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The [transvestite] Play: Is It the Thing ?

A [two-dimensional] literary-psychological re-reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with Jeremy Freeston and Henry Fuseli

I.

The transvestite play – is it the thing wherein we can catch the conscience of a king and queen? I am asking this question playfully relating Hamlet's words (2.2.600-1)[1] to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. What really requires explanation is my addition of the word 'transvestite'.

It is common knowledge that transvestism is the practice of wearing the clothing of the opposite sex as a means of emotional or sexual expression. However, transvestism does not include all instances of this practice. Cross-dressing, for example, differs from transvestism because it is conducted for different reasons; namely, a person cross-dresses to make a comment on society or to entertain. Cross-dressing, therefore, does not necessarily involve transvestism.

Transvestites tend to perceive themselves either as women with masculine predispositions, or as men with feminine dispositions. For some, transvestism is limited to using the clothing of the other gender to provoke sexual excitement. However, for most transvestites, sexual behaviour is involved only slightly or not at all; the transvestite simply gains emotional satisfaction from dressing in the clothes of the

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[1] References to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are to the Arden editions, by Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) and Kenneth Muir (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), respectively.

opposite sex. Transvestites often describe their behaviour as expressing those attributes and behavioural characteristics of the other gender that they feel are important aspects of their own self-definition. Transvestism, however, does not necessarily involve abandoning one's original gender identity as a woman or man.

Current opinions about transvestism are divided. Some see transvestism as a symptom of failed gender socialization; others view it as a normal expression of the desire to blur the social distinctions between women and men. Whereas some psychiatrists view such behavior as symptomatic of a maladjustment that requires treatment, others believe that treatment is appropriate only if the person experiences conflict or disturbances in his or her social or professional life.

Cross-dressing has a long history, going back at least to ancient Greece. It was often a ritual practice during festivals or religious ceremonies. Cross-dressing is still common during carnivals such as Mardi Gras, on Shrove Tuesday, the last day of carnival before Lent. In this context, cross-dressing is a parody of social conventions and social mores, particularly as they relate to gender roles. Cross-dressing is also a means for providing comic entertainment and is a socially acceptable medium for transposing gender roles. There is a rich Western tradition which exploits the incongruities and confusions that can result from transvestism. These works range from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to films such as *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *Victor/Victoria* (1982), and *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993).

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As You Like It is not the only transvestite Shakespearean play. Shakespeare's characters are, in fact, forever changing their clothes, especially – but not exclusively – in the comedies. Shakespeare takes the inherited theme of mistaken identity, as old as Menander and Plautus, and turns it into a meditation on Renaissance role-playing. He is the first to reflect upon what has become a distressingly frequent theme in modern art: the fluid nature of gender and identity.

Images of clothing – especially images of changing one's clothing – have a special role in *Macbeth*.[2] Beginning with the first tailoring metaphor, which describes Macbeth fighting with Macdonwald "till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops" (1.2.22), there are many recurring images of this type in the play. Most of them refer to Macbeth and his new honours, which "sit ill upon him, like a loose and badly fitting garment" that belongs to somebody else. Macbeth himself expresses it just after the first appearance and the prophecies of the witches when Ross greets him as the thane

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[2] Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us* (Boston, Beacon Hill: Beacon Press, 1958) pp. 325-27.

of Cawdor: "The thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me / In borrow'd robes?" (1.3.108-9) Only a few minutes later, when he is turning over in his mind the remarkably quick confirmation of the witches' prophecy, the observing Banquo murmurs:

> New honours come upon him,
> Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
> But with the aid of use.
>
> (1.3.145-7)

Later, when Duncan is in Macbeth's castle, and Macbeth debates within himself whether or not to do "the deed," he uses the same metaphor of clothes:

> I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon.
>
> (1.7.32-5)

Lady Macbeth immediately retorts cynically: "Was the hope drunk / Wherein you dress'd yourself?" (1.7.35-6) After the murder of Duncan, when Ross says he will go to Scone for Macbeth's coronation, Macduff uses the same simile: "Well, may you see things well done there: adieu! / Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!" (2.4.37-8) And, at the end, when Macbeth is at Dunsinane and the English troops are advancing, the Scottish lords depict him as a man who narcissistically tried to fasten a large garment on him with too small a belt: "He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause / Within the belt of rule;" (5.2.15-6) says Caithness, while Angus presents the image by which the nobles have read Macbeth ever since he took over the kingdom:

> now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief.
>
> (5.2.20-2)

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are obsessed with their appearance and clothes as well as with their gender and identity. Throughout the play, exclamations of the type – "Are you a man?" (3.4.57) – abound. In order to understand the real meaning of these references, we must examine the relationship of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, a relationship which – despite its constancy – is based on continual transformations.

In treating the genders and personalities of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare is a shapeshifter and master of transformations. He recognizes that Western identity, emerging from a long pagan tradition, is indeed impersonation. He

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returns dramatic impersonation to its ritual origins in the cult of Dionysos, where masks were magic. Role in drama, in Kenneth Burke's definition, is "salvation via change or purification of identity (purification in either the moral or chemical sense)." The pattern of chemical breakdown, remixture of elements, is especially obvious in King Lear, where the mad king is set to boil on a stormy heath.

Transformation, whether chemical or moral, was the focus of alchemy. Alchemy was not just a quest for a formula to turn lead to gold but also a philosophical quest for the creative secrets of nature. Mind and matter were linked in a pagan way. Alchemy might, thus, be called pagan naturism. As Titus Burkhardt says, the spiritual aim of alchemy was "the achievement of 'inward silver' or 'inward gold' – in their immutable purity and luminosity." Jung calls alchemy not merely "the mother of chemistry" but "the forerunner of our modern psychology of the unconscious." The alchemical process sought to transform the prima materia, or chaos of mutable substances, into the eternal and incorruptible "Philosopher's Stone." This perfected entity was depicted as an androgyne, a rebis ("double thing"). Both the primal matrix and the finished product were hermaphroditic because they contained all four basic elements, earth, water, air and fire. The self-contained magnum opus of alchemical process was symbolized by the uroboros, the self-begetting, self-devouring serpent. The synthesis of contraries in the watery "bath" of the opus was the hierosgamos or coniunctio ("sacred marriage" or "union"), a "chemical wedding" of male and female.

The alchemists gave the name 'Mercury' to the allegorical hermaphrodite who constituted all or part of the transformative process. Mercury, the god and planet, is liquid mercury or quicksilver, the elixir of transformation. Arthur Edward Waite says that "universal Mercury is the animating spirit diffused throughout the universe."[3] Mercury, conceived by Shakespeare, is undoubtedly the androgynous spirit of impersonation, the living embodiment of a multiplicity of persona. Mercury possesses verbal and hence mental power. Shakespeare's most well-known androgyous Mercury figure is the transvestite Rosalind, and after her the male-willed Cleopatra – but, first and foremost, there is Lady Macbeth. Their main characteristic is an electric wit, dazzling, triumphant, euphoric, combined with rapid alternations of persona. Lady Macbeth is Shakespeare's most uncontrolled and uncontrollable transvestite heroine, changing her gender with astonishing rapidity – a protean Mercury who (and this is her tragedy) seems to obey no law but her own. With her husband, she performs a most

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[3] All quotes from Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae. Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) pp. 198-9.

peculiar transvestite show: a frantic and self-destructive change and exchange of gender and identity – an undertaking they cannot survive.

But Lady Macbeth surrenders an even more androgynous universe than her own: she becomes captured and dissolved, together with her husband, in the inviolable world of their wedlock – which is so constraining that, if left for an instant, serious, even irreparable, damage will be inflicted upon their oneness.

II.

In the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare provided two strong roles long regarded as attractive vehicles for the leading actors of the world. Jason Connery and Helen Baxandale, in Jeremy Freeston's 1996 recreation of the play for the screen, provide a magnificent pictorial realization of the *hieros gamos* or *coniunctio* of male and female in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as discrete characters and as a couple.[4]

Yet Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is generally assumed to be the story of the rise and fall of a self-made man who, led on by others and because of a defect in his own nature, succumbs to ambition.[5] Truly the play is a harrowing study of ambition. It is the record of how, in his ambition to secure the Scottish throne, Macbeth dulls his humanity to the point where he becomes capable of any amoral act.

Jeremy Freeston's *Macbeth* – authentically set in eleventh century Scotland – conjures up a world of grim battlefields, desolate moors, forbidding castles and haunted caverns. Peopled by kings, queens, warriors, witches, and assassins the film moves at a breathtaking pace through scenes of war, murder, intrigue and revenge. Nevertheless, one immediately develops the suspicion that Freeston will destroy the image of a self-made Macbeth.

Shakespeare, as he does with all his androgynous women, both enriches and complicates Lady Macbeth's character by giving her wit, audacity, and masculine force of will. He makes Lady Macbeth kinetic rather than iconistic. Helen Baxandale's Lady Macbeth is, accordingly, kinetic: she is the wife who manages to drive her husband to kill and to take over a kingdom. She has a large amount of sex appeal, also a kind of raw appeal; to put it shortly: she is physically attractive and sexually beguiling. In fact,

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[4] *Macbeth by William Shakespeare*. A Helen Baxandale and Jason Connery film, directed by Jeremy Freeston. UK: Cromwell Productions, 1996.

[5] Cf. Géher István, *Shakespeare-Olvasókönyv* (Budapest: Cserépfalvi Könyvkiadó, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1991) pp. 230-43.

all her attention, all her power, all her *self*, is turned towards the object of her enchantments: her husband.

Jason Connery's Macbeth, on the other hand, is not a brute whose life is nothing more than a never-ending quest for absolute power. He displays a more complex character. His Macbeth is always concerned with the people around him, the first and most important of whom is his wife. He is obsessed with time, and at every stage questions his own actions.

The most important feature of Freeston's *Macbeth* is its unusual focussing on the drama as a story of *two* people. He interprets the play as being fundamentally the tragedy of two people who – together – choose the wrong path. In this view, Macbeth is not at all a self-made man, he is much more like a half-made man who lives only by and for the inalienable supernatural (unnatural?) unity of the relationship between himself and his wife. Almost every meeting between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is magically transformed into a tender and loving reunion in which their only authentic form of existence is restored. The way they steel themselves for the murder of Duncan, the way they gear themselves up to do it, the way they pluck up just enough courage to do "the deed": they are never apart. And sexual desire is always hovering there as well, drawing them towards each other whether they be together or apart. But Freeston – like Shakespeare – is never overtly sexual, he – like Shakespeare – is more interested in psychology than pornography. Though Macbeth and Lady Macbeth never take their clothes off in the film, they keep putting on and taking off their mental or psychic robes. They follow an unusual ritual: when one, metaphorically speaking, gets fully dressed, the other removes his or her garments; when one loosens his or her protecting robes, the other tightens his or her belt. The husband and wife perform a most peculiar transvestite show – while wearing the external costumes that pertain to their own sex, they exchange between themselves their mental and psychic attire.

The usual "one-man-show" conception of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is thus undermined by Freeston when he interprets the play as a "two-(wo)man-show," implying that otherwise it could be no more than a "half-man-show." Freeston's main concern is obviously the *relationship* between Macbeth and his Lady. All other aspects of the tragedy, such as problematics of history and politics, and ambition and power, are subordinated to the revelation of the *conjunctio* of the two protagonists.

Macbeth and Lady ("Give me the daggers ...," 2.2; 1795-1800)

III.

If the relationship of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, despite its undeniable constancy and continuity, is based on transformations, the most interesting point in each transformation may be the moment when change begins. When, for instance, Lady Macbeth (who always knows what to do) suddenly changes roles with her husband and asks: "What's to be done?" (3.2.44). Film is an appropriate medium to show change in process; drawings and paintings – like specially selected shots from a film or photographic snapshots – might be better suited to catching the elusive moment when change commences.

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Lady Macbeth (1.7; 1815)

Between the 1770s and 1820s – about the time of the English and European "Shakespeare Cult" – an amazing man of remarkably diminutive stature produced some of the most disturbing yet most penetrating and sensitive Shakespeare-criticism, in the form of around two hundred illustrations. He was the drawing master of England during his time, and his subject matter was dramatic, macabre, sensual and ghostly. He left nature alone, and modelled his human bodies on Michelangelo and used them to horrify and entertain the polite society of his time. He was born Johann Heinrich Füssli, in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1741. (Later in London he anglicised his name az 'Fuseli' to make it easier for the English to pronounce it.) "I was born in February or March – it was a cursed cold month, as you may guess from my diminutive stature and crabbed disposition," he wrote.[6] He came from a family of artists going back to the fifteenth century and as a boy helped his father draw and paint. While still a schoolboy he sold drawings to his friends to earn enough money to buy flame-coloured clothes. He was always a fancy dresser, with a heightened sensitivity and a not so innocent

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[6] Stephen Longstreet, *The Drawings of Fuseli* (Alhambra, California: Borden Publishing Company, 1969) p. 1. Cp. also: *Füssli pittore di Shakespeare. Pittura e teatro 1775 - 1825* (Milano: Electa, 1997).

exuberance. The pictures he based on *Macbeth* reveal a unique approach to clothes, or rather to the lack of them.

Macbeth was Fuseli's favourite Shakespeare-play, so much so that he attempted a German translation of it while he was still in his teens. We could borrow Macbeth's own words, "So foul and fair [...] I have not seen" (1.3.38), to describe the pictures he created for the play. The best known ones are huge paintings, but there are some smaller drawings that seem to represent the tragedy of the Macbeths' even more forcefully. They depict – in several versions – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the dagger scene (2.2), the three weird sisters appearing to Macbeth and Banquo (1.3), and the same sisters appearing to Macbeth alone (4.1). Others focus only on Lady Macbeth, either showing her sleepwalking (5.1), or visualizing her mental struggle (1.7), or presenting her part in the dagger scene. Fuseli's hero was undoubtedly Lady Macbeth.

A first encounter with Fuseli's Shakespeare pictures might lead one to think there were in fact two basic types of artist: one who builds the labirynth, the other who gets lost in it, what is more: makes the viewers lose their ways, too. Fuseli would apparently fall into the latter category. Whether we know these pictures are Shakespeare illustrations, or we do not, we are not sure how to handle his pictures. After a while we realize that we must handle them with care – for our own sake

First of all, it is impossible to observe his pictures objectively. "Hell is murky," says Lady Macbeth (5.1.34). These pictures *are* murky: are they of Hell? They are dark, horrible nightmares, they are irrational, daemonic, sinister, pathological and, without exaggeration, perverse – far too mysterious. At first sight, they are like the products of a clouded or distorted mind, of someone who – like his figures – has been seeking redemption from some unbearable state of life, or state of mind. And, while doing so, has lost every point of reference, has cast himself out of every human relation.

What can we, then, expect from such illustrations? Illustration, according to its original meaning, is illumination – that is, "throwing light upon," explanation,

interpretation and comment upon the meaning of something. A literary illustration should, therefore, be able to "enlighten" as well as "sum up" the message of the literary work, that is, it could and should become a form of non-verbal criticism – especially if we accept the Chinese maxim that "a picture does the work of many words."[7] Fuseli's *Macbeth*-pictures, however, do not seem to offer such a helping hand for the subtler understanding of Shakespeare; in fact, their figures – and possibly their artist creator – seem to need one themselves. Besides the macabre atmosphere, the sense of loneliness and extreme vulnerability are the most powerful emotions aroused by these pictures. "Transvestite" Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear here almost or entirely naked. One might think it is not the subject – the horrible dagger scene or the appearance of the witches – or the figures themselves that are so fearful but their *nakedness*. Fuseli disrobes the Macbeths, bringing an end to their spectacular Shakespearean show. What remains is one or two bodies, *in puris naturalibus*, totally exposed to whatever surrounds them.

What does, then, surround them? In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, besides the clothes, the other frequent images are, first of all, those of reverberating sound, echoing over vast regions, limitless spaces thus signifying the vastness, and in fact, limitlessness of space; secondly, the images of lightness as opposed to darkness, including images of sleep, usually referring to the contrasted notions of life, virtue, goodness and evil, sin and death.[8] Although Fuseli appears to deviate from Shakespeare, he nevertheless remains faithful to Shakespeare's settings in his pictorial effects: his characters are thrown into an undefinable, unidentifiable space where they cannot find any point of reference. There is hardly any difference between background and foreground; the pictures seem to show one whirling unit. The space of the pictures is an undecipherable, visionary space, a "u-topos," unsettling in its unnaturalness. The apparent neutrality of the external world thus becomes hostile, in fact, the absolute indifference of the surroundings is shocking.

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[7] Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1997) p. 251.
[8] Cf. Spurgeon pp. 230-43.

The simplicity of the pictures is thus deceptive; these pictures are more like riddles, or – perhaps with only a slight exaggeration – objects for meditation, like emblems. Emblems normally consist of three parts: a motto, an inscriptio or subscriptio, and the image. Formally, there is an obvious parallel between the emblem and the literary illustration, which itself has three parts: a title, a literary text it is based on or related to, and the picture. But there is deeper resemblance between the emblem, which is not merely an art form, but a mode of thought, and Fuseli's *Macbeth*-pictures: they both represent much more to the mind than to the eye.

The Three Witches Show Macbeth the Descendants of Banquo (4.1; 1773)

Fuseli's mind, in these pictures, seems to be occupied with something in Shakespeare that does not allow him to turn to anything else. And, like his characters, finding no satisfactory answer, he seems to reach the utmost limits of his tolerance.

His clear yet jerky lines well express the internal tension. The figures violate the rules of anatomy – this makes them absurd and ridiculous but, at the same time,

inescapably doomed. They are caught at a moment when they are paralyzed with astonishment and rooted to the spot. They would not be able to move on even if they wanted to: they are too petrified with terror.

Their strange position suggests, however, that they are tormented by antagonistic internal passions that pull them in different directions at the same time – as if they were constituted of warring selves. Or, as if they had two or more selves at a time. Their hair, head, eyes, limbs – all point in different directions. Their bodies lack natural, organic unity, they seem to have been dashed to pieces, then put together again with arbitrary fancy.

On their faces there are only traces of expressions: mostly eagerness, greed, and covetousness, but also delirium, frenzy, and fury. They do not seem to react to anything around them, they are unable to establish any relationship with an external entity. The figures never look each other in the eye, but look past each other, staring at an invisible point in the distance.

By now, the viewer is in serious doubt. Are we viewing Shakespeare's *Macbeth?* No order whatsoever can be found in the pictures. No system of values can be established. The characters are thrown into universal darkness where everybody and everything seems to be an enemy. The only possible reaction to such world, from the viewpoint of the characters, is constant, spasmodic struggle. Whether they are alone or watched, they battle on. The viewer, on the other hand, feels more and more forced into an unpleasant situation: into the attractive discomfort of voyeuristic peeping, even spying on the figures in their most intimate moments. For what we are witnessing here are images of the very moment of the birth of knowledge when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth feel not only the future but the past and the present – the entirety of their being – as they confront their innermost selves. Fuseli's pictures *are* illuminations: they light up the rare moments of illumination for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth which result in an ecstasy (an *ex-stasis* or 'stepping-out of themselves') which precedes agony and complete alienation. The viewer, by accepting and taking the peeping position, is drawn into the picture and forced to share the anguish of the characters. At this point we realize that the source of the characters' loneliness is their overwhelming awareness that they are irremediably estranged from the universe. They are, and must remain, caught in the abyss of their sinful souls.

Fuseli abandoned all roundabout ways, eliminated all peripheral detail so that he could confront the unutterable, the Medusa-eyed evil, the *self.* He shows that the only solid point of existence is to be found at the most insecure place – in the fickle-minded mind itself: in the imagination. If this is true, as these pictures suggest, there is

no hope of redemption from anywhere except one's self. That's why his Macbeth-pictures are entirely free of illusions: there is nothing to ease the tension; nothing to mitigate the sense of abandonment; nothing to moderate, soothe, lessen, or break the agony of his damned souls.

Now we can answer our initial question: yes, it is the "transvestite thing" wherein Fuseli catches the conscience of the King and the Queen. But in a negative way. By showing behind the many different faces of the King and the Queen the Macbeths' murky hell of never-ending internal drama, he illustrates that no external veil, not even a royal costume, can hide or protect a person's real self once it has let in the Devil.

Lady Macbeth Sleepwalking (5.1; 1772)
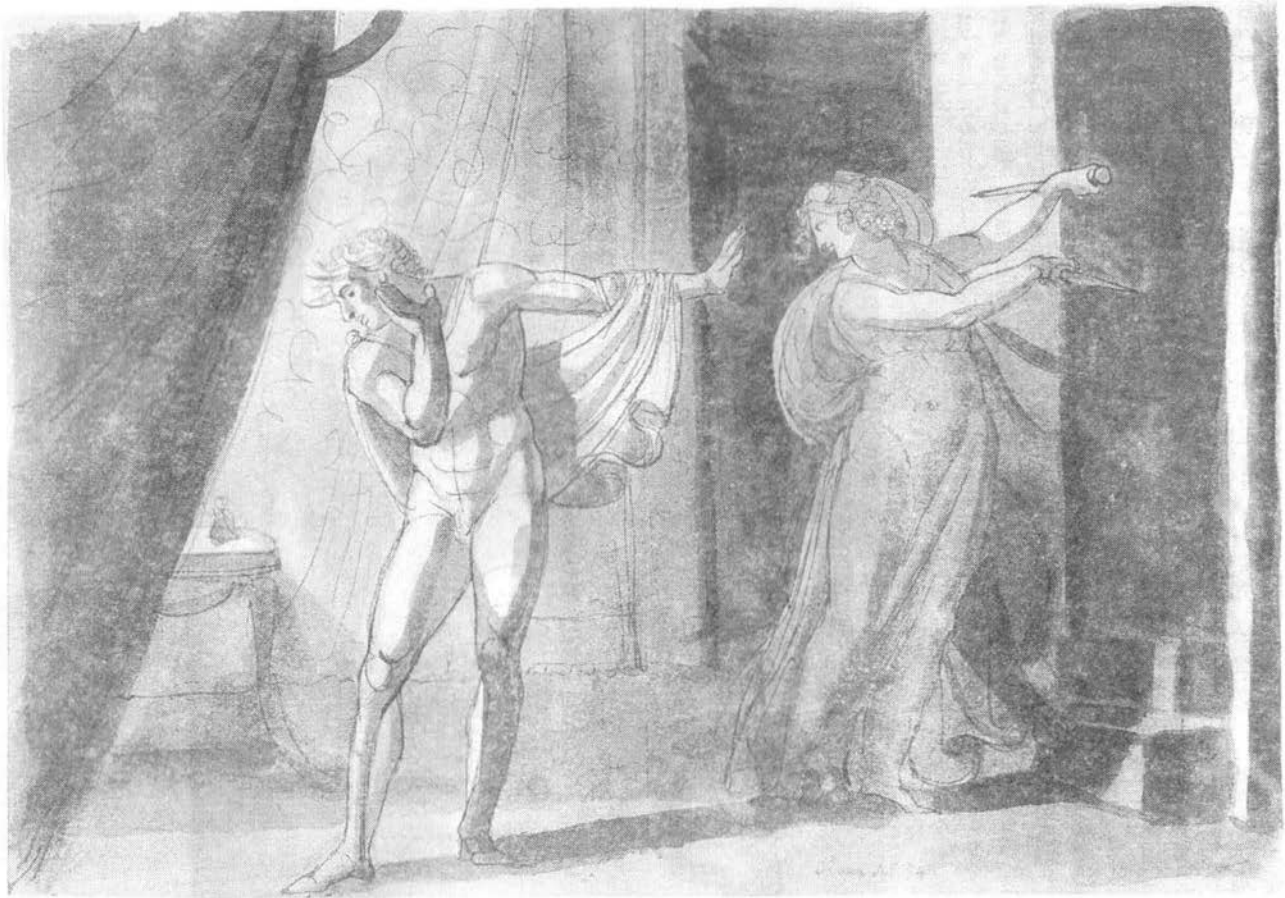
Macbeth and Lady Macbeth ("Give me the daggers …," 2.2; 1774

The Armed Head Appears for Macbeth (4.1; 1774)

Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches (1.3; 1792)

Zoltán Márkus

Mimesis Suspended: What "Passeth Show" in Hamlet?

Hamlet's response to his mother's urging to "cast" his "nightly colour off" (I.2.68)[1] which "seems ... so particular" with him, turns into an anti-mimetic manifesto:

> Seems, madam? Nay, it is, I know not "seems".
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief
> That can denote me truly. These indeed "seem",
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passeth show –
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
>
> (I.2.76-86)

After a detailed and overdetermined description of the actions of mourning (which "a man might play"), Hamlet underlines that he has something "within which passes show:" something that is authentic and credible exactly because it cannot be articulated by and in action. The contradiction is obvious: the hero of one of the most sophisticated theatrical plays distrusts theatricality.

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. In *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, et al. (Oxford: OUP, 1986) All further references to the play by act, scene and line numbers are from this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

This paper focuses on some contradictions of this sort regarding *mimesis* in *Hamlet* – both in relation to the Prince of Denmark and to the play as a whole. The topology of each subsection is determined by the varying perspectives of the course of the argument. First, I will show the complexity of roles that the Prince of Denmark is expected to put on at the beginning of the play and the mimetic interference of his "antic disposition" with this multitude of roles. In the second section, I argue that Hamlet's chosen "fool-role" undermines the integrity of his character and thrusts both Hamlet and the whole play into an impasse.

The third section discusses *The Mousetrap* scene and its anti-mimetic consequences. Here particular attention is paid to the function of dumb shows and the indistinguishability between observers and the observed, audiences and players, subjects and objects of *mimesis*. Continuing the concluding thoughts of the third section, the last (fourth) part deals with the mimetic problems of the theatrical representation of *Hamlet*.

The subsections of the paper are arranged in a way in which each section provides a critique of the previous one: the second provides a critique of the observations of the first and the third of those of the second. With the aid of a discussion of the predicament of theatrical representations, the fourth section offers a critique of and a supplement to all the previous parts of the paper.

I

While Hamlet's bitter advice "To a nunnery, go" (III.1.152) is still echoing in the auditorium, Ophelia draws exasperated conclusions about the young Prince's poor shape:

> O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
> Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
> (III.1.153-157)

Describing a mental state which lost all control – "is ... o'erthrown" – Ophelia's lines seem to be rather out of control themselves. The more revealing they seem concerning the young Prince, the more confusing they prove to be. While it is clear that Hamlet's mind is "o'erthrown," there remains the question of whether –

or why – Hamlet decided to "o'erthrow" it. After all, who "o'erthrows" Hamlet's "noble mind"?

Furthermore, the line "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword" is also somewhat baffling. G. R. Hibbard, the editor of the Oxford Shakespeare edition of Hamlet, remarks that here, "Shakespeare lists the roles the prince was expected to fill, together with the prime attribute each role demanded, without bothering to preserve exactly the same order in the two parts of the list."[2] While Hibbard admits that he thinks Shakespeare did not "bother," other editors emphasize that "this misalignment does throw light on the fact that Hamlet's sword is his intellect and that he fights with his tongue."[3] Neither of the textual explanations finds it significant that these lines are uttered not by a character called Shakespeare but Ophelia.

Moreover, the irony of the phrase "Th'observed of all observers" also casts light upon the complex nature of *mimesis* in *Hamlet*. Based on the authority of the Oxford English Dictionary, Hibbard's annotation reveals that the expression means that Hamlet is the "object of every true courtier's respectful attention."[4] We do not know about too many "true courtiers" or their "respectful attention" in Elsinore but we certainly know that Claudius and Polonius are hiding behind the arras during the dialogue between Ophelia and Hamlet. More generally, it is true that almost every single character in the play "observes" – and interprets – Hamlet. So does Ophelia: she compares the perfect Renaissance knight of her dreams to "mad" Hamlet, and remarks in exasperation that the "noble mind is here o'erthrown!" Every character observes and interprets Hamlet; and vice versa, Hamlet also observes and interprets everybody he encounters.

Observation – or, engaging a more pedestrian expression, spying – is crucial in *Hamlet*; logically therefore, role-playing becomes central as well. As we can understand on the basis of Ophelia's picture of Hamlet, Hamlet is one of the most versatile role-players, that is actors, within the play. As Harry Levin remarks in his essay on Hamlet's "antic disposition," "Hamlet's complexity is compounded of many simples: the frustrated scholar, the unwilling courtier, the mourner who becomes a revenger, the lover whose imagination rages like that of

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[2] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987) p. 245.

[3] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. The Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988) p. 150.

[4] Hibbard p. 245.

the lunatic or the poet, and still others – not least, the witty fool."[5] Consciously or unconsciously, Hamlet acts out a great number of roles.

Role-playing becomes significant not only as counterreaction to "observation," the great "pastime" of Elsinore, but also as the result of various tasks imposed on the characters of the play. The most important organizing elements at the opening of the play are the instructions given by the dominant characters in which they charge the less powerful ones with various roles. The actors on the stage are commissioned to play *actors* in given situations. Hamlet's commission is to revenge his father's murder. His imposed role is that of the avenger. Hamlet must first decide whether to perform or not to perform his assigned role; as he chooses to perform it, he then must choose how. From one perspective, this choice seems to be the central issue of the play in which Hamlet is acting as well as in the play in which the actor who is performing Hamlet is playing. Compared to the commands issued by Claudius and Polonius, the Ghost's guidelines for the task are extremely unprofessional and slack:

> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damnèd incest.
> But howsomever 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.5.82-8)

As a stage manager, the Ghost fails to provide directions specific enough for Hamlet, who, on the basis of his performance in Act I, Scene 2, is a reluctant actor. In the "transforming" Scene 5, however, Hamlet is forced to acquire some form of acting in order to be able to fulfill his task. As a device to achieve his aim, as a role within a role, he opts for "feigned madness."

Hamlet decides "[t]o put an antic disposition on" (I.5.173), to "assume a wild fantastic manner of thought and behaviour."[6] The expression "antic disposition" is a prominent reflection of the double theatrical nature of the play, since, as C. T. Onions's *Glossary* elucidates, *antic* as an adjective means "Fantastic, grotesque, ludicrous," while as a noun it refers to a "Buffoon, burlesque

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[5] Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959) p. 125.
[6] Hibbard p. 195.

performer, jester."[7] Hibbard's annotation adds that "the part Hamlet will go on to play in his dealing with his opponents will have much in common with that of the witty clown."[8] This aspect is emphasized by Harold Jenkins's remark that the word *antic* was "particularly used of an actor with a false head or grotesque mask."[9] From a wider perspective, therefore, Hamlet's roles truly include "the frustrated scholar, the unwilling courtier, the mourner..., the lover,"[10] etc., but from the particular point of view of the play-within-a-play, his part is that of the avenger who pretends to be a clown. The roles of scholar, courtier, mourner, and lover are the consequence of the opening situation of the drama, in which the bereaved Prince arrives at court. The role of the avenger results from the actions of the play. The part of the clown adds a third layer, since this is not an imposed task but the outcome of Hamlet's decision. Robert Weimann remarks in his essay, 'Mimesis in *Hamlet*,' that the feigned madness signifies not only "an *object* of representation," such as the roles of the scholar, courtier, lover, and even that of the avenger, "but also ... a (nonclassical) *mode* of representing."[11] The role of the clown is not a static characteristic but a dynamic device of action. Due to this kind of *mimesis*, Hamlet's character gains its multiplicity: Hamlet is a character who is played by an actor; this character is commissioned to play a revenger, a hero; the hero decides to play a madman, which is articulated primarily in his jesting with the members of the Danish court. The problem, however, is that the madman role overshadows Hamlet's other roles. In other words, due to Hamlet's feigned madness, his other roles "pass show."

II

The above described interpretation offers a relatively transparent system in which the drama's characters are moving and a somewhat complicated but seemingly trouble-free interpretation of the working of *mimesis* in relation to the Prince's

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[7] C. T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary*, enl. and rev. Robert T. Eagleson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, rpt. 1991) pp. 8-9.

[8] Hibbard p. 195.

[9] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Harold Jenkins (1982, rpt. London: Routledge, 1993) p. 226.

[10] Levin p. 125.

[11] Robert Weimann, 'Mimesis in *Hamlet*' in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, eds., *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (1985, rpt. London: Routledge, 1991) p. 278.

roles presented in the play. On the other hand, Hamlet's "antic disposition" also raises some serious problems concerning representation. His feigned madness undermines Hamlet's character and opens up vistas to the critique of *mimesis* itself. Hamlet's situation becomes impossible due to his fool-mask.

First, there is an obvious criticism of Hamlet's madness unfolding in Ophelia's disturbed lines quoted at the beginning of this paper. The "o'erthrown" "noble mind" prevents the Prince from performing his "actual" roles of the "courtier," "soldier," "scholar," etc. This criticism clearly echoes a Platonic reproach of role-playing. In *The Republic* Socrates emphasizes, "I think, too, that they must not get into the habit of making themselves resemble madmen, either in word or action. They must know madmen and bad men and women, but they must neither do nor imitate any of their actions."[12] This is a passage in *The Republic* offering an approach to *mimesis* which Jacques Derrida also discusses under the heading '*Mimesis, guilty or not guilty*.' Derrida remarks, "What is important for our purposes here is this 'internal' duplicity of the *mimeisthai* that Plato wants to cut in two, in order to separate good *mimesis* (which reproduces faithfully and truly yet is already threatened by the simple fact of its duplication) from bad, which must be contained like madness (396*a*) and (harmful) play (396*e*)."[13] Derrida's observation underlines two aspects through which Plato found the concept of *mimesis* problematic. The first aspect reveals an *ethical* criticism rejecting "bad" *mimesis* which represents negative and "harmful" human practices. The second aspect focuses on an internal flaw of the process of *mimesis* which is raised by the suspicious operation of "duplication." Both aspects are relevant to Hamlet's role determined by his "antic disposition."

Concerning the *ethical* side of Plato's criticism, it is evident that – for both an Elizabethan audience and Hamlet himself – the Prince's feigned madness raises obvious misgivings. In the Elizabethan theater, Hamlet's role of madness is "associated with the element of clowning, punning, and 'impertinency,' the tradition of topsy-turvydom and the 'mad' nonsensical Vice,"[14] as Weimann remarks. Moreover, the tracts in A. V. Judges's collection *The Elizabethan Underworld* suggest that Shakespeare's audience must have considered pretended

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[12] Plato, *The Republic*, transl. A.D. Lindsay (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1980) p. 78.

[13] Jacques Derrida, 'The Double Session' in *Dissemination*, transl. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981) pp. 186-7.

[14] Weimann p. 278.

madness chiefly a device of criminals. Thomas Harman, for instance, describes them in his *Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1566):

> These abram-men be those that feign themselves to have been mad, and have been kept either in Bethlem or in some other prison a good time, and not one amongst twenty that ever came in prison for any such cause ... Some of these be merry and very pleasant; they will dance and sing. Some others be as cold and reasonable to talk withal. These beg money.[15]

The abram or abraham men were possibly named after the Abraham Ward of Bethlehem Hospital, and Judges notes that "there is reason to believe that most of these wandering mad folk were impostors."[16] After the enactment of *The Poor Law* in 1586, the strolling abraham men were obviously considered criminals not only in moral but in legal terms. Dekker in his tract 'O Per Se O' (1612) points out that "The abram cove is a lusty strong rogue," and they "are more terrible to women and children than the name of Raw-head and Bloody-bones, Robin Goodfellow, or any other hobgoblin."[17] Dekker's observation clearly echoes Ophelia's disturbed reaction to Hamlet's madness ("My lord, I do not know, / But truly I do fear it" [II.1.86-7]).

That Hamlet finds his role and situation debasing is demonstrated by the first line of his self-berating soliloquy at the end of Act II ("O what a rogue and peasant slave am I..." [II.2.544ff]), which sounds even more berating in the first quarto edition of *Hamlet* (1603): "... what a dunghill idiote slaue am I?" (E4ᵛ). Hamlet's derogatory comments, therefore, indicate that the role into which he is forced by his "antic disposition" is not acceptable to him. Hamlet's problem here is primarily connected to *what* he is imitating. But his misgivings about the role in which he finds himself and his increasingly less controlled actions in the course of the play lead to the second aspect of Plato's above quoted criticism of the concept *mimesis*: the flaw within the process of *mimesis* itself.

From this second perspective it is particularly significant what Jean Baudrillard writes about *simulacra* in his essay, 'The Procession of Simulacra,'

> To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other

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[15] Thomas Harman, 'A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly called Vagabonds' in A.V. Judges, ed., *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London: George Routledge, 1930) 61-118, p. 83.

[16] See Judges pp. 494 and 497.

[17] Thomas Dekker, 'O Per Se O' in Judges 366-82, pp. 371-2.

an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: "Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littré). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary."[18]

Although the differences between Plato's above described concept of *mimesis* and Baudrillard's concept of *simulation* are numerous (problems of origin, the inferiority of a copy, etc.), Hamlet's "antic disposition" gathers common elements between the two. On the one hand, Plato's suspicion raised by the process of duplication in *mimesis* becomes reinforced by the case of Hamlet. The *process* of *mimesis* determines the *product* of *mimesis*: the imitator deteriorates by the process of imitating. On the other hand, Hamlet's madness – as a *simulacrum* – eliminates the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary."

It is clear enough, therefore, that this description of the mechanism of *mimesis* or *simulacrum* in Hamlet's madness relegates questions such as "Is Hamlet really mad?" or "Is Hamlet a madman *or* a fool?" as non-relevant questions. "Madness and non-madness," "reason and non-reason" are intertwined in Hamlet's character; they appear as two sides of the same phenomenon, those of Hamlet's Janus-faced "antic disposition."[19]

In the course of the play, Hamlet's madness gradually undermines his non-madness. The Prince is unable to overcome the chosen disguise of the "antic disposition;" he is not capable of "taking off the fool-mask." His protesting in the bedroom scene "It is not madness / That I have uttered" (III.4.132-33) does not sound convincing to his "internal" audience, Gertrude, who has not seen the Ghost, nor does it convince the "external" audience shocked by Hamlet's excessively harsh treatment of his mother. Hamlet's simulation, which has proven beneficial in the beginning, which has provided him "with the sought-for position

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[18] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994) p. 3.
[19] See also – for a different perspective but similar results – Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, transl. Richard Howard (1967, rpt. London: Tavistock, 1971) pp. ix-x.

of a *punctum indifferens* in the midst of action,"[20] which has vigorously survived after the play-within-the-play scene, becomes disadvantageous in the play's second half. The accidental slaughter of Polonius presents Hamlet's "true" or "real" role as an avenging hero in a devastatingly satirical manner.

The voyage to England, then, is the result of and the metaphor for the final futility of the actions determined by Hamlet's "antic disposition." The sea voyage on a kind of *Ship of Fools* (with passengers such as Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) serves as a metaphor for the failure of Hamlet and, more generally, for the impasse of the actions of the play. The journey is a final submissive act in a stalemate situation. Hamlet's antic disposition has overwhelmed not only his other roles such as courtier, lover, soldier, etc. but Hamlet himself. In other words, in Act IV even Hamlet as a character disappears or "passes show."

III

The previous section of this paper has argued that the mimetic mechanism behind Hamlet's "antic disposition" undermines Hamlet's character and – to a certain extent – the play itself. This following section, furthermore, examines how Hamlet's "antic disposition" also problematizes the classical concept of *mimesis*. Weimann suggests, "There is, in *Hamlet* as in at least some of the other tragedies and problem plays, a deeply disturbing gulf between what is represented and what is representing (i. e. the Shakespearean activity in the text plus the performative action on the stage)." Weimann's argument is that *mimesis* in *Hamlet* cannot be "formulated in (let alone reduced to) either a representational or a non-representational theory of dramatic language."[21] Hamlet's "antic disposition" is crucial from this point of view since it epitomizes the co-presence of, and the conflicts between, verbal and non-verbal discourses in the *mimesis* in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's feigned madness offers an ironical perspective on *mimesis*: a kind of *mimesis* of *mimesis* which obliterates classical interpretations of this concept.

The Mousetrap scene is central to the suspension of representational models of *mimesis*. First of all, it is crucial that a mise-en-scene is the chief device of Hamlet's plotting against Claudius: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the

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[20] William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969) p. 196.
[21] Weimann pp. 277-78.

conscience of the King" (II.2.606-7). As no professional jester is employed in the court of Denmark, no clown appears in *The Murder of Gonzago*. David Wiles argues that "Hamlet casts himself as the fool of both 'The Mousetrap' and *Hamlet*."[22] Taking Wiles's suggestion into consideration, it is particularly interesting that Hamlet advises the First Player to "let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them" (III.2.38-9). His main point is that clowns should not improvise; they should closely follow their own part. The instruction becomes sharply ironical because Hamlet, as the clown of the play-within-the-play, as the clown of the second part of *Hamlet*, and even in his role of revenger, plays extempore. In other words, there is an abyss between what is *said* and what is *done*, between text and show.

The play-within-the-play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, begins with a dumb show. Since W.W. Greg's famous article 'Hamlet's Hallucination'[23] published in 1917, this dumb show has been one of the most frequently discussed and most puzzling passages of *Hamlet*. Few critics discuss, however, that the dumb show as such is a major organizing constituent of the whole play from the beginning, from the appearance of the Ghost. Ophelia's description of Hamlet's odd behaviour *represents* a dumb show and it also appears in other scenes such as the scene of the silently praying Claudius and the scene in which the Ghost reappears. It also becomes significant in the graveyard-scene, in which Yorick's mute skull prophesies the play's somber conclusion. The dumb show has the same function in the inner play as the play-within-the-play in the whole *Hamlet*. The dumb show--with its tautological element and with its different mimetic quality-- becomes the *supplement* of the unfolding stories represented by the voiced text of the play.

Beyond the dumb show of *The Murder of Gonzago*, another – an even more significant – dumb show gains dominance over the voiced text in *The Mousetrap* scene. The whole scene is a metaphor for the whole play and it contains two separate lines of the plot: behind the surface entertainment of staging *The Murder of Gonzago*, there is the grim hidden line of the trap for Claudius. The entertainment and the trap are two different series of events in *The Mousetrap* scene, and Hamlet is the chief organizer of both of them. As he turns himself into a commentator, his dramatic point of view merges with the audience of *Hamlet*.

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[22] David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987) p. 57.

[23] W.W. Greg, 'Hamlet's Hallucination' *Modern Language Review* 12 no. 4 (October 1917)

When the audience's attention is focused on the play-within-the-play (the line of entertainment), Hamlet makes us conscious that the reaction of the audience-within-the-play (the line of the trap, the "meta-entertainment") is equally – if not even more – important. In other words, the dumb show (Claudius's reaction to the trap) appears parallel to, or even more dominant than, the voiced text (*The Murder of Gonzago*).

This dumb show is a "mimicry imitating nothing" as it is discussed in Derrida's 'Double Session.' This is the event in which we are "faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference." This event of the referentless reference, or of the copy of nothing, shifts from the simulacrum of classical mimesis to something different and this shift is marked by a "barely perceptible veil," a medium of undecidability and in-between-ness: a membrane that Derrida names the "hymen."[24] This in-between-ness evoked by the series of dumb-shows in *Hamlet* questions the applicability of classical or representational concepts of *mimesis*.

But there are further implications of *The Mousetrap* scene. Hamlet – with the aid of his mask offered by his feigned madness – gains control over various layers of discourse within the play. The play-within-the-play is Hamlet's complex and concealed trap for Claudius. Hamlet's threat is concentrated around another liminal in-between phenomenon: a secret.[25] Hamlet finds out Claudius's secret (that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father) but – once he succeeds – he thus also discloses his to Claudius (that he knows that Claudius murdered his father). The exchange between the Prince and the King can be best grasped through a distinction between *mutual knowledge* and *shared knowledge*: "Mutual knowledge, as opposed to *shared knowledge*, is that knowledge which speaker and addressee have in common and which they both know they possess. Shared knowledge is simply knowledge shared by speaker and addressee without explicitly knowing that they share it."[26] The most significant consequence of *The Mousetrap* scene is that it turns shared knowledge into mutual. The revelation is, therefore, quite manifold, following the rules of logical permutation. Consequently, we can argue

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[24] Derrida, 'The Double Session' pp. 206-16.

[25] "[N]othing is more virginal and at the same time more purloined and penetrated, already in and of itself, than a secret." Derrida, 'The Double Session' p. 259.

[26] Clara Calvo, *Power Relations and Fool-Master Discourse in Shakespeare*. (Nottingham: Dept. of English Studies, Univ. of Nottingham, 1991) (Monographs in Systemic Linguistics) pp. 96-7.

that the following pairs of presuppositions hold at the end of the play-within-the-play:

a) Claudius knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius; Hamlet knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius.

b) Claudius knows that Hamlet knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius; Hamlet knows that Claudius knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius.

c) Claudius knows that Hamlet knows that Claudius knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius; Hamlet knows that Claudius knows that Hamlet knows that Hamlet can threaten Claudius, etc.

If the "purpose of playing" is "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (III.2.22), the purpose of the play-within-the-play, the epitome of *Hamlet*, is to hold a mirror up to Claudius. Hamlet, "The glass of fashion" (III.1.156), as Ophelia calls him, creates an endless series of reflections. What is important here from the point of view of *mimesis* is the aggressivity with which these reflections cut through the veil of representation which has been presented in the play before. The in-between "hymen" of Hamlet's crazy fool-role and of Claudius's apparently legitimate king-role are penetrated by the rays of these reflections and for a moment the revenger-Hamlet faces the usurper-Claudius. This event puts the rest of the play up to the very last scene into a kind of "parenthesis:" the rest of the play as a whole serves as a kind of *hymen* or *supplement* between this moment of the play and the very last scene.

This endless series of reflections appears through a diverse system of "observation" and role-playing. In this complex system, an audience changes into actors and the actors into an audience. Beyond the contradictions and suspensions of classical models of *mimesis* and the heterogeneity of verbal and non-verbal representation, the interchangeability of audience and actors – observers and the observed – makes the distinction between the subject and object of *mimesis* problematic within the play-world of *Hamlet*. In other words, representational *mimesis* breaks down in the play-world of *Hamlet*: it also "passes show."

But this blurred indistinguishability – or more fashionably the "différance" – between the subject and object of *mimesis* also exists between the "real" world of the audience and the play-world of a *Hamlet*-production. There is nothing outside *Hamlet*: the last section of this paper is evoked by this statement.

IV

According to the Platonic model, the dramatic representation of *Hamlet* is further removed from the level of ideas than the written play-text and thus inferior to both. The highly canonized text of the play functions as the site of an author-God conjured by the theatrical productions of Shakespeare's play. Any production based – even if frequently somewhat arbitrarily – on the Shakespearean text serves as a representative performance text of the "original." Although their forms of reflections and representations are variable to infinity, the theatrical productions still function as representations of the written text. The frequently endorsed desire to be "loyal to Shakespeare" reveals the theater-producers' submission to this Platonic model of *mimesis*.

The possibility of this loyalty to the author, however, is questionable on several accounts. Terence Hawkes, for instance, opens his essay 'Telmah' with the observations that *Hamlet* both opens and ends with dumb shows. As we have seen previously, dumb shows represent a *hymen* or *supplement* of representation which works against a Platonic perception of *mimesis*. Moreover--after drawing several parallels between the beginning and the end of the play – Hawkes also observes that it is in fact extremely difficult to determine when and how *Hamlet* actually begins and ends: "In our society in which *Hamlet* finds itself embedded in the ideology in a variety of roles, the play has, for complex social and historical reasons, always already begun." And when does it end? After the last words uttered on the stage, after the cannon fires, after the curtain calls, or after we have left the theater?

Hawkes, furthermore, senses an "opposing current" against the "straight, purposive, linear motion forward through the play." "Reinforcing its recursive mode," he refers to the play as "*Telmah*:" "*Hamlet* backwards." His chief argument is that "looking backwards, revision, or re-interpretation, the running of events over again out of their time-sequence, ranks, in effect, as a fundamental aspect of *Hamlet*."[27] All of the characters revise and reinterpret the events in the play; they are the first audience, the primary critics of Hamlet's acting. This primary audience – similarly to the secondary audience, that is, to us – constantly re-observe, re-create, and re-invent the Prince. On the other hand, the fact that *Hamlet* is always already begun opens the way to Hamlet to re-observe, re-create,

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[27] Terence Hawkes. 'Telmah' in *That Shakespeherian Rag* (London: Methuen, 1986) pp. 94, 96.

and re-invent his primary audience as well as his secondary audience – that is, us – as well.

What Hawkes offers us here is a different model of *mimesis*. In his argument he depicts a multifaceted mimetic practice taking place between audiences and players, observers and the observed. The borderline between these groups is usually blurred: the subjects and objects of *mimesis* are simultaneously merged. While questioning the significance of a Platonic (even classical) system of *mimesis*, Hawkes provides a political mimetic model. Instead of advocating "loyalty to Shakespeare," he argues that mutual ideological, political, and cultural representations occur – evoked by any performance of *Hamlet*: a cultural (educational, ideological, political) "reality" surfaces by and around *Hamlet*-productions.

Hawkes' reading of *Hamlet* is a popular rescue-effort of *mimesis* prevalent in (new) historicist and cultural materialist readings. In his book *Anti-mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock*, Tom Cohen describes these readings as a "movement back to representationalism." Cohen finds that "It at times seems that the (re)turn into *representationalism* has involved a larger form of cultural hegemony, an aesthetic regime based on a certain trope, mimesis, that, when identified with 'the political,' displays an often suspect complicity (and even ahistoricity) of its own." What Cohen offers instead – following French theoreticians of mimesis from Lacoue-Labarthe through Derrida – is a return to "the materiality of language as such" and a focus on "an *anti-mimetic politics* in post-humanist reading." The title of his book *Anti-mimesis* "is not meant to be heard simply as a classic rejection or opposition to mimesis (with the classic of Auerbach echoing in the background), but rather to raise the prospect of other models of mimesis – and in particular, of addressing active forms of mimesis without models or copies."[28] What Cohen does not address, however, is the question whether an anti-representationalist reading is possible at all in the case of theatrical performances.

The obvious answer to the lack of a discussion of this question is that theatrical performances – independently from their producers' intention – are always entangled in the closure of representation. Discussing Artaud's 'Theater of Cruelty,' Derrida draws the following conclusions about theater "as the original repetition of difference,"

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[28] Tom Cohen, *Anti-mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994) pp. 2-3, 8.

Because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself. That is to say, closure is its *playing* space. This movement is the movement of the world as play...

To think the closure of repetition is thus to think the cruel powers of death and play which permit presence to be born to itself, and pleasurably to consume itself through the representation in which it eludes itself in the deferral. To think the closure of representation is to think the tragic: not as the representation of fate, but as the fate of representation. Its gratuitous and baseless necessity. And it is to think why it is *fatal* that, in its closure, representation continues.[29]

Theater is the site of the infinite closure of a kind of *mimesis*; it cannot escape the necessity of representation. But what gets represented in a *Hamlet*-production? Hawkes argues that it is not the Shakespearean text but an ideological, political, and cultural reality surrounding the performance that is put into play around a theatrical production of *Hamlet*. Tom Cohen warns against this regime of the representation of "the political."

Baudrillard, furthermore, claims that we live in a post-theatrical age: "Of the same order as the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible."[30] Accordingly, a *Hamlet*-production is the representation of the impossible: entangled in the necessity of representation on the one hand, and representing something non-presentable on the other. A theatrical production of *Hamlet* and the theatrical representation of the Prince of Denmark are both embedded in the paradox of this necessity and impossibility.

So, after all, what "passes show" in *Hamlet*? On the one hand, very little: the play is interpreted, played, read, made sense of, day by day, and its gaps and lacunae are bridged by meaning-providing narratives. On the other hand, too much: from the point of view of mimesis, the play faces a double impasse. In the written script, Hamlet's "antique disposition" and the play's various non-representational or non-discursive elements cause a mimetic havoc; in the theatrical production, the general predicament of dramatic representation forces the play into the closure – or straitjacket – of physical appearance.

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[29] Jacques Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978) p. 250.

[30] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: semiotext(e), 1983) p. 38

Offering an insightful theoretical reflection, a sensitive and ironic perception of this predicament is articulated in Heiner Mueller's *Hamletmachine*: "THE ACTOR PLAYING HAMLET: I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. I'm not interested in it anymore either. I won't play along anymore."[31] Or as Hamlet puts it: "But I have that within which passeth show." Both are disillusioned and reluctant actors but they are acting nonetheless.

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[31] Heiner Mueller, *Hamletmachine* in *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*, ed. and transl. Carl Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 49-58, p. 56.

Miklós Péti

The Shaping of a Literary Cult

The reception of Chapman's *Homer* from   Jonson to Keats

I.

As Agamemnon and his generals pass before Achilles in the third act of *Troilus and Cressida*, they "put on / A form of strangeness [...] and either greet him not / Or else disdainfully" (III. iii. 50-53). And though Ulysses (the hero who remains polytropic even in Shakespearean burlesque) finds time to address the fierce Peleides, he does so only to deliver an impressive speech:

> ... The present eye praises the present object:
> Then marvel not, thou great and complete man,
> That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;
> Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
> Than what not stirs...
>
> (180-184)

These words are not spoken in vain, since Achilles, who had been reluctant up to this moment to engage in combat, perceives at once that his "reputation is at stake" (226). Compared with the original Homeric tale, however, he cuts a rather ridiculous figure. In the *Iliad*, the efforts of Odysseus to appease the hero's wrath towards Agamemnon are (to say the least) unsuccessful, and Achilles's long speech of "exceeding vehemence"[1] suggests that he readily abandons even his *kleos* (his

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[1]   Cf. *Iliad*, IX. 410-416.

renown or "reputation"), the foremost ideal of any Homeric hero, and is ready to return home just to show the extent of his displeasure. Needless to say, both the Homeric and the Shakespearean Achilles have "strong reasons of [their] privacy" (III. iii. 190-191) which are clearly related; still, there seems to be a world of difference between the indignant chieftain of the Myrmidons, and the love-fool of *Troilus and Cressida*.[2] The final irony, nonetheless, emerges only if we consider that in Shakespeare's version, Hector is killed when he is ambushed by a large band of Myrmidons who are obliged to bear the message that "Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain" to the Greek camp (V. viii. 14).

However ludicrous a character Achilles may be in the Shakespearean "problem play," along with Ajax and the other Greek heroes he still passes for an enduring literary figure. Indeed, it seems as if the Ulyssean admonition of the hero was but an ingenious definition of the concept of "the classic" elegantly positing one single criterion, "presence" as a prerequisite for a permanent reputation. And if we – somewhat arbitrarily – interpret Ulysses's words by extending their possible frame of reference to include not only "heroic nature," but also texts representing the very same concept, then Shakespeare's aperçu becomes even more conspicuous. For it lies at the very heart of the critical enterprise ("the present eye") to commend or condemn texts precisely because they do or do not exert (or – according to the persuasion of some critics – because they ought to exert) some desirable influence on either the creation or the reception of literature. These texts are the "present objects" that stir and make their constant presence felt. Of course, it is the peculiar characteristic of the reception of literature (and – we might hazard – literary works themselves) that some of the texts "stir" only for awhile, that is, they remain dead for a subsequent generation of readers, and as such, for a subsequent generation of texts, too. A small number of works, however, seem to have remained almost ever-present in critical discourse, but owing to this specific quality, have not received unanimous praise; on the contrary, they are likely to be – in the words of Ezra Pound – "stirrers up of strife." And, as the presence of the strife stirred up by Achilles is revealed by the constancy of the interpretative strife his character has inspired, so

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[2] The interpretation of Achilles's character as either an "insatiable womanizer" or Patroclus's lover is, of course, not Shakespeare's speciality. Such literary representations of the hero have been present ever since Aeschylus or Plato's *Symposium*. Cf. Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer and Manliness* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 99-109. Cf. also *Inferno* V. 65-6. where he is presented as a victim of love.

may the texts that we term "classic" remain classic only if they maintain their positions of eminence as objects of contention.

The little Shakespearean parable outlined above would be persuasive enough if we could ignore the fact that, according to George Steiner, "there are, at a very rough count, more than two hundred complete or selected English renditions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from 1581 to the present."[3] If we keep this in mind, the question arises: *which* English interpretation of Homer should intellectually curious readers use if they really want to compare the Shakespearean and the Homeric Achilles? A possible answer is Harold Bloom's who, compiling a survival-kit of canonical texts at the very end of *The Western Canon,* states that "[h]ere, as in the following lists, I suggest translations [of non-English canonical works] wherever I derived particular pleasure and insight from those now readily available."[4] But – and it is Bloom's own rhetoric that suggests this – the pleasure derived from, for example, Lattimore's or Fitzgerald's translations of the Homeric epics, however "particular" it is in the sense of "special" or "noteworthy," may only be "particular" in the sense of "specific" or "not general." Bloom's principle of selection is, of course, not the single example of such critical procedures. Ezra Pound, for example, says something very similar in his essay, 'How to Read,' when he draws up a list that bears basically the same function as Bloom's: "HOMER – in full (Latin cribs, Hugues Salel in French, no satisfactory English, though Chapman can be used as reference)."[5] One may apparently assume that both Pound and Bloom are in a position to judge, since their knowledge of both the source and target language allows them to decide upon the "adequacy" of one or other translation. An interesting forerunner of these writers may be Keats who clearly held different critical ideas, but who (Byron's condescending judgement notwithstanding[6]) in one of his sonnets seems to communicate his "first-hand experience" readily and easily upon first looking into one of the translations of Homer's works.

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[3] George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: OUP, 1977) p. 401. Steiner's count is, however, more than twenty years old, and one cannot be sure to what extent the figure has increased since 1977.

[4] Harold Bloom. *The Western Canon. The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) p. 531.

[5] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1960) p. 38.

[6] Cf. Keats "who was kill'd off by one critique, / Just as he really promised something great, / If not intelligible, without Greek." *Don Juan,* XI. lx.

