freedom of choice', offered by the multiplicity of voices in the first part of the story, towards the heroic mythical narrative, a fictional genre which is predicated on the ethos of community."¹⁵ Jim's attitude in the courtroom,

¹⁴Lord Jim, 7

¹⁵Erdinast-Vulcan, 40

has already predicted his insistence on the authority of the moral order postulated by the existence of God. Patusan seems to be the mythological world, a world born out of Jim's desires and the 'ignorance' of its inhabitants (that is they are not contaminated by the ills of Western civilisation), where nature seems to be the expression of human existence. Patusan is dominated by a conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart; the idyllic setting literally opens up for Jim, granting him the protective shields of the hills, besides the distance from the 'civilised' world. This seems the perfect world for Jim, but he instinctively attempts to master it as if it were a world of his own creation: " On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim's house [...] rose exactly behind these hills, it diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc [...] appeared gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated above the summits, as if escaping from the yawning grave in gentle triumph.

'Wonderful effect,' said Jim by my side. 'Worth seeing..Is it not?'

And this question was put with a note of personal pride that made me smile, as though he had a hand in regulating that unique spectacle. He had regulated so many things in Patusan! Things that would have appeared so much beyond his control as the notions of the moon and the stars!"¹⁶ The inhabitants of Patusan consider Jim to be a kind of deity and he himself seems to accept this mythical version of himself.

Many critics considered the story of Patusan (chapters 24-45) a failure. F. R. Leavis dismisses *Lord Jim*, saying that it: "does not deserve the position of pre-eminence among Conrad's works often assigned to it, because, as he puts it: The presentment in *Lord Jim* in the first part of the book, the account of the inquiry and of the desertion of the Patna, the talk with the French lieutenant - these are good Conrad. But the romance that follows, though possibly offered as a continued exhibition of Jim's case, has no inevitability as that; nor does it develop or enrich the central interest, which consequently, eked out to provide the substance of a novel comes to seem decidedly thin"¹⁷ Leavis manages to identify 'the doubt' as the 'central theme of the book', but cannot see the plurality of convergent elements defining the theme of the novel. Jim's ideals are destroyed by the 'civilised' world, but he is not defeated. He is looking for a new identity and this new identity requires a different environment. This is why he attempts to move to a 'primitive' world. As we have already stated the crucial stations of Jim's tragedy are clearly

¹⁶Lord Jim, 203

¹⁷Leavis, 218

marked by Conrad's choice of the setting. On the Patna he openly betrays the norms of the seamen when 'jumping' into the lifeboat of the white officers he despises. The circumstances are complicated since after violating the seaman's, the gentleman's and public school codes he is brave. He is the only officer of the Patna not to dodge the official inquiry which is an act of moral courage. Jim tries to be different from the other officers. This attempt certainly isolates him from those who don't think too much about the Patna affair, that is the 'civilised' world.

Jim chooses a 'primitive' society in order to find the peace, calm and faith he experienced in the parental home, the setting of his initial innocence he refuses to return to. As we have already mentioned he needs a new environment to establish the centuries old harmony of man and God. He seems to recreate the world that has not lost its faith in the Almighty, but his ideological construction defined by his status as a 'civilised' man inevitably demolishes the myth he hoped to have rediscovered and recreated. He unconsciously undermines, manipulates the 'primitive' level, the reinstated myth that could bring about his recovery and allow for the heroic possibilities imminent in his character. He has to discard the Stevensonian identi-fiction, because he cannot identify with the 'civilised' world generating it. Patusan even by virtue of its geographical location separates him from the 'civilised' world. Jim wants a refuge to return to a state of innocence prior to his jump, and in Patusan he finds the very place where he can rehabilitate, regenerate his own self. Leavis is right when he states that in this part of the novel space and time are subject to typical romantic alterations. Jim's task to return to myth and re-establish the world of innocence and perfect harmony is an impossible one. But what could offer a more effective retrospection on the theme of lost honour than its repetition in a totally different social and cultural context the factors determining this loss included. This Conrad does in the form of a heroic epic contrasting past and present, individual and social, 'primitive' and 'civilised'. Jim separates himself from the 'civilised' world, hoping that being isolated from that world he could start again. A. J. Guerard describes Jim as: "a rather adolescent dreamer and 'romantic' with a strong ego-ideal, who prefers solitary reveries of heroism to the shock and bustle of active life [...] He differs from other introverted dreamers chiefly in the degree of Bovarysme; he can literally confuse reality and dreams at times [...] He tries to live his dream."¹⁸ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan questions the validity of such a 'working hypothesis' founded on the distinction between facts and ideas, truth and fiction, reality and illusion, 'real' and self-ideal. Erdinast-Vulcan dismisses this

¹⁸Guerard, 140-141

approach where: "the first term in each pair is a reflection of a desired standard, and the second is a form of deviation."¹⁹ In spite of its romantic overtones the Patusan section is strongly rooted in the historical realities of the period. After siding with the rightful Malayan chief, Doramin, against the pretender, Tunku Allang Jim reaches the position of the 'white lord'. This position is also justified by imperial realities. Joycelyn Baines states that: "There were, at the time of Conrad's service on the Vidar and earlier, a number of white men, traders and adventurers, who had established themselves in out-of-the-way places and gained influence over the local native rulers."²⁰ I tend to agree with D. Erdinast-Vulcan, who argues that in the context of the fictional material there is no 'fault-line' between the Patna and the Patusan sections. Erdinast-Vulcan states that the shift is the result of: "the willed effort of the character to enter another story, as it were, to construct his identity and find a new ethical orientation in a different textual sphere."²¹ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan introduces the concept of 'identi-fiction' to denote a literary text or genre on which a fictional character construes his or her identity. The term is designed to indicate the distinction between the generic model which reflects the intentions of the author, and a text or a genre which serves as a point of reference for the characters themselves in the definition of their identity and the management of their lives. This approach also seems to support Conrad's choice of narrative filters or lenses when reporting Jim's story.

The horizontal shift of the Patna section is joined by a vertical one in the Patusan section. The 'civilised' man's authority over his own fate acquired through knowledge is replaced by the 'primitive' man's acceptance of the authority of the Creator. Jim's moving East brings about the possibility of the return of God. Britain is abandoned when Jim moves East. The text, the word does change in the Patusan section. Benita Parry notes that: "Patusan [...] is primarily a metaphysical landscape."²² "Tony Tanner finds that: "The people of Patusan exist as if under an enchanter's wand ... they are not human beings, but creatures of a fairy tale, fixed in their symbolic postures."²³ The above quotations properly suggest the shift in tone towards a romantic and mystical perception of the world, but certainly are not sufficient as far as the historical, social and cultural implications of the Patusan section are concerned. Jim does leap into the unknown, appropriating the

¹⁹Erdinast Vulcan, 37

²⁰Baines, 253

²¹Erdinast-Vulcan, 37

²²Parry, 96

²³Tanner, 40

mythological world of the Garden of Eden to his status, but his life is solidly anchored in the everyday social life and activity of the 'primitives' as well as in the crisis that grows to threaten life in this remote land. He settles the problem of the old fool's divorce and the problem of the rotten turtles' eggs and he assumes the responsibility of settling the problem of the white adventurers threatening the country. The duality propagated by the desire to return to myth and Jim's insistence on his 'civilised' status is clearly maintained by Conrad. Nevertheless, he seems more efficient, by virtue of his education than the Malaysians and this determines the population of Patusan consider his efficiency as something miraculous. Conrad analyses convincingly how they, because of their 'backwardness', accept themselves to be racially inferior. Indeed they regard Jim as a kind of deity and Dain Waris, their leader mortal. Jim does not really project himself into the position of God, but is longing for the peace and faith that can only be experienced in a world governed by the Almighty. The posture he creates for himself is that of the unquestioned representative of harmony and the modern concept of law and order, the modern man revisiting the Garden of Eden. By virtue of his extraction he is a naive coloniser experiencing the present of the 'primitives' as his past, and is in search for a solution that could allow for the rehabilitation of all his lost dreams in a context seriously affected by his status in that world. Jim clearly insists on his authority over that world. The instinctive drive to rule the 'primitive' world is illustrative of a traditional British attitude that has been widely acknowledged since Robinson Crusoe's solution to the problem entered literary conscience. Jim sympathises with Dain Waris the able leader of the people of Patusan. He feels indebted to Jewel and virtually falls in love with the girl of mixed Malayan-European parentage. Perhaps this delicate interaction between a Malayan and a European is most illustrative of the imminent difficulties when the exponents of the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' world meet. Jim, in spite of being projected in a mythical world, is not capable of escaping, abandoning his imperialist prejudices and reactions. Conrad clearly states this displacement of the European in Patusan when he makes Marlow state, in the instant he gets to know Jewel, that she has an 'amusing' way of speaking English, and a 'clipping boyish' intonation. Jim only realises that he is in love with her when it is too late. Jewel's affection and Malayan background determines her to overvalue him. That this affection was partly governed by the fatalistic admiration of a member of a subject race for a member of a ruling race becomes obvious when, although she tried to save him, after his death she undervalues him with the similarly fatalistic prejudice of her tribe. The change of attitude on her part also

suggests that the moral codes of the 'primitive' world do not allow for amendments based on affection. In Patusan conduct determines personal and public affection, the failure to meet the expectations of the heroic posture automatically brings about the effect of being punished. The moral rules governing Patusan are not falsified even for the sake of a 'Tuan'. There is no hope for them to bridge the gap between two races, two cultures even in a fictionally mythological milieu. Neither of the two prototexts can dissolve 'the acute consciousness of lost honour' of the individual, the crisis of the modern world at the turn of the century, modern Britain included. Still, this more general context provides Jim with nearly mythical power and determines him to accept the consequences of the moral verdict postulated by the 'primitive' world: he willingly accepts death, although he would have the possibility to escape.

The difference between the official version of reality and the factual state of affairs makes Jim not only a victim of his own deficient self, but also that of a world whose basic principles are constantly falsified. Jim is then on the one hand one of those whose insistence on honour and the ideal moral codes is in opposition with the beliefs and conduct of the perverse falsifiers of these principles. On the other hand he projects his ego against a heroic background that exceeds his abilities and thus becomes the archetype of the tragic hero in search of his own identity in a world that he perceives as being hostile to its own declared ideals and thus implicitly to him. Jim's acts prove clearly destructive in spite of his intentions. The Patna incident creates a deep sense of guilt in Jim, but as we have already stated, he does not start back home to recover. Conrad and Marlow, the two governing narrative voices of the novel, have created a different trajectory for him. At this point D. Erdinast-Vulcan's already mentioned interpretation of the sources of Jim's choice proves relevant. Jim's perception of Patusan as a land of myth onto which he can impose his heroic imagination allows him to achieve a new identity. Jim illustrates a momentary return of the 'civilised' world to the state of innocence, a world born out of man's desires and 'ignorance' that was defined by identification with nature and God. The fact that nature is threatening in the Patna section, while in the Patusan section it seems to invest Jim with supernatural power is illustrative of the difference between the modern and the mythical modes of discourse that seem to support the idea of return to myth. But myth is challenged by reality, the messengers of the outer world arrive to Patusan. Jim's deep seated instincts of a white man did not disappear. His confusion when faced with the situation is clearly stated. Jim's instincts don't let him remember comprehensively enough the wrongs the 'civilised' world did to him. He seems to have forgotten that the 'civilised' world

provided him with lofty ideals that proved insufficient at sea, and in the name of the same ideals denied him any possibility to really defend himself at his trial. The Patusan section seemed to absolve Jim of his predictable fate of a man who no matter how hard he tries is doomed to fail, first because of his inability to act, second because of his naive insistence on a set of moral codes of the 'civilised' world that are not entirely valid if they are valid at all. Jim's choice of exile was one imposed on him, his retreat in good order towards the rising sun (and not towards his father's house in Britain) seems inevitable as: "the fact followed him casually and inevitably (the fact refers to Jim's jump from the Patna) [...] and his keen perception of the Inevitable drove him away for good from seaports and white man,"²⁴ because he needed purity, a state of innocence that 'civilisation' could not provide. Still it certainly would be inaccurate to say that 'primitive' is equated exclusively with purity and innocence, while 'civilisation' stands for meanness and the evil only. The pain of the 'homo duplex' is purveyor of the anxieties caused by ambiguity, anguish and exasperation caused by the impossibility to reconcile the antagonisms of the world as it is. The myth of innocence can only be interpreted through value judgement, and this value judgement belongs to Jim, the son of the British Empire.

Jim is looking for a: "totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" in Patusan, which allowed him to leave his "earthly failings behind."²⁵ Jim's constant moving East has clearly shown that he lost faith of the 'civilised' world and in the white man's judgement and moral principles. Thus, although Marlow repeatedly declares him 'one of us', it is impossible for him to return. The situation is paradoxical and it clearly predicts Jim's destiny. As L. Kolakowski states in his *Presence of Myth* it is only through a mythical arrangement of our universe - meaningful narrative order - that we can overcome its essential randomness and indifference. The allusion to the Old Testament in the Patusan chapters has been noted by critics and Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan convincingly argues that as Patusan is Jim's Garden of Eden one should be suspicious about the existence of a serpent in the garden. "Erdinast-Vulcan arrives at the conclusion that: The real serpent in Jim's Garden of Eden is his own weakness, the wavering of his faith in his own fiction. [...] In Patusan he tried to cast off his role of Cain, after having enacted the archetypal punishment, and to regain the wholeness of Adam. Paradoxically, his sympathetic identification with Brown and his inability to kill

²⁴Lord Jim, 2

²⁵Lord Jim, 218

him or let him die will bring about the death of Dain Waris, his adopted brother, and the collapse of the heroic code."²⁶ When trying to state the significance of the story we must remember that it is Cain who is the forefather of civilisation. Civilisation is, therefore, Cain's estate by extension. The intrusion of civilisation into the mythical world of Patusan destroys the possibility of Jim's total identification with Adam or Abel and proves fatal for him.

Although Jim's choice of Patusan shows that he seems able to be an alternative Adam or Abel, it is Stein who grants him the possibility, the chance to escape out from 'civilisation' and ignore its discontents. This means in turn that Jim needs the exponents and the accessories of the modern world to gain rebirth in Patusan, although in his understanding this rebirth creates of him the man without history, the prehistoric man if you want. "Marlow himself describes Jim as: the heir of a shadowy and mighty tradition"²⁷, [...] a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old."²⁸ The authority of 'civilisation' over Jim does not cease. The only, and impossible, alternative for Jim would be to maintain the status he managed to gain in Patusan. But Conrad is too much aware of the fact that identification with an adoptive culture and myth has its limits.

Jim manages to achieve most of his dreams in Patusan, but he never manages to discard his instincts of a white man, his history. The Stevensonian adventure paralyses him; the Biblical pattern gives him back his dreams, but leaves him a lonely character, isolated from his race but still dependent on his roots. While Jim is in pursuit of his dreams and searching for self-knowledge he does not give himself the chance of identifying with the people whom he decidedly serves either. He does not let himself be assimilated by the 'primitive' culture he is supposed to rule, just as he refused to side with the hypocritical exponents of the 'civilised' world aboard the *Patna* or the Eastern ports he visited after the *Patna* incident. Jim remains a prisoner of his sense of being a white man, a victim of his own consciousness: he identifies with Brown through his guilt and decides to free him in the name of honour. He does not perceive the darkness of Brown's heart, but is evidently anxious that some misunderstanding should occur, 'ending perhaps in collision and bloodshed', stating that he is responsible for every life in the land. This seems to me to be the repetition of the 'felt honour' aboard the *Patna*, when he felt he was responsible for every life

²⁶Erdinast-Vulcan, 45

²⁷Lord Jim, 244

²⁸Lord Jim, 256

aboard the steamer, the pilgrims included. Jim's illusion is repeatedly unqualified, for the material fact is that he has allowed a brigand to slaughter Dain Waris and his party, and that he has left the village open to ravage (just as he abandoned the Patna against his own will.) His decision brought about the consequences of Cain's deed. Jim sacrifices his own myth and faith in his responsibility to the community. The massacre of Dain Waris and his people, who have blindly trusted him, marks the: "failure of a potent charm"²⁹ and Jim has to pay with his life to reinstate the power of his word. Because: "Those people had trusted him implicitly. Him alone!"³⁰ The mythical power does eventually recoil on him: he has to perish.

If Jim's end formulates the ambiguities of the modern world, the two identifications, the Stevensonian and the Biblical-mythical one follow the oppositional pattern of the traditional and the modern, of the 'civilised' and the 'primitive', stating the impossibility of a return to the initial state of innocence. The proto-texts and the setting clearly define a willed detachment from the Western world representative of 'civilisation'. Conrad's vision as a novelist, as Virginia Woolf observed: "is both complex and specialised; complex because behind his characters and apart from them must stand something stable to which he relates them; specialised because since he is a single person with one sensibility the aspects of life in which he can believe with conviction are strictly limited. [...] and Conrad's *Lord Jim* as most of his books has: the air of telling us something very old and perfectly true."³¹

The plurality of possible readings stems from overwhelming complexity of the novel. This complexity of the convergent themes calls for an equally overwhelming narrative diversity.

It is Marlow the narrator-character who provides the concrete detail of felt life as he is the sensitive investigator who proves not only a psychological observer, but also one of Jim's friends, sympathy implied. Starting with the fourth chapter Marlow, becomes the dominant narrative voice, although we do not really know where Conrad starts and Marlow ends. In *Lord Jim* Marlow's narrative authority is repeatedly destabilised by the fact that he often relies on details provided by the other characters. "As Padmini Mongia puts it in 'Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad': The novel's complex narrative structure serves to deflect attention away from the plot and towards the process whereby we do or do not apprehend

²⁹ *Lord Jim*, 256

³⁰ *Lord Jim*, 268

³¹ Woolf, 308

meaning."³² As we have already seen, the first three chapters belong to Conrad. Chapter four introduces Marlow and establishes him as the only authority on the subject. The final chapters comprise Marlow's letter addressed to the Privileged man.

The omniscient narrator of the first three chapters is not devoid of irony. Conrad provides us with the very reasons why Jim was sent to a training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine, in spite of his obvious inability for the task: "The living (at the parsonage) had belonged to the family for generations; but Jim was one of five sons ..."³³ The parsonage cannot provide for the fifth son of the extended family. This aspect passes unnoticed in the course of the novel. The omniscient narrator shows no intention to interview Jim. He strictly sticks to facts even when foreshadowing the tragic events in Jim's career. A comprehensive approach to these events is Marlow's task.

The premises of Marlow's status as a compulsive narrator of Jim's story are also grounded in the opposition between the participant and the non-participant points of view challenging each other in chapter four. The omniscient narrator's presentation in the first three chapters was as devoid of sympathy as was the attitude of the judges during the trial. Marlow discards the official insistence on facts and the insufficient, irrelevant meanings facts can provide.

Even the non-participant point of view adopted by Conrad in the fourth chapter accepts, indirectly though, the insufficiency of the tribunal's insistence on facts. "They wanted facts. Facts. They demanded facts from him as if facts could explain anything.[...] The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible ... they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear."³⁴

Marlow is seemingly the only person attending the trial who is aware of Jim's hopeless difficulty. The right to describe the momentum creating the visible conflict that is Jim's jump is passed on to Marlow by Conrad because he seems to be the only person who can describe Jim's jump in all its complexity. Marlow is not only interested in how things happened but also in the reason determining Jim's act and its spiritual consequences. Once facts are dropped, the difference between 'them'

³² Padmini, 174

³³ Lord Jim, 3

³⁴ Lord Jim, 18-9

and 'us' can be comprehensively explored. Marlow's point of view by virtue of his sympathy has the potential of explaining Jim's choice of exile.

Then we can clearly state that the structure of the narrative starts to be shaped by Marlow in chapter four and he remains the governing authority for the rest of the novel. He is interrupted by the privileged man in chapter thirty-six, when in his (Marlow's) letter he remembers one of their earlier conversations. The epistolary form suits Marlow perfectly, because the last word on Jim remains his, and it is he who can postulate the final moral verdict. Marlow insists on Jim's isolation, acknowledging opposition to the privileged man's former statement about Jim's selling his 'soul to a brute.' (The statement is meant to qualify Jim's dedication to bring wealth and happiness to all mankind irrespective of race.) The letter form clearly limits the chances of any external interference and so Marlow can state again his perception of the themes underlying the novel. Marlow, who readily formulated the first layer of the theme by proving that Jim is 'one of us' and not one of them, had projected Jim against the dreams of heroism which Jim clearly did not have the ability to match. It was Marlow who sensed Jim's finding a totally new world in Patusan which allowed him to try again. Marlow's investigation also touched upon the opposition between Jim's ideals and the fast-fading power of Colonial Britain's official ideology. Thus, although he is declaredly 'one of us', it is impossible for him to return. In Patusan Marlow senses Jim's return to the mythological tradition and the everlasting quality of that tradition. Marlow is also invested with the capacity to translate Jim's status as a border-dweller, for example when he speaks about his 'contemptuous tenderness.'

It is through Marlow that Conrad discloses both the dilemmas that regard Jim's integrity and those of the 'civilised' world at the turn of the century. Thus Marlow becomes the interpreter of the personal and the public themes of the novel and the authoritative mediator between late Victorian realities and the author, Conrad and his material and Jim and his imagination.

As we have seen, the complexity of *Lord Jim* is overwhelming. The richness of the sometimes overlapping narrative voices (Conrad, Marlow, Stein, Brierly, Jim) can be maintained through a consistent, stable narrative frame. The governing narrative voices are Conrad in the first three and a half chapters and Marlow for the remaining chapters. This distinction does not match the partition of the novel into the two main sections or 'stories', that is the Patna story and the Patusan story. This is possible because Conrad's explicit authorial voice is preparatory of the two 'stories' just like Marlow's letter is a conclusion to both sections. The omniscient

narrator opens up the discussion on tradition and modernity, and the 'epistolary' part relating Jim's end formulates the ambiguities of the modern world. Jim manages to regain his faith in the traditional ideal of heroism and providence, he acquires the moral strength to pay the ultimate price for his mistaken decision. Yet the novel's final message seems to me paradoxical because Conrad who was never at home in the world formulates one of the questions to which he knows the answer all too well. Through Jim's death he also tells us that it is impossible for the modern man to regain absolute faith in the Almighty and through it the privileged position of innocence.

Lord Jim then is a masterpiece illustrative of the overwhelming diversity of the dilemmas of the turn of the century. The novel is built on the paradoxical principle of regression and progression visible at both the narrative level and the level of the myths underlying the plot. The presence of myth and the narrative technique allow for discussion regarding the relationship between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' world based on the opposition of tradition and modernity avoiding the danger of even a shade of racism. The multiplicity of the themes (both public and personal) formulated by the novel is given coherence through a consistent narrative technique inclusive of disrupted chronology and masterly employed shifts of the narrative point of view.

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“Everything Unexplained”

The Structure of Secrecy and Secrecy as Structure in Henry Green’s *Party Going*

[W]e have to assume that narratives capable of interesting competent readers are likely to be in some ways inexplicit and indeterminable to the extent that there is no universal agreement as to what kind of significance, if any, are to be attributed to any particular moment of a text.

Frank Kermode: The Art of Telling, 72

Party Going, Henry Green’s third novel, enigmatically refutes all attempts of interpretation. It can be read as a social allegory, unleashing bitter criticism on the members of the upper middle class; it could be seen as a Freudian attempt to present the frustration a young lady (Julia) might feel in coming to terms with sexuality; or it could be regarded an existentialist novel, showing a party, the guests of which have been deprived of personal identity, and are seeking the means of reasserting themselves. All three interpretations seem possible, but each is equally encouraged and undermined at the same time; though each is doubtlessly valid for some aspect of the novel, neither is consistently so.

There is more to this novel than a single interpretation. The text is too elaborate and over ornamented to maintain a single allegory. Events are often unexplained, characters sometimes seem to lack motivation, objects float into focus without any discernible cause or reason, though professing a provokingly powerful sense of being.

Party Going is rather like a metaphor of immense complexity, hiding some undiscoverable secret, a metaphor having a multitude of meanings, but lacking a context, so that neither of the meanings is more accentuated than the others; neither can be granted priority over the rest without the fear of losing the secrecy inherently present. Thus, the metaphor is about the secret, but at the same time the metaphor is the secret itself, and it is impossible to reveal it, since that would inevitably lead to the destruction of the secret and the destruction of the metaphor.

Secrecy is overwhelmingly and abundantly present in the novel, as an organising principle of both plot and structure, its presence playing a crucial role in making the novel such a tensely composed unity. What I would like to show, through analysing Green's method and the means by which this secrecy is achieved, is, how by the force of their integrity, secrets assume a principal importance, pointing towards the essence of fictional reality.

The plot is quite simple, almost eventless. A party of rich and less-rich members of the London upper middle class aims to go to France for three weeks. The town is beset by a thick fog, making railway traffic, and their departure, impossible. How long the fog will last is unknown. The party-goers gather on the platforms, then take up positions in the railway hotel to waiting. Drinks are ordered; conversations develop; some members of the party are in love, others are jealous, others are bored. Time passes, and as the crowd thickens below, on the platforms, tension is slowly accumulating. Steel doors are shut and bolted to prevent the fatigued crowd from occupying the hotel. After a time the party-goers finally receive the good news of the fog rising, and they prepare to leave.

Throughout the novel the fog prevails, and quite often it serves as means for creating or for hiding secrets; it is not to be forgotten that fog is in itself a secret. Its nature is difficult to determine; occasionally it might become almost transparent, giving a generous display of what is concealed behind it, or, it may, just as easily, turn into an impenetrable milky whiteness which will consume the attributes of reality, transforming it into an indefinite thickness devoid of all dimensions.

The fog is not only present physically in the novel, it is likewise present in modes of structure; some events and motivations are described in detail while others are veiled in obscurity, lacking any discernible order, just as fog would shift without any apparent pattern, its varying density driving perception in and out of focus.

Accordingly, there are many events in the text which are not explained: the characters sometimes say or do things they cannot account for. A dead bird drops

from the sky; Miss Fellowes picks it up. Max Aidey, the host of the party, is talking on the phone with his lover Amabel, then, in the middle of the conversation, pours whisky and soda on the fire, and, leaving Amabel hanging on the line, goes to mix himself another drink. Thomson, one of the manservants, is complaining because he'll have to miss his tea, when a girl he has never seen before comes out of the fog and kisses him on the mouth. Due to the fog, perception is partial or distorted, and consequently a certain amount of indeterminacy is inherently present. Events may not be seen clearly, things might turn out to remain unexplained, or explanations might lead into deception.

In his study of Henry Green, Edward Stokes says the following about these unexplained events: "Like all of Green's novels *Party Going* has a dimension of poetry and wonder, there are at least a dozen scenes, episodes and passages in which Green endeavours to fire the reader's unconscious imagination into life."¹ By not explaining them Green is creating secrets, just as he does with the symbol-like birds which keep reoccurring, and these secrets not only manage to 'fire the reader's unconscious imagination to life' but are at the same time arousing the readers suspicion and curiosity.

Turning to the text, the first paragraph of the novel illustrates the role of the fog and the intricate means of explanation, suspicion and secrecy, present on a multitude of levels:

Fog was so dense, bird that had been disturbed went flat into a balustrade and slowly fell, dead at her feet.

There it lay and Miss Fellowes looked up to where that pall of fog was twenty foot above and out of which it had fallen, turning over once. She bent down and took a wing (...) She turned and she went back to where it had fallen and again looked up to where it must have died for it was still warm and, everything unexplained, she turned once more into the tunnel back to the station.

(384)

The paragraph is very tense, the first sentence, fashioned in a compact, telegram-like way, holding as much information as possible. The text, bearing the final brunt of 'nine or ten beginnings,'² is secretive and aims to divert the reader's attention.

¹Stokes, 204

²Mengham, 31

Miss Fellowes and the bird have something in common, notably, that neither of them knows what is behind the fog. The bird is unaware of a balustrade, therefore it must die, Miss Fellowes is granted a bit more information than the bird; the body of the dead bird functions as a signal, a sign which shows her that something must be behind that pall of fog, there 'twenty foot above and out,' something which is causing birds to fall dead at her feet. The bird was completely unaware of the secret, while Miss Fellowes knows about its existence, but that is the most she will ever be able to find out. The bird is still warm, so it must have died there, in the fog. Everything else is 'unexplained'. Miss Fellowes and the bird share a secret, not knowing it, though, they share it all the same.

In the first sentence the reader is granted a glance through the fog: not only the reason for the bird's death is known, 'went flat into a balustrade,' but also that the bird had previously been 'disturbed by the fog'. The secret Miss Fellowes aims to find out, the explanation behind the bird's death, is not a secret for the reader; it never was, as the circumstances of the bird's death are clarified well before Miss Fellowes is touched by the problem.

Miss Fellowes looks up twice, once immediately after having seen the bird fall, and once after having picked it up; but she cannot see through the fog on either occasion. The secret is there, and is not there, its existence depending on the fog; but by being shown to the reader, it is actually hidden, as, led by the knowledge of what has happened, the reader is tempted to believe that Miss Fellowes does not know what happened, which is true; but it is also true that she is nevertheless aware of the fact that something happened; saying that she does not know *what is behind* the fog does not equal saying that she does not know *what it is that is behind* the fog. Not knowing about the existence or not knowing about the qualities of a thing can hardly be the same. Yet the apparent clarity of the first sentence seemingly aims to nullify this difference, which is once again the difference between the bird's ignorance and Miss Fellowes's ignorance; and by this delusive nullification it aims to call into being a secret, a secret which is hidden from the reader through this process of honest deception.

For Miss Fellowes the dead pigeon is a proof, demonstrating that there is something behind the fog. She picks it up, taking a wing, as if to secure her proof, but her motives behind the deed are not shown. Yet, once she picks it up, she won't be able to get rid of it, she will wash it³ (with warm water), wrap it up in paper, and

³While washing it, Miss Fellowes is caught in the act by two nannies, who are related to the party, being servants to one of its members. The social difference between them and Miss Fellowes makes

carry it with her for the remainder of the story.⁴ This brown parcel, secured with strings, containing the well washed body of a dead bird demonstrates the genesis of a complex secret. Having been wrapped up, the pigeon, with all the personal and impersonal secrets attached to its death, is transformed into a literal secret, the brown paper wrapping simultaneously confirming and denying its presence.⁵ From this point on, the pigeon's existence will be a mystery, the pigeon being transformed into an entity possessing the power of existence, but entirely devoid of any possibility of a definition.

