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Saint Guthlac, the Warrior of God in the Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book¹

During the Middle Ages, hagiography was one of the most common and typical literary genres. The lives of saints were sacred stories designed to teach the faithful to imitate actions which the Church decided were paradigmatic. The message was clear: ordinary Christians too must remain steadfast and resist the temptation of the forces of evil. In addition to this, the medieval hagiographer intended to show how God's almighty power manifested itself in the miraculous acts of a particular saint.

The genre became fashionable from the end of the fourth century. With Constantine's reign the freedom of Christian worship was theoretically ensured in the Roman Empire. People were forced to look for new ways of proving their devotion in religion. Following in the steps of the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist and also the example of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness, zealous Christians renounced worldly goods, chose solitude and asceticism, and went to live into the deserts under ascetic conditions. The biographies of these confessor saints were to be known as *vitae*. The most influential works of Christian hagiography were Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (and its Latin translation by Evagrius), Jerome's *Lives of Paul the Hermit, Hilarion and Malchus*, Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin*, and Pope Gregory's *Life of Benedict* in his *Dialogues*. The example of the first "Desert Fathers" became well known almost immediately, and their lives inspired others. The Anglo-Saxon church became

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familiar quite soon with these saints' lives which were to exercise a strong influence over the hagiographic literature of Western Europe.

In this paper I would like to show that while the Old English Guthlac poems fit in the hagiographic tradition of the Medieval Church, they still show a considerable amount of originality derived from the characteristics of Anglo-Saxon poetry. I intend to demonstrate that besides the Latin text they frequently borrowed from the treasury of Old English literature.

The primary source for our knowledge of St. Guthlac is the early eighth-century life by Felix, an Anglo-Saxon monk, written for the East-Anglian king, Ælfwald. There are thirteen medieval manuscripts, which contain either full or fragmentary versions of Felix's *Vita*. Since at least the second part of the *Guthlac* poem depends heavily on this Latin life, it will be necessary to examine some of its aspects. Felix's *Vita* was in turn influenced by earlier hagiographic works. Benjamin Kurtz describes Felix as he is

at work with the *Vita Antonii*, the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Dialogi Gregorii* open before him, and perhaps the *Vita Martini* as well, while with the plan and spirit of the Antonius as model he pieces out the details of the oral tradition with passages and phrases from his manuscript, drawing at first most largely from Evagrius, later most often from Bede.²

Apart from Felix's *Vita*, the only early documents of any length concerned with the Guthlac material are the Old English poems on Guthlac, entries in the *Old English Martyrology*, and the Old English Prose translation of the *Vita*.³

It is accepted opinion now that the verse section devoted to St. Guthlac in the early eleventh-century collection of Old English literature consists of two distinct poems. They are known as *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, and can be found in folios 32–52 of the Exeter Cathedral MS 3501, which has been in the cathedral library at Exeter since the mid-eleventh century. *Guthlac A* consists of 818 lines and cannot have been much longer than 900 lines (some 80 lines are missing between lines 368 and 369), when it was written into the Exeter Book collection of verse in the latter part of the tenth century. The dependence of the poet upon Felix's *Vita* has often been debated, and, though few close, significant parallels can

² Benjamin P. Kurtz. "From St. Anthony to St. Guthlac." *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, xii., no.2 (1926), p. 126.

³ Jane Roberts. "An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials." *Mediaeval Studies*, xxxii. (1970), p. 201.

be found between the two, general critical opinion appears now to favour the poet's knowledge of Felix's *Life* even if he was not influenced strongly by it.

The remaining 560 lines of the poem are called *Guthlac B*, and they provide a detailed account of Guthlac's death. This part is incomplete, and it is impossible to judge how much of the original poem has been lost. Taking the style of the Guthlac poems into consideration, one can say that the poet of *Guthlac B* was probably a different man, and his close dependence on the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* has long been recognised. Nevertheless, he used Felix's material freely, not mechanically. He developed themes that were unimportant in or absent from his source. According to Jane Roberts, "The imagery and the diction of the poem suggest a date of composition late in the eighth century, and at any rate contemporary with the Cynewulfian canon."⁴

In this paper, I will examine both of the poems, and demonstrate the characteristic features of hagiographic literature in them while concentrating on the Anglo-Saxon colouring.