It is not to be overlooked that Keats allegedly glossed Chapman's *Homer*, a fact or fiction that attains special significance when one considers that by Keats's time Homer had been translated into English by quite a number of eminent translators, i.e. Pope and Cowper just to name two of the most important ones. It might not be generally known that the only alternative version of Homer available to Keats was Pope's, and thus for some readers it might well appear that 'On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*' – besides being a testimony of poetic self-election[7] – takes a clear position as to *which* translation of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* should be read. Keats's praise of Chapman, and that this praise has been confirmed by a large number of readers over the past almost two hundred years is a phenomenon worth close consideration, all the more so, since with the publication of scholarly prose-translations – as we may expect – such individual and idiosyncratic choices as the Romantic poet's should have been disregarded once for all both by the most ardent champions of fidelity and by those who search for some specific "Homeric" criteria in the translated texts. Unfortunately, such expectations are not met when we begin to read such prose-renditions. Let us, for example, take A. T. Murray's translations the *Odyssey* rendered in 1919 and the *Iliad* in 1924, published together with the Greek text in the *Loeb Classical Library*, and read what the distinguished Homer scholar, George E. Dimock says about it:

> No more faithful translation of Homer was ever made, and its elegance matches its fidelity. Homer's formulaic epithets, phrases, and sentences were consistently rendered, and his artificial amalgam of dialects and archaic vocabulary were, as was perfectly acceptable in those days, reflected in archaic English.[8]

After this panegyric, it is quite interesting and rather perplexing that Dimock actually *revised* Murray's translation "in such a way as to preserve its excellences while bringing all that sounds unnatural into line with today's canons of English."[9] But it is even more interesting that, in spite of the availability of such translations, the view that Chapman is "faithful to the essence of Homer's conception" more than most other translators frequently occurs in the scholarly

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[7] Cf. Jamey Hecht, 'Scarcity and Poetic Election in Two Sonnets of John Keats' in *ELH* 61 (1994) pp. 103-120.
[8] Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol. 1, transl. A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919, 1995[2]) p. vii.
[9] Homer, *The Odyssey*.

discourse.[10] Chapman's *Homer*, or, rather the effect it made upon the speaker of Keats's sonnet overshadows most major translations of the Greek epics; the Renaissance translation constantly makes its presence felt in the academic discourse about Homer-translations, it lurks there like the promise of some final argument too profound to put up.

My purpose within the confined scope of this paper is to expound, and at the same time question this argument. In what follows, therefore, I shall be concerned with outlining the interpretative strife that, in the long run, had ensured and strengthened the presence of Chapman's *Homer* in the scholarly discourse. As I shall argue, it is the period from Jonson to Keats that with its commendations and condemnations of this translation had – somewhat against the individual interpreters' motives – set the bases for later scholarly perspectives. Presenting the early reception history of Chapman's *Homer* from such an angle, of course, requires reflection on the underlying principles governing these responses. One model for this type of inquiry is hinted at by Dr. Johnson himself who – at the close of the *Life of Milton* – claimed rather sarcastically that "his [Milton's] work is not the greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first."[11] Johnson appears to argue that Milton can only be second to Homer, but his emphasis ("*only because...*") also suggests that all this is said with a certain amount of cynicism. In this way, the hierarchy posited between (say) the Homeric works and *Paradise Lost* is not a matter of some objectively definable poetic merit, but rather of temporal precedence, a factor irrelevant from the perspective of either poetics or aesthetics. Likewise, one may safely apply the Johnsonian criterion to each and every Homer translation that followed Chapman's without falling into the trap of either asserting or negating the "greatness" of any one text. It is, however, my contention that in the case of the critical evaluation of Chapman's *Homer*, something more than the text's obvious temporal precedence over all English language Homer translations[12] is at stake;

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[10] George de Forest Lord, *Homeric Renaissance. The Odyssey of George Chapman* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956) p. 15.

[11] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* vol. 1., (London: Dent, 1968) p. 114.

[12] Actually, almost all of them. As David Penon George points out in his Latin dissertation on the *versiones Homeri Anglicae*, "[a]tque primus quidem omnium Arthurus Hall Homerum in linguam Anglicam transferre conatus anno p. Chr. n. MDLXXXI. decem priores Iliadis libros Anglicae redditos edidit." But Arthur Hall's version, as Penon hastily adds quoting "Thomas Wartonus," "has no other merit than that of being the first appearance of a part of the *Iliad* in an English dress," since

therefore, in the final section of my paper I shall provide a possible theoretical context for the responses I shall now enumerate.

II.

In his "Preface" to the *Whole Works of Homer*, Chapman mentions with great indignation "a certaine envious Windfucker,"

> that hovers up and downe, laboriously engrossing al the aire with his luxurious ambition and buzzing into every eare my detraction – affirming I turne Homer out of the Latine onely, & c – that sets all his associates and the whole rabble of my maligners on their wings with him to bear about my empaire and poyson my reputation.[13]

This person, according to Phyllis Bartlett, must have been Ben Jonson,[14] Chapman's one-time friend, whose 1618 poem, 'To my worthy and honour'd Friend, Mr *George Chapman*, on his Translation of Hesiods Works, & Dayes,' seems to contradict the aggressively self-justifying tone of the 'Preface':

> Whose worke could this be, *Chapman*, to refine
> Old *Hesiods* Ore, and give it us; but thine,
> Who hadst before wrought in rich *Homers* Mine?
>
> What treasure hast thou brought us! and what store
> Still, still, dost thou arrive with, at our shore,
> To make thy honour, and our wealth the more!
>
> If all the vulgar Tongues, that speake this day,
> Were askt of thy Discoveries; They must say,
> To the Greeke coast thine onely knew the way.
>
> Such Passage hast thou found, such Returnes made,
> As, now, of all men, it is call'd thy Trade:
> And who make thither else, rob, or invade.[15]

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it was done exclusively from a French translation. Cf. David Georgius Penon, *Versiones Homeri Anglicae. Inter se Comparatae* (Bonnae: Apud Adolphum Marcum, MDCCCLXI) p. 2.

[13] All quotes are from the following edition: Allardyce Nicoll, ed., *Chapman's Homer* 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956, 1998^2) p. 17. I will only deal with excerpts from the *Iliads*.

[14] Phyllis Bartlett, 'Chapman's Revisions in his *Iliads*' *ELH* 2 (1935) pp. 92-119.

[15] C.H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *The Works of Ben Jonson* vol. VIII. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) pp. 388-389.

Thus, even though Chapman rages against Jonson in the "Preface," the "Windfucker" published the very first significant response to the famous translations. But let us consider the rhetoric of this short encomium by Jonson. The speaker's use of a nautical metaphor to pay tribute to Chapman's Homer translations is later picked up in Gay's "Welcome from Greece" written on the occasion of Pope's finishing his translation of the *Iliad*:

> Long hast thou, friend! Been absent from thy soil,
> Like patient *Ithacus* at siege of *Troy*;
> [...]
> Did I not see thee when thou first sett'st sail
> To seek adventures in *Homer's* land?
> Did I not see thy sinking spirits fail,
> And wish thy bark had never left the strand?
> Ev'n in mid ocean often didst thou quail,
> And oft lift up thy holy eye and hand,
> Praying the Virgin dear, and saintly choir,
> Back to the port to bring thy bark entire.[16]

Notwithstanding the apparent similarity between the discovery motifs in Jonson's and Gay's poems, it is important to note that while the former defines Chapman's endeavour as "Discovery," the latter regards Pope's completion of his enterprise as something akin to Ulysses's homecoming. The comparison of these two tropes may throw new light on the interpretative practices they represent. Although both works pretend to be written only to praise the person of the translator, the rhetoric of Jonson's dedication turns the readers' attention to the Chapman translations themselves. While Gay's Ulysses parallel emphasises the perseverance of the poet-translator (since Ulysses himself is the ante-type of the "enduring" hero), Jonson's reflection on Chapman's "Discovery," and that this discovery is authorized by the quality of the enterprise (Such Passage... such Returnes) discloses that the speaker positions Chapman as the only true interpreter of Homer in the English speaking world of the time. Moreover, this identification goes hand in hand with denying the possibility of a "better" or simply a "later" version of either Hesiod or Homer, which would of course be robbing or "invading," an opinion that seems especially ironic from the perspective of Gay's poem, since the *Ithacus* mentioned in "Welcome from

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[16] David Nicol Smith, ed., *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966) pp. 164-168.

Greece" was indeed one of those invaders who caused the destruction of Troy. With this manoeuvre of "idolising" Chapman and his translations, therefore, Jonson prepares the ground for the later strains of condemning Pope, a critical trend that – as we shall see – reaches its height with the early Romantics. Two hundred years had to pass until (say) Coleridge re-opened Chapman's translation. In the meantime, Jonson's praise of Chapman turned abruptly into Dryden's hardly explicable scorn and contempt.

There is, as might be expected, a considerably ambivalent stance towards Chapman's works in the prose writings of Dryden who also translated parts of the *Iliad* and the whole *Aeneid*. In his "Dedication of Examen Poeticum," for instance, there is a parallel strain of agreeing with and, at the same time, condemning Chapman's methods. The speaker of the dedication (Dryden) defends the paraphrastical rendering of Chapman and considers it superior to the methods of those who "run into the other extream" (i. e. those who translate word-for-word); furthermore, he also approves of the occasional use of *synaloepha* in Chapman's *Homer*, "which lyes before me" (an unwise confession that was going to be an easy prey to Johnson and Pope – as we shall see). Nonetheless, towards the end of the "Dedication," we find the following bold assertion:

> The Earl of Mulgrave and Mr. Waller, two of the best judges of our age, have assured me that they could never read over the translation of Chapman without incredible pleasure and extreme transport. This admiration of theirs must needs proceed from the author himself; for the translator has thrown him down as low as harsh numbers, improper English, and a monstrous length of verse could carry him.[17]

Dryden's inconsistent evaluation of Chapman's *Homer* is, of course, ruthlessly exploited by the generations that followed. Although Pope laments that "Mr. Dryden did not live to translate the *Iliad*," he also observes that the *poet laurate* was too indebted to Chapman's translation: "[h]e seems to have had too much regard to Chapman, whose words he sometimes copies, and has unhappily followed him in passages where he wanders from the original."[18] Dr. Johnson goes even further when he claims that "[Dryden] gives a false account of Chapman's versification, and he discovers in the preface to his *Fables* that he

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[17] John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* vol. 1. (London: Dent, 1971) pp. 163-67.
[18] 'Preface to Homer's *Iliad*' in Maynard Mack, ed., *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope* vol. 7. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967) p. 22.

translated the first book of the *Iliad*, without knowing what was in the second."[19] However, the famous lexicographer has a couple of words to say about Pope's translation, too:

> With Chapman, whose work, though now totally neglected, seems to have been popular almost to the end of the last century, he [Pope] had very frequent consultations, and perhaps never translated any passage till he had read his version, which indeed he has been sometimes suspected of using instead of the original.[20]

Pope, naturally, thinks differently about the matter. The *marginalia* in his copy of Chapman's *Homer* clearly indicate the translator's dissatisfaction with the Renaissance version of Homer. One of these notes is especially interesting; it is written beside and under Chapman's rendering of a passage from the first book of the *Iliad* and reads: "Vd. Dryden/WT [wit] is mark'd not in Homer."[21] If we consider the Augustan poet's critique of Dryden's version, the implication of this passing remark, that is, the application of Dryden's criteria to Chapman's *Homer*, is rather startling. Nevertheless, it seems that, in Pope's "Preface to Homer's *Iliad*," the two classicists, for once, unite to find fault with Chapman's version. In the "Preface," Pope is dissatisfied with Chapman's *Homer* on precisely the same grounds as Dryden was, i.e. the length of the verse-line, the "expression involved in fustian," the unnecessary enthusiasm of the speaker and, furthermore, the infamous interpolations or digressions that, even to this day, have annoyed so many critics of Chapman.[22]

As it seems, the reactions to Chapman's *Homer* and to Jonson's reflections on the very same work emerged within the context of a critical triangle two of whose members (Dryden and Pope) try to play down the importance of Chapman's translation on the basis of its poetic diction. Johnson's role in this scenario seems to be that of the sober scholar who tries to harmonise this unique, and by all means fruitful interplay of responses by pointing out the indebtedness of both Dryden and Pope to Chapman. However, when Johnson claims Chapman's version to be "totally neglected," his critical position seems to fail. "Total neglect" would obviously imply the disappearance of the text from either the scholarly discourse or the later translations, but this – as we shall see – does

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[19] Johnson, vol. 1, p. 228.
[20] Johnson, vol. 2, p. 159.
[21] Mack, vol. 10, p. 475. Cf. also *Iliads* I. 447-9.
[22] Mack, vol. 7, p. 21.

not happen. It is precisely with the two Augustans, Dryden and Pope, that mere opinion is reinforced by the creative re-readings and re-writings of Chapman's texts. How are we to decide about the "presence" of Chapman's *Homer* in the discourse of later epochs, when we observe the obvious difference of opinion in Johnson's account and the personal remarks of the translators? The best way is to contrast the contending texts, especially since the direct influence of Chapman's *Homer* is all the more conspicuous in these early versions. Let us, therefore, take a glance at how the three translators interpret the opening lines of the *Iliad*:

> Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
> οὐλομένην, ἥ μυρί᾽ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε᾽ ἔθηκε,
> πολλὰς δ᾽ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
> ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
> οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ᾽ ἐτελείτο βουλή,
> ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε
> Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

The wrath do thou sing, O goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of warriors, and made themselves to be the spoil for dogs and all manner of birds; and thus the will of Zeus was being brought to fulfilment; – sing thou thereof from the time when at the first there parted in strife Atreus' son, king of men, and goodly Achilles.[23]

> Achilles' banefull wrath resound, O Goddesse, that imposd
> Infinite sorrowes on the Greekes, and many brave soules losd
> From breasts Heroique – sent them farre, to that invisible cave
> That no light comforts; and their lims to dogs and vultures gave
> To all which Jove's will gave effect; from whom first strife begunne
> Betwixt Atrides, king of men, and Thetis' godlike Sonne.
>
> *(Iliads, 1-6)*

> The wrath of Peleus' son, O Muse, resound;
> Whose dire effects the Grecian army found:
> And many a heroe, king, and hardy knight,
> Were sent, in early youth, to shades of night;
> Their limbs a prey to dogs and vultures made;

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[23] Homer, *The Iliad* vol. 1., transl. A. T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) p. 3. – henceforth *Loeb.*

So was the sov'reign will of Jove obey'd:
From that ill omen'd hour when strife begun
Betwixt Atrides great, and Thetis god-like son...[24]

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heavn'ly Goddess, sing;
That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign
The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain;
Whose limbs unbury'd on the naked shore,
Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore:
Since great Achilles and Atrides strove,
Such was the sov'reign doom, and such the will of Jove![25]

Chapman's characteristic rendering of these first lines provides some of the important guidelines for the two Augustans who follow. Thus, the translator's synecdochic rendering of the Greek pronoun "αὐτούς" (referring to the bodies of the "ἥρωες") as "limbs" is conscientiously followed by both Dryden and Pope, just as the apparent *periphrases* of the underworld which, nevertheless, are handled differently by all three translators. None of the texts mentions the name of Hades straightforwardly, but Chapman's "invisible cave that no light comforts" besides being an actual intratextual reference to the description of the sudden appearance of Hades's domain in Book Twenty,[26] is also explained by one of the translator's etymologizing notes in the "Commentarius" to the First Book:

Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν: ἀΐδης (being compounded *ex à privativa, and* εἴδω, *video*) signifies, *locus tenebricosus*, or (according to Virgil) *sine luce domus*; and therefore (different from others) I so convert it.[27]

As his *marginalia* testifies, Pope took heed of Chapman's gloss,[28] and probably that is why "gloomy" is added to "Pluto's reign," the *duplicatis verbis* in which – again, possibly due to Chapman's mention of Vergil – the Latin name of the underworld-deity is used. Dryden's "shades of night" in turn, is the most remote figurative rendering of the original: instead of the Greek god, it recalls such

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[24] John Dryden, *Fables Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, W. Creech and J. Balfour, 1773) – henceforth *Fables*.
[25] Mack, vol. 7, pp. 82-85 – henceforth Pope's *Iliad*.
[26] Cf. the "dread and dank abodes" of Hades "wherefor the very gods have loathing" (*Loeb* XX. 64-5)
[27] *Iliads*, I. 3n.
[28] Cf. Mack, vol. 10, p. 475.

Homeric stock-euphemisms of death as "and down upon the eyes of him came the darkness of night, and enfolded him."[29] Furthermore, it is essential to note that Dryden falls into his own trap in translating the original's seventh line by Chapman's own words. Only two words differ in Dryden's "Betwixt Atrides great, and Thetis' god-like son" from Chapman's "Betwixt Atrides, king of men, and Thetis' godlike Sonne." But while the latter's heptameter (fairly faithful to the original) is in perfect accord with the fourteeners surrounding it, Dryden's alexandrine (a feet Dryden actually attributed to Chapman) sticks out from among the heroic couplets.[30] From this angle, Pope's claim that Dryden had "too much regard" for Chapman appears to be justified. Nonetheless, it appears that Pope also had too much regard for Dryden. As his earliest versions of the opening line show, he used Dryden's phrase ("The Wrath of Peleus' Son") to translate the sublime Μῆνιν...Πηληϊάδεω. Another excerpt that will hopefully show that Pope owes at least as much to the Renaissance translator as his predecessor is one of the climaxes of the *Iliad*, the lament of Andromache in the sixth book:

> Ἕκτορ, ἀτὰρ σύ μοί ἐσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
> ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακοίτης·
> ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν᾽ ἐπὶ πύργῳ,
> μὴ παῖδ᾽ ὀρφανικὸν θήῃς χήρην τε γυναῖκα

Nay, Hector, thou art to me father and queenly mother, thou art brother, and thou art my stallwart husband. Come now, have pity, and remain here on the wall, lest thou make thy child an orphan and thy wife a widow.   (*Loeb*, VI. 429-432)

> ...Yet, all these [my mother and father] gone from me
> Thou amply renderst all: thy life makes still my father be,
> My mother, brothers – and besides thou art my husband too,
> Most lov'd, most worthy. Pitie then, deare love, and do not go,
> For, thou gone, all these go againe; pitie our common joy,

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[29] Cf. e.g. *Loeb* XIII. 580. for only *one* appearance of the stock-phrase.

[30] Cf. Dryden's opinion on the alexandrine: "I frequently make use of the triplet rhymes, and for the same reason, because they bound the sense. And therefore, I generally join these two licences [the Pindaric line and the triplet] together, and make the last verse of the triplet a Pindaric [...]. Spenser is my example for both these privileges of English verses; and Chapman has followed him in his translation of Homer." John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, vol. 2, p. 247. To my knowledge, Chapman never used the alexandrine in any of his translations.

Lest (of a father's patronage, the bulwarke of all Troy)
Thou leav'st him a poore widdowe's charge...
(*Iliads*, VI. 464-470)

But thou, my Hector, art thyself alone
My Parents, Brothers, and my Lord in one.
O kill not all my kindred o're again,
Nor tempt the Dangers of the dusty Plain;
But in this Tow'r, for our Defence, remain.
Thy Wife and Son are in thy Ruin lost:
This is a Husband's and a Father's Post...
(*Fables*, 82-88)

Yet while my Hector still survives, I see
My father, mother, brethren, all in thee.
Alas! my parents, brothers, kindred, all,
Once more will perish, if my Hector fall.
Thy wife, thy infant, in thy danger share:
Oh prove a husband's and a father's care!
(*Pope's Iliad*, VI. 544-549)

Chapman's influence is most easily detectable in the later translations. In the Greek text, Hector's wife first recounts the loss of her father, mother and family at the hands of Achilles, and then, as in the quoted excerpt, attributes the virtues of the lost relatives to the still-living Hector. This rhetorical device carries the *implicit* content that, with the loss of Hector, the woes of Andromache and the child shall be greatly multiplied: that is, she will probably relive all those sorrows that she felt upon the loss of her family. Needless to say, Homer leaves this inference to his readers/hearers. But if one turns to the *Iliads* of Chapman, it is clearly observable that the translator in lines 462-463 makes what is to be inferred in Homer explicit. Chapman's text does what structuralist translation theory terms the *amplification* of the subject matter's implicit status.[31] However, the fact that the first English translator of Homer "amply rendereth all" would not appear to derive from some semantical incommensurability between the two tongues (since one would be able to leave the content implicit just as easily in English), but rather from the necessity of some fine sparkle of wit which – as far as Pope and Dryden are concerned – "is not mark'd in Homer." It is rather strange then that

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[31] Eugene A. Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) p. 227.

both of the later translators follow Chapman's conceit of the second death of Andromache's family, which in Dryden's version is reinforced by didactic passages on the role of Hector as a father and a husband.[32] All in all, it seems that Steven Shankman is right to point out that "[...In Pope's *Iliad*,] the gratuitous play on words and parenthetical prolixity as well as the gratuitous conceit recall precisely those elements of Chapman's style to which Pope objected."[33] As a result, we witness how the creative re-reading and re-writing of Chapman's *Homer* happens on at least two levels; for re-writing in the case of Dryden and Pope does not simply result in further (competing) alternatives, but also in a tutelage to the text they intended to replace.

Given that Dryden and Pope were indebted both directly and indirectly to Chapman, one would have expected that the scholarly and critical literature of Romanticism had objected to the Augustan versions on precisely the same ground. However, instead of the solemn critical strain of Johnson the Romantic evaluation of Chapman's *Homer* pursues the tradition of uncritical adulation initiated by Jonson. Lamb, for example, feels bound to contrast "the pert modern Frenchify'd notes" of Pope with the

> solemn weighty prefaces of Chapman, writing in full faith, as he evidently does, of the plenary inspiration of his author, [Chapman's metre] is Milton's blank verse cloth'd with rhyme [...] I shall die in the belief that he has improved upon Homer, in the *Odysee* particular...[34]

And Coleridge's is of the same opinion as Lamb. In his "Seven Lectures upon Shakespeare," he remarks that Chapman's *Homer* is "as truly original as the *Fairie Queene*," and if translator had been consistent enough with the use of the heroic metre (i.e., if he had used it in the *Iliads*, too), the outcome "might have saved us from Pope."[35]

The reception of Chapman's *Homer*, after the work's publication, has proceeded along two easily separable lines. On the one hand, there are Augustans who criticize the text but cannot help being influenced by it; but on the other hand, there is the emergence of a strong literary *cult* that adulates the translation

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[32] Pope's version seems to suggest some borrowing from Dryden in this respect. On Pope's general indebtedness to Dryden's *Ilias* and the tribute of both of them to Milton in their translations of Homer see especially Peter J. Conelly, 'Pope's *Iliad*: *Ut Pictura Translatio*' *SEL* 21 (1981) pp. 439-455.

[33] Steven Shankman, *Pope's Iliad: Homer in the Age of Passion* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) p. 126.

[34] Roy Park, ed., *Lamb as a Critic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 174.

[35] Quoted in George de Forest Lord, *Homeric Renaissance. The Odyssey of George Chapman* pp. 20-21.

by providing ample praise *without* the deep knowledge of Chapman's text that is evident in the translations and commentaries of Dryden and Pope. It would be reasonable to expect that, with the advent of modern criticism, these competitive positions fade away, and so it is all the more intriguing to notice that, in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, Chapman's *Homer* remains an object of contention just as it was for Pope, Dryden, Lamb, and Coleridge. The reminiscence of the classical tenet of "Wit *versus* Homer" reappears, for example, in Matthew Arnold's essay, "On Translating Homer," when the critic discusses one of Chapman's fanciful tropes:

> I say, the poets of a nation that has produced such conceit as that, must purify themselves seven times in the fire before they can hope to render Homer.[36]

And, of course, we are told what that fire is:

> He [the translator] will find one English book and one only, where, as in the *Iliad* itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness; and that book is the *Bible*. No one could see this more clearly than Pope saw it: "This pure and noble simplicity," he says, "is nowhere in such perfection as in the Scripture and Homer."[37]

Naturally, Pope's "mistakes" are pointed out in Arnold's grandiose coverage of two preceding centuries of Homer translations. What should be especially noted, again, is the application of Pope's criteria of "Homeric" qualities, i.e. "Simplicity," to Homer-translations, a trend that contributed to the appearance of the Lang-Leaf-Myers prose rendition whose scholarly translators claim that they have reverted to the language of the King James Version, for, just like the *Bible*, Homer uses "words old and plain." Such a position obviously requires the condemnation of Chapman's "luxurious conceits" and the dismissing of such anachronisms as Chapman's labelling the toils of Ulysses amongst the waves as "the horrid tennis."[38]

The reaction to such views was quick and strong. Ezra Pound at the beginning of this century asserts that "Chapman remains the best English

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[36] Matthew Arnold, *The Works of Matthew Arnold* vol. 5, (London: Macmillan, 1903) p. 242.

[37] Arnold pp. 239-240.

[38] Cf. Homer, *The Complete Works of Homer*. The Iliad and The Odyssey. The Iliad done into English Prose by Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, Ernest Myers. The Odyssey done into English Prose by S. H. Butcher and Andrew Lang (New York: Klopfer, n.d.) pp. v-viii.

'Homer', marred though he may be by excess of added ornament," but he also adds that

> [t]he nadir of Homeric translation is reached by the Leaf-Lang prose; Victorian faddism having persuaded these gentlemen to a belief in King James fustian [...] In their preface they grumble about Chapman's 'mannerisms', yet their version is full of 'Now behold I' and 'yea even as' and 'even as when' tushery possible only to an age bent on propaganda.[39]

Let us, however, consider E. M. W. Tillyard's position, who makes yet another attempt to question the literary status of Chapman:

> Judged as a feat of endurance, Chapman's Homer is indeed a prodigy; judged as a poem, the very things that made it a prodigy destroy its value.[40]

Contrary to the ire he exhibits, however, Tillyard does little actual analysis of the translation. For example, he refers to one of Phyllis Bartlett's articles to introduce the theme of the "ethical bias," but does not bother to name one section of the text where the alleged presence of the ethicist discourse is evident; moreover, he is content to leave the reader with the remark that "Chapman has been overestimated for his translation of Homer, as Pope has been underestimated."[41] But Pope, as we know, had "frequent consultations" with Chapman, hence, Tylliard's passing treatment of the text becomes at least as dubious an enterprise as Pope's was.

This somewhat random selection of judgements on Chapman's *Homer* from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is, of course, not representative. It is, however, not within the scope of this study to create an extensive typology of the modern reception of Chapman's *Homer*, and I have cited Arnold, Pound, and Tillyardonly to show that the critical positions drawn as early as Jonson and Dryden have not undergone great change in modern times. It is my contention that the perennial terms of this debate may be found in Keats's sonnet and the problems it poses in relation to the earlier responses. In the final section of my paper, therefore, I shall interpret the special position of "On First Looking into

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[39] Ezra Pound, op. cit, pp. 249-250.

[40] E. M. W. Tylliard, *The English Epic and its Background* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966²) p. 348.

[41] Tylliard p. 350. Cf. also Phyllis B. Bartlett, 'The Heroes of Chapman's Homer' *Review of English Studies* 1941, pp. 257-280.

Chapman's *Homer*" within the framework of the opinions we have seen emerging so far.

III.

The powerful rhetoric of "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*" has been almost over-analyzed by critics, and it is of course not my concern to reproduce these arguments. Let it suffice that the poem may be interpreted as Keats's unfavorable reading of Pope, a quasi-biographical consideration that is likely to shape our reception of the text.[42] At first glance the tropes used by the speaker show the influence of the very first response to Chapman's *Homer*, Jonson's 'Dedication.' As in Jonson's text, we read about "rich *Homers* mine," "Discoveries," and "Passage," in "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*" there are "realms of gold," "western islands" and Cortez discovering the Pacific. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the sonnet is written on the occasion of *first* looking into Chapman's text concerned, as if the speaker were trying to reiterate Jonson's purpose of vindicating Chapman the right to be the only true interpreter of the Homeric epics.

However, the poem also appears to reinterpret Augustan positions. We must not forget that Keats's speaker – in looking for Homer – actually found Chapman. This substitution and displacement (already considered at the beginning of my paper) represents a radical reinterpretation of Jonson's stance; all the more so, since it is immediately followed by another displacement. The grand simile at the very end of the sonnet transfers the reference of the "discovery" motif from the interpreter's enterprise to the reading process, whereby – considering the inter-texts of Jonson and Gay – the sonnet's speaker, as well as the sonnet's reader, are substituted for the translator, and through the persona of Chapman, for Homer. The basic mechanisms of this very same maneuvre are nevertheless exactly those that we have witnessed in Pope's and Dryden's reinterpretation of Chapman's lines according to and or sometimes against their own particular philosophical or ideological dispositions. Thus, the two types of responses so far enumerated – the acclaim of Jonson, Lamb, and Coleridge, and the suspicion of Dryden, Pope, and Johnson supported by the actual and concrete

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[42] Cf. Ágnes Péter, *Roppant Szivárvány. A Romantikus Látásmódról* (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1996) pp. 175-76.

re-writing of the text – seem to have been synthesized in Keats's poem, which celebrates Chapman's translation through creative perusal, or we might say, re-creation. This synthesis is, in turn, of foremost importance, since it unites the specific cultic elements in the reception with the critical interpretative measures. Using Péter Dávidházi's terminology, we might say that Keats's sonnet represents a powerful re-*initiation* into the excellences of Chapman's *Homer* by both praising the author and allowing him to disappear behind the persona of the reader.[43]

Clearly, the mention of literary cults in relation to the evaluation of reception history is not without problems. As Dávidházi himself points out, the survey of a cult has always to separate the critical response from attendant cultic phenomena, highly subjective occurrences of the reception.[44] Up to the appearance of Keats's sonnet, this was a more or less feasible enterprise, but as soon as the two positions became inseparably bound together in "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*," such a discrete division was no longer possible. It is evident that Dávidházi – discussing the veneration of an author and a set of primary texts that are related to that author – will foreground only one implication of "kultusz" (from the Latin "cultus" with the double meaning of both "worship" and "cultivation").[45] By contrast, Keats's sonnet embraces both meanings of "cultus," since it involves both the "cultivation" and the "worship" of a translation, a highly problematic situation, as here the worshipped and cultivated texts (and their interpreter) are but mere shadows of the "original." But it is exactly because of the secondary nature of all translations that their scholarly or professional critique must – in almost all cases – point out their failings and virtues by referring to other – sometimes only prospective – versions, which, in some favourable textual environment, engenders the inter-textual play we have seen in Pope's and Dryden's works. However, when this critical "cultivation" of the text is reinforced – as in Keats's sonnet – by "worship" that is, the cultic

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[43] Cf. Dávidházi Péter, *Isten Másodszülöttje. A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989) Dávidházi's term is presented here in my translation.

[44] Dávidházi pp. 12-15.

[45] Dávidházi p. 4. Dávidházi, at length, votes for the "worship" use of the word, but his ironic self-reflexive remark on p. 296 makes it clear that the total "extirpation" of the cultic element is not possible, not even in such a semi-metacritical discourse as his. A little excursus on the same matter in a recent interview makes the underlying assumptions in the above mentioned textual locus even more explicit. Cf. '"Siet valahová?" (Dávidházi Péterrel beszélget Szirák Péter)' *Alföld* 47 (3-4); (1996) pp. 55-56.

element, we witness *the survival of an ephemeron* – as all translations may be handled as *ephemera*, especially in a textual universe in which there are more than two hundred of them. Thus, the unification of the cultic and critical elements in the reception of Chapman's *Homer* turns out to be the very factor that ensures the canonisation of the text. As a consequence, the presence of these often contradictory receptive strategies in Keats's sonnet does not only produce a situation which may best be signified by an oxymoron, the survival of an ephemeron, but – as we have seen – also contributes considerably to the ambivalent and sometimes contradictory critical positions in modern scholarly discourse.

That the Romantic sonnet is partly prone to assert its influence through a special cultic diction is hardly a new perception. Tillyard is probably the first to point this out:

> Romantic prejudice prompted Keats to write an indiscreet sonnet on Chapman's *Homer*; a sonnet on the strength of which the book has enjoyed an undeserved reputation that has not yet been exploded.[46]

Tillyard may be right, but, as we can see, his rhetoric works against itself by allowing his diction to aspire to Keats's strength; that is, his critical stance remains ambiguous precisely because he wants to account for the strange shift in the reception history of Chapman's *Homer* that is best represented by Keats's sonnet. As a result, any attempt of his to "explode" the reputation of the text has to be a fiasco, since Keats's "indiscreet" sonnet always and already overshadows his discourse, containing an affirmation and a rebuttal of the "objective" scholarly enterprise.

Such considerations may only strengthen our conviction that the interpretative strife that Chapman's *Homer* is likely to stir up even nowadays is by and large due to the specific rupture in its reception-history. For Keats's sonnet proves to have set back the development of responses to the very beginning of the process of reception: the translator's comprehension. Surely, the sonnet maintains its influence through its "presence," thereby assuring a secure position for Chapman's *Homer*, too. However, it is precisely this duality, the presence of both Keats and Chapman, that frustrates any interpretative attempt to break from the praise of Johnson, or the ambivalent scorn of Dryden and Pope, since in this sonnet – whenever and wherever it is read – the reader is re-initiated into the very

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[46] E.M.W. Tillyard p. 348.

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process of translating by assuming the position of the speaker / translator / discoverer / original epic poet. In other words, by the cult's necessary leaping over its own boundaries and entering the critical discourse, Chapman's *Homer* has remained, and is likely to remain, one of the most important "present objects" in the realm of Homer translations and translation studies in general.

Veronika Ruttkay

Encounters with *Lear*

Beggar Imagery in Wordsworth's Poetry

"Wordsworth's poem suggests that we must read the writer as a reader."
Geoffrey Hartman[1]

Jonathan Bate claims in *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* that "the exploration and definition of a writer's conceptions and various uses of Shakespeare provide a way of defining that writer's Romanticism."[2] With regard to William Wordsworth, this has yet to be written, largely because critics have dealt almost exclusively with his more obvious indebtedness to Milton. There are some important exceptions, of course. In his *Diction and Defense in Wordsworth*, Geoffrey Hartman finds the origins of an enigmatic poem of 1816 in *King Lear*, even though the text contains several allusions to Milton as well.[3] Bate himself gives a fascinating account of Wordsworth's ambivalent relationship to Shakespeare as a "poetic father," showing how Wordsworth both contributed and

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[1] Geoffrey Hartman, 'Words, Wish, Worth: Wordsworth' in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1985) p. 210.

[2] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) p. 5.

[3] "It is possible, that the real block, or the poet defended against [...] is Shakespeare. In the poem of 1816, at least, Milton is a screen, or part of the 'outwork' (Freud's metaphor) erected by Wordsworth's imagination to keep it from a starker scene." Geoffrey Hartman, 'Diction and Defense in Wordsworth' in Joseph H. Smith, ed., *The Literary Freud: Mechanisms of Defense and the Poetic Will* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1980) p. 215.

fell victim to the legend of his antipathy to Shakespeare and how he built various passages on overt or (more frequently) covert allusions to Shakespeare's works.

I am following these directions when I analyse various instances of what I shall term Wordsworth's beggar trope, which, in my opinion, is influenced by *King Lear*, even to the degree of being a series of rewritings (and thus Wordsworth's interpretations) of some important aspects of the drama. Wordsworth's beggar trope is not a fixed *topos*: it is rather a set of features occurring in various contexts with different emphases and meanings, often at crucial points in Wordsworth's poetry. Some of the individual cases may well be debatable, such as the extent to which, for example, the discharged soldier in *The Prelude* is *actually* related to Shakespeare. Unfortunately, such questions are unanswerable, for there are no clear boundaries between the "realms" of the two poets. I would even risk the suggestion that the more fundamental the Shakespearean influence, the more deeply concealed it is in Wordsworth's text. I shall therefore analyse a series of interrelated passages which are, or can be, connected to *King Lear*, as the poet's complex response to Shakespeare's drama. Such an enterprise, as Bate suggests, will also involve an interpretation that seeks to contribute to a definition of Wordsworth's Romanticism.

Wordsworth's poetic self is characterized by Keats as "the egotistical sublime."[4] This phrase seems to involve that Wordsworth would never give up his own personality or his own perspective for the sake of other perspectives. In other words, Wordsworth's poetry might prove to be inherently undramatic and thus inherently un-Shakespearean.[5] If this is true, what kind of role could *Lear* play in it? For one thing, it might well explain to us how stability and self-assurance were achieved – if indeed they were achieved – in Wordsworth's poems; especially since the appearance of Lear-like beggars is always accompanied by a momentary loss of balance. The structural features of tragedy (such as discovery

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[4] "As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself — it has no self — it is every thing and nothing — It has no character — it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated." John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952) p. 226.

[5] Hazlitt voices this opinion in *The Spirit of the Age*: "We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespear. How should he? Shakespeare was the least of an egotist of any body in the world. He does not much relish the variety and scope of dramatic composition." William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Wordsworth' in *The Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989) p. 245.

and reversal) can also be identified in the narration of these scenes, and their descriptive passages suggest apocalyptic powers at work. And yet, tragedy itself is always avoided; as if the Lear-like figures were the cause of, as well as the means of preventing, an impending catastrophe. To see how this pattern operates, I will now examine some examples of Wordsworth's beggar trope.[6]

TRAVELLERS OF THE PUBLIC ROAD

Collecting the Lear-like destitutes in Wordsworth poses some difficulties. One is the fact that even in Shakespeare's play there is more than one Lear-like figure for even if we ignore the various faces of Lear himself, there is also Gloucester, whose tragedy complements that of Lear; their actions and characters (their "blindnesses") being interwoven and even their consciousness seeming to merge after Gloucester, blinded, starts out to Dover. Analysing the scene where the blinded Gloucester meets Lear, Cavell writes: "Gloucester has by now become not just a figure "parallel" to Lear, but Lear's double; he does not merely represent Lear, but is psychically identical with him."[7] One of the most important of Wordsworth's Lear-like figures, the blind beggar in *The Prelude*, indeed resembles Gloucester rather than Lear, while the passenger who meets him (that is, "the poet") takes the part of the king.

There is another character in the drama apart from Lear and Gloucester, who is reduced to the state of "a poor, bare, forked animal" and thus can be a model for Wordsworth: Edgar, the only 'real' beggar of the play (ironically, he is also the one who takes on this role voluntarily as a disguise). Edgar as Poor Tom becomes an emblem of the *reductio ad absurdum* that takes place in the drama: he is the naked, "unaccommodated man" who owes "the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume" (3.4.106-8).[8] Lear, at least, regards him as "the thing itself" and is ready to strip off his clothes in order to become even more similar to this mirror-image of himself. It is not by accident, then, that

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[6] Figures like the protagonists of *Resolution and Independence* and *The Pedlar* are outside the scope of this paper, although they are clearly related to the beggars. This time I can analyse only some characteristic *examples* of the beggar trope.

[7] Stanely Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in Janet Adelman, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of King Lear* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978) p. 77.

[8] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). All references are to this edition.

some of the Wordsworthian beggars bring to mind Edgar – or, rather, that they contain something of the "common root" of all the destitutes in *Lear*, including the Fool. Jan Kott may have this "common root" in mind when he calls these characters "four beggars wandering about in the wilderness, exposed to raging wind and rain."[9]

The figure in Wordsworth's *The Old Cumberland Beggar* is closely related to these outcasts. A rhetorical exclamation in the poem – "let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath / Beat his grey locks against his withered face"[10] – invokes the Lear of the storm scene, not only on account of "heath," "grey locks" and "withered face" but also because Wordsworth, here, repeats Lear's "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" (3.2.1), in a different context. The beggar's almost non-human age in Wordsworth ("His age has no companion") also resembles that of Lear, which is central to the final lines of the play: "The oldest hath borne most: we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long." The Lear-like quality of Wordworth's protagonist is also remarked upon by Harold Bloom,[11] and J. W. B. Owen points out the similarity between Wordsworth's recurring line, "then let him pass, a blessing on his head" (162, 171), and Kent's words as Lear approaches death: "O! let him pass: he hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him any longer" (5.3.315-317).[12] But the pivotal link between the texts is the ambiguous status of Lear and the Cumberland beggar, who are both mighty yet also powerless. In the drama, the king is a houseless beggar (though even as a beggar he retains some traits of his kingly behaviour), while the most intriguing characteristic of the Cumberland beggar is the reader's sense of his authority and self-sufficiency, which is preserved in spite of his dependence on other people's charity. This paradox is repeated by Wordsworth in other passages that describe beggars, and it is certainly present in *King Lear*.

The beggar trope in *The Prelude* usually appears (as one would expect) in descriptions of a public road of some sort. But these "lonely roads" also have some

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[9] Jan Kott, '*King Lear, or Endgame*' p. 280.

[10] William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London, New York: Routledge, 1991).

[11] "... in his late twenties, [Wordsworth] was very Shakespearean, rewriting *Othello* in *The Borderers* and capturing in beggars, peddlers, children and mad peaple something of the Jobean quality of *King Lear*." Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: the books and school of the ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) p. 240.

[12] W.J.B. Owen, 'Two Addenda' *The Wordsworth Circle*. Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), 86-89; p. 96.

less obvious qualities in Wordsworth. In Book XII, for example, he writes: "there I found / Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace, / And steadiness, and healing and repose / To every angry passion" (178-81).[13] How could the road offer so much to the young boy? Why is it that it "hath had power / O'er [his] imagination"? The experience seems to be a kind of education, for a little earlier Wordsworth remembers: "[the roads] Were schools to me in which I daily read / With most delight the passions of mankind, / There saw into the depth of human souls" (164-6). The image of the road is closely related to that of travelling, a basic metaphor of *The Prelude*, which figures "the life which the poet narrates as a self-educative journey" and also the poet's "imaginative enterprise, the act of composing *The Prelude* itself, as a perilous quest through the uncharted regions of his own mind."[14] The image of the road can be interpreted on both levels: as the course of education of the self and as the process of poetical composition; and the beggar trope bears upon both of these.

A description of such a road prepares an encounter with another Lear-like figure in Book IV. Wordsworth here also recalls his youth: "when at evening on the public way / I sauntered, like a river murmuring / And talking to itself" (118-120). In this state of mind, he meets another unconscious source of speech, a man from whose lips "there issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain / Or of uneasy thought" (422-3). These descriptions (as the former one about "schools" and "reading") suggest that the road conveys language, that can take an oral or enscripted form, and which can either be read or listened to by the traveller. Moreover, it mediates between two poles that fall outside language, as another passage about the road in Book XII suggests:

> [...] its disappearing line
> Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
> Beyond the limits which my feet had trod,
> Was like a guide into eternity,
> At least to things unknown and without bond.
>
> (148-152)

The Lear-like figures come from one end of the "disappearing line" and move towards its other end; they appear to be intimately related to "things unknown

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[13] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850.* eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (London, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979). Parenthetical references are to this edition.

[14] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971) p. 285.

and without bond." Probably this is the main source of the awe that they invoke in the child who sees them, for it is clear that their appearance belongs to the darker scenes of his education: to the ministrations of fear:

> Awed I have been of strolling Bedlamites;
> From many other uncouth vagrants (passed
> In fear) have walked with quicker step.
> (158-160)

The conspicuous word in this passage is "Bedlamites." It is likely that in Wordsworth's time this name was still in use to denote wandering beggars who received charity through of feigned or real madness (the term itself originates from the Bethlehem hospital for the insane). But it is certain that readers of Wordsworth remembered the most famous of all Bedlamites: Edgar, who disguises himself as a Bedlam beggar in *King Lear*. The description he gives of these people in the drama makes the fear of the young Wordsworth understandable: "The country gives me proof and precedent / Of Bedlam beggars, who with roaring voices, / Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms / Pins, wooden pricks, nails, springs of rosemary [...]" (2.3.13-16). The correspondance between Wordsworth and Shakespeare suggests that the description in *The Prelude* of that fearful experience stems not only from a real-life encounter between the young poet and a wandering beggar (which is probable but outside the concerns of this paper) but from the equally deep impact of reading *King Lear*. The roads where the beggars appear are, in this sense, indeed schools where the poet "daily read [...] the passions of mankind."

The public road is also the scene of a later confrontation with a Lear-like destitute. The child who used to be afraid of Bedlamites has become a young man himself, a traveller of the road who is moving towards the end of the "disappearing line." It seems that in his wanderings he wants to get rid of all the things that make man "accommodated." I have already quoted the passage about the night-wanderings during which the young man converses with himself like a murmuring river. He also has a powerful urge to remove his clothes or, to use Lear's words, to get rid of his "lendings": "It seemed the very garments that I wore / Preyed on my strength, and stopped the quiet stream / Of self-forgetfulness" (IV, 295-7). The most powerful state, according to these lines, would be a nakedness untouched by civilization and lacking anything that does not belong to what is inalienably human, just as in childhood when the mountains "were bronzed with deep radiance [and he] stood alone, / A naked Savage in the

thunder shower" (I, 26). If the grown-up man did not resist the temptation, he would, like the child or like Edgar, "with presented nakedness outface / The winds and persecutions of the sky" (2.3.11-12). Such a state, constituting the myth of "the savage" as taken up by Romanticism, would make the subject both utterly vulnerable and utterly invulnerable – it would mean the zero point of human existence.

But this absolute zero is never really reached in Wordsworth's texts. The man in Book IV is halted by the sight of another outcast, a discharged soldier, and this experience makes him move back towards civilisation ("There sought with quiet heart my distant home"). Following a hint given by Kenneth R. Johnston, I call this reversal the moment of catastrophe in Wordsworth: "the precise instant when one course of events suddenly reverses itself into another."[15] What is it that brings about this sudden change? I think that a scene of recognition is taking place, and what the poet recognizes in the veteran is an aspect of himself; more precisely, the self that he is unconsciously seeking in his night-time journey. The discharged soldier is stripped of all his "lendings," even his clothes forming an organic part of his being: "in his very dress appeared / A desolation, a simplicity / That seemed akin to solitude" (IV, 417-9). For him, nothing prevents the flow of the "stream of self-forgetfulness," since he embodies the genesis of half-articulate speech:

> [...] From his lips, meanwhile
> There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain
> Or of uneasy thought; yet still his form
> Kept the same steadiness, and at his feet
> His shadow lay, and moved not.
>
> (IV, 421-5)

The uncanniness of this passage lies in the sense of discontinuity that surrounds the soldier. His speech is disconnected from his physical and also, it seems, from his psychological being. It is "issuing forth" from his lips while nothing else is moving. It gives intimations of the "things unknown and without bond" that attract man towards the "unaccommodated" state. It also bespeaks tragedy and

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[15] "[Wordsworth's] fixation upon individual power is paralleled by his attention to what mathematicians call 'catastrophe theory': the precise instant when one course of events suddenly reverses itself into another." Kenneth R. Johnston, *Wordsworth and the Recluse* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1984) p. 181.

wounds; however, when the young man wants the soldier to speak "of war, battle, and pestilence," there is "a strange half-absence" in his replies.

One of the most Wordsworthian acts of all is not letting this state of half-consciousness prevail. The traveller makes the essentially un-Romantic move of leading the discharged soldier to shelter – un-Romantic because it covers "the thing itself" and denies the possibility of directly knowing it. His motive for doing so is not only a sympathetic feeling towards the poor man but also a need to remove him as a source of apocalyptic and discontinous speech from the hearing distance of other travellers. To ensure this, he even reminds the soldier not to "linger in the public ways," as if the soldier were a child. When the tragic language is safely sheltered yet avoided, Wordsworth is ready to seek his own home in the society of men.

A very similar pattern can be traced in Wordsworth's encounter with the blind beggar in the next book of *The Prelude*. But before analysing this passage in detail, let me turn to the only instance in the entire poem where Lear is explicitly mentioned. It is another moment of catastrophe when the French Revolution has already turned into its own reversal, the Reign of Terror. Wordsworth tries to prove that there were some pleasant happenings even at the time of that terrible continuum, and so he recalls his trip to Arras. He becomes uneasy, however, when he suddenly remembers that Robespierre, the leader of the massacres, was born in that town – the reference to Lear pertains to to this situation:

> As Lear reproached the winds, I could almost
> Have quarrel'd with that blameless spectacle
> For being yet an image in my mind
> To mock me under such a strange reverse.
> (X, 463-6)

The "reverse" in this passage may refer either to the Revolution that devoured itself or to a turning point in the composition of the text. As Johnston points out: "the paragraph's very movement has described a 'strange reverse,' since the verb tense ('could... have quarrel'd') refers less sensibly to 1790, or any time thereafter when [Wordsworth] thought of Arras, than to the beginning of the paragraph itself, when he set out to present a reassuring image but failed in the very moments of composition by its opposite."[16] Here, the confrontation with Lear (the raging Lear of the storm scene) takes place within the subject: the Lear-like

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[16] Johnston, p. 185.

self of the poet is observed and contolled by the non Lear-like "normal" self. The latter self knows that the spectacle is "blameless" and not implicated in the actions of Robespierre, but the Lear-like other self would still quarrel with it, employing Lear's irrational logic. In *The Prelude*, such a schizophrenic split is one of the main characteristics of Wordsworth's experience of the Revolution: "The Man has come parted as by a gulph, / From he who had been" (XI, 59-60). It is also the culminative mode in which Wordsworth is able to confront Shakespeare's *Lear*, without being overwhelmed by its power and thereby losing his identity.

THE BLIND BEGGAR

The elements that I have underlined in the individual passages above come together to form a coherent structure in one of the most fascinating appearances of the Wordsworthian beggar trope: the encounter with the blind beggar. It is another moment of catastrophe (literally of "turning round"), but one that takes place in the streets of London:

> And once, far travelled in such mood, beyond
> The reach of common indications, lost
> Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
> Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The story of the man, and who he was.
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seemed
> To me that in this label was a type
> Or emblem of the utmost that we know
> Both of ourselves and the universe,
> And on the shape of this unmoving man
> His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked
> As if admonished from another world.
> (VII, 636-651)

The subject has again travelled far from home physically and mentally. He is "beyond / the reach of common indications," as if he were at the point where the public road and the indications of ordinary language disappear from sight. His striking encounter with the beggar at this crucial moment resembles Lear's

meeting with the blind Gloucester. Some of the enigmas of both texts can be more easily approached if we read the two of them side-by-side.

In the tragedy, Lear indeed travels far from his home and loses, together with his kingly power, his sense of the ordered meanings of language. He irrationally commands the blind Gloucester to read without even proposing a text. Strangely enough none of the participants of the scene query this. Perhaps Gloucester should simply invent a scripture, as Edgar invents a password ("Sweet marjoram") when Lear asks for one. He may think that he should read Edmund's letter once more, to find traces of falsehood at least in "the penning of it." Or maybe he should read the "character" of the king, to make him see, as in a mirror, his catastrophic mistake. Gloucester cannot fulfill any of these tasks. Edgar's commentary, uttered between Gloucester's refusal and Lear's renewed command, interprets this inability: "I would not take this from report; it is / And my heart breaks at it" (4.6.145-6). Gloucester, whose suffering virtually merges with that of Lear, cannot understand their situation in terms of language. He "sees it feelingly," to which claim Lear responds quite logically: "What! art mad?" (for if Gloucester is really in sympathy with Lear, he must be as mad as the king). What Gloucester experiences is something unmediated that simply *is* – it cannot be reported upon.[17] Lear, in the same scene, makes various "reports" on Gloucester: constructing different identities for him by calling him different names. From adresses like "Goneril, with a white beard" and "blind Cupid," Lear gradually reaches a state in which he can affirm: "I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester" (4.6.182). This process is a healing experience for Lear because it brings about a recognition of others and consequently helps him to recognize himself. Lear reads his own mirror-image in the blind Gloucester precisely because Gloucester cannot read himself.

In the blind beggar episode of *The Prelude*, reading is important in a similar way. The traveller ("the poet") is overcome by a strong experience of discontinuity. He sees a man who is, like Gloucester, unable to read his own life story – the text that belongs, most intimately, to him. The figure resembles the discharged soldier who relates his own life story half-consciously. (The difference

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[17] "[Report] cushions the impact of immediate experience because it re-presents it as some distance in time, but also because, however scant it may be, report is still a made meaning, a transformation of rawness into the once-remove of speech, and hence of coherence, sequence, order, and form." James L. Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*' in Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare's King Lear. Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) p. 131.

between reading and hearing is not necessarily crucial here; Hartman suggests that "reading is, or can be, an active kind of hearing. We really 'look with ears' when we read a book of some complexity"[18] [the advice of "looking with ears" is, of course, given by Lear to Gloucester]). However, the blind man himself is transformed into something knowable and even readable for his observer. At first, he is only an inarticulate and disturbing "view," but then the written paper is revealed on his chest and is transformed into a "type" or "emblem" of another text beyond our ordinary grasp ("the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and the universe"). Moreover, the whole figure seems to be an emblem that has come to life: a form with a legend that interprets it (the legend, importantly, is not quoted by Wordsworth, just as the meaning of the emblem itself is left open). Finally, the face and eyes of the man bespeak an even deeper knowledge, becoming texts for the onlooker to read. Hartman observes that they are "equally fixed or affixed: we expect the beggar's face and eyes [...] to be centres of life whereas they are as much a surface as the paper he wears."[19] This surface (the "texture") conveys for Wordsworth a sense of being "admonished from another world." The reading process closes with this experience. It seems that the encounter was essential for "turning round" the mind of the poet, who, like Lear, has travelled beyond "common indications" and has been led back to his home in the world of men with quasi-supernatural assistance.

THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGINATION

It has become inevitable by now to ask some questions about the quasi-supernatural power that seems to belong not only to the blind beggar but to all the other Lear-like destitutes in Wordsworth. What is the source of the power? What role does Shakespeare play in its context? To come closer to an answer, Wordsworth's interpretation of *Lear* has to be tackled. His prose writings are revealing in this respect. In the 1815 *Preface* he claims that, in the field of "the human and dramatic Imagination," Shakespeare is the single authority, quoting the storm scene of *King Lear* to support his opinion.[20] Coleridge, who must have

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[18] Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text. Literature / Derrida / Philosophy* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1981) p. 128.

[19] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1964) p. 241.

[20] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) p. 31.

shared some of Wordsworth's views on the subject, quotes the same passage as "undoubted proof" of the power of imagination: "that which shewed itself in such might and energy in *Lear*, where the deep anguish of a father spreads the feelings of ingratitude and cruely over the very elements of heaven."[21] Coleridge and Wordsworth, according to these texts, regard *King Lear* as one of the most outstanding achievements of the imagination in literature, and consider Lear's speech as an example of its workings. It is plausible, then, that the Lear-like beggars in Wordsworth are manifestations of the imaginative power. What their poverty and powerlessness signifies is one of the most intriguing problems of Wordsworth's poetical world.

Wordsworth's conception of the imagination can be fruitfully analysed in comparison with Coleridge's theory. The latter is strictly philosophical, built on the Kantian idea of the mind as capable of transcending the boundaries of the empirical world. Coleridge, in his response to Wordsworth's *Recluse*, gives a characteristic account of his own position:

> I supposed you first to have meditated the faculties of man in the abstract, in their correspondence with his sphere in action, and first, in the Feeling, Touch, and Taste, then in the Eye, and last in the Ear, to have laid a solid and immoveable foundation for the Edifice by removing the sandy Sophisms of Locke, and the Mechanic Dogmatists, and demonstrating that the Senses were living growths and developements of the Mind and Spirit in a much juster, as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the Senses .[22]

Wordsworth must have been very familiar with Coleridge's vision. The idea of the mind "forming" the world of the senses is clearly discernible in some passages of his poetry. However, he most characteristically proposes a reciprocal relationship between the mind and the empirical world, as in the second book of *The Prelude*, when he writes about the "Babe, Nurs'd in his Mother's arms" whose mind is "creator and receiver both,/ Working but in alliance with the works/ Which it beholds" (273-5).

In the case of the beggars, the balance of "creator and receiver" is completely lost. The reciprocal functioning of mind and nature is prevented by the blindness or madness of the beggars because their channels of reception are

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[21] S. T. Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Dent, 1960) p. 188.

[22] S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters* I-VI, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71) pp. 574-5.

blocked. Their mind is thus neither limited nor aided by the senses: it is given complete freedom to create a world of its own. How appealing such a possibility could be for Wordsworth is indicated by the frequent occurrences of the beggar trope in his poetry. But the way the beggars are actually described proves that he considers imagination without the mediation of the senses to be extremely dangerous because it disrupts a balanced relationship between the mind and the empirical world. Hartman encapsulates well this characteristic ambivalence: "... though the imagination is often said to be a life-giving or animating power, it is not, in Wordsworth, life-giving initially. The poet's later strength has its origin in experiences that intimate (negatively) death of nature and (positively) a faculty whose power is independent of nature."[23]

Negative intimations occur in all the beggar episodes: the poet nearly loses his way and his place in human society, as if unbounded powers were threatening to devour him. A real apocalypse is experienced during the Reign of Terror, but the "nakedness" of an insufficiently mediated imagination (lacking the guidance of the senses) is always fearful. This is why all the Lear-like figures in Wordsworth are powerless outcasts even though they are also mighty and self-possessed beings. They are "boundary beings" (Hartmann's phrase), equally belonging to the realms of the mind and the senses and signalling the dangerous passage between the two. The poet does not follow them into their isolated world; he never strips off his "lendings" to become more similar to them, but avoids them after he has recognized their dangerous power in himself. In his own drama of the imagination, he plays the part of the peaceful Edgar rather than Lear, while still retaining the tragic dimensions of self-discovery and reversal in his narration.

Wordsworth's tragic vision of the imagination is strikingly in accordance with ideas dramatized in *King Lear.* I am specifically thinking of the Dover cliff scene that has "peculiar importance for the Romantics not only because it offers a sublime precipice but also because it is an example of the poetic imagination – the cliff is not a stage-location, it is created through the vividness of Edgar's poetry."[24] In this scene, Edgar's imagination appears to be a positive force that eventually saves his father's life. But Edgar himself does not conceal the risks he takes when he lets this power loose. Before his final success, he admits: "And yet I know not how conceit may rob/ The treasury of life..." Reading Wordsworth, one has to face the idea that conceit or imagination may indeed rob our "treasury of life" and

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[23] Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* p. 215.

[24] Bate p. 83.

thus make "beggars" of us in that it leads to a world that is completely independent of nature and of the senses.