After the initial act of picking it up, Miss Fellowes is unable to get rid of the bird; once she gets as far as having Robin Adams sent on the errand of dropping the parcel into a waste basket,⁶ but later on she will be careful to retrieve it and carry it along. Perhaps it is the secret Miss Fellowes shares with the pigeon which binds them together, and perhaps it is the burden of the bird which causes Miss Fellowes's illness. (This illness by the way, is also a secret which some members of the party are trying to keep from other members.)

Later on, Miss Fellowes will reflect twice on the question of picking up the pigeon, (just as she had looked up twice); once after having washed it -

she had been right she felt, she could not have left it there and besides
someone might have stepped on it and that would have been disgusting,
she was glad she had washed it

(394)

-and once in the nightmarish dreams of her illness:

It might have been an argument with death. ... And another voice asked her
why she had brought a pigeon, was it right to order whisky, did she think
... And she argued why shouldn't she order whisky ... and as for the pigeon

them keep the secret of having seen her wash a dead bird with warm water. They consider it "improper," therefore they will refuse to talk about it, aside from a few nervous whisperings here and there.

⁴This point in the plot has led to frequent comparisons to Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The Mariner was forced to tell his tale, his secret, Miss Fellowes however will keep it to herself.

⁵The bird in the parcel is very much like the Lockean concept of *substance*, or the Kantian concept of the *ding an sich*.

⁶This is the first of the many futile errands, another motive recurring all through the novel. People ask each other to carry obsolete messages, or send each other on errands which are made impossible by the circumstances.

it was saving the street-cleaner trouble, when they died they were never left out to rot in the streets nowadays.

(452-453)

Both of the explanations are unsatisfactory, because, just like the nannies, the reader also feels Miss Fellowes's actions 'improper', and, as the deed transcends the realm of everyday rationality, the explanation should likewise transcend it. It does not do so, and, consequently, it is an unsatisfactory explanation.

According to Rod Mengham, "The novel's obsession with motive is replaced by a fascination with narrative where everything is 'unexplained'."⁷ The obsession with motive, however, is present in this lack of explanation. 'Everything unexplained' may mean that there is no explanation, or it may mean that the explanation exists, only it is a secret, and therefore is not given. In the first paragraph of the novel there are only two events the reasons for which would belong in the category of 'everything,' one being the bird's death, and one being Miss Fellowes' picking it up. For Miss Fellowes apparently both are unexplained; for the reader, only the second is a mystery. Just as the bird's body worked as a proof in Miss Fellowes case, the clearly formulated explanation for the first event can be interpreted as a hint, pointing at the existence of another secret, namely some kind of reasonable explanation which could account for what Miss Fellowes did.

The first paragraph illustrates the different levels of secrecy, and the complex devices utilised for hiding them, hinting at them, or revealing them. There are four phenomena to be considered in the paragraph; the bird's death, the reason behind the bird's death, Miss Fellowes's picking it up, and the reason behind Miss Fellowes's picking it up. Out of these four three are secret to some degree; only the fact that Miss Fellowes picks up the pigeon is seen with equal clarity by Miss Fellowes and the reader alike.

The pigeon is cleaned and wrapped up, but the figure of the bird keeps recurring: it pops up in the conversations or the memories of the others. Julia remembers that once she saw swallows flying under a bridge; later she thinks they were pigeons. In the manservants' conversation the whole pigeon incident is presented, while neither of the two men may know anything about it:

'Go on if you lie and pick up some bird, alive or dead, Thomson and get yourself your cup of tea if you feel like it.'

⁷Mengham, 31.

'What do you mean alive or dead?'
 'Alive or dead? I meant nothing.'
 'Not wrapped up in brown paper you didn't?'
 'What's that?'
 'Oh, nothing.'

(472)

In a conversation about Embassy Richard, Max makes the following observation: "‘If he was a bird,’ he said, ‘he would not last long.’ Julia asked him what on earth he meant and got no answer" (417). Once again the existence of the secret is pointed at, by characters who should be, and are, perfectly ignorant of it. When forced to reflect on their utterances, neither Max nor the manservant knows what he meant. Actually, both believe that they meant ‘nothing’. The secret of the pigeon will transform the apparently meaningless remarks into surprising revelations of the truth. Thus, secrets seem to be powerful entities, which have the strength to transcend the law of ordinary communication. Nobody knows what is the secret of the dead pigeon, but on a subconscious level everybody knows about it.

The frequent reoccurrence of the bird incident is called ‘symbolic’ in almost all the studies written on *Party Going*, though no one is able to clearly state what it may symbolise. Fair enough: the dead body of a white pigeon seems to be much more than a simple object. It is packed with such powerful mythological and Biblical allusions that treating it as a symbol seems not only legitimate but almost compulsory. The evident nature of the birds’ importance is contrasted with the absolute lack of explanation concerning its presence, and it is this very contrast which leads to the pressing need of some clarification. Once again, the problem is the lack of consistency. The bird may be interpreted differently at each new occurrence. A bad omen, an apocalyptic warning, alluding to the myth of the Biblical Flood, a representation of Miss Fellowes’s soul, foreshadowing her illness, or a parallel for Amabel, the pigeon seems to be not so much a symbol as a sign, some kind of complex hint pointing toward a secret entity, which may be hiding behind the textual fog of the novel’s structure.

In *Party Going*, very often the same events reoccur. Alex keeps mixing drinks all the time, Robin, Angela Cravy’s young man, goes away and comes back three times, Julia keeps looking for her charms almost continuously, and she exploits every possibility to send Robert Hingnam on absolutely impossible errands. The

conversations are likewise repetitive, Aunty May's illness⁸ and Embassy Richard's story sooner or later will turn up in every conversation, and then the conversing parties will make their guesses and state their opinions regarding the matter. All this could be extremely boring, were it not for the steadily increasing tension.

At one point in the novel there is a remark which cannot be attributed to any of the characters and may thus be considered Green's own, casting light on the repetitive nature of the text: "People, in their relations with one another, are continually doing similar things but never for similar reasons." (446) In his book, Keith C. Odom quotes Green, saying: "people probably cannot know in real life 'what other people are really like.' even more definitely, he says 'we certainly do not know what other people are thinking and feeling.'" ⁹ Thus repetition is accounted for and acquires an aura of secrecy. People are doing similar things for different reasons, reasons which cannot be known by other people. But if the only distinction between different people resides in the difference of the reasons determining their actions, (which is a secret and cannot be known) then people will lack real distinction, and will become uniform. Evelyn Henderson, whose financial situation turns her into an outsider,¹⁰ is sufficiently detached from the party to be able to observe this uniformity: "If people vary at all then it can only be in the impressions they leave on others' minds and if their turns of phrases are similar and if their rooms are done up by the same firm and, when they are women, if they go to the same shops, what is it makes them different, Evelyn asked herself" (464). People are hopelessly standardised; if there is any difference at all, then it must reside in the 'impressions they leave on others' minds'.

At some stages of the novel not only other people's feelings and thoughts are unknowable, people are not simply uniformised, but their very existence is questioned. Once it is Robert who thinks that people are "a store of tailors' dummies, water heated" (408), and once it is the man whose accent is constantly shifting from educated to uneducated,¹¹ running on Robert's errand, who sees the crowd as "thousands of tailors' dummies stored warm on a warehouse floor" (483)

⁸ Claire, her niece will make every effort to keep it a secret, but her attempts prove to be unsuccessful.

⁹ Odom, 25; Odom quotes Green and the source he is referring to is Henry Green: *A novelist to his readers*, *The Listener*, XLIV (Nov. 9, 1950), pp. 505-506

¹⁰ Everybody is careful to mention that it is Max who finances the party, for the sake of 'poor Evelyn Henderson' who could not afford it.

¹¹ This is a recurring figure in Henry Green's novels, the character, who is puzzling everybody else by the constant technique of shifting his accent through different ranges, thus defying placement in any social class.

On the surface nobody seems to care, and only common secrets are discussed, such as the Embassy Richard affair. The apparent casualness is not genuine however; a touch of frustration is present, everyone is eager to find out what the others are thinking and why. Alex Alexander gives a clear but superficial definition of this practice:

if you were girls and went out to a party then it seemed to him you thought only of how you were doing, of how much it looked to others you were enjoying yourself and worse than that of how much whoever might be with you could give you reasons for enjoying it.

(494)

Alex fails to show how important all this really is, but seen together with Evelyn Henderson's already quoted remark that people vary "only ... in the impressions they leave on others' minds" it becomes evident that this practice is the only possible means of self-assertion.

In the constant communication demanded by this practice of self-assertion (which is partying), secrets play a central part. All members of the party have their own secrets and suspicions, and make every effort to keep the secrets and find good enough reasons for suspicion. Some secrets are short lived, some suspicions are unconfirmed, some secrets are not even secrets but only pretensions, yet secrecy seems able to transform the commonest everyday practices into affairs of mysterious significance.

On a surface level, secrets may simply serve as means for intrigue -for instance, when Amabel arrives,¹² only she and Max know that her arrival had been unexpected. Everybody else believes she was only late. She feels her position insecure, and therefore she starts whispering with Angela. "She began to make secrets which was her way when she did not know how things would turn out." (480) True secrets though, just like the secret behind the pigeon incident, are entities on their own, and possess the power of bestowing significance on everything else.

The story of the artichoke bamboo patch, to which I shall immediately turn, will illustrate the way such secrets define the structure of communication in the novel, and will show how apparently unimportant events may assume personal significance when touched by a secret.

¹²Her arrival is mysterious in itself, because we know that the hotel is separated from the outside by the steel door well before she arrives. Nobody seems to notice this though, and how she managed to get in will remain secret.

There are four people involved, Julia, Robert, Claire, Robert's wife and Max. Julia, Claire and Robert have been brought up together. In Robert's garden there was a patch of overgrown artichokes which they as children playfully considered a bamboo patch. What Robert remembers is that;

When small he had found patches of bamboo in his parents' garden and it was his romance at that time to force through them, they grew so thick you could not see what temple might lie in ruins just beyond.

(407-408)

Thus, what he knows is that the 'bamboo patch' held the possibility of a secret. Something might have been there. Later he talks about it with Julia:

when we were small there was a bamboo patch in the kitchen garden ... we used to imagine there was something out of the way in the middle of it ... Claire was practically brought up with us, wasn't she ... we never told her about those bamboos. Curious, wasn't it?

(415)

Robert believes that he and Julia have been sharing a secret ever since their childhood. They have never told about it to Claire, whom in the meantime Robert had married, and this fact gives a further touch of intimacy to their friendship. When Julia is telling Max about her charms, she also tells him about the bamboo patch, revealing the secret Robert believed to know, but actually did not, namely that there really was something in the middle of the bamboo patch.

She went on to say what Robert had never known was that one of her charms, the wooden pistol, had been buried plumb in the middle of the bamboo patch. In consequence, and no one had ever known of it, these bamboos, or probably they had been overgrown artichokes, had taken on a great importance in her mind because of this secret buried in them

(442)

Julia tells Max what no one has ever known that the suspected secret was really there in the middle of the bamboo patch. Robert does not know what gives the patch such a tremendous importance, he can only guess that it must have been some secret. By not telling Claire he is attempting to appropriate the secret he does not know. Julia is sharing her secret with Max, which is an act of intimacy, but it is

possible that she only does this to avoid other, definitely less verbal acts of intimacy:

Again he came over as if to sit on the arm of her chair.
 'If you do that, 'she said getting up, 'I shan't be able to tell you about my top.'
 He thought bother her top.

(445)

Max is apparently not interested in the story of Julia's charms,¹³ but she is determined to tell him everything.

She explained that each time they went through those artichokes pretending they were explorers in jungles, she was excited because she knew she had buried her pistol there and because the others did not know. She felt her experiment had made their game more secret, and that it was this secrecy which was what Robert remembered of it. 'So that it was my having hidden the pistol there which made the whole thing for him. He'll never know.' she said.

(442- 443)

Julia's secret is like a stone thrown in a pond, which is, through Julia's excitement, emitting waves, waves serving as signals, telling about its existence. When the man with the shifting accent, whom Robert had hired, is pushing through the crowd, he only knows that he is to search for Miss Julia Wray's luggage, and is unaware of the fact that the real motive of his being sent is Julia's collection of her charms. Just like Robert in the childhood bamboo patch, the shifting accent man is on an unconscious quest for Julia's pistol. And, as he is pushing through the crowd, he mysteriously shares Robert's experience of pushing through the patch: "To push through this crowd was like trying to get through bamboo or artichokes grown thick together or thousands of tailors' dummies stored warm on a warehouse floor." (483)

Thus, Julia's pistol, or the secret behind Julia's pistol, made the artichoke patch become an entity of its own, capable of intruding in the thoughts of all who are associated with the pistol. The relation, however, is twofold, and saying that the artichoke patch turned the pistol into a 'charm' would be equally legitimate. The two

¹³ According to Edward Stokes Julia's 'charms' can be interpreted as Freudian symbols of her sexual organs. In this case Max would certainly be much more interested in the 'charms' themselves than in the story of the 'charms'.

are united in a secret, and the significance they seem to possess originates from there.

Just as Miss Fellowes's parcel would lose its essence after the pigeon was taken out of it, bereft of their secrets Green's character's would scarcely amount to more than tailor's dummies. The fog only allows casual glances, but these moments of clarity accumulate, and inductively convince us, that though our perception is merely temporal, the presence behind the fog is permanent. "The evidence points in many ways,"¹⁴ though it seems that the subtle network of secrecy and secret association constituting the core of Henry Green's novel serves as a model demonstrating the transcendental nature of fictional existence. By showing the secret behind certain objects Green may in fact suggest that perhaps all things are fashioned in such a way, and on these grounds secrecy may evolve into the ultimate structure sustaining the whole construction of a fictional reality.

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¹⁴Kermode (1979), 89.

'So leastward on'

Reduction and the Absurd in Samuel Beckett's Late Drama¹

The overall tendency towards reduction which ensued in Samuel Beckett's artistic career after his first non-stage (radio) play *All That Fall* in 1956, and which is a peculiarity instantly given away by the lessening number of pages and dramatic characters, is rather difficult to overlook. Another widespread view classifies Beckett's plays as belonging to the absurdist tradition, and the link between these two characteristics does not seem altogether unnatural considering the famous Beckettian statement of 1949 about a new art which would, rather absurdly (in a non-technical sense), prefer the expression that

there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.

(*'Three Dialogues'*)²

However, since no other absurdist playwright seems to have imposed as severe limitations on his work as Beckett did, the relationship between reductionism and the absurd appears to be, if not uneasy, at least not evident. One of the main concerns of this essay is to try to investigate how and why, in Beckett's case, these two trends should have become intertwined.

¹ The quoted phrase in the title comes from *Worstward Ho* 119. In what follows, references to Beckett's works will be given using the abbreviations listed in the Appendix. The page numbers refer to the editions listed in the bibliography.

² "Three Dialogues," *Disjecta* 139. Like all of the dialogues, this notorious statement should, however, be taken with a (large) pinch of salt.

I shall start with a brief description of Beckett's reductionism in his shorter plays (starting with *All That Fall*), with occasional references to his late prose. This will be followed by an attempt at interpreting these phenomena, and linking them to the absurdist tradition. Finally, I shall try to offer for consideration some very general attitudes which might have influenced Beckett in the creation of his peculiar reductionist variant of the absurd.

DRAMA WRITING DEGREE ZERO

E M Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* made a seminal distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters, the former being 'constructed around a single idea or quality,'³ while the latter significantly more complex and capable of convincingly surprising the reader.⁴ It appears that Beckett's shorter plays can be described as exhibiting a move from the fairly 'round' towards the radically 'flat.' This statement would indeed apply not only in respect of characters, since such a reduction seems to be operating at all of what one might crudely describe as the three main sensuous 'faces' of dramatic representation: characters, stage action and the spoken word.⁵

Such is the radicalism, however, of Beckett's reductions, and the variety of modern literature after Forster conceived of his idea in 1927, that instead of this binary distinction it appears beneficial to adopt a more pluralistic one. Basing the metaphor, this time, on a slightly more complicated geometry, one could theoretically distinguish between phenomena of any number of dimensions, defined as their 'significant aspects' or 'relevant systems of meaning.' Of all these dimensions, then, Forster's 'flatness' would correspond to 'very few dimensions' (one or two), and his 'roundness' to 'sufficiently many to seem natural.' More significantly, though, the system would also invite an additional recognition of the two extreme cases of zero and infinitely many dimensions, which could, arguably be used to grasp the differences of such radical literary experiments as, for instance, Beckett's late drama or Joyce's late prose.⁶

³ Forster 75.

⁴ Forster 85.

⁵ I shall assume that representation, as an attempt to convey some sort of meaning or value through sensuous form, is a relevant aspect of most works of literature, if not art in general.

⁶ This difference, summed up in the critical commonplace that 'Joyce puts in and Beckett takes out' (Feshbach 593), can be briefly described as follows. If, as I shall argue, Beckett's writing approaches infinitesimal dimensions, Joyce's (in *Finnegans Wake*) could be said to have a tendency towards infinity. The text of *Finnegans Wake* is striving to invite as many frames of reference as possible: words evoke several others in various languages, character configurations correspond to dozens of configurations of fictional or real persons, actions are identified with various other actions. There is no theoretical limit to the number of connections readers can make: the number of possible frames of

Characters

Considering the dimensions related to characters first, one can argue that *All That Fall* in Mrs Rooney offers a sufficiently well-rounded character of several dimensions, with various aspects which determine and describe her, and along which she can be interpreted: nation, social status, religion, family, gender, age, physique, aspirations (death) and the basic condition (living on), with these last two dimensions being arguably the strongest. This bias points towards other plays, where we often find characters with fewer meaningful aspects to them. In a number of cases there seem to be two such aspects (e.g. gender and having to live on, as in *Play*), whereas perhaps more often there is only one overwhelming dimension, that of being human beings, of being confined and doomed to living on (as, for example, in *AWW1*, *AWW2* or *Quad*). Indeed, this could be taken as the zero dimension of human being: a default void of any additional meaning.

A brief look at the names that Beckett gives his characters is relevant here. Mrs Rooney and Miss Fitt (of *ATF*) or Krapp (of *KLT*) bear names which, though emphasising one particular dimension ('ruiny,' 'misfit' and 'crap'), are socially and officially acceptable forms which sound 'normal' enough. So do the names of Ada and Henry (*Emb*), which stress the aspect of familiarity (and family).

In contrast, Flo, Vi and Ru (*CG*) or Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom (*WW*) seem to have been reduced to a status lower than that of socially recognizable human beings, with perhaps one real dimension: they are females (in *CG*) or males (in *WW*), with the indication that they are minimally distinct in that they are not each other and still retain some appearance of individuality. (In fact, the existence of Bem, Bim, and Bom is in itself questionable, as *What Where* could be interpreted, along with other pieces by Beckett, as mere mental occurrences within the closed space of a mind; in this case, Bam's.)⁷ A further step is the resort to solely gender distinctions, mostly abbreviated or pronominalised into generality: He, She (*RR1*), W1, W2, M (*Play*), M, M1, W (*btc*), W (*Rock*). Similarly, some characters are reduced to the dimension of one function: Opener (*Casc*), Auditor (*NI*), Listener (*TT*), Speaker (*PM*). Beckett often does not even make a clear distinction between characters and other elements: set, movements, or music are repeatedly listed on a par with characters in his plays, as if reinforcing the sense of their severely reduced humanity.

reference is infinite. Although Beckett and Joyce are obviously extreme cases, the general tendencies towards limiting and multiplying frames of reference could have a wider application. (The avoidance of exact dimension numbers in the non-extreme cases is a consequence, and indication, of the non-triviality of exact assignments of concrete aspects.)

⁷ See Jonathan Kalb on *All That Fall* as having reality only in Maddie's mind.

What could be seen as zero dimensionality in this respect is the pure unmotivated algebraisation and numbering of characters, where the implication of the 'names' is mere difference: A, B, C (*AWW2*), A, B (*RT1*), A, B, C (*RT2*), or 1, 2, 3, 4 (*Quad*).

Another relevant aspect of dramatic characters is their visual appearance. This, of course, is lost (zero-dimensional) in the radio plays. That this might have been a powerful attraction for Beckett towards the genre of radio plays seems rather likely from the fact that he often uses disembodied voices in his stage and television plays as well: there is no visual aspect to the voices in *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *Footfalls*, *Ghost Trio*, etc. Another bodiless quasi-character is point of view in Beckett's television plays, which actually appears as a separate character (E for 'eye') in his *Film*.

The visual fragmentation of characters is a further device typical of Beckett. Thus, the Listener is only a face in *That Time*; the bodies of W1, W2 and M are hidden in urns in *Play*; in *Not I*, one of the two characters is a mouth; in *Nacht und Traume*, two of the four characters are mere hands.

When characters do appear on stage in full, their individualising characteristics are minimised: nondescript grey and white hair, faces, and non-distinctive cloaks abound.

Stage Action

Similarly, stage action is also severely limited in Beckett's shorter plays. As this is another primarily visual aspect, the radio plays can be said to have this dimension, too, reduced to zero.⁸ The only later piece that contains action in open space seems to be *Film*, but even this closes the space up and, by the third and last part, confines it to a room, the characteristic venue of Beckett's plays. In the television plays, the movements within this room are very carefully plotted out by Beckett. As an extreme case of this, the numbered players of *Quad* move on fully determined repetitive tracks, rather like pieces on a game board, having no degree of freedom whatsoever. Indeed, in the later Beckett, a typical reduction of stage action is to 'movement' in the chess-like sense of 'pacing.'

The stage plays, apart from *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Catastrophe*, mostly limit the movement to one axis: the goad and the characters move horizontally along the edge of the stage in *Act Without Words II* and *Come and Go*, whereas the significant movement is vertical in *Act Without Words I* and *Nacht und Traume*. Often, stage movement has zero dimension, and the characters stand or sit inertly, as in *Play* or *That Time*.

⁸ From a less visual point of view, *All That Fall* can, again, be seen as containing 'round', fairly many-dimensional, lifelike action, which then becomes significantly more limited in the later pieces for the radio.

The Spoken Word

Language was still 'round' in *All That Fall*, and through Irishisms and other peculiarities it reflected national, cultural, social and personal traits. In the later plays, Beckett seems to have put an emphasis on bleaching these frames of reference out of his plays, leaving behind only the denotative, primary meanings of words - or not even those.⁹ In a sense, the purest form of denotation could be achieved when no words are spoken on stage (as in *AWW1*, *AWW2*, *Film*). As the audience do not know the actual text of the piece, which in such cases is a set of bare stage directions, they are encountered, ideally, with only the pure extension, or referents (the things to which they refer), of these stage directions as they are acted out on stage.¹⁰ Other major examples of Beckett's efforts to reduce linguistic representation are the numerous speechless characters of his plays (C in *FT2*, Joe in *EJ*, the Auditor in *Not I*), while the utterances of characters who do speak are also kept at a low number of common neutral words, frequently repeated.

Although the overall elimination of the spoken word from some plays appears to be more radical than mere repetitions, the latter also might be seen as the more severe of these reductions. For Beckett's repetitions do not only reflect a wearing away of possible particularities, or connotations, of meaning, but they frequently reveal a breach between the use of the word and any sort of meaning. Like Lucky's 'thinking aloud' in *Waiting for Godot*, Words'(s) repetitions of the same fragments of language in *Words and Music* to describe radically different concepts seems to suggest an underlying emptiness: what the torn veil of language reveals behind it might be Nothingness.¹¹

Breath

The most extreme example of Beckett's reductionism is, arguably, his roughly half-minute theatre piece *Breath*. Since character, stage action and language are all approaching the infinitesimal in the 'play', this is probably the least a dramatic piece can be and still not be nothing. *Breath*, of course, is not Beckett's last work, and I do not wish to argue for a chronologically smooth process of ever increasing

⁹ I use 'denotation' here in a sense excluding any emotional, cultural or historical connotations, but including the logical duality of extension and intension.

¹⁰ That Beckett had thought of trying to directly reach the referents, or the world behind the words, is illustrated by a famous statement of his from 1937: 'And more and more my language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it' (Beckett's German letter to Axel Kaun, transl Martin Esslin, *Disjecta* 171). This point will be taken up later again in this essay.

¹¹ See the quotation in the previous note. What I propose here does not exclude the possibility of some sort of meaning emerging from the connections of words with each other, without necessary reference to the external world.

reductions in the writer's career. What seems, however, a sensible conclusion to this overview of the conventional constituents of character, stage action and the spoken word is that Beckett was apparently trying to reduce these representational aspects to as few dimensions as possible. Taking this to a logical extreme, he occasionally attempts a dangerous total reduction, that is he attempts to eliminate representation itself. He does this in drama, the most blatantly representational of all literary forms: *reductio ad absurdum*.

DISCONNECTIONS

Why would Beckett engage in such a seemingly irrational project of representing (for he *was* writing for the audience) without representations? In Beckett's case, one does not expect the reason to be mere lack of logic on the playwright's part. As the answer would seem to hinge on some *separation* of what represents and what should be represented, it might be useful to see whether any such idea would be borne out by the plays.

It has been mentioned that certain types of repetitions seem to question the necessary links between the use of a word and the conveyance of meaning. A similar breach between word and meaning is hinted at in *Krapp's Last Tape*, when the recorded Krapp utters words (*memorable equinox* and *viduity*, pp. 57, 59) which have become meaningless for the older Krapp. The latter episode is emphasised by Krapp's attempt to eliminate the breach by using a dictionary, which leaves him newly confused, as more words do not appear to guarantee more or clearer meaning:

[*Reading from dictionary.*] State - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or - widower. [*Looks up. Puzzled.*] Being - or remaining? ...
(KLT 59)

A curious type of mismatch between referring word and the thing referred to is encountered in *All That Fall*, where the grossly exaggerated sound effects that follow the utterance of the corresponding word render the reality of the referent more than questionable. Of course, the fact that the sounds are highly at odds with Mrs Rooney's words only reinforce this discrepancy:

All is still. No living soul in sight. The word is feeding. The wind - [*Brief wind.*] - scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds - [*Brief chirp.*] - are tired singing. The cows - [*Brief moo.*] - and sheep - [*Brief baa.*] - ruminates in silence. The dogs - [*Brief bark.*] - are hushed and the hens - [*Brief cackle.*]

- sprawl torpid in the dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask.
(*ATF* 32)

Words also become disconnected, in very late works by Beckett, on the textual level, as essential conjunctions, verbs, auxiliaries and inflections are lost:

And now. This night. Up at nightfall. Every nightfall. Faint light in room.
Whence unknown. None from window. No. Next to none. No such thing
as none.

(*PM* 265)

On somehow on. Anyhow on. Say all gone. So on. In the skull all gone.
All? No. All cannot go. Till dim go.

(*WWH* 114)

Sometimes, dotted silences (also) indicate lost continuity within characters' trains of thought:

- sleep...no further...no more searching...to find him...in the dark...to see
him...to say him...for whom...that's it...no matter...never him...never
right...start again...in the dark...done with that...this time...it's the right
one...we're there...nearly...finish -

(*Casc* 141)

Connections are regularly missing between voices and characters in the case of Beckett's disembodied voices and mute characters. Even more blatant is the breach with those characters who, like Krapp (*KLT*), manipulate their own externalised (recorded) voices, while remaining (largely) speechless themselves. This seems to be rather similar to *Film*, where the protagonist's sense of vision (E) is separated from his objectified self (O).

Typical Beckettian characters include blind (Pozzo in Act II of *WG*, Mr Rooney in *ATF*, B in *RTI*) and crippled (A in *RTI*) ones, whose connection to the world outside seems broken. There are breaches in human relationships, as lovers (Mr and Mrs Rooney in *ATF*; W1, W2, M in *Play*; the Speaker in *PM*) do not love their supposed loved ones. As a consequence, an air of being separated and alone surrounds most Beckettian characters.

As far as action is concerned, the only movement the Auditor in *Not I* is capable of is four gradually lessening gestures of 'helpless compassion.' This, in a sense, is the counterpart of the artificial chess-like movement of pacing, an

opposition which might indicate a split between natural areas of human activity. In addition, actions and outcomes, causes and effects are disconnected: there is no rational explanation for what happens in *Act Without Words I*, nor can the consciousness in *Company* arrive at solid conclusions on the basis of phenomena:

So he imagines to himself as voice and hearer pall. But further imagination shows him to have imagined ill. For with what right affirm of faint sound that it is a less faint made fainter by farness and not a true faint near head? Or of a faint fading to fainter that it recedes and not in situ decreases?

(Comp 26)

Like Beckett's world, Beckett's God also seems to display disruptions of this kind. God's Word in the Bible is no longer certain, nor is its meaning:

It wasn't an ass colt at all, you know, I asked the Regius Professor. {...} Yes, it was a hinny he rode into Jerusalem or wherever it was on a hinny. [Pause.] That must mean something. [Pause.] It's like the sparrows, than many of which we are of more value, they weren't sparrows at all.'

(ATF 37)¹²

God's actions do not seem to produce the intended effect:

first thought was...oh long after...sudden flash...she was being punished...for her sins [...] ...she suddenly realised...gradually realised...she was not suffering...imagine!...not suffering!...indeed could not remember...off-hand... when she had suffered less...unless of course she was...*meant* to be suffering...ha!*thought* to be suffering... just as the odd time...in her life...when clearly intended to be having pleasure...she was in fact...having none...not the slightest

(NI 217)

God's love for his creatures is then equally questionable and the notion itself is sufficient to provoke laughter:

"The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." [Silence. They join in wild laughter. {...}]

(ATF 38)

¹² Braces ({}) indicate my omissions.

brought up as she had been to believe...with the other waifs...in a merciful...[Brief laugh.]...God... [Good laugh.]...

(*NI* 217, repeated once more on page

217)

As God seems to be totally separated from the world, there can be no certainty about even his existence: the world is unable to operate as a sign referring to the divine signified.

While the dimension of various aspects of representation often approaches zero, Beckett's plays reveal a world where outcomes are disconnected from actions, effects from causes, signs from meanings, representations from the represented. Far from being without its logic, a project in which a playwright attempts to minimise representation and still somehow convey his meaning seems then to be a frighteningly consistent participation in a world of disconnections.