GUTHLACA

In *Guthlac A*, the poet's main concern is the soul of just men, and the life of this particular saint, Guthlac is just one of the many ways in which a man might reach the Kingdom of Heaven. The opening twenty-nine lines were first recognised as the end of the previous poem, *Christ III*, and only later in Israel Gollanz's edition of the Exeter Book (1895) did it gain its present place at the beginning of *Guthlac A*.⁵

These lines begin with the generalised picture of the joy accompanying a righteous soul's entrance into heaven. In this part, the beauty of heaven is described by the guiding angel. The eternal happiness of God's city is contrasted with the transitory nature of this world. God, the "highest king of all kings" ("se hyhsta ealra cyninga cyning" [16b-17a]) is seen as he rules his city. This picture is well known from the *New Testament*, thus:

⁴ Jane Roberts. *An Inventory*, p. 202.

⁵ Jane Roberts. *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

For we must all be manifested before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.⁶

After this introductory section there is almost a new beginning in the poem. Attention shifts from the heavenly home to the ways of serving God in the world, in order to achieve holiness. Following Robert E. Bjork's division of the prologue one can say that "the introduction consists of four verse paragraphs dealing generally with Heaven (lines 1-29), earth (30-59), common men (60-80), and the ascetic (81-92)."⁷ This section already contains many of the conventional ideas of Old English elegiac verse. It is interesting to compare these lines with parts of *The Wanderer*, e.g.:

[...] Swa þes middangeard
ealra dogra gehwam dreosed ond fealleð,
forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer, ær he age
wintra dæl in woruldrice.

(*The Wanderer*, 62b-65a)⁸

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
winde biwaune weallas stondað,
hrieme bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.

(*The Wanderer*, 73-77)⁹

⁶ 2Cor. 5,10 *The Holy Bible*. Translated from the Latin Vulgate, The New Testament, first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

⁷ Robert E. Bjork. "Old English Words as Deeds and the Struggle towards Light in Guthlac A." *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985, p. 29.

⁸ All parenthesised references of *The Wanderer* are to this edition: George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. "The Exeter Book." *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936, p. 135. "So this middle earth / each of all days ageth and falleth. / Wherefore no man grows wise without he has / his share of winters..." All the parenthesised Modern English translations of the poem are from this edition: Michael Alexander. *The Earliest English Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.

⁹ In Alexander's translation: "A wise man may grasp how ghastly it shall be / when all this world's wealth standeth waste, / even as now, in many places over the earth / walls stand wind-beaten, / hung with hoar-frost; ruined habitations."

The transience of earthly glory is described with beautiful pictures in the Guthlac poem as well:

Ealdað eorþan blæd æpela gehwylcre
 ond of wlite wendað wæstma gecyndu;
 bið seo siþre tid sæda gehwylces
 mætræ in mægne. Forþon se mon ne þearf
 to þisse worulde wyrpe gehycgan...
 (*Guthlac A*, 43–47)¹⁰

The section closes with the explicit statement: “He fela findeð fea beoð gecorene” (*Guthlac A*, 59).¹¹ This notion can be found in the *Bible*: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”¹² With this sentence the poet returns to the ways in which one can serve God, and the redeemed and the fallen are contrasted with each other. We can see on the one hand those who praise earthly glory above all, and on the other hand the pious who serve God. The necessity of obedience toward God is emphasised time after time, which is not surprising, since apart from the aim of entertainment, the chief function of hagiographic literature was the instruction of believers. All through this part God’s order is described in hierarchical terms.

The poet gradually narrows down his scope of vision. He first describes a particular soul that reaches heaven, than looks at the whole of mankind in order to investigate the different ways one chooses to lead his life, and finally concentrates on the chosen saint.

From the generalised picture of the individual redeemed soul, the prologue descends to the many on earth who may potentially enjoy the same bliss, and “we” can “by right” belong to any one [of these ranks] if we fulfil the holy commands (32b–34b) [...] The initial words of the first

¹⁰ All parenthesised references of *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* are to this edition: George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. “The Exeter Book.” *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936. All Modern English translations of the Guthlac poems are to the following edition: S. A. J. Bradley. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London, Melbourne and Toronto: Everyman’s Library, 1982. “Earth’s vitality is aging in each of its noble qualities and the species of its offspring tend away from beauty; this latter season of each fruit is feebler in vigour. Therefore this man need not look to this world for an improvement.”

¹¹ Bradley’s translation: “He will meet many but few will be chosen.”

¹² Matt. 22,14 *The Holy Bible* Translated from the Latin Vulgate the New Testament first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

three sections are in themselves guides to the structure 'Monge,' 'Sume,' 'Sume.'¹³

From ordinary men the poet directs our attention toward the eremitic, lonely dwellers ("anbuend"), who are the chosen warriors of God ("gecostan cempán"). Finally the poet chooses an example, and approaches Guthlac himself. There is a general introduction of the saint in lines 93–107. Some of the introductory ideas are reintroduced in this passage such as his obedience, his hatred of sin, the desire to dwell in Heaven, angel guardian, spiritual goodness etc.