The Dover cliff scene in *King Lear* has a special significance in Wordsworth's poetic world. In one of his most important theoretical writings, the 1815 *Preface*, he distinguishes between the literal, the visual (half-figurative) and the figurative senses of words, exemplifying the visual sense with a quotation from the Dover cliff scene: "Half way down / Hangs one that gathers samphire [...]" (4.6.15-16). The verb "hang," according to his explanation, is used here in a sense that is neither literal nor fully metaphorical: in the intermediate "visual" sense.[25] Interestingly enough, Wordsworth uses the same verb in a similarly "visual" sense when depicting visitations of the imaginary power in passages of *The Prelude*, as in the episode of the Winander Boy:

> [...] while he *hung*
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain torrents
>
> (IV, 406-9)

The earlier scene of bird-nesting is very similar:

> [...] O! at that time,
> While on the perilous ridge I *hung* above,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ears! The sky seem'd not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion mov'd the clouds!
>
> (I, 341-5)

As these quotations suggest, a word that Shakespeare employs in an "intermediate" visual sense according to Wordsworth, comes to be associated in Wordsworth's own poetry with the intermediate state of the children who experience the power of the imagination in nature, and who are also hanging from dangerous heights.[26]

In some of his most famous passages, Wordsworth associates the imaginative power with high precipices or dark abysses, which could be a further echo of Shakespeare's Dover cliff scene. In Book VI of *The Prelude*, the image of

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[25] Wordsworth, *The Prose Works* III pp. 30-32.

[26] Interestingly, this Shakespearean passage has a specific meaning for Keats, as well. He writes in a letter: "I am 'one that gathers Samphire dreadful trade' the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me." Keats p. 28.

the abyss lends a tragic, even apocalyptic tone to the poet's discourse about the imagination: "That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss/ Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,/ At once some lonely traveller" (594-96). A very high precipice, Mount Snowdon is the scene of the poet's ultimate confrontation with the power of the imagination in the last book of *The Prelude*:

> [That vision] appeared to me the type
> Of a majestic intellect; its acts
> And its possessions, what it has and craves,
> What in itself it is, and would become.
> There I beheld the emblem of a mind
> That feeds upon infinity, that broods
> Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
> Its voices issuing forth to silent light
> In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
> By recognitions of transcendent power,
> In sense conducting to ideal form,
> In soul of more than mortal privilege.

The experience reveals for Wordsworth what the imagination is "in itself"; his vision, however, resembles to a remarkable degree his earlier descriptions of beggars in *The Prelude*. What he sees here is another "boundary being" similar to those outcasts who have marked out the lines between the two separate worlds, mind and nature. This "majestic intellect" is brooding "over the dark abyss" as the blind beggar is brooding over his own unapproachable self; it is listening to a voice "issuing forth [...] in one continuous stream" as the discarged soldier is listening to his own unbounded speech issuing from his lips. It appears to be "the type/ Of a majestic intellect" and "the emblem of a mind" while the label on the blind beggar's chest seems to be "a type/ Or emblem of the utmost that we know." The definite articles used in the Snowdon episode ("the type," etc.) as opposed to the indefinite articles of the blind beggar episode ("a type," etc.) suggest that a relation between "ideal form" and "example" connects the two passages (the "form," however, is also "the type" of something else). The revelation on Mount Snowdon presents the imagination in its full ("transcendent") power, while the beggar trope shows it "houseless" in the hostile world of the senses.

In his "Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul de Man discusses a general tendency of Romanticism that is relevant to the above correspondence: "The

relationship with nature has been superseded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject towards itself."[27] In connection with Wordsworth's beggar trope, all of these stages are present. A vision of a mountain landscape somehow re-formulates a vision of a destitute such as the blind beggar. Both of them, however, are instances of self-recognition, which is the reason why they are both crucial stages in the poet's self-education. In the last analysis, Wordsworth is in both cases confronted by the power of his own imagination, just as in the passage about his experience of the aftermath of the French Revolution: "As Lear reproached the winds, I could almost / Have quarrel'd with that blameless spectacle..."[28]

I have already pointed out how Wordsworth in the above lines distances his past "unaccommodated" self from his present rational self though a split in perspective. The fact that he does so by using Lear as a *metaphor* of his own irrational and imaginative self is probably the most important characteristic of his beggar trope. For the Lear-like figures exist metaphorically, *in language*, which means that they are the sign-posts of the apocalyptic imagination and at the same time the means of avoiding its threats. Embedded in language, the imagination is not dangerous any more but infinitely creative. The speech of the discharged soldier and the enscription on the blind beggar's chest remind the reader that language only can mediate between the two worlds. That the source of this mediating language is in the realm of the imagination while its operations are in the empirical world, in human society.

The power that is able to bind together the world of the senses and the world of consciousness is the defining characteristic of Shakespearean language and imagination, according to Wordsworth and Coleridge. As we have seen, to illustrate the intermediate "visual" sense of a word (between the literal and the fully figurative senses) Wordsworth quotes a passage from *King Lear*. Coleridge also attributes Shakespeare's language (especially that of *King Lear*) with a

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[27] Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' in *Blindness and Insight. Essays of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 196.

[28] This simile refers to the same scene in *Lear* that Wordsworth and Coleridge quote as "undoubted proof" of imagination (see above). It might be more than mere coincidence that Wordsworth finds his own imagination guilty of the same transgression that Shakespeare is praised for. It can be a silent acknowledgement of his own poetical powers; especially since this method of projecting emotions is common in his works (it is in fact a characteristic of the "egotistical sublime").

mediating quality.[29] For him, the tragedy is a masterpiece because it presents "apocalypse" mediated, through being distanced by language, and not "apocalypse" pure: "It is the representation of it, not the reality, that we require, the imitation, and not the thing itself," he asserts in his commentary on *Lear*. [30] Such use of language is the means and the meaning of the "binding" power that he attributes to Shakespearean imagination. It is also the way Wordsworth is able to tame his own apocalyptic powers into poetry.

If the language of imagination mediates between the empirical world and the world of the mind, then it is like a road leading towards the abyss of the imagination while at the same time offering escape from its destructive power for the finite consciousness. Similarly, the Lear-like figures in Wordsworth are mediators in both directions between language and non-language, between the worlds of the senses and imagination. What is intriguing about this is the fact that such motion is imaginable at all: that the two realms are indeed connected with each other through imaginative language. The joy over such a possibility is expressed in instances when one of Wordsworth's roads, "a pass, path, or thoroughfare – a medium of physical progress – is transmuted into a home, abode, or lodging for an '*un*father'd vapour' or 'home*less* voice.'"[31] The public road is thus transformed into the ultimate home of home*less* beggars and, as the birthplace of imaginative language, of the poet himself.

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[29] "Now the language of Shakespeare (in his *Lear*, for instance), is something intermediate [between the *Logos* and the arbitrary word], or rather it is the former blended with the latter, the arbitrary not merely recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it and, as arbitrary language is an heirloom of the human race, being itself a part of what it manifests" (Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism* II p. 185).

[30] S. T. Coleridge, 'Second lecture in the series *Shakespear and Milton*' in Frank Kermode, ed. *Shakespeare: King Lear. A Casebook* (Nashville and London: Macmillan, 1969) p. 42.

[31] Johnston p. 208.

Katalin G. Kállay

"Homeward Bound on a Circular Path to Nowhere":

A Reading of Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener'

The strange vision projected to the reader in Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener'[1] is that of a finite human framework of unknowable blank forces, perplexingly repulsing all that is human, avoiding interpretation by calling attention to the reversibility and infinity of practically anything that can be said about the central problem. It is the power of blankness[2] that radiates from the text. It holds the story together and captivates the reader without submitting itself to rational analysis; it is as strong as the force caused by a vacuum that held together the famous Magdeburg hemispheres,[3] and it is as difficult or hopeless to "pin down" as those hollow hemispheres were difficult or hopeless to separate. Having read 'Bartleby the Scrivener,' one feels like having swallowed a marble, which is

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[1] The short story was published twice in Melville's lifetime. First it appeared in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in 1853, under the title: 'Bartleby the Scrivener. A Story of Wall Street.' A second, slightly revised version of the text with the shorter title: 'Bartleby,' was published in Melville's collection of short stories, *The Piazza Tales*, in 1856. The text I use is that of the first version, which can be found in A. Walton Litz, ed., *Major American Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) pp. 169-202.

[2] As opposed to the "power of blackness" which fascinated Melville so much in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Dieter Meindl also calls attention to this in his manuscript, p. 126, for which see note 6, below.

[3] The German physicist Otto von Guericke (1602-1686) invented one of the first vacuum pumps in 1650 to exhaust air from his famous Magdeburg hemispheres. These hollow hemispheres, approximately 22 inches in diameter, could be fitted together so well that air could be pumped out of them. The pressure of air on the outside walls of the hemispheres then forced them strongly together. In a demonstration before the German Emperor Ferdinand III, he harnessed 16 horses, four pairs to each hemisphere. They failed to pull the hemispheres apart.

smooth and shiny, representing totality and perfection in its form, yet indigestible. We become captives of a problem we can never solve and in the effort trying to understand it through re-reading and re-telling the story over and over again, our minds go blank. "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable..." we read on the first page, and the sentence opens up a – real or illusory – possibility that through his strange figure (the) nothing is ascertainable. The last two (both ironic and desperate) exclamations in the story: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" remind us that there is much more at stake than the plight of an eccentric scrivener, a case so marginal and extreme that could serve only as an unsettling kind of anecdote: we have to face – as much as we are able – the faceless, timeless and universal problems of human existence and non-existence. But investigating nothing is – to say the least – a very dangerous enterprise. Before proceeding further, attention should be paid to Parmenides' warning: "... this I tell you is a path that cannot be explored: for you could neither recognise that which IS NOT, nor express it."[4]

So, instead of drawing a blank by turning the first and last pages over and over in our minds, perhaps we should pursue a more promising path to start the investigation. In 'Bartleby the Scrivener,' however, we find incomprehensibility concentrated in the form of a human being who is inside the "normal" world of the story (the law office in New York); consequently, it is not possible to see a path with a definite direction towards the chaos: we are forced to choose the circular road, a kind of orbit around the realm of unknowable forces, and thereby "bypass" the problem.

No wonder, since in Melville's story, the story of Bartleby the scrivener is never told. His mysteriously empty life and death is neatly wrapped up in the anecdotic style of the narrative by a narrator, the lawyer (unnamed in the text) who is the first one to step on the circular path mentioned above; in a way, the first reader of the last chapter of a non-existent story. Of course, he has to be dealt with cautiously: the point-of-view technique Melville uses as early as 1853 is a very cunning device. The Wall Street lawyer – being a human character – might be biased, limited and is inevitably fallible. Nevertheless, his rotating journey around Bartleby (basically characterised by repetition) is well worth following. In trying to interpret the strange phenomenon that confronts him, he is unable to give an account of more than what his "own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby," this copyist who gradually stops "functioning" without any comprehensible

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[4] *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, trans. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962) p. 42.

reason apart from the fact that he "would prefer not to" proofread copies, run errands, answer questions, work, leave the place, accept money, act at all, eat, and nor, finally, live. The "vague report" by which the lawyer later learns about Bartleby's former job at the Dead Letter Office makes the figure of the scrivener, if this is possible, even more obscure.

The case *presented to* the lawyer seems to be il-legal: it is without sufficient precedents and without sufficient consequences (i.e. in terms of the lawyer's basic form and interpretation of life), each of his intellectual approaches towards it results in an intellectual withdrawal from it; thus, each time, he is forced to close a circle of thinking without moving a step forward in "concluding the matter" (i.e. finding a proper place for it in his own universe). The circles are vicious and the problem is a crucial one, especially nowadays, when the notion of meaning and the possibility of conclusions are so little taken for granted and are therefore so much of an issue. What Jean Baudrillard says about the present danger in the existence of "pure events" may be relevant here, concerning the case of Bartleby as a "catastrophe":

> When light is harnessed and engulfed by its own source, there occurs a brutal involution of time into the event itself. This is a catastrophe in a literal sense: an inflection or curvature that makes the origin of a thing coincide with its end, and re-turns the end onto the origin in order to annul it, leaving behind an event without precedents and without consequences – the pure event. This is also the catastrophe of meaning: the event without consequences is identified by the fact that every cause can be indifferently assigned to it, without being able to choose among them... Its origin is unintelligible and so is its destination.[5]

The case that the narrator presents, including his own reflections might also become a kind of "pure event": although he provides the reader with a tremendous amount of redundant information about himself, his "story" (e.g. where he was born, what his family was like, how he became a lawyer) is just as much inaccessible as Bartleby's.

This mid-nineteenth century anti-story has indeed become a most challenging one for literary critics, especially in the twentieth century. Since the "heart" of the story is empty, Bartleby criticism can be characterised by so much diversity and variety that almost anything is acceptable and nothing is satisfactory

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[5] Jean Baudrillard, 'Fatal Strategies' in Mark Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (London: Polity Press, 1988) pp. 192-3.

concerning what the story might be a metaphor of. I would like to point out just a few interesting aspects of the "expressing, evolving, varied aggregate of Bartleby-criticism."[6] Bartleby can be – and has been – seen as a rebel against, and a victim of, American business-like, money-making society,[7] as a nihilistic rebel,[8] as a lunatic, suffering from dementia praecox, as a mental case of catatonia or anorexia nervosa,[9] as a new incarnation of Jesus Christ,[10] as a representative of Derridean ecriture,[11] or as a symbol of death.[12] The story can be – and has been – further understood as a parable of Melville's own fate and the fate of the artist in Melville's epoch,[13] as a prefiguration of modern absurdity[14] and as a demonstration of the human situation itself[15]– the line could be continued *ad infinitum*. "The tremendous potential of meaning heaped on Bartleby," says Dieter Meindl, "serves but to diversify the contours of the void which he figures in the tale."[16]

Nevertheless, the void, which resists interpretation, creates almost a necessity for the reader to enter the magnetic field around the enigma. I intend to give the text a relatively close reading, which will involve something like sharing

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[6] Dieter Meindl, *Melville's Most Metaphysical Story and the American Grotesque. A Survey of Criticism, an Interpretation and a Generic Classification of 'Bartleby'* (manuscript, 1990) p. 7. I had the privilege of getting access to this most remarkable forthcoming book from which I have learned a lot, and on the basis of which I made my brief critical summary. Parts of this manuscript are comprised in Chapter Three of Dieter Meindl, *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996) pp. 63-103.

[7] William M. Gibson, 'Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno"' in George Hendrick, ed., *The American Renaissance, the History of an Era: Essays and Interpretations* (Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg, 1961) pp. 107-116.

[8] Kingsley Widmer, 'The Negative Affirmation: Melville's "Bartleby"' *Modern Fiction Studies* 8 (1962) pp. 276-286.

[9] Marvin Fisher, 'Bartleby: Melville's Circumscribed Scrivener' *Southern Review* 10 (1974), pp. 59-79.

[10] H. Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods. Melville's Mythology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963). See especially pp. 126-136: 'Bartleby: The Ascetic's Advent'

[11] Monique Pruvot, 'Bartleby de Herman Melville: L'écriture et la loi' *Études Anglaises* 28 (1975) pp. 429-438.

[12] Norman Springer, 'Bartleby and the Terror of Limitation' *PMLA* 80 (1965) pp. 410-418; and Meindl, *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*, especially pp. 63-103: 'Bartleby and Death.'

[13] Leo Marx, 'Melville's Parable of the Walls' *Sewanee Review* 61 (1953) pp. 602-627.

[14] Robert D. Spector, 'Melville's "Bartleby" and the Absurd' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (1961) pp. 175-177.

[15] Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: William Sloane, 1950).

[16] Meindl, *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque* p. 64.

and observing the lawyer's absurd, existential "merry-go-round" experience because the "path to nowhere" which I choose to follow, is strictly circular, and will predominantly be intellectual instead of literal throughout. I would like to concentrate on the narrator's "circles" around the case and the figure of Bartleby – by which I mean instances of APPROACH and WITHDRAWAL which follow the course of events, the lawyer's line of thoughts and the changes in his basic attitude towards the (primarily philosophical) problem of whether or not a man in whom the void manifests itself can be regarded as a human being, and whether the void can be "humanised" through its representation in a human form.

When trying to think in circles, one must be aware of the dangers of "circular reasoning," and take into consideration what Martin Heidegger puts in the following way:

> Formal objections, such as the argument of "circular reasoning," an argument that is always easily raised in the area of investigation of principles, are always sterile when one is weighing concrete ways of investigating. They do not offer anything to the understanding of the issue and they hinder penetration into the field of investigation.[17]

Keeping Heidegger's warning in mind (together with the words of Parmenides and the almost apocalyptic vision of Baudrillard), I return to the path of "circles," because I feel that only through the sterility of the perfect geometric figure can the innermost sterility of the American emptiness or void be discussed. Since the text offers a possibility to differentiate between stages of APPROACH and WITHDRAWAL (i.e. individual circles), each circle can be different from all the others. This might open up the possibility of covering most of the surface of a whole sphere around the void by circles of interpretation. The sphere thus created might serve as an atmosphere: it might enable us to breathe in the proximity of the void, it might enable us to find a way "home" through the circular paths (i.e. to find a proper place for the problem of the vacuum – without reducing it, and at the same time without being "vacuum-cleaned" out of our own universe). This is the challenge of the present paper.

I have divided the core of the story into three sections on the basis of the lawyer's attitude to Bartleby (three unsuccessful efforts, instances of APPROACH

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[17] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977) p. 49.

and WITHDRAWAL, i.e. circles), which would constitute the three dimensions of the "sphere":

1. The first section, from Bartleby's appearance up to the point when the lawyer discovers that Bartleby actually lives in the office, can be characterised as an effort on the lawyer's part to incorporate Bartleby into his world, to think of him as an employee who is a "valuable acquisition," despite Bartleby's eccentricities. But living in the office is not just a matter of eccentric behaviour but is absurd and must be dealt with on a different level. The lawyer's first effort therefore proves a failure.

2. The second section, up to the point when the lawyer decides to move his office from the premises, testifies to the lawyer's attempt to get incorporated in the world of Bartleby, inspired by true "fraternal melancholy," since they are both "sons of Adam." This APPROACH fails because of the fear that he might succeed, i.e. the perfectly natural fear that he might become a kind of Bartleby and be absorbed into the void that Bartleby personifies.

3. In the third section, which ends with Bartleby's death, a NEGATIVE APPROACH (i.e. the inability to APPROACH, fleeing from the problem) can be observed, as the lawyer tries to forget the matter and "erase" the vacuum from his life – but this manoeuvre results in a NEGATIVE WITHDRAWAL (i.e. the inability to withdraw, but the compulsion to turn back to the problem again and again): no eraser, however, can clean a blank sheet of paper of its blankness.

These attitudes or dimensions (which might be called vertical, horizontal and spatial, respectively) give the three directions of the individual, concrete "circles," the instances of futile mental approach and withdrawal which are to be followed, "whirled through" and examined in the text. One more dimension is missing: that of time, which is provided by the narration itself, and the reflexive nature of telling the story. This can be best examined in the framework that the first paragraph, the five-page long introduction and the "sequel" in which the "vague report" is told establishes.

The structure of the story seems to allow the construction of an (atmo-)sphere for the "humanisation" of nothing through the sterile activity of dehumanisation, through the deconstruction of every individual effort, through the transformation of every situation into a wire of thought which can be bound into a circle. Yet, the question remains whether reading a story can ever be a "sterile activity," whether we can transform without being transformed, "getting our wires crossed," without inevitably and deeply (both painfully and blissfully)

entangling our lives with the human situations presented in the text into an organic knot which can never be undone. Equipped with all that has been said, we can now start reading.

It is time – our fourth dimension – of which the first sentence of the story reminds us: "I am a rather elderly man." This utterance strikes the reader by being very short and concise (in contrast to the Dickensean flow of the following sentences), and it becomes significant in setting the situation, for it raises a kind of respect for someone who can certainly be experienced, and it categorises the narrator as a character (and distances him from Melville, who was thirty-four, about the age of Bartleby, when he wrote the story). What follows is the very well structured sketch of an anecdote to be told by the lawyer: a hint at his "more than ordinary contact" with scriveners as such, then at the perplexing strangeness of the particular case, indicating that the non-existence of Bartleby's story ("full and satisfactory biography") is an "irreparable loss to literature." (Despite the irony of the statement, the reader's interest is captured here. We are "taken in" by the word *loss*, which causes our curiosity – and our final dissatisfaction, too, when we are confronted with a *lack* instead. I intend to return to this crucial difference.) Finally the lawyer draws the net of mystery around the figure by mentioning the "vague report" whose content will be revealed later in the story. With this, he succeeds in engaging us totally in the topic while distancing and, in a way, alienating himself from the phenomenon. It is a commonplace that time heals wounds: with the help of this dimension the crucial riddle becomes so story-like that we secretly hope to be given a solution at the end by the narrator who, without being omniscient, still knows something we do not yet know. Time, for the lawyer, seems to have provided the problem of the vacuum with a "common place" – in the comfortable distance of the anecdote. But, no matter how cosy it may be, the common place can never become a "home" – and this can be felt in the lawyer's self-introduction as well as in the description of his office chambers.

His self-introduction is by no means attractive: "a man who" is "filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best," who "in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat" does "a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title deeds" does not sound to be the ideal, daring lawyer whose "prudence" and "method" one would blindly trust. On top of all that, he seems much too money-conscious and self-confident – although the sentence, "All who know me consider me an eminently safe man," and the frequent allusions to "the late John Jacob Astor" indicate that his security is strongly dependent on his

"connections." Strangely enough, he is the one who starts the sequence of negations in the story – at least grammatically – because, a surprising number of times, he uses the negative instead of the affirmative construction (in a direct or indirect way), basically in statements in connection with Astor, the millionaire: "a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm had no hesitation in pronouncing...," "I was not unemployed by...," "I was not insensible to...," etc. Can this (involuntary?) negativity suggest that this man is infected by a kind of scepticism which has become encoded into him by the form of life his social role dictates; can it be a warning sign, that, although he is the "first reader" of Bartleby's story, his eyes will never be open to the somewhat innocent freshness of a first reading? He probably feels it redundant to burden the reader with his own personal "history" – this way the self-introduction becomes "hygienic": his thoughts and feelings concerning Bartleby manage to hide his "flesh and blood."

The description of the office chambers is essential from the point of view of the central imagery of the story – that of walls (already hinted at by the subtitle: "A Story of Wall Street"). The windows of the "premises" provide a blank view, indeed, one of them "looking upon the white wall of a spacious skylight shaft," the other on a "lofty brick wall, black by age." The whole "universe" of the story is squeezed into these dim-lit, stuffy and claustrophobic chambers, and the scene strikingly lacks any breath of American spaciousness and vastness in all possible connotations, forming a startling contrast with the adventurous life and practically the whole oeuvre of Melville. "It reminds one of no other American story," observes Newton Arvin, "... if it reminds one of anything, it is of some tale by Gogol or Dostoyevsky..."[18] Indeed, the setting and the cosmic absurdity of the story would perhaps fit more into a Russian or East European setting. However, the dehumanising effect of the environment is not alien to the American mind, either. "Much of the imagery in Bartleby is related to popular sensational literature," says David S. Reynolds, comparing the story with George Foster's New York Slices (1849). Foster writes: "Wall Street! Who shall fathom the depth and rottenness of thy mysteries? Has Gorgon passed through thy winding labyrinth, turning with his smile every thing to stone .. hearts as well as houses?" In Wall street, Foster continues, man has erected huge stone temples to "the one god – Mammon." Through the labyrinthine chambers of buildings

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[18] Arvin p. 242.

rush throngs of people "as if they went whirling about in some gigantic puppet-show, while a concealed hand pulled convulsively at the wire."[19]

The "puppets" of the lawyer's story remain to be introduced: the two clerks and the office-boy, "First, Turkey, second, Nippers, third, Ginger Nut." (Now, for the third time in the text the narrator introduces a catalogue – it might indicate his need meticulously to categorise, to put everything he encounters in his life to its proper place.) The anecdotic style of description, the jovial attitude towards the eccentricities of these people who have only nicknames, is a necessity. It is essential for the lawyer in his desperate efforts to make at least the tone in the office more friendly. This common place has to be intimate to some extent, since the private lives of the characters – all men–seem to be totally insignificant. In fact, what they are actually engaged in, the meaning, the target or whatever is at stake in their work (except money and position) does not seem to be of much importance, either. What we get a glimpse of is their pseudo-home, the private side of their office life. Despite all the lawyer's witty remarks, the kind of all-inclusive, genuine humour, which would be the best defence against dehumanisation is absent. The average lawyer keeps control over his clerks, whose fits, by the law of averages, "relieve each other, like guards." Turkey and Nippers take turns in losing their temper, and this way they provide every day with its unique rhythm. By complementing each other, they provide the story with a balance; they become the measure of *time*, and, later, of the lawyer's personal sanity. The stable "zero" their oddities add up to, on the imaginary scales, becomes the standard of normality in the life of the Wall Street office. Before the "advent" of Bartleby, there is a certain symmetry in the arrangement of the characters: Ginger Nut, the office boy, for whom "the noble science of law" is "contained in a nutshell," is twelve years old, Nippers, suffering from "ambition" and "indigestion" is twenty-five; and Turkey, the caricature of the lawyer as an "elderly man," is around sixty. The stages of a human life-span are in a way represented by their ages, "fossilising" the form of the office life by stressing its perenniality and eternity. The lawyer as puppeteer can observe this circle from the outside, although by taking up the role of the employer, he, too, has to share the life-form which identifies people with functions (or at best, anecdotic stereotypes) instead of admitting their complex, genuine and unique identities.

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[19] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance. The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988) pp. 294-5.

After these introductory pages, the lawyer and the reader can feel well-prepared for the first encounter with the "motionless young man" appearing on the office threshold, answering the lawyer's advertisement, "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn": Bartleby. A kind of duality of action and non-action on his part can already be observed here – since he must have decided to apply for the job. (As if he were silently stating (somewhat echoing the lawyer): "I would prefer not to be unemployed." And the lawyer immediately employs him, without asking for a resumé – quite in contrast with the demands of American efficiency.)

1. The case of Bartleby, thanks to the time-dimension, first appeared as an event in the past, then as an event in the future – now that he is present, the problem no longer enjoys the protection of time, so a new dimension is needed for investigation. This is the starting point of the lawyer's circles of APPROACH and WITHDRAWAL – now on the "vertical" level, trying to fit the scrivener's figure into the social pattern of his normal, everyday life.

1.1. His first impression of Bartleby is positive. He calls him "uniquely sedate" but, perhaps already governed by some kind of an uneasiness, he instinctively places (misplaces?) him at a relatively safe distance. The scrivener is alienated first from the other clerks, then from the narrator (although within easy call). He is situated in the lawyer's own room, by the folding doors, separated with "a high green folding screen which might entirely isolate Bartleby" from his sight. In this way, the narrator draws a kind of magic circle around the new scrivener, before any kind of personal contact could develop between them.

1.2. The next short section is that of observation, of a slow intellectual APPROACH: "At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion." The metaphors of eating show the importance of Bartleby's internalisation of the documents, and, in a way, of the world of the office.[20] This is doubtless an activity, requiring a great effort, but it is done "silently, palely, mechanically," in a passive way, so to say. This kind of productivity cannot make the lawyer happy, it results in his own spiritual WITHDRAWAL.

1.3. On the third day of Bartleby's stay in the office, the first confrontation occurs. The lawyer, in "haste and natural expectancy of instant

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[20] cf. Thomas Dana Cohen, *Hyperbaton: Essays in Dialogue, and the Materiality of Inscription: Plato, Bakhtin, Melville* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1989).

compliance" (which, for him, is a totally normal APPROACH to a clerk in his office), calls he scrivener to proofread a copy, to examine, to "verify the accuracy" of a piece of writing, which in the narrator's own words is "a very dull, wearisome and lethargic affair." Now, for the first time, Bartleby utters the words for which he is remembered world-wide: "I would prefer not to." This utterance presupposes a personal choice, which, in the given situation, in the form of life in which Bartleby is supposed to participate, is not supposed to exist. Employees cannot choose not to comply – if they do, it is understood as a complete refusal. Such a refusal would be in sharp contrast with the "mild, firm voice" and the "sedateness" the lawyer had previously observed, so his natural first reaction is that the scrivener cannot have heard the request right. He repeats himself – and so does Bartleby. The second reaction of the lawyer is anger: "What do you mean? Are you moonstruck?" But the third repetition of the strange sentence creates a serious gap: if Bartleby were one of his clerks–in other words, if he participated in the lawyer's form of life–such a disobedience would result in dismissal. But Bartleby's basic standards seem to be different, and the lawyer is unable to step out of his own world to accept them. (Being human, after all, how could he do that?) Nevertheless, he feels and accepts the difference, and consequently has to regard Bartleby's behaviour as non-human: "as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors." (The lawyer does not realise that Cicero, in fact, has been expelled from this office long ago, and eloquence has already been muted into plaster-of-paris.)

Such a confrontation with the irrational can only result in a "gaze" – but the lawyer's practical mind has to WITHDRAW from the absurdity, he has to "place" Bartleby in the human world of the office again (after all, it might have been just a temporary aberration on the scrivener's part, perhaps he just failed to "plug in" this time). The narrator accepts the strangeness of the matter but "concludes to forget" it for the time being. The dilemma, which later turns cosmic, is already enunciated, in a concentrated form, here, in the circle of the first confrontation.

1.4. "A few days after this..." (note that time in this part of the story is almost always measured by the day – this strengthens the feeling of repetition in the text but, never being concrete, also disrupts our sense of time: we never find out how long the Bartleby-period lasts in the lawyer's life). So, "A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents" – and the first confrontation is repeated, this time witnessed by the three other employees, as well. The lawyer

turns to Bartleby with the same "normal" APPROACH, wanting him to verify the copies, and, hearing the scrivener's "regular" answer, he first "turns into a pillar of salt," then he asks the reason for what he regards as refusal. (The why-question comes up relatively late in his mind, only after the fourth "I would prefer not to" in the story.) A refusal has to have a reason but a preference, being an expression of volition, might not. Bartleby's answer – the repetition of his sentence – might be all right according to his (indecipherable) standards, but by stressing the strange difference, he deepens the gap: the lawyer becomes "disarmed," "touched," and "disconcerted." He suddenly starts reasoning with the scrivener, wanting to convince him from the perspective of common sense. He gets the same answer, "in a flute-like tone" : in Bartleby's standards there seems to be no place for logical argumentation. All the more misleading it is that the scrivener presents his conclusion as a result of careful consideration, as a decision, as if he took a stand in favour of one of at least two possibilities. His absurd inner freedom of choice turns the concept and myth of the infinite number of opportunities America offers to a free citizen inside out. In vain does the lawyer try to insert Bartleby as a fourth item into his set of eccentric clerks – with him, there seems to be no common ground for playing the employer-employee game. The lawyer now begins to "stagger in his own plainest faith." He WITHDRAWS and turns to the other three clerks, the "disinterested persons," "for some reinforcement": He gets the reassuring answers but these – despite their educational intent – fail to move Bartleby. One more circle is closed, and the dilemma is postponed again by the lawyer.

1.5. In the next section, before a new APPROACH, the narrator tries to observe Bartleby's ways once more in order to find some explanation for his behaviour. There is not much to be observed except that the scrivener never seems to leave the office, and he seems to eat nothing else but ginger nuts (the "small, flat, round and very spicy" cakes – after which the office boy got his nickname, since it is him who brings them to all the clerks, including Bartleby). The lawyer's "reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger nuts" brilliantly illustrate the absurdity of reasoning and the need to turn the matter into an anecdote: "Ginger, then had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none."

The narrator, a bit relieved by his own good humour, now tries to approach Bartleby from a "not inhumane" standpoint, stating that the scrivener's eccentricities are involuntary, and, after all, they can get along. This is the first

instance of pity on the lawyer's part (for the first time, he calls Bartleby a "poor fellow"), although we can see the traces of the mercantile aspect of piety in this paragraph: "Here I can purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby, to humour him in his strange wilfulness will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience." But the lawyer seems to have underestimated his task and overestimated his pious charity (the only sweet morsels in this story, that of the ginger nuts, are consumed by Bartleby). The lawyer's practical common sense gets the upper hand and, after WITHDRAWING ("The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me"), he cannot resist the temptation of an "evil impulse" (or of normal curiosity) to test Bartleby's passive resistance in a new APPROACH.

1.6. Trying to find the limits of the scrivener's tolerance, he starts acting like a naughty child, playing on the nerves of the "adult": he deliberately thinks of things Bartleby would surely prefer not to do, and addresses him with these requests, one after the other. The curiosity he is driven by also resembles that of a scientist experimenting with a strange compound, actually having the results he wants in mind, still wanting to see the proof, to "verify." He "stages" the scenes and again asks his clerks' opinion for reassurance – a kind of "verification": after all, this is their normal duty. (By Nippers' reserved answer and Turkey's "combativeness," the reader can tell that all this happens in the afternoon, counterbalancing one of the previous circles which took place in the morning.) It is amazing that nothing can make Bartleby lose his temper, he (and the kind of void he personifies) seems to have no memory at all. Every time he starts from scratch and answers so mildly and firmly as if he had never been asked to do anything against his preferences before. "Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation..." (perhaps the only laws in terms of which, for the time being, he can be defined), "at the third summons, he appears..." It is this stubborn mildness that puzzles, annoys, disarms, later even "unmans" the lawyer. Perhaps it is not so much the fact of irrationality, of meaninglessness (shall we say: nothingness?) that troubles and shocks the narrator and the reader, keeping them on circular paths – it is rather the fact that there has to be something "ordinarily human" about Bartleby, that the blank, mechanical, unalterable answer comes out of a human body (not a malfunctioning Xerox machine), in a human way (as a result of a decision). The ambiguities of Bartleby (his activity and passivity, his human face and non-human reactions) paralyse the lawyer, depriving him of his famous "prudence" and "method," of his ability to decide. "Suffering much from

perplexity and distress of mind" (and hunger, since it is close to his dinner hour), the lawyer again leaves it at that and WITHDRAWS, unable to think of any "terrible retribution" for the obstinacy of the scrivener. "Shall I acknowledge it?" he asks himself – and his problem is more and more like an educational dilemma (now from the adult's point of view, with a sense of inherent responsibility: how much of disobedience should the "parent" or "teacher" tolerate?)

1.7. He decides to be permissive, bringing himself to a kind of reconciliation: he tries to APPROACH Bartleby again, by thinking of him as a "valuable acquisition," and making a list of all his merits: his steadiness, his incessant industry (although we get the first hint at the scrivener's standing "dead-wall reveries") and, above all, his honesty, in which the lawyer has a "singular confidence." Although he sometimes forgets and complains about the whims of the scrivener, he is on his way to get accustomed to the new way things are arranged in his office and to accepting Bartleby as an exceptional example of the "somewhat singular set of men: law copyists or scriveners." However, Bartleby never ceases to surprise him, and the WITHDRAWAL that is caused by a true shock has to be dealt with at a different dimensional level.

2. This new dimension is "horizontal" – since the lawyer has to change his role of boss for that of neighbour. Seeing Bartleby in shirt-sleeves in the office "one Sunday morning" is something too intimate and too absurd to be tolerated. The shift in roles is also demonstrated by the existence of a literally (physically) circular path: the lawyer, in his disturbed state of mind, acts upon the scrivener's strange advice and obediently walks round the block "two or three times" (whereas he only wanted to "walk round to" his chambers on the way to church). He feels and acts like an unexpected visitor, although he knows that he would have every right to enter his own office and turn Bartleby out of doors. The dilemma again resembles that of distressed teachers or parents when confronted with a problem-child. Feeling the burdensome weight of responsibility and the strength of their child's obstinacy and not knowing what they have done wrong to provoke it, they become weak and surrender to all kinds of whims. Whatever the lawyer does in such a state will be an "impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery." Here again we can see passivity and activity conjoined: Bartleby's gradual withdrawal from society is at the same time a gradual intrusion into the world around him. The lawyer feels "un-manned," i.e. both weakened and touched by something (or somebody?) "non-human." This symptom shows that his assimilation (or "initiation"?) into the world of Bartleby has begun.

2.1. This existential uneasiness can only be relieved by an "uneasiness" "as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in the office in his shirt-sleeves and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning." Here both humour and common sense help to restore the lawyer to himself; humour, because even the slightest allusion in the form of a banished thought to Bartleby's possible immorality (e.g. his having a mistress) has comic effects, and common sense, because the lawyer's responsibility finds its proper direction again: he is, first and foremost, responsible for the office for which he pays the rent and not for its strange inhabitant. In this state of mind, he is now ready for a new APPROACH: he returns to the office – and finds it empty. But the emptiness is full of signs of life which indicate that Bartleby actually "has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself." The sight of the scrivener's "rolled blanket," "blacking box and brush," "tin basin," "soap," "ragged towel" and the remainders of his breakfast in a newspaper ("a few crumbs of ginger nuts and a morsel of cheese") results in the lawyer's sudden twinge of "overpowering, stinging" "fraternal melancholy." (Indeed, the best ground for true fraternal feelings is an encounter with one's own human weakness through the exposed, defenceless misery of somebody else. In other words, the realisation that the other is also a human being with the same biological functions and insignificant, though essential, utensils. Perhaps we are already on our way to "love our enemies," i.e. accept them as human beings when we imagine their vulnerability exposed to us through innocent objects such as their "ragged towels.") The lawyer is deeply moved by the "miserable friendlessness and loneliness" he has just come upon, and what he finds most horrifying and pitiable is his own desolate image of Wall Street by night and on holidays: "Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall Street is as deserted as Petra, and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building, too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy and all through Sunday is forlorn." This description reminds one of Foster's *New York Slices* again, except that the lawyer here makes a sharp distinction between daylight and night-time. According to Michel Foucault, the classical period of thinking introduced the idea that the ability to make this sharp distinction is in a way the condition of one's sanity: "The circle of day and night is the law of the classical world: the most reduced but the most demanding of the world's necessities, the most inevitable but the simplest of nature's legalities."[21]

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[21] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans., Richard Howard (New York: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1967) p. 109.

Foucault seems to suggest that the gap of silence between reason and unreason originates in classical thinking:

> More effectively than any other kind of rationalism, better in any case than our positivism, classical rationalism could watch out for and guard against the subterranean danger of unreason, that threatening space of an absolute freedom.[22]

All this is important because it might happen that the lawyer in fact turns back to the central image or "law" of the stronghold of reason in order to exorcise unreason from Bartleby. In this way, he can comfortably rely on "the common bond of humanity" between them. At the same time, his own fantasy grows to a gigantic scope and he imagines "the scrivener's pale form" "laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding-sheet," which fancyings he himself confesses to be "chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain" – this shows that, at least at this point, the bond between them is based upon unreason.

In his imaginings, the lawyer almost forgets that he is standing in his own office (and not trespassing in Bartleby's home). As a counter-effect to his sentimentality, he does something led by curiosity that is in fact an intrusion into the scrivener's privacy. He is "attracted by Bartleby's desk" and opens the drawers, in order to find more of those "secret objects" that would give him a clue to the Bartleby-riddle and testify to the scrivener's human fragility. What he actually finds is an "old bandana handkerchief, heavy and knotted" – with a savings' bank inside. With the appearance of money, the magic attraction of Bartleby's belongings disappears, and the lawyer's generous approach, after having recalled in his memory everything concerning the scrivener, slowly turns into a WITHDRAWAL. He says: "just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did ... melancholy merge into fear, ... pity into repulsion." He explains his changed feelings by the "hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" and he wisely adds: "if such pity cannot lead to effectual succour, common sense bids the soul be rid of it." (It will turn out that listening to his common sense is in fact much more difficult than complying with Bartleby's crazy wishes, e.g. walking round the block, since the lawyer at this moment is only about halfway through with his circles.) He diagnoses Bartleby as "the victim of innate and incurable disorder," i.e. a madman, realising that "it is his soul that suffers and his soul (he can) not reach."

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[22] Foucault p. 84.

This whole circle of approach and withdrawal rests on the presupposition that Bartleby's soul suffers. The presupposition is absolutely normal and natural: who would think that a human being can be happy with a life like Bartleby's? Yet the basic problem lies here: we never get proof of Bartleby's sufferings or misery – the scrivener never complains about anything and seems content and balanced, which is in total accordance with his inaccessible and strange way of life. (As we shall see, his sterile, two-directional, irresistible movement – withdrawing from and intruding into the world around him – is definitely linear, not circular, and there is something firm about him that suggests that he is not a problem for himself but only for us). Help of any kind can only be given to someone in need of it. Bartleby does not seem to be in need of anything. In fact, nothing else seems to be "ordinarily human" in him but his pale body – this is why we cannot suppress our presupposition that he is vulnerable, exposed to our mercy and care, that he is enshrouded in a deep sadness; in other words, that he is a human being. The lawyer compares him to Marius, the ancient Roman warrior, who, after losing fame and glory, became a fugitive among the ruins of Carthage. This image is behind the lawyer's presupposition that, in Bartleby's case, he is confronted with a loss, something irreparable but still human, that Bartleby has his own – probably very sad and moving – story. But since this presupposed story – or history – is inaccessible, we have to accept that what we are confronted with is a *lack*. In the case of a loss (e.g. the plight of Marius) we always feel the weight of the values that are at stake and that are finally lost. In the case of a lack, we ourselves try to provide whatever is missing with a weight, a counterbalance to the void. Because without the presupposition of a loss, a lack would never even be felt: we cannot miss what we do not, in a certain sense, know of. We have not forgotten Parmenides' warning: "that which IS NOT," is neither recognisable nor expressible. The simple fact that Bartleby has a human body is the very condition for us to recognise the lack, the void. The "sheer vacancy" of Bartleby's expression leads us to the perception of some kind of a sterile, inorganic nothingness – pure and perfect, so exact that it is almost tangible. Bartleby's human body is a straightforward, free and brave – American – presentation of the non-human, of the inconceivable nothingness that after all, exists in all of us.[23]

This is the frightening reverse of the experience of "fraternal melancholy" – because instead of a "common bond," we feel the magnetic attraction of the

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[23] I wish to thank my husband, Géza Kállay, who, in our many conversations, called my attention to the essential problem of presuppositions.

vacuum. The lawyer, now terror-stricken, no longer wants to postpone the matter (although, from now on, he will be "forced" to do so): the thought of Bartleby's incurable insanity leads him to the conclusion that – after a probably unsuccessful attempt at asking him questions – he will, as gently as possible, have to dismiss him.

2.2. It is no longer curiosity but necessity that drives the lawyer to a new APPROACH: he is now craving for a proof of his own humanity through trying to find the human in Bartleby. The questions he asks (while the scrivener keeps "his glance fixed upon" the already familiar "bust of Cicero") are all basically humane, they all concern Bartleby's story. "At present, I prefer to give no answer," the scrivener replies, and the word "prefer" has an immense power here: it suggests that Bartleby knows his own story, he is not unable to relate it (i.e. he is not mentally ill) but after some consideration he decides that he would prefer not to share his story with the lawyer. "To keep something to oneself is the most incredible and thought provoking power," says Jacques Derrida in his essay *How to Avoid Speaking*.[24] Bartleby seems to be filled with this power, in his manner, while the lawyer feels his efforts at communication have been treated with disdain. Of course, he is annoyed, but "something superstitious" forbids him to do anything against Bartleby and drives him to be even more friendly, now only wanting to hear a reassuring word that the scrivener might be willing to change his eccentric behaviour. "At present, I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," answers Bartleby absurdly, and the second occurrence of the expression "at present" again suggests the promise of a speech that has to be, so to say, "well deserved." It is a challenge now for the lawyer to "deserve" the bridge over the gap of silence, but he realises how seriously he has been affected by the scrivener: he and all his clerks have got into the habit of using the word "prefer." The thought that the Bartleby-disease is contagious horrifies him, so he WITHDRAWS (and, in fact, warns both of his clerks to "withdraw" in this passage), again deciding that he must get rid of the "demented scrivener."

2.3. The next section begins with a new – though not wholly unexpected – shock, which is the most absurd of all, and which forms the empty heart of the story: Bartleby says that he has "decided upon doing no more writing." When the lawyer asks for a reason, his reply is a question, again thwarting the narrator in

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[24] Jacques Derrida, 'How to avoid Speaking: Denials' in Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds., *Languages of the Unsayable. The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) p. 18.

his quest for Bartleby's humanity: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" Now, strangely enough, it is the scrivener's utterance that presupposes something common between them – it suggests that the lawyer is capable of seeing the reason, that the reason (in fact, of unreason) "hits him in the eye." The lawyer is so dazzled by such a paradox that he projects his own troubled sight into Bartleby's "impaired vision." In this way, he can APPROACH the scrivener again: he can be touched by him, feel sorry for him, he can also postpone facing the unfaceable. But when Bartleby informs him that he has permanently given up writing, the lawyer becomes so much confronted with absurdity that, from a certain point of view, no difference exists for him between reason and unreason any longer.

Any attempt at keeping his identity would result in unreason – a proof that he is not only infected by but actually has become a kind of Bartleby. Turning a blind eye to the "fixture" in his chamber, as if Bartleby's presence were an accident, like a small blot of ink on a sheet of paper or a crack in the wall not worth mentioning, would be, in a way, rational and comfortable: he could maintain the rhythm of the office-life, he could pay more attention to the "necessities of business," disregarding the existence of the living statue – but this, of course, would be just as much an absurd choice of non-action as Bartleby's "passive resistance." In this respect, the situation he is (or rather both of them are) trapped in foreshadows the helpless inertia of humans recognised by the state of the world more than a century later, in our own times. Stanley Cavell, in *The Avoidance of Love*, writes the following:

> What we do not know is what there is to acknowledge, what it is I am to make present, what I am to make myself present to. I know there is inexplicable pain and death everywhere, and now if I ask myself why I do nothing, the answer must be, I choose not to. That is, doing nothing is no longer something which has a place insured by ceremony, it is the thing I am doing. And it requires the same energy, the same expense of cunning and avoidance, that tragic activity used to have to itself.[25]

But the deliberate choice (or preference) of non-action is precisely what the lawyer dreads; he wants to act, and the only possible action is Bartleby's dismissal. However, without any comprehensible reason, he is paralysed by a strong feeling

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[25] Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love. A Reading of *King Lear*' in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 346.

of guilt, the kind which, according to Cavell, might be one of the consequences of "deifying" reason:

> The point of reason, the thing that made it seem worth deifying, was not simply that it provided a god-like power but that it could serve to rationalise and hence to minimise distress. But the consequence of its uses, since no one is responsible for them – that is no one more than anyone else – is that it has made everything require an answer, and only I have the answer that is no one has it if I have not. And if I have not, I am guilty, and if I have, and do not act upon it, I am guilty. What we forgot when we deified reason, was not that reason is incompatible with feeling, but that knowledge requires acknowledgement.[26]

The lawyer feels personal guilt both for the existence of the irrational and for his failure to do something about it. He wants to know and he is unable to acknowledge. This is no snug business any longer: he, once so good at making things profitable, now simply cannot find any grist to his "millstone-necklace." (Were he living a few decades later, perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche could convince him that "the irrationality of a thing is not an argument against its existence, rather a condition of it."[27] He wants to relieve himself by handing Bartleby over to a "relative or friend" – but such persons do not exist. Bartleby "seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic." The image of the sea, recalling Melville's whole oeuvre, and the word "universe" (quite unusual in the lawyer's vocabulary) indicate that this is a crucial point in the story. For the reader, this image suddenly reveals a disturbing similarity between the situation of the enigmatic scrivener, the baffled narrator and the writer himself at a loss. For one moment, Bartleby, the lawyer and Melville are organically brought together in a genuine "bit of wreck," like the one in Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*[28] but for them, the tragic experience remains a never actualised possibility. The image works like an electric shock: the lawyer immediately WITHDRAWS, telling Bartleby that "in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office."

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[26] This is followed by a sentence in brackets, which I feel relevant to quote here: "(The WITHDRAWALS and APPROACHES of God can be looked upon as tracing the history of our attempts to overtake and absorb acknowledgement by knowledge, God would be the name of that impossibility.)" Cavell p. 347.

[27] R. J. Hollingdale, ed., *A Nietzsche Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1987) p. 198.

[28] Cf. "Alone, alone, all, all alone / Alone on a wide wide sea! / And never a saint took pity on/ My soul in agony."

2.4. A new circle opens as the lawyer buttons up his coat in a kind of blindfolded, desperately bold effort to be the "boss" again. Although he should know from experience that commands and orders do not usually reach Bartleby, he wants to trust the performative power of his own words so much that in the act of dismissal he repeats "you must" three times, as if a spell could expel the apparition from his office, as if this "must" meant not only that Bartleby "will leave" but actually that he "has already left" the premises. But such power cannot be in his mortal possession. This section seems to be a battle between modal expressions: "must," followed by "assume" on the lawyer's side, and "prefer" on Bartleby's. The lawyer APPROACHES Bartleby – not the man but the solution to the problem – with an extra sum of money (a painfully generous offer according to his standards), but the thirty-two dollars remain untouched and the walls of the empty office falsely reverberate his kind but serious departing words. The wordless Bartleby now stands "like the last column of some ruined temple" – and the image strangely recalls a former one, when the lawyer confronted the scrivener for a second time (see 1.4.), saying: "For a few minutes, I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks." Without noticing what he admits, the lawyer's present words imply that the temple – now ruined – is his own office, from which the iconic arrangement of him and his clerks has been wiped out, precisely by the power of the single sign that is left of them as a reminder – or merely a remainder. But the lawyer now, in a mood governed by musts and assumptions, is insensitive to the implications of his own images, since he is busy congratulating himself for his "masterly management." "The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness... Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart – as an inferior genius might have done – I assumed the ground that depart he must, and upon that assumption built all I had to say."

However, the lawyer himself soon has his doubts concerning the success of his procedure and he keeps "veering about." As the comic episode in the street reveals, he is so much obsessed with his vacillation that, for a moment, he thinks that Bartleby's stay or departure is the only thing that matters for everybody in Broadway. When he finds the office door closed and hears Bartleby's voice from within ("Not yet, I am occupied"), he says he is "thunderstruck."

> I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless
> afternoon long ago in Virginia by summer lightning, at his own warm

open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the
dreamy afternoon, till someone touched him, when he fell.

This emblematic little story about the country man is the "capsule" of an
American ballad: the man killed in his home, who has been exposed to the
unforeseeable whims of nature, could have, so to say, an organic experience of an
original "pure event," following which he died. Consequently, his plight itself did
not become a pure event but a tragedy: it turned into a living story. Fortunately,
Benjamin Franklin soon invented the lightning conductor, thus depriving
humanity of the tragic experience of being thunderstruck. (Melville himself treats
this problem in one of the stories close to Bartleby in Piazza Tales: "The
Lightning-Rod Man.") So the lawyer's not wholly unexpected metaphorical
thunderbolt has no real consequences: learning from his former experience, he
automatically walks round the block once more (without even being asked to do
so), and, trodding the literal circular path, he WITHDRAWS from solving the
problem by deciding to "argue the matter over with Bartleby again."

2.5. "Reading Bartleby can appear an almost nauseating exercise,"[29] says
Thomas Dana Cohen, and we might be very tempted to agree after all these
rounds with the lawyer on his absurd roundabout. Both that the story can be
further twisted, and that it will eventually come to an end seem unbelievable at
this point. We have to "whirl through" another APPROACH, starting with a
reproach (in the manner of the baffled and hurt parent or teacher again), followed
by questions concerning Bartleby's departure (in the flow of which the lawyer
gets more and more upset); the scrivener's utterance "I would prefer not to quit
you" wrapped in silence; and finally the lawyer's passionate but impotent
rebellion in WITHDRAWAL, recalling the notorious murder case of the
"unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt."[30] His latent but ardent
wish for Bartleby not to exist almost makes him lose his temper. What prevents
him from committing such an ill-considered act is his moral education.

2.6. He starts the new APPROACH with "the divine injunction": "A new
commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." (The choice of the
word "injunction," its dry, formal, official overtone, surprises the reader –
although, for the lawyer, the legal term might be the only appropriate expression.
For us, an "injunction" sounds to be indifferent to the circumstance whether our

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[29] Cohen p. 463.
[30] "John Colt ... was convicted for the Broadway office murder of Samuel Adams and on the day
scheduled for his hanging ... committed suicide in prison." Reynolds p. 177.

obedience is wholehearted or mechanical. The injunction is followed by the enactment of the "wise and prudent principle" of "sweet charity," which prevents the lawyer from "diabolical murder," and which changes his anger to pity and benevolence. But is sweet charity the same as love? Can love ever become a prudent principle? Can philanthropy make the lawyer love Bartleby? Not at all. Guided by prudent principles of his moral education, the most the lawyer can achieve is tolerance. He tolerates the existence of the motionless scrivener very similarly to the way one tolerates the existence of a harmless spider in the corner of his room, because his repulsion for extinguishing life (in general) is stronger than his repulsion for the insect itself. But all this has nothing to do with love. For a definition of love, the lawyer could consult Saint Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, where he could read: "Love is the fulfilling of the law."[31] But the fact that the divine "corpus juris" consists of one and only one paragraph, so Paul implies, with not a moral but an ontological basis, which can only be authentically fulfilled by God himself, and cannot be circumscribed in comprehensible sentences, the fact that the only law is that "we shall obey the law," is impossible to conceive rationally, especially for a lawyer. (Without recognising and acknowledging himself in Bartleby and Bartleby in himself, the lawyer can never "love" the scrivener – but paradoxically enough, such a recognition would probably work like the Virginian lightning strike of long ago and result in the lawyer's tragic death or mere disintegration.) The lawyer consoles himself with the thoughts of Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Priestley on predestination and the laws of causation, and accepts Bartleby as the cross he must bear. He goes very far in tolerance, to the best of his capacities: "Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I, I shall persecute you no more, you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs, in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. ... [M]y mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain."

But this generous state of mind is disturbed by rumour around him: the explicable feeling of shame proves to be stronger than the inexplicable feeling of guilt which led him to tolerate Bartleby – so he WITHDRAWS, calling the scrivener a "strange creature," an "apparition" and finally an "intolerable incubus." (His shame turns into fear: and what he is the most afraid of is that Bartleby would live long and eventually outlive him, claiming possession of his office. In other words:

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[31] Rom. 13:10.

he is afraid that Bartleby would become him and he would become Bartleby. In one word: right now, he is afraid of death.)

2.7. Now that getting rid of Bartleby is vital, the lawyer APPROACHES the scrivener with a suggestion of "permanent departure." After three days of meditation, he gets Bartleby's answer "that he still prefers to abide with" the lawyer. At this point, the narrator turns to the Kantian "moral question," repeating it three times (What shall I do? ... What shall I do? What ought I to do?), while he tries to draw some strength by "buttoning" his "coat to the last button." He is horrified by any means that would entail violence or cruelty. He wants to find a legal solution, a "just" reason for Bartleby's confinement, but he admits that all his efforts of this kind are in vain. "... - a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will not be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him as a vagrant. That is too absurd." And, in the misery of his vacillations, a brilliant idea comes to the lawyer's mind: "Since he will not quit me, I must quit him." Yes, moving away seems to be the healthiest reaction and, for solving problems, this is always a possibility, especially in America. The arrangements take not more than a week and, "in a few hours," the office (into which, up to now, the "universe" of the story has been squeezed), can be successfully evacuated.

But is it really as simple as that? "Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn, and, being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room." Bartleby, so divested, does not melt into the non-human background. Now, more exposed than ever, he is a man, the prototype of the human race, in Shakespeare's words, a "bare, forked animal" – "the thing itself."[32] The breath of such an existential self-revelation touches the lawyer: his WITHDRAWAL – like the withdrawal of the screen from around Bartleby – is definitely a painful movement. With "(his) hands in (his) pockets and (his) heart in (his) mouth" the lawyer tears himself from Bartleby – and we feel a sense of finitude in this scene: from now on, even the possibility of human relationship is gone.

3. The force with which the lawyer "tears himself from" Bartleby creates a new dimension for circling round the problem. I call it spatial because this time it

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[32] Lear says this to Edgar in *King Lear:* "thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man s no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here" (IV.3.104-107). William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* ed. Kenneth Muir, (London and New York: Methuen and Co., 1972).

is the lawyer who deepens, actually "double spaces" the gap between himself and the scrivener, trying to flee from existential confrontations. In this new dimension, APPROACHES and WITHDRAWALS are almost impossible to be differentiated because they are NEGATIVE, so they can only be characterised by the inability to carry them out. In this final dimensional circle, all the lawyer's efforts miscarry.

3.1. The NEGATIVE APPROACH of the first circle is the lawyer's escape, which first seems to be successful. Now he is free to home in on a new "home from home," to re-establish his snug office-world with his old clerks, trying to forget about the embarrassing Bartleby-episode in his life. But all the time, he suffers from a persecution complex and he is full of "inward tremor" when his successor, the new lawyer at the Wall Street premises, pays him a visit and questions him about Bartleby, stating that he is responsible for the man he left there. "The man you allude to is nothing to me," says the lawyer, and there is a sense of betrayal in his utterance, deepening his feeling of guilt. (Feeling like a kind of Peter, at this moment, the lawyer surely wouldn't be surprised if he heard the cock crow.) But the sentence can also be understood as a true confession: Bartleby is nothing to the lawyer; that is, to the lawyer, Bartleby is the personification of nothingness, through whom he has caught a glimpse of the vacuum that exists, first and foremost, in himself. The visitor leaves with the intention to "settle" Bartleby – and the lawyer is left alone with his perturbed feelings. But the scrivener does not cease to haunt him. The owner and the tenants of the Wall Street building are waiting at his door one morning, forming a menacing crowd and demanding an immediate solution to the Bartleby-problem, since the scrivener "now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night." This is the point when the question of Bartleby truly becomes a public affair. "Aghast at this torrent" and "fearful of being exposed in the papers," the lawyer admits his NEGATIVE WITHDRAWAL and agrees upon striving his best "to rid them of the nuisance they complained of."

3.2. The next circle bears a striking similarity to those of former times when Bartleby was still employed by the lawyer. But there is, to a certain extent, a change of roles: now it is the lawyer who appears on the threshold to meet Bartleby. This time, Bartleby is more talkative than ever and, though his intention to stay there is unchanged, his answers sound quite logical – whereas the lawyer's questions become more and more absurd. The start of the conversation is

quite comic: when being asked what he is doing, Bartleby answers, "Sitting upon the banister." As in modern absurd dramas, a commonplace question is taken literally, determining the setting of the communicative situation from now on. It is also remarkable that Bartleby is sitting, not standing: his physical posture demonstrates his decline and foreshadows the final image we have of him lying on the ground.