BECKETT, THE ABSURD AND REDUCTIONISM

As such disconnections deprive inference, meaning and rational thinking of their bases, it is not difficult to find in the Beckettian world the kin of the absurd in Camus's sense of a life lived solely for its own sake in a universe which no longer makes sense (because there is no God to resolve the contradictions).¹³ Whether or not there was a God for Beckett, there is certainly no successful communication with him in the writer's works. The created world is as unable to give evidence of God's existence or explain his meaning in creation as it is unable to provide explanations and meaningfulness in everyday matters.¹⁴

It seems reasonable to say, then, that Beckett's strongest link to the absurdist theatre is a shared sense of lost connections, lost origins, lost frames of reference. We have also seen that in order to convey this sense and emphasise disconnections, Beckett chose to radically reduce certain aspects of representation in his work. The

¹³ Alvarez 15.

¹⁴ Curiously, the etymology of the term *absurd* also goes back to rather Beckettian disconnections. According to the *OED*, Latin *surdus* originally meant 'deaf' and 'mute' as well as 'inaudible' and 'insufferable to the ear,' and with the addition of the intensifying (but normally disjunctive) prefix, it came to mean 'inharmonious,' 'unreasonable' and 'ridiculous.' Deaf and mute, blind and crippled characters, of course, mostly belong to farce, and the ridicule of such characters is now also part of the meaning of the word *absurd* and the tradition of the absurdist theatre.

Naturally, however, the laughter provoked by the absurdist theatre is not the easy laughter of comedy. To have pure comedy, as well as tragedy, there has to be a solid framework of meaning shared by playwright and audience (if not by all characters). As such a framework would be lacking in Beckett's view, it seems natural that after *Waiting for Godot* (a 'tragicomedy'), he ceased to use the terms 'tragedy' and 'comedy' in generic descriptions of his later plays.

question asked in the introduction now arises again: What made Beckett decide by exactly this reductionist way to achieve his goal?

A possible aspect of the writer's eventual preferences can be sought in certain intellectual influences that could have had an effect on Beckett's attitudes towards representation. I propose to consider two systems of thought to which Beckett was exposed: Calvinist Protestantism and the philosophy of Descartes.

In Protestantism and Descartes, like in the theatre of the absurd, the question of representation is bound up with the relationships between word and meaning, body and mind, the world and God. Specifically, a typical concept of God in Protestantism is that of the transcendental God, who, in contrast with the immanent God of, for instance, sacramental Catholicism, does not dwell in the created world.¹⁵ As an effect of this, the world is tainted with imperfection and evil, and so is, as a consequence of the Fall of Man, the human body, which partakes of the corruption of the dedivinized world. Similarly, worldly signs are imperfect, even deceptive conveyors of pure meaning. The two basic types of faith (immanentist and transcendental) are, then, closely linked to two extreme attitudes towards signs, namely the iconophile and the iconophobe traditions, characterised by their respective trust and distrust of material representations. Protestantism's general affinity towards the latter can be seen attested to by its ascetic, puritanical trends as well as by its active iconoclasm in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, and the controversies, in the same period, surrounding the use of figurative language.¹⁶

The philosophy of Descartes, one of Beckett's favourite thinkers,¹⁷ can, among other things, reinforce the clear Protestant preference for the non-material. In Descartes' Dualism, mind and body are strictly distinct, and indeed substantially different, the mind (*res cogitans*) coming from God and immortal, while the body, which belongs to the material world (*res extensa*), is perishable.¹⁸ Therefore, the body is inferior, and the Cartesian definition of existence (*Cogito ergo sum*, 'I think therefore I am') is solely based on the mind.

¹⁵ I am referring to overall theological approaches, as distinct from everyday religious practice. See Endean 1981 on the transcendental and immanent God as alternative models for the relationship between God and the created world. Paul Tillich identifies a similar difference between sacramental and mystical faith, which he describes as the two basic ontological types of faith (1957, 58-64). See Tillich (1962) 96-97 on the 'dedivinization' of nature and iconoclasm in Calvinism.

¹⁶ Cf. Chapter 2 of Gilman for Puritan attacks on figurative language in 16th- and 17th-century England. A parallel trend in science is described by Horne.

¹⁷ Beckett's exceptional interest in and affinity to Descartes is indicated by the fact that, according to Deirdre Bair, he 'read Descartes voraciously and filled three large loose-leaf notebooks with his own thoughts and impressions as well as excerpts from critics and biographers' while he was at Trinity College (Bair 52). Also see Feshbach 593, 601.

¹⁸ Fürst 40-41.

I would like to argue that, although Beckett's endorsement of these systems of thought or even their premises (like the existence of God) might well be questioned, these mental patterns could still have had a lasting influence on his attitudes.

As early as 1937, Beckett described his literary ideal in religious terms as language's 'Descent to Hell,' as opposed to the 'apotheosis of the word,' or its 'Ascension to Heaven,' in Joyce's last work, *Finnegans Wake*. Significantly, he objects to the idea that there would be something 'paralysingly holy' in the word, and that this could prevent that 'terrible materiality of the word surface' from being 'capable of being dissolved.' Beckett names such a dissolution as the highest goal for writers of the age, as reaching it would mean that holes would be bored into 'vicious' language, 'until what lurks behind it - be it something or nothing- might seep through' and be reached.¹⁹

Although Beckett later dismissed this letter, one of his very few explicit written statements concerning his own works, as 'German bilge,' these ideas are far from being alien to the world of Beckett's later works. In these, too, the body is all too imperfect, stricken by numerous ailments and disabilities, inertia and impotence. Every act is a failure, and no attempt at correction can guarantee success:

All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again.
Fail again. Fail better.

(*WWH*, 101)²⁰

One's efforts are incapable of bringing about success, and to minimise failure, the only reasonable choice is between ceasing to do, or be, altogether, or carrying on, with as little pain (and action) as possible.

Language likewise is imperfect, stricken by numerous ailments and disabilities, inertia and impotence. Every act of speech is a failure, and no attempt at correction can guarantee success: "Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid" (*WWH*, 101).

One's efforts are incapable of bringing about perfect communication, and to minimise miscommunication, the only reasonable choice is between ceasing to say altogether and carrying on, with as few words and misunderstandings as possible. Beckett, an artist having an obligation to express, though nothing with which to express, chose the second option:

So leastward on.²¹

¹⁹ German letter to Axel Kaun, transl Martin Esslin, *Disjecta* 172, *passim*.

²⁰ Cf. 'Any others would do as ill. Almost any. Almost as ill.' (*WWH* 105)

APPENDIX

The dates refer to the year of writing. E (for English) and F (for French) indicate the language in which the work was originally written. Th, R, and TV indicate whether the piece was intended for the theatre, radio, or television.

- ATF**, *All That Fall*, 1956, E, R
AWW1, *Act Without Words I*, 1956, (F), Th
AWW2, *Act Without Words II*, 1956, (F), Th
Bre, *Breath*, 1969, E, Th
btc, *...but the clouds...*, 1976, E
Cat, *Catastrophe*, 1982, F, Th
Casc, *Cascando*, 1962, F, F
CG, *Come and Go*, 1965, E, Th
Comp, *Company*, 1977, E, Prose
EJ, *Eh Joe*, 1965, E, TV
Emb, *Embers*, 1959, E, R
FF, *Footfalls*, 1975, E, Th
Film, 1963, (E), Film:
GT, *Ghost Trio*, 1975, E, TV
KLT, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1958, E, Th
NI, *Not I*, 1972, E, Th
NT, *Nacht und Traume*, 1982, (?), TV

²¹ It is possible to argue that the same can be applied to the late Joyce as well, as the diffuse abundance of *Finnegans Wake*, just like Beckett's reductionism, seems to derive from the idea of the imperfection of language. The main difference is that Joyce does not mistrust language and representation as such, and does not deny the possibility of making sufficient meaning by making a constant effort. For him, increasing the number of words and semantic systems involved increases the possibility of understanding rather than misunderstanding. As with Beckett, these views can be set against a background of theology, and in particular immanentist and iconophile trends of Catholicism. For Joyce, there is always a chance for success after failure: the Fall is always followed by resurrection in *Finnegans Wake*. In Beckett, even failure fails: the rope breaks or is pulled away, and 'God upholdeth,' depriving one of a perfect F/fall and the expectation of resurrection.

- OI**, *Ohio Impromptu*, 1980, E, Th
Play, 1962-3, E, Th
PM, *A Piece of Monologue*, 1979, E, Th
Quad, 1982, (?), TV
Rock, *Rockaby*, 1979-80, E, Th
RR1, *Rough for the Radio I*, 1961, F, R
RR2, *Rough for the Radio II*, early 1960s, F, R
RT1, *Rough for the Theatre I*, 1950s, F, Th
RT2, *Rough for the Theatre II*, 1950s, F, Th
TT, *That Time*, 1974-5, E, Th
WM, *Words and Music*, 1961, E, R
WW, *What Where*, 1983, E, Th
WWH, *Worstward Ho*, 1981, E, Prose

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Stella and Rosa¹

The two connected short stories: "The Shawl" and "Rosa" were first published separately in 1980 and in 1983 and only in 1989 were they published together under the title "The Shawl." This title not only identifies the governing symbol of the two short stories but gives priority to the more obviously experimental work of art of the two. This short story marks a significant departure from the traditions of the Holocaust-literature, since non-survivors generally do not write directly about the inmates' experiences in the concentration camps². The second, considerably longer novella: "Rosa" takes place in the terrain traditionally available to non-survivor artists, namely in post-Holocaust America. However, this short story for a brief period also crosses that border and writes directly about the Warsaw Ghetto.

As even the title of Cynthia Ozick's short story "Rosa" shows, the protagonist of the story is obviously Rosa Lublin, a survivor of the Holocaust³. However, in or-

¹ This essay was for publication by Alan Rosen (Bar Ilan University).

² Breaking this tradition was the result of a long internal debate. The main stages of Ozick's inner fight, can be traced in her writings clearly. Amy Gottfried calls attention to the fact that "Ozick herself has long been concerned with the differences between recorded history and art, stating in 1969 that Jewish writers must 'retrieve the Holocaust freight car by freight car, town by town, road by road, document by document. The task is to save it from becoming literature.'" (Gottfried 40.) Ozick stated the next step of her struggle with herself at a roundtable discussion at a conference held in 1987: "Finally, about writing fiction. In theory, I'm with Theodor Adorno's famous dictum: after Auschwitz, no more poetry. And yet, my writing has touched on the Holocaust again and again. I cannot *not* write about it. It rises up and claims my furies. All the same, I believe that the duty of our generation, so close to the events themselves, is to absorb the data, to learn what happened. I am not in favor of making fiction of the data, or of mythologizing or poeticizing it. [...] I constantly violate this tenet; my brother's blood cries out from the ground, and I am drawn and driven." (Lang 284.)

³ One certainly feels reluctant to use the term "survivor" describing Rosa after reading her opinion: "Consider also the special word they used: survivor. ...As long as they didn't have to say human being.

der to understand this work of art one needs to examine closely the special love-hate-dependence relationship between the two Holocaust survivors: Rosa and Stella⁴. While analyzing the two short stories: "The Shawl" and "Rosa" together, one can see clearly that Stella is the real central figure of Rosa's life. For both of them the other has been especially important from the beginning. In their relationship Stella's original motives and needs were clear. She wanted to turn Rosa into her lost mother, but Rosa who was quite young herself (she was only twenty- three) and had been protected in all her life could not enter this role, although she fully realized Stella's need. However, she used her niece, the only living member of her family, as a special reference person. Sentences such as the following indicate this clearly:

Sometimes the electricity inside the fence would seem to hum, *even Stella* said it was only an imagining, but Rosa heard real sounds in the wire: grainy sad voices.

(9) [italics are mine]

Moreover, Rosa's ways to address her niece, the epithets and all the other words she uses in connection with Stella, reflect her ambivalent and extremely intensive feelings. She associates the very same words with Stella as with the other two people who evoke strong feelings in her: Magda and Dr. Tree. On the one hand, she calls Stella "Angel", "Dear one", "Golden", "Lovely", "Beautiful", etc. On the other hand, she uses the word "bloodsucker", her strongest and most accurate word to characterize Dr. Tree and his kind, also in connection with Stella.

Both of the short stories start with a name: "The Shawl" with Stella's first name and "Rosa" with the protagonist's full name. This, on the one hand, directs readers to pay close attention to both Stella and Rosa. On the other hand, it

It used to be refugee, but by now there was no such creature, no more refugees, only survivors. A name like a number..." However, I hope to use this word in an entirely different context.

4 "The Shawl" is an extremely intensive and complex work of art. Thus, there are numerous valuable approaches to the two connected short stories. The relationship between the two survivors has not been explored in depth yet. Alan L. Berger mentions one important aspect of this relationship: "By having both Stella and Persky insist that Rosa cannot live in the past, Ozick underscores not only the difference between survivors and refugees, but points out varying orientations amongst survivors themselves". (Berger 124.) However, he is mainly interested in exploring the Jewish images, tradition, and their significance in the two connected short stories, and placing them into the American Jewish Literature (Berger 52-54, 120-126.). Other scholars, such as Friedman (Friedman 16-17, 113-121.) and Kauvar are mainly interested in placing the two short stories into the context of Cynthia Ozick's oeuvre. Kauvar's analysis is especially illuminating concerning the Pagan and the Christian imagery of the two short stories (Kauvar 179-202.).

emphasizes the utter difference between the two realms of reality: the world of the concentration camps and the world afterwards, since pieces of information such as family names are only important in a normal everyday world.⁵ However, this is merely one function of the extremely intense and multifunctional beginnings. Apart from the characters, the common imagery and symbols, etc., the opening of "Rosa" unifies the two short stories very effectively. Immediately the first sentence of the second short story tells the reader everything that has happened to Rosa since the closing scene of the first story. We gain the information that she survived the concentration camp, emigrated to the United States of America, became a shopkeeper, destroyed her own shop and moved to Miami. She is old now (later on one can calculate that the events of the second short story takes place in 1977), extremely unhappy and damaged. She cannot fit into the American society, but she fits in the stereotypical category of Holocaust survivors since she displays the most "obvious" features: she is a madwoman, a scavenger, who acts unpredictably, illogically and violently. Cynthia Ozick has a subtle, slightly ironic way of emphasizing Rosa's not fitting into the American society by saying in the second sentence that moving to Miami was a mad thing to do. An action which is so very natural for other elderly Jewish people is completely insane for her.

Already from the fourth sentence we learn that Stella has survived as well. The way the writer reveals this piece of information together with the title: "Rosa", and the opening words, make the reader aware that as far as this short story is concerned the central character is Rosa. The narrator talks about Stella at first in relation to Rosa: Rosa depends on her and she is Rosa's niece. At this point of the story even Stella's name is not mentioned.

The narrative technique employed by Cynthia Ozick has a very complex impact. The story is told from Rosa's point of view, it presents Rosa's mind, yet it is not told by employing first person narration. The fact that the story is told from the protagonist's point of view is emphasized powerfully by a device inherited from the modernists. Cynthia Ozick builds in phrases characteristic of the protagonist into the language of the narrator without indicating this with quotation marks.⁶ On the one hand, this special third person narration technique shows how deeply the writer is committed to her protagonist, in other words, she stands behind her firmly. Thus, by employing third person narration, the writer introduces a voice independent from Rosa

5 The exact degree to which Rosa and Stella are related to one another is another example of this kind of detail.

6 One of Joyce's major innovations is that he profiles his characters not only by their actual language use, but Joyce builds in phrases characteristic of them into the language of the third-person narration. Hugh Kenner calls this tricky device "uncle Charles Principle." "...the uncle Charles Principle: the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's." (Kenner, 18.) This device is highly confusing because Joyce never bothers to provide the reader with quotation marks.

which takes all of her thoughts seriously, and by transmitting them faithfully, this narrative voice objectifies them to a certain degree. It seems to be a gesture, a way of not leaving the survivor alone, a way of creating a backing to her piercingly lonely voice. On the other hand, this way of narration leaves room, like the first person narration, for irony by rendering Rosa's views and understandings of the world, which are obviously not shared by the writer. It is so sad and ironic to realize how much prejudice against unassimilated Jews and against people from the lower classes Rosa brought with herself from home. One could find these disgusting remarks of hers about Yiddish, Hasidim, Judaism, peasants, working class people, etc. throughout the short novel. Undoubtedly the most hurtful point of the second short story, when Rosa, after talking to Mr. Finkelstein feels so triumphant: "She had no fear of Jews, sometimes she had-it came from her mother, her father-a certain contempt."

By forcing the reader to realize the limited nature of Rosa's understanding, the writer prepares the audience to be suspicious of Rosa's views concerning Stella. As the short story unfolds, Cynthia Ozick provides gradually all the necessary details to enable the reader to realize that Rosa in a peculiar way scapegoats Stella. She tries to escape from blaming herself by blaming Stella. Rosa embodies all her feelings of guilt in Stella. It is human, but of course so extremely unjust that she blames herself for her baby's death (she did not take the risk of giving up Magda during the march, she went after the shawl which was inside the barrack instead of going after the loudly crying child in the arena and covering her mouth with her hands, she did not dare to run towards Magda, etc.). On the one hand, it is extremely painful for the reader to realize that the victim has a sense of guilt, on the other hand one has to see that blaming another victim is morally wrong. Thus, precisely Rosa's psychological self-protecting mechanism is the reason why Stella could not try Rosa's surviving strategy; Stella cannot remember, since then she would have to take responsibility for Magda's death. One of the most painfully ironic elements is that Rosa, who in the above described way took a considerable part in making Stella unable to remember, cannot forgive her for that. She can not forgive that her niece betrayed her by leaving her alone with their common past. She is unable to forgive that the very person who should understand her best and share her feelings, consciously has chosen not to. Rosa's intention for keeping Stella closely beside her was to prevent loneliness, to prevent complete isolation. This was a very natural expectation since the two women went through exactly the same hell together. Rosa even states this in one of her letters to Magda: "Stella was with me the whole time, she knows just what I know." However, Stella did not accept the role that Rosa wanted her to play. So much so, that she reminds Rosa that Magda is dead over and over, urges her to

start a new life, and even buys her striped clothes as a birthday present. This is what the constant reference to Stella's coldness means. Thus, one aspect of the tragedy of the relationship of Rosa and Stella is that neither of the two women was able to accept the roles the other expected from her.

Literally, Rosa shifts all the responsibility over to her niece for all of her uncomfortable thoughts. Rosa is the one who knows that Magda is a child of rape committed by an SS man, but accuses Stella for having a "naturally pornographic mind." However, Rosa herself thinks that Persky stole her underwear.

However, there is a problem with the short story. In spite of the writer's traceable intentions to make the reader careful not to evaluate Stella and what she stands for with Rosa's bias, still, the short story communicates a message that there exists a "good" or at least an expedient way to deal with the trauma of the Holocaust taken by Rosa and a "bad", harmful way taken by Stella. One cause of this phenomenon is that in "Rosa" Cynthia Ozick defines two methods from which a survivor of the Holocaust can choose to fight for an acceptable human life "afterwards". These two methods mutually exclude one another.

The other cause is that Rosa's story has a "happy end," so it can be interpreted as a kind of success story. As opposed to this, Stella's life is shown as a stream of constant failure: She is an old spinster (49 years old) who cannot catch a husband although that is her main ambition. To trap a man is the main reason why she takes evening courses at New York University. She does not make enough money to feel safe. She looks exactly like an American-born person but she has a heavy accent. These troubles are inevitably real problems, in other words real indicators of failure in the eyes of any reader who accepts the American middle class value system. It also shows clearly how deeply Stella is damaged by her past and how obviously she displays the characteristics of a Holocaust survivor. Thus, the reader begins to feel that Stella's life is really a failure, versus Rosa's "success story," and at this point the reader naturally tries to find a reason for this.

The quite obvious answer is an ancient myth. This prefabricated thought which creeps in is that "suffering purifies", or rather consciously chosen and undertaken suffering purifies. The stories of Stella and Rosa suggest that if a person lets him/herself sink deeply, more precisely as deeply as is humanly possible into suffering, rage and insanity, then and only then he/she has a chance to come out of it at the end. The short story makes it also clear that this process is only effective if one takes all the suffering in entirely, sucks on it like the characters of Cynthia Ozick on the shawl, squeezes out every drop of its juice, gets stuffed with it. One must allow oneself to be filled up with it to the point when one becomes a mere container of pain, until one can state "...Before is a dream. After is a joke. Only during stays. And to call it a life is a lie." Thus, part of the problem is that Rosa's surviving strat-

egy is in harmony with our expectations, and Stella's goes against them. These expectations are set by the above described myth. The effect of this train of prefabricated thoughts is enhanced by another belief deeply rooted in the American society: a person whose life is obviously a failure (who is a "looser") has some kind of moral deficiency, he/she is somehow inferior to "winners."

Moreover, Stella's method is not well represented; the reader sees it only through the eyes of somebody who has tried the other way. We are never allowed to hear Stella speaking for herself. The only two occasions when we hear Stella's own voice are in connection with Rosa. Once we hear her voice literally, on the phone, powerless, sleepy, and in addition to all that, she speaks through electric wires, thus, she becomes one of those voices which even she herself thought to be unreal back in the camp. The other such occasion is her letter which should have been accompanied by Magda's shawl. This letter especially clearly reveals that Stella is convinced that the method one takes to win back one's "stolen" life is a result of a conscious choice⁷. That is the reason why she can ask Rosa to stop making herself crazy.

The view on insanity and constant suffering, which is suggested by Cynthia Ozick's short story, and which is supposed to prepare a way for some kind of recovery, is in such a sharp contrast with the general experiences of a lot of survivors, of their families, and of psychologists.: The Holocaust and all experiences in connection with it are so overwhelming that usually those who let insanity and pain possess them are not able to come out of that state again. On the other hand, those who keep themselves under strict control are able to lead a life which they can enjoy.⁸ Thus, it seems that Rosa's accusations according to which her niece tries to forget

7 Cynthia Ozick has a nicely subtle way of indicating the conscious nature of Stella's choice. Stella writes in her letter: "It isn't as if I don't know just exactly how you do it, what its like." This sentence, on the one hand refers to the scene of Rosa's worshipping the shawl, but on the other hand the word "it" can refer to the process of making oneself crazy.

8 "Forgetting, or rather not letting the Holocaust experiences enter one's consciousness, is a way of self-defense" was the finding of several psychological researches. For example the researches carried out in the dream-laboratory of Haifa University. In addition to that, psychologists who work with Holocaust survivors are convinced, and psychological research showed it conclusively that the experience of the Holocaust is unique psychologically. Unique in the respect that one does not stand a chance to resolve it by bringing it up to one's consciousness and confronting it directly. Whereas, bringing up traumas to the patient's consciousness from his/her subconscious and enabling the patient to face and solve the various problems caused by traumatic experiences is the general method followed in psychotherapy. This usual method for Holocaust survivors not only ineffective, but expressly harmful, because remembering and thinking about their Holocaust experiences makes them ill. According to the experience of Péter Popper, the famous Hungarian psychologist, the behavior of those Holocaust survivors who threw themselves into hyperactivity and did not allow themselves to think about their immediate past proved to be the most successful. (Péter Popper's kind verbal help.)

everything, cover a heroic attempt to control one's own life and not to let the past take over.

It is also crucial to understand why Persky is able to save Rosa. What is so special about him that enables this man to perform a miracle? Precisely this person, who has so many features that Rosa learnt at home to despise the most. He is an uneducated, old immigrant, whose family were not assimilated in Poland, who does not think much of philosophy, and does not speak English very well. On the other hand though, Persky is clever, funny, kind, self-confident, determined and patient. He frequently makes witty remarks such as "Only why backwards? I'm an application form? Very good. You apply, I accept." The only answer which is quite easy to prove from the text is a very natural one: He sees Rosa as a woman and this is exactly what she wanted for such a long time. Rosa, herself states this in another context, when she makes comments on Dr. Tree's letter: "They don't call you a woman anyhow." Rosa needed this the most since one of her most troubling problems is her identity. She feels that she has failed to fulfill the requirements of any roles or labels that have been offered to her, such as being a woman, a mother, a Jew, a Pole, an American, a witness, etc. There is something wrong with all of them. Either she was unable to identify herself with those roles or others could not do that.

Cynthia Ozick follows the process of Rosa becoming aware of her body and her appearance extremely delicately and sensitively. First she became embarrassed about her shoes: "Her shoes were not nice, she should have put on the other ones." Then she realized that "her dress was missing a button." She looked in the window of the cafeteria and fixed her hair. Even the writer's descriptions are getting more and more physical: "The air-conditioning was on too high, she felt the cooling sweat licking from around her neck down, down her spine into the crevice of her bottom." (These kind of bodily descriptions are in such contrast with the descriptions of the first short story, where the women's bodilessness, "their turning to air" were emphasized.) The last phase of Rosa's feminine metamorphosis is that she prepares herself for the opening of the box of Magda's shawl as a woman going out for a date. She even puts make up on.

It is also nicely ironical that the event of Persky accosting Rosa, which seems so personal to Rosa and is so much needed by her, is obviously a much practiced routine of Persky. Practically, Cynthia Ozick gives a well-tried recipe how to get acquainted with a stranger in Florida. One can represent this routine of Persky in a chart:

1, stores story (to mention Hitler and the public security is useful)

2, Does she have an accent?

if YES	if NO
--------	-------

a,

How strange life is! Europe / Poland / Warsaw	I am from Europe / Eastern Europe
---	-----------------------------------

b,

Imagine this, two people from ... meet in Miami, Florida ... In 1910 I didn't dream of Miami, Florida ...	Imagine this, two people born so far from each other meet in Miami ...
---	--

3, Famous members of the family

Obviously, "Rosa" is an important work of art of the American-Jewish literature. It deals with topics that proved to be central to the American-Jewish consciousness. There are several themes appearing in "Rosa" besides the main ones which are major concerns of the works of for example Bernard Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Topics like Jewish anti-Semitism, the alienated relationship between parent and child (Just think about Persky and his son!), the terrible loss of the mother tongue for an immigrant who used to be an intellectual, etc. In fact, the writer seems to summon all the central topics of American-Jewish literature. In addition to that, Cynthia Ozick deliberately refers to great works of art, such as Rosa's obsessive letter writing points to Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, etc. Cynthia Ozick accomplishes something very important extremely subtly. By calling into play all the determining topics of American-Jewish literature and assigning central importance to the Holocaust she transfers the emphases of this literary tradition. Thus, the two short stories written by Cynthia Ozick, "The Shawl" and "Rosa" not only fit in smoothly to the main trend of the so called Jewish-American literature, but function as a statement that the Holocaust is the main concern of the American Jewish consciousness. This statement, since it is communicated by the work of art itself, is extremely powerful and influential.

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The Self-Consuming Narrative: Paul Auster's New York Trilogy

Of course it happened. Of course it didn't happen.

Thomas Pynchon: Gravity's Rainbow

All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out.

Paul Auster: The Locked Room

Postmodernist fiction or "metafiction"¹ is an introspective narrative form: it provides a key for the narrative analysis. The door of the postmodernist novel seems to open easily, but it leads to another door. Questions follow questions, and the answers become interim: they are short corridors between two doors.

Paul Auster is a second generation postmodernist writer. As a true follower of Samuel Beckett he tries "to find a form that accommodates the mess"², because "[literature is] an art that begins with the knowledge that there are no right answers. For that reason, it becomes essential to ask the right questions."³

The *New York Trilogy*, Auster's first novel, swarms with questions. In the maze of the *City of Glass* we follow *Ghosts* to reach the door of *The Locked Room*. This

¹ "Metafiction", as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity." Hutcheon 1

² Auster (1990b) 113 (from an interview with Beckett by Tom Driver).

³ *ibid*

quest means constant meditation on the nature of the story, on personal identity, on the narrator's persona and the problem of language.

THE LOST GENRE

Paul Auster's novels are classified as detective stories by many of his readers. The writer himself, however, might have had a slightly different public in mind than the average mystery story reader, because he published the *Trilogy* under his own name, stubbornly sticking to the text of the book even when - before its first publication - the *City of Glass* was rejected by seventeen different publishers. By the time the first volume of the *Trilogy* appeared, Auster was a successful pseudonymous mystery story writer (*Squeeze Play* was published in 1982, under the name of Paul Benjamin).

Being so familiar with the genre, Auster eagerly uses its tricks and treats in his first novel, carefully blending the suspense of the mystery with the existentialist questions and narcissistic self-awareness of the postmodernist novel. Auster does not merely seek a good story in a mystery novel, he also admires the way the good mystery is written: nothing is meaningless, every bit and piece gains its own significance.

Although it seems clear that *The New York Trilogy* (together with some of Auster's later novels) does not fit the tradition of the "well-made mystery story", it is also clear that many of its elements are strongly connected to the genre. The most obvious of these is the title of each novel, especially *Ghosts* (which is a typical paperback title) and *The Locked Room* (which refers to a classical type of mystery story). As far as the clues - the crucial props of the detective story - are concerned, Auster seems to play a fair game with the reader by fulfilling the requirement of accurate description⁴. His characters are peculiar enough to arouse the interest of any mystery story reader; his typical heroes seem to be people with a more than average moral sense. They are ideal detectives, just as Raymond Chandler describes the type: "He must be the best man in his world an a good enough man for any world"⁵

The "certain spirit of detachment"⁶, which is another trait of the good mystery novel, is also present in Auster's *Trilogy*, and this, according to Chandler⁷, makes a

⁴ "[the clue] must be accurately described to the reader, as the detective sees and feels it" Rodell 266

⁵ Chandler 237

⁶ *ibid*

story realistic. "In the strictest sense of the word, I consider myself a realist." - Auster admits in an interview - "What I am after, I suppose, is to write fiction as strange as the world I live in"⁸.

The basic formula of the detective fiction is that somebody (usually a professional detective) is in search of something (the solution of a crime) and/or someone (the criminal). The essential presupposition of the detective story is that problems have a suitable solution, and, with cold logic and careful examination, the mystery can be reduced to facts.