Contrary to Felix, who described Guthlac's life from his birth, the *Guthlac A* poet concentrates on his protagonist's life after his "conversion," and he only mentions the fact that he was a soldier earlier, and that he "gelufade frecnessa fela" ("loved many horrible things"). In this section there is an interesting reference to the oral tradition of the saint's legend as the poet declares: "Hwæt we hyrdon oft" ("What we have often heard"). The poet himself could have turned to such an oral source, when writing his poem. This formula could have also indicated the presence of the oral poetic style, which was also an important feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

The saint's conversion from an earthly warrior to *miles Christi* was described in a manner different from Felix. In the Latin *Vita* the saint's change of lifestyle was due to an inward conflict, caused by the realisation of the transitory nature of earthly life. In *Guthlac A* it seemed to be a matter of external direction through divine power. An angel and an evil spirit fought over the saint, but the final decision was in the hand of God. In the ancient fight between the forces of good and evil, the idea of the world's transitory nature and the possession of earthly treasure reappear once more in the two "fighters" reasoning.

After Guthlac is won over for the good cause, the poet goes on to describe his hermitage. In contrast to Felix, no human helper has had a part in Guthlac's education, the God-sent "frofre gæst" (Holy Spirit) taught him, and even the place of his hermitage was revealed by God himself:

[...] Wæs seo londes stow
 bimipen fore monnum, oppæt meotud onwrah
 beorg on bearwe, þa se bytla cwom
 se þær haligne ham arærde...

(*Guthlac A*, 146b–149)¹⁴

¹³ Robert E. Bjork, p. 29.

Felix is very precise in describing the place of Guthlac's hermitage:

*Ipse enim imperiis viri annuens arrepta piscatoria scafula, per inuia lustra inter atrae plaudis margines Christo viatore ad praedictum locum usque pervenit; Crugland dicitur, insula media in palude posita quae ante paucis propter remotioris heremi solitudinem inculta vix nota habebatur. Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum...*¹⁵

From now on, this place gains primary importance in the poem. The desire to acquire of this particular spot becomes the reason for the continual fight with the evil spirits. The poet of *Guthlac A* does not regard it as necessary to give the exact location of the saint's new home, but he makes it clear with poetic pictures that it was an unpleasant place:

[...] on westenne
 beorgas bræce, þær hy bidinge,
 earme ondsacan, æror mostun
 æfter tintergum tidum brucan,
 þonne hy of waþum werge cwoman
 restan ryneþragum, rowe gefegon;
 wæs him seo gelyfed þurh lytel fæc.
 Stod seo dygle stow dryhtne in gemyndum
 idel ond æmen...

(*Guthlac A*, 208b–216a)¹⁶

¹⁴ Bradley's translation: "This rural locality had been hidden from people until the ordaining Lord revealed the hill within a wood when that builder turned up who erected a saintly retreat there."

¹⁵ Both the Latin and the English texts of the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* are from this edition: Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, pp. 88–89. "Tatwine accordingly assented to the commands of the man and, taking a fisherman's skiff made his way, travelling with Christ, through trackless bogs within the confines of the dismal marsh till he came to the said spot; it is called Crowland, an island in the middle of the marsh which on account of the wildness of this very remote desert had hitherto remained untilled and known to a very few. No settler had been able to dwell alone in this place before Guthlac the servant of Christ on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it."

¹⁶ Bradley's translation: "in the wilderness, he violated the hills where they, wretched antagonists, had formerly been allowed at times a lodging-place after their punishments, when they came weary from their wanderings to rest for a while, and enjoyed the quiet; this had been conceded them for a little time. This secret place stayed prominent in the Lord's consciousness; empty and desolate, remote from hereditary jurisdiction..."

Later the poet calls our attention once more to the fact that this *westen* (wilderness) is haunted by evil spirits and gives the following words into Guthlac's mouth:

Wid is þes westen, wræcsetla fela,
 eardas onhæle earmra gæsta.
 Sindon wærlogan þe þa wic bugað...
 (*Guthlac A*, 296–298)¹⁷

The *mearclond* (174a, borderland, wasteland) recalls the memory of the moorland where Grendel lived with his mother in *Beowulf*:

Hie dygel lond
 warigeað wulfhleoþu windige næssas,
 frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
 under næssa genipu niþer gewited,
 flod under foldan. Nis þet feor heonon
 milgearnearces, þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wrytum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
 Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
 fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
 gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite.
 (*Beowulf*, 1357b–1367)¹⁸

The fearful, mysterious marshes have always been associated with different kinds of horrible creatures and demons in Anglo-Saxon literature. It is not surprising therefore that they inhabit the saint's chosen hideaway and, he, Guthlac has to put up with living there alone amid these repugnant creatures that haunt that place.