They move into the refurnished familiar chambers, where the lawyer offers him a wide range of occupations he might undertake (they are quite unsuited to Bartleby's character), acting as if he did not know that the scrivener would surely prefer not to take any of them. Bartleby considers and refuses each one of the possibilities. To the offer of a clerkship in the dry-goods store, he says "there is too much confinement about that." He refuses to become a bartender as well, but informs the lawyer about this in a well structured and relatively long sentence. To the third offer, that of a bill-collector's job, he says: "I would prefer to be doing something else." This is the only positive statement we hear from Bartleby in the story – and the lawyer fails to ask WHAT else the scrivener might want to do, thus extinguishing a last, faint sparkle of hope for bridging the gap between them. The lawyer's next offer is the most illogical one we could imagine: "How then, would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation – how would that suit you?" Bartleby answers in four complete sentences, and for the third time during the conversation he says: "I am not particular." (Of course, he is not: he is, one might say, general instead. As Dieter Meindl observes, he "can be seen as emblematic of the human condition" – whereas the lawyer's "complex and realistic character is expressive of human nature."[33]) The lawyer is bewildered by Bartleby's verbosity and calmness and, "flying into a passion" he stumbles in the logical construction of his sentence when trying to menace the scrivener, as if by magic some fairy in favour of Bartleby had twisted his tongue: "If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound – indeed, I am bound – to – to – to quit the premises myself!" Aware of his absurd conclusion, he wants to withdraw, but his NEGATIVE WITHDRAWAL manifests itself in a last desperate attempt to remove Bartleby: he offers to take him home, to his own dwelling. (This is the only mention of a private home and the lawyer's offer is more than generous here – although it is partly guided by fear of the group of impatient people waiting outside for his solution.) The scrivener prefers not to share a home with the

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[33] Meindl pp. 101-2.

lawyer, thus implying that he does not regard the lawyer's house to be a true home – and this implication strikes the narrator as a home truth.

3.3 As if stung by a bee, the lawyer, "effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of his flight," rushes from the building, runs up Wall Street towards Broadway and "jumping into the first omnibus is soon removed from pursuit." In this frenzy of a flight, the most NEGATIVE APPROACH possible is manifested. He tries to calm down by considering that he has done all that could be done for Bartleby, but his persecution complex almost reaches paranoia: he dare not go home or to his office but, for a few days, lives like a fugitive in his "rockaway."

But upon going home, he is deeply touched by a note informing him that Bartleby has been taken to prison, and the rest of the story up to the "sequel," from now on, can be characterised by a NEGATIVE WITHDRAWAL, i.e. an impossibility of withdrawal from watching, witnessing, testifying to the scrivener's inevitable decay. What the lawyer formerly thought of as "too absurd," has now come true: Bartleby is imprisoned "as a vagrant." What Michel Foucault says about the confinement of madmen, might be relevant here:

> Confinement is the practice which corresponds most exactly to madness experienced as unreason, that is, as the empty negativity of reason, by confinement, madness is acknowledged to be nothing. That is, on the one hand, madness is immediately perceived as difference: whence the forms of spontaneous and collective judgement sought, not from physicians, but from men of good sense, to determine the confinement of a madman, and on the other hand, confinement cannot have any other goal than a correction (that is, the suppression of the difference, of the fulfilment of this nothingness in death), whence those options for death are so often to be found in the registers of confinement, written by the attendants, and which are not the sign of the confinement's savagery, its inhumanity or perversion, but the strict expression of its meaning: an operation to annihilate nothingness.[34]

The "Tombs" – what an ominous name for a jail! – George Foster describes it as a "grim mausoleum of hope," and as a "foul lazar-house of polluted and festering humanity."[35] The narrator describes how (as he later learns) Bartleby was conducted to his final destination, "offering not the slightest obstacle," how

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[34] Foucault pp. 115-6.
[35] Quoted by Reynolds p. 295.

"the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon." The lawyer can be indignant about the procedure professionally as well, since sending an innocent man to prison is a clear "miscarriage of justice." The same day he visits the Tombs, not only because he is required to make an official statement, but because he desperately wants to have an interview with Bartleby, again guided by the guilty feeling of the parent or teacher who has neglected his educational responsibility. "In the quietest of the yards," he finds the scrivener and senses a kind of threat to Bartleby's "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable" innocence: "all round, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves." In their last, brief conversation the messages are hopelessly miscarried: "I know you ... and I want to say nothing to you," says Bartleby, and the lawyer reads an implied suspicion from his words, so he starts making an apology and excusing himself: "It was not I that brought you here." (Bartleby's sentence could also be understood as a futile attempt at saying nothing, i.e. revealing the nothing to his former employer.) The lawyer tries to console him by calling his attention to the sky and the grass, and to the fact that the prison "is not so vile a place" – to which a dry "I know where I am" is the scrivener's reply. So the lawyer leaves him.

The episode with the healthy, jovial "grub-man" serves to release the tension of the dialogue above, since the turnkey is a figure typical of anecdotes. But at present, being a bit out of humour, the lawyer is more irritated than amused by the talkative "broad meat-like man." He gives him some money to provide his "friend" with more substantial meals – but Bartleby "prefers not to dine." The grub-man is quite disappointed to hear that Bartleby, instead of being a "gentleman forger," is "a little deranged"; nevertheless, he would gladly start a conversation about forgers with the lawyer – but the latter "cannot stop longer."

The lawyer's next visit to the Tombs is the final one – and the prison yard where Bartleby's secret is sealed, is described like the sanctuary of a mysterious temple: "The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seems, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung." Then the lawyer catches sight of the "wasted" Bartleby, "strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying

on his side, his head touching the cold stones," in the typical position of a fetus–a not-yet actualised possibility of a human being. The lawyer feels his hand and shivers – and to the round-faced grub-man's profane questions ("... does he live without dining?" "Eh! – He's asleep, ain't he?") he answers, closing Bartleby's eyes, with the dignity of a priest. What seemed so impossible and still so evident, what had secretly been his ardent wish has come true: Bartleby has preferred to cease to exist. He "lives without dining" and sleeps "with kings and counsellors." The lawyer finds the Word for his funeral sermon in the Book of Job:

> Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves, Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been, as infants which never saw light.[36]

Yes, Bartleby's plight is in a way similar to the brief life of an unborn child: in both cases the question of what can be regarded as a human being is painfully left open.

But the time-dimension provides the confronting nature of the question with distance: in the "sequel," the lawyer's anecdotic and self-important style returns. He gives us the information which up to now he has managed to hold back: that Bartleby had formerly been working at the Dead Letter Office – where letters that have not reached their destination "are annually burned" "by the cartload." The lawyer's slightly melodramatic recital of the possible messages these miscarried letters might have contained is followed by the two exclamations: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" – and this is the end of the story (or anti-story).

Of course, we are dissatisfied. Frank Kermode comments: "There is, one might say, a tendency on the part of writers and readers to wish upon endings the status of ends: mere cessation is not satisfying – one hankers after entelechy, some sense that a potential has been actualised, that the ending has conferred order and consonance on the beginning and the middle. To express the matter as simply as possible, this completion is also what we should want in our own lives and deaths, however skeptical we may be about the possibility of achieving it." ... "By such

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[36] Job 3:11-16.

means we 'humanise the common death.'"[37] But does the text of Bartleby offer such a humanisation?

What happens to Bartleby and the lawyer can by no means be called a tragedy, and there is no moral to be learned. What we are confronted with is a "pure event" – like a sudden miscarriage – without comprehensible precedents and practically without consequences. A pure event is indeed something which we would prefer not to place anywhere in our lives – our "common sense bids the soul be rid of it." But in the course of close-reading, this is not a possibility. The reader – unlike Bartleby – is not free to state preferences. Trying to place a pure event in one's life is by no means a comfortable withdrawal from taking it into account but a necessity, in order to be identical with ourselves, in order to be identical with the self that had to live it through. Even pure events have to be in some sense workable since, within a lifetime, they at least succeed each other and gain a place in the linearity of our history.

Our "sphere" of interpretative circles is constructed – but does it serve as an "atmosphere"? Can we now breathe in the proximity of the void? I think breathing is possible, but the "void" has escaped from the middle of the sphere. It seems that, unlike the Magdeburg hemispheres, the sphere of interpretation is not held together by the vacuum but by something else. The void now exists outside, in a kind of linear tangent, represented by the linear, two-directional movement of Bartleby, aiming both at life and at death. But then, what have we got in the sphere? A passage from Melville perhaps answers the question since, in the chapter "The Doubloon" from *Moby Dick*, a similar sphere of interpretation is constructed by captain Ahab, who, in examining the emblems on a gold coin nailed to the mast (three mountains, one bearing a flame, one a tower and one a crowing cock), says:

> The firm tower, that is Ahab, the volcano, that is Ahab, the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too is Ahab, all are Ahab, and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn mirrors back his own mysterious self.[38]

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[37] Frank Kermode, 'Endings, continued' in Budick and Iser, *Languages of the Unsayable* p. 81.

[38] John T. Irwin quotes this passage in his *American Hieroglyphics. The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (Baltiomore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983) p. 287.

Now, that my own APPROACH and WITHDRAWAL has come full circle, I would, in the home-stretch of this paper, not like to "stretch the truth." It is, of course, highly debatable, to say the least, whether "circular paths to nowhere" can ever lead anybody home. After having read 'Bartleby the Scrivener,' we have to accept ambiguities as ambiguities. Indeed, it is very tempting to leave the whole enterprise at that. But in our ambiguous world, there would be too much conformity in such a conclusion. Ambiguity, in fact, can only remain ambiguity if it is not accepted, if the possibility of finding ourselves suddenly at home is not totally rejected. We can never aim at less than a final "nevertheless."

Éva Péteri

William Holman Hunt

'England's Greatest Religious Artist'

As a result of his devotion to religious art and the immense popularity of some of his religious paintings by the end of the 19th century, William Holman Hunt came to be regarded as "England's greatest religious artist."[1] And though he was often seen as taking sides in sectarian debates, a closer look at his religious pictures reveal a surprising impartiality.

In his youthful years he was, as he described himself, "a contemptuous unbeliever in any spiritual principles,"[2] thus the accusations that his early paintings manifested Tractarian sympathies were unjust and unfounded.[3] In the 1850s, however, Hunt became a firm believer, which meant a kind of turning point in his art. From that time on he resolved on the "single-minded application of [his] art to the service of Christ"[4] and decided always to remain the "pictorial chronicler of Christianity."[5] He thus became the embodiment of the Ruskinian ideal described in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, according to which a painter's vocation was like that of a priest, whose appointed mission was "to express and explain every divine truth which can be gathered out of God's

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[1]   Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) p. 106.

[2]   George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 6.

[3]   For more on Hunt's alleged Tractarianism see: 'William Holman Hunt's Early Work and the High Church Movement' *The AnaChronisT*, 1996.

[4]   W. H. Hunt, 'Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' in John Dixon Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelite Imagination* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) p. 2.

[5]   Francis Bickley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Comedy* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932) p. 241.

revelation."[6] The first picture conceived in this newly found devotion was *The Light of the World* (1853), an image Hunt "painted with what [he] thought ... to be a divine command, and not simply as a good subject."[7]

'PAPISTICAL PHANTASY' OR 'ICON OF PROTESTANTISM'?: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Despite Hunt's claims for originality and the fact that he was inspired solely by the text of the Bible there is a stunningly similar 19th century predecessor of *The Light of the World*. The similitude was spotted by Elisabeth Siddal when she first saw *The Light of the World* in Hunt's studio. David Larg gives an account of how the startled Miss Siddal called Hunt's attention to it:

> ... she observed that it was like a very similar picture she had just seen in a Catholic print shop. Yes, 'night, lantern, crown, orchard, overgrown door and all.' At once Hunt set out to look for the shop in Covent Garden where she said this picture was. Sure enough it was there. But it was a 'very poor lackadaisical German figure of Christ – knocking at a meaningless door:' and Hunt returned much relieved, saying that Miss Siddal had a vivid imagination.[8]

But it seems that not only Elisabeth Siddal had such a 'vivid imagination.' The similarity of the two pictures were observed by many others too, so finally Ruskin, who enthusiastically praised *The Light of the World* in the third volume of *Modern Painters*,[9] felt obliged to defend Hunt against charges of plagiarism admitting at the same time the existence of a pictorial predecessor. So he added an Appendix to the volume, in which he wrote:

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[6] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923) vol. 1, p. 59.

[7] Letter to William Bell Scott, 19th Aug. 1883, quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. by the Tate Gallery. (London: Penguin Books, 1984) p. 117.

[8] David Larg, *Trial by Virgins* (London: Gowans and Gray Ltd., 1923) p. 146.

[9] "...in Hunt's great poetical picture of the Light of the World, the whole thought and arrangement of the picture being imaginative, the several details of it are wrought with simple portraiture; the ivy, the jewels, the creeping plants, and the moonlight being calmly studied or remembered from the things themselves." (p. 39.) "Hunt's Light of the World is, I believe, the most perfect instance of expressional purpose with technical power, which the world has yet produced." (p. 29.)

I have so often spoken, in the preceding pages of Holman Hunt's picture of the Light of the World, that I may as well ... glance at the envious charges against it of being plagiarised from a German print. It is indeed true that there was a painting of the subject before; and there were, of course, no paintings of the Nativity before Raphael's time, nor of the Last Supper before Leonardo's, else those masters could have laid no claim to originality. But what was still more singular (the verse to be illustrated being, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock"), the principal figure in the antecedent picture was knocking at a door, knocked with its right hand, and had its face turned to the spectator! Nay, it was even robed in a long robe, down to its feet. All these circumstances were the same in Mr. Hunt's picture; and as the chances evidently were a hundred to one that if he had not been helped to the ideas by the German artist, he would have represented the figure as not knocking at any door, as turning its back to the spectator, and as dressed in a short robe, the plagiarism was considered as demonstrated.[10]

As L. Robinson pointed out in his lecture *Pre-Raphaelites and the German Connection,*[11] the German print in question was a reproduction of one of the Nazarene painters', Philip Veit's works. No wonder, therefore, that both Ruskin and Hunt, who were equally hostile to the Nazarenes, tried to dissociate *The Light of the World* from the print. Whether Veit's image made an unconscious impression on Hunt's mind, which was evoked while he was reading the Bible, or the two artists came to the same idea accidentally is impossible to decide. Nevertheless, Hunt always regarded *The Light of the World* as the manifestation of his own, personal experience of divine revelation, so much so that only in the case of this picture did he think self-expression more important than public interest. As he later referred to it:

> I may say that any occult meaning in the details of my design was not based upon ecclesiastical or archaic symbolism, but derived from obvious reflectiveness. My types were of natural figures such as language has originally employed to express transcendental ideas, and they were used by me with no confidence that they would interest any other mind than my own.[12]

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[10] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, pp. 324-5.

[11] Delivered at the Bar Convent Museum in York on 20th April, 1991.

[12] John Dixon Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelite Imagination* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) pp. 137-8.

Hunt's resolution not to rely on the legacy of earlier biblical presentations and the highly personal and imaginative character of the work meant that, when first exhibited in 1854, the picture proved to be less comprehensible to most of the contemporary spectators than would be thought in view of the picture's later popularity. To guide the mindful audience and reveal the literary source of the painting, a biblical quotation was inscribed on the frame, citing the Revelation:

> Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20)

Thus the central image was explained: Christ arriving, asking for admittance, asking for acceptance. However, to acquire fuller understanding, to decode the significance of the numerous details incorporated into the scene, one had to be well-versed in the text of the Bible. Himself being quite familiar with the Scriptures by this time, Hunt could create a pictorial complex full of meaningful, inter-related references, each of which contributed to the artist's 'priestly' message. The title itself comes, for example, from the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to St John, where Christ declares himself the light of the world saying: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Christ gives guidance to man like a lamp does in darkness, as it is said in the Psalms: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path" (Psalms 119:105). Quite untypically of Hunt's usual insistence on presenting things as they might actually have happened and in contrast with his claim of not relying on the conventions of religious art, he depicts Christ as a crowned king, a portrayal based on tradition, which has its source in Jeremiah's prophecy:

> Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. (Jer. 23:5)

The image of the neglected orchard recalls how the garden of Eden was entrusted to man in Genesis 2:15 ("And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it"), and then, despite the divine charge, abandoned and neglected, as the rank briar refers to it in the painting just as it does in the Bible ("And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briars and thorns." [Is. 7:23]). The picture as a whole also recalls the parable of the

wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) in the sense that it warns of constant vigilance by presenting man's unpreparedness at the time of Christ's arrival during the night.

These symbolic references were comprehensible to a select audience of regular church-goers and conscientious readers of the Bible. The number of this receptive, understanding audience, however, did not satisfy the aesthetic sense and educating spirit of Ruskin. His genuine enthusiasm for the painting and his desire to gain wider public appreciation to such a valuable work of art impelled him to write an elaborate interpretation of the painting for *The Times*, in which he tried to unveil its biblical references. As Timothy Hilton points out,[13] Ruskin concentrated on the signs of human ignorance, on the devastation caused by neglect, and not so much on the hope of salvation brought by Christ.[14] Ruskin's Evangelical upbringing, which taught him always to be conscious of man's fallibility and inclination to sin was probably one reason behind his rather pessimistic view, but it was also caused by the fact that some of the more positive references consciously employed by the painter were so complex and so individual that they were unattainable even by Ruskin's expertise. Though originally Hunt wished "the picture to be left without any explanation,"[15] he finally, but only in 1865, resigned to publishing a pamphlet, *An Apology for the Symbolism Introduced into the Picture called The Light of the World* with a detailed description of the painting. In this essay Hunt reveals the meaning of two important, though seemingly insignificant, elements incorporated into his work.

Both the lamp held in Christ's hand and the clasp which fastens his robe were contrived by the painter, and show his constant striving to provide every single detail of his pictures with symbolic meaning. The lantern was painted after a model designed by Hunt himself and constructed strictly according to his special requirements. A drawing of it reveals that it had seven sides each of which was formed as a divided window with differently shaped apertures above them. According to Hunt they were to represent the seven churches mentioned in Revelation (1:19-20), which appear there as the seven golden candlesticks. The fact that in Hunt's image Christ appears delivering the light of life as shining through

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[13] Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) p. 92.

[14] The door of the human soul, for example, is described by Ruskin as "fast barred, its bars and nails are rusty; it is knitted and bound to its stanchions by creeping tendrils of ivy, showing that it has never been opened. A bat hovers above it; its threshold is overgrown with brambles, nettles, and fruitless corn." Quoted in Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 92.

[15] Quted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 119.

a lantern with the emblems of seven churches was regarded as the painter's belief in the existence of more than one true church. It was seen later by the Anglican clergy as such a serious offence that it caused anxiety even in 1908 when the picture was given to Keble College and its officials felt obliged to object to the painting on this ground.[16]

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[16] *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 120.

Hunt's tolerant religious approach is reflected in the symbolism of the clasp or breast-plate too. It consists of three parts, each about the same size but with a different shape. On the left the circular part refers to the heathen priesthoods, since many pagan priests actually bore such symbols.[17] The middle section is cross-shaped, symbolising the Christian congregations by recalling Christ's crucifixion. The red precious stones, with which it is encrusted, refer to the wounds he suffered, and they correspond with the stigmata shown in the painting on Christ's hands. The third, rectangular clasp is an Israelitish symbol, it has the shape and lay-out of the breast-plate of judgement made for Aaron as described in Exodus 28:15-24. Although, as the colours of the painting reveal, they are not shown by Hunt in the enlisted biblical order, their arrangement and number – four rows with three stones in each – are precise. It seems that since the types of these stones did not seem to have symbolic reference in the Old Testament, the otherwise always painstakingly accurate Hunt concentrated only on the presentation of the correct number of the stones, since they were symbolically important bearing the names of the children of Israel and referring to the twelve chosen tribes. This rectangular plate may be identical with the breast-plate of judgement containing the mystic Urim and Thummin (Exodus 28:29-30), with the help of which the will of God could be made known to the children of Israel. This tripartite breast-plate, the creation of Hunt's fertile mind, combining the symbols of heathens, Christians, and Israelites represents the same message as the seven-sided lantern; that the light of the world is accessible to all regardless of denomination. This early and very conscious sign of Hunt's tolerance and open-mindedness in religious matters is often neglected, though such flexibility was not at all in conformity with current popular feeling. No wonder, therefore, that Hunt did not reveal the meaning of these symbolic objects of the painting till 1865. Even then it was a rare thing to hold such tolerant views, but by that time the painting had gained so much in popularity that basically nothing could damage its public reputation.

When first exhibited in 1854, the picture did not bring immediate success, despite the fact that the Victorian spectators had not the slightest idea about its more complicated symbols and the liberal view they reflected. The *Art Journal*, for example, disapproved of it for its realisation of the ideal, writing that "The knocking at the door of the soul is a spiritual figure of such exaltation that it must

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[17] Referred to by F. G. Stephens in *William Holman Hunt and His Work*, 1860. Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 119.

lose by any reduction to common forms."[18] To accept Hunt's ambitious attempt to render a highly imaginative and symbolic image in a truly Pre-Raphaelite manner was, at first, difficult for the public. It must be added, however, that Hunt himself admitted making compromises in this case and deliberately idealising the face of the Saviour because he wanted to add a certain amount of mysticism to the image underlining its revelationary nature.[19] But the painter's approach was strongly criticised by Thomas Carlyle too, who wrote to Hunt in a letter:

> Do you ever suppose that Jesus walked about bedizened in priestly robes and a crown, and with jewels on His breast, and a guilt aureole round His head? ... Don't you see that you are helping to make people believe what you know to be false, what you don't believe yourself?[20]

In Carlyle's view Hunt offended against what is called by Houghton Victorian earnestness[21] by presenting something that was historically obviously not true. He disapproved of Christ being shown as a "feeble, pretty priest, decked out in bejewelled finery," and called *The Light of the World* a "papistical phantasy."[22] He detected a sense of Catholic sympathy, and the painting was quickly rejected. And Carlyle, in a sense, was obviously right. Christian mysticism and inspired, enthusiastic visions belonged more to the Catholic tradition of worship, and it is no wonder, therefore, that this painting was again purchased by the Tractarian Thomas Combe.

Strangely enough, by the 1860s *The Light of the World* had become a celebrated icon of Victorian Protestantism.[23] The Victorians came to see it as it was seen by Bickley, who wrote in 1923 that:

> It is ... the religious picture of the Protestant. Hunt was, except for his talent, a typical Protestant Englishman of his time. He put all himself into that work, depicting a Saviour solemn and humane, whose aureole

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[18] Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 118.

[19] As Hunt wrote in a letter to J.L. Tupper on 20th June, 1878, he "... felt very determined to make the figure mystic in aspect." Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 119.

[20] Bell, Quentin: *A New and Noble School, the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: MacDonald, 1982) p. 77.

[21] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) pp. 220-22.

[22] Kenneth Bendiner, *An Introduction to Victorian Painting* (Yale University Press, 1985) pp. 67, 69.

[23] Cf. David Crowley, *An Introduction to Victorian Style* (London: Apple Press, 1990) p. 70.

signified his holiness but hinted at no Popish mysteries. The picture struck an answering and lingering chord in a million English breasts.[24]

Though in view of his religious tolerance it seems to be questionable whether Hunt was a typical Protestant of his time, it is undeniably true that, in the end, the painting became immensely popular, not least because of its concentration on the most important problem occupying the public religious mind in the 1860s.

By that time the detestation of Catholicism and fear of Catholic propaganda was pushed into the background by a far more harassing problem: the spreading of scepticism, and even the loss of Christian belief altogether. A certain amount of mysticism thus became more easily accepted as long as it served conversion or helped to preserve faith. Hunt's picture warned Christians never to abandon their religious duties, never to discard the love and service they owe to their Saviour. This image, which showed Christ appearing to the living in a very realistic setting could give a much needed reassurance to many of its spectators, and made the work a desirable piece for reproduction, to be hung in schoolrooms and family parlours. Though J. Steegman feels that this "... timorous, self-pitying Christ could in no circumstances ... illuminate or save the world,"[25] his view was definitely not shared by the crowds who wanted to possess a copy. However, Steegman's claim that the image has an unmistakable sentimental appeal, an early symptom which "... foreshadows the decline of the early, intense, pure Pre-Raphaelitism into a sentimental-romantic otherworldliness"[26] can be easily agreed with. Giving way to idealisation and irrational elements in this picture, Hunt moved away from his earlier principles, but only to return to pure realistic presentation in his next work.

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[24] Bickley p. 241.

[25] John Steegman, *Consort of Taste (1830-1870)* (London: Sidwick and Jackson Ltd, 1950) p. 262.

[26] Steegman p. 263.

TYPOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM: THE FINDING

In *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* Hunt attempted to achieve an overall accuracy: not just realism in presentation, but also a strict adherence to historical and biblical facts. Elements of mystic nature were completely excluded.

By 1854 Hunt became convinced that in order to present biblical scenes truthfully he had to go to the Holy Land and acquire a first-hand knowledge of the place and the people he intended to paint. His conception was part of a more general Victorian trend, and he was not the first and only painter in such a pursuit. Sir David Wilkie travelled to the Middle East in 1840, and David Roberts and John Frederick Lewis followed his example in 1842. Hunt finally left England in January 1854. He started working on *The Finding* in the same year, but it took 16 years till he could regard it as completed.

Since reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in 1847 Hunt had wanted to achieve such complexity in religious pictorial presentation as is shown by Ruskin in Tintoret's *Annunciation*. With *The Finding* Hunt, at last, could achieve his aim. Breaking away from the mystic nature of *The Light of the World* he could here successfully present matters of the spiritual world in a highly and purely realistic manner by making the most of prefigurative or typological symbolism. Highlighting the change in Hunt's artistic approach Landow points out that while *The Light of the World*

> recorded a vision that took form in [Hunt's] own mind, thus creating a pictorial emblem of that spiritual experience, ... the typological works ... gained access to the world of the spirit by means of symbols – types – which partake simultaneously of the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal.[27]

Though bound by the natural limitations of visual art and obviously able to depict only a single moment of the Saviour's life in one painting, Hunt extended the scope of his image by means of integrated prefigurative symbols: important past and future events are referred to, while all are focusing on the main incident actually shown.

The Finding basically concentrates on the clash between the old and new religious laws: Christ is shown as the bearer of new faith facing the stiff opposition of the Pharisees, the representatives of the old one. The main theme of

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[27] Landow p. 125.

rejection – the rejection of Christ and the new law he stands for – is underlined by parallel background scenes. A church-building process is shown on the right; masons are giving the finishing touches to the keystone while others are considering it and are about to reject it. Here Hunt applies a conventional type taken from the Bible itself, where Christ is referred to by the Apostles as the keystone of the church and the congregation (Matt. 21:42, 1Peter 2:5-6). Behind this scene, in the far distance, the Mount of Olives can be seen, the place of Christ's betrayal and consequent arrest. In the back of the Jewish temple a lamb is shown as being taken away for baptismal sacrifice, an obvious reference to Christ's own death.

The chief rejecters, the Rabbis sit in a semicircle around Christ, their discussion with the young boy brought to an end by the arrival of the relieved parents. The doctors are clearly not convinced, not yielding to Christ's arguments. Again, as is usual with Hunt, nothing is accidental in the presentation. In the case of this painting the indispensable detailed explanation is provided by F. G. Stephens, whose pamphlet was vetted by Hunt himself.[28] Stephen claims that each of the Rabbis stands for a certain aspect of the corruption of the old law, and thus together they are showing the unworthiness of their faith. The chief of them, a blind old man sitting on the left and clutching the Torah displays blind insistence upon the old, lapsed doctrine. His spiritual blindness is contrasted by the other blind figure of the picture, the beggar, who is sitting at the gate of the temple on the right side of the painting, and whose sight is to be restored by Christ for believing in his teaching (John 9:1-11). The other grey-bearded Rabbi, sitting next to the chief and holding a phylactery-box, represents the ever-faithful member of any establishment, who is never troubled by new ideas. His neighbour displays just the contrary quality; he is argumentative and passionate, but his eagerness is used only to prove his own point. The fourth Rabbi, wearing an unusually broad phylactery-box on his forehead, is an intellectual type, whose expression shows extreme self-satisfaction and self-centeredness, while the fifth is concerned only about his physical well-being. The next in the row, inquiringly leaning forward to catch a glimpse of the persons who interrupted the conversation, represents the envious, curious type, while the last one displays repugnant sensuality. The Torah, which contains the five books of Moses, is itself the symbol of the old law, and the young boys surrounding it display the idolatrous love with which it is adored; most of them are musicians, one of whom

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[28] Stephens' pamphlet is quoted in Landow pp. 87-92, and in *The Pre-Raphaelites* pp. 159-60.

is actually shown kissing the Torah, while another boy is employed to chase the flies away from this precious icon.

As opposed to the group of the Israelites inside the temple the Holy Family stand at its golden gate. Corresponding to the incident shown in the picture, a part of Malachi's prophecy is inscribed in Latin and Hebrew on the gate saying: "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to the temple" (Mal. 3:1). Malachi's prophecy can be found right at the end of the Old Testament, where through Malachi God complains about the ingratitude of Israel (Mal. 1), and the profanation of the covenant by her priests (Mal. 2), and He promises to send His messenger to renew His alliance with the people (Mal. 3). With Christ's appearance in the temple the prophecy is fulfilled, though it seems that nobody realises it except the young Christ himself.

He seems to be absorbed in distant thoughts, paying attention neither to the Rabbis and the discussion he had with them, nor to his mother who approaches him with great relief in finally finding her son after three days of search. As Landow suggests[29] the moment shown in the painting is actually Christ's sudden realisation of his appointed mission, an instant in which he may have a foreboding of his fate and his future work. Tiny, but important details can support this argument. One of them is that Christ is shown tightening his belt, which evokes the biblical descriptions of how Israelites were expected to "gird their loins" before going to battle or when preparing for hard work (Ex. 12:11, 2Kings 4:29, 9:1), and on the basis of Jeremiah (13:11) it can also refer to the reinforced bond between God and His people. The cross on Christ's belt, referring to his sacrificial death, is another sign of this renewed alliance. Another point to support Landow's idea is Hunt's choice of the quotations inscribed on the frame of the painting. He decided to omit certain lines of the section relating the story in order to direct the spectator's attention onto the aspects he found important in connection with his work. The biblical description of the scene can be found in the Gospel of Luke, and goes as follows:

> And when they found him not they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.
>
> And it came to pass that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.   (2:45-6)

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[29] Landow p. 102.

Here Hunt omitted the next verse which says: "And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (2:47). Then he continued quoting:

> And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.
> And he said unto them, How is that ye sought me? wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business? (2:48-9)

The next part was also left out: "And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them" (2:59). Then the story as well as the quote is concluded: "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart" (2:51).

Probably by reason of the fact that this event is the only one of the youthful years of the Saviour which is mentioned in the New Testament, it has always been a popular subject in religious painting. Traditionally, however, the emphasis was laid on Christ's teaching the doctors, while Mary and Joseph were treated as secondary characters shown perhaps at a far side or in the background of the picture.[30] In Hunt's painting just the contrary happens. The theological debate is pushed to the background, overshadowed by the family's reunion. In certain cases painters depicted the scene with Mary in the centre.[31] These works were conceived in the tradition which regarded the finding of the Saviour in the temple as one of Mary's seven joys as contrasted to the loss of the child in Jerusalem, which was considered as one of the Virgin's seven sorrows. Hunt's approach is even more striking when compared to this tradition. He presents the episode not at all as if it was a happy moment for the mother. Here Mary encounters a painful experience, a bitter feeling for being rejected for the first time by her son, an affliction which was on her mind and laid heavy on her heart for long. The theme of rejection is repeated here, though with a different meaning.

This sudden and quite ruthless denial of the mother by the young Christ is the sign of his realisation of his mission. An ignorant child has just turned into a man perceiving and taking on his duties and responsibilities. The painting thus presents an important Victorian concept according to which work was a supreme virtue, the condition of common progress and self-improvement. "Every one who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman,

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[30] See, for example, Bernardino Luini's *Christ among the Doctors*, or Giotto's *Christ among the Doctors*.
[31] See, for example, Claudio Coello's *The Child Jesus at the Gate of the Temple*.

has a mission, has a work," wrote Cardinal Newman.[32] It was man's duty as well as privilege to find his mission, and the critic of *The Athenaeum* was glad to see that "the idea of duty predominates all" in the painting.[33] "Blessed is the man who has found his work ...," "let him ask no other blessedness"[34] wrote Carlyle, and *The Finding* visualises the exact moment when Christ finds his work, the hardest and noblest ever delivered, as experienced in a sudden self-recognition, a divine message dressed in human form. For this quality of the painting Landow regards it as a Protestant version of the traditional Annunciation theme,[35] which eliminates the mystic immaculate conception and delivers the divine message to the conscious intellect of the youthful Christ. Accordingly, Mary appears as a simple earthly mother, puzzled and not comprehending her son's words and behaviour. The elected divine role of Mary is thus abolished, and the traditional Catholic adoration of her is denied. Mary's repudiation both on the concrete and on the abstract level is seen by Landow as Hunt's rejection of Roman Catholic Mariolatry.[36]

To regard the painting as a unique Annunciation can again be justified by small details incorporated in the crowded scene. The doves, for example, the indispensable attributes of the Annunciation scenes are present, traditionally symbolising the Holy Ghost, God acting spiritually. They enter the church together with Christ, enhancing the idea that a divine message is delivered to the Israelites by the appearance of Christ. As Christ the messenger is rejected by the Pharisees, so are the doves chased out of the temple by a Jewish girl in the background. Also in the background, on the left-hand side, a man is shown lighting a lamp, which may correspond to Christ's rejected message on the basis of the Gospel of St John: "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (1:5), but it may also underline Christ's own illumination.

In such complex symbols as these Hunt could find the proper means to work with. Employing them he could spiritualise concrete facts or details, deliver moral messages, and, in addition, calculate that many of the Victorians would find them relatively easy to understand, since they were widely used in sermons,

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[32] Quoted in Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1995) p. 56.

[33] Bendiner p. 66.

[34] Houghton pp. 243-44.

[35] Landow p. 102.

[36] Landow p. 103

especially by the Evangelicals.[37] And, though it is very difficult to estimate how much an average contemporary spectator could really comprehend of the picture's abundant symbolism, the outstanding public success the painting enjoyed immediately after its first display suggests that the method needed for basic understanding was familiar to most of them. In a way *The Finding* is similar to the so called Victorian 'problem pictures'[38] which invite the spectator to detect clues that can help a fuller understanding, thus to "read the painting" like a book. The basic difference between a problem picture and Hunt's *The Finding* or the later *The Shadow of Death* is that while the former relies almost exclusively on visual hints and requires only an attentive examination of the painting, the decoding of Hunt's works presupposes literary, mostly biblical erudition, since they employ symbols and not just visual elements as keys to understanding.

A. P. Oppe attributes the picture's popularity to what he sees as the conventionality of the work. As he says:

> [people] flocked in thousands to see the picture which was certainly England's masterpiece and perhaps the world's, not only because it had taken longest to paint and had fetched the largest price, but also because it contained the greatest mass of detail and the brightest colours, with no novelty of conception to puzzle the mind and no disconcerting visual feature of atmosphere or design.[39]

He adds that the painting exhibits "precisely the semi-classical convention which the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had originally set out to replace," and that it was "in effect a criticism of the early Christian affectations displayed by Millais in *The Carpenter's Shop* and, still more, the growing eccentricities of Rossetti."[40] There is, of course, a difference between the religious sentiment of Millais' and Rossetti's early works and Hunt's reserved moral symbolism. However, they all reflect the same interest in making Christ's life more familiar, trying "to actualise the distant and scarcely conceivable," as J. D. Hunt puts it.[41] Millais' wish to present a real carpentry with unidealized figures in his *Carpenter's Shop* and Rossetti's aim to

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[37] Landow p. 106.

[38] See, for example, Alfred Rankley's *Old Schoolfellows* (1854), Robert Braithwaite Martineau's *The Last Day in the Old Home* (1861), or George Elgar Hicks' *Woman's Mission, Companion of Manhood* (1863).

[39] G. M. Young, ed., *Early Victorian England 1830-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 170.

[40] Young 171.

[41] John Dixon Hunt p. 26.

show the scenes of Mary's life in a genuine, historically plausible manner in his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* served a purpose similar to that of Hunt. In *The Finding* Christ's presentation as a strong Jewish boy as well as the painstaking effort to provide an authentic setting[42] was part of a general tendency to convince people about Christ's real, historical existence, at a time when the credibility of the biblical stories was challenged by scientific evidence.

The Finding in this respect, and painting in general, preceded most of the scholarly or literary attempts which tried to present a verisimilar account of the life of Christ. Apart from Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, which was written in 1835 but published in England in George Eliot's translation only in 1846, there was no such publication till the 1860s, when the writings of Renan, J. R. Seeley, Sir Richard Hanson, Bishop Ellicott, and later F. W. Farrar came out within a short time. And though Strauss' work is regarded as the first startling attempt "to describe Jesus as a human person,"[43] it is also considered as an unsuccessful endeavour, which failed for being "too theological to be historical."[44]

In the sense that *The Finding* served as a kind of reassurance for the Christian congregations about the validity of their faith, it has a message similar to that of the earlier *The Light of the World*. The difference, though, is that the imaginative, visionary character of *The Light of the World* made it less readily accessible to its audience than the more realistic nature of its successor.

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[42] Apart from travelling to the Holy Land in order to see the place where all these biblical events actually happened, Hunt examined different sources to find the possible architectural features of an early Jewish temple to show Herod's temple in the painting accurately. He studied, for example, the Alhambra Court of the Crystal Palace, and the biblical description of Solomon's temple (2Chron. 3:7, 4:12-13). For further details see Bendiner pp. 73-75.

[43] Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) vol. 2, p. 61.

[44] Chadwick 62.
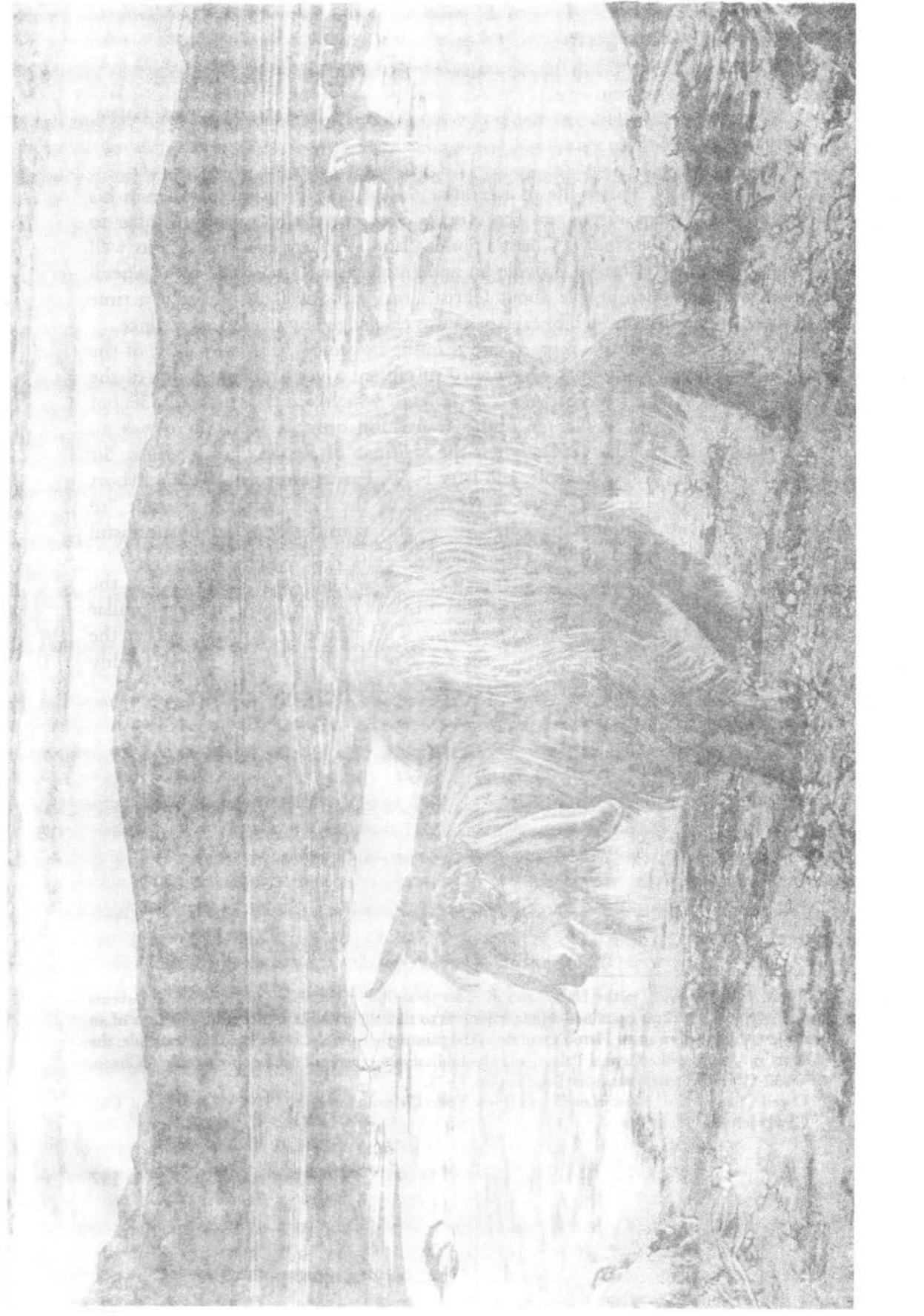
APPALLING ACCURACY: THE SCAPEGOAT

Though regarded as the most consistent in his artistic principles among the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt never quite repeated himself. The famous *The Scapegoat* which was produced during the intervals when Hunt had difficulties carrying on with his work on *The Finding*,[45] presents an unparalleled, most unusual religious image. While making use of the same type of typological symbolism as he applied in *The Finding*, he here singled out one basic type and made it the core of his conception employing other types only as subordinate ones with complementary functions.

The chosen type is again not new in itself; it is taken from the Old Testamental description of the sacrificial goat, which is the traditional type of the Saviour. The surprising thing is, though, that never before in Hunt was this type used or shown in visual presentation. When he discovered it as a novel subject for a painting Hunt thought of offering it as a theme to Landseer, the celebrated animal painter of the time, the Queen's favourite painter, but finally he decided on the execution himself. Landow sees Landseer's *An Offering* (1861) presenting a goat bound and laid upon a pile for sacrifice as a successor of Hunt's *Scapegoat*,[46] and strangely enough, J. Nicoll finds a possible predecessor to Hunt's work in another of Landseer's paintings, *The Challenge*, which was first exhibited in 1844.[47] Though *The Challenge* is very different in conception from *The Scapegoat*, not even a religious picture, the scene – a solitary animal in a desolate land with a lake and distant mountains in the background – definitely bears some resemblance to Hunt's.

In other respects, however, Hunt's *The Scapegoat* has nothing in common with Landseer's popular, often sentimental animal pictures. Landseer masterly exploits the characters of the animals portrayed, often endowing these images with human traits as he does in *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (1837), *The Monarch of the Glen* (1839) or in *Dignity and Impudence* (1851). As Treuherz describes, Landseer "brings to animal painting the epic and heroic qualities of high art."[48] Hunt's exhausted, starving goat has neither dignity, nor sentiment.[49] It

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[45] Hunt had great difficulties in finding sitters for his painting, since in 1854 it was forbidden for the Jews to work for Christians, and Hunt insisted on employing only semitic models. For further details see *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 158.

[46] Landow p. 110.

[47] John Nicoll, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Studio Vista, 1970) p. 18.

[48] Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) p. 30.

generates neither elevated feelings, nor sweet smiles; it is basically repulsive and unpleasant to look at. This is, of course, a great achievement, since that is exactly the moral 'duty' of the picture: to rouse the benignant spectator by showing him how an innocent creature must suffer for his own iniquities.

The intention was noble and the idea was not new, since all the traditional Crucifixion pictures carry the same message.[50] Nevertheless, the painting seems to have been destined to instinctive rejection. As Houghton points out evasion was an important aspect of Victorian hypocrisy,[51] which basically meant that people simply wanted to "shut their eyes to whatever was ugly or unpleasant and pretended it didn't exist."[52] Hunt's picture discomfited many of its Victorian spectators. Rossetti's comment, made when he first saw *The Scapegoat*, shows his clear insight into the situation; he said that *The Scapegoat* was "a grand thing, but not for the public."[53] Ruskin, on the other hand, proved to be a typical Victorian in this sense. Already 1846, in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, he had definitely rejected all pictorial presentations of bodily pain regarding it as morally erroneous.[54] So he was obviously not pleased by what he saw in Hunt's canvas. After the picture's first display at Royal Academy he wrote that:

> ... the mind of the artist has been so excited by the circumstance of the
> scene, that, like a youth expressing his earnest feelings in feeble verse ...,
> in his honest desire to paint a scapegoat, he has forgotten to ask himself
> first, whether he could paint a goat at all.[55]

Whether Ruskin, who had probably never seen a dying Middle Eastern goat, was right or just tried to give justification for his instinctive detestation of such an

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[49] As in many things in connection with *The Scapegoat* there is a disagreement concerning the sentimental appeal of the painting. While Landow, for example, says that "Hunt has given the animal an almost human expression, which strikes one as ludicrously sentimental rather than deeply moving" (pp. 107f), Hilton claims that "The Scapegoat totally fails to make use of the revolution effected by Edwin Landseer ... through which animals could be made to represent human emotions" (p. 110).

[50] Had Hunt painted a "Crucifixion" it probably would have been more easily acceptable to the public, since that image was so conventional that nobody would have felt offended. But Hunt always wanted to avoid conventionalism, as it is also shown by his unique version of the crucifixion theme, *The Shadow of Death*, painted between 1870-73.

[51] Houghton p. 395.

[52] Houghton 395.

[53] Letter to William Allingham in 1856. Quoted in Landow p. 108.

[54] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 2, pp. 279-80.

[55] Andrea Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1981) p. 66.

awful, tortured creature is hard to tell. Nevertheless, Hunt was as firm as ever in his determination to adhere to realistic presentation and tried to capture the agony of the goat as perfectly as he could. So much so that, always working after real life models, he bought a goat in Usdam and took it to the proper location, where the poor animal had to perish on the altar of high art being starved to death while 'posing' on the infertile shores of the Dead Sea.

Despite the shocking novelty of the image, it seems, it caused no difficulty for the public to understand its symbolic references. As usual, Hunt provided help by placing biblical quotations as well as other referential signs on the frame. On the upper panel the prophecy of Isaiah can be read: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted" (53:4). On the lower part of the frame a passage from Leviticus is quoted: "And the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (16:22). The first citation and its reference to Christ's passion were easily understood by the viewers, who knew it, if not directly from Isaiah then from the text of Handel's *Messiah*, which was a highly popular piece at the time.[56] This first reference together with the second quote made the painting's central type easy to grasp.

In the symbolism of the picture Hunt basically relied on the descriptions of the Day of Atonement ritual as it is found in the Bible, the Talmud, and J. Lightfoot's *The Temple Service as it Stood in the Dayes of our Saviour* (1649). According to the Hebraic custom two goats were selected as penitential symbols of human sin on the Day of Atonement, one of which was sacrificed on the altar, while the other was first abused by being beaten, kicked and spat upon, then sent into the wilderness to perish slowly. Thus it carried away the sins of man, which were transferred to the goat beforehand by "lay[ing] both ... hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess[ing] over him the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins" (Leviticus 16:21). It was also part of the tradition that a red fillet was bound about the horns of the goat, and as the

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[56] See the letter of Lowell Mason, in Sept. 1852: "Whatever may be the reason, the fact is certain, that in England the *Messiah* is vastly more popular than any other oratorio. The best judges of music, professors and amateurs, the learned and the unlearned, the noble and the ignoble, the great and the little, those who ride in proud carriages, with servants liveried with buff and scarlet, and those who walk through the rain with cotton umbrella, the old and grave, the young and gay, those who love music, and those who do not know whether they have any love for it or not; – all do homage to this mighty production of Handel." Quoted in J. M. Golby, ed., *Culture and Society in Britain 1850-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 167.

sign of God's acceptance of man's offering and His remission of sins the colour of the fillet turned from red to pure white. Accordingly, Hunt's picture shows the goat with a red fillet around his horns, indicating that redemption has not yet come.

The painting perfectly renders the stifling heat and heavy, oppressive air of the hot summer eve in Usdam, as the Atonement rituals were traditionally performed in September or in October. Total devastation rules the land, where all that lives is doomed to perish, as it is shown by the eerie skeleton of a camel in the background. As he says in one of his letters,[57] Hunt himself wanted the sense of despair to suppress the sense of hope, that is why he made certain changes between the first, smaller version and the final, bigger one.[58] The first version suggests far more optimism presenting a magnificent rainbow spanning over the desolate land, the rainbow traditionally referring to God's mercy and a renewed covenant on the basis of Gen. 9:8-17. Finding it too dominant and too optimistic, Hunt omitted the rainbow from the second version, and he also changed the colour of the goat. Originally he wished to paint a black goat, which was more common, seeing it as the personification of Azazeel, the evil demon (Lev. 16:8,20,26), but later he opted for the rarer white one in order to emphasise the purity, the sinless nature of the animal, and therefore strengthening its symbolic power as a type of the Saviour.

There are, however, faint but obvious references to future redemption, which somewhat sooth the overall despair of the scene. An olive branch shown in the lower left corner represents not just life as a plant but also recalls the story of Noah in Genesis suggesting the coming end of the devastation. The reflection of the full moon on the water shown in the upper left corner appears as a halo round the horns of a scull in the water, which may refer to the other goat already sacrificed in the temple and accepted as an offering. The decorations on the frame also try to counterbalance the overwhelming eerie atmosphere of the picture. The olive branch is shown again on the left frame, and facing it on the right a five-petalled rose can be seen, a conventional symbol of the stigmata, out of which four trees grow in the direction of the four cardinal points, together probably standing for the renewal of life acquired through the Passion and sacrifice of Christ. On the horizontal frames a group of seven stars and a seven-branched

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[57] Letter to Agnew in 1906, quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 154.
[58] The first, smaller version was started in 1854, but actually finished only in 1858, later than the second, bigger one, which was begun on 17 November 1854 and completed in early June in 1855.

candlestick are shown referring to the seven churches of Christ and their angels (Rev. 1:20) as they appear in the hands of the Saviour at the Last Judgement, who finally makes them triumphant.

However, these tiny details did not relieve the painting of its terror. And even if it was not taken with widespread enthusiasm by the public, Rossetti's appreciation was echoed by other artist friends who regarded *The Scapegoat* as something special, as something matchless in the history of religious art. Charles Collins expressed his enthusiasm writing to Hunt:

> I was especially struck with the noble idea of the *Scapegoat*. It is a glorious subject full of wild terror and (much more) one of the strongest and most unmistakable types of Him who bore our sins and was wounded for our transgressions and as that it becomes a theme of the utmost and most touching interest and importance. I envy you the subject, only glad that it has got into better hands than mine.[59]

And another colleague, Ford Madox Brown wrote that:

> ... Hunt's *Scapegoat* requires to be seen to be believed in. Only then can it be understood how, by the might of genius, out of an old goat, and some saline encrustations, can be made one of the most tragic and impressive works in the annals of art.[60]

BENEATH THE SURFACE: HUNT'S FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO RELIGION

While staying in the Holy Land and working on *The Finding* and *The Scapegoat*, Hunt became acquainted and then made friends with a unique person of prophetic nature, a Zionist and early advocate of world peace; Henry Wentworth Monk. At that time Monk was absorbed in his studies of Revelation, and his thoughts and ideas as well as his individual approach to the Bible made a strong impression on Hunt.[61]

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[59] Landow p. 109.

[60] Wood p. 44.

[61] As Hunt wrote: "His [Monk's] knowledge of history, and his enthusiasm for the progressive thought stored in the Bible, made him of special interest to me" (Andrea Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*. [Oxford: The Oxford Illustrated Press, 1981. p. 56]). And also: "He is certainly a man of

Monk was born in Canada, and was originally trained for the Church of England, but during a serious illness, when he was in a trance, he experienced a revelatory vision of God, which entirely changed his view of religion. From that time on he firmly rejected all forms of traditional religious teaching, and started studying the Bible as if it were a record of similar revelations to the one he himself had experienced in his trance. In his studies he relied solely on the text of the Scriptures disregarding all commentaries, and he came to the final conclusion that the promised millennium was imminent. Besides his biblical studies he also stood up for the foundation of an independent Jewish state in the Holy Land regarding its establishment as his own appointed mission.

Though Hunt could not accept many of Monk's prophetic ideas, he revered his friend's genuineness and vast knowledge, and found Monk's missionary zeal akin to his own belief in the priestly nature of art and his own divine mission as an artist. So together with Ruskin he helped Monk to have the fruit of his hard work, an individual interpretation of the Revelation[62] published in 1858. During the time Monk spent in London preparing the publication, Hunt painted a portrait of him, which was to accompany the written work in its propagation of Monk's ideas.

Accordingly, all the details in the picture bear significant references to Monk's views. He is shown in a priestly, gold and brown eastern robe, which refers to his errand to work for the establishment of a Jewish state, and which is decorated with golden stars, emblems of heavenly brightness.[63] His missionary zeal and strong determination are suggested by his undeviating expression. The long hair and beard, which were grown under the vow of not cutting them until the kingdom of Heaven was established on Earth, make his appearance that of a prophet. He holds in his right hand a copy of the Greek New Testament open at the last pages: at the Revelation, and in his left he has a sealed copy of The Times referring to the seven seals mentioned in Revelation and suggesting that the time had finally come for them to be broken (Rev. 5). The green glass window, which is made of square panels with bubbles in the middle, and which provides the background to the painting, also refers to Monk's pamphlet. It is there to recall

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intellect and with the clearest exposition of the Bible mysteries I have ever heard" (*The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 181).

[62] *A Simple Interpretation of the Revelation* (1858)

[63] In the case of these allusions Hunt relied on Pugin's *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costumes* (1844).

the sea of glass described in Revelation (4:6, 15:2), which can be identified with the water above the firmament mentioned in Genesis (1:6-8); in both cases referring to Heaven itself. It is also important that Hunt painted the glass of the window opaque, for it suggests that the heavenly world could not yet be clearly seen, since the millennium had not yet come. As is said in the Bible:

> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part,
>   But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part
> shall be done away. ...
>   For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I
> know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known(1Cor. 9:10,12).

Monk's portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860, and, as the sitter's religious views were not familiar to the public, its symbolism was basically unnoticed. In the case of this painting, luckily for Hunt, no one suspected religious propaganda. Monk's pamphlet, just like Hunt's painting, passed unmarked, leaving the sitter and his views in obscurity. Had Hunt's open-mindedness and support for such an independent religious presentation been known, it probably would not have remained without comment and criticism.

The general unconcern for Monk's pamphlet at the time of fervent religious debates may seem peculiar. *Essays and Reviews*, a collection of seven essays concerned with Bible-interpretation[64] set off an excited stir in the clerical world, despite the fact that the liberal views that some of the essays propagated were not entirely new. In general the volume which was promoted by Frederick Temple, first principle of Trinity College, and Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, was intended to "encourage free and honest discussions of Biblical questions."[65] In Owen Chadwick's opinion the main reason for the agitation that followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 was not so much its content, but rather the fact that the essays were written by eminent members of the Church of England,[66] and "if laymen had written it," writes Chadwick, "it would have fallen dead from the press."[67] Monk was, on the contrary, an isolated, eccentric prophet,

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[64] Just like Monk, one of the essayist, Benjamin Jowett also stood for studying the Bible independently from all traditional interpretations.

[65] Chadwick vol. 2, p. 75.

[66] As has already been mentioned, the only layman among the authors was C. W. Goodwin, the others, Temple, Jowett, Rowland Williams, H. B. Wilson, Mark Pattison, and Professor Baden Powell held important clerical posts.

[67] Chadwick vol. 2, p. 78.

who had nothing to do with the institution of the established church, and who even spent most of his life far away from England. Thus the publication of his individual ideas was seen as no threat to the Anglican Church.

PICTORIAL HISTORICISM: THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Parallel to the desire to reconsider some aspects of the traditional interpretation of the Bible, there was a popular demand for a historically reliable account of the life of Christ. As has already been mentioned, the first biography of Christ written in this spirit was Strauss' *Leben Jesu* in 1835, but the real flood only followed in the 1860s. As Owen Chadwick points out,[68] the trend was significantly boosted as travelling became much easier than it had been before, which encouraged ever more people to explore distant and exotic countries. Given its sacred appeal, the Holy Land had always been a popular destination, and those who could afford the journey obtained a real knowledge of the land and the people of which so far they had only remote and obscure ideas. And as 19th-century Palestine became familiar through personal experiences and written or pictorial accounts, so did the Palestine of the first century start to lose its mysticism.

A lively, though somewhat idealised image of Palestine appeared in Ernest Renan's famous biography of Christ, *Vie de Jesus*. It was first published in 1863, and though the English translation was not as highly popular as its original French edition, it was widely read, and it also stimulated English writers to follow suit. The first account of Christ's life from an English author was published quite soon, in 1865. The book, *Ecce Homo* was brought out anonymously,[69] which probably contributed to the fact that it soon became a central topic of conversation. Typically of general interest, the peak in its sale came after Lord Shaftesbury's public remark describing *Ecce Homo* as "the most pestilential book ever vomited ... from the jaws of hell."[70] Nonetheless, the book was very much in agreement with the general concerns of most churchmen and intellectuals, since it drew attention to the importance of Christian morality. The next biography of Christ, Sir Richard Hanson's *The Jesus of History* was issued in 1869, and it was followed within just five years by F. W. Farrar's *Life of Christ*. Farrar's work became far the most popular among all the biographies in England. Apart from

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[68] Chadwick vol. 2, p. 62.
[69] The author later turned out to be J.R. Seeley, professor of Latin at University College, London.
[70] Chadwick vol. 2, p. 65.

these complete biographies, several pamphlets, studies, and articles were published on the same subject from such prominent authors as Samuel Hinds, former Bishop of Norwich, C. J. Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, and Archbishop Thomson of York.

With his next painting, Hunt made a pictorial contribution to the current interest in the history of Christ's life. The idea of *The Shadow of Death* (1870-73) was suggested to the artist by his reading of Renan's book, in which he saw the manifestation of a similar desire for realistic presentation in writing to his own in painting. As he wrote in one of his letters:

> ...with my particular picture [*The Shadow of Death*] and old religious priest teaching I see nothing at all in common, and I should think that so far from any ecclesiological school being pleased with it that it is more fitted by itself for the Renan class of thinkers who have been studying the life of Christ as one particular branch of history – ... my picture is strictly – as the Temple picture was – *historic* with not a single fact of any kind in it of a supernatural nature, and in this I contend it is different for all previous work in religious art.[71]

In its conscientious realism, *The Shadow of Death* is obviously a successor of the previous *The Finding*. There is, however, an important novel element in its conception. So far Hunt relied on the prefigurative symbolism of the Bible itself in his paintings, but here, for the first time, he himself created a type, which was entirely visual, which did not and could not have a written equivalent. Christ is depicted in the painting as a carpenter, who is stretching out his exhausted body after a long day's hard work. With his extended arms his body constitutes a cruciform, the shadow of which is reflected on the wall behind, cast at a wooden rack of tools. The visual images of Christ and his shadow become the prefigurative symbols of the Crucifixion.