The detective story always has a solution. In this sense it also has a comforting role, being a type of "rhetorical presentation" as described by Stanley Fish:

A presentation is rhetorical if it satisfies the needs of its readers... the experience of such a form will be flattering, for it tells the reader that what he has always thought about the world is true and that the ways of his thinking are sufficient.⁹

Paul Auster's "detective stories", however, do not perform this function. The reader has to confront the fact that the basic questions remain unanswered, although the stories have a certain kind of ending. Suspense, just as in a detective novel, is present, but this suspense does not seem to cease with the ending of the book. The story itself is ended, but the mystery remains unsolved. The Austerian fiction then is "dialectical" in the Fishian sense:

A dialectical presentation ... is disturbing, for it requires of its readers a searching and rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by. It is didactic in a special sense; it does not preach the truth, but asks that its readers discover the truth for themselves ...¹⁰

The "dialecticism" of *The New York Trilogy* is partly the consequence of the disturbing narrative structure of the book, but, to a greater extent, it can be attributed to the fact that the greatest mystery the three novels are concerned with is the act, the content and the result of writing: books are quoted, notes are made, reports are written. The written material is always expected to provide some revelation, an explanation of the mystery (what is Stillman's "project" in *City of*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ McCaffey - Synda 4

⁹ Fish 1

¹⁰ *ibid*

Glass? what is Black writing about in *Ghosts*? how can Fanshawe explain his disappearance with the help of his diary in *The Locked Room*?

At the end of the novels, however, no such thing happens. In *City of Glass* Quinn, the main hero, vanishes without a single trace, and the story proves to be an account of his fate narrated by an outsider, who is ignorant of the true weight and importance of his thoughts and the happenings of Quinn's life. At the end of *Ghosts* a disturbing feeling of suspicion might arise in the reader of the novel concerning the narration: it seems likely that the novel he holds in his hand is nothing else than the very book that Black, the writer in the story, was writing, based on the reports of the detective hired by him. It is possible that, while Blue watched him, Black was watching Blue, and he wrote exactly the story of this "double-spying", the monotonous happenings of his own life and the life of Blue as well. This supposition is grounded on Blue's thorough knowledge concerning the contents of Black's Book: "He [Blue] reads the story right through, every word of it from beginning to end. (...) Black was right, he says to himself. I knew it all by heart." (232) Thus the story does not reflect anything but itself, it is the story of a story, a mirror reflecting another.

In parallel, the end of *The Locked Room* does not reveal anything. Although the quest is ended, the narrator does not and cannot explain the basic question of Fanshawe's self-imposed disappearance and death. He reads through Fanshawe's last notes, but finds them beyond understanding, and instead of delving into it he tears apart and throws out the notebook that is supposed to solve the mystery ("It's all in the notebook" - Fanshawe has suggested.)

This is certainly not a traditional handling of the detective-story genre. Paul Auster himself admits this in an interview: "I was employing these detective conventions only as a means to an end, as a way to get somewhere else entirely... mystery novels always give answers; my work is about asking questions."¹¹ Consequently, the story or plot is not the one and only thing that evokes interest. There is another layer of the story that is more than the solution of a criminal case. This is the realm of questions, of meditations about personal identity (Quinn's in *City of Glass*, Blue's and Black's in *Ghosts*, and that of the anonymous narrator of *The Locked Room*), language (this involves old Stillman's quest for the language of Eden in the first novel, the literarily untrained detective's desperate search for the right words in *Ghosts*, and Fanshawe's strange diary at the end of *The Locked*

¹¹ McCaffey-Synda 6

Room), and also the tradition and innovation in novel writing (thus the constant references to classical - mainly American - writers in each novel.)

These questions are not meant to be solved by the novel, and thus will remain open at the end. Instead of a comforting novel we get a confrontational one, which makes the readers to meditate on the problems raised by the fictional work even after they had finished reading it. This narrative type is “anti-detective fiction”, as William Spanos defines it: “It is (...) no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story (...) the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to ‘detect’ and/or to psychoanalyse in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime (...).”¹² Paul Auster, as a postmodern writer, aims to disturb and even distract the reader from the story by constantly questioning the genre of the novel, its authorship, its narration and its characters as well. His works fit in a tradition established by Kafka, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet and Borges. *The New York Trilogy* can be described by the Sartreian definition of the

anti-novel that reads like a detective story, [which is] ... a parody on the novel of “quest” into which the author has introduced a sort of impassioned amateur detective [who] doesn’t find anything ... and gives up the investigation as a result of a metamorphosis.¹³

The detective genre, therefore, has consumed itself in Auster’s narratives. Something that seems like a traditional mystery story reveals itself to be a narcissistic metafiction, even metamystery.

THE LOST IDENTITY

The pattern of the Austerian story is very simple: “Something happens, and from the moment it begins to happen, nothing can ever be the same again”¹⁴: “It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night...” (*City of Glass*); “White wants Blue to follow a man named Black” (*Ghosts*); and “...I received a letter from a woman named Sophie Fanshawe” (*The Locked Room*).

¹² Spanos 81

¹³ Spanos 85

¹⁴ Auster (1990b) 81

There is a life at stake in every novel: Quinn disappears; Black dies; Fanshawe commits suicide. The novel begins, and the characters become part of a situation they won't be able to quit, and which will consume their lives. The protagonist is asked to do a job for someone, and he becomes obsessed by it. His life and identity are ruined for the sake of the case. The detective-writer and the writer-detective are giving up everything in their devoted search for something that cannot be found.

Auster, like Beckett, "begins with little, ends with even less".¹⁵ A man is following another man. A detective keeps a record of a man he is watching. A writer writes. A story is being written.

"The writer and the detective are interchangeable" says the narrator of *City of Glass*, (9) because "the detective is ... in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all ... things together and make sense of them... The reader sees the world throughout the detective's eyes... [things] might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence."

This - almost didactic - theoretical grounding is turned into practice in all three of the New York novels. A writer, who has turned into a detective, has to experience the dangers of getting too much and too sensitively involved in other people's lives. This also means that, in taking on the disguise (and the name) of a detective, he will consequently lose his identity. Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of *City of Glass*, who wants to see how it feels taking up the personality of his own fictional character, detective Max Work, has to use a name other than his own, and gradually aims to get rid of his own personality through the power of his new name. Quinn is successful in hiding and disappearing under the name of William Wilson, the detective story writer.

The mad professor, Peter Stillmann, identifies himself with Henry Dark, his own fictional character. In *Ghosts Black*, under the name and personality of White, hires detective Blue. In *The Locked Room* the anonymous narrator is possessed by the thought that he is identical with Fanshawe, the person he is chasing. This conscious consuming of the self creates a world of uncertainty, a world where there is no fixed point, where one means two and two means one, when one person equals three or even more, where one personality dissolves into another.

The most complex system of such relations is established in *City of Glass*; here the structure of connected identities is the following:

Daniel Quinn - Paul Auster (Quinn "wandered through the station,... as if in the body of Paul Auster," [62])

¹⁵ *op. cit.* 150

Daniel Quinn - William Wilson ("It was then he had taken on the name of William Wilson. Quinn was no longer that part of him that could write books," [4])

Daniel Quinn - Max Work ("Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother," [7])

Daniel Quinn - Peter Stillman senior ("It felt as though he had lost half of himself. For two weeks he had been tied by an invisible thread to the old man," [110])

Daniel Quinn - Daniel Auster ("The boy looked at him from across the room and laughed: 'Good-bye myself!' he said," [122])

Daniel Auster - Peter Quinn ("In his dream ... he found himself walking down Broadway, holding Auster's son by the hand," [126])

Peter Quinn - Peter Stillman junior ("Uncannily, in that first moment, Quinn thought of his own dead son," [17]; "It did not help, perhaps, that his son's name had also been Peter," [42])

Peter Stillman junior - Peter Stillmann senior

Peter Stillman senior - Henry Dark ("I needed him, you see. I had certain ideas at the time that were too dangerous ... So I pretended they have come from someone else." [96])

Henry Dark - Humpty Dumpty (Humpty Dumpty is "the origin of Henry Dark," [99] - thus one fictional character (Dark) invented by another fictional character (Stillman) stands for yet another fictional character, Humpty Dumpty).

Daniel Quinn - Don Quixote ("He wondered why he had the same initials as Don Quixote," [115])

Similar pair relations can be found in the other two novels (in *Ghosts*: Brown-Blue, White-Blue, Blue-Black, Black-White; in *The Locked Room*: narrator-Fanshawe). The characters take on (or are forced to take on) other personalities, trying to acquire a new view of the world.

The experiment of seeing through someone else's eye has an elaborate theoretical background in the novel, and it is connected with the problem of the identity of writer and detective: "Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter 'i', standing for "investigator", it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him," (9-10).

This pun becomes a leading principle in the novel. The notions “seeing through other’s eye” mean the other man’s “I” or personality, and at the moment Quinn - who is William Willson and Max Work at the same time - enters the house of Peter Stillman under the name of Paul Auster and says “I must keep my eyes open”, it can be also taken as keeping the “I”s or personalities open.

There is another element in the trilogy that is especially confusing if we take into consideration the reaction of the reader to these effects. In this case not personalities are lost, but names: the names of the characters are attached to other characters, like the name of Peter Stillman or the name Henry Dark in the final part of the Trilogy (here the narrator is chasing a character that identifies himself as a certain Peter Stillman). The same confusing effect is acquired when the writer uses his own name and pseudo-personality (a character named Paul Auster) in *City of Glass*.

The Trilogy provokes a disturbing question: if the name itself is not part of the personality, then what distinguishes one man from the other? The clothes, maybe: “men in brown and gray and blue and green, women in yellow and grey and white and pink, children in sneakers, children in shoes, children in cowboy boots.” (66). However, as the clothes play a great role in the Austerian world, they also imply that changing them means a change of personality (we may think about the several disguises used in the novel). Children still believe, that wearing similar clothes means being similar: “If Fanshawe came to the playground wearing black sneakers, then I would ask for black sneakers.” (247) Wearing someone’s clothes means taking on their identity: “[wearing Pavel Shum’s uniform meant that] I was stepping into a dead man’s body, that I had been turned into Pavel Shum’s ghost.”¹⁶

Taking off clothes, however, does not mean taking off personality. Rather, it means returning to one’s self. In the first novel of the Trilogy nakedness means getting rid of all outer expectations and inner beliefs about one’s personality, life reduced to being, the active man to a passive watcher and thinker, to the “naked eye”¹⁷ (the naked “I”). This is the moment of finding identity by losing it: to be everybody and nobody.

By entering the “locked room” (which, in this context, means the inner self, the inside of the skull, the human mind) one will have to lose everything that is not an integral part of oneself, just as Quinn gets rid of all his earthly possessions except his red notebook and his pen. “I remain in the room in which I am writing this ... It

¹⁶ Auster (1989) 120

¹⁷ “the realm of the naked eye” Auster (1990b) 81

is a journey through space, even if I get nowhere, even as I end up in the same place I started"¹⁸ - writes Paul Auster in the poetic prose text, "White Spaces". This is the position of the writer: to be everywhere and nowhere, to be everybody and nobody.

THE LOST CHARACTER

The idea of the self-consuming character is an echo of the idea of self-consuming fiction, as explained by Stanley Fish¹⁹. The self-erasure of the characters is a highly disturbing factor of postmodernist fiction: "(...) projected existents - locales, objects, characters, and so on - can have their existence revoked. The effect is most acute, of course, in the case of characters, since it is especially through projected people that the reader becomes involved in the fictional world."²⁰ This is characteristic of Auster's Trylogy, as emphasised by his critics: "[In *City of Glass*] Both modern and postmodern notions of character are exploded"²¹. The characters are not only "consumed" (pushed out of existence by being ignored by the author) but also "self-consuming" or self-erasing. This is especially emphatic in *The Locked Room*, where Fanshawe, the doppelganger of the narrator, places his own existence 'sous rature' by his consequent dissappearances.

The most interesting feature of Fanshawe's character is that he is virtually unseen. He is only a "ghost" of a character. His figure is emphatically and enigmatically fictional: only a letter or a voice behind a door. He is the mysteriously and untraceably vanished killer of the "locked room mystery", but he is also the victim - he is both the object and the agent of his fictionality.

THE LOST WRITER AND NARRATOR

In *The New York Trilogy* Paul Auster has created a manifold structure of characters. He, the writer (let him be indicated by W1) has created a special anonymous narrator who seems to be the organiser and the writer of the stories (W2). Through the first two novels W2 seems to be a faceless voice, of whom the reader knows almost nothing, but who is involved in the stories in such a way that it

¹⁸ *op. cit.* 85

¹⁹ this is based on the consideration of "meaning as an event, something that is happening between the words and the reader's mind." Fish 389.

²⁰ McHale 105

²¹ Lavender 54

raises our attention and makes us try to guess who he is. At the end of *City of Glass* the narrator reveals himself as the friend of one of the characters, Paul Auster the writer: "I called my friend Auster that evening ... He said that I was the only person he could trust." (157) In *Ghosts* the narrator ends the book saying: "For we must remember, that all this took place more than thirty years ago, back in the days of our earliest childhood. Anything is possible, therefore. I myself prefer to think that he went far away." (232) *The Locked Room* begins with the narrator telling a story of his own, being the narrator and the character of this particular novel. There is a hint, however, at the end of the Trilogy, that he is not only the narrator of this story but the writer of the whole book: "The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*." (346) It is not clear that this passage is the voice of the interfering W1 or W2 can really be considered as the writer of the three novels. Either one is true, W1 and W2 are closely related or mingled, even, because the narration is not consistent. Once the narrator seems to be omniscient ("In his dream, which he later forgot, he found himself in the town dump of his childhood," 87) another time he is highly limited ("At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow ... will never be known," 157). Once he seems uninvolved and appears to set up all the elements of the story through his own assumptions ("The address is unimportant. But let's say Brooklyn Heights, for the sake of argument," 163), another time he is totally involved and unable to change anything in the story ("I was there, I read those words with my own eyes, and yet I find it hard to trust in what I'm saying," 371) The same is true for the time of narration: in the same story it is once - at the beginning - defined as "present" ("The place is New York, the time is the present, and neither one will ever change," 162), while at the end - it is defined as "past" ("all this took place more that thirty years ago." 232) In every story there are constant references to a certain "ending" - a mysterious and sinister time-to-come, which is the decisive element in the characters' fate - but at the end of the novels we know very little or nothing of what really happened at this decisive moment (we do not know if Quinn died or not, and we do not know for sure if Fanshawe really committed suicide).

The question of narration gets more complicated if we find out that W1 can not only be related to the Paul Auster of the first story and also W2, the narrator, but he has many common features with Fanshawe, the writer, in the third story. This latter statement is based on some autobiographical resemblances, but also on the fact that

a piece of writing by Fanshawe (about the Arctic explorer Peter Freuchen) can be found word by word in an early work of Paul Auster (W1) which has the same title as one of Fanshawe's books: *Ground Work*.

When the time of the novel is obscure, the viewpoint is uncertain and the characters are constantly changing their identities, it is hard to pass a judgement about the narrator's person. The author, just as the narrator, seems to be lost in the manifold structure of uncertainties. Auster, the author, erases his own autobiographical presence by creating narrators and characters, but at the same time he also emphasises his existence by his pseudo-personalities and the multiple identities of the characters in the novel (like Quinn²², Auster the character²³, Fanshawe, and the narrator in the third novel²⁴).

THE LOST LANGUAGE

"New York Babel" is the title of one of Auster's early essays on a book by a schizophrenic writer, Louis Wolfson, who mixes up the words of all human languages, thus creating a new, unified language. His act is the reverse of that of God's at Babel: Wolfson does in some way re-create the "Ur-language" from its surviving fragments. In another essay, "The Art of Hunger", Auster meditates on "thingless words and wordless things", on words "in no language", "words with no meaning"²⁵. His essays and novels are deeply concerned with the problem of language, because the word "hides the thing it is supposed to reveal. And if we cannot even name a common, everyday object that we hold in our hands, how can we expect to speak of the things that truly concern us? Unless we can begin to embody the notion of change in the words in use, we will continue to be lost." (94) The philosophical problem of "wordless things" (as the "broken umbrella"²⁶, that has lost its function but has not lost its name) and "thingless words" (as the sound sequences the Stillmans invent to express exactly what they mean) is solved in Humpty Dumpty, who is a "master of the language", "the future of human hopes" and "our clue to salvation", who makes "language answer our human needs." (98)

²² "Quinn is a paper-Auster, a mere linguistic construct of the author himself". Russel 73

²³ "[I wanted] to implicate myself in the machinery of the book. I don't mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self." McCaffey-Synda 14

²⁴ "such stratagems as [...] his introduction of himself into the dramatis personae of the *City of Glass* is too precious by half". Brawer 68

²⁵ Auster (1990b) 110

²⁶ Orlando's "magic umbrella" Auster (1989) 209

As language is an inadequate form of communication, literature becomes endangered by lack of comprehension. In *City of Glass* Quinn meets one of his readers on a railway station, and he feels disappointed and even disgusted: "He did not like the girl sitting next to him, and it offended him that he should be casually skimming the pages that had cost him so much effort. His impulse was to tear the book out of her hands and run across the station with it." (64)

Right before this incident Quinn meets a deaf mute in the same railway station who sells him a ballpoint pen. Quinn will write with this same ballpoint pen in a cheap red notebook ever after (the same kind of a notebook will be present in all three volumes of the trilogy). The two following scenes - the one with the girl and the other with the deaf mute - seem to be connected: they both represent the impossibility of communication between writer and reader. The ballpoint pen seems to suggest that the writer himself is a deaf mute, unable to hear his reader's questions and comments, and at the same time incapable of giving any response.

The use of signs is an alternative to spoken and written language. Peter Stillman senior is using a refined and mysterious sign-language, "walking his letters" on the streets of Manhattan. Even here, the language of signs is in fact an imitation of writing. Stillman's "message" is a nonexistent one: it had been consuming itself during the very act of its creation (his footsteps leave no trace, and the only proof of his route is Quinn's notebook).

This self-consuming language appears as an alternative to fiction writing at the end of the third novel of *The New York Trilogy*. Fanshawe's notebook appears to contain a message that cannot be understood, because "Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible." (230)

Self-consuming fiction is a heroic and tragic attempt to make chaos understandable: "It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it. These were not the words of a man who regretted anything. He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something to be willed, something too perfect, as though at the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail - even to the point of failing himself." (370)

A narrative that consumes itself - this seems to be the "perfect" artifact, the form "to be willed" in Auster's fictional world. *The New York Trilogy* is self-

consuming only on the narrative level. Although self-consuming text appears as the ideal form at the end of the Trilogy, Paul Auster does not use this device. The main reason for this, I suppose, is that the completely self-erasing text would be totally incomprehensible to human understanding. It would be a perfect work of art - and perfection leaves no place for questions.

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Seamus Heaney: Forcing the English Lyric.

I am intrigued by a lesser key moment in Seamus Heaney's poetry. It is at the end of "Station Island", a poem which, by following in the steps of both the pilgrims at Lough Derg and Dante, brings a pre-programmed tension to bear on its final resolution (liberation, resurfacing, necessarily self-administered, the ending of the fast, the feast, the charged spirit). After the spirited exhumations and the relentless self-probing of the long poem, Heaney issues a licence to himself to thrust this resolving role onto Joyce. Not only that he may meet Joyce publicly but that he may represent this ghost also, and also named, that he may speak his voice. The immediate crisis of rupture that is to be addressed is precipitated at the centre of the poem, where Heaney remains unabsolved by the ghost of a murdered friend:

"Forgive the way I have lived indifferent -
forgive my timid circumspect involvement,"

I surprised myself by saying. "Forgive
my eye," he said, "that's all above my head."
NSP 122

which leads to a series of progressively more severe accusations, initiated by a relative "for the way you white-washed ugliness", and culminating in self-denunciation:

"I hate how quick I was to know my place.
I hate where I was born, hate everything
That made me biddable and unforthcoming."
NSP 128

It is perhaps fitting that the resolution of the poem should take the form of absolution from the literary messiah himself, but his appearance at this point in this poem, gives him a heretofore unacknowledged, although apparent, centrality in Heaney's personal cosmology.

Heaney's Joyce says to Heaney:

"Your obligation
is not discharged by any common rite.
What you do you must do on your own.

The main thing is to write
for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust
that imagines its haven like your hands at night

dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.
You are fasted now, light headed dangerous.
Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,

so ready for the sackcloth and the ashes.
Let go, let fly, forget.
You've listened long enough. Now strike your note."

It was as if I had stepped free into space
alone with nothing that I had not known
already (...)

"The English language
belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires

rehearsing the old whinges at your age
That subject people stuff is a cod's game,
infantile, like this peasant pilgrimage.

You lose more of yourself than you redeem
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
When they make the circle wide its time to swim

out on your own and fill the element
with signatures on your own frequency,
echo soundings, searches probes allurements,

elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.”

NSP 133-4

This spirit is, like each of the poem's apparitions, fused or confused with Heaney's own. While the sketch of Joyce had been as faultlessly bare and precise as Cesar Abin's caricature, the voice, the instigation of the quotes, is necessarily charged with a near impossible task: that of representing two distinct creative voices in one. For the first three stanzas this stretched voice is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus' diaries, i.e. advice to oneself, which happens to fit Heaney's mode quite well¹, particularly “what you do you must do on your own” is almost transcribed. Words such as “cultivate”, “work-lust”, “haven” and the “hands” that knew “nubbed treasure” in *North*, inscribe Heaney into the appropriately oblique metaphor of Joyce's masturbation. Palimpsest informs the passage, creating a consistent blend of signatory styles and vocabularies that tends or attempts to blur the distinction between the two writers. Noticeably, when the import of the words approximates Joyce, the language, the constitution, the tone remain firmly Heaney; “raking at dead fires” “subject people stuff”, “doing the decent thing”. On the other hand the touches of Joycean play have Heaney's aural structures and country cunning about them: “echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements, elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea”.

But to read this as a happy blend of difference would be optimistic. The first real shock is the explicit advice “And don't be so earnest”; as though Joyce were to have forgotten Wilde, and abandoned irony - I cannot hear this line in Joyce's voices. Rather than ironic, this sentence is oxymoronic in the fullest sense. At the very moment of attempted departure from the tendencies of his own poetry (earnestness), Heaney is dragged back to earth by those very poetic imperatives (as though the admonition to “Let go, let fly, forget” were *projected* onto Sweeney alone, by virtue of necessity). The passage would be laughable if it attempted to be light. It succeeds because Heaney's trademark: relentless sincere self-analysis dominates as always. It is paradoxical that it also fails for this reason.

It is not only the subordination of adopted style to established style that disturbs me here however, it is also the oppositions that are concealed beneath the singular voice. Heaney's Joyce's “fill the element with signatures on your own

¹ Heaney also comments on the coincidental significance of his birthday, April 13, being the day that Dedalus notes the autonomy of his Irish English through the word “tundish”. Synchronicity figures regularly in Joyce's work also.

frequency” picks up Joyce's own vocabulary: “Signatures of all things I am here to read” is Dedalus' thought on Sandymount strand². The contrast is stark. Joyce's constant movement as an artist, his variety of signatures, is attributable to this desire to read. Beside it, the need to sign everything appears defensive at best. On the other hand, the effect of Joyce's work *was* to leave his signatures on all things, although they are difficult to read and impossible to fake³. The shift that Heaney brings about from Joyce's austere receptiveness at a distance to immanence, through to Heaney's self-absolution through a transcendental invocation of the artist, relies on this historical validation of Joyce's body of work. Where Joyce's stand was taken in the face of the conventional, Heaney invokes that which has become conventional in order to rest a troubled conscience. But in doing so he goes much further: “the English language belongs to us” appropriates the linguistic alienation of a fictional character and appears to collate it with a nationalist rhetoric of decolonisation. It is precisely through Joyce that we receive an English language that belongs to no-one.

Heaney had outlined his indebtedness to the “Holy Feast of the Tundish” often:

Stephen feels excluded from the English tradition, which he senses as organic and other than his own. His own tradition is linguistically fractured. History, which has woven the fabric of English life and landscape and language into a seamless garment, has rent the fabric of Irish life, and effected a breach between its past and present and an alienation between the speaker and his speech.⁴

What had seemed disabling and provincial is suddenly found to be corroborating and fundamental and potentially universal... Stephen now trusts what

² Joyce 45.

³ Joyce's heritage appears to be haunted by a remarkably well documented “anxiety of influence” factor in succeeding artists from Flann O'Brien through to Burgess and Nabokov.

⁴ Heaney (1978) 35. The passage continues in a vein reminiscent of the “Citizen” in *Ulysses*: “Whether we wish to locate the breaking point of Gaelic civilisation at the battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls in the seventeenth century or whether we hold out hopefully until the Jacobite dream fades after the flight of the Wild Geese, there is no doubt that the social, cultural, linguistic life of the country is radically altered, and the alteration is felt by the majority of Irish people as a kind of loss, an exile from an original whole and good place or state.” Cf. “Our harbours that were empty will be full again, Queenstown, Kinsale, Galway, Blacksod Bay, Ventry in the kingdom of Kerry, Killybegs, the third largest harbour in the wide world, with its fleet of masts of the Galway Lynchés and the Cavan O'Reillys... And will again, says he, when the first Irish battleship is seen breasting the waves with our own flag to the fore...” (Joyce 354).

he calls "our own language" and in that trust he will go to encounter what he calls "the reality of experience." But it will be his own specific Dublin experience, with all its religious and historical freight, so different from the English experience to which he had heretofore stood in a subservient relationship.⁵

The *agent* of history, which acts simultaneously on and between two countries in diametrically opposed ways (and casually genderizes both, through the worn active/passive trope; cf. the poems "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union"), and the "historical freight" both forget Stephen's "nightmare from which I am trying to awake" and extrapolate his *non serviam* onto a pre-fabricated national historical rhetoric which is much more in keeping with Heaney's early archaeological agenda⁶. Likewise the shift from "our own language" to "belongs to us" is the difference between the recognition of validity of a local language ("Irish English"), and the investment of that language with a purpose⁷. Every artist in any language must make the language his own. That the trope by which Joyce achieves this can begin to appear as an acceptable *national* procedure points rather to bankruptcy than inheritance⁸.

However, it would not be correct to read Heaney's appropriation of Joyce through the simple filter of his expressed "tribal" loyalties, and to insist that his poetry operates in the furtherance of nationalist causes would definitely be inappropriate to its general thrust. It is rather Heaney's continued *fidelity to his own experience* that allows his poetry to *retain* such a flavour long after the explicit political engagement of *North* had been superseded. For *its authenticity of expression*, this experience relies on constant measurement against the predetermined and therefore *fixed* criteria of childhood memory, and its correspondent clannish claims.

If we consider Heaney to be opposing Joyce we get further. The etymological investigations that he undertakes in *Wintering Out*, channelled through this same "tundish", mark a decisively individual move⁹. Where Joyce advances to the

⁵ Heaney (1983) 6.

⁶ Interestingly a similar shift has taken place within the criticism of these literatures: the continual recycling of the "ale, Christ, master, home" passage from *Portrait*, (which is, in any case, less original Joyce, than Joycean originality applied to the theme of the Revival) and its significance in Heaney, conceals a personal rupture with a tradition of opposition.

⁷ This move is analysable in terms of the Marxian distinction between use-value and exchange-value.

⁸ I am also thinking of the persistency of the debate surrounding "Irish literature", which returns to passages such as this in order to re-inscribe, as a preliminary gesture to analysis, writers from the island into the dated terms of imperialist colonialism.

⁹ see Stan Smith, *The Distance Between*. in: Corcoran 96-122.

frontier of Indo-European and indeed global, correspondances, Heaney sets out in the other direction, towards rupture in a time before Ernest Jones had established an idea of larger linguistic kinship. The tensions between Anglo-Saxon and Irish become battles of linguistic authenticity in poems such as "Toome", "Broagh", "Anahorish", and "Birthplace", and Heaney's dogged revival of antiquated Anglo-Saxon makes History itself the battlefield:

Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition.
WO 23

Likewise, if the "inner emigré" is more than a little consciously opposed to Joyce the young international "exile", it would appear that Heaney's celebrated traditionalism is equally opposed to Joyce's innovation. Joyce's exile is itself the embodiment of keeping at a tangent (both in relation to the subject matter of his work and in terms of his regular skirting around the artists and movements on "mainland" Europe), and only his absolute consistency in this keeps it from the unholy dustbin of "juvenilia". Heaney has become so thoroughly planted in the soil designated as "Irish" that it is impossible to read his tenures at either Oxford or Harvard as "exile" in the sense that has become peculiarly associated with Irish writers - framed in such a way as to be read solely in terms of place *left*¹⁰. In Heaney that focus shifts. Moreover it takes place at a time when professional mobility has become such a norm that it would barely warrant comment if it weren't for the persistence of the debate surrounding *locus* in Irish writing. Heaney's movement is so natural in the context of decades of steady economic emigration, that it throws doubt, on the other hand, over the extravagant rootedness with which his poetry has established itself. The celebrated inner emigré "feeling every wind that blows" begins to look a little more romantic after his Nobel Prize. His later poetry returns often to the idea of *coming* home, as opposed to Derek Mahon's "going home."

Joyce is also to blame if a poet's earlier writing becomes suspect due to the course of that poet's career, through consciously having moulded a life's work into a singularity, (a much more concrete tower than Yeats' more ad hoc construction),

¹⁰ Whether this sense can be usefully maintained in any case is doubtful. Another of Joyce's bastard children (see also "epiphany", "parallax") that has outgrown its genes, due to its easy adaptability to schematization.

with which Joyce most fully challenges the writer to be an artist. And it is precisely this early manifesto approach that is inherited, not just by Heaney, but Longley and Muldoon also. Clearly Joyce's project "to create in the smithy of my soul the unforged conscience of my race" does not become Heaney's "the squat pen rests; snug as a gun. I'll dig with it," Longley's "(I embody bed and breakfast)" or Muldoon's "by my broken bones I tell new weather" without serious mediation. Yet I would argue that at the heart of each lies an assertion of poetic intent that cannot be measured on its own, but rather exists in constant tension with the succeeding work of the writer, and with the consistency of identification between the stated poetic self and the public poet himself. The remarkable thing about Joyce's assertion is how it retains the full flavour of idealist youth through a lifelong application of its terms, and so conserves its integrity while undergoing sufficient stress to leave it almost entirely changed by the end of the *Wake*. Perhaps this is what is meant by "sea-change". Although in Heaney's case certain ruptures take place (particularly after *North* and *The Haw Lantern*), the poetry does continue, autonomously, to fulfill its stated ambition, although the focus often changes. The centre which holds his work together is *authenticity*.

MY TRUST COULD NOT REPOSE.