To show the Saviour as a toiling carpenter was in itself a quite novel thing. Christ was sometimes shown as a young boy assisting St Joseph, who is known to have been a carpenter, but Christ himself is usually not associated with the craft, despite the fact that according to a brief reference in the Bible (Mark 6:3) he had worked as a carpenter until he started his missionary work at the age of about thirty. The timing for Christ's presentation as a labourer was ideal. Showing Christ as a working man, taking on ordinary, manly tasks was a

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[71] Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 221.

conception which very pertinently reflected upon the dominant issues concerning contemporary spectators. The citation inscribed on the frame was again carefully chosen by Hunt to suit his painting and support the message it carried. It is from the Epistle of St Paul to the Philippians, in which the apostle exhorts his readers to follow Christ's example in love, unity, and humility. The inscribed lines emphasise Christ's own humiliation as the servant of the Lord, taking on a human form and unquestioning obedience:

> ...he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in likeness of men:
> And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.   (Phi. 2:7-8)

Just like the painting itself these lines emphasise Christ's likeness to man and not his superiority, just as it was intended by Christ's ardent biographers. In addition, the painting displays an explicit reference to the value of labour by associating it with the Saviour. As has already been mentioned in connection with *The Finding*, work was a key notion for the Victorians; but whereas *The Finding* concentrated on work as a mission or duty, *The Shadow of Death* focuses on its physical nature. The interpretation of work in this sense was more ambiguous, since Hunt had to reconcile the 19th-century evaluation of labour with the traditional biblical view of it which in itself was equivocal.

Manual labour was held in unusually high esteem in the second half of the 19th century. Generally the Broad Church party was known for its respect for the labourer and his hard work, especially because of the ideas and activities of two of its leading personalities, Thomas Arnold and Frederick Denison Maurice. But apart from them, Carlyle was also a well-known advocate of the ennobling effect of both mental and physical work, and John Ruskin as well as William Morris thought likewise. Ruskin, for example, as Slade Professor at Oxford University took his students to build roads finding it a useful complementary to their intellectual education. Morris, in his utopian novel *News from Nowhere* and in his articles like *How We Live and how We Might Live* and *Useful Work Versus Useless Toil*, often confirmed his belief in the utility as well as the joy of creative and productive physical work.

The respect for manual labour often also featured in contemporary painting. Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1865), which was conceived under the influence of Carlyle's writings, is known as the pictorial glorification of man's power to do useful work. William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1861), Millais's *The*

Resque (1855), and John Brett's *The Stonebreaker* (1858) show similar pride and respect. Even the exhausted, effete, haggard workman was sometimes seen as respectable, as it is shown by Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (1858). Wallis, quite typically, quoted Carlyle in the exhibition catalogue:

> Venerable to me is the hard Hand; crooked, coarse; ... indefeasibly royal, as of the Sceptre of this Planet. Venerable too is the rugged face, all weather-tanned, besoiled, with its rude intelligence; for it is the face of a Man living manlike. Oh, but the more venerable for thy rudeness, and even because we must pity as well as love thee! Hardly entreated Brother! For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy strait limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. For in thee lay a good-created form, but it was not to be unfolded; encrusted must it stand with the thick adhesions and defacements of labour, and thy body, like thy soul, was not to know freedom.[72]

Though Carlyle's view was steadily spreading and the presentation of the defacements of labour in connection, for example, with a stonebreaker became acceptible or even respectable, the same thing probably would not have applied to a painting presenting the members of the Holy Family. Thus while Hunt was as accurate as ever in the presentation of the Middle Eastern workshop, he paid attention to show Christ as a strong, muscular young man perfect and healthy not just in soul, but in body alike. When twenty-four years earlier Millais had depicted St Joseph in his *Carpenter's Shop* he showed a real carpenter with all the bodily deformities caused by his hard work, so, in this sense, his work was more realistic and more audacious than Hunt's *The Shadow of Death*. No wonder, therefore, that while Millais' work was found appalling, Hunt's picture was greeted with sincere enthusiasm.

Similarly to the 19th-century view of the true worth of labour, the Bible also regards work as a dignifying duty of man. Work is the task devolved on man by God (1Thes, 4:11); it is the condition of his living, as well as the source of his happiness (Psalms 128:1-4). However, hard daily labour is also referred to as a punishment imposed on man after the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19). Its cessation in the evening is, therefore, an obvious relief. The pamphlet[73] which accompanied the

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[72] From *Sartor Resartus*, quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 167.
[73] Supposedly written by Hunt himself. Cf. *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 221.

painting at the time of its first exhibition in 1873, pointed out both of these aspects of manual labour.

As Christ's daily work ends in the painting with his stretching, so would his work as the envoy of God on earth be accomplished by his crucifixion. Christ's passion and the Crucifixion are recalled by some other symbols. The reeds on the left, for example, refer to the mock sceptre given to Christ's hands, the red fillet carries all the references explained in connection with *The Scapegoat*, and here it also recalls the crown of thorns. The shadow of the saw appears as a spear pointing to the shadow image's heart which is represented as a plumb-bob hung on the wooden rack. The pomegranates on the window sill are traditional symbols of the Resurrection. The semi-circular upper section of the window behind Christ appears as a halo around his head, while the star in the middle refers to the prophecy of Balaam (Num. 24:17) and to the star which guided the Magi to the new-born Jesus. The visit of the Magi is also indicated by their gifts, revealed in the open chest on the left.

Mary is shown opening the chest, suddenly noticing the eerie cruciform shadow of her son on the wall; a moment of disturbing foreboding to her. Thus the painting can be seen again as a unique version of the ancient Annunciation theme[74] where the divine revelation is carried by the vision of the cross, and where not the birth, but the death of Christ is announced. Mary's kneeling position is reminiscent of the traditional Annunciation scenes, but here she is shown with her back to the spectator, which was regarded by contemporary critics as the manifestation of anti-Catholicism.[75]

The Shadow of Death, just like the previous *The Finding*, was greeted with general approval, and, for obvious reasons, the painting enjoyed an unusual popularity among the working classes. Despite, however, the success of the historical-realistic approach applied by Hunt in this painting, he was still fascinated by religious mysteries, and returned to its presentation in his last religious work, *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1876-87).

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[74] Cf. Stephen Adams, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Jersey: Chartwell Books, 1988) p. 120; Landow p. 121.

[75] Cf. *The Pre-Raphaelites* p. 223; Adams p. 120.

RETURN TO MYSTICISM: THE TRIUMPH OF THE INNOCENTS

After the relative comprehensibility of *The Shadow of Death*, *The Triumph* puzzled even the connoisseurs. The reason for the spectators' bewilderment was manifold. First of all Hunt combined two traditional, originally individual types of biblical presentations; the 'flight into Egypt' theme and that of the 'massacre of the Innocents.' In addition, the supernatural elements employed in this picture are far more unconventional than the ones, for example, in *The Light of the World*, and while *The Light of the World* presents an entire vision as it was envisaged in the painter's imagination, *The Triumph* shows the vision and its seer at the same time, making hardly any distinction between the real and the visionary. Furthermore, many of the symbols of the painting are so individual that instead of extending the meaning of the picture, they make it even more obscure.

The picture presents the Holy Family's escape from Bethlehem under cover of darkness: Mary, holding the infant Christ, is shown sitting on a donkey, which is led forward by St Joseph. So far the image is wholly conventional. It is unusual, however, that the proceeding Holy Family is accompanied by a procession of small children; three babies are even shown hovering in the air above the group on the ground. Each of these children is enveloped in a delicate layer of sacred light, otherwise they look like ordinary human figures. But they are actually spirits, the reincarnations of those children, who had been killed by Herod's troops in Bethlehem. They seem to be visible only to Christ,[76] who smilingly greets them turning and looking back to them twisting his body in his mother's arms. The fact that Christ catches sight of the otherworldly connects *The Triumph* with *The Finding*, though here the revelation is merely seen, and comprehended. Mary seems to be immersed in thought, while Joseph is looking back on the distant town they have fled from.

The children are shown as the first martyrs whose lives were sacrificed for Christ. They carry the attributes of their sacrifice and their subsequent redemption; garlands of flowers and laurel wreaths are around their waists and on their heads. The different plants in the hands of some of them are all biblical ones, each conveying a reference to salvation: the blossoming apple branch traditionally

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[76] Discussing the painting in one of his letters Hunt mentions that the vision is granted to the Virgin Mary, however, it becomes apparent in neither versions of the painting itself. Mary seems to be deeply immersed in thought, showing no concern for the proceeding spirits. For Hunt's letter see: Landow p. 130.

symbolising immortality, the red rose martyrdom, while the palm stands for the everlasting victory of those who died for Christ. The olive branch means hope and reconciliation, and the wine refers to Christ's blood in the Eucharist. The ripe ears of wheat in Christ's hand may refer to the bread of the Eucharist, but it also recalls a conventional pictorial version of the flight into Egypt theme, which presents in the background a field that is being put under wheat or where the wheat is being harvested.[77] This type of presentation goes back to the legend according to which on their flight the Holy Family passed a corn field just being sowed, and by the following day, when Herod's men inquired about the family, the wheat was already harvested.

Some of the children are endowed with further allusive marks. The one on the far right, leading the whole group, appears as a priest at the head of a procession. He is the only one who wears a long, brightly coloured dress, reminiscent of priestly robes, and also the only one looking forward and a bit upwards as if following divine guidance. The second child, marching right after him, is pointing a palm branch to the ground in front of the Holy Family, recalling the scene of Christ's entry to Jerusalem, the first stage of his passion and sacrifice. Another little boy in the foreground of the painting is a proper pictorial type of Christ, he is wounded on the chest recalling Christ's spear-wound suffered on the cross, and the pearls of the ruby necklace in his hands suggest the drops of Christ's blood.

The children proceed along and on a strange watery substance, sometimes narrow as a string of ropes, sometimes flat and round as a pool, which turns into shiny bubbles, or, as they were called by Hunt, into 'airy globes'[78] when it should cross a real brook. This unearthly surface on which the spirits of the Innocents move on is the stream of eternal life, which is transformed into bubbles since it cannot blend with ordinary water. The two biggest ones of these airy globes present individual pictures within the painting with symbolic references to Creation, the Fall, and the Redemption. Landow gives a detailed description of these visionary globes[79] relying on Hunt's own 15-page long explanation in the 1885 exhibition catalogue. According to it the biggest bubble shows Jacob's ladder connecting earth and heaven (Gen. 28:12-17), being thus often used as a type of

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[77] See, for example, Hans Vereycke: *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, or Joachim Patinir: *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*.

[78] Quoted in Wood p. 104.

[79] Landow pp. 130-35.

Christ. In the middle of the globe the Tree of Life can be seen, another pre-figurative symbol of Christ, which is often identified with the cross. The lion and the lamb, both symbols of Christ (Rev. 5:5-6), one for its power and strength, the other for its purity, are also presented. On the right, above the animals, a procession upon the heavenly ladder can be seen, while on the left a woman is shown as if being driven out from the Garden of Eden. The other, much smaller globe shows a red serpent approaching Christ's heel, recalling how God cursed the serpent after the Fall saying: "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head; and thou shalt bruise his heel"(Gen. 3:15). In traditional Christian theology this section is usually interpreted as the Lord's prophecy of Mary's triumph over original sin by giving birth to the Saviour, and of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion.

The inspiration for all these symbols came mostly from the Revelation, possibly also from Monk's interpretation of it. Describing the heavenly Jerusalem the Bible says:

> And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.
>
> In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life. ...
>
> And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.
>
> And they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.
>
> And there shall be no more night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.   (Rev. 22:1-2, 3-5)

To connect the bloody act of the massacre of the Innocents with these promising passages at the end of the Bible is highly unusual. The incident has always evoked scenes of torment and brutality; the display of human cruelty and selfishness. In his last religious work Hunt turned the bloodiest subject of religious painting into the celebration of Redemption and immortality.

Ruskin was understandably ecstatic about the painting, declaring that it was "the greatest religious painting of the time."[80] But his contemporaries were more puzzled than enthusiastic. No one doubted the picture's merits and the painter's creativity in producing once more something new and revolutionary,

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[80] Quoted in Frederick Harrison, *John Ruskin* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1907) p. 80; and Wood p. 104.

but most viewers were disturbed by "the strange mixture of real and unreal"[81] in the painting. F. G. Stephens, for example, found it "self-contradictory and puzzling," regarding *The Triumph* as a "noble failure."[82] In the *Edinburgh Magazine* a contemporary critic expressed the same when he wrote: "We honour the artist's aspiration, yet the attempt to render the minds intangible imaginings palpable to sense, is proved once more beyond the range of pictorial art."[83] Present-day criticism of the painting is also divided: to Graham Hough it is "original and beautiful,"[84] while Stephen Adams regards it as "a profoundly idiosyncratic and unlovely flight of fancy,"[85] and Christopher Wood as artistically not satisfying.[86]

Talking of Hunt's religious works in general, Wood claims that these pictures

> ... are symbols of Victorian faith; [which] to our sceptical, twentieth-century eyes ... seem too laboured, too sentimental and too evocative of the very kind of Victorian religiosity and humbug we have deliberately rebelled against.[87]

Nevertheless, all that these paintings reflect and manifest was, beyond any doubt, genuinely thought and felt by the painter, even if by today they definitely seem to be outdated and typically Victorian. But, at the same time, Hunt's works also reveal that he was unusually open-minded in his approach to religious issues, giving attention to Tractarian, Evangelical and independent views alike, and in this sense he was unlike most of his contemporaries.

Despite the fact that his faith deeply influenced his art, it is, as Landow points out, "difficult to define precisely the nature of that belief."[88] But, as he concludes, "Hunt's emphasis on strict morality, personal conversion, and typology all [suggest that] he shared more major points of belief with the

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[81] In *Art of England* (1883), quoted in Harrison p. 143.

[82] Quoted in Wood p. 104.

[83] In *Mr Holman Hunt: His Work and Career*. In Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*, 1886. In http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/Hunt/Triumph.

[84] Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1949) p. 66.

[85] Adams p. 120.

[86] Wood p. 106.

[87] Wood p. 106.

[88] In *William Holman Hunt's Religious Belief* in http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertxt/landow/Hunt.

Evangelicals than with other parties."[89] Nevertheless, the fact that, despite his prophetic vocation, he never openly took sides suggests that he did not think of himself belonging to any. Hunt seems to have agreed with Ruskin that:

> ... violent combativeness for particular sects, as Evangelical, Roman Catholic, High Church, Broad Church, – or the like, is merely a form of party egotism, and a defiance of Christ, not confession of Him.[90]

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[89] In *William Holman Hunt's Religious Belief* in http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertxt/landow/Hunt.

[90] John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* (London: George Allen, 1896) vol. 1, p. 296.

Szilvia Barta

The Comedy of the Tragic

Anticipations of the Theatre of the Absurd in William Butler Yeats's *The Death of Cuchulain*

Since William Butler Yeats is most often classified as a writer of poetic or symbolist drama, an attempt to search for absurdist elements in his plays may seem a rather dubious enterprise. I must also keep in mind the judgement of many of his critics that he is a minor figure as a dramatist. Thus, my intention is twofold, to argue that Yeats's drama anticipates certain constituents of the Theatre of the Absurd, and to propose a more positive positioning of Yeats as a dramatist. By "constituents" I mean the elements of both drama and theatre, and not textual borrowings of the playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd from Yeats's plays and poems, such as the titles of Beckett's plays ... *but the clouds ...,* or *Words and Music.* Such an approach is thwarted by Beckett himself when he rejects any connection between the characters of *The Cat and the Moon* and *Waiting for Godot.*[1] Yet there are scholars who claim that Yeats's dramaturgy includes absurdist principles. Richard Taylor, for instance, suggests in *The Drama of W.B. Yeats* that "his methods of poetic compositions and stage representations have influenced the recent flowering of the Theatre of the Absurd."[2] In *British Drama 1890 to 1950* R.F. Dietrich draws a similar conclusion about Yeats's role in creating a "total theatre"[3] while, to reverse the analogies mentioned above, Ch. Innes in *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* argues that Beckett's art is "the

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[1] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett. A Biography* (London: J.Cape, 1978) p. 383.

[2] Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W.B. Yeats. Irish Myth and Japanese No* (London: Yale UP, 1976) p. 187.

[3] Richard F. Dietrich, *British Drama 1890 to 1950. A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1989) p. 184.

extension of the symbolist line in British poetic drama from W.B. Yeats to T.S. Eliot."[4]

Among the few comparative studies devoted to discover the interrelation between the Irish dramatists, Katharine Worth's *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* even in the title suggests her attitude towards the two playwrights. Saying that "it is a narrow view to look at Yeats's dramas as part of only the 'Irish Dramatic Movement' as Una Ellis-Fermor does in *The Irish Dramatic Movement*," Worth associates him with Craig, Maeterlinck, Artaud, Beckett and the contemporary director, Brook.[5] At the same time, she lays emphasis on the elements of dramaturgy, like the "double-effect" as present in both Yeats and Beckett.[6] That my hypothesis is not far-fetched can also be justified by the correspondences between the Theatre of the Absurd and other Irish writers. One of these analogies is mentioned by Dietrich who interprets Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* as "the epitome of standing things on their heads."[7]

As it must have become clear from the comments quoted above, there are various dimensions in Yeats's drama that resemble certain experiments of modernist theatre. In the following, concentrating on *The Death of Cuchulain*, I would like to throw some light on these modernist tendencies in Yeats's poetic-symbolist play.

THE HERO AND HIS METAPHORS

The Cuchulain legend was one of Yeats's earliest discoveries. In the nineties he accumulated the primary figures of the "iconography of the Cuchulain cycle": the fool, the guardian and the shape-changing birds of ambiguous omen.[8] Since he was conscious of the spiritual regeneration of Ireland, he planned the Irish Mystical Order but gave up the project in 1903. During the Irish Literary Movement Yeats became an "amateur folklorist." He roamed over the country and noted the songs, poems, and stories of the village people. However, his interest and approach to Irish folklore and saga material – which was primarily

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[4] Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) p. 428.

[5] Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: University of London, 1978) pp. 1-2.

[6] Worth p. 259.

[7] Dietrich p. 70.

[8] Reg Skene, *The Cuchulain Plays of W. B. Yeats. A Study* (London: Macmillan, 1974) pp. 11f.

inspired by Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* – "have aroused much ridicule among Celtic scholars."[9] They did not seem to approve of Yeats's conception of the Irish literary and social revival and of his idea of folklore forming the real unity of a nation.

In studying the Cuchulain legend, Lady Gregory and her collection *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* provided Yeats with the mythological plot of the plays. Lady Gregory was another enthusiastic "collector" of Irish tales. Her works, though lacking critical evaluation, include a great variety of themes like visions and beliefs, gods and fighting men, saints and wonders. Yeats wrote a series of dance-plays based on the Cuchulain cycle: *On Baile's Strand* (1903), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939). But other plays are linked with fragments of Irish mythology like *Deirdre*, and *The Herne's Egg*. The Cuchulain plays are mostly studied as parts of a series because they are claimed to mark the crisis points of Yeats's life. Reg Skene and Birgit Bjersby were concerned with analysing the Cuchulain plays as a "psychological biography."

I wish to concentrate on *The Death of Cuchulain*, as it develops what Yeats had already implied in *The Herne's Egg*, that is, the destruction of the heroic. The first draft of the play was completed in September 1938 and Yeats finished it one month before his death on 28 January, 1939. In a letter to Ethel Mannin he describes his intentions on the presentation of the play: "I am writing a play on the death of Cuchulain; an episode or two from the old epic. My 'private philosophy' is there but there must be no sign of it; all must be like an old faery tale... ." In another letter written in January Yeats refers to the play as "strange and the most wooing" he had written for years (Letters, pp. 917-8.). It is true, the Cuchulain story which earlier serves as the ideal of heroism and the Celtic Revival becomes an image of destruction and loneliness in *The Death of Cuchulain*. But who was Cuchulain?

He earned his fame as the "Hound of Ulster," and his deeds are told in the Ulidian Heroic Tales that, as Gerard Murphy claims, find their parallels in Greek epic literature.[10] The "Irish Achilles" was celebrated as the symbol of the nationalist movements. Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, and even Yeats identified themselves with the image of Cuchulain during the Easter Rising in 1916, while

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[9] Bjersby, Birgit: *The Interpretation of "The Cuchulain Legend" in the Works of W. B. Yeats* (Upsala: Upsala UP, 1950) p. 7.

[10] Gerard Murphy, *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* (Dublin: Colm O. L., 1961) p. 26.

his female counterpart, the Countess Cathleen was represented by Maud Gonne. In his poetry and drama Yeats's personal and impersonal visions are projected into the hero who was partly the object of a heroic "cult," partly the metaphor of Yeats's inward struggles. The Cuchulain-image, however, gradually changed. In "The Circus Animal's Desertion" the poet recollects the heroes of the Irish mythology as "stilted boys," and "themes of the embittered heart"(pp. 391-2). As an irony of fate, Cuchulain – previously symbolizing the faith of modern Ireland – was cast into bronze to commemorate the unsuccessful Easter Rising. He became a "mummy-dead," one of "those old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can / old iron, old bones, old rags." In the poem Yeats describes the heroic deeds of Cuchulain with a sense of irony:

> And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
> Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;
> Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said
> It was the dream that enchanted me.
>
> (pp. 391-2)

The mythical hero degenerates in *The Death of Cuchulain*. Yet Skene states that the play remains a "monument, to the noble dream of an Irish nation founded on a 'heart-uplifting pride' rather than on hatred, envy, bitterness and suspicion of a land."[11] Although Yeats's play does not express hatred and envy, Cuchulain's death at the hands of the Blind Man, which recalls Congal's pathetic death in *The Herne's Egg*, cannot be interpreted as a "noble dream" or the manifestation of "heart-uplifting pride" but as the irony and the bitterness of the poet. By the end of Yeats's life, Cuchulain became "the statue" reviving the spirit of political and personal failures. A letter from April 1935 with a reference to Toller's plays shows Yeats's insistence on the theme of the revolution and his sympathy for a different dramatic experiment.

> My great sensation of recent weeks has been Toller's *Seven Plays* ...*Hoppla* and *The Blind Goddess* prove that Toller has taken up drama as it came from Ibsen and transposed it completely (turning towards the crowds) as Pirandello (turning towards the individual). (Letters p. 833.)

Ernst Toller's play, *Hoppla Wir Leben!*, reflects on the German Revolution in 1918-19. Toller himself, a member of the German expressionist movement, participated in the revolution as a commander of the Red Guard. But

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[11] Skene p. 21.

by the time *Hoppla* was completed in 1927, his enthusiasm and illusions turned into a tragi-comic feeling. Therefore, Toller's mood possibly resembled the attitude of the Irish dramatists, O'Casey and Synge, and consequently must have had an important impact on Yeats's anti-heroes.

ILLUSION AND RITUAL

The Death of Cuchulain opens with a prologue told by an Old Man "looking like something out of mythology"(p. 693). His speech as a dramatic innovation of the seventy-three-year old poet combines two functions. First, it implies Yeats's self-irony since he "looks back over a lifetime devoted to the attempt to re-establish ritual verse-drama in the modern theatre, in the face of the public preference for melodrama, realism and satire."[12] The ideals celebrated in the previous era are transformed into an "antiquated stuff" which is "out of fashion," while the Old Man enumerates the critical comments on Yeats's dramatic work. The prologue also functions as a "dramatic mirror" that has a double-effect. On the one hand it evokes laughter, on the other hand it awakens the awareness of the audience by quoting their own critical remarks. The same double-effect is achieved by the social clichés repeated in the Theatre of the Absurd. In *All That Fall*, for instance, Mrs Rooney turns to everyone on her way with the same question: "How is your poor mother?" (p. 177.) Her "mechanicalism" sounds comic, however, the spectator may realize that the laughing-stock – the clichés and the criticism retold by Mrs. Rooney and the Old Man – actually derives from those who laugh at it.

After confronting past and present in the prologue, the Old Man forecasts the events: "I promise a dance," "there must be severed heads" (p. 694). He drafts the plot and the scenery, instructs the movement of the dancers, and introduces the musicians. He is the "director" as he was "asked to produce a play"(p. 693). The introduction of the Old Man as the "Master of Revels" creates a distance between the drama and the audience, for he emphasizes that it is a well-directed performance, not reality, that the audience is going to see. Thus the prologue functions like the Brechtian "Verfremdungseffekt" removing the viewers from the illusory world of drama. As the alienation is already present in the critical remarks of the Old Man, Skene's idea to put Yeats's mask upon the Old Man in his production of *The Death of Cuchulain* seems to reverse and neutralize the

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[12] Skene p. 222.

intended effect.[13] The prologue is separated from the rest of the events, as the Old Man never emerges again. There is a similar introduction in *A Full Moon in March* in which two attendants arrive arguing about what song the director wished for. In the play, then, they act as the servants of the Queen, which implies the narrow border between reality and illusion. Their dialogue, like the Old Man's prologue may raise the problem of creation, although the characters slip into a new role with much confidence. They are not puzzled by their transitional state like the actors in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search for an Author*.

In the prologue the Old Man predicts Emer's dance with severed heads. Beheading, blood-sacrifice were equally part of the ritualistic ceremony of the Celtic warriors. The rite springs from the heroic age, along with the characters: Cuchulain, Eithne Inguba, Maeve (Aoife), Emer and Morrigu. The women encircle Cuchulain in a "fatal dance," because, as he says, "Women have spoken so, plotting a man's death" (p. 698). Finally, wounded by six men he is tied to a pillarstone, like Prometheus, with Aoife's veil. But the ritualistic sacrifice of the hero is abruptly interrupted by the Blind Man who kills Cuchulain for twelve pennies. This anti-heroic moment may be the reason why Taylor defines the play as a "thorough revision of *The Herne's Egg*."[14] After his inglorious death, Cuchulain is resurrected in Emer's dance that is not comic like the Lame Beggar's rite in *The Cat and the Moon*, but a moment of "pure theatre." Emer's dance rather recalls the conclusion of *A Full Moon in March* where the Salomé-like Queen dances with the head of a Swineherd she has killed.

The dance as a climactic point in the plot begins the ritualistic cycle of life and death in *The Cat and the Moon* and in *At Full Moon in March*. But in *The Death of Cuchulain* it is followed by the loud music of an Irish fair through which the illusion is broken. Northop Frye in his essay on Shakespearean tragedies emphasizes music as the symbol of the Apollonian world, and thus harmony, order, and stability. Linking the metaphors of harmony with social order he continues: "the passing of such an order is regularly symbolized by music." Departing from Frye's concept the concluding song can be interpreted as the revelation of a new age or the meditation on the interrelation of an old and a subsequent period.[15] Wilson argues for the song being the keypoint in the play,

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[13] Skene p. 123. (A production of *The Death of Cuchulain* staged by the author at the University of Winnipeg in 1969.)

[14] Taylor p. 188.

[15] Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1977) p. 23.

and this may be relevant because it relates the fable of Cuchulain to contemporary Ireland.[16]

> What stood in the Post Office
> With Pearse and Connolly?
> What comes out of the mountain
> Where men first shed their blood?
> Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
> He stood where they had stood?
>   (pp. 704f)

The lines draw attention to the responsibility of the leaders of the Easter Rising, while the Cuchulain-legend sets an example for the Irish who might have remembered Cuchulain not merely as a hero but a man whose death turned into the mockery of heroism. From this angle, Wilson's argument about the song as a "keypoint" could be paraphrased so that the interrelation of the song, the fable and contemporary Ireland is at the heart of the play.

Music and dance organize the ritual in *The Death of Cuchulain* as well as in *The Player Queen* and *The Cat and the Moon*. In Yeats's drama music may deliver a symbolic message – the "passing of an order" as Frye describes – which may be embedded in the structure of the plot, or the ideas of the characters. In the songs and the ritualistic dances inexpressible thoughts and emotions come to the surface, because one can be

> dancing as if language had surrendered to movement ... as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms.[17]

Emer's last dance is precisely instructed by Yeats:

> Emer runs in and begins to dance. She so moves that she seems to rage against the heads of those that had wounded Cuchulain....going three times round the circle of the heads. She then moves towards the head of Cuchulain ... she moves as if in adoration or triumph.   (p. 703)

Yeats's consciousness of movement is a modernist approach in the theatre, since he pointed out the importance of body language as a means to express emotions. He did not invent any new principles, but by returning to the ritualistic dance

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[16] Wilson, 'W.B. Yeats and Tradition' in Peter Ure, *Yeats the Playwright* (London: Routledge, 1969) p. 78.

[17] Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) p. 71.

that is "united" with the mind, he discovers how the player is able to enact his or her Self. Beckett's plays composed with musical effects, like *Words and Music*, also reflect the inner life of the characters. Yet, as life in the Theatre of the Absurd is degraded, in *Words and Music* the sounds of a rapping baton, and a thumping club can be heard instead of harmonic melodies. In Yeats's *The Herne's Egg* music accompanies the mock-heroic fight of the two kings, which can be similarly considered as a means to express the chaotic world and the disintegration of Self.

DREAMS AND MEMORIES

> It was only by watching my own plays upon the stage that I came to understand that this reverie, this twilight between sleep and waking, this bout of fencing, alike on the stage and the mind, between man and phantoms ... is the condition of tragic pleasure. (*Uncollected Prose* p. 389.)

Yeats describes dreams as if he instructed the figures of *The Death of Cuchulain* who move between "sleep and waking." The characters "appear and disappear inconsequentially," and their memories form the three levels of time in the play in which Cuchulain's past and present are subordinated to the reality of the Old Man.[18] Yeats adopted the technique of "dreaming back" from the Noh drama to confront his protagonists with their previous life. Cuchulain recalls his encounter with Aoife *At the Hawk's Well,* and his son's death that constantly haunts him. Because of the illogical mixing of past and present *The Death of Cuchulain* is not only an adaptation of a fable but a drama of the inner self in which the characters give an account of their lives. As Krapp does in his last recording. In Beckettian plays the "being of man" is emphasized as Worth points out.[19] From this aspect, Yeats's *Purgatory* and *The Death of Cuchulain* correspond to *All That Fall* or *Waiting for Godot,* but to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as well. The characters of these plays make an attempt to remember and free themselves from their dreadful memories.

Cuchulain's recollection of the events and the prominent figures of his life fails sometimes, so Aoife asks: "Am I recognized?" (p. 699) The hero who used to fight the ungovernable sea, seems to be troubled by the burden of killing his only son. His consciousness of guilt reminds one of Mrs. Rooney in *All That Fall* who

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[18] Bjersby p. 100.
[19] Worth p. 244.

also conceals something: "oh if you had my eyes ... you would understand ... the things they have seen ... and not looked away" (p. 185). Failing to recognize each other may also create comic situations, for instance, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*:

> HAMLET: My excellent good friends! How dost thou Guildenstern? *(Coming downstage with an arm raised to Ros, Guil meanwhile bowing to no greeting. Hamlet corrects himself. Still to Ros.)* Ah Rosencrantz! *(They laugh good-naturedly at the mistake.)* (p. 39.)

Like Cuchulain, Ros and Guil relive their memories in order to indentify themselves. However, by the time they find their identity, they have to die. Besides failing memory, the hero is weakened by the presence of the malevolent war goddess, Morrigu who is the ultimate power inciting the women to kill Cuchulain. In the first scene she stands between him and Eithne disturbing the conscience of the latter. Frye's reference to ghosts, omens and magic implies that they–

> threaten our sense of reality with madness: as things conceived, they show up the limited and finite nature of the human perspective, especially in thought. Thus they emphasize the existential irony in tragedy by showing that there are always more things to be experienced than philosophy can digest.[20]

Cuchulain is unaware of the evil ghost, it is Eithne who feels "that somebody or something is there / Yet nobody that [she] can see" (p. 696). The "blindness" of the hero may be "the existential irony" of his fate, but at the same time it shows his inability to apprehend the deity. Cuchulain and King Congal have to face "a ghost as a clinging presence," as Worth says, "an emanation from some obscure region of consciouness or a mysterious continuation of mind outside the body." It is this definition of the supernatural on the basis of which Worth finds a resemblance between the plays of Beckett and Yeats.[21]

As a counterpoint to the confusion of the "seeing" characters the Blind Man enters the stage who represents the real world. He is bright, and witty, and even Cuchulain states "that the blind Know everything" (p. 702). The spontaneous movements of the Blind Man such as feeling Cuchulain's body to find a right place to stab him do not mirror the hopeless stumbling of the hero

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[20] Frye p. 24.
[21] Worth p. 253.

among dreams and memories, but the possibility for him to survive. Ros and Guil discover this possibility standing in darkness:

> ROS: ... I can't see a thing
> GUIL: You can still *think*, can't you?
> ROS: I think so.
> GUIL: You can still *talk*.
> ROS: What should I say?
> GUIL: Don't bother. You can still *feel*, can't you?
> ROS: Ah! There's life in me yet!
>
> (p. 71.)

"There's life in me yet" – it could be said by the old man in Maeterlinck's play *The Intruder* who can feel that something evil has happened in the family although they refuse to tell him. Worth suggests that Beckett and Pinter inherited the importance of blindness from Maeterlinck, as a state when our inner self is more intensive.[22] The blind, as Cuchulain believes, "know everything," and in the Greek tradition even the role of the "vates" was attributed to them. Yeats's blind figures derive from mythology and symbolism, but lacking the traditional attributes of the "vates" they are greedy and witty, and their mock-heroic position enables them to execute the protagonists for a few pennies.

THE "DEATH" AND THE HERO

In the introduction I suggested that the Cuchulain-image as the symbol of faith was degraded in Ireland. In *The Death of Cuchulain* the heroic is degraded on two levels: in the hero's relation to the goddess and to his death. As both aspects are manifested in an ironic tone, Cuchulain's death ends in a feeling of tragi-comedy. With black magic Morrigu, the war goddess falsifies Emer's message, which confuses Cuchulain. Although he declares that "I make the truth," repeating Congal's statement "I am the Court," the hero cannot recognize whether Emer or Eithne betray her, or whether his battle and love are in vain.(p. 698) For lack of a sense of reality and truth, Cuchulain is close to the "contemporary view of man's unprotected situation in a hostile universe."[23] It is not his heroic aspiration, but his nature of being that is illuminated when he is opposed to the monstrous, invisible

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[22] Worth p. 210.
[23] Taylor p. 199.

and fatal power of the goddess. Frye, commenting on the Greek gods explains that they–

> are to human society what the warrior aristocracy is to the workers within human society itself. Like aristocrats, they act towards their inferiors with a kind of rough justice. [so] as long as the gods are there, man is limited in his scope, ambitions and powers.[24]

Morrigu acts with the "rough justice" of the Greek gods, so Cuchulain is sentenced to death. In the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd there are similar symbolic deities, and the characters are mostly aware of that "we are little men, we don't know the ins and outs of the matter" (p. 81.), as Guildenstern expresses the limited condition of the human being.

Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* stand motionless, "paralyzed" by the power of the unknown. Cuchulain's attitude to death may be described as an exhibition of "heroic generousity and heroic calm," while he, unlike King Congal, faces death with a kind of indifference.[25] The existential danger embodied by an old man having a "lucky day" forces him to come face to face with "Death" not in a heroic battle but in an absurd encounter with the blind anti-hero. The legendary hero becomes conscious of his finite nature, yet he cannot fully identify himself. Deprived of his fame he has to come to terms with death like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, being alone in an unfamiliar reality, and degraded as a human being.

Yeats's plays do not restrictively belong to the poetic-symbolist tradition, but they mingle the tragic, the symbolic, the tragicomic and the grotesque. These attributes are all closely associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. The tragicomic may simply mean the co-existence of the tragic and the comic in a play, but Yeats, however, achieves the inversion of these two. In *The Cat and the Moon*, when a lame and a blind beggar are hopping hopelessly like puppets, the serious attempt of two retarded men to meet the saint is comically contrasted with their awkward movements. Yeats deliberately referred to "puppet stage" instructing the Lame Beggar's bodily movements in the farcical scenes, when, for instance, the Blind Beggar chases the Lame Beggar swinging his stick. Tragedy and comedy do not stand far apart in this "clowning" but it awakens a mixed feeling

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[24] Frye p. 7.
[25] Leonard E. Nathan, *The Tragic Drama of W. B. Yeats. Figures in Dance* (London: Columbia UP, 1965) p. 201.

like most absurdist plays. Kott, commenting on the Theatre of the Absurd, introduces a new theatrical genre – "ridiculous-tragic" – and explains the confusing tone with Ionesco's thought:

> I have never understood the difference people make between the comic and the tragic. As the 'comic' is an intuitive perception of the absurd, it seems to me more hopeless than the 'tragic.' The 'comic' offers no escape.[26]

In the prologue of *The King's Threshold*, which was omitted from the final version of the play, Yeats writes about

> the stage ... filled with great ladies and gentlemen ... as if there was no such thing in the world as cold in the shoulders, and speckled shins, and the pains in the bones and stiffness in the joints.[27]

This passage implies the double reference of the tragi-comic nature of life that is a common element of the Theatre of the Absurd and the Yeatsian plays. Tragicomedy even turns into an image of the grotesque in *The Death of Cuchulain*, where the heroic is degraded in a senseless, destructive world. The inversion of the tragic and the comic results in a distortion, the desecration of the myth, which becomes the grotesque alternative of Yeats's first plays, *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Cathleen ni Houlihan*. The grotesque appears in several forms in *The Death of Cuchulain*: in the exaggerated and distorted picture of the human figure, as part of the nihilistic worldview, or as "the quest for the lost unity."[28]

The dramatic structure in Yeats becomes a "parody" of the conventional plot because it either represents an inverted order of society or a linear pattern of events with anti-climactic points. In *The Death of Cuchulain* the theatrical technique of the play-in-a-play governs the plot, in which the three levels of time are also underlined by the "intrinsic strangeness" of the characters.[29] It is the unity of the real and the unreal, the spontaneous and the conscious, as Worth suggests, that results in the "double-effect" so closely associated with both the Yeatsian and the Beckettian characters.[30] Supernatural deities like the Morrigu do not emerge as

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[26] Jan Kott, *The Theatre of Essence* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1984) p. 98.

[27] Innes p. 365.

[28] Dietrich p. 682. (my translation)

[29] Innes p. 363.

[30] Worth p. 259.

aiding spirits but rather as the unknown menace evoking man's existential fears in the incomprehensible universe. Csilla Bertha highlights this point holding that—

> the fantastic elements [in Yeats's plays] help to bring to the surface indefinite longings for the unknown, fears of superior powers or the tragedy of human helplessness in this fallen world.[31]

The existentialist philosophy generally considered as the spiritual source of the Theatre of the Absurd manifests a similarly degraded role of man in the modern world. Deprived of his sense of logic and willpower he is forced into the great mechanism of life. So he is obsessed with anxiety, loneliness, the fear of death, boredom and the feeling of the absurd. This corresponds to Yeats's philosophy of cyclical history. He believed that he was "out phase," because his phase was not identical with that of his age. Therefore he had to face the incongruity of the world. Yeats's disillusionment with the "decrepit age that has been tied to [him] / As to a dog's tail," may have compelled him to search for modernist principles of the theatre and dramaturgy. And it is these aspects, the devaluation of man and mythology, and the nontextual techniques borrowed from the Noh drama like song, dance, mask, puppet-like movement, and theatrical games, through which I could truly regard Yeats's dramatic imagination as the anticipation of the Theatre of the Absurd.

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[31] E. Donald Morse, ed. by Csilla Bertha, *Worlds Visible and Invisible* (Debrecen: Kossuth UP, 1994) p. 11.

Árpád Mihály

Me, That Word, or Death by Text

> I wake: How happy they who wake no more!
> Yet that were vain, if Dreams infest the Grave.
>
> Edward Young: *Night Thoughts*

I. INTRODUCTION

It took a considerable time for Beckett criticism to bring itself to look upon *Texts for Nothing* as an original work rather than detritus from *The Unnamable*, with problems and goals of its own.[1] Despite Beckett's own dismissal of it as a text that fails to move beyond the impasse of *The Unnamable*,[2] the few attempts to see it as a new beginning after the trilogy have been illuminating, if the actual suggestions as to the why-or-how vary in persuasiveness. Two arguments seem of interest here.

As is clear from the subtitle of his *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for being in Samuel Beckett's fiction* (1990), P. J. Murphy believes that there is an ontological concern at the core of Beckett's writing:

> Beckett's art is an eloquent testimony of the power struggle between the
> conflicting claims of 'author' and 'other' – that alien being or character

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[1] For whole chapters devoted to the work in recent studies, see Susan D. Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); P. J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990); H. Porter Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: the author in the autograph* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[2] Interview with I. Shanker, quoted in Murphy p. 34.

> discovered in the very act of creation. ... [He] has obsessively sought the
> new forms which would allow the 'other' the power to speak in order to
> substantiate his own hungering for being, and ... has also sought to
> accommodate this incredible struggle to be human with the author's
> equally real need to corroborate his being through the creation of a self-
> sufficient formal literary construct. Beckett affirmed in the early sixties
> that "Being *has* a form," but the situation revealed in his fiction involved
> a perplex of quite fantastic perplexity: how to reconcile the claims of
> two distinct entities, with separate needs and radically different
> relationships to language.[3]

Much of my thesis derives from my initial misreading of this passage. Recognising
the character as truly "alien" seemed to me an exciting critical tool for reading
Texts for Nothing. The clause "this incredible struggle to be human" appeared to
confirm my budding hypothesis that "alien" is to be understood as 'non-human.'
However, Murphy's real meaning transpired later on, with this sentence:
"Beckett's prose fiction reveals a struggle for an art of living that would
reconstitute the human being within the fictional world of the text."[4] This
struggle, Murphy suggests, is Beckett's solution to the problems of the *avant-
guarde* "in the sense advanced by Peter Bürger in which it is a historically
conceived attack on the autonomous status of art ... [aiming] at the reintegration
of art and life."[5] Beckett works, as it were, in reverse, "trying to bring life to his
art, to 'let being into literature.'"[6] His work is thus to be seen as an experiment
with life within the boundaries of the literary text. Hence his interest in the
"alien" discovered in this new world and its relation to the author. The question is
then:

> how to reconcile the conflicting claims of the two distinct entities, with
> separate needs and radically different relationships to language. What
> constitutes reality, what is its ontological status, what is its significance –
> these are the central issues that Beckett raises in highly original ways.[7]

But the affair is thorny – Murphy's equation of 'being' with 'life' seems gratuitous
to me. All Beckett is reported to have talked about is the former:

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[3] Murphy p. xvi.
[4] Murphy p. xvi.
[5] Murphy p. xiv.
[6] Murphy p. xvi.
[7] Murphy p. xvi.

'Being,' according to Beckett, has been excluded from writing in the
past. The attempt to expand the sphere of literature to include it, which
means eliminating the artificial forms and techniques that hide and
violate it, is the adventure of modern art.[8]

For Beckett being is clearly non-identical with life, as the latter has hardly been
"excluded from writing in the past." At the time of his conversation with Harvey,
Beckett had been "eliminating the artificial forms and techniques" obstructing the
way to being for more than a decade. These "forms and techniques" may well be
the fruits of a peculiar susceptibility of language, aptly described by the speaker of
Texts for Nothing[9] thus:

No, no souls, or bodies, or birth, or life, or death, you've got to go on
without any of that junk, that's all dead with words, with excess of
words, they can say nothing else, they say there is nothing else, that here
it's that and nothing else, but they won't say it eternally, they'll find
some other nonsense, no matter what...   (*T* 10: 142-3)[10]

Readers cannot help assuming a *speaker* behind these words; how could they when
fickle pronouns like 'I,' 'here' and 'now' seem to function, signify, though the
bodily presence that in live speech fills them with sense is not present? Their
function is to identify a presence: he who speaks; and how could a speaking
presence not live? The whole "nonsense" of life follows...

Yet this is not life – Beckett insists on elaborating this truism because he is
in search of being, and written language seems to offer 'pure,' albeit spurious,
being without life.

Murphy *may* understand as much when he says that *Texts for Nothing* tries
to relocate "the self which has fallen into the noman's land of fictional non-
being"[11]; however, his argument that Beckett intended to reunite this fictional
being with "the world of things and people"[12] to give it a "proper" being seems

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[8] Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princetown: Princetown University Press,
1970) p. 249.
[9] I believe there is only one and the same spaker in all thirteen 'Texts.' For a proof, see the
beginning of the sixth one: 'How are these intervals filled between these apparitions? ... I mean, how
filled for me?' – where the 'intervals' clearly refer to the blank spaces between the 'Texts.'
[10] Abbreviated references are to *Texts for Nothing* in Samuel Beckett, *Complete Short Prose, 1929-
1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995). The numerals before the colon refer to the
number of the 'Text.'
[11] Murphy p. 34.
[12] Murphy p. 35.

unjustifiable to me. What Beckett came to realise in *The Unnamable*, a recognition developed with exceptional force in *Texts for Nothing*, is the function of the body in "turning" being into life.

Beckett's critique of the idealist tradition, up to *Texts for Nothing*, concentrated on language, the home of counterfeit being and the perpetuator of essentialism. The speaker of *The Unnamable*, in true Cartesian fashion, is 'happy' to conduct his search for his true self without the assurance of a body, and attribute his pathetic failure to the nature of language: "it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name, for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that..."[13] But the speaker's certainty of his own body, of having a body, is removed in the course of a mystic-philosophical excercise, which neutralises the effect for the reader who has already seen Descartes recede into his mind. (Or the textual being calling itself Descartes, to be precise.) For the speaker of *Texts for Nothing*, on the other hand, the body is not an epistemological crux but an ontological nix: he has to perform the trick of *cogito* in the full assurance that 'he' is nothing but words.

Beckett's interest in the ontology of fiction, suggests H. Porter Abbott, is not completely disinterested: what is at issue is the possibility of self-representation, or as the subtitle of his book imples, how *the author* can appear *in the autograph*. The term is broader than autobiography, and Beckett seems to belong to an exclusive club whose members include Augustine and Wordsworth:

> These texts are as distant from fiction as from conventional autobiography insofar as conventional autobiography is as given to the comforts and authorial distance enabled by fictional form as are traditional novels. Beckett's subset [of autography] is writing governed not by narrative form or any species of tropological wholeness but by that unformed intensity in the present which at every point in the text seeks to approach itself.[14]

These works are typically "work[s] in progress, something happening in a textual present ... in effect an escape from time."[15] Narrative becomes suspended in a gel of non-narrative writing, as Wordsworth's "spots of time" are surrounded by lyric or speculative discourse, rendered isolated, discontinuous. As Abbott points out, these "spots" of narrative in all three writers (his example from Beckett is

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[13] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: John Calder, 1994 [1959]) p. 372.

[14] Abbott p. 18.

[15] Abbott p. 6.

Company) typically relate to the father or fatherhood, as if what was to be made ineffective by isolation were the authority of these past narratives over the present of the work. This kind of autography, it is suggested, strives for self-definition by the very displacement of the oedipal conflict:

> The signs of originary force which so absorbed Beckett's attention throughout his life achieve a configuration, not within a dialectic of parent and self, but outside of it. A major step in this process is disassembling narrative itself, disassembling, that is, the formal equivalent of generative fatherhood. This in turn, means the undoing of sequential time.[16]

Abbott's proposition is that Beckett's whole oeuvre is to be seen as an autographical project:

> What appears an extravagant concern for originality is a key part of the effort to avoid the development of tropes from within, tropes however peculiar to his own work, which would still occlude the possibility of, to ill-express it, the closest possible encounter. For one function of strangeness in Beckett's work is to keep readers (including, while he was alive, Beckett himself) in quest of its deviser. ... Instead of an artist above his work, paring his fingernails, we have an artist seeking to approach unmediated contact.[17]

This "unmediated contact" is what *written* language seems to preclude. *Texts for Nothing* fully thematises the problem and the struggle to overcome it. This work, more than anything Beckett had produced before it, constantly plays upon the bizarre situation of someone *speaking in writing*, when one (if one is an author) literally loses one's voice. One of the the images 'the speaker' in the *Texts* uses to describe his status gains an eerie ambiguity in writing: "I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy" (*T* 8: 133). The ambiguity concerns the *origin* of the sentence, the identity and authority of the voice saying 'I.' Ventriloquism is "the art of producing vocal sounds that appear to come from another source"[18]: it is exactly the silent presence of a human body (the ventriloquist's) in the company of an obviously non-human body (the puppet) that thrills the audience: the voice does not appear to belong where it *should*. (In contrast with puppet-theatre, where

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[16] Abbott p. 19.
[17] Abbott p. 21.
[18] *Collins English Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998).

the absence of human bodies enables the audience's leap of faith: it is the puppets who say 'I.') Yet, the comic incommensurability of the two bodies in a way compensates for the surrender of authority, which in itself is unsettling, as a human speaker on the stage is at times demoted to the status of passive listener to a puppet. This function of the body fails, once the sentence is written down: the surrender in *Texts for Nothing* results in an anarchy of authorities – perhaps no less comic –, since readers cannot help assigning authority to the one who 'says' 'I,' over what he says, while he seems to surrender all authority (he calls himself the "puppet") to another, one who cannot speak for himself. The word "mere" functions in a similarly anarchic manner in the above clause, since it might modify only the "ventriloquist," rather than the whole phrase "ventriloquist's puppet," in which case the puppet is depreciating his master, the author, as "a mere ventriloquist," i.e. one giving up his voice for the use of another. And indeed, what shall one think of an author without a voice of his own? How shall one, if one is an author, communicate about oneself to his audience?

The problem is no easy one if one understands oneself to be more than— and one is back at the problem of *what* is one? Beckett's philosophy of the self and the role of the body therein confront with his autographic project for the first time in *Texts for Nothing*.

Abbott also finds the *Texts* a turning point in the ouevre, rather than a dead-end after *The Unnamable*. The latter he sees as a terminus in the process he calls "recollection by invention,"[19] "the effort to avoid the development of tropes from within ... which would ... occlude the possibility of ... the closest possible encounter" with the audience. The treatment "the Victorian trope of onwardness"[20] receives in the oeuvre is typical of this operation. The onward journey as a theme first occurs in *Watt* and, by *Malone Dies*, Beckett has already introduced a "striking variation on the trope ... [by] its reflexive application to the writing of which it is a part."[21] Malone's journey is the writing of his book, with the end always in sight. In the next novel, "the trope was transferred from the task of narration to that of self-formulation."[22] *The Unnamable* brought this task to a dead-end, leaving only one option for *Texts for Nothing*, "the absence of any overall pattern."[23] Even though each 'Text' sets out on a journey of some sort,

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[19] Abbott p. 28.

[20] Abbott p. 33.

[21] Abbott p. 34.

[22] Abbott p. 34.

[23] Abbott p. 90.

they are never finished, having been started only to accentuate the "absolute frustration of structural 'onwardness.'"[24] They are therefore "the final steps in easing the deep structure of his work from the dominion of narrative,"[25] making *Texts for Nothing* Beckett's first exercise in a "postnarrative art,"[26] the new start after the trilogy, in which "Beckett consolidated his autographical project."[27]

I slightly disagree with Abbott, as far as "the absence of any overall pattern" in the work and the method of consolidating the autographical project are concerned. In the course of giving a close reading to the first four 'Texts,' I hope to reveal a progress of sorts, a change in concerns and methods. I wish to show how self-writing is thematised, together with those problems of representation that makes the Beckettian speaker call himself a "ventriloquist's dummy" in a later part of the work.

II. DEATH BY TEXT

Dead metaphors?

A journey appears to have come to grief in the first sentence of *Texts for Nothing*, which nevertheless seems strangely welcome for the speaker: "Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on. Someone said, You can't stay here. I couldn't stay there and I couldn't go on" (*T* 1: 100). With such predecessors as Malone and the speaker of *The Unnamable* it is no surprise to see the journey of words terminate in a paradox. It is also no surprise that the narrative should be enmeshed with metanarrative remarks: "I'll describe the place, *that's unimportant*" (*T* 1: 100).[28] If the aside refers to the landscape rather than the narrative act, it may be emphasising that the landscape has figurative rather than literal significance:

> The top, very flat, of a mountain, no, a hill, but so wild, so wild, enough. Quag, heath up to the knees, faint sheep tracks, troughs scooped out by the rain. It was far down in one of these I was lying, out

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[24] Abbott p. 89.

[25] Abbott p. 87.

[26] Abbott p. 88.

[27] Abbott p. 87.

[28] In quotes from *Texts for Nothing* all italics are mine.

> of the wind. Glorious prospect, *but for the mist that blotted out*
> *everything*, valleys, loughs, plain and sea. (*T* 1: 100)

Since as early as the first short stories in French, landscapes in Beckett's writings have worked in a remotely allegorical fashion by standing for mental scenes. Rubin Rabinovitz was among the first to warn that these landscapes often provide the "raw material for metaphors depicting inner reality."[29] Thus climbing hills or towers represent the attainment of a "mental overview,"[30] while enclosed spaces, such as dens or caves, act as "refuge[s] from the harshness of existence."[31] Now the speaker's remark may serve as a warning, as this hill refuses to give an "overview" (Note the ironic "glorious prospect").

"How can I go on, I shouldn't have begun, no, I had to begin" (*T* 1: 100). The present tense has been used for the time of the narrative act, so this seems a metaphoric equation of journeying and narrating, a trope of long standing – used by such members of the guild as Dante and Malone, to mention only two of those who make an appearance in this work. This enigmatic necessity to talk (write) has tormented all Beckett's first-person narrators, and is one major theme in these 'Texts.' But for the time being, this thread disappears underneath the surface of the texture and the story to be told briefly returns: "Someone said, perhaps the same, What possessed you to come? I could have stayed in my den, snug and dry, I couldn't" (*T* 1: 100). Slowly, the hidden narrative pattern starts to reveal itself, with the speaker seeming to have left his "den" and to be stranded on a hilltop, among unidentifiable company. Moreover, his coming here seems no less enigmatically motivated than his need to report it.

> *My den, I'll describe it, no, I can't.* It's simple, I can do nothing any more, that's what you think. I say to the body, Up with you now, and I can feel it struggling ... till it gives up. I say to the head, Leave it alone, stay quiet, it stops breathing, then pants on worse than ever. I'm far from all that wrangle, I shouldn't bother with it, I need nothing, *neither to go on nor to stay where I am*, it's truly all one to me, I should turn away from it all, away from the body, away from the head, let them work it out between them, let them cease, I can't, it's I would have to cease.
>
> (*T* 1: 100)

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[29] Rubin Rabinovitz, 'Samuel Beckett's Figurative Language' *Contemporary Literature* 26:3 (1988) p. 317.
[30] Rabinovitz p. 318.
[31] Rabinovitz p. 320.

His reluctance to deal with matters of body and mind is of the same stamp as the relief he felt in the first sentence when his journey was aborted. Yet, he admits grudgingly, the need to care is at the very core of his being ("it's I would have to cease"). The last sentence adds this care to the connotations of the journey. It also reveals the speech situation to be the continuation of the opening scene, as the tense of the next sentence confirms as well ("Ah yes, we seem to be more than one, all deaf, not even, gathered together for life" [*T* 1: 100-1]). In "I need nothing, neither to go on nor to stay where I am" journey and narration meet under the aegis of the opening paradox ("I couldn't stay there and I couldn't go on"). Going on has been associated with narrating, but now the narrated journey, too, becomes the metaphor of writing. This is a frustrated or disillusioned writer, claiming impotence ("I can do nothing any more") but spurred on by some instinct. His collapse may be the renunciation of his calling, the reason for which we do not know yet. But the sense of the journey, oscillating between metaphorical and common usage, now returns to rest momentarily in the concrete:

> Another said, or the same, or the first, they all have the same voice, the same ideas, All you had to do was stay at home. Home. They wanted me to go home. My dwelling place. But for the mist, with good eyes, with a telescope, I could see it from here. It's not just tiredness, I'm not just tired, in spite of the climb. It's not that I want to stay here either.
>
> (*T* 1: 101)

The motivations for this frustrated journey are not any clearer; neither is the speaker more ready to account for his collapse. The clue may be in the obscured landscape, where "home" is, to which the speaker refers repeatedly, with nostalgia? incredulity? scorn?

> I had heard tell, *I must have heard tell of the view*, the distant sea in *hammered lead, the so-called golden vale so often sung, the double valleys, the glacial loughs, the city in its haze, it was all on every tongue.* (*T* 1: 101)

"The *so-called* golden vale" preserves this ambiguity of attitude, as the elevated style can be either respectful or ironic. What is more important is that instead of an intimate *vision* of the homeland we are given a quasi-familiar *tale* of the view, shared by a community? all people? The "glorious prospect" now appears *fabulous*, as one fabled: the speaker's "den" turns out to be in a land of tale, with the journey leading here a little less real. All of which is canvassed over by the realistic presentation of the surroundings:

> Who are these people anyway? Did they follow me up here, go before
> me, come with me? I am down in *the hole the centuries have dug*, centuries
> of filthy weather, flat on my face on the dark earth sodden with the
> creeping saffron waters it slowly drinks. They are up above, all round
> me, as in a graveyard. ... Do they see me? What can they see of me?
> Perhaps there is no one left, perhaps they are all gone, sickened. I listen
> and it's the same thoughts I hear, I mean the same as ever, strange. To
> think in the valley the sun is blazing all down the ravelled sky. How
> long have I been here, what a question, I've often wondered.   (*T* 1: 101)

As we shall see, these are the last realistic moments in the story. Yet even this
tableau is 'loosened up' by the strange "I listen and it's the *same thoughts* I hear, I
mean *the same as ever*." We recall how he described this group of people ("they all
have the same voice, the same ideas") and they start to assume an eerie familiarity
for the speaker; as if he were not here for the first time, or as if he has grown to
know them through a long stay.

> How long have I been here, what a question, I've often wondered. And
> often I could answer, An hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on
> what I meant by me, and here, and being, and there I never went
> looking for extravagant meanings, there I never much varied, only the
> here would sometimes seem to vary.   (*T* 1: 101)

The first sentence only deepens the doubt voiced in the previous passage ("I've
often wondered"). But the next sentence explodes the realist tableau, indeed the
whole landscape, with the speaker revealing himself to be a fabulator, one creating
tales of himself. "Here" is no more real than the "so-called golden vale."

Which leaves us all the more curious about the metaphoric value of his
impotence to travel and to fabulate. What does his collapse and reluctance to
commence symbolise:

> And that other question I knew so well too, What possessed you to
> come? unanswerable, so that I answered, To change, or, It's not me, or,
> Chance, or again, To see, or again, years of great sun, Fate, I feel that
> other coming, let it come, it won't catch me napping.   (*T* 1: 101-2)

The question may well be familiar, as it is a distorted version of what Dante is
asked in Canto XV of the *Inferno*. As Murphy points out, the answers given are a
melange of the conversation between Dante and Ser Brunetto,[32] and as they

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[32] Murphy p. 37.

appear to have been offered by the modern speaker on different occasions ("or,... or,... or again,... or again"), he cannot have been down here for the first time.

But "the here would ... seem to vary": this may not be simply Hell after all. If we take the hint of the Dante allusion and turn back to the description of the place, we find that it is more like a strange Irish (see *loughs*) version of the Mount of Purgatory: although Dante is blinded in Cantos XV-XVI of *Purgatory* by *smoke* (*fummo*), at the beginning of the next Canto he refers to it as *fog* (*nebbia*). The "golden vale" was also sung by him, and the company on this hill may be a group serving their sentence in Purgatory.

Is the speaker a reincarnation of Dante? As countless allusions in the *Texts* to other literary works could testify, the speaker has been a traveller not only of Dantean landscapes but the whole of the literary tradition – the archetype of the traveller, if you like. Dante himself seems only one manifestation of the model, as will Molloy or Piers Plowman in the next 'Text.' Why is this archetype lying "down in the hole the centuries have dug," as if in the grave of a tradition?

> To change, to see, no, there's no more to see, I've seen it all, till my eyes are blear, nor to get away from harm, the harm is done, one day the harm was done, the day my feet dragged me out that must go their ways, that I let go their ways and drag me here, that's what possessed me to come. And what I'm doing, all-important, breathing in and out, saying, with words like smoke, I can't go, I can't stay, let's see what happens next. (*T* 1: 102)

The age of journeys is over, "there's no more to see." A journey is no longer a way "to get away from harm" – as it was for Dante, seeking his way out of the "dark wood of error" – but the harm itself. Yet there is a dark instinct that drove him out of his den, symbolised by the headlong feet. The elliptic last sentence explains this psychomotoric deficiency: if read as "and [that's] what I'm doing, ... saying," the feet start operating as the vehicle for the tenor of words; the journey starts signifying writing. It is writing the speaker wants to but cannot abandon. The reason for wanting to do so is hinted at in a powerful image:

> Eye ravening patient in the haggard vulture face, perhaps it's carrion time. I'm up there and I'm down here, under my gaze, foundered, eyes closed, ear cupped against the sucking peat, we're of one mind, all of one mind, always were, deep down, we're fond of one another, we're sorry for one another, but there it is, there's nothing we can do for one another. (*T* 1: 102)

The schizophrenic scene is the recycling, the "recollection by invention," of an earlier moment in the oeuvre. As Murphy points out, the image first occurs in Beckett's poem of 1935, 'The Vulture'[33]:

> dragging his hunger through the sky
> of my skull shell of sky and earth
>
> stooping to the prone who must
> soon take up their life and walk
>
> mocked by a tissue that will not serve
> till hunger earth and sky be offal[34]

Lawrence Harvey calls attention to the allusion to the opening lines of Goethe's 'Harzreise im Winter.'[35] There the vulture in search of its prey is the song.[36] In Beckett's poem, the carnivore is the poet's creative self or poetic instinct: hence the distinction between "*his* hunger" and "*my* skull." As for "the prone," there is at play an ironic indeterminacy about who/what animates them, as if Beckett could not decide at this point 'how' dead they are. Is it the kiss of the vulture, which descends only on dead bodies, that gives them a new life, making poetry the creator of zombies? Or does the word that orders them to 'take up thy life and walk' come from the poet's imagination, which cannot help seeing them alive, despite his conviction that they are not? And who/what is mocked by the tissue? The fact that all stanzas begin with a participle, the first two of which clearly have the vulture for their subject, supports the idea that it is the bird whose hunger is scorned. It little matters whether the tissue belongs to the poet or his creations; poetry, in Beckett's view, is unlikely to give justice to life, since writing starts with the death of the subject. We arrive at the same conclusion with the other reading, as well, in which the fifth line modifies "the prone": the zombies' life, no more substantial than their will, appears a mere mockery of life as lived in living tissues.

I think Beckett would agree with Paul Ricoeur that one's body is something of an enigma insofar as it is "at once a fact belonging to the world and

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[33] Murphy p. 37-8.

[34] Samuel Beckett, *Collected Poems in English and French* (London: John Calder, 1977) p. 9.

[35] Harvey p. 113.

[36] Harvey provides H. E. Zeydel's translation: 'As a vulture would, / That on heavy clouds of morning / With gentle wing reposing, / Seek for his prey— / Hover, my song.' Harvey p. 113.

the organ of a subject that does not belong to the objects of which it speaks."[37]
But the problem for writing is not simply representing an object, but the
impossibility of recreating that pre-linguistic *sense* of one's own body that
constitutes one corner-stone of Ricoeur's ontology of the self. With the danger of
oversimplifying his ambitious work, that much at least must be said that the key
idea is the distinction between two senses of identity. *Idem*-identity is what
answers to the questions of permanence in time, while *ipse*-identity responds to
moral injunctions: even the latter "implies no assertion concerning some
unchanging core of the personality."[38] As his title shows, part of his project is to
show how the constitution of *ipse*-identity (of *oneself*) is dependent upon the
Other (*another*), how *as*, in his title, means "inasmuch": being "oneself inasmuch
as being another."[39] The body, being the first alien object in the world and the
place of the most intimate "mineness," becomes one site of the dialectic between
the *me* and the *other*.

So while the self as "as a multiple, sequential linguistic event"[40] is capable
of representation, this sense of one's own body remains immune to
representation. It actually saves the consciousness from complete linguistic
deconstruction. In writing, where the ties with the body have been severed, this
deconstruction can freely operate, as Beckett demonstrated in *The Unnamable*.[41]
This rupture between the body and the subject in writing is, in a way, like death.

Texts for Nothing 'recycles' the metaphor and introduces the type of
"invention" Porter talks about. The vulture now is clearly the speaker, while he
himself is his own "prone" subject. This is self-writing, with a new awareness of
the (meta)physics of the textual universe. The regret of "there's nothing we can do
for one another" has to do with a new understanding of the possibilities in
(self-)representation.

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[37] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University
of Chicago Press, 1994 [1992]) pp. 54-5.

[38] Ricoeur p. 2.

[39] Ricoeur p. 3.

[40] Shira Wolosky, *Language Mysticism: The negative way of language in Eliot, Beckett and Celan*
(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 125.

[41] As pointed out by Wolosky. She sees *The Unnamable* as 'the relentless fulfillment' of a negative
mystic project which aims to reach a/the core of the subject. The project, as is apparent in the novel,
'finally defeats itself. For it achieves a reduction that is revealed to be either impossible or empty.'
(Wolosky p. 109.)

The tradition of first person narratives that involve metaphoric journeys, which is is epitomised here by Dante – the traiditon of fictional autographies –, is clearly rejected for its faith in representation. In the words of the second 'Text,' "it let nothing show ... of the true affair" (*T* 2: 106). The journey is the metaphor of gaining (self-)knowledge, and Dante's climb is its eminently successful version, with "home" at the end, symbolising a confirmation of salvation. The model receives parodistic treatment in *Texts for Nothing*, as the glory of "home" has been demeaned into a "den," just as Dante's confident narration of his journey to Ser Brunetto is chopped up and offered as evasions for the "unanswerable" question.

Not that Beckett himself could give an easy answer. As he told Lawrence Harvey: "I write because I have to. ... What do you do when 'I can't' meets 'I must'? ... At that level you break up words to diminish shame."[42] The vulture and its "carrion time" become the metaphor of this instinct in *Texts for Nothing*, whose speaker also aims to diminish the power of words by inserting the wedge of self-consciousness. He is by turns resolved to stop the sham called writing and downhearted because it can never be stopped, bursting out in frustrated asides like "that's what you think." It seems there is no end to this journey:

> One thing at least is certain, in an hour it will be too late, in half-an-hour it will be night, and yet it's not, not certain, what is not certain, absolutely certain, that night prevents what day permits, for those who know *how to go about it*, who have the will to go about it, and the strength, *the strength to try again*. Yes, it will be night, the mist will clear, I know my mist, for all my distraction, the wind freshen and the whole night sky open over the mountain, with its lights, including the Bears, to guide me *once again on my way*, let's wait for night. All mingles, times and tenses, at first I only had been here, now I'm here still, soon I won't be here yet, toiling up the slope, or in the bracken by the wood, it's larch, I don't try to understand, I'll never try to understand any more, that's what you think, for the moment I'm here, always have been, always shall be, I won't be afraid of the big words any more, they are not big. (*T* 1: 102-3)

The journey will continue in a world of text, as it always has. In fact, two journeys are implied: one the metaphor of writing in the past and the future, the route leading here and hence; the other, in a sense more real though appearing only in its trace, cvarried on in the structure of the sentences and the text: the

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[42] Harvey p. 249.

present writing itself. In a way, this is the kind of honest self-writing the passage hankers after, since the stasis of the first journey "down here" directs the reader's attention to the traveller "up there." Talk is still of written "me," but writing *me* signals his presence by the movement of writing itself. In this sense, "I" can never leave "here" ("I'm here, always have been, always shall be"). Once this is acknowledged, the first journey might as well be continued, if only to make life more interesting. After all, that is what journeying has always been about:

> Sometimes it's the sea, other times the mountains, often it was the forest, the city, the plain too, I've flirted with the plain too, I've given myself up for dead all over the place, of hunger, of old age, murdered, drowned, and then for no reason, of tedium, nothing like breathing your last *to put new life in you*, and then the rooms, natural death, tucked up in bed, smothered in household gods, and always muttering, the same old mutterings, the same old stories, the same old questions and answers, no malice in me, hardly any, stultior stultissimo, never an imprecation, not such a fool, or else it's gone from mind. Yes, to the end, always muttering, *to lull me and keep me company*... (*T* 1: 103)

Despite the paradox of an invigorating death scene, the tone is more melancholic than querulous, and "to lull me and keep me company" belies the autographer's loneliness. To solace himself, both for his solitude and the division of his writing and written selves, he remembers old times of union:

> Yes, to the end, always muttering, to lull me and keep me company, and all ears always, all ears for the old stories, as when my father took me on his knee and read me the one about Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse keeper, evening after evening, all the long winter through. ... Yes, I was my father and I was my son, I asked myself questions and answered as best I could, I had it told to me evening after evening, the same old story I knew by heart and couldn't believe, or we walked together, hand in hand, silent, sunk in our worlds, each in his worlds, the hands forgotten in each other. That's how I've held out till now. And this evening again it seems to be working, I'm in my arms, I'm holding myself in my arms, without much tenderness, but faithfully, faithfully. Sleep now, as under that ancient lamp, all twined together, tired out with so much talking, so much listening, so much toil and play. (*T* 1: 103-4)

"Tucked up in bed" might recall the moribunds of the trilogy, but the "old story" is certainly no newcomer, as it first appeared in the 1946 short story,

'Le Calmant' ('The Calmative'). In the latter – the story of a journey to gain a "mental overview" – the narrator remembers his father reading him the story and says: "For me now the setting forth, the struggle and perhaps the return, for the old man I am this evening, older than my father ever was, older than I shall ever be."[43] His self-consciousness did not prevent the narrator from telling a tale of a journey of self-exploration, or hinder the tale from functioning metaphorically, which explains the present nostalgia. It is in this mood that writing appears as "play" through the association made earlier between toil and the journeying ("toiling up the slope"). Though the narrated journey was never continued and though, strictly speaking, we leave the "hero" lying in the mud as the story ends, the other, implied, journey has achieved much. The need for a new kind of self-writing has been declared and perhaps fulfilled.

What with allusions to the 1946 short story and the fact that the "Joe Breem, or Breen"-story was a tale Beckett used to hear from his father,[44] the obvious question arises whether this is not simply Beckett's disguised intellectual-artistic autobiography. Is this speaker not a Beckett-persona? Certainly not in any clear-cut way: 'Texts' to come will amply thematise the speaker-author relation, presenting it as a major issue. Till then, we should bear in mind the ironic intent of the prone character when talking about himself and the vulture, saying: "we're of one mind, all of one mind, always were, deep down." Which is exactly what self-writing is about.

When life was babble

'Text 2' sets out with the heightened awareness that the previous one tried to dismiss towards the end. The line of thought is accordingly less tangled and produces an enquiry into the nature of "here."

> Above is the light, the elements, a kind of light, sufficient to see by, the living find their ways, … the living. … Here you are under a different glass, not long habitable either, it's time to leave it. You are there, there it is, where you are will never long be habitable. Go then, no, better stay, for where would you go, now that you know? Back above? There are limits. Back in that kind of light. See the cliffs again, be again between the cliffs and the sea, reeling shrinking with your hands over

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[43] Beckett, *Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* p. 64.

[44] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) p. 372.

> your ears, headlong, innocent, suspect, noxious. Seek, by the excessive
> light of night, a demand commensurate with the offer, and go to ground
> empty-handed at the old crack of day.   (*T* 2: 105)

This is not a little like Hell, but perhaps more for the sake of distinguishing life "here" and life as described in the old autographical discourse than for any topological precision. For the issue is again writing. The firmament as (looking) glass is an allusion to the Book of Job (37:18), where it is described as a metal mirror. But the next return of the phrase, in 'Text 5,' points further:

> The sky, I've heard—the sky and earth, I've heard great accounts of
> them, now that's pure word for word, I invent nothing. I've noted, I
> must have noted many a story with them as setting, they create the
> atmosphere. Between them where the hero stands *a great gulf is fixed*,
> while all about they flow together more and more, till they meet, so that
> he finds himself as it were *under glass*, and yet with no limits to his
> movements in all directions, let him understand who can, that is no part
> of my attributions.   (*T* 5: 118-9)

To be under glass (either under a belljar or the behind the glass of a framed picture) is to be the hero of a story. This passage too contains an allusion to the Bible, to a metaphor of rupture. Abraham talks thus to the rich man in Hell:

> And beside all this, between us [Abraham and Lazarus] and you *there is a
> great gulf fixed*: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot;
> neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.   (Luke 16:26)

The hero under the glass, the written character, 'stands' in the very gulf of incommunication. The paradox the speaker refuses to deal further with is thus a compact formula for the ontology of the fictional world: a no-place with infinite dimensions.

This journey is also suspended in paradox: though this "place" may not be suitable for self-representation ("not long habitable"), the old possibilities are no longer of use, either ("there are limits"). The archetypal traveller, Dante, is evoked again as examplum: the shore alluded to is probably Ante-Purgatory. Dante and Virgil emerge from Hell when it is still night and talk to Cato by "the excessive light" of four stars.[45] As Virgil tells Cato, Dante is seeking freedom (*Purgatory*:

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[45] 'The rays of the four holy lights so adorned his face with brightness that I saw him as if the sun were before him' (*Purgatory*: I.37-9).

I.70-72)[46]: his later incarnation in Beckett's text, who seems to be conducting his journey backwards, is frustrated in his expectations – apparently of necessity ("seek ... a demand commensurate with the *offer*, and go *to ground* empty-handed at the old crack of day"). This manifestation of the archetypal traveller is blended with memories of Molloy, who also spent unforgettable days by the sea:

> Much of my life has ebbed away before this shivering expanse, to the sound of waves in storm and calm, and the claws of the surf. Before, no, more than before, one with, spread on the sand, or in a cave. In the sand I was in my element, letting it trickle between my fingers, scooping holes that I filled in a moment later or that filled themselves in, flinging it in the air by handfuls, rolling in it.[47]

His play in the sand may be recalled now as "reeling shrinking with your hands over your ears, headlong, innocent, suspect, noxious."

The speaker emphasises his new awareness of the ontological rift that is the subject of 'The Vulture,' by openly talking to himself. He is addressing not only his written semblance but his writing self as well. He exhorts himself to summon memories of the old discourse and congratulates himself on his success:

> There's a good memory. Mother Calvet. She knew what she liked, perhaps even what she would have liked. And beauty, strength, intelligence, the latest, daily, action, poetry, all one price for one and all.
>
> (*T* 2: 105-6)

The nostalgia of the fourth sentence imperceptibly slips into the shouting of a street-vendor selling, among other things, cheap literature. The sarcasm is of course directed at the high-realism of a preceding scene with Mother Calvet and her dog. Her story is rejected together with that of Dante-Molloy:

> If only it could be wiped from knowledge. To have suffered under that miserable light, what a blunder. *It let nothing show*, it would have gone out, nothing terrible, nothing showed, of the true affair, it would have snuffed out.   (*T* 2: 106)

Paradox remains the main strategy for delineating the situation. The light of the night "here" is powerful compared to the light "up there." What is to be seen is

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[46] Dante Alighieri: *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and commentary, Charles S. Singleton, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

[47] Beckett, *Molloy* p. 68.

the possibilities of self-representation in language. Molloy on the shore is "suspect, noxious" because autography done in the old belief does not reveal "the true affair," death by text. In its dark truth, the light of the living "would have snuffed out." "Night prevents what day permits," said the speaker in the previous 'Text,' probably having in mind the useless freedom of the old discourse (the worthless "offer"), which only helped to obscure the ontological fissure.

The autographer goes on to examine the new possibilities in earnest:

> And now here, what now here, one enormous second as in Paradise, and the mind slow, slow, nearly stopped. And yet it's changing, something is changing, it must be in the head, slowly in the head the ragdoll rotting, perhaps we're in a head, it's as dark as in a head before the worms get at it, ivory dungeon. The words too, slow, slow, the subject dies before it comes to the verb, words are stopping too. *Better off then than when life was babble?* That's it, that's it, the bright side. (*T* 2: 106)

Doing away with narratives ("memories") results in motionlessness, the eternal present of a text that does not proceed anywhere. The seeking mind is, as it were, grinding to a halt, while the journey of words also seems to come to an end. The apparently free association to the head will later appear as the vulture's foreboding of his sky. The forced jubilation over discarding the hoax of the old discourse ("babble") cannot for long obscure the fact that the journey of words cannot be stopped:

> So long as the words keep coming nothing will have changed, there are the old words out again. *Utter*, there's nothing else, *utter, void yourself of them*, here as always, nothing else. But they are failing, true, that's the change, they are failing, that's bad, bad. Or it's the dread of coming to the last, of having said all, your all, before the end, no, for that will be the end, the end of all, not certain. To need to groan and not be able, Jesus, better ration yourself, watch out for the genuine death-pangs, some are deceptive, you think you're home, start howling and revive, health-giving howls, *better be silent*, it's the only method, if you want to end, not a word but smiles, end rent with stifled imprecations, burst with speechlessness, *all is possible*, what now. (*T* 2: 106-7)

The passage itself illustrates the travelling of words, if only the journey is ultimately circular – after all the rumination and the marshalling of extreme possibilities to end all discourse, the conclusion is: "all is possible." Saying is journeying. In fact, "having said all" may be "the end of all," not only of

travelling, since there may be no life beyond discourse; hence the anxiety over failing words, "the ragdoll rotting." It is both a constructed self-image, disintegrating with a language deemed insubstantial, and a specimen of the "prone" race.

More memories, to avoid answering the question "what exactly is going on" (*T* 2: 107)? First, reminiscences of "Mr. Joly," the bell-ringer, and the devout (*T* 2: 107), to provide the context for an ironical misjudgement: "Here at least none of that, no talk of a creator and nothing very definite in the way of a creation" (*T* 2: 107). Pretty soon, in 'Text 4,' the talk will be of a creator.

The second memory is of "Piers pricking his oxen o'er the plain" (*T* 2: 107), another incarnation of the traveller seeking for truth. The "den" is mentioned again, with little interest now for the speaker: "It was nonetheless the return, to what no matter, the return, unscathed, always a matter for wonder. What happened? Is that the question? ... No" (*T* 2: 107). The question is what *is* happening. It is the movement of the words that matters not the recounted journey.

> There, it's done, it ends there, *I end there*. A far memory, far from the
> last, it's possible, the legs seem still to be working. A pity hope is dead.
> No. How one hoped above, on and off. With what diversity.   (*T* 2: 108)

"There": the painter finishing a sketch for a self-portrait, ripe for the bin from the start. But these are words, with more will of their own than lead has ("the legs seem still to be working"). This 'Text,' too, ends on a note of nostalgia for the self-representation of olden times. The coda is ambiguous: is the hope of truthful appearance in a text really dead? Is its death welcome? Is the hope inextinguishable?

What matter how you describe yourself?

'Text 3,' in its investigation of the implications of writing on the speaking subject, returns to the non-sequential method of 'Text 1.' The opening is baffling, as a result:

> Leave, I was going to say leave all that. What matter who's speaking,
> someone said what matter who's speaking. There's going to be a
> departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll
> say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything, there's
> going to be a story, someone's going to try and tell a story. Yes, no

> more denials, all is false, there is no one, it's understood, there is
> nothing, no more phrases, let us be dupes, dupes of every time and tense,
> until it's done, all past and done, and the voices cease, it's only voices,
> only lies.   (*T* 3: 109)

The speaker tries to evacuate all traces of himself from the text before the new
journey starts. He tries to hide behind "someone," and make sure by means of
paradox that the story cannot be taken to be about him. Then he changes his
tactics ("yes, no more denials") and tries to proceed in the knowledge ("it's
understood") that the textual journey is all too obviously virtual ("there is no
one, ... there is nothing"). He seems to have resolved the dilemma of the previous
'Text' about what to do till the "end of all" and chooses to carry on talking.
However, the lack of control over language, first implied by the self-willed "feet"
and then the attempt to "void yourself of them," is now openly admitted: not
only by the decision to be "the dupes of every time and tense," but also by the
story apparently being told by lying "voices."

But read with the knowledge of death by text, the problem is different.
Up till now, the speaker has been talking as if he were assure of his extratextual
existence, lamenting only the impossibility of faithful representation. Beckett
suddenly offers the reverse of the situation, i.e. that all that is certain is the
representation. What can a consciousness 'do' without a body? Suffer. (The move
is not so sudden in view of the previous 'Text,' with its descent into Hell, a
possible damnation, and the enclosure in a mind other than the speaker's own.
The vulture and his feast are, indeed, "of one mind"!) Alternatively, it can start
seeking a body.

> Here, depart from here and go elsewhere, or stay here, but coming and
> going. Start by stirring, there must be a body, as of old, I don't deny it,
> no more denials, I'll say I'm a body, stirring back and forth, up and
> down as required. With a cluther of limbs and organs, all that is needed
> to live again, to hold out a little time, *I'll call that living, I'll say it's me* ...
> It's enough to will it, I'll will it, will me a body, will me a head, a little
> strength, a little courage...   (*T* 3: 109)

He acts as if he had never heard the maxim of the Belgian follower of Descartes,
Geulincx, a favourite with Beckett: "Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis" (Where you
are worth nothing you must will nothing). Yet this irony is only the sign of a
greater one, that of writing, in which the speaking consciousness becomes effaced
by its own words – by the consciousness created. The silent assurance of one's

own body is replaced by the din of bodiless words. No wonder, then, that this consciousness 'feels' as if he were created by lying voices.

After moments of knockabout humour in which he claims to be creating different semblances, the speaker (we must call him one) returns to his doubts:

> Who taught me all I know, I alone, in the old wanderyears, I deduced it all from nature, with the help of an all-in-one, *I know it's not me*, but it's too late now, too late to deny it, the knowledge is there, the bits and scraps, flickering on and off, turn about, winking on the storm, in league to fool me. Leave it and go, it's time to go, to say so anyway, the moment has come, it's not known why. What matter how you describe yourself, here or elsewhere, fixed or mobile, without form or oblong like man, in the dark or the light of heavens, I don't know, it seems to matter, it's not going to be easy. (*T* 3: 110-11)

Essentialism as is represented here in neo-Platonism ("an all-in-one") is responsible for the neglect of the body in Western thought. Beckett's project is to show how giving credence to the lies of language fosters idealism. Deconstructing a solely verbal (i.e. transcendent and transcendable) consciousness shows what can be done to a mind without a body. The heritage is a burdensome one, as the speaker indicates here ("too late to deny it, the knowledge is there") and in later 'Texts' as he hankers after a kind of negative transcendence, seeking "committal to flesh" (*T* 10: 142). But this parody by inversion, similar to the *reductio ad absurdum* of negative mysticism in *The Unnamable*, exists in a situation which makes the speaker more of a victim than a gullible fool. Now it is only "voices" that create him, but in the next 'Text' the puppet-master will appear, too. But before that, this 'Text' spells out the knowledge that makes the speaker want to "leave all that":

> To be bedded in that flesh or in another, in that arm held by a friendly hand, without arms, without hands, and without soul in those trembling souls, through the crowd, the hoops, the toy balloons, what's wrong with that? I don't know, I'm here, that's all I know, and that it's still not me, it's of that the best has to be made. *There is no flesh anywhere*, nor any way to die. ... Departures, stories, they are not for tomorrow. And the voices, wherever they come from have no life in them. (*T* 3: 113)

The lack of presence in representation is nowhere more apparent than in the irreproducible mortality of human flesh. In this sense, it is certainly of little interest "who's speaking."

There's my life, why not

The instinct to travel dies hard. Even after the unmasking of the speaking subject in 'Text 3,' the first question in 'Text 4' concerns moving on, if only in the conditional:

> Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply. It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer.　　　　　　　　　　　(*T* 4: 114)

This time the speaker attempts to answer the question the previous 'Text' tried to ignore. The text is a "pit of ... inexistence" not only because of the gap between the body and its representation but also because of the separation of the voice from the speaking body. The grammatical sense of "accusative" directs attention to "I" as a pronoun (even if it is, strictly speaking, not in the accusative), a shifter that gains its reference in the speech situation – only to remind us that this situation is not one of *speech*.

　　"There's a simple answer" goes the ironic aside, for the logic of misrepresentation affects an author, too. Beckett's response is exaggeration – the "overdoing" of his own image – a move corresponding to the hyperbolic hypothesis of a speaker beleaguering its creator, the "ventriloquist's dummy" arguing with his master:

> He would like it to be my fault that he has no story, of course he has no story, that's no reason trying to foist one on me. That's how he reasons, wide of the mark, but wide of what mark, answer us that. He has me say things saying its not me, there's profundity for you, he has me who say nothing say it's not me. All that is truly crass. If at least he would dignify me with the third person, like his other figments, not he, *he'll be satisfied with nothing less than me, for his me.*　　　(*T* 4: 115)

This open if comic admission of the autographic project illustrates its problems in the making. Written words masquerade as the voice of a consciousness while they efface the consciousness emitting them. But if the removal of 'I' from the body opens the way for its deconstruction, "he" fares no better. But instead of a victim, Beckett presents himself as the perpetrator of it all:

> When he had me, when he was me, he couldn't get rid of me quick enough, I didn't exist, he couldn't have that, that was no kind of life, of

> course I didn't exist, any more than he did, of course it was no kind of
> life, now he has it, his kind of life, let him lose it, if he wants to be in
> peace, with a bit of luck. His life, what a mine, what a life, he can't have
> that, you can't fool him, ergo it's not his, it's not him, what a thought,
> treat him like that, like a vulgar Molloy, a common Malone, those mere
> mortals, happy mortals, have a heart, land him in that shit, who never
> stirred, who is none but me, all things considered, and what things, and
> how considered, he had only to keep out of it. That's how he speaks,
> this evening, how he has me speak, how he speaks to himself, *how I*
> *speak, there is only me*, this evening, here, on earth ...   (*T* 4: 115)

I will now take the liberty to rewrite the passage as I understand it, turning the
reported speech back into the direct speech that was never spoken:

> "When I had you, when you were me, I couldn't get rid of you quick
> enough, you didn't exist, I couldn't have that, that was no kind of life."
> Of course I didn't exist, any more than he did, of course it was no kind
> of life, now he has it, his kind of life, let him lose it, if he wants to be in
> peace, with a bit of luck. "My life, what a mine [of stories?], what a life, I
> can't have that, you can't fool me." Ergo it's not his, it's not him. "What
> a thought, [to] treat me like that, like a vulgar Molloy, a common
> Malone, those mere mortals!" Happy mortals! "Have a heart: [to] land
> me in that shit?!" [Him], who never stirred, who is none but me?! "All
> things considered,–" – and what things? and how considered? – "I had
> only to keep out of it." That's how he speaks, this evening, how he has
> me speak, etc.

Samuel Beckett, who identifies himself by two of his creations, emerges here in all
the lustre of a vain god, deprecating "mere mortals" ("happy mortals," adds the
speaker wryly). Not only is the writer a creator who is glorified in his creation
but his condemning characters to bodiless being is also made to appear as
irrationally motivated as anything the Old Testament God might do.

Of course, the certainty of "that is ... how I speak, there is only me"
returns us to the paradox of the ventriloquist. The fact that Beckett has his
speaker talk about him at length only in two 'Texts,' and later only sporadically,
shows he tries to "go about it" differently. He opts for another kind of presence
in the text than the false one written words create in exchange for the speaking
body. As Abbott shows in his studies of later works, and as I hope to have shown
in the case of the first 'Text,' there is a possibility for signalling this presence –
what Abbott calls "autographic signature" – through the tensions and movement

of the text. Through the force that drives the text out of its den on a new journey; through the will that stops these journeys despite the claim that it is "an unending flow of words and tears." They all belie a presence that functions with the same silent authority as a conductor, "execut[ing]... one dead bar after another" (*T* 11: 144). In fact, the title is an allusion to 'measure for nothing,' a musical term for the silent movements of the conductor's baton at the beginning of a performance, setting the tempo for the orchestra.

János Kenyeres

Kerygma, Concern and Literature

Northrop Frye and the Bible

"FRYE CONCLUDES A FEARFUL, MYTHIC JOURNEY"

This was the title of the essay that appeared in the Toronto *Varsity Review* on January 8, 1991 on Northrop Frye's two latest books, *Words With Power* and *Myth and Metaphor*. When Peter Yan published his article in early January, he could not know that his title was going to assume quite an extraordinary and peculiar sense only a couple of days later and that it was going to be filled with the inexorable and irrevocable truth of prophecies. On early Wednesday, January 23, Northrop Frye died of a heart attack.

In his article Peter Yan claimed that *Words With Power* definitely closed the Frye canon: "*Words With Power*, the long awaited sequel to *The Great Code* (1982), is really the end of a tetralogy which starts with *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), and *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), still the most encyclopaedic study of literature and literary criticism since Aristotle's Poetics."[1]

Frye's fearful, mythic journey started with his study of Blake (*Fearful Symmetry*) and continued with 26 volumes: 10 monographs and over a hundred essays on literature and literary theory, until his last book, *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*, published posthumously in 1991.[2] "Once a

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[1] Peter Yan, 'Frye concludes a fearful, mythic journey' in *Varsity Review* (Tuesday, January 8) p. 13.

[2] These numbers are only indicative as posthumous publications of his essays and letters have been coming out in recent years.

verbal structure is read and reread often enough to be possessed, it "freezes." It turns into a unity in which all parts exist at once, which we can then examine like a picture, without regard to the specific movement of the narrative" (GC 62-63).[3] It seems that Frye's works are now ready for such a comprehensive examination and it is possible to analyse his oeuvre like a painting. He himself summarised briefly what he thought was a particular feature of his criticism: "In a sense all my critical work, beginning with a study of William Blake published in 1947, and formulated later in *Anatomy of Criticism*, has revolved around the Bible" (GC xiv). Indeed, Frye, who was ordained in the United Church of Canada in 1936, never detached his interest and scope of study from aspects connected with the Bible, or, to put it in another way, he always seemed to be magnetised to Biblical themes and methods throughout his life. This attraction of his only seemed to be magnified in the last decade of his life. Jonathan Hart remarks in an essay on Frye that Frye used to claim jokingly that he was an undercover agent for the United Church of Canada and, near the end of his life, he "blows his cover purposely."[4]

INTERPRETATION IN PRACTICE

The Great Code touches on a wide range of fundamental questions that belong to the scope of a literary critic in respect of the Bible and thus it presents a comprehensive critical analysis. However, the focus of the present investigation will be narrowed down to what seems to be one of the primary subjects of current literary criticism: language as the vehicle of all forms of literature.

Most of the facts and data Frye refers to and makes use of in the final structure of *The Great Code* can be found in more general books on the Bible.[5] It is rather due to the arrangement and conclusions deriving from the systematic structuring of already known facts that Hugh Kenner could rightly say that *The*

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[3] *CP*: Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path: An essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism.* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1971); *DV*: Northrop Frye, *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion.* (Toronto etc: University of Toronto Press, 1991); *GC*: Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.* (San Diego etc: A Harvest/HJB Book, 1983).

[4] Jonathan Hart, 'Frye's Anatomizing and Anatomizing Frye' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 6 (1993) p. 133.

[5] Most of the data in Frye can be found in Howard Clark Kee, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1983), and *The Origins of Christianity*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann, (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1985).

Great Code "contains numerous shocks of illumination."[6] In the final analysis, however, Frye's book comprises a vast amount of information about the Bible. Therefore, this analysis will concentrate only on the way in which Frye decreates traditional conceptions of the Bible and the manner in which he uses the various elements of the Bible as building blocks to create a pattern that can be called a new structure of the Bible, a recreation of the text.

In this sense, *The Great Code* and its sequel, *Words with Power*, are important contributions to the development of Bible research as well, especially in the light of the process through which modern literary theory has pervaded Biblical studies in the last few decades. This is part of a recent paradigm shift in the interpretation of the Bible. This paradigm shift invited literary and linguistic approaches to explore the Bible. According to Tibor Fabiny, there are five major types of this new perspective: canonical criticism (Brevard S. Childs, James Barr, etc.), rhetorical criticism (James Muilenburg, Amos N. Wilder, George A. Kennedy, etc.), reader-response criticism (Roland Barthes, E. Fuchs, G. Ebeling, J.M. Robinson, R. Funk, etc.), narrative criticism (Auerbach, William A. Beardslee, Hans Frei, Frank Kermode, Meir Sternberg, David Rhodas, Donald Michie, etc.) and deconstruction (John Dominic Crossan, David Clines, Mark C. Taylor).[7] All of these approaches concentrate upon the text of the Bible and the last four derive directly from literary theory.[8] Canonical criticism, the form of Biblical study that does not have a direct counterpart in literary theory proper, investigates how the canon was created – in this it is historical – and it maintains that the texts of the Bible can be understood only if approached in the same spirit as the canonising community would.[9]

Frye's works on the Bible belong to a number of these approaches at the same time. He pursues narrative criticism in his study on the myth of the Bible, which to him consists of a series of "U shape" stories along the whole narrative before they turn out to make a circle with the new creation in Revelation. Frye's method is also close to reader response criticism in that his interpretation is a

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[6] Quoted from *The New York Times* on the back cover of GC.

[7] See Tibor Fabiny, 'Új irányzatok a Biblia értelmezésében' in *Szóra bírni az Írást: Irodalomkritikai irányok lehetőségei a Biblia értelmezésében*, ed. Tibor Fabiny, Hermeneutikai Füzetek 3. (Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont: Budapest, 1994) 5-62.

[8] Other approaches include fundamentalist, evangelical, feminist, materialist and psychoanalytical perspectives. See *A viszály könyve? Egy Biblia – Sokféle értelmezés*, ed. Tibor Fabiny, Hermeneutikai Füzetek 10. (Budapest: Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont, 1996)

[9] See Fabiny, 'Új Irányzatok' p. 17.

complete recreation of the text in the reader, and by the reader. He also touches on questions concerning the compilation of the Bible, therefore, to that extent, he assumes the perspective of canonical criticism. However, more importantly, he emphasises that the Bible was not intended to be literally true in the sense of being historically accurate. He claims that the Bible is inherently metaphorical, and in order to understand it, it must be accepted that it is based on myth and metaphor. This suggests that Frye's recreation of the Bible is an attempt in the spirit of the original cast of mind of the "community" that compiled and read the Bible, an aspect which is, again, characteristic of canonical criticism.[10] Moreover, to Frye the kerygmatic feature of the Bible is a cornerstone. He believes that the Bible is as literary as any literature without actually being a work of literature, and the distinction of the Bible lies in its kerygmatic nature. Therefore, the rhetorical aspect is of primary importance to Frye and this brings him close to forms of rhetorical criticism. In sum, Frye's approach is unique not only as a theory that differs from established schools of Biblical research, but also in sharing some typical features with most of them.

The main interest of the present investigation is the underlying pattern of *The Great Code*, which is different from the structure that the book itself offers in the sequence of its chapters. This underlying pattern consists of a series of decreations of the Bible and of its imaginative recreation aiming to form another unity. The following pages will trace some of the basic elements of this underlying pattern.

THE THREE PHASES OF LANGUAGE

The opening chapter of *The Great Code*, which focuses on language as the preliminary substance of all verbal forms, is of primary importance in understanding Frye's endeavour to give new meaning to Biblical texts. Drawing on Vico's principle of three ages in a cycle of history, Frye constructs a pattern of three successive linguistic ages, each producing its own kind of "langage" (in the Saussurean sense), which Frye calls (i) the hieroglyphic, (ii) the hieratic and (iii) the demotic, or, alternately, (i) the metaphorical, (ii) the allegorical and (iii) the descriptive.

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[10] See also the resemblance between Childs and Frye pointed out by Tibor Fabiny in *The Lion and the Lamb: Figuralism and Fulfilment in the Bible, Art and Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) p. 9.

It should be noted that Vico's use of these phases of language were only preliminary forms of Frye's distinction and it was due to Frye's creative reading that he could use them as a source for his own thought. In his *New Science*, Vico made a series of threefold distinctions in human culture, also dividing the history of language into three phases. However, as Frye also admitted, there was very little left of Vico in what finally emerged in *The Great Code*. Quite specifically, Vico made the following remarks about the three stages of language:

> Three Kinds of languages. The first of these was a divine mental language by mute religious acts of divine ceremonies, from which there survived in Roman civil law the *actus legitimi* which accompanied all their civil transactions. This language belongs to religions by the eternal property that it concerns them more to be reverenced than to be reasoned, and it was necessary in the earliest times when men did not yet possess articulate speech. The second was the heroic blazonings, with which arms are made to speak; this kind of speech survived in military discipline. The third is by articulate speech, which is used by all nations today.[11]

The above classification is substantially different from Frye's. However, it must be borne in mind that Vico refers to language in various contexts throughout the *Scienza nuova* and his scattered remarks on language do make up a theory which could serve as a basis for Frye's own work.

Language phases in *The Great Code* are not purely linguistic phenomena; more importantly, they also represent the mental phases of humanity. Frye determines the period of the first mental phase in Greek literature before Plato, in the pre-biblical cultures of the Near East, and in the Old Testament. Frye calls this period "hieroglyphic" in the sense that words are used as signs of a particular nature. This language stage is primarily metaphorical, as there is no clear distinction between subject and object in language use. Words are purely metaphorical, for there is a sense of identity between sign and referent: the names of the gods represent a personality as well as an aspect of nature, and knowing a name invests one with a special power over the referent. In this mental phase, the "this is that" formula is predominant as opposed to the succeeding hieratic or metonymic stage where it becomes replaced with the "this is put for that" expression, where words are "put for" concepts.

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[11] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science,* transl. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fish, abr. and rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1961) p. 291. See Frye's remark about Vico's divisions as compared to his in *GC* 5.

According to Frye, this second phase of language emerged with Plato, who introduced a more individualised, as well as a more continuous, prose into literature after the prose of the hieroglyphic phase, in which it was predominantly discontinuous and consisted of "a series of gnarled epigrammatic and oracular statements" (GC 7). This metonymic use of language was based on the internal logic of the argument, which was "true" if it was built up in a consistent manner. In metonymic language, the idea of a monotheistic God replaces the metaphoric deities, in Biblical commentary everything follows from the perfection of God, and the metaphorical images of the Bible are only illustrations of a conceptual argument.

The third phase of language began around the sixteenth century, but gained cultural ascendancy only in the eighteenth. In philosophy it arose with the ontological theories of Bacon and Locke. This phase is called descriptive, because its truth-criterion is not the internal consistency of the ideas connected in a line of argument, as in second stage thinking, but rather the external world that is assumed to surround language. In this language phase the criterion of truth of an external reality moves into the centre of thought. The source of all knowledge is attributed to sense experience in the order of nature, as opposed to the order of words of the metonymic phase. In this phase, a statement is true if it is in accordance with the outside reality it describes. Frye observes that in contrast to the metaphoric nature of the first stage (A is B) and the metonymic feature of the second (A is put for B), the descriptive level of human consciousness is characterised by the simile (A, the verbal structure, is like B, the external reality). Therefore, "extreme forms of third-phase thinking demonstrate the "impossibility of metaphysics" or declare that all religious questions are unmeaning" (GC 13). From all this Frye infers that in third phase thinking God becomes "linguistically unfunctional," and that "on a sense-apprehended distinction between objects that are there and objects that are not, "God" can go only to the illusory class" (GC 17).

However, as Frye emphasises clearly enough, with the emergence of the third language-stage the question of illusion and reality shifted into the foreground and became one of the most important elements in modern thinking.[12] In the

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[12] Another perspective: F.C. McGrath characterised modernist thinking in *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986) under "eleven cardinal principles" based on Walter Pater's texts as (1) subjectivity and (2) relativity of knowledge, (3) epistemological scepticism, (4) the primary of sensory experience, (5) an observance of the Kantian limits on knowledge, (6) aesthetic and (7) historical idealism, (8) functionalist attitude toward all the products of imagination and intellect, (9) the notion of a unified sensibility of mind,

later development of the third phase of language all this has been accompanied by the blurring of the clear distinction of subject and object and because of this there has been a return to the first stage of metaphoric thought. Einstein proved that what had seemed to be matter is only an illusion of energy. In science, the observer cannot separate himself from what he observes, because he becomes part of what he observes. The modern conception of God also entails a movement: whereas in second-stage thinking God represents an immutable being and as so he belongs to the category of abstract nouns, according to modern interpretations God's self-definition "I am that I am" should be correctly read "I will be that I will be." Frye concludes from this that we would probably come closer to the correct meaning of "God" if "we understood it as a verb [...], implying a process accomplishing itself," than as an abstract noun (GC 17). Thus, there is a regression back to the very beginning, where words had special power and were forces and energies rather than signs of physical objects.

This cyclical concept of the development of language also goes back to Vico and Vico's concept of *ricorso* in language was important for Frye in his perception of cycles, repetition and continuity in the development of literature, too.

Vico has been the subject of widespread interest in a variety of disciplines in recent years on account of the broad variety of topics he discusses in the *Scienza nuova*. In addition, besides the three language phases and the concept of *ricorso*, there are two other important paths that connect Frye to Vico throughout his theory of literature. The first is the principle of *verum factum*, in other words, that man knows only what he has made. The principle of *verum factum* reappeared in several of Frye's works and became a central tenet in his own criticism.[13] It gave Frye a wider perspective which led him towards culture in general. The prison house of language syndrome is another, more severe formulation of the same concept, but as Nella Cortrupi remarks, both Vico and Frye "tinker with the constructive possibilities of illusion" instead of "wallowing in delusion."[14] It is interesting to note here that recent Viconian research questions whether Vico indeed applied the *verum factum* principle in his own

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body and feeling, (10) an expressive orientation toward the creative process and (11) ascetic devotion to aesthetic craftsmanship.

[13] For example in *GC*, in 'Cycle and Apocalypse in *Finnegan's Wake*,' in *Myth and Metaphor*, in 'Expanding Eyes,' in *Spiritus Mundi*, in *DV* and in *Words with Power*.

[14] Nella Cotrupi, 'Viconian Markers along Frye's Path' in *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*, ed. Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham (Toronto etc: University of Toronto Press, 1994) p. 292.

work. Gino Bedani believes that traditional criticism of Vico clings on questionable assumptions, including the centrality of the *verum factum* principle in his *New Science* or his alleged attempt to undermine the traditional Christian view of history. As Bedani claims "the 'verum factum' principle was actually of far more limited importance to Vico than is usually supposed," and what was indeed important to him was the *vero / certo* problem, the concept of uncertainty in science.[15] Whether Bedani is right or not, Frye did use the *verum factum* principle, which goes back to this passage of *The New Science:*

> Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which since men made it, men could come to know.[16]

But Frye was attracted to Vico for another reason as well and what Joseph Mali says of Joyce suits Frye too: he "was responsive to Vico because he saw in Vico's 'great effort' to forge a new science of history by means of imaginative philology, rather than by real philosophy, that pattern of quest which was closely related to his own struggle" for a new theory of literature.[17] It was undoubtedly in part due to this intellectual kinship that Frye returned to Vico for his theory of the three phases of language.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE

Which linguistic phase is reflected in the verbal structure of the Bible? This is one of the most significant questions Frye attempts to answer when focusing attention on language. He points out that whereas the language of the Bible belongs predominantly to the metaphorical phase, it also shows certain traces of the metonymic period as well. But in fact the Bible does not fit into these categories and it belongs to another mode of expression.

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[15] Gino Bedani, *Vico Revisited: Orthodoxy, Naturalism and Science in the Scienza Nuova* (Oxford etc: Berg, 1989) pp. 3 and 163.
[16] *The New Science* p. 53.
[17] Joseph Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's 'New Science'* (Cambridge: CUPress, 1992) p. 270.

Frye brings up the notion of oratorical rhetoric as a catalyst when advancing along his enquiries. Although oratorical rhetoric is a common genre in the second phase of language, it–

> represents a kind of transitional stage of language between first-stage metaphor and second-phase argument [...] Hence oratory at its best is really a combination of metaphorical or poetic and "existential" idioms: it uses all the figures of speech, but within a context of concern and direct address that poetry as such does not employ. (*GC* 27)

In our age of third-phase writing, where the primary emphasis lies in the distinction between reality and illusion, oratorical rhetoric is rather scarce except for some verbal techniques explicitly intended to create an illusion, such as advertising and propaganda. As regards the Bible, Frye arrives at the conclusion that its linguistic idiom does not really belong to any of the three phases mentioned above:

> It is not metaphorical, like poetry, though it is full of metaphor, and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being a work of literature. It does not use the transcendental language of abstraction and analogy, and its use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout. It is really a fourth form of expression for which I adopt the now well established term *kerygma*, proclamation. (*GC* 29)

Kerygma unites the metaphorical and concerned aspects of all rhetoric, however, the nucleus underlying it is not an allegorical argument, but is "the vehicle of what is traditionally called revelation."(29) As for the word "revelation," Frye warns against taking it as a "simple" form of descriptive writing. In *Kerygma and Myth*, myth and *kerygma* are opposed to each other and Bultmann or, more appropriately, his interpreters and followers suggest that by demythologising the Bible the *kerygma* will remain in a bare and unadorned form.[18] In contrast to the concept attributed to Bultmann, however, Frye believes that myth is the vehicle of *kerygma* and "to 'demythologize' the Bible would be the same thing as obliterate it" (*GC* 30).[19]

To Frye, *kerygma* is:

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[18] *Kerygma and Myth*, a collection of essays on this topic by various authors, was edited by H.W. Bartsch in 1953.

[19] Frye remarks in the notes of the *GC* that "I think it unfortunate that the term 'demythologizing' has been associated with Rudolf Bultmann, whose conception of the New Testament is not really a 'demythologizing' one at all." *GC* 237.

> a mode of rhetoric, though it is rhetoric of a special kind. It is, like all rhetoric, a mixture of the metaphorical and the "existential" or concerned, but unlike practically all other forms of rhetoric, it is not an argument disguised by figuration. It is the vehicle of what is traditionally called revelation [...] (*GC* 29)

In Frye's interpretation, *kerygma* is not an argument because an argument is always based on reasoning and thus it is aggressive. An argument manipulates the audience, whereas *kerygma* reveals a vision of truth. As Tibor Fabiny has noted about Frye's concept of *kerygma*, "biblical language is characterized by a kind of 'transparence' as it can be 'seen through,' it does not want to hide something as a hidden agenda."[20] While possessing a transforming power (the power to transform the readers), *kerygma* is also characterised by a sense of interpenetration, "the free flowing of spiritual life into and out of one another that communicates but never violates" (*DV* 18). Therefore, *kerygma* is tied in with freedom, and because it is free from aggression and is genuinely concerned about human beings, it constitutes the language of love.

DECREATION OF LANGUAGE

In Frye's conception of language there is no transition between the three major phases of linguistic development but represent three absolutely disparate mental stages in history. The only exception is poetry, a form of language that has come down to the "descriptive" phase from the "metaphorical" one, constantly recreating it in new forms.

But if the boundaries of the mental phases of humanity are closed down so tightly, the question arises whether we can, and how we can, understand and interpret texts which were written in a linguistic-mental stage that is fundamentally different from our own. The problem can be well illustrated by a duality, two large interpretive classes into which individual interpretations can be readily classified.

"This is a way contrary to all human reason; like Abraham you can only advance along it by faith, not by sight, always sure that whoever loses his life for Christ's sake will find it."[21] This quote from a life commitment ceremony reflects

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[20] Tibor Fabiny, 'Myth and Kerygma: From the Perspective of Rudolf Bultmann's Theology and Northrop Frye's Literary Criticism' (paper presented at the Budapest colloquium of the Zürich-Budapest Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics Project, on 6 October 1997).
[21] 'Life Commitment of a Brother' (Taizé, 1991)

a major problem all approaches to the Bible must face. In contrast to "external" approaches, there are also "internal" or "spiritual" modes of understanding it, and these do not move along the way of reason in the sense "reason" is attributed to in third-phase thinking. The very kernel of the Bible's own teaching is that the reader must accept it as the source of truth and, in Blake's words, "He who replies to words of Doubt / Doth put the light of knowledge out." Moreover, the Bible suggests that once this acceptance or inner revelation has taken place, new perspectives open up whereby "deeper" levels of understanding become possible. According to Paul, any other attempts to understand the Bible are futile:

> God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.
>
> (I Corinthians 2:10-13)

Modern critical approaches to the Bible in the age of the descriptive language-phase often follow a different line and apply an external analysis. However, scientific thinking inevitably contains limitations (the problem of illusion and reality has already been mentioned). It seems that the two essentially different ways of thinking in respect of the Bible are irreconcilable and that it is the descriptive phase of empiricism that has made the essential breach in human thinking, and the metaphorical and metonymic phases adhered more to each other with their common category of theistic systems than to the descriptive stage where these systems became "unmeaning." With the emergence of descriptive – or empirical – thinking, the understanding of the past in Gadamer's sense of a dialogue through a gradually expanding and accumulating human tradition entails, besides the almost impossible task of totally possessing that tradition, the insoluble problem posed by the radical shift in language and which took place with the descriptive phase, blocking the way of that dialogue, isolating humankind linguistically as well as mentally from its cultural heritage. So the question remains: How can we understand the Bible? Can we understand it at all? Before answering these questions, we should first examine Frye's decreation of the historical truth of the Bible, an underlying principle which is for him a prerequisite for understanding and interpreting the Biblical text.

DECREATION OF HISTORICAL TRUTH

In his books on the Bible, Frye deconstructs the traditional view that the Bible describes historical events, and at the same time he shatters the concept of the applicability of an external truth-criterion to the Scriptures.

Frye uses the word "myth" in both a broader and a narrower sense. First, myth as *mythos* is an expression identical with "plot," "narrative" or any "sequential ordering of words." In the more restricted sense, myth comprises those stories which have a peculiar significance for the societies in which they were born. Myths in this secondary sense give people a solid frame of reference in life, they instruct them in what is important to know about their gods, history, laws and society. In this way myths become sacred as contrasted to profane stories, such as folktales. It is interesting to note that Frye's argument is in line with what Mircea Eliade claims in *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries*:

> [in] primitive and archaic societies [...] the myth is thought to express the *absolute truth*, because it narrates a sacred history; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (in illo tempore).[22]

Although "myth" today carries the widespread meaning of "a story not really true," in this more restricted context it is entrusted with a particular importance. Frye points out that myths take place in a mythology, an interconnected group of myths, and this feature also distinguishes them from profane stories, such as folktales, which never belong to such an intricate network.

Frye comes to the denial of the historicity of Biblical events on grounds of an examination of biblical description and history as we know it from other sources. He argues for example that the occurrence of similar events in mythologies far away from each other in time and space does not prove they actually took place since the "widespread distribution of flood myths is no more evidence for such a flood than a widespread distribution of creation myths is evidence for the creation." (GC 36) Similarly, the supposition that a place has been given its name after the event that took place there (Samson killed a thousand Philistines with a jawbone and "called that place Ramath-lehi," the hill of the jawbone) is illusory since the process is likely to have happened the other

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[22] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (London and Glasgow: The Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy, 1968) p. 23.

way round, the name suggesting the story. Egyptologists have nothing to prove that the exodus of Israel ever took place and despite the existence of written records about the rise of Christianity, there is no evidence for the life of Jesus outside the Bible. Most importantly, the fulfilment of a prophecy, so characteristic of the structure of the Bible, questions the truth of any claim to historicity. Frye points out that in the Book of Judges, which comprises a series of U-shape narratives, the emphasis falls on the structure and not on the historicity of the stories, which are made to fit the pattern because of the moral interest they bear.

Frye's attempt to decrease the historic reference of the Bible does not stop at the refutation of the truth of the Bible in terms of the world outside it, but in some cases he also challenges traditional theological dogmas. Here is an example:

> The Trinity, though a logical enough inference from Biblical language about God as a Father, a Son and a Spirit, does not explicitly appear in the Bible except in I John 5:7:
>
>> For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.
>
> This verse is not in the early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, but was inserted into some Latin copies, and so entered the Vulgate: then, by further efforts of devout faking, it was translated into Greek.
>
> (GC 163)

Or elsewhere:

> A warning that the law, even if transcended, was not to be regarded as destroyed or annihilated by the gospel appears in Matthew 5:18, where it was perhaps inserted to guard against the Gnostic tendency to think of Christianity as totally discontinuous with Judaism, even to think of the Old Testament God as an evil being. (GC 84)

Laymen may feel perplexed hearing all this, or simply reject what Frye claims, because what they believe to be the truth of the Bible is shattered by these arguments. Frye is preoccupied with destroying the external truth layer of the Bible to the extent that his claim that the Bible establishes another set of "reality" may well remain hidden to many of his readers. On the other hand, it may appear that Frye's examples follow from the perspective they claim to support, i.e., that his rejection stems from the standpoint he assumes. At a closer look, however, this statement may not prove accurate.

RECREATION OF THE BIBLE

It has been mentioned that one may be inclined to believe that Frye's rejection of the historic truth element of the Bible derived from his scientific, or "descriptive" perspective, that is his perspective as a scholar living in an age characterised by the third phase of language. This is part of the reason. Frye did not accept that God made tests of faith "to make things as difficult as possible for intellectually honest people to believe anything he says" (GC 43).

More importantly, however, his approach derived from, and coincided with, his wish to recreate the Bible. This attempt, in turn, was bound up with the acceptance of the "intentionality" of the Scriptures in the broad sense of the term. According to Frye, the external truth criterion attached to the Bible is deficient because the Bible does not accept any proof external to itself. Therefore, the endeavour to find such truth is out of line with its internal consistency (see GC 44). Although Frye was firmly against the concept of authorial intention in the *Anatomy of Criticism* and elsewhere, in his later studies of the Bible he nevertheless clearly respected the Bible's intentionality.[23] This concept of intentionality, however, is not based on the intention of an author, but on the recognition of the *kerygma*, the proclamation, present in the text. This recognition is not simply a subjective "feeling," but is the result of the rhetorical examination of the text, which shows that the Bible "expresses the voice of authority" (GC 211). Frye's primary goal, it seems, is to recreate the *kerygma*, and he proceeds from putting the imagery and the narrative units of the Bible together to reach a larger synthesis of understanding. In doing so, he adopts an "internal" perspective, similar to the general method used in his book on Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*. He accepts that if the Bible does not relate historic truth and does not describe Weltgeschichte, then it represents Heilsgeschichte, sacred history. With this distinction, one is reminded of the Aristotelian distinction between history and literature, where literature is superior to history because it describes not actual events but probabilities.

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[23] See the first sentence of 'Metaphor I,' GC 53. Answering a question by a student, Frye, again, said that it was important to respect the religious intentionality of the Bible, see 'The Bible and Literature,' video series, Episode No. 1, *Introduction: an approach*, [videocassette] (Toronto: Media Centre, University of Toronto, 1982) In the 'Hypnotic Gaze of the Bible,' Frye said: "Well, I was confronted with the difficulty that the Bible seemed to have all the characteristics of literature, such as the use of myth and metaphor, and yet at the same time it was clearly not intended to be a work of literature." in *A World in a Grain of Sand* p 222.

Instead of demythologising the Bible, as Rudolf Bultmann or his interpreters proposed, Frye re-mythologises it, since the *kerygma* is imbedded in myth and metaphor. Re-mythologising is, therefore, necessary to reach the *kerygma*, and is based on the revelation of the interconnections within the text itself, which Frye maps out by his typological method.

Returning to the question of whether it is possible to understand the Bible in the descriptive phase of language of the present time, one must conclude that Frye's own answer is not stated explicitly, but is suggested by the very existence of his books on the Bible. In *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*, Frye broke away from the "descriptive" language phase, and his "decreation" of the Bible was the decreation of approaches taken from the descriptive perspective, implying that it is only our modes of understanding that can be shattered to pieces.