When Christopher Ricks identified Heaney as "the most trusted poet on these islands" in a review of *Field Work*, he brought a focus onto a little debated central hinge in Heaney's work and poetry generally. Authenticity, that is *fidelity* to subject matter (a commitment to the limited power of words to indicate things), and a *unity* between source and text, is peculiarly resistant to analysis, as opposed to either irony or persona. Criticism of both the Frankfurt school and the postmodern debate have bracketed the notion, precisely because it can never be definitively indicated¹¹, and it is in the face of this that the mechanisms with which Heaney nevertheless puts it in place as an organising principle demand examination.

MacNiece contended that since poetry must be honest, it will, in an impure age, be impure. Yet the consistency of Heaney's poetry is resident more than anywhere else in the precision of his language. His poetry is a poetry of texture, a language of resonance. It has even been called "oblique", and in fact much of the poetry of

¹¹ The old aesthetic argument in its most recent manifestation has eulogized first "authenticity" (Benjamin), and hot on its heels, "reality" itself (Baudrillard). Beside these, Heaney is unreadable, unless a return to local contexts places these theorists into an area of reduced reference.

North is basically unapproachable without background information. It is also noteworthy that *North* is Heaney's most publically acclaimed selection, and represents, even by his own admission, a certain coming-of-age¹². *North* is also the crucible of "the troubles", a subject sufficiently impure that poetry should smell of rot (which in *North* it frequently does). But Heaney's strategy is less to reflect the honesty of the age than to distil it in the still of his personal historical epiphany.¹³

Heaney's work is riddled with personal admissions. "I've no spade to follow men like them." "I knew that if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it." "Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not." "I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing." These, from *Death of a Naturalist*, attempt a unity of theme and poet. As such they perform a classic poetic *resolution*, not simply of the poet and his environment (potatoes, frogs, blackberries and wells), but also of the world and poetry, and, significantly, of past and future. Each poem has three movements: the past is posited, as childhood familiarity and/or rural tradition; a rupture with that past is presented (through metonymy "I have no spade" or metaphor: in "Death of a Naturalist" the onset of maturity or experience becomes "The great slime kings were gathered there for vengeance"); and finally a renewed continuity is proclaimed through the medium of poetry, which will stand only on its performance in the future through the mediation of the invoked poetic subject, Heaney himself. The last of these, "Personal Helicon", performs this routine more explicitly, moving from

As a child they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

to

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

NSP 14

¹² In an interview with Seamas Deane, quoted in: Longley 140.

¹³ Yet it is also *North* that Edna Longley attacks for its *insincerity*, or at least a certain artificiality concerning that which before had been "genuine".

The poems are essentially dialectical, and their final resolution is indeed a synthesis. This contrasts with Blake's *Songs* which deals with the same subject matter, but leaves the two in a state of permanent revolution, finally unknowable to each other. In this poem, the "big-eyed Narcissus" is not superseded, but rather given an *image* more appropriate to his agent - that of the poet. The poem's confession of this masking process arrests what would otherwise be a poetry of the mask.

Two factors make Heaney's resolutions remarkable. Firstly his approach to the past: tradition and childhood, which arguably constitute the oppositions that break in maturity (child adjusting to tradition, gaining an awareness of the past etc.), are dealt with as interchangeable phenomena, constantly flowing into each other, and constantly exchanging metaphors (digging; well; bog). Secondly, the locus of resolution of the dialectical elements is in the poet himself (not *poetry* or *history per se*). This would lead to a thoroughly personal poetry if his metaphors were not continually attracting larger societal and political implications, as metaphors must, and as Heaney no doubt intends (this becomes more explicit in *Wintering Out*). As such, he places tremendous pressure on himself in his early poetry to act as a midwife between past and future; to perform the continuity he has invoked, and thus fulfill the poetry itself. The *truth* of the poetry, and by extension its authenticity, exist only in constant tension between its utterance and its assimilability to further utterance *from the same source*. In this way *Death of a Naturalist*, the title of which already describes both a rupture and a summation of that rupture, is a blueprint or manifesto rather than a simple collection

THE OTHER: LOVEMAKING OR A STRANGER'S WEEPING?

Whether a society of conflict without apparent resolution necessarily engenders a poetry of conflicts and resolutions remains a starting point for criticism of contemporary poetry from the North of Ireland, and an issue to which Heaney has referred directly. Given that the primary conflict in Heaney's immediate vicinity is centred on constructs of race and religion, one might expect these societal constructs to be the locus of resolution. In fact Heaney describes exactly this process taking place in the poetry of Wordsworth, caught between his "nationalism" and his "revolutionary sympathies" with France, but it is not this opposition he understands to be resolved:

It is another truism that the work of art is salutary in these circumstances, and we can easily see how the composition of *The Prelude* was, in itself, part of the symbolic resolution of a lived conflict. Wordsworth admits an inner conflict between those powers and hopes which landed him at the impasse he describes. The poem is diagnostic, therapeutic and didactic all at once.¹⁴

The “lived conflict” immediately becomes an “inner conflict”, and its resolution apparently belongs rather to the field of psychotherapy than social ill. The crucial difference is that Wordsworth finds himself *on both sides*, and therefore his personal struggle is also a meeting-place for two conflictual constructs. The poets that Heaney discusses in the above essay share an analogy with this only in so far as they experience a very different tension; that between engagement and extrication, which leaves the political poles themselves untouched.

Although “The Other Side” is notable for its “imaginative entry” into the Protestant psyche¹⁵ - the other “tribe” in Heaney’s cosmology, it is equally notable for being the only poem to do so, and it is interesting to see what exchange takes place there. Exchange is the key word, because the poem posits borders and situates them as possible thresholds. The question is whether it can overcome the thorough othering of its title and the system of dichotomies that it immediately puts into place to illustrate or support this estrangement: “lea” - “fallow”; “our scraggy acres” - “his promised furrows”; “his fabulous, biblical, dismissal” - “our small lanes”. Despite the stereotyped emphases on diligence and Old Testament vocabulary (staples also of a long tradition of English writing), the protestant neighbour is allowed to rise above cliché, especially in the sympathetic closing image, waiting for Heaney’s family to finish their prayers:

He puts a hand in a pocket

or taps a little tune with the blackthorn
shyly, as if he were party to
lovemaking or a stranger’s weeping.
NSP 42

“Blackthorn” again contrasts the ash plant of Heaney’s father, Stephen Dedalus, and later Heaney himself¹⁶, but it is the alien-ness of the Rosary that is most striking.

¹⁴ Heaney (1984) 143.

¹⁵ Longley 201.

¹⁶ see “I.I.87” in *Seeing Things*.

This estrangement does not simply stem from the sense of invaded intimacy but from the nature of the prayer itself and its contextualisation; the physical, emotional and even phonetic “femininity” of the Catholic rite as against “his brain” - “a whitewashed kitchen/ hung with texts, swept tidy/ as the body o’ the kirk”. Heaney’s uncharacteristic use of Ulster Scots here, with its hard consonants, serves further to emphasise the “patriarchal dictum”. This picks up the undercurrent of competition that permeates the poem; from its opening we have the idle poet child, “I lay where his lea sloped to meet our fallow, nested on moss and rushes”, attentive, on the border, unresponsive to the judgemental neighbour; “my ear swallowed”, “he prophesied ... then turned away”. The traditional Calvinist opposition to artistic expression is here doubled by the poet’s use of the neighbour as material for poetry, not only now, but then also: “For days we would rehearse each patriarchal dictum”, but there is a key to the competitive air at the centre of the poem, when their rehearsal

faltered on a rut -
 “Your side of the house, I believe,
 hardly rule by the book at all.”

NSP 41

Is this “faltering” the pain at the insult, or the recognition of an implicit truth in the undisciplined (and unproductive) Catholic? “Rut” would seem to indicate a frustration at the inflexible nature of the dismissal. Despite the neighbour’s direct communication with the Catholic family (one of Heaney’s surest moments of colloquial reproduction: “A right looking night (...) I was dandering by/ and says I, I might as well call.”), they are struck dumb by an inhabited sense of inferiority - “the gag of place” of *North*¹⁷. Both sides speak within ritual - the Protestant biblically or through cliché, the Catholic more so: in rehearsal, “the moan of prayers”, and of course poetry - and these rituals conceal two essentially different value-systems, both hinging on the nature of *production* and *discipline*, one of which not only has cultural superiority (“the book”), but also a demonstrable sense of its own worth (compare: “next season’s tares”). Self-reference to the medium of poetry is, as ever, the culmination of the poem, and when Heaney introduces himself into the poem it is within the framework of produced and disciplined communication (poetry), and as a ghost in his own frustrated childhood memory: “But now I stand behind him/ in

¹⁷ “Whatever you say say nothing” in: N 59.

the dark yard, in the moan of prayers". It is now the neighbour who stands at the threshold, bordered on either side, as it were, by Heaney, and once again the poem focuses on the transmission of the inherited past into the future:

Should I slip away, I wonder,
or go up and touch his shoulder
and talk about the weather

or the price of grass-seed?
NSP 42

Given the complexity of fertility of the land throughout this poem I don't believe the ultimate question can be read simplistically as a symbol of "the cost of fundamental growth and change"¹⁸, attractive as it is to do so. Notably communication does not actually take place in the poem, nor could it given its retrospectivity. Furthermore, since the apparent agenda for future engagement with "the other side" is never taken up in Heaney's poetry (the title becoming even more uncomfortable as the only reference in Heaney to the "psychic frontier") the question appears to be either unanswerable or rhetorical. Therefore it seems possible that Heaney's chosen fertility - presented in terms more feminine, more cyclical, more inclined towards preservation ("we have no prairies" begins "Bogland", the first of the "bog poems" which surround this poem chronologically) than transformation - the discipline of poetry, is deliberately contrasted with, and attempts to reverse the cultural importance of, the "grass-seed" so central to the neighbouring ethic. The resolution is of past guilt - unproductivity is mediated through femininity. Heaney's resolutions are often closer to absolutions.

North famously continues this project with a thorough feminisation of the his native Irish, Catholic root,¹⁹ and a personal identification with this root that borders on necrophilia. The conflict that emerges is entirely unallegorical with the Wordsworthian dilemma:

¹⁸ Longley 201.

¹⁹ As in "Bog Queen"; at the time of writing the bog poems Heaney describes the political situation as follows: "to some extent the enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and goddess". Heaney (1980) 56.

I always thought of the political problem... as being an internal Northern Ireland division. I thought along sectarian lines. Now I think that the genuine political confrontation is between Ireland and Britain.²⁰

HEANEY'S SUBJECT AS SUBJECT.

The "I" of Heaney's poetry seems familiar, in both senses: we recognise its poetic precedent, and in time we begin to feel acquainted with it. Both senses matter. As the authenticity underpinning sensation and experience, its closest relative would appear to be Wordsworth, rather than Yeats, Auden, Larkin or Hughes. Neither Kavanagh nor MacNiece, who are both fond of this "I" of authentication, use it with anything of the finality of origin that both Heaney and Wordsworth do²¹. For each of them the poetry constantly refers back to its speaking subject for assurance, and as the reader gets to know this speaking subject so she or he can identify and authenticate the poetry. As Heaney's body of work continues to develop it is still this "I" that informs the poetry (even in the Sweeney translations, where he consciously usurps the "I" of another). This is often the case even when "I" does not appear. In "Alphabet" (*The Haw Lantern*), for example, a third person narration is adopted by the poet; "He understands he will understand more when he goes to school." This is maintained until the 15th stanza, where the "he" abruptly changes subject, "As from his small window the astronaut sees all he has sprung from", and is then replaced with the first person, "or like my own wide pre-reflective stare..."²². The sense that the subject has been repressed all along is justified, the poem is given its final affirmation. Heaney's "I" truly is the root from which all else grows, it draws things unto itself and then signs them.

And this signature is also the performance of the poetic resolution. "I" stands between two realities and unites them. This puts a tremendous pressure on the

²⁰ quoted in: Longley 168.

²¹ It is to Wordsworth that Heaney is most often compared, and he acknowledges his debt frankly and often.

²² It is also interesting that this poem has a particular background - it was commissioned by a Harvard fraternity. For once, the child really is the universal child, and maybe this is what holds his identity at bay throughout, until the stamp of authenticity marks it.

subject and on Heaney himself, to continue the consistency and the development of this subject. The two realities may be any of the possibilities I have already outlined, but finally, over time, they become the familiar and the unfamiliar, or perhaps the assimilated and the to-be-assimilated (the movement from “sectarian lines” of thought to “Ireland and Britain” is paradigmatic here). In this context it is interesting to look at “Making Strange” (*Station Island*):

I stood between them,
the one with his travelled intelligence
and tawny containment,
his speech like the twang of a bowstring,

and another, unshorn and bewildered
in the tubs of his wellingtons,
smiling at me for help,
faced with this stranger I'd brought him.

Then a cunning middle voice
came out of the field across the road
saying, “Be adept and be dialect,
tell of this wind coming past the zinc hut,

...

Go beyond what's reliable
in all that keeps pleading and pleading,
these eyes and puddles and stones,
and recollect how bold you were

when I visited you first
with departures you cannot go back on.”
A chaffinch flicked from an ash and next thing
I found myself driving the stranger

through my own country, adept
at dialect, reciting my pride
in all that I knew, that began to make strange
at that same recitation.

NSP 106

Note the familiar pressure on the subject, the emphases on the known and unknown, the final clumping for the familiar, the admixture of the national and personal histories. The voice (Sweeney's) which interpolates in "Making Strange" has a number of ghostly predecessors (Heaney's father, "The Other Side") but becomes a marked feature of his poetry in the poem "North", where in an epiphany (sic) he is given advice from the "ocean-deafened voices" of Ireland's viking invaders:

"Lie down
in the word hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain.

Compose in darkness.
Expect aurora borealis
in the long foray
but no cascade of light.

Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle.
Trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known".

N 20

It is in this form, advice from the past, that voices recur in Heaney's poetry from *North* on. By "Making Strange" this past has become three-fold: his own; Ireland's mythological past (inscribed in Sweeney) and the autonomous history of his poetry (Sweeney's residence in Heaney).

Heaney describes *North* as follows "I'm certain that up to North, that that was one book; in a way it grows together and goes together."²³ The past has grown in complexity since *Death of a Naturalist*, from a child's rural environment to specific instances of Irish and European history, and the organic inheritances of etymology. The ruptures are now historical ruptures, which is how the British colonial presence now appears in Heaney. In fact it is only in this context of *rupture* that the idea of continuity between the viking invasion and Ireland in the present could be said to make sense.

²³ Longley 140.

Thor's hammer swung
to geography and trade,
thick witted couplings and revenges,

the hatreds and behindbacks
of the althing, lies and women,
exhaustions nominated peace,
memory incubating the spilled blood.

N 20

Despite its local context, this is actually an *archetype* of colonialism, and just as the Bog Poems work images of tribalism, punishment and martyrdom into archetypes²⁴ ("a saint's kept body"), everything that previously had been latent in Heaney's poetry is metamorphosed in *North*. The voice of resolution that had addressed its past is now re-addressed with clarity and assurance, and no longer requires metaphor, but speaks itself, from the archetype of continuity - "the word-heard" - like a vast echo. A monumental history, in every sense, now focuses on the attentive and absorbant subject, who alone can carry its significance to its revelation.

North appears to be a meta-resolution of the problematic established in *Death of a Naturalist*, and as such freezes the terms of Heaney's poetry. Within the structure of the book as it is published, a meta-dialectic also appears. The book's two parts then represent a conflict of styles for the transmission of the poetic self/subject, and the subject of the poetry is in fact "I", the subject.²⁵

History is also frozen in *North*. The reach from childhood norms to Universal forms, but, even more, the need for authentic experience for an authentic subject, leads to a plethora of preserved historical imagery whose connection to the present is little more than allegorical, but whose allegory with the present tends towards arbitrary archetypes of violence. Once again the connection pivots on the experiencing subject: "*I can feel* the tug of the halter at the nape of her neck" (my italics); "I first saw his twisted face in a photograph"; "I push back through dictions, Elizabethan canopies. Norman devices..."; "I returned to a long strand"; "I step through origins"; and the focus:

²⁴ *ibid.* 160.

²⁵ In this context, Blake Morrison's investigation of the conflict between the *vers donnés* and the *vers calculés* in Heaney is interesting. See Morrison 53.

My words lick around
 cobbled quays, go hunting
 lightly as pampooties
 over the skull-capped ground.²⁶
 N 24

Using this form of the subject not only returns us to a former tradition of poetry, but in doing so recreates the dichotomies between self and world with the word as mediator, that much of the thrust of high modernism (and not least Joyce) had sought to defuse through a *transgression* of the linguistic limits of the subject. In Heaney, as in Wordsworth, the self finds itself constantly at the locus of dichotomies between art and politics, love and death, memory and history, surface and depth, which it must either suffer or resolve or both. As the motor of poetry it may generate continually exploitable tensions, but risks the inescapability of its own terms. Both occur in the bog poems of *North*.

In every sense, the bog poems bring to Heaney's work the gravitas they require to ground their subject. However, experience *per se* has been replaced by experience as such. A tracing of the bog poems is also an investigation of increasing subjectivity *vis á vis* images. The epiphany of "North" is entirely imagined, unlike the frogs of "Death of a Naturalist", and a new ground for authenticity is required to arrest a concurrent alienation of the poet.

This is where personal admission really comes into its own in Heaney. The nature of these now become self-accusatory as well as self-dynamic:

I who have stood dumb
 when your betraying sisters,
 cauled in tar,
 wept by the railings,

who would connive
 in civilised outrage
 yet understand the exact
 and tribal, intimate revenge.

N 38

²⁶ from "Punishment", "The Grauballe Man", "Bone Dreams", "North" (cf Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey") and "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" respectively.

This controversial ending to "Punishment" has been accused of self-abnegation by Edna Longley and Ciarán Carson ("artistic, not political, fence-sitting", "offering his 'understanding' of the situation almost as a consolation"). Blake Morrison writes:

pity is off-set by his understanding for the motives for judicial punishment... it is a courageous piece of self-analysis, acknowledging what he calls elsewhere "the persistence of what appear to be anachronistic passions"²⁷.

It seems that the price to pay to create a poetry grounded enough to deal with the impurity of the Northern Irish situation, is the sacrifice of the transforming power of the artist, even within himself. The *authenticity* of his reaction and transcription of that reaction alone is offered as the public artist. It is, perhaps, not surprising that Heaney begins to retreat from such direct engagement with the political and historical following North, but the pattern of rupture and resolution remains in place through this shift, and even becomes thematically incorporated in poems such as "Oysters"²⁸. The essentially *confessional* feel of this voice precipitates a continuing movement into Catholicism in Heaney's poetry, which is also perfectly in keeping with the extrapolation of memory onto an ahistorical world. (It will be necessary to return again and again to childhood memory, as Heaney proceeds to do in both *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things*, to maintain the authenticity of the poetry.) This precipitates a general emphasis on conscience probing (the successful Catholic) that remains (through its own modifications) the voice of authenticity in Heaney's poetry up to *Seeing Things*. The confessional invites self-flagellation, and promises forgiveness and redemption in return.

²⁷ Morrison 64.

²⁸ Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:
I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine-stung
Glut of privilege

And was angry that my trust could not repose
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom
Leaning in from the sea. I ate the day
Deliberately, that its tang
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

Here the reflex to relate things colonially is arrested by the reflex to trust to yourself.

Field Work is a careful extrication of the poet from the burgeoning *inheritance* of political history. In its place, a superficially simpler, actually more complicated, interrogation of his relation to politics comes into being in poems such as "Triptych", "Casualty", and certain of the "Glanmore Sonnets". One feels, in a poem such as "The Toome Road" - "How long were they approaching down my roads/ as if they owned them?" - as in "The Other Side", that the entire constitution of this self is bound to its political situation; that there is a symbiotic dependency at work here that can only *appear* oppositional, but never achieve it. The growing issue of *responsibility* reveals a more appropriate "other": the man of action. The poet who "confused evasion and artistic tact" regarding his political situation, feels himself more and more to be a political (and, through a continuing motif, always mediated by violence, sexual) *voyeur* - a motif introduced in "Punishment" which is picked up again in "The Skunk" and "The Guttural Muse". Poetry becomes the site of an "apology for poetry", that is to say, a confession of poetry, and its own absolution. "Station Island" devotes itself to this theme.

DIOGENES THE CIVIC.

It is apparently in the face of this "authentic" Heaney that Richard Brown produces his reading of a tongue in cheek poet in his essay "Bog poems and book poems"²⁹, where his emphases fall on the plethora of puns and allusions, but most of all on the public Heaney, who in his essays and lectures continually exposes the means of manufacture of his poetry. The argument for a postmodern Heaney is patently redundant, relying as it does on the very dubious notion of a postmodern period than a postmodern attitude, which Heaney does not exhibit. However, consider this "traditional" poet, this locus of the "timeless" struggle between responsibility and art, functioning also as authority on current world poetry; Harvard and Oxford professor; the exemplar of poet as professional in a world of irrefragable specialisation; an admirer furthermore of the irrepressibly playful (and authentically postmodern, pardon the oxymoron) poetry of Paul Muldoon. The individual thus positioned is either absolutely transparent or hopelessly opaque. A poem such as "Exposure" is unthinkable from this locus. A paradox of high exposure is that rather than coalescing, the personal and the public become *essentially* divided: one ceases to be either the lone investigator, experimenting with

²⁹ Corcoran 58-81.

one's social being, or the representative of "gagged" culture, measuring on one's own pulse the heart of the street. The speaker in this position cannot speak simply: public statement becomes opinion; private self-analysis. In Heaney's case, the self having been the *burden* of the poetry throughout the relocation of the poet by the poetry, successive readings are necessarily pointed towards a search for the new locus of authenticity in line with the poet's altered public status. The axes of his poetry have become that of the fixed relation between the self and authenticity and that of the moving relation of the self through its career (i.e. "poetic development").

In a BBC interview, Heaney responded to the comment that *Seeing Things* marked "quite a departure" for him, with the remark "It was about time I started writing poetry"³⁰. It is a final acknowledgement of the role of "poet", a flaunting of the transcendence of conflict, hidden beneath modesty. Whatever conflict had taken place as the speaker's ground shifted ("the line between panic and formulae" as it appears in "The Mud Vision"), takes place in his previous collection *The Haw Lantern*. If *North* delivers a resolution to the meta-conflicts of Heaney's previous works, *The Haw Lantern* does the same with regard to the later works. It comes on the one hand as a series of postcards and records from frontiers, republics and islands, caught between physical and metaphorical as the writer tentatively steps from familiar ground, and, on the other hand, like a last plea for the voice of representation, the unfamiliar and uncomfortable first person plural. An instance of the first is "From the Frontier of Writing" (the title's invitation to the avant-garde is immediately assaulted, superficially, by the pentameter):

The tightness and nilness round that space
when the car stops in the road, the troops inspect
its make and number and, as one bends his face

towards your window, you catch sight of more
on a hill beyond, eyeing with intent
down cradled guns that hold you under cover

and everything is pure interrogation
until a rifle motions and you move
with guarded unconcerned acceleration -

a little emptier, a little spent

³⁰ with Fintan O'Toole on *The Late Show*, Nov 1991.

as always by that quiver in the self,
subjugated, yes, and obedient.

So you drive on to the frontier of writing
where it happens again. The guns on tripods;
the sergeant with his on-off mike repeating

data about you, waiting for the squawk
of clearance; the marksman training down
out of the sun upon you like a hawk.

And suddenly your through, arraigned yet freed,

...

past armour-plated vehicles, out between
the posted soldiers flowing and receding
like tree shadows into the polished windscreen.

NSP 184

The allegory is blurred by the finer definition of its tenor, but even without the throw-back to "The Toome Road", the frontier of the pioneer is clearly dismissed, almost cynically, particularly in the false universal *you*, and the internal alignment of "arraigned yet freed" with "subjugated ... and obedient". The sense is rather that too many have been here before; the mapping is complete and patrolled, but whether the agent is the *superego*, publishers, government or the media is not clear. A poem that invites a number of readings is already a surprise in Heaney's work, and the next surprise is the pervading sense of passivity ("the car stops"; "suddenly your through") moving towards complicity ("out between/ the posted soldiers") permeating the familiar antagonism. For contemporary poetry delineates the frontiers of writing even if it is anti-avant-garde, if it is in fact consolidating a border rather than extending a horizon. "Quiver in the self" (pun?) meets "data about you" to produce implicitly the public figure, the data-based poet of a societal curriculum. The scrutiny is that of a receptive and critical audience as well as of the poet in response to that audience. The political accusations of *North* finally meet with the self-accusations that have dogged his poetry ever since, to produce a synthesis of complicity, the self "spent" like a gun, the vehicle (poem) "guarded", the "posted soldiers" "flowing" into the "polished windscreen" of Heaney's

perfected style. (The poet in the car becomes an increasingly common metaphor for the self in the poem from *Field Day* on).

The quasi-fictional setting for this investigation is significant in other of these poems also; "The Republic of Conscience", "The Disappearing Island", and create an appropriately ambiguous context for the growing fictionalisation of an increasingly documented life. It is perhaps not surprising that the poems in *The Haw Lantern* which re-attempt a community spokesman, "The Mud Vision", "From the Canton of Expectation", are less convincing. The title poem, "The Haw Lantern" achieves a more subtle unity of the two, by its *recognition*, at last, that the scrutinizer, scrutinized and absolver all originate politically only in so far as they originate in the poet himself - "Diogenes/ with his lantern, seeking one just man" (Heaney is both of these men). The haw lantern, with

its bonded pith and stone,
its blood-prick, that you wish would test you and clear you,
its pecked-at ripeness that scans you, then moves on.
NSP 197

becomes the ideal model for Heaney's poetry of scrutiny, accusation, and absolution. But here it is two-way: it recognises its own constructed systems, which is a far more appropriate authenticity than the increasingly forced expiations of guilt that were becoming a worn trademark rather than a genuine investigation. Poetry here moves decisively away from the grand statement and becomes instead

a small light for small people
wanting no more from them but that they keep
the wick of self-respect from dying out,
not having to blind them with illumination.
NSP 197

The sonnet sequence "Clearances", returns like so much of Heaney's poetry, to death, the very frontier of authenticity. However, the mood is set more by the painstaking recalling of childhood, in a different mood from that of his early poems, an unmetaphorical attempt at fidelity to memory, which intimates the tone of his next, most recent but one, volume *Seeing Things*.

The translated passages which flank the poems of this volume, one from Virgil, one from Dante, are so immediately resonant with Heaney's opus (visiting the father in the underworld; crossing into Hades as a "just man"), so thoroughly Heaneyfies

the epic poets, that it is hard not to see them as playful tests of the reader's eligibility: the guards at the borders. Indeed the book gives us what we expect along both axes of Heaney's work: the fixed relation between self and authenticity remains in place, the moving relation (the "new departure") takes us into the next stage of that quest: memory. In a way it seems inevitable that a morally untroubled, aesthetically unembarrassed return to the past (as indicated in "Personal Helicon") should dominate at some point in Heaney: if the self is concerned about its authenticity it must examine itself politically; if it is concerned with *preserving* authenticity (trademark) it must focus ever more inward, towards a horizon beyond challenge. In neither case can it avoid the basic dichotomy, once in place. However once a poet can unproblematically reproduce his own authenticity he is far down the road to irony, wherein all such sharp categories begin to dissolve. It is in *Seeing Things* that Heaney finally takes his own advice in Joyce's mouth to stop being so earnest, or rather, learns the importance of being Seamus.

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KIND OF ANNIVERSARY

Károly Pintér

UTOPIA - Approaches to a book with many faces

*Utopos me General from not island made island.
Alone I of-lands all without philosophy
State philosophical I-have-formed for-mortals.
Willingly I-impart my-things, not not-willingly I-accept better-ones.*

(A Specimen of Utopian Poetry in Thomas More's "word-for-word translation")¹

According to Nietzsche, 'only that which has no history can be defined'. If he is right, then the concept of utopia is certainly one among the countless others the definition of which is to be deemed hopeless from the start. The term itself looks back upon a history of almost five hundred years but the underlying idea - the proposition of an ideal human community - is at least two thousand years older. In addition to the sheer historical time span, utopia has been from its inception an ambiguous concept and this inherent ambiguity seems to have been particularly vigorous, reproducing and multiplying itself in the course of the centuries to such an extent that nowadays almost any discourse on utopia is threatened to get bogged down in the quagmire of the interpretation of the very term. A perceptive reading of a large part of the literature written on the subject reveals that in many a case, the participants of a particular scholarly debate are often not even aware of the fact that

¹ More (1965) 25 (an 'example of Utopian poetry' in supposedly original form, transliterated and in Latin translation, was attached to the beginning of *Utopia*)

their disagreement stems from a fundamentally different interpretation of what 'utopia' is.

The detailed investigation of the tortuous development of the concept - and the genre - would stretch the limited space of this essay. It would not be without interest, however, to focus our attention to the generic source and archetype, Thomas More's *Utopia*. Thanks to its pioneering character and the challenging, still provocative ideas it contains, the book has found its way to probably all major literatures and many literature and history textbooks. But its widespread popularity and certain well-known interpretative clichés often obscure the complexity and ambiguity of More's work. A closer examination of this multiplicity of meaning may help us to see how the subsequent development of the utopian genre - with its numerous turns and traps - has been determined and influenced by More's work.

1. RECEPTION AND CRITICAL VIEWS

The word 'Utopia' was invented to designate an imaginary island and as the title of a literary piece.² More's work (published first in 1516 in Louvain, Flanders) achieved instant success and became an outstanding best-seller of its time: the various editions both in Latin and in all the important Western European languages of the age³ ensured that *Utopia* gained wide international popularity and reached not only the privileged few educated in Latin but the literate public as well, the proportion of which was growing with the advent of Reformation.

If we attempt to look for a reason for this considerable success in critical opinions, we may be surprised to find some very different reactions and interpretations, which, on the other hand, can help in highlighting some of the problems surrounding *Utopia*.

The virtuous poet:

Philip Sidney, the noted Elizabethan courtier, traveler and writer, praised More's *Utopia* in the following words in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (published posthumously in 1595):

But euen in the most excellent determination of goodnes, what Philosophers counsell can so redily direct a Prince, as the fayned Cyros in Xenophon, or a vertuous man in all fortunes, as Aeneas in Virgil, or a whole Common-wealth, as the way of Sir Thomas Moores Eutopia? I say the way, because *where Sir Thomas Moore erred, it was the fault of the man and not of the Poet*, for that way of patterning a Common-wealth was

² The word is a Latinized form of a Greek compound: *ou + topos*, meaning 'no-place'. More, however, hid a pun in 'utopia': the Latinized prefix *u-* can stand for the Greek *eu-* as well as *ou-* and thus 'utopia' may also mean 'good-place'.