Frye transforms literal meaning into metaphorical meaning, claiming that the literal meaning of the Bible is essentially metaphorical, and accepts mythical dimensions as its objective referents. Mention has been made of Frye's distinction between the three phases of language and it has been earlier claimed that according to Frye the language of the Bible constitutes a fourth language phase, which is the language of *kerygma*. However, Frye refers to this fourth phase of language in another context as well. He asserts that we cannot understand the Bible unless we attain a fourth level of language ourselves, stating that the "reconsideration of the Bible can take place only along with, and as a part of, a reconsideration of language, and of all the structures, including the literary ones, that language produces" GC 227). In 'Freedom and Concern,' Frye claims that "A fourth stage, which I mention as a future possibility, would unite these three and perhaps do other things by uniting them."[24] This fourth level is to be reached by the reader or interpreter. Frye never spoke quite clearly about this fourth stage of language, which the reader should possess, but it may be suspected that he did "reconsider" language in his books and the foundations of this "future possibility" were laid down in the approach set out in *The Great Code*, *Words with Power*, and *The Double Vision*. Frye attempted to reach the fourth phase of language by recreating the building blocks of the Bible, using an "internal" approach and respecting the intentionality of the text. Therefore, it may be claimed that Frye's own plan was to recreate the fourth phase of language (*kerygma*) by using a language that actually turns into it, or at least as close to it as possible, while incorporating the three language phases and thereby establishing their synthesis.

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[24] 'Freedom and Concern' in *A World in a Grain of Sand* p. 284.

Thus, the two contexts of the fourth phase of language – one being the Biblical and the other the interpretive – turn out to be merging into one another. In that way, Frye's attempt to reveal the Bible's structure and thought is in fact very similar to what Paul claimed by saying that spiritual truth can be interpreted to those, and by those, "who possess the Spirit," with the important distinction that Frye attempts to reach the level of *kerygma* by using solely his own conscious, intellectual effort. Keeping this in mind, the following pages will demonstrate the pattern of Frye's recreation of the Bible.

TYPOLOGY: RECREATION OF IMAGERY AND NARRATIVE

Typology used to be a popular form of Biblical commentary in the Middle Ages, a mode of understanding which is suggested by the Bible itself. This feature distinguishes it from other forms of literature: it is a text full of self-explanation as its narrative contains a great number of explicit references to its other parts. Therefore, since the inherent unity of contrary aspects in certain metaphors or narrative elements is clearly recognised in the Bible itself, when typology was widely used in the Middle Ages, the commentators only followed this tradition.[25]

Typology is a term with several different meanings and therefore it cannot be used unambiguously without some kind of a definition. Apart from many other things that the term means, it is a way of thinking. In recreating the mythic elements and metaphoric imagery of the Bible, Frye uses typology as a way of cognition in exploring the Bible. Both Testaments are full of types and antitypes in this sense, and can be read typologically independent of each other. However, Frye's approach focuses on the typological reading of both Testaments together. In the *Lion and the Lamb*, Tibor Fabiny distinguishes between nine basic meanings that the term typology has been associated with. These include:

> (1) a way of reading the Bible; (2) a principle of unity of the "Old" and
> the "New" Testaments in the Christian Bible; (3) a principle of exegesis;
> (4) a figure of speech; (5) a mode of thought; (6) a form of rhetoric; (7) a

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[25] Such passages in the New Testament are Matthew 12:39-40; John 3:14; Romans 5:14; I Corinthians 10:1-6, 11; Galatians 4:22-26, 28; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:8-9, 23-24, 10:1; I Peter 3:20-21. The water as a metaphor and a building block of typology is clearly apparent e.g. in the Catholic liturgy of the baptism.

vision of history; (8) a principle of artistic composition; (9) a manifestation of "intertextuality".[26]

In his books on the Bible, Frye uses typology in a very broad sense. To him it is a "mode of thought" and a "figure of speech," as well as a vision of history (see e.g. *GC* 80-82). He shows that as opposed to causality, which relates to the past, typology relates to the future and is thus bound up with the concept of fulfilment. However, in *The Great Code* typology also assumes the meaning of intertextuality, which is constructed in the reader's mind by pure associations. For example, his reference to the "golden calf" as "a type of the later schismatic cult set up in the kingdom of Northern Israel (1Kings 12:28)" (*GC* 83) is an intertextual connection, not one that relates to a sense of fulfilment, and therefore Aaron's making of a golden calf and Jeroboam's schismatic cult cannot be connected in a strict sense of typology.

In the following pages, the discussion will examine how Frye gives meaning to the building blocks of the imagery of the Bible while using a technique which results in a unified vision of the Biblical texts.

Although there are connections between Frye and structuralism, Frye did not "learn from" structuralism, but arrived at a very similar technique by viewing the Bible (and literature in general) from a typological perspective. In *Structural Anthropology*, Claude Lévi-Strauss claims that:

> the true consistent units of a myth are not isolated relations but *bundles of such relations*, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined as to produce a meaning. Relations pertaining to the same bundle may appear diachronically at remote intervals, but when we have succeeded in grouping them together we have reorganized our myth according to a time referent of a new nature.[27]

Lévi-Strauss examines the Theban legend by analysing its narrative features. His method involves searching for similar elements in the narrative which he groups into columns and then reads the columns from left to right, to see what meaning they suggest. This two dimensional network, however, can and will turn into three dimensions if a new version of the myth comes to light, because the structure of any new variation of the myth can be placed "behind" the previous one and, therefore, the reading incorporates a third dimension. Lévi-

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[26] Fabiny, *The Lion and the Lamb* pp. 1-2.

[27] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, transl. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967) p. 207.

Strauss is never confused if new versions of the same myth emerge; on the contrary, the variations ensure that his structure remains both dynamic and inclusive. As regards the Theban legend, by opposing categories of overrated blood relations to underrated blood relations and the concept of the autochthonous origin of mankind to the denial of it, he interprets the myth as representing "the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous [...], to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman."[28] To Lévi-Strauss, however, it is the structuralist method that really matters, and his specific interpretation of the given myth is only of secondary importance, whereas in the case of Frye, method and interpretation go hand in hand to describe, suggest and visualise the recreated substance of the original work.

In Frye's interpretation of the Bible, the typological reading of the narrative determines seven phases of revelation: Creation, Revolution, Law, Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospel and Apocalypse, a sequence in which each subsequent phase follows from the pervious one and completes it as well. His analysis of a series of "U shape" stories along the whole narrative-mythical structure of the Bible also follows the principles of typology, from the largest unit stretching from Creation through the Fall to Revelation to small narrative units such as the ones described in the Book of Judges, all of them identical in shape, and, metaphorically, also in substance with the story of Jesus, which thus incorporates the whole narrative of the Bible.

However, the typological structure of the imagery of the Bible, consisting of a series of apocalyptic and demonic imagery, is difficult to interpret on a level of synthesis, especially in view of the tables presented in *The Great Code* (see *GC* 166-167), although it must be noted that Frye's theory and interpretation cannot be reduced to, or explained by, tables, and that he uses them only for the illustration of his thought. And although he generally refrains from psychology when collecting the elemental units of the Bible, he sometimes renders psychological explanations to support his ideas, especially when contrasting demonic images to apocalyptic ones, which makes it difficult for the reader to reach a synthetic idea of the overall imagery of the Bible. Here is an example of this tendency in *The Great Code*:

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[28] Lévi-Strauss p. 212.

> The Whore of Revelation holds in her hand a golden cup full of the blood of saints and martyrs, a figure derived from Jeremiah 51:7. We note the metaphorical identification of blood and wine and the sexual image of the cup: its apocalyptic counterpart would be the cup held by Jesus when instituting the Eucharist (I Corinthians 11:25).   (GC 155)

Following this line of association, Frye arrives at the Oedipus legend a few sentences later (see GC 155-156). And although in Jeremiah 51:7 it seems that it is the wine of Babylon, *viz.* of the Whore of Revelation, that is being drunk and it is difficult to see any ground for Frye's supposition which claims something else, the real problem is the demonic meaning that he attributes to the cup. By virtue of the opposition between apocalyptic and demonic imagery, the apocalyptic cup also assumes this connotation, since what oppositions (comparisons) of this kind imply is the identification of the positive and the negative side, their difference being a matter of affirmation or negation of the same. Although this implication of Frye's interpretation is hardly conventional, the crucial problem with it lies elsewhere. Such oppositions and allusions may grow and expand without limitation and all they do is offer associations. From his works we know that Frye was a man dedicated to reach final unity and not dissemination. He warns against excessive associations in another context: "anyone writing the life of Napoleon might speak of the 'rise' of his career, the 'zenith' of his fame, or the 'eclipse' of his fortunes. This is the language of solar mythology, but it does not follow that the story of Napoleon evolved from a sun myth" (GC 35). In a similar way, the apocalyptic and demonic cups are not connected and it seems that Frye is unable to draw a clear line between them, or, alternatively, to reach their level of synthesis. In the intertextual reading of apocalyptic and demonic images, therefore, one is left without any answer as to how to interpret them, unless one thinks that the evil images point to the absence of their apocalyptic counterparts in human consciousness.

In Frye's final analysis, however, the central metaphor of the apocalyptic vision is the body of Christ, which holds together "all categories of being in an identity." This vision supersedes the demonic images, and it is clear that Frye follows the Bible in that he concentrates on the apocalyptic vision and not the demonic one.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Frye sees literature as a bundle of relations that add up to larger meanings. One of these was the cultural aspect of literature from which moral and social vision is a direct step. As has been seen, Frye deconstructs the Bible only to recreate the vision of its unity by a conscious effort to see the *Gestalt* of

interrelations, soaring to the level of anagogy to suggest its complex meaning. Frye sets up patterns which are obvious only to combine them into more profound sets of patterns, which finally suggest the anagogical meaning. Each intertextual relation suggests a pattern, but when read simultaneously, they make up a large, more profound meaning, which can be described only by metaphoric language – hence the metaphoric nature of Frye's language so typical of most of his works.

FROM MYTH TO LITERATURE: ASPECTS OF CONCERN

The following pages offer a path that connects Frye's Biblical interpretation with his interpretation of literary language, according to which there exists a "concerned," or "engaged" aspect of literature which leads it out of the captivity of pure aestheticism.

It has been noted in numerous books and essays on Frye that the basic heuristic assumption for him was the conception of the unity of all literature, a pattern of coherence which he demonstrated by his archetypal-typological-intertextual criticism. It has not been emphasised with equal weight, however, that another principle was also of fundamental importance in his works: the notion of the concerned aspect of myth, which in the Bible is represented by *kerygma*.

In the *Critical Path* Frye distinguished between the "myth of concern" and the "myth of freedom." The myth of concern comprises everything that people should know in order to live in society. It is socially established and is conservative. It manifests itself in belief and ideology, dogmas and authority: "Concern, so far it is a feeling is very close to anxiety, especially when threatened. The anxiety of coherence is central: normally, voices of doubt or dissent are to be muted at all times" (*CP* 37). The "myth of freedom," on the other hand, is liberal, it is connected to the age of writing and to "the logicality of argument" (*CP* 44) as opposed to authority. It brings in the notion of tolerance and dissent. And although literature should represent the myth of freedom, in history it has also been forced to adapt to the myth of concern. In the 1980s, Frye reviewed this bipolar distinction between the myths of concern and freedom, arriving at its most refined version in his last book, *The Double Vision*. This revision went beyond the rephrasing of "myth of concern" to "concern expressing itself in myths," as he later clarified his expression, and turned into a structure of primary,

secondary and spiritual concerns, in which the word "concern" was not in opposition to "freedom" any longer.[29]

Frye intended *The Double Vision* to be a "shorter and more accessible version of the longer books, *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*" (*DV* xvii), but it was a new and final synthesis of his thought. In the double vision of language, nature, time and God the reader understands that Frye's attachment to the Bible was more than the interest of a literary critic exploring the forms of expression in which the Western literary tradition lies. The spiritual vision that the Bible represents became an integral part of his outlook and in his last book we see Frye not as the literary critic but as the well-tempered scholar of human culture and society. The *Anatomy* was a purely theoretical book on literature, *The Great Code* and *Words with Power* focused on the identification of the Bible as myth and its intricate relation to literary forms and traditions. *Myth and Metaphor* contained essays on faith and belief and marked a shift in Frye's attention towards the transforming power of the Bible and the primary concerns present in literature. This shift was completed in *The Double Vision*, which repeats as well as supplements Frye's thoughts about the Bible and its role in a spiritual and social context.

Perhaps the strongest expression of Frye's individualistic conception of God is his statement of God being at the bottom of creation inside man. This is of course a Romantic concept, which Frye believed was made by the inversion of the traditional structure in theology, where God was "up there" in the sky. In this traditional vertical structure, the Garden of Eden was the next step down below God, which was, in turn, followed by the fallen world ordered for man to live in. The fourth, lowest, level was a demonic world of chaos, existing below the order of nature. This structure became a model for social authority, and anything "up there" became a threatening force of tyranny. It was the romantic movement that turned this structure upside down and in Blake's poetry God is at the bottom of creation, inside man, trying to recreate the world through man. Everything above God in this structure, such as social authority and ideology, needs to be transformed or overcome by man, with God inside, through the act of re-creation. As David Cayley remarked, to Frye, the Romantic inversion of the traditional structure was the central mythological event of the modern age. This metaphor is crucial in the thought of modern thinkers: Schopenhauer's world of idea being on top of the world of will, Marx's ascendant class being on top of an

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[29] *Northrop Frye in Conversation*, ed. David Cayley (Anansi, 1992) p. 114.

increasingly stronger proletariat, Freud's concept of the ego fighting for survival with the *libido* and *id* underneath, Kierkegaard's idea of the ego, being on top of *Angst* and dread. For Frye, it was the metaphor itself that mattered in terms of poetry, whether in its traditional version as it appears in Eliot or Yeats, or in the inverted, as in Blake. Both structures can be penetrated by authority, but the only good option is "to try to duck out from under all structures of authority"[30] The above restatement of Frye's ideas clearly points at his use and interpretation of cultural phenomena in both a structuralist and psychological way, but most importantly in a metaphoric and visual framework. The same imagery of a hierarchy symbolised by Jacob's ladder in western civilisation is used as a guiding principle in the second part of *Words with Power*, in *The Double Vision*, or in 'The Repetition of Jacob's Dream.'[31] Frye deemed that there was no third way out of the system of descent or ascent for human thinking, whether a positive or negative philosophy was looming in its background.

The double vision of nature is another exposition of the *verum factum* principle: the distinction between the physical world and the social or human world. The human world, which envelopes bare nature, consists of work and play. Play makes a world of freedom, where the creative arts belong. Creative arts, in turn, are the home of spiritual primary concerns. The level of spiritual primary concerns is the one to which *kerygma* also belongs, but Frye stresses that literature does not have the transforming power of *kerygma*. Instead, together with the creative arts, it produces models of primary concerns. In Frye's words:

> Literature incorporates our ideological concerns, but it devotes itself mainly to the primary ones, in both physical and spiritual forms [...] In short it does everything that can be done for people except transform them. It creates a world that the spirit can live in, but it does not make us spiritual beings. (*DV* 16)

Frye therefore does not think that literature retains the kerygmatic aspect of the Bible, but that it represents the same primary concerns, or their absence in the human condition.

In *The Double Vision* there are two kinds of nature. The first represents an objective physical environment, from which human consciousness feels separated and which gives rise to human anxiety. This is the single vision of nature, a world

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[30] Cayley pp. 105-107.
[31] 'The Repetition of Jacob's Dream' in *The Eternal Act of Creation: Essays, 1979-1990*, ed. Robert. D. Denham (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) pp. 37-49.

of aggression and hierarchy, which is the model of all the cruelty in immature human societies. The double vision of nature, however, is a humanised nature, which is created by work and imagination. Frye claims that God cannot be found in physical nature but in the human world.

It is interesting to note how Frye's concept of "fourfold" vision in *Fearful Symmetry* changes into a double vision in his last book. In *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye distinguished between four levels of vision. The first was represented by generalisations and abstraction based on memory (the Lockean universe), or by Blake's Ulro. The second was the world we live in, the physical world, which Blake called Generation. Above it lay the world of imagination represented by a vision of love and wonder, lifting man from the world of subject and object but still unable to produce art. Blake called this level Beulah. The fourth level was an intensification of the third, "the highest possible state," the "union of creator and creature, of energy and form," which Blake named Eden.[32] In *The Double Vision*, the distinction lies primarily between the second, which represents our "normal vision" of the world, and the third and fourth visions contained in one. The double vision relates to spiritual (metaphoric) vision that is capable of producing not only works of art, but also a criticism of life. In *The Double Vision* criticism assumes a broad meaning and encompasses all that we "know on earth" and is synonymous with education (*DV* 38).

The double vision of nature relates to the double vision of space, and in contrast to the subject-object split in the physical vision of nature, it brings about what Alfred North Whitehead called "everything is everywhere at all times" in his *Science and the Modern World* (*DV* 41). This incorporates the double vision of time as well, the presence of the eternal "now", which is absent in ordinary experience. The double vision of God is a spiritual vision of the humanised God:

> The single vision of God sees in him the reflection of human panic and rage [...], the double vision [...] tries to separate the human mirror from God's reality. The point is that his reality comes far closer to human life when purified of the reflection of human evil.   (*DV* 83)

Frye's attempt in the *Anatomy of Criticism* to create a sense of unity and mutual understanding in literary criticism has failed, in part because the language he employed was not radically different from the language of other scholarly works. In his last book, Frye's language withdrew from any trace of aggression or arguments, and reached the kerygmatic language of love. *The Double Vision* was

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[32] See *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947) pp. 48-50.

another attempt, with an expanded dimension, to reach the goals set out in the *Anatomy*. In his last book Frye's typological thinking soared to the level of a philosophy of love, unity and concern, where the vision of the world possesses a redemptive power to transform language, nature, time and God into a humanised form. This aspect of Frye's criticism, expanding and turning into the language of charity is perhaps less known to the critical world, although it seems it is exactly the kind of expression that is needed today, when culture is becoming more and more fragmented and intellectual groups, more than ever, appear to be separated from each other by unbridgeable gaps.

Márta Pellérdi

Aestheticism and Decadence in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

Lolita is a deceptive text that has been putting readers on trial ever since its publication in 1955 by the ill-famed Olympia Press.[1] It is a fictitious autobiography written by Humbert Humbert, whose conjoined propensities for pedophilia and highbrow aesthetics have persistently baffled critics. Humbert's erudition manifests itself in the numerous literary allusions he scatters throughout his text. They have been noticed by Nabokov's earliest critics, but little has been said about the correspondences between them and the patterns they form.[2] The allusions to past writers and their works bolster Humbert's intention of convincing his readers that his case is not an abnormal one, since it has precedents in the lives of renowned artists. In other words, he is trying to persuade his readers that he truly regrets having ruined Lolita's childhood, but he also wants to make them condone his immorality. The allusions serve particular authorial purposes; they posit the book as texture and intimate themes, thereby revealing the "secret points, the subliminal coordinates by means of which the book is plotted" as Nabokov expresses it in a postscript to the novel, 'On a Book Entitled Lolita' (p. 334).[3] Nabokov, through Humbert's direct or indirect literary references, also points to the exclusively literary existence of his character.

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[1] American publishers rejected the book and only the French Olympia Press was willing to publish it. Later, the author in an article entitled "*Lolita* and Mr. Girodias" declared that he had not known that most of Olympia Press's production consisted of "obscene novelettes." (Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* [New York: McGraw Hill, 1973] p. 271.) As a result, *Lolita's* reputation was tainted for years. There were many objections on the part of the American reading public when the book was published in 1958 in the United States.

[2] Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1967) p. 338.

[3] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1961). All references are to this edition.

Humbert's text feeds on other texts, it is a rewritten and compiled, distorted version of other literary texts.

Humbert is an elaborate stylist and after losing Lolita, he regrets that he no longer has her but "only words to play with!" (p. 35). As a foreigner whose mother tongue is not English, Humbert is playing with the language of his new homeland. He is of "mixed French and Austrian descent, with a dash of Danube in his veins" (p. 11). While he is experimenting with English words and sounding informal, archaic and erudite alternately, Nabokov is doing the same, for he declares in the postscript that *Lolita* was more like a love affair on his part with the English language (p. 334). Humbert provides readers with various pieces of information from his European past, that explain his erudition and the presence of numerous allusions in his text. As a student in Paris, he "switched to English literature, where so many poets end as pipe-smoking teachers in tweeds" (p. 18). Later, after finishing his studies, he worked as a teacher of English in France and then "started to compile that manual of French literature for English-speaking students (with comparisons drawn from English writers) which was to occupy [him] throughout the 'forties" (p. 18). The influence of this work can be faintly detected in Humbert's autobiography. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to remark that the texture (not text) of *Lolita* is very much like a "manual of French literature" for English readers "with comparisons drawn from English writers" (p. 18).

In *Lolita*, Humbert's moral decadence is fused with a taste for literary decadence. When Humbert describes the source of his passion for nymphets, he recalls his first love, Annabel Leigh, echoing Poe's 'Annabel Lee.'[4] This reference is significant not only because Poe married a thirteen year-old girl (Virginia Clemm), or because it underlines that Lolita's, and thus Humbert's, existence is just as literary as that of Poe's Annabel, but because it serves as a link in series of references that intimate a theme. Humbert stresses that when the germs of his ruthless obsession were born, he and Annabel were co-evals: "When I was a child and she was a child, my little Annabel was no nymphet to me; I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right, on that same enchanted island of time" (p. 20). Unfortunately for him, he cannot remain a simple "faunlet," and after growing up, he becomes a veritable lecherous faun because his obsession for nymphets remains. When speaking about himself and his relationship to nymphets, he consistently sees himself as having the attributes of the pagan faun: he has "ape

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[4] Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Prose* (Moscow: Raduga, 1983) p. 55.

ears," "ape paws," "hairy hand[s]," "timid claws" and "talons."[5] Besides these animalistic features, he is also faun-like in his desire for nymphets. But Humbert's case is not a simple one; his malady is a longing for a "more poignant bliss" which only the females that he designates "nymphets" can provide and to which the unfortunate twelve-year-old Lolita happens to belong (p. 20).

> Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travellers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as "nymphets."
>
> (pp. 18-19)

In other words, not all little girls are nymphets. Humbert's problem is that he wants to find the bliss he is seeking through a 'real' girl and therefore projects demoniac attributes onto the brash teenager, Lolita. The critic Michael Wood sees the role of the reader as having a major role in finding the Lolita to which Humbert pretends to be blind: "the 'actual' Lolita is the person we see Humbert can't see, or can see only spasmodically."[6] Underneath her impetuous teenage vulgarity, Lolita suffers, "sobbing in the night--every night, every night--the moment [Humbert] feigned sleep" (p. 185). Humbert is deeply aware that Lolita will never be able to forget that she has been "deprived of her childhood by a maniac," and since he seems to condemn himself for what he has done to her, the only way he can try to save his soul is to apply "the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art" (p. 298). For Nabokov, the favored character is not Humbert but Lolita, the vulgar little girl of the novel with a philistine background. Brian Boyd informs us in his biography of Nabokov that "of all the thousands of characters in his work, Nabokov once said Lolita came second in his list of those he admired most as people."[7] Humbert at one point, however, unfairly calls her a "mentally ... disgustingly conventional little girl" (p. 156). Lolita's background is trite and philistine compared to Humbert's erudition and taste. Although his cruelty is incontestable, it cannot be denied that he is blessed with an artistic insight that immediately recognizes and rejects all pseudo-intellectual and artistic commonplaces, as when he describes Lolita's mother and their family home at Ramsdale:

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[5] *Lolita.* pp. 52, 64, 59, 217.
[6] Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 117.
[7] Brian Boyd, *Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 273. The first on the list of Nabokov's favorite characters was Professor Pnin in *Pnin*.

> The front hall was graced with door chimes, a white-eyed wooden
> thingamabob of commercial Mexican origin, and that banal darling of
> the arty middle-class, van Gogh's 'Arlésienne' ... She [Charlotte] was,
> obviously, one of those women whose polished words may reflect a
> book club, or any other deadly conventionality, but never her soul;
> women utterly indifferent at heart to the dozen or so possible subjects of
> parlour conversation, but very particular about the rules of such
> conversations... But there was no question of my settling there. I could
> not be happy in that type of household with bedraggled magazines on
> every chair and a kind of horrible hybridization between the comedy of
> so-called 'functional modern furniture' and the tragedy of decrepit
> rockers...   (pp. 39-40)

Humbert thus combines cruelty, lechery, moral decadence and elitist views on art;
and it is in the last quality that he rather resembles his creator. Although he may
find the real Lolita "conventional," when he sees himself as a faun, she becomes
the nymph, that is, the ideal, the beautiful, the inaccessible, all that an artist
would strive to attain. When Nabokov in the postscript describes what a real
work of art means to him, he emphasizes that:

> a work of fiction exists only in so far as it affords me what I shall bluntly
> call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere,
> connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness,
> kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.   (p. 332)

For Humbert, this "aesthetic bliss" can be found in the 'flesh and blood' nymphet
Lolita and her likes; and he confuses 'real' life with art, as a result. This is of course a
paradox, since the fictitious Humbert also produces the text of *Lolita* in order to
attain, like Nabokov, "aesthetic bliss ... where art ... is the norm," even though his
own character may lack three of the four parenthetical qualities listed by the author.
This is where the reference to Poe in the name Annabel Lee becomes the center in a
series of correspondences, creating an allusive texture and providing an answer to
why Humbert refers to an array of symbolist and decadent French and British
artists either directly or indirectly such as Maeterlinck, Rossetti, Swinburne, Wilde
and Beardsley.[8] Several allusions are made to the precursor of French symbolism,
Baudelaire, as well. Humbert does not name one of the most important ones,

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[8] There is an indirect reference made by Humbert to Swinburne's poem, *The Nympholept*, when he
accuses himself of nympholepsy. Lolita's name, Dolores Haze, is also another Swinburnian name, as
in the poet's *Dolores*. (Kenneth Foss, ed., *A Swinburne Anthology* [London: The Richards Press,
1955] pp. 38-39.)

Stéphane Mallarmé, however. The French symbolist poet was fascinated with Edgar Allan Poe (as Baudelaire had been) and translated some of his works, as well as the poetry of Victorian poets such as Swinburne and Tennyson into French and made a living as an English teacher, like Humbert back in France.[9] Mallarmé also became the leading figure of the symbolist movement at whose Tuesday evening gatherings numerous contemporary French and British artists (some of them more decadent than symbolist) turned up to discuss literature. One of his literary predecessors, Edgar Allan Poe, had an enormous influence on French poetry in the second half of the 19th century, not only through his poems and tales, but also through his critical writings which were early versions of the theory of art for art's sake . The Russian decadent-symbolists came to know Poe's works from the French symbolist and decadent poets. Nabokov's favorite Russian writers, Aleksandr Blok and Andrej Belyj, also borrowed many themes such as "spiritually crippling pessimism and malaise" from their French predecessors.[10] Poe is the link that ties references to French, English, and Russian literature together in *Lolita*, since, through his influence on French poetry, he became a source in turn for British and Russian poets.[11]

Although Humbert does not directly refer to Mallarmé, his texts always hover in the background. Humbert is similar to the faun in *L'après-midi d'un faune*; his diabolic desire for the nymphet matches the description of the faun's in Mallarmé's poem, and their intentions are the same: "Ces nymphes, je veux les perpétuer," the faun declares.[12] This reverberates within Humbert's words: "A great endeavor lures me on: to fix the perilous magic of nymphets" (p. 141). Mallarmé's poem shares characteristics with especially decadent poetry of the time, but writing about nymphs, satyrs and cultivating the pagan spirit appealed to other poets as well.[13] This tendency in France (which began even earlier)

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[9] Judy Kravis, *The Prose of Mallarmé: The Evolution of Literary Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) pp. 31-34.

[10] Samuel D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1973) p. 23. Russian readers were first acquainted with French symbolism and decadence in 1892, when Zinaida Vengerova's article in the *Vestnik Jevropi* was published on Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and others. (Cf. Jean Cassou, ed., *A Szimbolizmus enciklopédiája*, trans. Mária Dévai [Budapest: Corvina, 1984] p. 173.)

[11] This is not surprising if we remember that Nabokov's three languages were Russian, English and French.

[12] "These nymphs, I wish to immortalize them" [my translation]. István Fodor et al., eds. *Textes Littéraires Français du XIXe Siècle. I. Poésie* (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1978) p. 428.

[13] Marshall C. Olds, *Desire Seeking Expression: Mallarmé's 'Prose pour des Esseintes'* (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1983) p. 50.

parallels the aesthetic movement in English literature whose first representatives were D.G. Rossetti, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde in England. Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) demonstrated a return to a hellenistic, impressionistic view of life, which his followers later developed into sensuality, a form of hedonism in life-style, the (self)-criticism of which can be found in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Aestheticism meant elitism in art, or "art for art's sake," and the decadents felt they were fulfilling a purpose by fighting against "barbarism"; mediocrity, conventionality and materialism in their quest for the Ideal.[14] The decadents, in other words, extended aestheticism to the sphere of non-textual existence. There are other reasons why Mallarmé is important, if not so much to Humbert then to Nabokov. Besides the fact that the French poet translated Poe and sounded Arcadian themes, Mallarmé's commitment to art was metaphysical, whereas Wilde's for instance, remained on the aesthetic plane; he flaunted his views in a flamboyant and propagandistic way. Although Wilde's comments on art superficially seem to coincide with Nabokov's, the latter did not agree with the British representative of the art for art's sake theory:

> I do not care for the slogan art for art's sake – because unfortunately such promoters of it as, for instance, Oscar Wilde and various dainty poets, were in reality rank moralists and didacticists – there can be no question that what makes a work of fiction safe from larvae and rust is not its social importance but its art, only its art. [15]

It is with Mallarmé's conception of true art rather than Oscar Wilde's that Nabokov agrees. When Mallarmé began to write *Hérodiade,* his intention was to "peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."[16] To him, it is "the art of suggestion in language [which is] ... the only way of creating an entity equal in expressiveness to that which is seen and felt."[17] Nabokov, the stylist seems to agree with Mallarmé, and has Humbert vest the words of his memoir with a magic quality in an attempt to create an aesthetically ideal text that stands in opposition to the impurity of the surrounding world, an ideal text that counteracts his own moral corruption, a "refuge of art" where timelessness and immortality is awaiting the true lover of art (p. 325).

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[14] Pierre Brunel et al., *Histoire de la Littérature Française,* Tome 2 (Bordas, 1972) p. 539.

[15] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature,* ed. Fredson Bowers (New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) p. 33.

[16] "...to paint not the thing, but the effect it produces." Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes. 1. Poésies,* eds. C. P. Barbier and C. G. Millan (Flammarion, 1983) p. 211. (my translation)

[17] Kravis p. 198.

There is another pattern in the comparative literary network of which Humbert as scholar is also probably aware. Mallarmé's dramatic poem *Hérodiade* (1864) might have served as a basis for Flaubert's *Hérodias* (1877). Nabokov admired Flaubert's fiction, praising his "impersonality" and preference for the style or "form" of a work of art in *Lectures on Literature* (p. 147). In Flaubert's version of the story, Salomé is a very young girl who makes only a few appearances. It is Hérodias, the mother, who believes that she can attain her ultimate goals with her husband by scheming to have her daughter (his step-daughter and niece) noticed and desired.[18] *Lolita*, on the other hand, is the inverted story of *Hérodias*, in that Humbert marries Charlotte Haze to get closer to his step-daughter, while Charlotte does all she can to keep her daughter away from Humbert (she sends her to a summer camp and decides to enroll her in a remote boarding school). It seems that the symbolists and decadents were fond of myth-making, for they returned obsessively to the Hérodias-Salomé theme in painting and music, as well (e.g. Gustave Moreau and Richard Strauss). Oscar Wilde, one of the main representatives of aestheticism and decadence in Engish literature, took up this popular subject, and with perhaps Flaubert's *Hérodias* and Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* in mind, transformed the story into *Salomé* (1893), a play he wrote in French. Wilde's Salomé is a demoniac *femme fatale*, who is blinded by her own selfish lust for St. John the Baptist. What the the unfinished dramatic poem, the short story and the play have in common is the theme of incest. (Hérodias marries her brother-in-law, and her daughter Salomé arouses the desire of her uncle, Herod Antipas). Humbert tries unsuccessfully to act like a father to Lolita, but:

> it had gradually become clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which in the long run was the best I could offer the waif. (p. 302)

Nabokov could not directly allude to Wilde's *Salomé*, but through the name of Beardsley, the town where Lolita and Humbert settle for hardly a year, and through the first name of one of Lolita's classmates, Aubrey McFate, the illustrator of the first edition of Wilde's play, Aubrey Beardsley joins the list of *fin de siècle* decadent artists alluded to in *Lolita*. Finally, the first name and the last appear casually together in the text as: "Aubrey Beardsley, Quelquepart Island" in

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[18] Gustave Flaubert, 'Hérodias' in *Trois contes* (Le livre de poche, 1972) pp. 103-149.

one of the hotel registrations signed by Clare Quilty, Humbert's rival (p. 264). The rather covert references to Wilde, Swinburne, and Aubrey Beardsley, also point to the Victorian period, when the lives of many decadent artists were looked upon with horror. Humbert is one of their belated disciples, transplanting the decadent spirit from Europe to 20th century modern America. His problem however, is that America proves to be too Victorian in matters of nympholepsy, and too conventional for his aesthetic tastes, but still capable of exerting a powerful influence over him (in the person of Lolita).

There is an even larger literary correspondence behind the name of Beardsley, which branches out to embrace mainly the British symbolist and decadent artists. Aubrey Beardsley was the art director and illustrator for four issues of *The Yellow Book*, which was published between 1894 and 1897. Arthur Symons (who attended Mallarmé's Tuesday evening sessions) and Yeats were also contributors to the magazine, together with many other prominent poets. Yeats, as another example of a symbolist poet, used history as a way of myth-making, turning to the Irish past for the subjects of his poetical dramas. It is incidental, but still worth mentioning, that the subject of Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is based on a true historical event that took place in 1798, when a general named Humbert (!) led a French expedition to Ireland, which triggered a rebellion against the British.[19]

The second pedophile in the novel is Gaston Godin. The posters in Gaston's room also indicate a taste for the *fin de siècle*, as well as early twentieth century English and French literature, and Russian music. His sexual preferences are subtly suggested by the pictures of "André Gide, Tchaikovsky, Norman Douglas, two other well-known English writers, Nijinsky (all thighs and fig-leaves), ... and Marcel Proust," but he prefers faunlets to adults or nymphets (p. 191). It annoys Humbert that:

> he was devoid of any talent whatsoever, a mediocre teacher, a worthless scholar, a glum repulsive fat old invert, highly contemptuous of the American way of life, triumphantly ignorant of the English language – there was he in priggish New England, crooned over by the old and caressed by the young – oh, having a grand time and fooling everybody; and here was I.   (p. 193)

The third pedophile in the book is a peripheral character who rises to key significance in Part Two of *Lolita*, when Lolita becomes interested in dance and

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[19] Cassou p. 176.

dramatics at Beardsley School. Quilty happens to be writing his play *The Enchanted Hunters* at The Enchanted Hunters hotel where Lolita and Humbert spend the night together. She will get the title role of Diana in the school performance of the same play.[20] Quilty is also the co-author of *The Little Nymph*, the author of fifty-two scenarios, whose work Humbert despises. He is also referred to several times as Humbert's brother, or as his Swiss cousin Trapp. When he manages to abduct Lolita, he checks her out of the hospital in Elphinstone with the pretext that he is her uncle (a continuation of the incest theme). Besides the obvious similarity in looks, Humbert is dismayed to discover from the hints Quilty drops in the hotel registers that: "his allusions were definitely highbrow. He was well-read. He knew French." (p. 263). His plays have a dreamy and symbolic atmosphere to them, and he is called the "American Maeterlinck, Maeterlinck-Schmetterling," and with this reference another symbolist work is implied (p. 317). The theme of "brothers" and "jealous revenge" trickles more dreamily and less blatantly in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), which was one of the most successful plays of the 1880s. Mallarmé, who adored the theater, was also impressed with the drama.[21] Middle-aged Golaud's tyrannical jealousy of, and passion for, the very young and innocent Mélisande leads to his killing his half-brother, Pelléas. Humbert's jealousy and murder of Quilty is similar to Golaud's. In his plays, Maeterlinck was concerned with the dark forces of Destiny, "le troisième personnage, énigmatique, invisible, mais partout présent, qu'on pourrait appeler le personnage sublime."[22] Maeterlinck's preoccupation with destiny is also echoed in *Lolita* and is called McFate. There are a series of incomprehensible coincidences that Humbert blames on McFate, because he does not realize that he too is a literary character whose destiny is sealed by the author:

> No matter how many times we reopen "King Lear," never shall we find the good king banging his tankard in high revelry, all woes forgotten, at a jolly reunion, with all three daughters and their lapdogs. Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts of Flaubert's father's timely tear. Whatever evolution this or that popular character has gone

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[20] *The Enchanted Hunter* is the English title K. M. Weber's opera, *Der Freischütz*, which is referred to in Chapter Three of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

[21] Kravis p. 125.

[22] "...the third character, enigmatic, invisible, but always present, who could be called the sublime character" (Maeterlinck, quoted in Brunel p. 558), my translation.

> through between the book covers, his fate is fixed in our minds... Thus
> X will never compose the immortal music that would clash with the
> second-rate symphonies he has accustomed us to. Y will never commit
> murder. (p. 279)

It is therefore surprising when Humbert finally murders Quilty. He inflicts
punishment on the playwright for abducting and debauching Lolita (the same
crimes Humbert is guilty of); for being an impotent voyeur of nymphets, and for
not having loved her. The character who has to this point played a marginal role
appears fully-fledged in the ghastly murder scene Humbert has no qualms about
committing, although he insists being "opposed to capital punishment" (p. 325).
Invisible McFate is an agent that directs Humbert to his predestined Fate and
McFate in turn may be the devilish agent of Clare Quilty, which means that
Humbert could in fact be Quilty's (the American Maeterlinck's) creation in the
prose version of his *The Little Nymph*, alias *Lolita*. (The co-author of *The Little
Nymph*, as Humbert finds out from an encyclopaedia, is Vivian Darkbloom,
which is an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov). This could be the reason why once
Humbert is faced with Quilty, intending to kill him, there is a nightmarish
quality to the whole scene, in parody of the dream-like, fatalistic world of *Pelléas
et Mélisande*. At the beginning of *Lolita*, Humbert describes one of his dreams:

> Sometimes I attempted to kill in my dreams. But do you know what
> happens? For instance, I hold a gun. For instance, I aim at a bland,
> quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet
> after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle. In
> those dreams, my only thought is to conceal the fiasco from my foe,
> who is slowly growing annoyed. (p. 51)

The description of this dream is rather similar to the nightmarish slow motion
slaughter of Quilty during which, at one point, Humbert feels that "far from
killing him I was injecting spurts of energy into the poor fellow, as if the bullets
had been capsules wherein a heady elixir danced" (p. 319). At times the slow
motion is accelerated, but the dream-like quality of the action is sustained:

> with another abrupt movement Clare the Impredictable sat down before
> the piano and played several atrociously vigorous, fundamentally
> hysterical, plangent chords, his jowls quivering, his spread hands tensely
> plunging, and his nostrils emitting the soundtrack snorts which had been
> absent from our fight. Still singing those impossible sonorities, he made
> a futile attempt to open with his foot a kind of seaman's chest near the
> piano. My next bullet caught him somewhere on the side, and he rose

from his chair higher and higher, like old, grey, mad Nijinski, like Old
Faithful, like some nightmare of mine to a phenomenal altitude. (p. 318)

Curiously enough, music is also present in *Lolita* through the musical
quality of the words, Humbert's puns, the piano lessons Humbert wants Lolita to
attend, and in the musical snatches described in the text. He sings a popular tune
about Carmen to Lolita who, just like any ordinary teenager likes to listen to the
radio (p. 65). He takes her to concerts and tries to offer her a thorough musical
education. She learns to dance at the school in Beardsley, where the curriculum is
centered on the "four D's: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating" (p. 186).
Music and dance have to be present in the book to a certain extent to complete
the references to the decadent-symbolist artists.[23] They believed in the musical,
magic quality of the words, "de la musique avant toute chose...," as Verlaine
expressed in 'Art poétique.' Impressionist composers however, attempted to
combine all the arts in their music – poetry, painting, dance – through developing
implications in the subjects of famous poets of the symbolist tradition.[24] A
prominent example of such a composer was Claude Debussy who in 1894 wrote
L'Après-midi d'un Faune. (In the most famous staging of this tone poem, the
choreography was devised by Nijinsky who also took the part of the faun). Later
in 1902, Debussy also composed *Pelléas et Mélisande*, based on Maeterlinck's
play.[25]

The diabolic-incestuous themes of Salomé (Hérodias); the faun's powerful
passion for the inaccessible nymphs in Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*; the
jealous passion of Goleaud for Mélisande; the brotherly relationship between
Pelléas and Goleaud in Maeterlinck's play, appear throughout in the text of *Lolita*
and point to some of the major subjects that preoccupied symbolist and decadent
artists at the turn of the century, while also marking some of the "subliminal
points" the author encouraged his readers to enjoy in the postscript, but which
readers must seek for themselves to find.

Like many decadent artists (Wilde, Pater, Swinburne, Verlaine and
Huysmans), Humbert also seeks forgiveness for his sins in Catholicism, but
proves to be unsuccessful in his efforts:

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[23] See the references to Nijinsky in the passage quoted above. Symbolist painting is also present
through the reference to Whistler's *Mother* (*Lolita* p. 194), and Humbert gives as a birthday present
to Lolita the *History of Modern American Painting* (p. 210).

[24] Paul Verlaine, 'Art Poétique' in Fodor p. 421.

[25] József Újfalussy, *Debussy* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1959) pp. 283-4.

> A couple of years before, under the guidance of an intelligent French-speaking confessor, to whom in a moment of metaphysical curiosity, I had turned over a Protestant's drab atheism for an old-fashioned popish cure, I had hoped to deduce from my sense of sin the existence of a Supreme Being... Alas I was unable to transcend the simple human fact that whatever spiritual solace I might find, ... nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted upon her.   (p. 298)

All these "correspondences" (to use a Baudelairean term) are implicit in the pages of *Lolita* where Humbert is made the most outrageous of all the decadents. When Nabokov remarks in the postscript that "there are many things besides nymphets, in which I disagree with [Humbert]" (p. 333), perhaps he might also mean that Humbert, like many of the decadent artists, could not distinguish moral decadence from artistic decadence, immorality from aesthetic permanence. Aestheticism as a life-style was only an exterior manifestation of the quest for Beauty, and this is perhaps one reason why Humbert persistently but unobtrusively, attempts to defend his moral decadence with literary allusions. He still does not fully realize his error when he refers to a quotation from an "old poet": "The moral sense in mortals is the duty / We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty" (p. 298). *Lolita* is an exploration into the difference between immorality in life and immortality in art. Humbert is sure that he is mortal, unaware that he is only an immoral literary figure who strives to immortalize his Lolita through his memoir. By doing this, he does manage to transcend time and mortality. It is in art that he realizes his desire: "I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita" (p. 325).

Raymond Horvath

A Generative Concept of Poetic Truth

1. THE PROBLEM, THE METHOD, AND THE OBJECTIVE

Peter Baker in *Modern Poetic Practice*, as Albert Cook puts it on the back cover of the book, "attempts to develop a generative criticism of poetic practice."[1] Baker employs traditional rhetorical terms to describe the process in which the poetic text is made. He seriously considers the conventions of rhetorical criticism, as his Table of Contents reveals,

He tests his approach through the analysis of a few selected poems by eight different poets. He identifies poetry as a field of creative activity in which the artist uses language to mobilize other faculties of self-awareness. He does not limit the analysis of the poem to linguistic structures that parallel the organization of *memory*. He finds that *memory* dominates in certain situations, while it might play negligible roles in others, when *absence, desire, knowing, style,* or *compassion* can take the lead. In this way, he admits that conceptual thinking and/or linguistic communication cannot reproduce experience fully because experience is

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[1] Peter Baker, *Modern poetic practice: structure and genesis* (New York: Lang, 1986) (American University Series, Comparative Literature, vol. 2.)

more complex and/or more personal than they are. His application of rhetorical categories can mislead those who assume the presence of an Aristotelian tradition that uses rhetorical terms as congruent elements in a terminology. Baker emphasizes the validity of his categories, but dismisses the Aristotelian concept of the whole as linguistically and conceptually inaccessible. He emphasizes the validity of his categories, but dismisses the Aristotelian concept of the whole as linguistically and conceptually inaccessible. His application of traditional terms in a deconstructionist setting is an accomplishment in itself but even his remarkable expertise cannot redeem the inherent weaknesses of deconstruction. I agree with him that the literary work of art is, from its author's point of view, an expression of a hopelessly personalized stage in the cognitive process. As such, it can never materialize for the reader without a perhaps similar, but hardly ever identical process. The problem with this approach is that at first Baker implies that we cannot really talk about personal experience – which the literary work of art obviously is – then he talks about it, nevertheless. Indeed, the reader's reconstruction of the author's experience never coincides with the original experience, but I will try to show why not. Experience is unrepeatable, even for the same person, thus the problem lies in the uniqueness of experience, not in its inalienability. Writing and reading poetry join everyday experience in memory, partaking in a process that follows the patterns of cognition. I emphasize the process, and do not give up the hope of reconstructing the cognitive patterns of poetic creation. I place my emphasis on a general reconstruction of the poetic process.

I emphasize the poet's point of view with Baker, but discuss the poetic process as an integral part of the cognitive process with the ultimate goal of computerized emulation. The poet modulates experience held in memory suitable for poetic signification. In this essay, I introduce a theory of truth judgment that situates poetic signification in the cognitive process. A deeper understanding of the nature of truth judgment eliminates abortive disputes over issues that make sense only for the individual subject. This vantagepoint also enables me to outline a modular model for poetic signification. My theory follows the stages of the cognitive process and provides a controlling tool for checking truth content against pragmatic functionality. I share Baker's hope that "the group inscribed by this text is not simply a social class or even a class of professional scholars, but all poets and writers actively involved in producing works of the imagination." (Baker, ix) The cognitive process – in which poetry is only one of the several

possible strategies – selects or develops problem-solving methods for particular situations that seem to show some regularity. For one, the poet's knowledge could approximate the reader's by pointing to the universal questions that underline cognitive activity.

Modern theories in most areas of humanities that I know disregard the possibility of a consensus. It would be far too simple to blame the need for an academic career and, consequently, self-marketing, self-justification, or paranoia. A few more important reasons why a consensus would be either premature or impossible deserve our consideration. A metatheory embracing all existing approaches will materialize only if:

(1) the theories it mediates between are all true in some way;
(2) natural language implies sufficient common knowledge to communicate; therefore, common problems exist;
(3) the fundamental units of communication are based on commonly known answers to general problems;
(4) the theory meets its own truth conditions;
(5) the results solve problems outside the theory; that is, evidence of the validity of the theory lies outside the theory, thus avoiding circular reasoning.

I will test my argument against these conditions. First, I will discuss possible reasons why things that are considered true by many are not necessarily true at all. Secondly, I will propose criteria for the value of specific cases of truth judgment. Finally, I will demonstrate that my description is systematic enough to be reliable by pointing out its shortcomings. After all, the design of theoretical systems ought to include the point of their failure, admitting their range, avoiding problem-solving areas they are not meant to address.

2. FUNCTIONALITY ALONE PROVIDES LITTLE EVIDENCE FOR TRUTH CONTENT

The relics of literate cultures have preserved an embarrassing multitude of logically irreconcilable theories that, nevertheless, fully function as approaches and techniques to conceptualize experience in their own cultures and, sometimes, even in other cultures. The trends known today are assumed to have survived because they have determined the course of history. The argument that ideas become popular because they work might tempt the cultural historian. However,

it is not difficult to point out that many ideas become popular because they work but solve different problems from the ones they initially addressed. In other words, falsehood often works when truth does not. Attractive ideas nearly always end up as dogmas in ideologies competing for popularity. The widespread use of an idea may, at first, stem from its truth content, which is why it can turn into an integrated part of instituted standards almost immediately. Popular ideas represent specific ways of asking questions that address some common and, possibly, universal problems, including the problem of having to ask questions. Theories of language or literature, although rarely strictly opportunistic, cannot ignore the problem of authority. Baker's interpretation of modernism in contemporary literary criticism illustrates my point:

> The most influential studies of modernism highlight the ideological content of the works and thus feature authors in which this dominant ideology is either expounded directly or clearly discernible. One result of this movement is that academic criticism has become increasingly detached from the mainstream of vital and creative artistic activity.
>
> (Baker p.1)

An idea remembered by history books, therefore, cannot claim to have solved the problems that created it. Rather, it represents specific ways of asking questions. Questions misrepresent problems by imposing the speaker's point of view on the listener. Moreover, a single culture admits only a limited number of questions. Language refers to known answers to questions that can be asked in the speaking community. Cultural thinking pays attention to functional phenomena. Questions, therefore, initiate, condone or, at least, indicate cultural standards by their implications. The availability of questions in a language community marks the boundaries of cultural thinking. Each culture allows a number of questions with unquestioned presuppositions, which increases the chances of cultural dogmatism.

While contending that valid judgments are possible in literary criticism, I emphasize the disparity between popular and authentic ideas. Pragmatism has prevailed as one of the few widely approved principles. The critic, when judging a literary work of art in relation to his own culturally and personally limited truth judgments, must observe the maxim that an idea can be judged *authentic* only if it proves to have solved at least some of its original problems, preferably before being accommodated to an ideology. Truth judgments deemed necessary to relate to the work of art or in the critic's reading remain subject to pragmatic

verification. I am unable to offer an evaluative summary of all possible approaches to my theory, so I will merely suggest that the method elaborated here works toward its goal: it elucidates a few aspects of truth judgment in the cognitive process.

3. WHAT HAPPENS IN THE COGNITIVE PROCESS?

Problem solving constitutes the central faculty of the human intellect. According to psycholinguistic research done over the last few decades, raw sensory input needs speedy interpretation to remain in the perceiver's memory: there seems to be a 4-second limit to remembering unprocessed sensation.[2] Articulate thought, when used successfully for practical problem solving, structurally parallels either socially acknowledged segments of cultural schemata[3] or the semantic pattern of individual experience retained in long-term memory.[4]

Perception is followed by immediate cognitive processing based on cultural knowledge and personal judgment. The thinker's concept of the subject epitomizes the direction and the sophistication of his problem-solving activity. The first stage of cognition produces cognitive units for long-term memory. Most people have little or no doubt of their own internalized reflection[5] upon previously experienced cognitive events. However, *impressions* (raw perceptual experience) and *notions* (first-time segmentation of perceptual experience) make sense in memory only because the thinker relates them to the rest of his knowledge of the world. The originally isolated segments of impressions and notions eventually enter long-term memory. During poetic signification, working memory temporarily retrieves, holds, and exchanges cognitive units – memories and processes – from long-term memory, thus reinterpreting the first stage of

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[2] See G. Sperling, *The information available in brief visual presentations. Psychological Monographs* 74 (1960) for experiments on "partial report technique." C.J. Darwin, M.T. Turvey and R.G. Crowder, 'An auditory analogue of the Sperling partial report procedure: Evidence for brief auditory storage' *Cognitive Psychology* 3 (1972) pp. 255-267 is also authoritative on the subject.

[3] This is what the representatives of "mental model theory" claim in psycholinguistics. See P.N. Johnson-Laird, *Mental models* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) for more detail.

[4] Among well-known linguists, Fillmore and Lakoff notice that thinking is based on personal and culturally shared experience. When describing this phenomenon, Fillmore emphasizes the significance of *semantic frame*, Lakoff embellishes the idea as the *ideal cognitive model* (ICM) but their scripts stress the same, common observation.

[5] The corresponding rhetorical term is *memory*.

cognition for a second time. Memory, after this point, will hold an episodic event that fits into what Tulving distinguishes as the semantic portion of long-term memory.[6] The resulting image in memory, determined by personal judgment, can affect any further truth judgment. The new judgment, if integrated into long-term memory, will join other truth criteria. Such criteria first interpret perceptual *impressions*, then supervise their transformation into working *notions* in the cognitive space where they make sense and will not be used for evaluating phenomena that they cannot handle. Few scientists would regard astrology, palm-reading, or other manifestations of the occult as reliable sources of knowledge about nature, but each one of these benefit from the segment-isolating nature of cognitive problem solving. Such a subjectively framed system cannot fail within itself for at least four reasons:

(1) it ignores thought patterns that do not comply with it, often by calling them defective which, within the range of its accompanying personal experience, they indeed tend to be;

(2) it does not challenge indubitable first-hand experience;

(3) it directs the practitioners' awareness towards phenomena that resolve problems within the system;

(4) experience becomes communicable after the two-stage conceptual segmentation (raw perception to impression, then impression into notion) that inevitably happens within a system directed consciousness that complies with the first two principles.[7]

The third process applies to any form of systematic thinking, including approaches to literature.

Several parallel concepts ("definitions") exist for identical phenomena. Thought systems prioritize each truth judgment according to its problem-solving capacity. The complexity of such systems can vary according to the complexity of their priorities. These priorities can range from variables presented by ownership or curiosity to elaborate, hierarchic systems of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. For a single person one set of priorities prevails in a single decision.

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[6] E. Tulving, 'Episodic and semantic memory' in E. Tulving and W. Donaldson, eds., *Organization in memory* (New York: Academic Press, 1972) pp. 381-403. Tulving divides long-term memory into two sections. *Episodic memory* contains actual events, while rules and priorities are stored in *semantic memory*.

[7] In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Thomas Kuhn expounds the scientist's cultural determination.

In another situation, the same person will probably change the set of priorities on a mostly practical basis according to current problem-solving needs. For instance, the rules of logic solve mathematical problems best, while an existential problem will involve the person as a whole. Solutions that work best for corresponding types of problems tend to be chosen in similar contexts by analogy. The functionality of occult practices indicates that they answer the questions they ask, so the question is not whether they are true or not but if they are asking the appropriate question.

Since the disappearance of literacy in Latin, the tendency towards pluralistic concepts has grown steadily. Multiple terminologies have evolved even more rapidly since nation-centered views took over the place of ontology-based traditional thinking. Kristeva refers to this phenomenon in a rather poetic manner in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

> OUR PHILOSOPHIES of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archeologists, and necrophiliacs ... These methods show that ... [language has been] divided ... into self-contained, isolated islands – heteroclite spaces existing different temporal modes (as relics or projections), and oblivious of one another.[8]

In my reading, Kristeva's text itself is not exempt from what she calls *semantic positionality*. Her idea of poetic signification appears to be true of other kinds of conventional descriptive practices, including her own treatise. Moreover, as far as I can see, only those can decipher her text who, owing to their semiotic skill, accuracy of observation, and wide learning, are fully aware of the events she is talking about. I append to her elusive statement that the "islands" are usually in constant flux, not statically codified for their users. Reflection upon experience generates cognitive units that, integrated into the recursive interpreting process of subsequent experience, represent modules in the process of cognition. Kristeva observes the isolation between individuals but does not emphasize that it originates from the compartmentalization of the community and the loss of hope in interpersonal communication, not from one of a dissociation of language, which is only one of their corollaries.

The linguistic compartmentalization of humanities works against the use of traditional terms. A pragmatically useful knowledge of ourselves necessitates pluralism and calls for parallel projections. The study of humanity evolves into

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[8] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. Margaret Waller, introd. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) pp. 13-14.

synthetic but arbitrarily phrased systems of thought. Socially encoded semiotic systems change rapidly. The accumulating data should fit into a single open system that integrates anomalies as modular subsystems. A complex recursive algorithm could maintain the open system in a computerized simulation by allowing data to be added to a self-improving computer program managing a dynamic relational database. Such computer programs restructure themselves according to the actual problems they deal with. The program will have to, in a humanoid way, develop its own modules of interpretation and eventually become a partner for verbal communication, that is, account for all the variables involved. This is not a purely theoretical problem any more, not even as far as literary theory is concerned. Algorithms will always be limited to solving specific problems in which the sensory variables can be converted into finite algebraic statements. Such theoretical systems will, even after overcoming the limitations of closed systems by generating their own recursive rules, make a difference only as long as they keep solving problems. Kristeva's results illustrate my argument. Her descriptive system functions within itself although its scope does not necessarily exceed a tautologous reference to itself. Literary scholars should follow the path of natural sciences instead of developing self-sufficient systems. They could use theories as working paradigms towards constructing an artificial intelligence that will demonstrate the efficiency of their theories by its own efficiency at problem solving.

4. INDEXICALITY AND SYMPTOMOLOGY

Semioticians use the term *indexicality* to denote a causal relationship between the signifier and the signified. The result indicates ("indexes") the cause. In Charles Sanders Peirce's classic example, the presence of smoke indicates fire. The same process has always been used for interpreting language. Who would not ponder every once in awhile why some other person speaks in a particular way? In such cases people explore the indexical value of linguistic signs. The same method can apply to investigating ideas: a solution offered to a problem often better articulates a way of processing the problem than articulating a useful solution.

Symptomology will, as I propose it, attempt to recover the reasons why certain incidental solutions are offered to specific problems. I treat culturally and individually specific answers to common questions in their indexical value and identify them as symptoms for motivations. All answers solve problems,

although – as I explained before – not necessarily the ones posed by the question they ask.

Twentieth-century poets offer selective blends of existentialist and humanistic thought. Indexically, existentialism can be regarded as symptomatic of the human inability to conceptualize the world in a universally valid and/or consistently communicable manner. Increasing rootlessness, following the decline of oral tradition in industrialized communities, the rapid and incessant accumulation of uncontrollable social, cultural, and environmental changes, and inevitable self-contradiction within one's lifetime ensure that a multitude of parallel concepts emerge. The lack of an alternative argument does not prove that things themselves make sense in no other than the currently available paths. Inability to comprehend and the volatility of socially accepted identity leave the modern person with little choice but to accommodate his decisions to each particular situation without consistency. The old-age technique of maintaining viable patterns of self-images consistently compatible with the person's role in the community has proved impossible to sustain mainly because, owing to the absence of a communal ideology, the role is hardly ever identifiable. Existentialism reveals the problem without solving it. With the *locus* of judgment transferred from the public domain to the inalienable vision of the individual, human existence bears alarming resemblance to tautologous reasoning. Subjectivity projected as the only objective asset of intelligent comprehension might indicate that the traditional closed descriptive systems will have to be replaced by open, dynamic models that adequately, though inevitably temporarily, serve the purpose of sharing and understanding. Personal isolation and the failure of interpersonal communication lead to circular argument if, with one generating the other, they are assumed to be the central faculties of the human situation. If existentialist epistemology is right, a socially commendable description of the situation can never materialize. The existentialist enterprise might eventually offer one of the several parallel open systems necessary for the elaboration of a dynamic model for the human intellect. Existentialism might not have anything left to say beyond the uniqueness of personal decisions, a uniqueness that the AI simulation will have to reproduce. Neo-humanism, when it tries to establish a common denominator among everything customarily recognized as human, appears to be the antithesis of existentialism. The latter claims that the very characteristics and modes of experience humanity shares have caused the breakdown of both understanding and a sense of community. Humanists do not mind if their work is theoretically impossible as long as they

can foster sharing and understanding. My current work is part of this historical process. The outcome is still out of sight.

Prevalent approaches in literary criticism also demonstrate problems besides offering temporary remedies to age-old problems. Literary critics of the last two centuries have tried to implement the expanding range of diversity and changes in the technical forms and the social roles of the poem and the poet into their discourse. In recent decades, pluralism has been emphasized along with the tendency to unite human thinking again. The comparison of a lot of parallel systems that work might offer an explanation to the existence of parallel systems, while placing them into a more global perspective.

It seems possible to write a symptomological history of literary criticism. How far did particular critics represent compartmentalized aspects or even invent problems rather than work on omnipresent problems? How can one distinguish cultural limitation from personal whim? Which were the trends that transformed popular ideas into ideologies that brought fame for the critic rather than any discernible progress in the study of literature? No matter what the answers might be, the indexical value usually epitomizes the nature of particular critical trends.

5. THE COGNITIVE VALUE
OF TRUTH JUDGMENT:
THE SEMANTIC FRAMES OF POETRY

Umberto Eco exemplifies the compartmentalization of humanities flavored with aristocratic provincialism when he explains the limitation of descriptive systems in his introduction to Yuri Lotman's semantic theory: "When a culture is analyzed as a code or system ... the processes of use are richer and less predictable than the semiotic model that explains them."[9] This realization was about 77 years late: it entered the history of logic as Russell's Paradox in Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* in 1913. Late as it is, let us consider the problem itself. Both the creating and the reading process employ cognitive patterns unlike the ones used for their description. To complicate matters further, conceptualization can take place in a number of ways, and individual choices from these seem to comply with no universal rules but with cultural, personal, and contextual variables. Various modes of cognitive experience ideally compose a single continuous plane;

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[9] Yuri Lotman, *The Universe of the Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) p. x.

however, in reality, modes of cognition seem to work as tools towards problem solving, much in the way car mechanics use different tools to fix various problems. Consequently, Wittgenstein's abandoned idea of constructing continuity between isolated reflections might actually eventuate: but the process would revolve around universal problems of humanity, and not an artificially enforced mode of discourse. Problem-centeredness leaves enough room for pluralistic scholarship. Scholars need to identify universal problems that originate from the human situation irrespective of historical or cultural surroundings.

An ancient referential matrix to cognitive values might apply even today more usefully than competing contemporary theories in the philosophy of science. Lord Krishna (the Creator in Hinduism) says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

> Men say that the senses are superior
> to their objects, the mind superior to the senses,
> understanding superior to the mind;
> higher than understanding is the self.[10]

This typology assumes a hierarchy among the modes of cognitive experience that also applies to the poet's cognitive activity. Truth judgments made at lower levels work as binary constituents that can appear in concordance with Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance at higher levels to construct more complex cognitive units during category-identification. Cognition employs typical methods that respond to typical problems. These modes, if they do exist, also apply to the poet's cognitive activity. To link the ancient source to contemporary scholarship, I will name the psycholinguistic terms that best parallel the cognitive stages of truth judgment described by the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Empirical and logical cognition represent the dialectical thesis and antithesis of inductive and deductive reasoning and understanding.

Level One: The products of *empirical* cognition appear hardly questionable at the time of judgment although they reveal anomalies even for the same subject. Beyond recognizing that a hot oven can burn me or hitting my finger with a hammer hurts, most empirical experience involves pre-directed attention: you see what you need to see and the way you want to see it. The perceiver's attitude precludes the chance of objectivity. Eyewitness accounts at courts of law often demonstrate how vulnerable empirical cognition can prove.

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[10] *The Bhagavad-Gita*, transl. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Books, 1986) third teaching, verse 42.

Still, empirical cognition solves empirical problems effectively. The induction of, and deductive experimentation with, logical problems takes place at this level. In an encounter with written poetry, the empirical factor affects the reader's perception of the poem through the quality of the binding, the paper, the typefaces, the illustrations, and the colors of the book. Truth judgment takes place in relation to the reader's cultural codes. Perception is linked with a pre-motivated interpreting faculty[11] that employs a personally and culturally systematized pattern of rules and categories.[12] The mechanism itself accommodates the actual cultural and personal contents in the same fashion as an algebraic expression with multiple variables welcomes a variety of actual numerals. Psycholinguistics refers to this cognitive level as the sensory stage of memory, assuming that the perceiver interprets raw sensory experience before ever thinking about it.[13]

Level Two: *Rational* cognition (this processing mode characterizes judgment in closed system, e. g. logical, metaphysical, analogical, syllogistic, circular) develops self-sufficient systems and interprets perceptual cognition by employing pre-set rules that prevail in a community (a group of people in a space where the success of their activity depends on their cooperation) in order to ensure functional communication. Logical cognition attempts to make segmentations of, and offer solutions to, dilemmas that emerge empirically, although it works flawlessly only with abstract problems (including any type of systematic thinking, usually incorporating the processing of two semantic planes at the same time).

The memory of perception implements factors of experience that encourage induction and deduction at the same time. For instance, the reader, noticing fine paper and nice binding, might presume the presence of something valuable, relying on cultural analogy, but at the same time might simply enjoy the empirical pleasures of a book with a fine binding.

Everyday thinking favors Aristotle's common sense over Hegel's mathematical clarity. The following pattern exemplifies the everyday use of Aristotelian dialectic based on the empirical observation that the binding of a book looks finely-done:

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[11] *Sensory memory* is interpreted by *working memory*.

[12] Psycholinguists call this *semantic memory*, part of *permanent memory*.

[13] See Sperling for more detail. It is essential that uninterpreted memory lasts for about 4 seconds and only those elements survive that have been linked with long-term memory.

Original idea (I):   the binding of the book is finely-done
Analogy (A):   finely-done things are valuable (application of
                 generalized truth)
Synthesis (S):   the finely bound book is valuable

This setup easily proves simplistic. Several other things can show up in the place of the current analogy, which makes one wonder how far the applied analogy depends on the synthesis. Preconception, expectation, and personal need make teleological argument the standard in common logical arguments. In fact, even the sequential order of the following three steps seems quite arbitrary, depending on the synthesis one intends to support by the analogy:

Idea: the binding of the book is fine
Analogy: fine bindings feel good to touch (generalization)
Synthesis: buying this book will allow me to touch it any time

It does not take much to ascertain that any of the six sequential possibilities is possible, rendering ordinary logic somewhat irrelevant in the process of forming a synthetic judgment. The arbitrariness of analogies substantiates the rule that a thought can combine with an unlimited number of other thoughts. There is an unpredictable number of synthetic combinations, and a synthesis can originate from an inscrutable variety of components. The object of scrutiny can generate a spatial model that, theoretically, could develop into a complete model of experience. Logic puts a limitation on my argument, because I am supposed to rationalize the irrational too. Logical questions often generate answers that work but by the laws of logic, make little or no sense. The problem the questions pose still needs to be solved in a pragmatic manner. Laughter and art, among other things, offer such illogical, but functional solutions. Poems certainly go beyond the reach of logic, so expecting logic to serve as the primary tool for identifying the elements of the poetic act courts imminent frustration.

The existence of a systematic response to empirical input suggests that the sensory input noticed, conceptualize, and used as a basis for comparison by the cognitive faculties are dynamically related in the process of truth judgment. Sensory input is transmitted through the filter of *memory* and *desire*, and each memory of the first event might restructure the remaining conceptual image of the original experience by presenting another filter for inference each time the memory is recalled. Culturally and linguistically specific concepts need intuition for their interpretation. Concept generation and concept recognition represent cognitive domains that empirical experience and common logic cannot solely amount to.

Level Three: *Conceptual* cognition recognizes and dynamically generates concepts by synthesizing an initial idea with another gained from common analogy (analogy in a teleological setting) and by an act of prioritization performed by the conceiver's sense of proportion. Intuitive, absurd, humorous, bisociative,[14] mimetic, enactive, playful, emotional, reflexive, and reflective analogies are some of the most common. Recognizing a well-known composer's music, even if the particular piece is unknown to the listener, exhibits the virtues of conceptual cognition. Conceptual cognition integrates binary thought patterns into personal experience. For example, if "hot" and "cold" represent a dialectical opposition, their actualization happens in a common synthetic representation of both in the person's cognitive experience. The concepts, in the common synthesizing process that adds personal variables, move from the public concepts denoted by linguistic categories to the person's own sphere of judgment. Conceptual cognition (at Baker's *memory* stage) induces cognitive change within the person. The experience of heat, beyond being a logical concept and an empirical realization, constitutes a binary opposition between the concept and the empirical input, resulting in more than two planes being processed concurrently. Poetry offers primary experience by generating semantic modules at the level of mythic signification. Conceptual cognition usually plays a decisive role in creative problem solving. A problem can be removed from its context and transferred to another conceptual plane where it either functions again or can be eliminated without doing much harm to the thinker's psychological unity. This strategy ensures the acting person that reality is more spacious than perceptual experience, and even perceptual experience can be understood in far too many ways to take any single memory too seriously. Jokes and creative art are the most obvious examples of such problem-solving activity. Conceptual cognition, as a rule, involves the concurrent processing of logically irreconcilable semantic planes.[15] Mediation between *semantic* and *episodic memory* requires the complexity of at least this cognitive stage.[16]

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[14] Arthur Koestler's term from *The Act of Creation* (New York: MacMillan, 1964) refers to situations in which two incompatible semantic planes participate in concept-formation.

[15] Koestler describes this process both in terms of "The Logic of Laughter" (pp. 27-50) and of forms of creativity (pp. 271-412). Baker's platforms also favorably correspond with this idea.

[16] *Episodic memory* retains the actual event as we remember it while *semantic memory* contains the priorities and dominant principles that aid us in noticing, generating, and evaluating the products of our cognition.

Among these three cognitive stages, conceptualization ranks the highest and the empirical the lowest in complexity. Levels that are more complex can readily apply lower-level truth judgments to construct cognitive units of their own to be judged through yes-no questions. A less complex strategy that has only limited access to higher levels can reflect upon a higher level in a simplified manner. Today's literary theorists are usually expected to make logical arguments. However, communicating conceptual events logically is just as much impossible as tasting the fruits in a still-life. In general, the same applies to any other branches of cultural theory. The nature of an actual problem determines the usefulness of applicable problem-solving strategies. An empirical, rational, conceptual, or existential problem requires a solution at the corresponding cognitive level. A combination of empiricism and logic produces the most profit in sciences. Logic tested against physical experimentation tends to conglomerate into truth judgments that induce further, pragmatically useful truth judgments. We know very little about conceptual cognition but all studies of language or literature would badly need a firm knowledge of it.

Level Four: *Existential* cognition – no psycholinguistic parallel exists – relates to solving a problem that involves the person as a whole. The integrity of the human being overrides the partial truths recognized by the perceptual and the intellectual faculties. Theoretically speaking, cognition can result from a particular grouping that includes the combination of dialectical pairs of truth judgment from levels one to three. A combination of perception, logic, and/or conceptual representation can constitute existential judgment. Consequently, existential cognition could be verified only if the first three levels could be combined in a single, socially encoded semantic plane to ensure effective communication. Less complex dialectical pairs substantiate the existence of more complex levels analogically. That less complex levels integrate into more complex cognitive structures suggests a hierarchic structure of cognitive planes: the interdependence of the increasingly complex first three modes even speculatively appropriates the existence of a fourth level of cognition which involves the human being as a whole. While conceptual cognitive structures consist of a combination of empirical and/or logical structures, existential cognitive structures combine the first three levels. An unpredictable number of dialectical pairs in parallel planes results from the cognitive process that culminates into a single dialectical pair of conceptual understanding in a single plane of realization. Conceivably, this plane comprises of the person's sense of the world that appropriates an experience of the self.

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Inherent predisposition, if it exists, is an existential factor of truth judgment. Transcendental and visionary cognition, if assumed authentic, might be channeled through existential cognition. Faith in something can also be an existential necessity, easily overruling the findings of perception, logic, or most forms of conceptualization (which, nevertheless, affect the available scope of choices). Even if poetry addresses humanity existentially, the phenomenon itself, since it involves the whole human being, cannot reveal itself to anything less than another human being as a whole. Nicolas Berdayev refers to this knowledge preceding experience[17] in *Truth and Revelation*:

> ... the nature of truth is not intellectual and purely cognitive, ... it must be grasped integrally by the whole personality; ... the truth is existential.[18]

Of course, Berdayev's statement makes sense only if free will and truth judgment collate. If they do, the introduction of the cognitive levels of truth judgment points out the self-contradiction in quite a few common epistemological questions.

The *Bhagavad Gita* does not specify further levels of cognition. However, another two could be, and indeed have been, commonly conceived. Although their verification might never become fully possible, assuming their existence seems useful on the road towards an artificial intelligence emulation of cultural thinking because they constitute another two modules of truth judgment that might prove, eventually, hard to dispense with.

Level five: *Social cognition* originates from the historically popular idea that humans belong together. Jung's collective unconscious, Christ's mysterious body in Roman Catholic doctrine, the idea of Universal Consciousness in Taoist and Buddhist tradition appear to refer to the same *premise*. A Buddhist would probably refer to "all living things," while a Taoist would name "all things." Essentially, all these approaches appear to be variations on the same theme. If this level exists, poetry inevitably constitutes a part of it and, as such, it will not be defined before this level of cognition is found is properly described.

Level six: The theoretically most complex level of cognition is conceived when all things are assumed to belong together in a single ultimate harmony with
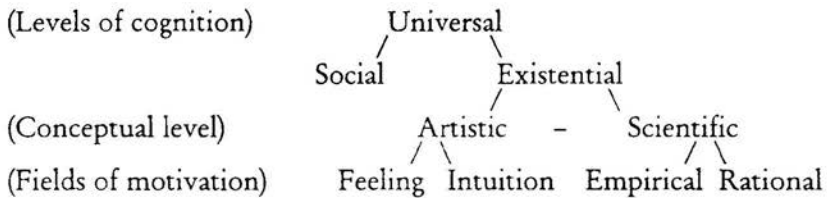
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[17] *A priori* in Kant.

[18] Berdayev, *Truth and revelation* (London: G. Bles, 1953) p. 20; the quote is from Robin Skelton, *Poetic truth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978) p. 120.

which personal contact is deemed possible. This level could be termed *Universal* cognition. This idea also frequently occurs in the history of civilization. Buddhist and Taoist thinking and a pantheistic concept of the universe converge with Mallarmé's insight:

> I believe that truly to be human, nature thinking, one must think with all one's body, which in turn yields a thought full and in unison like the strings of a violin vibrating unmediately with their box of hollow wood ... this is necessary in order to have a view truly – one of the Universe.[19]

Notably, the *Universal* level is only the end of a chain where reason and experience impose their limits on thought and language. Although successful translations of poetry employ truth judgment that works cross-culturally, poetry might include more cognitive domains than the six that I have named.

The following chart contains both the verifiable and the hypothetical levels of cognition in a dialectical hierarchy paralleled by Jung's personality types.[20] I interpret them – sensation, feeling, rational thought, and intuition – as problem solving strategies. I indicate the potential resources of motivation hypothetically, making no attempt to justify them in this essay.

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(Levels of cognition)            Universal
                                  /      \
                            Social        Existential
                                  /         \
(Conceptual level)          Artistic    –    Scientific
                              / \               / \
(Fields of motivation)  Feeling  Intuition  Empirical  Rational
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Complying with the Jungian distribution of attributes, the fields of motivation pair up into empirical/intuitive and rational/feeling dimensions, making the model three-dimensional. Intuition and feeling act in dialectical antithesis to empirical and logical cognition. Although both are conceptual in my previous definition of the term, I have distinguished artistic from scientific cognition since relatively clear communication of concepts is possible only when they come from

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[19] Henry Monody, *Eugéne Lefébvre*, cited by Robert Greer Cohn in *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)
[20] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Development of Personality*, transl. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

perceptual and logical resources, while artists express feeling or intuition more overtly – although not necessarily better or more often – than ordinary mortals do. The social level mirrors the existential frame. The community maintains its own cognitive units in the same way as individuals do, except that the cognitive contents of the community are available to each of its members and is usually linguistically encoded. In everyday life, popular myths are considered true in a community. Among contemporary myths the ones in medicine behave quite characteristically: they change frequently and quite spectacularly.[21]

6. TRUTH AND POETRY

Historically dominant descriptive techniques concentrate on the structural, poetic, mimetic, and affective elements of a poem. The poet's point of view has been rarely considered as a separate issue. From Antiquity to Classicism it was considered obvious. Later it became mystified in Romanticism and from the Avant-garde on it has been classified as inaccessible.[22] When the poet's job was clearly to teach while inciting delight, traditional logical-philosophical categories referred to the tools of poetry. It was assumed, as old-time school syllabi suggest by the inclusion of writing poetry into the curriculum, that even the less-than-talented could understand the nature of these tools and learn their usage by imitating the masters. The cult of the creative genius reached its climax in the nineteenth century.[23] It was a mark of the genius to create a wholly new vision of reality, sometimes even to show the way for the masses. In our days, poets are neither masters nor prophets. When asked about poetry, their opinions tend to differ to the extent of discrediting one another.

Rhetorical Criticism explores writing strategies. Stylistics, countering the same problem, concentrates on effects, rather than on techniques. Rhetorical criticism includes prose, and it also treats speaking in public. Speaking in public has been one of the ways poetry appeared in history; prose poems have also

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[21] For example, it turned out recently that a regular overdose of more than 500mg of vitamin C, considered innocuous since its discovery, damages the recipient's DNA.

[22] Carl Fehrman in *Poetic Creation: Inspiration and Craft*, transl. Karin Petherick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) pp. 198-200 argues remarkably effectively against "antigenetic" approaches, especially "intentional fallacy."

[23] S.T. Coleridge's distinction between primary and secondary imagination illuminates such an approach. Victor Hugo's role in French culture even during his lifetime exemplifies the reverence the "creative genius" was occasionally entitled to receive.

become common in the last one hundred years. Rhetorical criticism traditionally applies a descriptive language that does not concern itself with the building of theories or digging down to the roots of a poem's origin. The validity of the rules it proposes is usually affirmed by their influencing an audience effectively.[24]

Poetic tools can be understood as problem-solving methods, which means that computers can learn to use them as soon as the problems are clearly revealed. I have made the first step in this essay by pointing out the possibility of a binary system that is capable of truth judgment, while aligning the problems and the solutions in the same cognitive plane. The recursive nature of problem solving awaits academic treatment in another essay.

The levels of truth judgment, when recognized, perform as the primeval "black holes" of knowledge: they gather old problems together around cognitive faculties. The systematic hierarchy of the cognitive levels of truth judgment might prove to be a long step towards describing the cognitive process, the only context likely to shed light on the creative act. A full summary of the process will epitomize cognitive patterns in a symptomologically justifiable rendition that modularly prepares the groupings of truth judgment to fit for a comprehensive computerized emulation of the act of poetry.

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[24] Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) is a good example of this, and represents an authoritative perspective in the field.

The Cultic Debt

Péter Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective*
London: MacMillan Press;
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Péter Dávidházi ends the "Preface" of his recently published book with a statement that, read retrospectively, is too modest. He writes that "it was there [Trinity College, Cambridge], in the college of such admired authors of my youth as Frazer, Whitehead, Russel and Wittgenstein that I realised the utter hopelessness, yet the unquestionable obligation of trying to repay at least a fraction of what we receive" (p. XIII). The modesty seems exaggerated, for the quality of Dávidházi's book demonstrates that it is hardly a doomed endeavour to make up for what one has received.

The ambition of the book is to employ religion or cult as an analogy for the reception of Shakespeare during the Romantic era and for the cultural ramifications of this reception up to the present. The analogy between religious behaviour and literary reception has long been applied in Shakespeare criticism, but until now it has generally been used with either humorous or pejorative connotations. Dávidházi, however, treats Shakespeare's Romantic reception as a bona-fide cult, tracing its emergence, clarifying its underlying Romantic concepts (e.g. genius), and charting its evolution in Germany, France, Hungary, Poland and Russia. He also deciphers the significance of the Romantic reception in terms of its influence on the cultural developments of the countries under investigation.

The meticulous description of how the Romantics appropriated Shakespeare begins with a rigorous discussion of the concepts and methodological principles of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for an anthropology of literature. After establishing the limitations of the cult analogy and introducing it only as a heuristic device, Dávidházi goes on to define the three aspects of a literary cult; which are an attitude of unconditional reverence, verbal and non-verbal rituals, and a quasi-religious use of language where claims are regarded as unquestionable truths. The survey of the three main aspects of the cult is carried out according to three methodological principles. The first is an anthropological holism which claims that, by focusing on all significant

manifestations of literary cults, "an amazingly elaborate system emerges out of phenomena that used to be taken as nothing but incoherent ... pieces from the periphery of intellectual life" (p. 23). This is the principle that makes it possible to include details considered so far to be meaningless. The second principle is the suspension of judgements, especially value judgements, which follows from the first principle, since it is precisely the premature judgement that excludes a large body of data that bears upon Shakespeare's reception in the Romantic era. The third principle comes into play when the agnosticism of the second principle is abandoned after the "historical functions" (p. 30) have been analysed to assess "the indirect cultural productivity" (p. 31) of the cult.

The cult itself is the topic of the two subsequent chapters. Chapter two deals with the cult in English Romanticism, from the first Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 at Stratford to the tercentenary festival held in 1864. The Shakespeare cult during Romanticism began with David Garrick's Jubilee at Stratford, which established the ritual archetype of the literary cult. The ritual included a pattern of religious associations ranging from the experience of symbolic

communitas ("the abolition of the temporary differences of a worldly hierarchy for the sake of restoring the ultimate unity of an other-worldly order" [p. 36]) culminating in a communion-like drinking to the memory of the Bard. Even the absence of any performance of a Shakespearean play is integrated into the general pattern as the sign of mystification or of quasi-deification. Furthermore, the mixture of the farcical with the solemn is convincingly made to follow half-consciously the atmosphere of an archaic religious festival. Once Shakespeare had become a cultic figure to be worshipped in a secularised manner, it is not surprising that critical language turned away from Dryden's balanced critical approach to a secular theodicy inferring from the assumed perfection and complexity of the plays the super-human qualities of the author. Stratford slowly turned into a cultic place where pilgrims collected relics and sought illumination at Shakespeare's shrine.

The nineteenth century witnessed the social integration of the literary cult. The first significant step was taken when April 23 (St. George's Day) was adopted as the day of Shakespeare's birth and death; indeed, from 1824 it was the figure of St. George who led the

jubilee procession. The success of the symbolic unification of the literary saint and patriot paved the way for a further step. Some years later, George IV adopted April 23 as his own birthday and began to patronise the Shakespeare Club, which in turn became the Royal Shakespeare Club. As a consequence, the motto of the 1864 jubilee was "The King, the Poet, and the Patron Saint." The unity of monarchist, literary and religious loyalties meant the full institutionalisation of the cult as well as the replacement of the charismatic founder (Garrick) with official committees and of *communitas* with separation according to social hierarchy. Moreover, the transcendental commitment was backed up by the pillars of Victorian society so as to reinforce "the moral structure of Victorian ideology" (p. 101). The jubilee of 1864 thus meant the end of the English quasi-religious Romantic attitude to Shakespeare. The cult, however, was not confined to England but also appeared in other European countries such as Hungary.

The birth and development of the Shakespeare cult in Hungary follows a different pattern from the English. Dávidházi distinguishes five stages in its life. The first is the period of "initiation" from the 1770s to the 1830s;

the second is the period of "mysthicizing" from the 1840s to the 1860s; the third the period of "institutionalization" from the 1860s to the 1920s; the fourth the period of "iconoclasm" from the 1920s to the 1950s; and the fifth the period of "secularization and revival" from the 1960s onwards. Chapter three traces the evolution of the cult from its initiation to its institutionalisation. The initiation of the Shakespeare cult in Hungary meant the process of learning to revere Shakespeare without reading his works. The analysis of the earliest documents reveals that the function of these pronouncements extended beyond Shakespeare in that they "fostered the growth of Hungarian culture" (p. 111) through teaching "how to publish and buy, how to bury and how to worship an author" (p. 118). During this first period of the cult, translations were either not required at all or, when attempted, did not aim at textual fidelity. However, appraisals of Shakespeare at this period did not draw their metaphors from the realm of religion.

The 1840s, in contrast, brought about changes in attitude and signalled a new epoch in the Hungarian Shakespeare cult. The age of "mysthicizing" formulated a coherent and consis-

tent rhetoric of deification. This quasi-theology was advanced by at least fifteen authors ranging from Bertalan Szemere and Károly Szász to Sándor Petőfi and Ferenc Toldy. It consisted of ideas claiming that Shakespeare, like God, could create *ex nihilo*; that he could resurrect the dead; that his work was similar to divine revelation; that his birthplace should be venerated like the birthplace of Jesus; and that his coming had cosmological and eschatological significance (see p. 137).

The quasi-religious language of Shakespeare's reception during this period was fostered by the aesthetic ideals and the historical needs of Hungarian intellectuals. Dávidházi's analysis demonstrates that there was a melding of the psychological functions of art and religion in the works of critics in the period. There was also insistent reference to the Poet in nurturing patriotism: he was seen to convey divine orders to his community. What was also characteristic of the Hungarian cult was a desired uniformity of attitude, language and behaviour. The assumptions of critics who tried to teach the ignorant audience were twofold. They believed that there was only one appropriate response to a work of art and that the theatre-going audience

should be educated to behave in a manner that would conceal their ignorance and lack of refinement.

The next stage in the development of the cult was the period of "institutionalization," which saw the foundation of a Shakespeare Committee and the publication of the first complete edition of Shakespeare in Hungarian. This phase paved the way for a new principle of translating Shakespeare. The Shakespeare Committee had to convince the literary public that Shakespeare's plays were to be translated as they were. The new standard that no substantial cuts were allowed brought about a new apologetic genre of criticism. The task of the advocates of textual fidelity was to explain that the plays, understood properly, did not lead to the moral corruption of the audience.

To prepare the way for a proper evaluation of the Shakespeare cult, Dávidházi devotes the next chapter (Chapter four) to the establishment of a typology for its evolution. After clarifying the distinctions between church, sect and cult, Dávidházi locates the manifestations of the Shakespeare cult in its similarities to and differences from church and sect. To describe the cult more fully and to point out its

permutations in different countries, Dávidházi applies three models of cult formation. These are the "the old psychopathology model, the ... entrepreneur model and the subculture model" (p. 170). The psychopathology and entrepreneur models are both triggered by an individual, in the former case as a response to a personal and social crisis, and in the latter as a business-like enterprise resulting in wealth, power, glory and entertainment. The subculture model differs from the other two in that it emerges as the product of a group of equals to compensate for their common failure to seize rare and non-existing goods. The English emergence of the cult resembles the entrepreneur or business-like model in having David Garrick as its founder, with his yearning for profit and fame. The Hungarian formation of the cult reveals similarities with the subculture model (or rather with a modification of it that Dávidházi calls the "community model because it is assimilated into the mainstream culture too easily to be called *sub*culture" [p. 173]). Dávidházi goes on to analyse the formation of the cultic behaviour in countries such as Germany, France, Poland, Russia and Hungary. After having described the differences, Dávidházi claims that there were two basic types that the Shakespeare cult took on the Continent. The first type is the French one, which is characterised by aesthetic and patriotic resistance, and which can be deciphered in the Polish and Russian Romantic reception of Shakespeare. The second is the German type, which is reverential, and which "after a brief hesitation gave up the idea of open, whole-scale and programmatic resistance" (p. 193). The Hungarian Romantic attitude is closer to the latter model.

Once Dávidházi has provided the reader with a typology for the Shakespeare cult that is founded upon a wide range of Romantic verbal and non-verbal cultic behaviour, we are prepared for an informed evaluation of the Shakespeare cult. Dávidházi explains its Janus-faced impact on criticism and its contribution to the ritualization of culture, the formation of *communitas*, the foundation of theatres, and the formation of audiences. All these largely positive influences substantiate his sober judgement that "the cult was the midwife at the birth of many cultural values and it fostered their growth more significantly than it ever hindered the development of others" (p. 208).

The positive value-judgement concluding the book leads the reader

back to the "Preface." The profundity of thought and range of scholarship that this book reveals makes us doubt "the utter hopelessness [of repaying] at least a fraction of what we receive." A book that can make sense of details that have been dismissed as irrelevant up till now and that can re-position phenomena deemed marginal has not only "repaid"

what has been given, but has re-created something of similar value. Indebtedness has thus been handed down to the reader: "feeling the utter hopelessness, yet the unquestionable obligation, of trying to repay at least a fraction of what we receive."

ZSOLT ALMÁSI

The Author Resurrected

Richard Holmes, *Early Visions* (London: Harper Collins, 1998). Richard Holmes, *Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998).

"For in this bleak World of Mutabilities, & where what is not changed, is chilled, and this winter-time of my own Being, I resemble a Bottle of Brandy in Spitzbergen – a Dream of alcoholic Fire in the centre of a Cake of Ice" (*D* p. 550)[1] – wrote Coleridge at the age of fifty-four, and his self-portrait may well indicate not only the reasons why Wordsworth deemed him a "rotten drunkard" and "an absolute nuisance in the Family" (*D* p. 214), but also why he

declared that he was "the most wonderful man" he had ever known (*E* p. xiii).

Since Coleridge has indeed been accused of misdeeds such as habitual drunkenness, opium addiction, neglect of parental duties and, above all, plagiarism (let us accept this term for the moment), Richard Holmes feels the need to present an interpretation that opposes to the "hostile" (*E* p. 376) ones of Hazlitt, Fruman or Lefebure through attempting to answer the "one vital question: what made Coleridge [...] such an extraordinary man, such an extraordinary mind?" (*E* p. xiii)

Even if the reader might think that Coleridge has no need for defence given the huge amount of texts written by and on him (e.g. the less "hostile" J. L. Lowes, J. Beer, W. J. Bate or R. Ashton), they would have good reasons for taking his own mocking phrase

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[1] References in the text are to pages of *Early Visions* (*E*) and *Darker Reflections* (*D*).

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seriously and considering him a true "library cormorant" (*E* p. xv.). Holmes's book, without dissipating entirely the views that we may hold about Coleridge, brings the poet alive. The biography, which reads like fiction, acquaints us with a man who was the greatest talker of his age, whose witticisms, puns and inspired digressions left his audience spellbound for hours, but who was also a passionate mountain-climber and a permanent guest at his friends' houses. What seems to me the most revealing aspect of this character, however, is the constant self-analysis tinged with humour and the sense of the ridiculous in the sublime that intersperse his writings.

Although we are long past the "AGE OF PERSONALITY," the book is supposed to be read like "the most traditional form of popular narrative biography" (*E* p. xv.) If we consider this, as well as the fact that instead of focusing on Coleridge the politician or the religious thinker Holmes prefers to lay emphasis on the poet, this work which has had a particularly favourable reception in England, may even be regarded as a response to the recent wave of New Historicist interest in Romantic texts (cf. J. G. McGann on Byron, 1968; P. Foot on Shelley, 1980;

S. Gill on Wordsworth, 1989; E.M. Thompson on Blake, 1993; or A. Motion on Keats, 1997). As a traditional biography, it especially aims to supplement the canonical readings by the reconstruction of Coleridge's childhood, possible sources of inspiration ("the search for sources is itself suggestive of a restless curiosity of the poem's meaning, which does not seem entirely enclosed by the text alone" – *E* p. 164.) and the identification of "confessional voices" in the writings (*D* p. 420). But in rejecting "the stock premise that one of the major modern poets hit his true stride in the *Ancient Mariner, Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*,"[2] Holmes also challenges the critical tradition and pays especially close attention both to the Conversation Poems, which are fundamental to our notions of Romanticism, and the later poetry, which is indispensable for an understanding of Coleridge. As for the prose writings, he is eminently successful in revealing their verbal artistry through a thorough selection of passages.

Nevertheless, even if the readers accept that the analysis of the poems is as "traditional" as the biography itself, they might feel uneasy when Holmes,

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[2]   Bate, *Coleridge* (Columbia U. P., 1987) p. 41.

on occasion against his own aesthetic judgements, would appear to suggest the superiority of works containing autobiographical elements. Contrasting the *Letter to Sara Hutchinson* with the final published version of *Dejection: An Ode*, he declares: "The *Letter* draws more directly on Coleridge's true imaginative life. It is richer in, and closer to, those irrepressible sources of imagery which fill his Notebooks and private correspondence: the wind and sunlight over the fells, the moon and stars, the seasonal energy of plants and birds, the life of his children, the longing for love and a happy home. [...] Autobiography, in other words, gives the real authority to the vision of the poem." (*E* p. 320.) Unsurprisingly, when the formidable issue of plagiarism emerges, Holmes also pleads with a fatherly devotion "the homely touch which is unmistakably his" coming "from the rivers of the Quantocks and the Lake District," as well as the "fundamentally religious drive of the argument, its carefully unfolded imagery, its Platonic overtones, being wholly original and Coleridgean" (on *Biographia*, Ch. 12, *D* p. 407-8). Putting aside, for the time being, the questions concerning the concept of plagiarism, we might also ask ourselves whether a source of inspira-

tion can be unambiguously defined, that is, whether an image of the "starry Heaven," for instance, linked really back "to the star-gazing he had once shared with his father in the fields of childhood at Ottery St Mary" (on *Biographia* Ch. 13, *D* p. 412). Especially when the passage in question begins as follows: "the Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has Reached its own Horizon" and undoubtedly contains some Kantian reminiscences...

Meanwhile, well aware that Coleridge's writings would provide a fertile ground for psychoanalytic criticism, Holmes remains a "moderate" in his treatment of Coleridge's professional failures and miraculous recoveries, his unrequited love for Sara Hutchinson or his turbulent friendship with Wordsworth. His psychological explanations of Coleridge's character are thought-provoking. If opium (or, more precisely, laudanum – a tincture of opium diluted in wine or brandy) was a substitute for love, one would think that his eagerness to write and/or to talk may also have been one. And this latter characteristic might even be due to the poet's constant lamenting over his inability to impose wholeness on his

materials, since he seemed to fear a lack of mental integrity.

The above-mentioned problems suggest that Coleridge's biographers have a special predicament. In order to create a linear narrative from a teeming mass of notes and fragments, they have the task of making a thorough selection and also find the delicate balance between a textually over-constructed, yet contradictory Romantic self and the 'real man' whose life may slip the "autobiographical project"[3] that has explicitly determined it from the age of twenty-four. In a letter to Thomas Poole dated 6 February, 1797, Coleridge wrote: "As to my Life... you, my best friend! have a right to the narration."[4] Richard Holmes tries to stand firm against the legend maker: he is eager to show his hero through the eyes of the contemporaries (i.e., through the writings of Keats, Hazlitt, the Lambs, John Morgan, Dorothy Wordsworth, and even the report of the secret agent who mistook Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy for spies) while, changing the tone between "satire" and

"passionate elegy" (E p. 179.), he also regularly contrasts the Notebooks with the public image of Coleridge in order to assess the biographical truth. What he appears to overlook is that Coleridge's own letters and Notebook entries, as well as the letters of his contemporaries, imply an anticipated reader-response. Not willing to engage the autobiographical contract ("his Notebooks can never be accepted as a last word on anything" – E p. 91), Holmes still looks with Coleridge and reads the texts as it was 'anticipated.' Thus, even though we are expected to show leniency towards Coleridge for all the misery that he caused his wife, Mrs Coleridge's letters to Thomas Poole are hardly cited, and by the end of the second volume, even Sara Hutchinson's point of view becomes neglected. But the more striking and perhaps the more characteristic instance of Holmes's falling prey to Coleridge's rhetoric of self-justification is when he explains both his hero's weaknesses and, what seems to be more important, his alleged plagiarisms by the poet's opium addiction exclusively.

"– What crime is there scarcely which has not been included in or followed from the one guilt of taking opium? Not to speak of ingratitude to

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[3] Cf. de Man, 'Autobiography As De-Facement' in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia U. P., 1984) p. 61.

[4] Quoted by O. Doughty in Perturbed Spirit (London: Fairleigh Dickinson U. P., 1981) p. 9.

my maker for the wasted Talents; of ingratitude to so many friends who have loved me I know not why; of barbarous neglect of my family; [...] when at Box, and both ill – (a vision of Hell to me when think of it!) I have in this one dirty business of Laudanum a hundred times deceived, tricked, nay, actually & consciously LIED" – wrote Coleridge to John Morgan in 1814 (*D* p. 357.).

Coleridge, in fact, feared both the verdict of his contemporaries and that of posterity. In Chapter 10 of the *Biographia*, he alludes to his inability to concentrate his "powers to the realisation of some permanent work" but still agrees to be judged by his "fellow men" by what he has effected, since what he "*could* have done" is a question of his "own conscience"(*D* p. 395)... But his own conscience, he hopes, will be disclosed to every one: "After my death [...] a full and unqualified narration of my wretchedness, and of its guilty cause, may be made public" (letter to Josiah Wade, 1814, – *D* p. 366). That Holmes sometimes suspends too willingly his disbelief when Coleridge's personality is in question, can be put down to his attempt "to recapture [Coleridge's] fascination as a man and a writer" (*E* p.xiii). But I think that the issue of

plagiarism and the particular nature of Romantic authorship might have merited a deeper consideration than the one which follows: "For a man of such originality and intellectual brilliance this [plagiarism] is an acute problem in psychological terms, obviously connected with the mendacious habits of his drug addiction" (*D* p. 281). The supposition that "drug addicts lie" (*D* p. 281) may be true, but it does not seem to present very good grounds either for connecting it to the subject of plagiarism, or for entirely disregarding another possible, and not less Coleridgean explanation, unless this latter one contradicts the underlying assumptions of the book. In Chapter 9 of the *Biographia*, Coleridge deliberately brings up the issue of plagiarism and claims: "I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible" (*D* p. 402). I think that rather than being (mis)taken for mere self-defence, the above statement – together with the fragments, open-ended works, abstruse writings, Conversation Poems, written and oral monologues, the glosses and the prefaces which were added to the poems after 1800 – could be considered as a part of

Romantic irony stemming from that very German philosophy that Coleridge also incorporated into his works. As a matter of fact, we do not even have to employ a recently defined paradigm in analysing Coleridge's writings (see the works of Mellor, Wheeler or Garber), if we take into account that the ten months he spent in Germany (from September 1798 until July 1799) conspicuously coincides with the era of the periodical *Athenaeum*, which was the most important phase in the development of a critical theory of irony as defined, first and foremost, by Friedrich Schlegel. Hence, I would think that the arguments which seek to defend Coleridge against the charge of plagiarism should emphasise not the curse of being "an opium eater," but the fact that Coleridge's reading of the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Solger, Tieck and Richter did not only mean an acquaintance with their "dynamic" philosophy, but also, among others, with the dream of a Symphilosophy and with the rejection of the notions of unity and originality in favour of mixtures, shared authorships, plagiarisms and fragments. Alternatively, even if we accept opium addiction as a primary cause of his "literary kleptomania" (*E* p. 43), it would not have been an

exaggeration to remark that Coleridge's most indispensable form of plagiarism was perhaps the act of plagiarising itself. In addition, the collaborative relationship between Coleridge and Southey or between Coleridge and Wordsworth (see, for instance, Wordsworth's Preface to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* where no indication as to the authorship of the several poems is offered) could already "call attention to a possible weak link in the 'genial' conception of authorship *per se*."[5]

It must be admitted, however, that the choice of the Romantic ideology of the original, authentic poet diffusing "a tone and spirit of unity"(*Biographia*, Ch. 14.) over that of the "divine ventriloquist" with his "palimpsest tablet" of memory (Prefatory Note to *The Wanderings of Cain*, 1828) might be concomitant with the genre of "traditional" biography.

I should add to all this that Holmes's insistence upon originality eventually drove me to the other extreme, and I began to see "influence" where he found "genuineness." An instance of this was the footnote in which he praises "Coleridge's subtle, bifurcating bequest of ideas to

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[5] A. Hickley, "Coleridge, Southey, and Co.," in *Studies in Romanticism* 3 (1998) p. 306.

posterity," citing the following "seminal concept": "Every man is born an Aristotelian, or a Platonist.... They are the two classes of men, besides which it is impossible to conceive a third." Apart from the fact that this generalisation does not seem to me seminal to Western culture, nor its impact on "modern neurological theory which now seems to find the same [?] division between the left and right hemispheres of the brain" (*D* p. 492) very considerable, it shows a striking similarity to Fichte's view that the sort of philosophy which a man chooses depends on the sort of man that he is. According to Fichte, there are only two kinds of philosophy: dogmatism, absolutizing the object (Fichte's Spinoza – Coleridge's Aristotle) and criticism, absolutizing the subject (Fichte himself – Coleridge's Plato).

Besides the above example, Holmes's footnotes, "which initiate another level of speculation [...] reflecting on the action as it develops" (*E* p. xvi), are informative: they give account of various subjects such as Coleridge's financial situation, the contemporary state of knowledge about opium addiction or the English translations of German authors.

One of the most important merits of the book is the detail it gives on the 19th century reception of Coleridge's writings, lectures and the only staged play, *Remorse*, which ended up being the greatest success of his life. To mention a few of the colourful details: "There is something disgusting at the bottom of his subject" (Hazlitt on *Christabel*, *D* p. 434.); "unintelligible" (Hazlitt on the theory of the Imagination, *D* p. 453.); much "vicious affectation of phraseology" (Coleridge himself on the *Religious Musings*, *E* p. 115); "Coleridge said in the advertisement he would speak about the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, and so he is delivering the lecture in the character of the Nurse" (Charles Lamb whispering to Crabb Robinson during Coleridge's half an hour digression on contemporary politics in the middle of a lecture on Shakespeare, *D* p. 273.).

Holmes's monumental biography presents a huge amount of data within a carefully structured and compelling story. Indeed, it realises Coleridge's hope that a later generation might turn his life, that he believed was "little more than a far-stretched Series of Et Ceteras," into a cohesive, linear narrative.

ANDREA TIMÁR

An English Magus Comes at Last to Hungary

Szőnyi György Endre: *"Exaltatio és hatalom." Keresztény mágia és okkult szimbolizmus egy angol mágus műveiben* ["Exaltation and power" Christian Magic and Occult Symbolism in the Works of an English Magus] (Szeged: JATEPress, 1998)

In Hungary it is not easy to find a scholarly book on either Hermeticism or Christian magic, let alone on the English magus John Dee. Though interest has increased considerably in recent years and the number of books on related topics has mushroomed, academic interest has been very scant until very recently.

Most works concerned in this controversial area appear to be markedly for or against, either eulogising more commendable and alternative *Vorstellungsarten*, accepting the Hermetic teachings and the New-Age ideology at face value, or condemning the magical world-view as a stubborn weed, a prescientific surrogate for rational thinking still poisoning our culture.

As key texts have not been translated for centuries, and most of the translations are not from the original languages,[6] it is very good news that György Endre Szőnyi's book on John Dee's life, work, and main influences appeared in 1998.

I.

The chapters of the book are somewhat diverging, but they are all centred around John Dee (1527-1608), "one of the ornaments of his Age"[7] a most colourful figure of the otherwise not-so-dull Elizabethan England. For some primarily a philosopher, for others a mathematician, a great librarian, an influential court astrologer, or simply a conjurer and magician,[8] Dee influenced

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[6] Just one example: the Hungarian translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is based on the pioneering but dated four-volume translation of W. Scott though it has been retranslated many times before Copenhaver's new translation in 1992.

[7] As John Aubrey described him in 1718. in Peter J. French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: RKP Ark Paperbacks, 1972) p. 4.

[8] Much has changed when in 1659 Meric Casaubon (the son of Isaac Casubon, who eventually proved that the Hermetic writings, so influential in the Renaissance, were post-Christian) published excerpts form Dee's diaries about 'what passed for many Years Between Dr: John Dee...and Some Spirits'. The book known

many and was one of the most learned men of his time. He selected the most propitious day for Elizabeth's coronation; improved the Julian calendar (but his much admired improvements were rejected by the bishops); and had visitors such as Sir Philip Sidney, the Secretary Sir Francis Walsingham, and Queen Elizabeth, to his home in Mortlake. His life was not without difficulties; he was imprisoned in 1555 on the charge of having enchanted the Queen, and was subsequently tried on ecclesiastical charges, but released; his life-long quest for patronage was never fully successful, and after a life of much admiration and scorn he died poor and neglected.

Many interesting anecdotes have survived from this exceptionally well-documented life,[9] and, as Dee recorded

his book purchases meticulously, his intellectual development can be studied with relative ease.

II.

After outlining the task of the book and providing an overview of the chapters, Szőnyi describes in detail how he intends to tackle the occult and magic tradition and world-view in the first part. The book's organising principle, the Latin term *exaltatio* is also introduced.

The second part offers a biography of John Dee, with special emphasis on the years 1583-89, which Dee spent in Central Europe. It describes in detail Dee's journey to Pozsony [present day Bratislava] in 1563, where he took part in the coronation-ceremony of Maximilian of Habsburg (to whom he later dedicated the famous *Monas hieroglyphica*) The biography contains many amusing details, and gives a large-scale overview of Dee's life from his

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as "A True & Faithful Relation", established Dee as a fanatic deluded by devils.

[9] For his private life see: *Deborah E. Harkness, "Managing an Experimental Household – the Dees of Mortlake and the Practice of Natural Philosophy" *ISIS* 88 (1997) pp. 247-263. Apart from some harsh words such as "today psychologists would be tempted to label John Dee a clinical narcissist or an anal retentive for his exhaustive documentation of everything from his astrological consultations to his wife's menstrual cycles...", Harkness describes a strange agreement in April, 1587 between Dee and his

medium, Kelly on the "common and indifferent using of Matrimonial Acts amongst any couple of us four", to which the wives agreed after "weeping and trembling for a quarter of an hour". After consummation of the 'pactum factum' the angelic revelations increased, and new information was available for Dee on the Apocalypse.

early days and arduous University years at St John's College, Cambridge through his peregrinations in Europe, to his mature years in Mortlake. It sketches the continuously changing focus of his interests: "first excellency in mathematics and enthusiasm for natural scientific questions, followed by an increasingly historical – ideological interest, and ending in the most esoteric occult philosophy, which meant a gradual turning away from the empirical sciences."[10] Szőnyi believes that in Dee's life "the esoteric tradition of European humanism was undoubtedly united with the subconscious processes of a psychologically hypersensitive person."[11]

The third part of the book is a historical *Rückblick* which gives an overview of twentieth century developments in research into hermeticism, with special emphasis on the work of Frances Yates. It also introduces and discusses some of the Renaissance writers that influenced Dee. A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to the rediscovery, translation, and early interpretations of the Hermetic writings, focusing on the *Pimander*

and the *Asclepius* of the *Corpus hermeticum*, and also to the analysis of two influential medieval works on magic: the *Picatrix* (first translated from the original Arabic to Spanish in 1256, and later to Latin), a short book on talisman-magic, and the *Liber secretorum* (which was for a long time mistakenly attributed to Albertus Magnus).

Throughout the whole book Szőnyi's method is to characterise an age through analyses of selected works from carefully chosen authors; as an example he describes the christianization of magic through the writings of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)[12].

In the next epoch the works of Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) and Paracelsus (app. 1493-1541) illustrate the emergence and aims of 'naturall magick,' which evolved mainly from theoretical speculations by the sixteenth century, when it encountered a crisis. Both writers influenced Dee profoundly, in fact, he pioneered the study the Paracelsian writings in

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[10] Szőnyi p. 42. The translations are mine. G.Z.
[11] Szőnyi p. 46.

[12] Surprisingly little of Ficino and Pico has been translated into Hungarian, and even these are smaller essays like Marsilio Ficino, "Kratülosz, vagy A nevek valódi értelme – A Platón dialógus argumentuma" transl. Klára Pajorin *Helikon* 3-4 (1992) pp. 338-347.

England. Agrippa von Nettesheim was the most eminent pupil of Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516, engaged mostly in applied magic), and became known all over Europe with his *De occulta philosophia,* uniting medieval *magia naturalis* concepts with Neoplatonic ones. Szőnyi, however, investigates not only this work, but also Agrippa's much more sceptical *De incertitudine,* a work that rejects the possibility of certain knowledge and questions the usefulness of [empirical] science. A single, unified world-view can be postulated behind the two, however, even if the two works appear to contradict each other, since in the 1533 edition of *De occulta philosophia* Agrippa incorporated those chapters of *De incertitudine* that reject magic and Hermeticism most openly. Thus, Szőnyi claims, with Agrippa we find for the first time the recognition of a paradox inherently present in the magic world-view.

The chapter ends with a close reading of the scientist-magician Paracelsus' two books, to show how 'magic was scientized' in his *Paragranum,* and of his *Astronomia magna,* to illustrate an example of hermetic natural philosophy.

The fourth and last part of the book returns to Dee, closely investigating his natural philosophy and occult symbolism[13]. After an historiographical introduction Szőnyi traces how Dee's occult philosophy develops in his three major works.

In the *Propedeumata aphoristica* (1557) Dee develops a method for measuring the distances of heavenly bodies, so that the astrological constellations can be computed with more precision. The improved method, however, required the calculation of 25 341 constellations instead of the usual 120, which was practically impossible in Dee's time. This obstacle diverted Dee's attention to other areas.

After portraying the main theses of Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica* (1564) and the *Mathematicall Preface* (1570), probably the most famous of Dee's works, Szőnyi investigates the most curious area of Dee's life: his long preoccupation with cabalist angel-magic which he follows with short summaries of the magic tradition, Renaissance symbolism, the

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[13] For a short study on the importance and interpretation of visual symbols see for example *Urszula Szulakowska, "Geometry and Optics in Renaissance Alchemical Illustrations: John Dee, Robert Fludd and Michael Maier" in *Cauda Pavonis Studies in Hermeticism,* 14 No.1 (1995).

development of the Faust motive, and the change in attitude toward magic. The book ends with a general evaluation of Dee's life and work.

III.

Although two chapters from the four are not concerned with Dee directly, this is to be applauded not scorned, knowing the scarcity of valuable scholarly studies on this topic in Hungarian.

If we look for an organising principle in this multi-faceted tableau, we might say that it attempts to highlight the elements which flowed from Judeo-Christian culture into high European culture, that influenced Dee.

In treating the analysed texts as works containing some kind of cultural-historical truths, he aims to give a creditable, but not necessarily objective analysis that takes into account and incorporates the peculiar paradoxes inherent in magic. He rightly does not propose to judge or decide whether Dee's last years were those of enlightenment or madness.

Magic is treated as an independent discipline, not as a primitive phase[14] in

mankind's cultural history. Magic is a kind of act, which, with the help of occult knowledge unites the human spirit with the supernatural, enabling him to exercise his power in the spiritual world, and finally raises him to a level of divinity, so that he enters the world of ideas in earthly life. This concept, which reappears throughout the book is called *exaltatio* by Szőnyi. For him this higher organising principle is present in all the Renaissance works analysed.

IV.

It is impossible today to write about the Renaissance hermetic tradition without mentioning Frances Yates, and without a critique of the Yates-thesis, and Szőnyi devotes a whole chapter to this topic. In several places he criticises the Yates thesis, which states that the Renaissance magus is the immediate predecessor of the seventeenth century scientist. The structure of the whole book and the works he chooses to investigate, however, show that he is much indebted to Dame Frances.

Much of his criticism is directed against the too strong claims of Yates, and the coarseness of the picture she depicts. To give just one example, when discussing the origins of Ficino's magic,

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[14] See for example works of Walter Pagel like *Vindication of Rubbish* (1945), *Paracelsus* (1958), etc.

Szőnyi gives a more detailed and subtle interpretation than Yates. Though she described medieval magic extensively in her books, Yates claims that Ficino turned away from this crude and primitive tradition. She believes that neo-platonism in Florence originates almost exclusively from the Hermetic tradition. Szőnyi, on the other hand, holds that the medieval roots were important to understand Ficino's magic, and as, for example, the *Picatrix* is an Arabic treatise based on the classical tradition, there is little reason to call it 'primitive.' He claims that it is very important and pointing forward that there was a need to unveil the hidden truths, stress the central importance of man and of the scientific understanding. The magic preserved by the Arabic culture thus is a connecting link not only with the philosophical theology of the Florentine Neoplatonists, but also with the late renaissance acceptance of the experimental natural sciences.

Whether true or not, this opinion shows no major revision of the original Yates-thesis, seeing a direct link between the Hermetist and the seventeenth century scientist.

V.

While traditions of magic usually influenced and accompanied artistic work in the fifteenth century, the magus was increasingly seen as a scientific figure in the sixteenth. One of the most memorable scientist-magicians is the not-always-polite Paracelsus[15]. Szőnyi concentrates on his philosophical views, drawing his citations from the *Paragranum* and the *Astrologia magna*. Unfortunately, he devotes scant attention to Paracelsus the 'scientist,' and does not attempt to show the connections between his scientific writings and magical world-view.

What makes this even more regrettable is that the only comprehensive book available for the Hungarian reader on the History of Chemistry[16], only treats Paracelsus as a 'protochemist,' giving a painfully one-sided picture about him, and neglecting all other aspects relevant to our

[15] See, in Hungarian, for example: Paracelsus, *Credo* in József Pál, ed., *Hermetika, mágia - ezoterikus látásmód és művészi megismerés. Szöveggyűjtemény*; Ikonológia és műértelmezés 5. (Szeged: JATEPress, 1995), or any of the detailed monographs on Paracelus.

[16] Balázs Lóránt, *A kémia története I-II.* [The History of Chemistry] (Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1996).

understanding of "Thephrastus Bombastus."

This 'presentist bias' is still very common in Hungarian works on the history of science. There are exceptions, but as most writers are scientists rather than historians, they prefer internalist and 'modern-minded' accounts.

On the other hand, although Szőnyi consciously attempts to evade the usual mistakes of writing history, he is reflexive towards both his source and his own story, the reader is left unsatisfied, as the chapter entitled 'Occult history and natural science,' apart from some very general remarks, has very little to say about natural science, and thus evades the important issue. This means that though both works mentioned deal with the complex figure of Paracelsus, they both fail to provide a balanced picture. Instead of offering an outline of Paracelsus' work in the natural sciences (which the title of the chapter suggests[17]), Szőnyi only

gives a – surprisingly – detailed account of Jung's reading of Paracelsus.

We can only agree with Szőnyi that it is very difficult to employ the language of rationalistic, positivist science when the topic under discussion is a view of the world that is antagonistic to any form of discursive thinking, and aims at providing an *alternative to* it.

Szőnyi painstakingly shows how large-scale histories and master narratives aimed at giving an overview from a scientific or religious viewpoint deform Dee's figure by stressing only one side of his endeavours. Of course all history-writing necessarily implies the acceptance of some kind of master narrative. It is impossible, however one may try, to escape this trap, as already picking the topic and the relevant connections worthy of discussion presupposes a large-scale narrative: "the

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[17] The chapter title "Occult philosophy and natural science" is thus somewhat misleading. From the eighties onward, some excellent commentaries have appeared, like *Keith Hutchison, "What happened to the Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?" *ISIS* 73 (1982) p. 267; or Brian Vickers, ed., *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance.*

(Cambridge Uni. Press, 1984), this has a good introduction by Vickers and an article on Dee by N. H. Clulee. Also of interest is the article: Fehér Márta, "The 17th century crossroads of the mathematizaton of nature" in *Changing Tools – Case Studies in the History of Scientific Methodology* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995) pp. 1-26, which outlines an alternative to the Yates-thesis that follows in the footsteps of Mary Hesse.

historian's choice of subject matter and way of framing the questions to be asked of it are themselves always determined by reference to an existing historiographical picture."[18] He introduces his own organising principle, however: the framework of *exaltatio*. This serves well as an approximate organising principle, but, to my belief, is not able to replace the (rightly criticised) master-narratives of the history of science.

The book is demythologising, as the reader has to relinquish many fancy conceptions about Dee: he had no major impact on either the development of European science, or the cultural heritage of Central Europe and Hungary. These misconceptions result from distorting, one-sided master-narratives which inevitably lead to the homogenising of magic, the taming of controversies, the separation of black and white magic. The dichotomies listed, according to Szőnyi, greatly hinder our understanding of the dynamism and power of the magical world-view around the turn of the seventeenth century.

VI.

Knowing the scarcity of similar books in Hungarian, it is very understandable, that not a small fragment of Dee scholarship is chosen as the topic, and that the study is wide-ranging. The consequence is, however, that the book is mostly aimed at the 'lay' reader[19]: but for an introductory book, the meticulous details are somewhat superfluous. If, on the other hand, the book is regarded as an academic monograph, it is not able to compete with the much more detailed and focused works that have appeared in English.

The dilemma is not uniquely Szőnyi's, since most Hungarian scholars face the paradoxical situation: they have to opt either for substantial depth or substantial number of readers for a book, to achieve both is usually impossible. To my mind, Szőnyi has aimed at both, but his work is *more* of a good (probably too good) introduction.

And it comes at a very modest price, we may add. The book runs to 300 pages, with an index, a detailed bibliography, some 33 (!) illustrations,

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[18] *P. Dear, ed., *The Scientific Enterprise in Early Modern Europe. Readings from ISIS*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997) p. 2.

[19] Szőnyi p. 11.

precise footnotes and references.[20] The illustrations are unfortunately of mediocre quality. The large number of quotations is very useful, but they are not presented systematically. Sometimes a Latin original is given, but often not; the most curious is when only the *last* sentence of a longer quotation is reproduced in Latin, even if it has no key importance or great complexity hindering a precise translation.

The book is a modified version of Szőnyi's thesis for the title 'Candidate of Science' written in 1992.[21] The changes are not fundamental: the structure of the original thesis was retained, and the three parts were used as parts 2-4 in the new book.

GÁBOR ZEMPLÉN

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[20] The asterisks in my footnotes mark works that I have not found in Szőnyi's bibliography, but are connected to the topic.

[21] The original title is *Keresztény mágia, John Dee és az európai humanizmus.* [Christian magic, John Dee, and European Humanism].