³ Until 1600, *Utopia* was published in Latin in 11(!) different editions all over Europe (Louvain, Paris, Basel, Florence, Cologne, Wittenberg), with the remarkable exception of England, where the first Latin edition appeared only in 1663. The book was soon translated into several vernaculars as well: before the 16th century was out, three English, two French, two Dutch, one German and one Italian translation were published as well. (Gibson 3-4) The lack of an early Latin edition in England has not been adequately accounted for by scholarship; the most obvious explanation - that is, the possible political risks More would have incurred by the publication during his political career and his being a Catholic martyr and thus a *persona non grata* in Protestant England afterwards - is undercut by the fact that the three 16th-century English editions were published under the rule of Edward (1551), Mary (1556) and Elisabeth (1597), respectively, among widely different political circumstances, and yet they managed to promote *Utopia* to one of the popular and prominent books of the age in Ralph Robinson's classic translation.

most absolute, though hee perchance hath not so absolutely performed it.⁴

Sidney's enthusiasm is justified by the underlying idea of his tract, that is, to argue in favour of the importance and utility of 'poetry' (at that time still designating literature in general) in the spirit of the Horatian idea 'to teach and delight'.⁵ For him, *Utopia* was an outstanding example of the best qualities of 'poetry': it entertains the reader and at the same time persuades him or her about the best moral values not by abstract argumentation but by describing a convincing example, being therefore superior to both philosophy and history. This understanding was essentially in line with the dominant Humanist reading of More as the author of a great Christian allegory. More's fellow humanists - Erasmus, Jerome Busleiden and others - praised the book as an persuasive embodiment of true Christian virtues and practices but neglected (accidentally or deliberately) those aspects of *Utopia* which were difficult to harmonize with the teaching of the Church: religious tolerance, marriage of priests, euthanasia, lack of private property, etc. What is novel about Sidney's evaluation is the justification he provides for this discrepancy by making a distinction between artistic intention and its realization: even with the noblest intentions, a fallible man is prone to commit errors and thus More's perfect commonwealth inevitably has its defects; yet it doesn't disparage his merit of attempting to sketch up such an ideal social organization. Thus Sidney attaches a primarily pragmatic value - teaching ethics through entertainment - to *Utopia* without stopping to consider the actual ideas of the book, treating them as if they were absolutely unambiguous and unquestionably positive.

The Proto-communist:

The long-standing authority of this interpretation was challenged by 19th-century Marxists, who focused on exactly those aspects of the book which - being incongruent with the "Christian commonwealth"-type reading - were blithely tossed aside as mere "human errors". Marx and Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* already cited the famous "sheep-parable"⁶ of Book I to illustrate how market-

⁴ Sidney 18-19 (italics mine)

⁵ Cf. Horace 73: "The aim of the poet is either to benefit, or to amuse, or to make his words at once please and give lessons of life."

⁶ "These placid creatures, which used to require so little food, have now apparently developed a raging appetite, and turned into man-eaters. Fields, houses, towns, everything goes down their throats." (More (1965) 46)

oriented agriculture destroyed the medieval village, and pointed out the astuteness of More's economic prescience. Later Karl Kautsky devoted a whole book to More,⁷ in which he opted for a literal reading of Book II, with special regard to the communal arrangement of life, work and property, and hailed More as a political visionary, an early advocate of communist ideals. This reading later became a schoolroom commonplace in the Soviet Union and the satellite states of the Eastern Bloc.

The man of faith and political philosopher:

The single most influential work in 20th-century More-criticism has been R.W. Chambers' acclaimed biography, in which he evaluated *Utopia* with the following words:

[F]ew books have been more misunderstood than *Utopia*. ... When a sixteenth-century Catholic depicts a pagan state founded on reason and philosophy, he is not depicting his ultimate ideal. Erasmus tells us that More's object was 'to show whence spring the evils of States, with special reference to the English State, with which he was most familiar'. The underlying thought of *Utopia* always is, *With nothing save Reason to guide them, the Utopians do this, and yet we Christian Englishmen, we Christian Europeans...*⁸

In his wake, a whole critical school sprang up, which was characterized by one of its representatives as "humanistic" or "Catholic".⁹ Their argument essentially follows Chambers' line of thought: Book II is a demonstration of the way a good society can be created with the proper application of reason alone; such a society, however, is not More's own ideal because it lacks the guidance of true revelation, and that explains those aspects of *Utopia* contrary to Christian principles. It is thus a demonstration of the power of natural reason and an implicit criticism of contemporary European practices but also intended to show the limits of mere reason.¹⁰ Such an approach locates the core of the work in the serious political-ethical content it offers and considers it largely as a theoretical treatise expressed in a metaphorical form. Another current of the same school admonishes the advocates of the above-mentioned approach for their failure to appreciate the original and

⁷ See Kautsky

⁸ Chambers 118, 121

⁹ See Logan 8, Elliott 26; both quote the eminent More-scholar, Edward L. Surtz S.J., editor of the Yale critical edition of More's *Complete Works*.

¹⁰ For one of the most substantial arguments in favour of this reading, see Duhamel.

radical nature of the ideas put forward by More and suggests that *Utopia* is above all an outstanding piece of Renaissance political theory.¹¹

The literary artist:

The post-war boom of literary criticism with its contesting approaches and opinions has also affected the understanding of *Utopia*: a new group of critics drew attention to the defects of earlier simplistic readings or sweeping generalizations by shifting the emphasis on the satirical, that is, the actual literary nature of *Utopia*: the numerous puns and learned jokes; the question of More's attitude towards his own creation, the admirer of the island, Raphael Hythlodæus; the parallels *Utopia* shows with classical satirical works¹² are all to be accounted for to form a balanced view of the full meaning of the work. Some of them has gone as far as suggesting that *Utopia* is a mere *jeu d'esprit*, in fact an anti-utopia, a parody of the ideas of Hythlodæus and similar dreamy-eyed enthusiasts.¹³ These new critical observations, however, have not eliminated but rather multiplied the problems surrounding the book.

2. SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

More, of course, did not create his island out of the void: criticism has pointed to various probable sources of inspiration and discerned the influence of several traditions. The most obvious of these is the classical heritage: More received the best humanist education of his time in Oxford and London, made close friends with Erasmus during the latter's extended visits in England and joined his efforts to render the great works of ancient Greek authors available by translating Lucian into Latin. A comparison between *Utopia* and Lucian's fantastic voyages clearly shows that they undoubtedly served as a structural model.¹⁴ The other famous archetype is of course Plato's *Republic*, to which More makes explicit references at several

¹¹ A recent and excellent example of this approach is Logan; this book also contains a detailed and balanced evaluation of the various dominant currents of More-criticism (4-18)

¹² See e.g. "The Shape of Utopia" in Elliott 25-49

¹³ See e.g. C.S. Lewis 169

¹⁴ "[I]t is a curious fact that in More's lifetime he was probably more widely read as the translator of Lucian than the author of *Utopia*. By 1535 his translations of Lucian had appeared in fourteen editions compared to only six editions of *Utopia*." (Branham 23) This excellent study demonstrates in great detail that one of the dialogues by Lucian which More translated into English, *Menippus Goes to Hell*, shows close structural similarities to *Utopia*.

points,¹⁵ and his style and use of rhetorical figures shows that he has learned a lot from the classical masters.¹⁶

On the other hand - which might be less conspicuous to the majority of readers -, medieval attitudes, thought and literature also form an organic part of More's work. He belonged to the first generation of English Humanists; the earliest pioneers, John Colet, William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre and others, were probably no more than ten years his senior and although they all acted as his teacher at one time, More later became their intimate friend. Their claim to being 'Humanists' rests not only on their classical Greek scholarship but also on a passionate interest in contemporary problems of doctrine and the Church. All of them except More were churchmen, but More's early biographers emphasized his religious devotion, his austere personal tastes and his strong attraction to holy orders.¹⁷ Accordingly, there are several aspects of *Utopia* which show more affinity with the Middle Ages than the Renaissance. Chambers referred to a number of features which would have almost certainly made More look like a conservative man of his age. *Utopia* is

¹⁵ See e.g. the short, playful poem More inserted before the beginning of his book (ostensibly written by Hythlodæus' nephew), in which he makes an ironic statement about the purpose of *Utopia* :

**Utopia priscis dicta, ob infrequentiam,
Nunc civitatis aemula Platonicae,
Fortasse victrix, (nam quod illa literis
Deliniavit, hoc ego una prestiti,)
viris et opibus optimisque legibus
Eutopia merito sum vocanda nomine.**

(More [1971] 4; in More [1965] 28 and 133, one can find a rather free translation:

**NOPLACIA was once my name,
That is, a place where no one goes.
Plato's *Republic* now I claim
To match, or beat at its own game;
For that was just a myth in prose,
But what he wrote of, I became,
Of men, wealth, laws a solid frame,
A place where every wise man goes:
GOPLACIA is now my name.)**

Another reference is made to the famous archetype during the debate between More and Raphael in Book I (More [1965] 57).

¹⁶ For details, see e.g. McCutcheon (1977) and (1985) on More's use of litotes and Stoic paradoxes.

¹⁷ Chambers 71-80.

essentially founded upon the Four Cardinal Virtues assigned for goodly pagans (Wisdom, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice) by medieval tradition. The organization of the island in the main resembles the monastic way of life: class distinction is absent, manual labour is considered a positive virtue for all, private property is abolished, and lifestyle is frugal, lacking all luxuries, with discipline strongly enforced by a self-governing community.¹⁸ In addition, one scholar has provided convincing proof for the similarity between *Utopia* and eminent Scholastics in terms of argumentation and style.¹⁹

And last but by no means least, contemporary European issues and events are both explicitly and implicitly present in the book. Perhaps the one thing all critics agree on is that *Utopia* is a powerful criticism of the state of early sixteenth-century Christian Europe: besides the openly political dialogue of More and Hythlodæus in Book I, most of the satire of Book II is also implicitly directed against the exasperating reality of the age, with its ceaseless and pointless wars, selfish and tyrannical monarchs, greedy and corrupted churchmen and rampant social problems. Another obvious inspiration behind the book is the brand new experience of a widening and wondrous world full of surprises often exceeding the fancy of storytellers, resulting in a curious mingling of fantasy and reality in the common imagination. There is proof in the text for the fact that More was familiar with recent accounts of the wonders experienced by explorers of the New World.²⁰

3. NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Surveying the enormous diversity of literary, political, philosophical and historical influences on *Utopia*, one may well wonder how and to what extent More succeeded in moulding his disparate material into a unified artistic work. Doubts concerning the coherence of the book are further strengthened by the variety of often clashing opinions on *Utopia* outlined above. If we attempt to look for the

¹⁸ Chambers 124-130.


¹⁹ See Duhamel.

²⁰ In Book One of *Utopia*, Raphael Hythlodæus, the man who visited Utopia, is introduced to More as somebody who accompanied Amerigo Vespucci and "forced Amerigo to let him be one of the twenty-four men who were left behind in that fort. ... when Vespucci had gone, Raphael did a lot of exploring with five other members of the garrison." In this way, More skillfully gives an air of authenticity to what Hythlodæus is going to tell, because this account is taken almost verbatim from Vespucci's own descriptions of his adventures, *New World* (about 1505) and *Four Voyages* (1507) (More [1965] 38-39, 135-136)

primary cause of these disagreements, we inevitably arrive at the fictional framework within the limits of which More chose to constrain himself. *Utopia* is divided into two books of unequal length: Book I (B.I) is roughly half the length of Book II (B.II); in later editions, they are preceded by several letters exchanged between More, Peter Gilles (who is More's Flemish companion in B.I and another listener to Raphael Hythlodæus' narration) and other humanist friends (the number of letters varies in different editions). B.I partly serves as a general introduction, describing the actual occasion and circumstances of the encounter between Raphael and More, and partly contains a lengthy Platonic-style debate between them, with Raphael taking the lead. It is in the course of this debate that the island of Utopia arises, and B.II is essentially Raphael's continuous, uninterrupted and unmediated monologue about this island and its inhabitants, with a very brief, almost hasty, epilogue by More.

The apparent purpose of this whole fictional apparatus is to give an air of authenticity to the otherwise quite incredible words of Raphael. More's letter to Gilles, which has been attached to later editions of the book as a kind of introduction, consists mostly of repeated statements about how carefully he strove to "repeat what Raphael told us" (29):²¹ he implores Gilles to reinforce the correctness of each word either from his own memory or contact Raphael himself and get him to do the proof-reading; he even asks a trivial question about the length of a certain bridge in Utopia to show: "You see, I'm extremely anxious to get my facts right" (30). Just by way of a side remark, he requests Gilles to find out the exact location of the island since "we never thought of asking, and he never thought of telling us whereabouts in the New World Utopia is" (30-31).

This letter is, however, worthy of a second, closer look. More is all too eager to present himself as a humble scribe who has no creative ambitions nor talents but they are not necessary either, since the wording, the style, the structure is not his own: "So much of it was ready made, that there was practically nothing left for me to do." (29). But in More's hands, this seemingly modest disavowal of authorship becomes a crafty excuse for any defects, stylistic or other, the 'story' (that is, Raphael's account) might possess. More plays the game perfectly straight-faced: "I only wish my scholarship and intelligence were up to the standard of my memory... any lies that I tell will be quite unintentional, for I'd much rather be thought honest than clever" (30)

 All subsequent quotations are from More (1965), with page numbers given in brackets.

This exaggerated modesty and self-effacement is, of course, one of the stylistic requirements and clichés of the Renaissance following classical examples, just as Gilles' exuberant raptures in return (this letter is addressed to Busleiden) are, who glorifies More's excellent memory, beautiful Latin style and in general "the prodigious, if not positively superhuman power of his intellect" (34). Gilles is also quick to join More's authenticity game when he makes up a 'cover story' why More could not recall the exact location of the island (More was distracted by his servant's whisper and somebody else started to cough just at the moment Raphael uttered the relevant words). But do they seriously expect their readers - originally most of them also learned humanists - to be misled by such a traditional and transparent fictional framework of false reality?

An excerpt from More's letter may be helpful in this matter. At the end of his message to Gilles, More expresses doubts whether he should or will publish his work at all. His explanation is worth quoting in full:

Tastes differ so widely, and some people are so humourless, so uncharitable, and so absurdly wrong-headed, that one would probably do far better to relax and enjoy life than worry oneself to death trying to instruct or entertain a public which will only despise one's efforts, or at least feel no gratitude for them. Most readers know nothing about literature - many regard it with contempt. Lowbrows find everything heavy going that isn't completely lowbrow. Highbrows reject everything as vulgar that isn't a mass of archaisms. Some only like the classics, others only their own works. Some are so grimly serious that they disapprove of all humour, others so half-witted that they can't stand wit. Some are so literal-minded that the slightest hint of irony affects them as water affects a sufferer from hydrophobia. Others come to different conclusions every time they stand up or sit down. Then there's the alcoholic school of critics, who sit in public houses, pronouncing *ex cathedra* verdicts of condemnation, just as they think fit. *They seize upon your publications, as a wrestler seizes upon his opponent's hair, and use them to drag you down, while they themselves remain quite invulnerable, because their barren pates are completely bald - so there's nothing for you to get hold of.*

(31-32; italics mine)

Even though his letter is on the whole ironic and insincere, we have reason to suppose that the words quoted above reflect More's own opinion about the contemporary literary situation. It is true that this position - that of the intellectual

aristocrat, contemplating his age with a condescending satirical eye and occasional disgust - is very much in line with the fashionable humanist attitude of the times. But we should bear in mind that More was indeed not writing for "most readers", "low- or highbrows", "humourless", "half-witted" or "literal-minded" people: the language in which he chose to write, the fact that he had it published abroad, in a contemporary cultural centre of Northwestern Europe, the close affinity with classical Greek archetypes - all this strongly suggests that his audience in mind was a small and select community of erudite artist-scholars - people who can appreciate a complex work in its fullness, complete with its philosophical load, playful fantasy, learned allusions and satirical-critical edge. The underlying idea could best be understood as an intellectual game of a closed society which has its own secret rules to keep undesired intruders out. One of these tricks is to play the fool and thus fool others, as More appears to have done so already with some success: "there's a very pious theologian, who's desperately keen to visit Utopia, not in a spirit of idle curiosity, but so that he can foster the growth of Christianity ... As he wishes to do it officially, he has decided to get himself sent out there by the Pope, and actually created Bishop of Utopia. He's not deterred by any scruples about begging for preferment." (31)

This is the clearest moment in the letter when More's laughter is nearly audible behind the lines. This allusion, regardless of whether to a real or an imagined person, is a cutting quip on human ambition and human folly. More, however, who was also a lawyer, a man of practical wisdom and experience, must have known all too well that such people can be found in substantial numbers 'out there', that is, outside the circle of intellectual aristocrats. He must have also been perfectly aware of the possible dangers one exposes oneself to when taking such a radically new approach to society and religion. His work in its final form strongly suggests that, just as a seasoned professional wrestler should do, he was determined not to offer much hair for his opponents to grasp. A discerning reading of B.I of *Utopia* makes it clear that More the author was painstakingly careful to distance himself from Raphael, the "dispenser of nonsense".²²

The debate:

B.I begins the story at the beginning: More the narrator's ('More')²³ voyage to Flanders, his first encounter with the stranger and Raphael's brief life story are all

²² The meaning attached to the Greek-derived name 'Hythlodæus' by Paul Turner; see More (1965) 8

²³ To help distinguish between the various different references of the name, it seems justified to introduce three terms: 'More', the narrator of the whole story, 'More2', who argues with Hythlodæus

duly described. He is introduced to 'More' by Gilles as a philosopher-traveler ("He is really more like Ulysses, or even Plato." [38]), an experienced and very wise man. 'More' and Gilles are both eager to listen to his voyages and experiences in the New World but Raphael's actual account of his adventures is little more than alluded to: "My present plan is merely to repeat what he said about the laws and customs of Utopia.", says 'More' (41).

Before coming to that, however, 'More' considers it necessary to record "the conversation which led up to the first mention of that republic" (41). It is this exchange which gives the bulk of B.I and provides the narrative framework of the direct and uninterrupted description of Utopia in B.II, therefore it is of particular interest to us.

The conversation is triggered by the repeated urge of both Gilles and More the debater ('More2'):²⁴ why does Raphael, a man of so great wisdom and practical experience, not join the service of some king in order to apply his knowledge for public benefit? Raphael, however, is quick and categorical in rejecting the idea, and, in support of his position, he offers some scathing criticism of contemporary politics: kings are more fond of war and conquest than proper peaceful government, royal councillors are too arrogant, stupid and conceited to accept anybody else's advice or opinion. As an example and illustration, he brings up England which he also visited a few years earlier and where, at the dining table of the Lord Chancellor, Cardinal Morton,²⁵ he entered into an argument with an English lawyer.

From this point on, the narration becomes quite complicated: 'More' quotes the words of Raphael who in turn quotes a debate between himself and some others. The proper referential identity of the pronoun 'I' has thus become considerably confused, which may have been More's exact purpose: after all, it is certainly not without danger to criticize radically the political and social circumstances of one's own country. And Raphael is anything but restrained in his criticism during the quoted argument: he condemns the practice of hanging thieves as both exceedingly cruel and ineffective since the cause of crime - extreme poverty - remains. As to the cause of this poverty, he provides a surprisingly thorough and keen economic

and whose words are quoted by 'More', and More, the author, whose role is similar to that of a puppet master, watching the performance with a knowing smile. This system of distinction was partly inspired by Elliott, which also contains an incisive analysis of the complex narrative structure of *Utopia*.

²⁴ See previous note.

²⁵ Morton was More's benefactor and virtual stepfather, who raised and educated him, as a short remark of 'More2' on 57 also makes clear. This explains More's (Hythlodæus') admiring and affectionate portrayal of him.

analysis (which has always been a favourite with Marxist readers): the idle and wasteful lifestyle of the nobility compels them to make as much money as they can, therefore they enclose cultivated lands for raising sheep and selling the valuable wool. This practice both deprives people of their livelihood and drives food prices up. "Thus a few greedy people have converted one of England's greatest natural advantages into a national disaster. ... you create thieves, and then punish them for stealing!" (48-49) Raphael is therefore arguing strongly against the death penalty and, prompted by Morton, he even sketches up a minor 'prison-Utopia': an imaginary country (supposedly known by him), where criminals are not executed but sentenced to hard labour; if, however, they work diligently and behave well, they are treated humanely and are even allowed to move about freely during the day, wearing distinctive clothes. Thus, the lives of the criminals are saved, they do not suffer disproportionately and they even benefit the whole community.

These are radical words, which could easily become dangerous for an Englishman; but they are put into the mouth of a foreigner. At the table, everybody disagrees with him except for the wise Cardinal, whose tentative endorsement to the idea (it would be worth a trial) suddenly changes all other opinions. Thus, the political treatise becomes also a parable of servility - the original reason why Raphael has come up with the whole story.

After Raphael's long lecture, 'More2' takes up the debate again: he agrees with Raphael in what he has said, and yet tries to make him change his mind with the argument of duty; as a support, he refers to Plato in the *Republic*: "You know what your friend Plato says - that a happy state of society will never be achieved, until philosophers are kings, or kings take to studying philosophy. Well, just think how infinitely remote that happy state must remain if philosophers won't even condescend to give kings a word of advice!" (57)

Raphael retorts by saying that philosophers are glad to give advice and they have done so already in their works but people in power have never listened to them: "And that's doubtless what Plato meant." (57) He again provides examples, this time theoretical ones: what would the king of France say, if he were, together with his councillors, to annex new territories, and plotting all kinds of treacherous political moves, should a philosopher like Raphael advised him to stay in peace and concentrate on the better government of his own kingdom? Or what would be any king's reaction if, when considering how to make more money out of his subjects, Raphael reminded him that he rules not for his own but his subjects' benefit and therefore he should devote all his energies to the betterment of their lot? In these

imagined exchanges between himself and the king, Raphael again cites examples taken from nonexistent lands which are both "not far from Utopia" - the name is thus mentioned twice, seemingly casually and accidentally.

'More2' reacts in an interesting way: "Frankly, I don't see the point of saying things like that, or of giving advice that you know they'll never accept. ... That sort of thing is quite fun in a friendly conversation, but at a Cabinet meeting, where major decisions of policy have to be made, such philosophizing would be completely out of place." (63) What he prefers instead is a more practical kind of philosophy which takes reality and its constraints into account and takes a step-by-step approach in advocating reform. "You must go to work indirectly. You must handle everything as tactfully as you can ... For things will never be perfect, until human beings are perfect - which I don't expect them to be for quite a number of years!" (64)

Raphael strongly disagrees: he considers such an attitude an excuse for telling lies, which is unworthy of a philosopher, and also a cowardly endorsement of blind prejudice and petrified tradition. But besides this, why are his ideas so unusual and unrealistic?

If we're never to say anything that might be thought unconventional, for fear of its sounding ridiculous, we'll have to hush up, even in a Christian country, practically everything that Christ taught. ... His doctrines have been modified by ingenious preachers - doubtless on your recommendation! 'We'll never get human behaviour in line with Christian ethics,' these gentlemen must have argued, 'so let's adapt Christian ethics to human behaviour...' But I can't see what good they've done. They've merely enabled people to sin with a clear conscience - and that's about all I could do at a Cabinet meeting.

(64-65)

This gradually heightening argument is crucial since it draws a clear line of distinction between 'More2' and Raphael: the former, the *alter ego* of the author, is shown as a well-intentioned, morally earnest but at the same time sober and realistic man, whereas the latter appears doubtless highly educated and morally upright but also a stubborn adherent of noble but unreal ideas, a man of little practical wisdom. Or, alternatively, 'More2' can be regarded with equal justification as a man of cowardly compromise, whereas Raphael champions true Christian virtues and principles with unwavering loyalty. In either case, it is Raphael who comes to the conclusion that the root of all evil in the world is private property and material

inequality, and cites Utopia - here no longer in a fleeting remark but in an emphatic statement - as a country immensely superior to all European kingdoms by virtue of its institutions. There, with the elimination of private property, hardship and poverty have also disappeared.

'More2' continues to disagree and his counter-arguments are also surprisingly familiar:

I don't believe you'd ever have a reasonable standard of living under a communist system. There'd always tend to be shortages, because nobody would work hard enough. In the absence of a profit motive, everyone would become lazy, and rely on everyone else to do the work for him. ... there wouldn't be any respect for authority ... in a classless society.

(67)

Raphael's retort is predictable: "You're bound to take that view, for you simply can't imagine what it would be like ... *But if you'd been with me in Utopia, and seen it all for yourself as I did* ... you'd be the first to admit that you'd never seen a country so well organized." (67, italics mine) Such a statement naturally begs the request to introduce the famous island in detail - and 'More2' indeed does so. Abstract argument thus gives way to a supposedly practical example, communism in action - B.II follows.

More and 'More' versus Raphael:

How and in what direction does the dialogue of B.I examined above modify and reinterpret the meaning of B.II? First of all, it does not only identify but thoroughly characterize the teller of the utopian tale, Raphael Hythlodacus, and establish him as a person whose ideas and opinions are markedly different from More's own. The careful distance created between Raphael and 'More' constitutes the primary interpretative problem for most critics: which participant should be supposed to articulate the author More's own views?

The surprisingly short conclusion may be invited in help. The work ends abruptly: 'More' (or 'More2', if you like; the distinction is no longer relevant) thanks Raphael for his interesting account, and, seeing that he is tired after so much talking, bids good-bye to him with the words that they should meet and discuss the whole thing sometime. In his heart, however, he remains unconvinced:

The laws and customs of that country seemed to me in many cases perfectly ridiculous. ... there was the grand absurdity on which their whole society was based, communism minus money. Now this in itself would

mean the end of the aristocracy, and consequently of all dignity, splendour, and majesty, which are generally supposed to be the real glories of any nation. ... I cannot agree with everything that he said ... But I freely admit that there are many features of the Utopian Republic which I should like - though I hardly expect - to see adopted in Europe.

(132)

'More' thus remains faithful to his proclaimed belief to the last; he behaves exactly as a person of authority should expect him to do: he is the defender of the *status quo*, the representative of practical, if unimaginative, wisdom as opposed to the devoted and radical reformer, the enthusiast, the man of dangerous neologisms - Raphael Hythlodæus. The final counter-remarks of 'More', however, appear distinctly feeble, almost downright stupid, when he is trying to oppose "splendour", "majesty" and "aristocracy" to the well-being and harmony of Utopia. More, the author, does not offer a very flattering picture of himself with these last words - if we are to take him seriously. But even without knowing that More in reality was renowned for his frugal tastes and his contempt for all kinds of luxury and "splendour", the hidden irony in these words can be perceived. He is, however, a perfect player, whose face remains straight throughout: there is no direct way to catch him out, no opportunity to grab a single lock of his hair.

If the opinions of 'More' are most probably not identical with those of More himself, is it possible then that the real *raisonneur* is Raphael after all? It is true that, especially in the first half of B.I, one has the impression that Raphael's words could be More's own - but one should never disregard the significance of the fact that *Utopia* is a piece of fiction where the island is described by a character whose name means "dispenser of nonsense" and whose occasional overheated enthusiasm as well as his complete disregard of contemporary European reality make him look comic; the punning place-names and titles in Utopia, the supplied 'utopian alphabet' and 'poem',²⁶ the occasional surprising and humorous episodes in the description all serve as reminders that we are in the world of playful imagination, and thus the solemnity of the whole venture is constantly brought into suspicion. More's opponent wrestler, besides lacking anything to hold onto, has to watch the ground under his feet throughout.

Perhaps the most interesting attempt at clearing up the problem of "authorial intention" has been the book of J.H. Hexter, who conducted a detailed investigation

²⁶ See quote at the beginning of this essay.

into the composition of *Utopia*.²⁷ After a close examination of the text and various extrinsic evidence, he concluded that More wrote most of B. II (except for the end) and the general introduction of B.I first, while staying in Antwerp as part of an official trade delegation, and added the lengthy and meandering dialogue of Raphael and 'More' (which he called 'The Dialogue of Counsel'), that is, the bulk of Book I as well as the short conclusion later in London. This means that the unmediated monologue on the imaginary ideal community was written first; which was placed within the qualifying context afterwards. Hexter's conclusion is that, in this way, More managed to communicate fairly radical ideas without the danger of exposing himself to direct criticism while his own standpoint was made successfully indeterminable, but his real mouthpiece, as the order of composition suggests, is Raphael.

This is an attractive conclusion, but by no means the only one possible. The fact (provided that we accept it for one) that More felt it important to insert 'The Dialogue of Counsel' before B.II does not necessarily mean that his only legitimate brainchild is B.II and the whole of B.I serves exclusively evasive purposes. The passion and the eloquence of the argument gives one the impression that More, the author, had been turning these problems over and over in his mind for some time and the dialogue represents his own inner torment. Several critics have suggested that, after the successful embassy to the Netherlands in 1515 which also served as a fictitious background to his work, More got within reach of royal service but he harboured serious doubts about accepting such a position and this is what prompted 'The Dialogue of Counsel'. If we accept this idea, however, then - in the light of More's ultimate decision and subsequent prominent political career - we are forced to conclude that, in More's mind, 'More' emerged victorious over Raphael, pragmatic considerations triumphed over idealistic principles. In that case, More may well have wondered during his last days in the Tower awaiting his execution for treason that Raphael was right after all: philosophers, no matter how good wrestlers they are, should keep away from monarchs as much as possible if they do not want to lose their head and their hair.

Utopia has become known to us in its final ambiguous and complex form; any balanced approach to the subsequent history of the concept of utopia should, as much as possible, bear all the implications of this in mind.

²⁷ See Hexter.

4. CONCLUSION

More's *Utopia* stands at the crossroads of European culture, where the paths of the classical, the medieval and the Renaissance traditions meet, and it shows a different face to travellers approaching it from the various directions. Ancient models and recent discoveries, traditional thought and novel ideas, serious intention and mocking irony, severe criticism and *jeu d'esprit* - these are all present in More's universe and this is the reason why *Utopia*, just like its 'spiritual child', the concept of utopia, resists one-sided approaches and sweeping generalizations. Philosophy, literature and social reform all intermingle in a satirical composition, which must have appeared quite natural and self-explanatory for a Renaissance humanist-artist-lawyer-politician; he probably would not have understood the strict later separation of these disciplines, largely the result of the compartmentalization efforts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the age of reason and scientism. Bearing this complexity in mind, one is justified to see the subsequent development of utopia as a step-by-step realization of all the potential layers present in a nascent state in More's great pioneering work.

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REVIEWS

Borbála Szakács

Issues of Representation: The Irish Anthologies

John Montague, ed: *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (London, 1974)

Paul Muldoon, ed: *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, (London, 1986)

Frank Ormsby, ed: *Poets from the North of Ireland* (Belfast, 1990, second edition)

Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon, eds: *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Harmondsworth, 1990)

Seamus Deane, ed: *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry, 1991)

In the twentieth century the publication of anthologies has two main features: representing and canonizing. An anthology is constructed with the intention of being representative of a given culture, genre or group of people. (This aim is what always, necessarily makes an anthology exclusive.) Also, anthologies are a means of articulating identities. In a relatively homogeneous culture, or in a culture that willingly recognises diversity,

anthologies are less controversial issues. In a society that "lacks a common identity" the attempt to construct a book that is representative is a dangerous and at the same time challenging enterprise. Representation then leads to canonization: the value-judgement of including or excluding prevails among the literate.

It is very well known that one element of the cultural tension in Ireland is the problem of tradition.

Social, political, religious, linguistic and literary traditions are all crucial and problematic issues. The last is my concern here, though these terms easily converge.

The problem begins with the definition of literary tradition in Ireland. Three writers have dominated the literary landscape of twentieth century Ireland: Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. (Edna Longley calls them the “obvious pillars”¹ of Irish literary heritage) All of them were Irish yet all of them represent a problematic aspect of Irishness.² Joyce spent most of his life outside Ireland, Beckett wrote many of his works in French, and Yeats, though he was the main figure of the Irish Revival, had no grasp of the Irish language. However, despite the ambiguities, it is very acceptable that these writers should be given the term “pillars” of the Irish literary tradition. Whether the writers living in Ireland north and south would equally claim them to be their “forefathers,” is another question. Polarised writers will have a polarised audience and a polarised community will invent a literature which reflects its own preoccupations.

Literary heritage in Ireland definitely includes English literary tradition. According to Declan Kiberd, “If England had never

existed, the Irish would have been rather lonely. Each nation badly needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself.”³

One of the main sources of a nation’s self-definition is literature. Speaking the English language the Irish have become part of the English tradition. However, this heritage is not valued to the same extent everywhere on the island. Those who claim a stronger relationship with England will probably claim a more obvious linearity in the literary tradition as well. And the contrast does not merely lie between English and Irish: Irish writers are sensitive also to a threat to their identity posed by the international character of the language in which they write. As John Hewitt, speaking about the Ulster writer, remarked: “He must be a *rooted* man, must carry the native tang of his idiom like the native dust on his sleeve; otherwise he is an airy internationalist, thistledown, a twig in a stream.”⁴

There is a contrast between being “a rooted man” and “an internationalist.” These are two different, and perhaps ambivalent, identities which coexist in the Irish writers’ unconscious. (“The English language is the speech of millions. There is no limit to his [the writer’s] potential audience. Yet I believe this

had better not be achieved by his choosing materials and subjects outside or beyond those presented by his native environment.”⁵

In contemporary Ulster poetry both attitudes towards the English tradition coexist. The first generation of the Ulster poetic revival (itself a much debated term) inherited much from the English “Movement.” The Belfast Group that attracted the poets Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley was actually led by an English critic and poet Philip Hobsbaum, whose “primary formal allegiances were to clearly-cut Movement patterns.”⁶ There are other poets, however, who seem to be less “influenced” by the English heritage (eg. Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian). What may contribute to the fact that there is a “poetic revival” in the North is that these poets write in an international language about (controversial) national features. And by national I mean something that distinguishes them from the other English speakers, and not something that would necessarily be a uniting factor. All these poets are evidently Irish but they do not necessarily share the same Irish identity.

Catholic and Protestant traditions are other divisive factors. Being brought up as a Catholic or as a Protestant makes a huge difference in

Ireland, particularly in Northern Ireland.⁷ For much of this century equal access to education in Northern Ireland was denied to the Catholic population. It has been argued that Protestants were “more likely to have marketable skills and to have higher educational qualifications than Catholics.”⁸ Primary and secondary level education were religiously segregated, and I consider this to be an important contributory factor to the diversity of the literary tradition. The tradition of religious segregation found its way into literary criticism as well; the discussion of Catholic and/or Protestant; “nationalist” vs “revisionist” literature has been long on the agenda.

Language is another significant element of the Irish situation. There is the question of linguistic heritage and the actual usage of language. Ulster English has obviously been under the influence of Scots and Gaelic (and British English). There are a few people who speak Gaelic and even fewer who speak Scots, nevertheless, this cross-fertilization came up with a hybrid English which is not found anywhere else in the world. From other perspectives, language is a controversial issue. Above all, it is highly political so that, for instance, discourse about Northern Ireland requires acute

sensitivity to the subtle gradations of linguistic meaning. Paul Arthur and Keith Jeffrey in their introduction to a contemporary history of Northern Ireland state: "In writing about Northern Ireland we are sharply aware that language, like everything else in Ireland, has a political dimension."⁹

Nationality, the other crucial term, also evokes important questions. In trying to define what nationality in Ireland means, one might assert that in this island there are Irish and British nationalities. Both are controversial and exclusive terms for obvious reasons. Reflecting upon the Belfast graffiti "Brits out" Arthur and Jeffrey write: "'Brits out' begs the question of who exactly the 'Brits' are: does this group merely comprise members of the administrative and security forces who were recruited in Great Britain, or does it include all those who see themselves as 'British'? This latter group might include over a million people; more than one-fifth of the population of the island."¹⁰

The basic problem is of course that claiming one national identity (either Irish or British) is a clear-cut political statement, and claiming more than one national identity questions the meaning of nationality itself. "The great advantage of living

in Northern Ireland is that you can be in three places at once"¹¹, says Edna Longley, but I am not sure that it really is an advantage in the political sense.

Professor Longley believes in a "denationalized landscape"¹² where difference and division is not forced into one accommodating identity but is "faced up" because "this would actually help the North to relax into a genuinely diverse sense of its own identity."¹³ (I wonder whether a "genuinely diverse sense of identity" could ever be relaxing. I see it rather as an element of tension which, when faced by the sensitive mind, may lead to a productive creativity.)

The questions of national identity and religious affiliation blur into each other with crucial force in Northern Ireland: "religion remains a key social and political determinant in the province. It is not a question of religious belief but one of social and political identification."¹⁴

Indeed, the religious debate has long ceased to be about transubstantiation, purgatory or the veneration of images. Religious difference is almost an ethnic difference - you are *born* a Catholic or a Protestant. In Ireland being an "atheist Catholic" or an "atheist Protestant" is not in the least considered to be a controversial

identity. According to Gerald Dawe, "Ironically this condition [of a self-divided society] has very little to do with politics since there is very little *real* political discussion in the north. What clusters around the religious distinction between Protestant and Catholic is a desperate longing *for* identity in a society that lacks a common one."¹⁵ The society cannot have a common identity because of the historical segregation between Catholic and Protestant. But the lack of such a common identity reinforces the need to have a homogeneous identity on a personal level, which then further widens the gap between the two traditions. This creates a particular dilemma for writers who come under pressure either to give up searching for an identity ("Irish identity has to be sacrificed to facilitate the achievement of Irish unity"¹⁶) or to adhere to an image of identity, whether national, religious, linguistic or all of these together, which eventually has its danger of exclusion and aggression. Gerald Dawe remarks that "Ireland, the place where we live, *is* a sectarian place and we are all sucked into its perversity from childhood."¹⁷

If we now turn to the famous/notorious *Field Day* collection and four Irish poetry anthologies, we may see how

political, national and religious ideas permeate the approach to anthologising in Ireland, and may also observe the different possible ways of understanding the relationship between literature and politics. I do not want to trace actual politics in literature (though to trace literature in politics would be an interesting enterprise). I believe that political and social tensions call forth creative responses, but I am not saying that the response results necessarily in good literature or that good literature necessarily comes from such tension.

The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing [henceforward FDA] was published in 1991 with Seamus Deane as its general editor. The three volume anthology "stretches over 14 or 15 centuries and includes more than five million words."¹⁸ Its avowed aim to cover "Irish writing" - and the way it did so - evoked fierce criticism. *Field Day* is not an anthology of Irish literature - it is an anthology of Irish writing. ("This is less a distinction between writing and literature than an attempt to include the idea of literature within the idea of writing."¹⁹ - S. Deane) It includes political speeches as well as poetry, fiction, drama and literary criticism. In the following pages I will outline

some aspects of the “Field Day debate.”

In *Styles of Belonging: The Cultural Identities of Ulster*²⁰ Edna Longley (who is vehemently opposed to FDA) argues that the anthology “conjoined literature and politics” and “placed a primary emphasis on cultural decolonization” which, “in the Ulster context ... has a nationalistic political resonance.”²¹ Furthermore, she objected to FDA’s approach to the Ulster poetic revival, arguing that it “sometimes prematurely theorised a literary movement which is still various, fluid and unpredictable ... perhaps to self-canonize.” Referring to Deane’s wish to enable “new writing” and “new politics” which are “securely Irish” Professor Longley says “this surely overstates the need to oppose and depose a distant English critical oppression...” She disagrees with the concept of Irishness in FDA and remarks that “If we talk about ‘Irish literature’ we should do so in a neutral sense, referring to the country not the nation.” (However, “country” itself is an ambiguous term to use here.) Her reaction to Deane’s intention to “include rather than exclude” is: “In my view *all* anthologies are *ipso facto* exclusive, and are a metaphor for the selectivities of Irish politics.” (This

statement makes one wonder whether Edna Longley’s criticism of FDA as a politicized [nationalistic] reading of literature is not, according to her own reading, referable to *any* anthology.) Later she remarks that Irish literary history has not been “properly written yet: partly because too many Americans and too few Irish critics have been on the job” and that she finds “an element of cultural cringe in Field Day’s anxiety both to import gurus from abroad and to impress outside audiences.” The wide range and the fervour of Longley’s criticisms indicate the acute political sensitivities which are entangled in literary discourse in Ireland. (Although tangential to the discussion in hand, one can note that FDA was also subjected to criticism for its marginalisation of women writers.)

Seamus Deane’s attitude towards the relationship between politics and literature is clearly articulated in his General Introduction to FDA “In this anthology, we do not devote ourselves to the truism that all writing is profoundly political. We are concerned, rather, to show how this is sometimes openly acknowledged and at other times urgently concealed.”²²

Naturally one can argue that the political and religious convictions of an editor may influence the process of selection for an anthology. One

criticism of FDA has been that its criteria of selection are not sufficiently pluralist, that is not sufficiently sensitive to the diversity of tradition within Ireland. In response Seamus Deane has stated: "I don't think the answer to this [ie. diversity] is to surrender yourself in a sort of promiscuous embrace of pluralism. I don't think pluralism is an answer to anything. ... Therefore, while I would accept the need for a recognition of diversity, I don't at the same time say that, because things are diverse, ... you can't have a political belief or a religious belief. All I'm saying is that such a belief should strive to be ductile and flexible enough to be hospitable to a great sequence of things."²³

Inevitably, however, the anthology was criticised for not achieving flexibility and because it was not comprehensive enough to be an "anthology of Irish writing." However, Deane believes FDA is comprehensive primarily because of its *size*: "I am perfectly happy with the contradiction [ie. that FDA is a comprehensive anthology] because there are pragmatic reasons for saying it is comprehensive. Nobody has ever done anything as big before and nobody will do it again ..."²⁴ The question remains whether FDA is a gigantic monster, a freak child of the

Field Day project or a noble attempt to represent "a nexus of values, assumptions and beliefs in which the idea of Ireland, Irish and writing are grounded."²⁵

Turning from the Field Day debate we will investigate how poetry anthologies conceptualise their ideas about "Irish poetry." *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*, edited by the poet John Montague, was first published in 1974. The chronological span of the book is extremely wide: the works selected range from medieval mythologies to poems written in the 1970's. There is a lengthy introduction by Montague covering the history of the works he includes. Language constitutes an important element in this writing: the motto of the first chapter is Yeats's famous line "Gaelic is my national language but it is not my mother tongue." Montague publishes in English the works that were originally in Irish. The translation is not accompanied by the original text (as it would be in FDA for example), not even the titles are given in Irish. Though Montague remarks that "after the foundation of the Republic, the majority of Irish poets ... became to some extent bilingual"²⁶, this bilingualism does not appear in the book. It is very telling to have a look at the mottos at the beginning of some of the

chapters. For instance chapter three begins: "Irishness is not primarily a question of birth or blood or language; it is the condition of being involved in the Irish situation, and usually of being mauled by it,"²⁷ while chapter six again quotes Yeats: "Every man everywhere is more of his age than of his nation."²⁸

It seems that the question of language and nationality is again at the centre. Montague anthologised early Irish poetry to outline the background and tradition of the modern Irish poets. The whole concept of the book is to create a linearity of tradition; including, let's say, Tadhg Dall O'hUiginn (a 16th century poet writing in Irish) together with Michael Longley in an anthology called "Irish Verse" means that the editor suggest a connection, a linearity between the two poets on the grounds of "Irishness." In this context the exclusion of original Gaelic texts and any contemporary Gaelic poetry is particularly striking. When Montague remarks that "to have included modern poetry in Irish would have been *unfair*"²⁹ [my italics] he actually denies a linearity in the tradition of the Irish language, and defines "Irish verse" as primarily existing in the English language.

The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry edited by

Paul Muldoon [1986] avoids the difficult task of defining what "contemporary" and "Irish" mean. Muldoon includes ten poets - two of them twenty years dead at the time. As Edna Longley points out, placing Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967) and Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) at the beginning of the anthology was to highlight their influence on later poets³⁰ and shows that Muldoon saw them as literary "forefathers." Muldoon's selection is subjective and apart from the title there is nothing that would suggest an "objective" and comprehensive anthology. Muldoon did not write an introduction articulating his "beliefs." Instead, in a Prologue, he quoted a BBC discussion between F.R. Higgins and Louis MacNeice from 1939. This is his "credo": "MACNEICE: This is an impure age, so it follows that much of its poetry, if it is honest - and poetry must be honest even before it is beautiful - must be impure. ... I think one may have such a thing as one's racial blood-music, but that, like one's unconscious, it may be left to take care of itself. ... I think that the poet is a sensitive instrument designed to record anything which interests his mind or affects his emotions."³¹ Thus Muldoon's aim was to include a variety of *poems* rather than a variety of *poets*. His

book is an “unusually generous selection”³² of works he likes and sees as representative. Muldoon has a poetic approach to poetry; in his “canon” he includes poems “which basically interest his mind or affect his emotions.”

The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry (1990) was edited by Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon. After naming the “forefathers” (Yeats, Kavanagh and MacNeice) the introduction clearly puts forward the editors’ conception: “By ‘contemporary Irish poetry’ we mean poems written by Irish men and women, in English and in Irish, in the course of the past thirty or forty years.”³³ This is not necessarily an unproblematic definition, however, the anthology’s main self-perception is clear. Poets from the Republic as well as from the North are included, thus the differences in defining what constitutes “Irishness” are actually blurred. The concept of the anthology with regard to the relationship between North and South is to minimize difference and diversity and emphasize “unity”: “If the present anthology can be said to have any polemical purpose, that purpose would be to correct imbalances created over the years ... and to dispel the illusion that Irish poetry has been written exclusively by persons of

Northern provenance ... A glance at the cover pages tells a different story: as ever, poets from the North contribute to a national body of work, which, in its turn, belongs to a global community.”³⁴

It would appear that there are two (extreme) tendencies in talking about Irish literature. There is one which creates a term or idea that would cover everything and everybody living on the island. This is usually connected to a belief in national identity. People living north and south are seen as “Irish” and their works are also seen as “Irish.” This tendency has a double mission: to acknowledge and tolerate diversity and to maintain a sense of common, shared identity that would help people see themselves as belonging to the “same group.” The other tendency wants to forget “Irishness” and believes in the distinctiveness of “Northern” and “Southern.” This voice does not believe in a homogeneous identity. It envisages a map of Ireland with different (and clashing) colours and does not believe in rendering identity to geography. There is an obvious tension between these two tendencies and each carries its own particular dangers. Deconstructing a common sense of identity may lead to deeper segregation and/or a false

universalism, while forcing diversity into unity may lead to a pretentious sense of unity and intolerance towards the “other.” The *Penguin Book* apparently belongs to the second tendency with its reference to a “national body” and “a global community.”

That leads us to the fourth anthology, *Poets from the North of Ireland* by Frank Ormsby. As it is clear from the title the editor’s conception was to anthologise poets who *geographically* differ from the others. The title is actually very careful; it avoids using any contradictory terms like Irish or even Northern Irish. However, the introduction is thought-provoking. It starts off by stating: “Written poetry began in the north of Ireland, *as elsewhere in the country*, with the work of the bardic poet or *ollamh*.”³⁵

We have seen that one aim of an introduction is to place the included poems in a framework of tradition. Montague, Muldoon and Mahon & Fallon all named the “forefathers” who were the starting points. Placing the *ollamh* in this same position is telling. When Ormsby later describes the origins of the diversity of present northern literature he is already doing so with a starting point in mind. I myself find his way of tackling the question of Irishness very subtle. By

mentioning the *ollamh* in the first line he brings in the notion of Irishness but by placing it in a historical context he leaves it up to the reader (and writer really) to decide whether this is an “identity” or a mere “historical statement.”

Ormsby does not speak much about the “problems” directly. He introduces the poets from an aesthetic rather than a political point of view, though he does not avoid mentioning the actual backgrounds. Talking about the poets gives him an opportunity to approach the question from a distance. The tensions and controversies come up in the introduction as characteristic features of the poets’ life and work. The aim of his introduction, “to give the reader some sense of what the twenty-seven poets in the anthology have in common and how they differ from one another”³⁶ is, in my view, very well achieved. Instead of denying a shared identity or cramming everything into one, he says: “Readers must judge these matters for themselves. This edition of *Poets from the North of Ireland* celebrates the fact that an area once regarded as a cultural Siberia has nourished and continues to nourish a variety of poetic talents. It reflects the *poets’ shared concerns and individual preoccupations* and their

receptiveness to an enriching range of influences. Most importantly, perhaps, it is a gathering of poems which, for the most part, register, directly and obliquely, the time and place that produced them but which take us on rewarding journeys, home and away, from the provincial village to the global village, from the Moy to the universe."³⁷

From the above it is clear that the political and religious divisions in Ireland are reflected not only in the island's politics but also in its literature. It is interesting to note that attempts to accommodate these various divisions has resulted in the constant publication of new Irish literary anthologies. As has been seen from our sample of these anthologies there is no consensus concerning the best way to represent and canonize Irish literature. What constitutes Irish literature, and by extension Irishness, remains the subject of much discussion.

¹ Edna Longley: *The Living Stream*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994, 43

² Edna Longley discusses this question in a chapter called "Irish, Irish, Irishest" "From Cathleen to Anorexia" in *The Living Stream*, 175

³ Declan Kiberd: *Inventing Ireland*. London, 1995, 2

⁴ Quoted in *The Living Stream*, 50

⁵ Longley 50

⁶ Longley 19

⁷ In "Writing, Revisionism and Grass-seed: Literary Mythologies in Ireland" (in: Lundy and Mac Póilin, eds: *Styles of Belonging: The Cultural Identities of Ulster*, Lagan Press, 1992) Edna Longley, on the second page of her essay, [12] says that her views were "possibly always liable to differ from Seamus Deane's" on the grounds of her background. Seamus Deane also mentions his background as being "essentially the opposite of what Edna said about hers." [28]

⁸ Paul Arthur and Keith Jeffrey, *Northern Ireland Since 1968*. London, 1988, 24

⁹ *ibid.*, 3

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 93

¹¹ "From Cathleen to Anorexia" in: Longley 195

¹² See Kiberd 607

¹³ "From Cathleen to Anorexia" in: Longley 195

¹⁴ Arthur and Jeffrey 22

¹⁵ Gerald Dawe: *How's the Poetry Going? Literary Politics and Ireland Today*. Lagan Press, 1991, 83

¹⁶ Charles Haughey, quoted in "From Cathleen to Anorexia" in: Longley 180

¹⁷ Dawe 40

¹⁸ Seamus Deane: "Canon Fodder: Literary Mythologies in Ireland" in: *Styles of Belonging*, 23

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 22

²⁰ All the following quotes are from Edna Longley, "Writing, Revisionism and Grass-seed: Literary Mythologies in Ireland" in: *Styles of Belonging*

²¹ Within Ulster "nationalist" is the term generally given to the catholic minority.

²² FDA Vol.1., p.xxii.

²³ Deane in *Styles of Belonging*, p.32.

²⁴ *ibid* 22

²⁵ FDA Vol.1., xx.

²⁶ *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* 21

²⁷ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *ibid* 27

²⁸ *ibid* 34

²⁹ *ibid* 39

³⁰ Edna Longley in *Styles of Belonging*, 16

³¹ *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish*

Poetry 17-8

³² *ibid*, blurb

³³ *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish*

Poetry, xvi

³⁴ *ibid* xx

³⁵ *Poets from the North of Ireland* 1, my

italics

³⁶ *ibid* 3

³⁷ *ibid* 20, my italics

Judit Szalai

**An 'Heir to the Subject which Used to Be Called Philosophy'-
Philosophical Issues From a Technological Point of View**

J.C. Nyíri: *Tradition and Individuality. Essays*

Synthese library, v. 221., Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992.

Nyíri was among the first to label Wittgenstein as a conservative - traditionalist thinker. This idea has gained support from a number of Wittgenstein scholars¹ and reappears in the book reviewed here in the context of communication technology as Nyíri is applying and elaborating certain tenets of an influential theory proposed by Eric Havelock, Jack Goody and Ian Watt, Walter J. Ong, and Marshall McLuhan which claims that the natural accompaniment of fully developed literacy is critical - rational thought, whereas in an oral culture one assimilates traditions the truth-content of which " is not

allowed to be called into question"². Besides pulling motley threads together (using 'data' provided by sociology (Emile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim), literature (Robert Musil, Karl Kraus), linguistics and anthropology), Nyíri brings home a number of themes to the Central - Eastern European reader in essays on the role of the scientific and artistic tendencies developed in the ailing Austro-Hungarian empire in shaping 20th-century philosophical thinking, on Istvan Hajnal's oeuvre (containing important documents of an early realization of certain consequences of literacy) and on the Hungarian

language reform. The arguments I intend to focus on represent the most recent (and probably the most controversial) elements in Nyíri's work.

If we are to go along with the author as to the influence of communication technology on epistemology and philosophy of language as well as anthropology and political thinking, three initial steps should be taken.

1. Accepting "outer perspectives", that is, principles of explanation extrinsic to philosophy traditionally so called in our approach to matters usually looked upon as internal philosophical affairs. Theorists like Karl Marx, Georg Lukacs and Karl Mannheim successfully proposed such perspectives.

2. Appreciating the study of communication technology as yielding such a perspective.

3. Opting for the "great - divide theory"³, i.e. understanding literacy as being an "engine" of linguistic and psychological change as well as social and institutional.

The age of 'secondary orality' (the age of electric technology) is characterized by Marshall McLuhan as "mythical and integral"⁴: the detachment of the cognitively autonomous individual of widespread literacy (in which the "objectivized representation of spoken thought" created

the "distance of the cognitive subject to its own mental contents"⁵, as well as the mental contents of others) has come to an end: we live in an "overwhelming, continuous cognitive noise"⁶, from which, just like in pre-literate times, there is no way of distancing ourselves. Now Nyíri maintains that Wittgenstein's conception of rule-following and his denial of the possibility of a private language expose his 'oral bias' - the realization, as it were, of this cognitive noise. "Under the conditions of fully developed literacy", however, "the private language argument is false"⁷, for the following reason. Mentalism (a cluster of doctrines explaining thought and language with reference to psychic entities or occurrences in the mind) is "intimately bound up with the visual experience of language"⁸ which makes decontextualization, abstraction and private forms of thought possible. Language thus conceived is the representation of thought - just as written text is the representation of spoken language. Wittgenstein's criticism of private language leaves the mental *reality* (private thoughts, ideas) created by literacy out of consideration, denying the possibility of something actual.

It has been emphasized by a number of authors that the private language argument does not take up

the empirical problem of memory, i.e. it is not engaged in ascertaining whether my memory is reliable or deceptive when I am affirming that a particular sensation is the same as the one I had before; what Wittgenstein is interested in is the meaningfulness of such an assertion⁹. I would like to suggest, in a similar spirit, that the private language argument is *not concerned with 'what there is' in the individual mind* - it does not exclude the possibility that private mental entities of some kind exist. Therefore, affirming that fully developed literacy does produce such objects does not justify the statement that the argument loses its validity outside the cognitive situation created by orality. What the private language argument seeks to establish is, rather, the logical impossibility of private ostensive definitions. The private linguist makes out to fix the meaning of 'S' by an act of naming a particular sensation. One might think he will be capable of identifying the sensation on a subsequent occurrence simply by establishing the sameness of the two, using 'S', thereby, in a meaningful manner. This is denied by Wittgenstein on the grounds that "whatever is going to seem right to me is right" (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 258); that is, no criterion of correctness can

be found. Therefore, 'S' is not used meaningfully.

This argument not only allows of the existence of mental entities, but it is to a large extent *independent of matters of content*: "it is equally concerned with experience, notably with visual experiences"¹⁰. No wonder it should be so: for the empiricist (the *par excellence* mentalist), everything that is thinkable and communicable makes its debut in the mind as an impression. Therefore, Nyíri's remark that the arguments for the possibility of a private language come up with visual examples, whereas those denying the intelligibility of private criteria tend to make use of auditive phenomena does not seem to be conducive to a justified rejection of the argument with regard to literacy. Naturally, this is not to deny that the idea of the impossibility of a private language might have been *prompted* by a conception of language which is linked to the 'community-view' of rule-following. This fact, however, does not delimit its validity.

Nyíri affirms that under the prevalence of orality the private language argument is bound to hold, since it is only through the reactions of other members of the community that the individual can check on the reliability of his memory, as opposed to the 'literate' who is "essentially

capable of comparing visual signs in order to establish the identity or difference of written texts"¹¹. In orality, "correct recollection is a matter of consensus, memory is a collective faculty, privacy of thought, in any philosophically interesting sense, inconceivable"¹². Now when we admit 'memory' into the discussion of private language, it seems that the word is used in a different sense in this context. The contents of collective memory or collective knowledge are ideas that foster group-cohesion (such as myths and political propaganda). However, in orality as well as in literacy two persons may disagree on the question of whether the boar in front of them is the same as the one they saw the day before; and it is precisely *criteria of sameness* the possibility of which is brought into doubt by the private language argument rather than bits of collective knowledge - which is itself remarkably vague and difficult to grasp. Let my satyrs be auburn as opposed to your blond satyrs - we may nevertheless belong to the same pre-literate community and be understood to share the same contents of collective consciousness. Thus, the statement that in a non-literate society one is denied the cognitive freedom he uses when visualising his own *Gregor Samsa*¹³ calls for certain qualifications.

Moreover, mentalism is not given its due on the above interpretation. Idiosyncrasies do not necessarily derive from qualitative differences between ideas that inhabit the minds of different individuals - it is not *his conception* of causality that Hume gives an analysis of; rather, he makes an attempt to establish a genesis that our (only numerically different) ideas of causality share. The empiricist is bound to rebut a 'community-view' involved in a theory of communication on the grounds that ideas are essentially private - which only means that it is exclusively the speaker/hearer who is capable of *identifying* ideas as to be connected to certain expressions (the fact that *theoretically* you might mean by 'red' the colour I call 'blue' does not imply that our sets of colour-ideas are different: "the sensible ideas produced by any object in different men's minds are most commonly very near and undiscernibly alike"¹⁴).

My concluding remark concerning the private language argument is that it is debatable whether a 'community-view' is actually *implied* by it (note again the logical character of the problem):

"The moral of the tale is not that there is no such thing as following a rule in private. That would be absurd, since we do so frequently. There is no

conceptual barrier to envisaging solitary creatures who follow rules...Nor is it the case that one cannot follow private rules, i.e. rules no one else happens to know about, for many people do so, e.g. when writing diaries in private codes. Rather, the moral is that there is no such thing as following 'private' rules, i.e. rules which no one else could in principle understand inasmuch as the rules in question can have no public expression"¹⁵.

The 'use-theory' of meaning is criticized by Nyíri along similar lines. Use is something 'living' - it is tied to 'action'. Writing and reading are, on the other hand, "more aptly described in categories like deliberation and contemplation than in the terminology of actions"¹⁶. It is the meaning of the written sign that 'gives it life'. But what *this* meaning consists in cannot be clarified by reference to the *use* of the sign (or, for that matter, by a name-relation theory). These statements might be thought to suggest that different media of communication produce different word-meanings. (This is, *in abstracto*, not inconceivable: it is not incompatible with the idea (rejected with respect to literacy) that the meaning of a word is its use: one could argue that a word is used in different ways in writing and in speech. Nyíri affirms, however,

that written words "represent" spoken. Thus, the same word *in the same sentence* would have a different meaning when written. This view, it seems to me, calls for something other than a *theory of meaning*, for the latter is normally required to take the *whole* of language into account, disregarding such distinctions as written - spoken. (The possibility of claiming (in a rather vacuous manner) that the written word *means* its spoken counterpart seems to have been ruled out by the rejection of name-relation theories).

Apart from the fact that it is the task of disciplines like sociology and psychology to estimate the degree to which our lives are actually pervaded by orality, the theory seems to be too comprehensive to be put to the test. Nevertheless, certain explanations and predictions concerning new behavioural patterns in communities reshaped by technological advance can be criticized.

It is claimed to be the essential characteristic of pre-literate and post-literate societies that the individual is an organic part of the community, receives environmental stimuli in a comparatively unreflective manner (the examples offered in connection with 'secondary orality' usually refer to debilitating television programmes like advertisements and video clips),

assimilating imperceptibly 'customs, values and traditions' as communicated by the mass media. Thus, by entering the new phase of the history of technology, the individual has to a large extent lost his autonomy and capability of critical thinking.

The assimilation of the traditions (in a very broad sense) imposed on the annihilated individual by the community should mean that he/she is unburdened of the bulk of decision-making due to the orientating and integrating character of the society. However, it is not self-evident that we indeed live in such societies. In fact, we may still feel deep sympathy with the cultural pessimism of the truly traditionalist Wittgenstein.

Let me quote a passage Bouveresse adduces to show that Musil was inclined to think in our age "the individual finds himself in a situation of uncertainty which he no longer succeeds in dominating"¹⁷. (Musil is one of the authors whose sentiments towards the human milieu of his time bear a close affinity to those of Wittgenstein).

"What we call civilization is, in fact, essentially, nothing more than the fact that the individual finds himself laden with the burden of questions of which he hardly knows the first word (just think of political democracy and newspapers). Conse-

quently it is quite normal that he should react in a completely pathological manner; today we impute any shopkeeper with decisions in which a conscientious choice would not be possible even for a Leibniz."¹⁸

While humanity is supposed to become unified in a global embrace, "the ultimate harmony of all being"¹⁹, extensive literature on the postmodern condition gives us enough reason to believe that there cannot be a 'whole story' either for the community (in the manner pre-literate societies offered such 'stories') or for the individual - as opposed to the individual of the 'modern'. (Note that Nyíri uses the terms 'post-modern' and 'post-literate' as synonyms²⁰).

We read in *Culture and Value*²¹: "A culture is like a big organization which assigns each of its members a place where he can work in the spirit of the whole; and it is perfectly fair for his power to be measured by the contribution he succeeds in making to the whole enterprise. In an age without culture [that is, in our age] on the other hand, forces become fragmented and the power of an individual man is used up in overcoming opposing forces and frictional resistances".

The scope of validity of this analysis is certainly not limited to the early decades of the century. Jürgen

Habermas in *Legitimation Crisis*²² gives the following diagnosis: "Complex societies are no longer held together and integrated through normative structures. Their unity is no longer established intersubjectively through communications penetrating the minds of socially related individuals." However, says Habermas, without 'identity-securing world-views', without an order with cognitive and moral significance it is impossible to develop the unity of the personality²³.

I find the idea that the chasm between the postmodern and the previous ages (literate or preliterate) might be deeper than the one between pre-literacy grouped together with post-literacy and 'literacy fully unfolded' worth considering. At least two lines of reasoning could be plausible. We could argue that "inevitably the elevation of the idea of liberty has led to the debasement of the idea of authority"²⁴ - authority, which is an essential element in all conservative-traditionalist thinking. Both the pre-literate and the literate individual defined themselves in relation to world-views devised for "the avoidance of chaos, that is, the overcoming of contingency"²⁵ which presuppose some authority condemned by the ideology of ideology-neutrality as an agent of coercion. Thus, in the era of liberal-

ism, the renaissance of the tradition-bound, undetached individual celebrated by theorists like McLuhan proves to be an illusion.

The technological pessimist, on the other hand, would argue - to borrow an observation made by an optimist - that "computerization seems...to have brought about already a technological acceleration which is such as to make even the most recent past irrelevant and even the most imminent future radically unforeseeable"²⁶, which inevitably increases uncertainty, distrust and disintegration. The idea of 'equal chances' offered by widespread computer-use has also proved untenable due to the realization that without adequate aids in discerning relevant information from irrelevant the computer-user is precluded from making real use of the data accessible. Also, mass media might well contribute to the fragmented experience of 'atomized, dislocated, frustrated selves'²⁷.

Nyíri assigns to Wittgenstein a degree of ignorance of major motives of his own thinking. The cultural pessimism, the contempt towards technological progress exhibited in several writings from 1930 are seen as indicating the fact, that he had failed to sort out certain theoretical implications of technological change. Wittgenstein, Nyíri maintains, is "the

philosopher of a new orality - dreaming of pre-literal times, the times of old orality"²⁸.

It seems to me that the idea of a secondary orality is not essential for an explanation of Wittgenstein's traditionalism - in fact, the description of the *traditions* the absence of which he resents also applies to modern European culture and, as Musil writes, a "unitarian ideology [that] never again will...give birth to itself in our white society"²⁹. Bouveresse is using the word when discussing Wittgenstein's artistic tastes in this sense:

"He most certainly shared Kraus' cultural pessimism and his conviction that the great cultural works are already behind and not in front of us, his cult of tradition and his scepticism with regard to the future of the forms of art the most representative of the spirit of the age. Wittgenstein, like Kraus, had the distinct tendency to use the great classics, especially Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Mörke, as an antidote to the literary production of his time which...he did not appreciate"³⁰.

The picture Nyíri gives of Wittgenstein's traditionalist leanings in an earlier essay (republished in *Tradition and Individuality*) where he argues that "Wittgenstein's attitude towards the liberal idea of progress is that of a conservative"; that

Wittgenstein felt obliged to be loyal to any genuine authority and that Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* had a significant influence on him, is also reconcilable with this interpretation.

Wittgenstein's cultural views are neither anti-individualistic nor hostile to the modern: by the 'loss of energy' we experience the individual is as much weakened as the whole in the spirit of which its members should work: individual achievements and the cohesion of the community presuppose each other; therefore, says Wittgenstein, "in times like these genuine strong characters simply leave the arts aside and turn to other things and somehow *the worth of the individual man finds expression*"³¹.

It is a most demanding task to assess changes in progress, sociological or philosophical. As we have seen, these phenomena can be put into at least one alternative context (which, naturally, alters our views about what the phenomena *are*). As Nyíri affirms in his recent Hungarian volume³², the integrative endeavours relying on revived pre-war traditions of the Hungarian conservative government between 1990 and 1994 failed. This failure, however, not only illustrates the fact that different traditions have different capacities but also that when thinking about tradition, progress and

community we have to deal with a multi-factor interplay.

"The effects of literacy on intellectual and social change are not straightforward...it is misleading to think of literacy in terms of consequences. What matters is what people do with literacy, not what literacy does to people"³³.

¹ See D. Bloor, *Wittgenstein. A Social Theory of Knowledge*, Columbia University Press, 1983 p. 160. and A. O'Hear, 'Wittgenstein and the Transmission of Traditions' in (ed.) A. P. Griffiths, *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1991 p. 41.

² Nyíri (1992), p.76.

³ (eds.) D. R. Olson and N. Torrance, *Literacy and Orality*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.7.

⁴ M. McLuhan: *Understanding Media*, ARK Paperbacks, 1987, p.4.

⁵ Nyíri (1992), p. 76.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 105.

⁹ see H-J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Blackwell, 1996, p. 312.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 311.

¹¹ Nyíri (1992), p. 108.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 111.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁴ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1959; II. xxxii. 15.

¹⁵ P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, Clarendon Press, 1986 p. 271.

¹⁶ Nyíri (1992), p. 112.

¹⁷ J. Bouveresse, "The darkness of this time': Wittgenstein and the Modern World' in Griffiths, p.29.

¹⁸ R. Musil, *Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom*, reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke*, (ed.) A. Frise, Hamburg, 1978 vol. 8. p.1367.

¹⁹ M. McLuhan, p. 5.

²⁰ See Nyíri (1992), p. 147.

²¹ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Blackwell, 1980, p.6.

²² J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Heinemann Books, London, 1976 p. 131.

²³ The atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust has been manifest in the social sciences as well: Wissenssoziologie "takes on pertinence [under conditions where] conflicting perspectives and interpretations within the same society [lead to an] active and reciprocal distrust between groups". R. K. Merton, 'The Sociology of Knowledge' in (eds.) G. Gurwitsch and E. Wilbert: *Twentieth Century Sociology*, New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945 cited in a different context by Nyíri (1992), p. 26.

²⁴ The Introduction by Gertrud Himmelfarb to J. S. Mill: *On Liberty*, Penguin, 1974, p.8.

²⁵ Habermas, p. 118.

²⁶ Nyíri (1992) cites W. Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, Minneapolis, 1967, pp. 301 f. and 313.

²⁷ A phrase by M. J. Sandel, 'Morality and the Liberal Ideal', *New Republic* 7 May 1984:17

²⁸ Nyíri (1992), p. 103.

²⁹ R. Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1. p. 176., cited by Bouveresse, p. 30.

³⁰ Bouveresse, p. 31.

³¹ L. Wittgenstein (1980), p. 6.

³² Nyíri, J. K., *A hagyomány filozófiája*, T-Twins, 1994

³³ D. R. Olson, A. Hildyard and N. Torrance, *Literacy, Language and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 14.

Gábor Komáromy

Critics' Choice: The American Novel of Social Consciousness in the Mid-1990s: The Regression of the Human Mind in Legal America

William Gaddis: *A Frolic of his Own*
New York: Poseidon Press, 1994

This particular frolic is not a romp, a lark or an act of gaiety. It is, in fact, more of a rampage, a frenzy, an act of desperation. Yet, there is no confusion of terms here - the title of the novel is simply not in English but in Legalese, the language of a slightly apocalyptic but very imminent America, which tends to define phrases in terms of responsibility.

"Like an office worker puts out an eye shooting paperclips with a rubberband they say he's on a frolic of his own, no intention of advancing his employer's business his employer's not liable..." explains one of the slew of lawyers in Gaddis's award-winning novel:

The frolic in the title is of this kind, and about as cerebral an act as the one described above. We are served an early warning that the frolickers of these pages had abandoned not restraint but their brains - the novel is hardly under way but college professor-protagonist Oscar Crease has already run himself over with his own car and is suing, for lack of any other perpetrator, himself.

And thus the infernal floodgate of lawsuits is opened wide and they come gushing forth: Oscar suing the insurance company, the insurance company suing the dealer, the dealer suing the manufacturer - and this is just the beginning. We get a boy suing an artist in whose sculpture his

dog got trapped, the artist suing the city that wants to tear the sculpture down, the boy suing a mitten-manufacturer for misappropriation of his dog's name - later there is a minister is sued by the parents of a child who drowned during the baptism, a wealthy woman who sues pretty much everybody she bumps into (often literally), the Episcopalians suing Pepsi-Cola, claiming the brand name is an anagram of their church and so on and so on and so on - but bear with me, these are just peripheral legal actions, not always central to the plot which follows the meandering of, that's right, another lawsuit.

Oscar's very own frolic takes off when he discovers a few similarities between a blockbuster Hollywood movie and an unpublished play he had written some years ago about his grandfather and the Civil War. He immediately feels cheated, robbed, deprived of his rights and with an eye on the prodigious profits of the film, promptly sues its makers. Thus begins his descent into the legal nightmare that America has become and we follow his disintegration through countless complaints and cross-complaints, briefs, depositions and court opinions as Oscar keeps insisting he only wants "justice done."

If the idea is not highly original, its brilliant execution is - Gaddis explores the culture of litigation through a riveting flow of incessant dialogue, a tidal wave of verbiage which not only carries the reader

along effortlessly but thanks to the author's excellent ear for the vernacular, creates characters who appear incredibly true to life.

Oscar, the tragicomical protagonist is a tried-and-true stock character of literature with a twist. He is - or so he thinks - the civilized, educated, enlightened man amongst the barbarians (of contemporary life), the "last civilized man" as he calls himself. Still, it will take the reader but a short while to see through his pompous tirades, regurgitating of lofty ideas and see him for the rather repulsive, whimpering, spineless slug of a man he is. Independently wealthy, he can't stop whimpering about being ruined financially; a money-grubbing bastard, he claims he does everything for the lofty ideas of culture, literature and justice. Oscar truly believes he is entitled to millions of dollars for the theft of his wretched play which he had pieced together from Eugene O'Neill and the Greek classics - because the movie "degraded" his ideas - but when he actually watches the stupid, gory, exploitative film, he is totally engrossed in it.

Still, much as he deserves it, I find it hard to hate Oscar.

For Oscar is irretrievably lost in the moral complexities of our time, which make cameo appearances in the novel, represented by the dilemmas of abortion, gun control, environmental protection, famine, over-

consumption, illiteracy, political corruption and so on.

Bereft of a coherent set of values to guide him through this mess of our daily existence, Oscar turns to the most obvious device to bring order to chaos: language. Ideas started evolving when man first called a tree a "tree" and many trees a "forest." Hacking his way through the bewildering complexities of the world surrounding him, man reduced the chaos by first naming things then giving names to more and more abstract ideas. Then he could think about them, talk about them, write books about them. But somewhere along the way, it seems, words have lost their moral content and "right" and "wrong" depends on who you listen to, what set of values you adopt and these days there is an overabundance of entities offering incontrovertible truths, "only ways," and infallible directives as if a 2000-year-big baggage of these were not enough.

This is where the Law steps in and in its attempt to construct a set of values binding for everybody, it undertakes to redefine Language. In a series of brilliant and often hilarious legal briefs, opinions and discussions, Gaddis gives us an insight at the process and shows how, through its endeavor to redefine Language, the Law influences our entire contemporary culture with its values, standards and views. It must of necessity fail to provide an ultimate framework of values due to its inability to address

the spiritual side: in the novel, a lawsuit against Satan is dismissed for his address is unknown, in another legal action, Jesus is held liable as the master and employer of a pastor who had let a child drown.

What emerges from the avalanche of legal paperwork and twisted legalese verbiage is a redefined reality in over-litigious America, a rudderless society adrift on the wild waters of moral and spiritual putrefaction, hopelessly entangled in one apocalyptic legal action composed of innumerable interlocking lawsuits, desperately trying to find the light and meaning of it all, but it is probably too late: bankruptcy beckons in the form of legal costs and everybody is too busy anyway to return your phonecalls, life has no end and no beginning, just an interminable feeling of the present, an endless and torturous existence between two court hearings.

If it is a slightly futuristic vision, this future is upon us now. The social, political and cultural aspects of the emerging Litigation Society is examined by Philip K. Howard in his recent book, *The Death of Common Sense*, in which he lays out the rather common-knowledge tenets of the phenomena. Yes, we all suspect that we are becoming a culture of adversaries, nitpickers and finger-pointers (as he argues) and that the illness is so widespread that our very subconscious is infected. While Howard discusses the pathology of the dis-

case, in Gaddis we are treated to the psychiatry of it all and shown a frightening picture of the regression of the human mind.

The individual's plight in a culture where responsibility has lost its meaning and gave way to a world of blame-shifting is frightening indeed. Traditionally, responsibility has been the dividing line between children and adults, the capability of assuming responsibility for one's own actions setting immaturity apart from maturity. Voting, drinking, driving are all bound up with different definitions of maturity and legal culpability as such is based on this concept. But in a world devoid of all responsibility, "maturity" is thrown out with the bathwater. In such a world, we face the grave danger of becoming Oscars.

Oscar, for all his epithets - "wealthy Long Island recluse," "college professor," "historian," "playwright" - is nothing but a whimpering child, defenseless and lost in an incomprehensible world, who runs to the Law for everything, just as a child runs to his parents to complain of the neighbour kid who broke his toy truck. It is a master-stroke of Gaddis to have made Oscar's father in the novel a Federal judge, for his relationship to the Law is indeed filial, if not religious. The way the human mind undergoes a trophy in *Litigation Society* is elegantly depicted in Oscar's physical

and mental decline. He grows a beard, wears the same shirt for weeks, takes to drinking while the family mansion is falling down around him and he is taken advantage of by every hack lawyer, insurance salesman or passerby who promises him a quick buck. The reader will be exasperated by his haplessness, but bear with him and watch him - there is a little (at least potential) Oscar Crease in most of us.

But the novel is more than "just" a social commentary and a detailed description of Legal America. It is a remarkable literary achievement and a deserving recipient of the 1994 National Book Award. With its masterful depiction of characters, with its crafty balance of wit, humor, frenetic dialogue and choice of devices, the novel is arguably an outstanding feat by a very highly regarded author. In 1955, after the publication of his first novel *The Recognitions*, Gaddis was heralded as the American James Joyce. Forty years later and after reading *A Frolic of His Own*, we can safely conclude that he has not become one. (But then, does world literature need more than one Joyce?) What he has become though, is a master of his art, a sharp-eyed chronicler of a changing world and its effect on the individual, a highly confident, sure-handed, unique and remarkable voice in 20th century American novel.

From Guignol to a Grand Guignol: Death and the Puppeteer

Philip Roth: *Sabbath's Theater*
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995

In the land of the free, everybody should have the right to fight their battle with death their own way. Morris Sabbath's way, however, is not acceptable for the society he lives in, despite its claim to the epithet "the land of the free." Who is to blame? Sabbath, the arthritic Marquis de Sade epigon, the pathetic and painfully aging puppeteer? Or the politically correct America of the nineties that has taken it upon itself to rewrite the nation's moral and ethical code?

To get to the answer, one must burrow through America's hill of broken dreams, disintegrating social fabric and plagues of urban diseases - and in the meantime, sit back and enjoy the show at *Sabbath's Theater*, a bitter and hilarious morality play which won Philip Roth the 1995 National Book Award. Coming on the heels of 1994 winner William Gaddis's *A Frolic Of His Own*, - a work similarly social-minded and concerned with a nation sinking into mental regression - the award seems to signify the critics' preference for

this particular trend of the American novel in the mid-nineties.

Reviewers have been quite divided over Roth's twenty-first novel that finally won him the award he had been nominated for several times. Rather surprisingly, the political side of the novel has often been downplayed: while Sabbath's theater boasts of a stage upon which aspects of a particular social phenomenon parade up and down insistently enough to comprise an exhibition labelled "These Politically Correct United States," it has frequently been dismissed as a negligible backdrop to Sabbath the Sodomite's well-deserved descent to hell. We beg to differ.

Morris Sabbath of the title is a Jew with an Irish Catholic nickname, Mickey, who also goes by the suggestive sobriquet "Country." Born after the Great Depression, having lived through great social upheavals, Sabbath arrives at the end of his life only to be rejected and reviled for values instilled in him by society. He is boisterous, promiscuous,

adulterous, eloquent, loud, insufferable, impulsive - in short, an entertaining character. He is also a bygone (?) male ideal: adventurer, artist and Don Juan. He took to sea at the age of seventeen, visited all the whorehouses up and down the shores of the Americas, he was a street artist and theater director in New York and, according to his self-contrived epitaph, lived the life of a "whoremonger, seducer, sodomist."

He is the embodiment of all things politically incorrect: "abuser of women, destroyer of morals, ensnarer of youth," to quote more of the same epitaph. So much so that he smacks of being the Devil himself, as clearly insinuated by Roth. Sabbath will have none of the insipidness of the "kinder, gentler" America of the nineties, which, in its turn is willing to have none of him. The confrontation between this late but uninhibited incarnation of the dead pagan god Pan and the politically correct America of the nineties can only result in severe harm to somebody.

From an early age, Sabbath had been dogged by death and spent a lifetime escaping it. Now, at the age of sixty-four, he is penniless, jobless and, after leaving his wife, homeless. He consequently sallies forth into the world he had abandoned long ago - to find and face his death. But his Rip Van Winkle adventure goes all wrong and in vain does he totter through a series of farcical disasters. Life doesn't want him. Death doesn't want

him. And whatever it is that America has become in his absence, it certainly doesn't want him.

This holier-than-Sabbath world strives for impeccable morality but seems to be mired in too much death and destruction. Sabbath is treated to a grand guignol-style exhibition of its realities: his wife is recovering alcoholic, and his few remaining friends are all on the anti-depression drug Prozac. One of them commits suicide, an act that serves as a leitmotif in this tale: Sabbath's wife, his father-in-law, his ex-producer and a casual acquaintance had all tried suicide at one time, with more or less success and it is in their footsteps that Sabbath endeavors to follow.

However it is not the visibly, demonstrably ill that is ultimately wrong with the world surrounding Sabbath. They are only symptoms but not the disease. The real affliction is a stealthily, sinisterly evolving force, a way of thinking and behaving, a diverse mental attitude often blanketed by the term "political correctness." It is like a horde of termites, which invade a piece of wooden habitat, deprive it of its inner substance, render it hollow and brittle and susceptible to any passing band of marauders, however metaphorical. It is a disease infecting the American mind, preparing the soil for depression, alcoholism, suicide and other mental disorders.

In this sense, *Sabbath's Theater* is a very interesting successor to *A*

Frolic Of His Own in which Gaddis depicted the individual's plight in a culture where responsibility has lost its meaning and gave way to a world of blame-shifting and finger-pointing. Roth's characters do not turn to the law in search of scapegoats but delve into their own past to find the culprits for their misery. Sabbath is stunned when he visits his wife in the sanitarium. He knows he is largely responsible for ruining her life: taking her away from her life, driving her into alcoholism, womanizing and disgracing her by his scandalous behavior. After all this, after she had been through a nervous breakdown, a suicide attempt and a detoxication program, she claims to have found the root of all her problems: she blames her father whom she (falsely) accuses of molesting her!ⁱ Sabbath is stunned by this mentality, which his wife's fellow patient satirizes amply: "... they've been trying for three weeks to get me to turn in my dad. The answer to every question is either Prozac or incest."

Roseanna Sabbath's breakdown was a result of years of decline, but it was actually triggered by a scandal that constitutes another item in Roth's "These Politically Correct United States" exhibition. Sexual harassment and molestation are issues that have been dividing public opinion, never ceasing to be in the forefront of a national debate. Obviously, it was only a matter of time and opportunity that the incorrigible womanizer

Sabbath should become a target of a politically correct witch-hunt.

Sabbath, a one-time college professor, was fired from that last job of his life or sexually molesting a college student.ⁱⁱ Unquestionably, he had it in him to do just that - by a quirk of fate, however, he was chastised for something he didn't do. It is in the nature of the confrontation that Sabbath be "nailed" not necessarily for what he does but for what he is. It was the dean of the college (a genuine PC piece: a female/feminist ethnic academic) who put the girl up to "talking dirty" with him on the phone, tape-recording the conversation and subsequently making the tape public.

The dean happens to be Japanese and when Sabbath sinks his teeth into this fact, his alleged victim accuses him of being a racist.ⁱⁱⁱ And true: Sabbath does hate the Japanese. His beloved brother was shot down in the war by the Japanese over the Philippines, destroying him and his family: his mother never recovered from her grief and he became obsessed with death and the memory of his brother. Sabbath has been brought up to hate the Japanese. He was told his brother died a hero's death helping his country defeat the imperialistic Japanese - the same people who are now buying up the biggest American companies. But he is not allowed to have personal history, personal feelings, only the party line where a negative opinion of

a non-white person constitutes racism and must be persecuted.

In fact, it is party lines and ideology that he is surrounded by wherever he looks, but none so threatening to his person as the tenets of feminism, especially those of the militant right of that movement.^{iv}

"Fascism. Communism. Feminism. All designed to turn one group of people against another group of people. The good Aryans against the bad others who oppress them. The good poor against the bad rich who oppress them. The good women against the bad men who oppress them. The holder of the ideology is pure and good and clean and the other is wicked," rants one character and Sabbath nods in agreement.

But the threat is more than merely ideological: when his wife receives news of a Virginia woman who dismembered her husband and got away with it^v, Sabbath develops a morbid fear of cutting objects. It is the fear of losing his manhood that finally drives him away from his home, into the world he detests, to face the thing he had been running from all his life: his death.

When he returns after a series of disasters, ready to accept his fate, he finds his wife in bed with another woman. There follows one of the most delightful and concentrated scenes of the novel, as he jumps through the window into the bedroom where the two are making love. Dressed only in an American flag and

a patriotic yarmulke, he starts beating his chest and hooting, barking, roaring like a frenzied male gorilla.

A question unavoidably rises at this point: Is *Sabbath's Theater* nothing but that frustrated howl, let loose when all the eloquence had already failed? Is it, as one character put it, the "discredited male polemic's last gasp," an intelligent piece of anti-PC propaganda?

The answer, after a brief consideration, must be an emphatic 'no.' Roth has managed to sidestep the mire of controversy and avoid the pitfall of becoming embroiled in a national debate over ethics and morality. He has stayed outside of that brawl and achieved this remarkable feat with the cunning use of the central metaphor of the novel, the "theater" of the title.

The "theater" may be interpreted on a delightfully good number of levels, but most pertinent to the issues above is the way the novel identifies with the purpose of theater, that is, to entertain and not to indoctrinate, to present and not to argue. Roth manages to create the effect of this theater and avoid propagandizing chiefly by using a "shifting perspective," populating the stage with over-complex characters and frequently indulging in self-satire.

The "shifting perspective" is a simple enough device, but needs a masterful touch so as not to come across as clumsy. Roth provides precisely that and presents characters

as seen by themselves and others, events as filtered through opposing views, relationships as experienced by everybody involved and so on. This in turn, allows the reader to see Sabbath as a grand prolocutor of a noble cause, a dirty old man, a rebel-hero, an aging, pathetic Don Juan, an uninhibited hedonist, a complete failure - and the list could go on. Even Sabbath himself has multiple views of his personality, especially during periods of breakdowns: he is at once experiencing an event and observing that experience - the puppet and the puppeteer at the point where the puppeteer is no longer in control. Similarly all other characters and events are presented as multi-faceted and seen from many angles, as if in a hall of mirrors.

Such a device and approach gives birth to characters who are complex to the point of being self-contradictory. And not only Sabbath is drenched in ambiguity: Drenka, his mistress, is presented as an angelic whore; his friend, Norman, as the successful producer, well-meaning friend and Prozac-eating lifeless eunuch; Roseanna as victim and spineless blame-shifter and so on. To a certain, sometimes unconscious level, everybody is deceitful even if they don't want to deceive.

Finally, if everyone has a place on this stage of Sabbath's theater, the author also claims the right to be present as directly as the others. Roth's own voice (the puppeteer's

voice from behind the screen) becomes at times audible through somebody's words^{vi} as if to ridicule the gravity of his own statements and remind the audience that this is only entertainment.

What, then, is the real significance of Sabbath and his inability to get out of this mutually unhappy relationship with life?

Perhaps it is precisely the fact that the man seems to get lost amid the political agendas, while silently, desperately fading into the background. In the midst of all the controversy, something is being passed over, perhaps missed entirely. Beyond the platitudes, social clichés, polemic and heated debates, death looms larger and more incomprehensible - Sabbath the man, pathetic and helpless, is losing the battle.

He is the control-minded puppeteer who is baffled by the concept of passing, the ultimate in uncontrollability, and even more devastated by death in his own brother. He has staked his existence on taking big gulps of life - how could he then kill himself? At the same time, suicide beckons - he considers every other kind of death a personal failure. He hates the world and knows the feeling is not unrequited - still he cannot go.

Is his fate a generational tragedy? It is too early to say. If *Sabbath's Theater* is a polemic, it is that in the Orwellian sense of negative utopias.

Sabbath may or may not be the last great white male - but he is a tragic figure. Just not tragic enough to die.

Death then, at least for the time being, leaves the Puppeteer alone. But the reader had witnessed a fascinating transformation, one of the theater itself - what had been a stomping ground for Guignol, the quick-witted, boisterous puppet, the Lyonnais Punch, has become a stage for a Grand Guignol, a theater of horror, complete with the requisite madness, incest, haunting and suicide. How could this happen?

ⁱ Unlike Gaddis's presentation of America's mental maladies, Sabbath's Theater adheres very closely to current events, presumably on the premise that since these "true stories" were predominantly displayed by the media therefore helped to shape the nation's consciousness on these issues. In the most famous court case involving "blame-shifting" Lyle and Erik Menendez were charged with murder for the August 1989 shotgun slayings of their parents in the family's Beverly Hills mansion, where they practically slaughtered their parents in a most bestial way. The prosecution claimed the motive was greed as the brothers stood to inherit \$14 million. The defense claimed the shootings were an act of self-defense in a desperate attempt to escape years of childhood family violence and sexual abuse. The jury was unable to come to a unanimous decision and mistrial was declared

in January 1994. The case is currently being retried.

ⁱⁱ There have been a number of notorious cases in which university professors were attacked for behavior allegedly constituting sexual harassment. Donald Silva, teaching a writing class at the University of New Hampshire, used several sexual metaphors to describe good writing. Six female students filed formal sexual harassment charges. The university found against him and ordered him to apologize, fined him \$2000, and gave him a formal reprimand. They also required him to attend counseling sessions with a university approved therapist. Later, a federal judge found that the university violated Silva's constitutional rights to free speech. In another case, renowned psychology professor James B. Maas of Cornell University was charged with "overfriendly behavior," "sexual innuendo" and "sexual assault." This latter charge was an unsubstantiated accusation that Professor Maas touched a female student on the breast six years prior to the case. In 1994, a university disciplinary committee found that while not a single charge could be substantiated against him, Professor Maas "in effect" committed the violations. Details were leaked to the press, destroying the professor's reputation.

ⁱⁱⁱ The girl actually asks him "Why must you be so racially prejudiced against Japanese?" - caricature PC-speak (where one cannot say "blind" to describe the "visually challenged") turned upside down: in her muddled mind she identifies racism as a bad thing, but bad things must not be said of people, so a racist must be called "racially prejudiced."

^{iv} Also known as Segregationist Feminists or, derisively, "Feminazis." Their thoughts are propagated in such works as Andrea Dworkin's "Intercourse" or Valerie Solanas' "S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto." They maintain that now, that science has found the way to artificial insemination, men have become superfluous. Their language is suffused with propaganda techniques Communist, Revolutionaries, Fascist and other professional indoctrinators have used in the

past. (Not without cross-references, either: Dworkin, for example, calls all men "National Socialists" and the women who love them "collaborators.") It is very interesting to note a feminist reaction to the novel. Amy Bloom, reviewer for the San Jose (California) Mercury News wrote, somewhat mystifyingly: "A novel so ferociously contemptuous of men, so deeply adoring of women, you'd think it was written ...by...Andrea Dworkin...Women get the best lines, the better lives, the biggest hearts and the sharpest insights. The passage [describing Sabbath's love for Drenka's middle-aged body] should be reprinted and pasted on every woman's mirror to make the world a better place..."

^v The reference here is to an actual case: A Virginia woman, Lorena Bobbitt, cut his sleeping husband's penis off and threw it out the window. She subsequently claimed that she attacked him after he had raped her and she was not responsible for her actions due to temporary insanity. In January 1994, a jury found that she was not guilty by reason of insanity and committed her to a mental facility for a 45 day (!) observation.

^{vi} Roseanna Sabbath's fellow patient delivers to Sabbath a long, extremely convincing argument on Roseanna's noble nature, ending with "... But she has as much nobility as someone can within the limits of her imagination." Sabbath replies: "How do you know she does?" And she says, and we may hear Roth ridiculing his own arguments in the novel: "I don't. I just made it up. I make it up as I go along. Doesn't everyone?"