¹⁷ Bradley's translation: "Wide is this wilderness and the multitude of the fugitive settlements and the secret dwellings of wretched spirits, and those who inhabit these lodging-places are devils..."

¹⁸ All the parenthesised references of *Beowulf* are to this edition: Francis Klæber. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950. All the Modern English translations of *Beowulf* are from this edition: Michael Alexander. *Beowulf*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973. "Mysterious is the region / they live in – of wolf-fells, wind-picked moors / and treacherous fen-paths: a torrent of water / pours down dark cliffs and plunges into the earth, / an underground flood. It is not far from here, / in terms of miles, that the Mere lies, / overcast with dark crag-rooted trees / that hang in groves hoary with frost. / An uncanny sight may be seen at night there / – the fire in the water! The wit of living men / is not enough to know its bottom."

After depicting the saint's hermitage *Cristes cempa* (Christ's warrior) is pictured in front of us, and the concept of spiritual warfare is introduced. Although real action begins only in the next section, the poet foreshadows Guthlac's battles and his victories.

After a short eulogy on Guthlac's good character (170–178a) the poet describes the "battle-field." Guthlac erects the sign, the cross of Christ under which he intends to overthrow the devil. Guthlac, like a real warrior of God, fights with a *gæstlicum wæpnum* (spiritual weapon). The notion of spiritual weapons came from the Bible. St. Paul even describes how to go into the battle with Evil:

Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and power, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.¹⁹

This spiritual battle is a central concept in hagiographic literature, and also, in fact in other early Christian writings (e.g.: homilies). This fight theme was especially popular with the Anglo-Saxon audience who grew up on "Beowulfian" heroic literature:

In each case the opponents were the forces of evil, whose natural habitations, as the Anglo-Saxons believed were the marshes and the fens, the equivalent of the desert of the Egyptian hermits.²⁰

Although Guthlac successfully occupies the territory where the evil spirits have dwelt before, the troop of the evildoers (*teon-smidas*) come back time after time. It is interesting to note that in *Guthlac A* the devils do not have a separate,

¹⁹ Eph. 6, 10–18. *The Holy Bible* Translated from the Latin Vulgate, the New Testament, first published by the English College at Rheims, 1582.

²⁰ Bertram Colgrave. "The Earliest English Saints' Lives Written in England." *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlv (1958), 35–60.

external reality. Although different attacks are described, and these are more and more violent, the evil spirits' appearance remains more or less the same. Almost all through the poem they are referred to as *feondas* (devils, demons, enemies) *wræcmæcgas* (outcasts). These names show that the forces of the devil should not be pictured by the reader, they do not have a conceivable human form. Comparing this with Felix's *Vita*, one can see a great difference. Felix, who was relying on the Antonian tradition, presented the evil spirits in different forms,²¹ and thus they had a more tangible entity than their counterparts in the poem. Taking into consideration the inconceivable character of these black forces in *Guthlac A*, the reader of the poem is inclined to take the fight with the evil spirits on an allegorical level.

Thus Guthlac's fight, like that of every ascetic, is "in his heart [or 'soul']," and may justly be described as an inner psychological struggle, as well as a battle on psychological terrain.²²

In depicting the fight the poet sometimes recalls the battle imagery:

Da wearð breahm hæfen. Beorg ymbstodan
 hwearfum wræcmæcgas. Woð up astag,
 cearfulra cirm. Cleopedon monige,
 feonda foresprecan firenum gulpon...

(*Guthlac A*, 262–265)²³

Reading these lines, the picture of the waiting, tense and inimical troops of *The Battle of Maldon* can come into one's mind as they fought with words until such time as they could come to grips with each other. On other occasions, however, the description of the battlefield suggest a more spiritual landscape:

Symle hy Guðlac in godes willan
 fromne fundon, þonne flygereowe
 þurh nihta genipu neosan cwoman
 þa þe onhæle eardas weredon,

²¹ For instance, in XXXVI, the evil spirits terrified Guthlac in the forms of various beasts. Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life*, p. 115.

²² Paul F. Reinhard. "Guthlac A and the landscape of spiritual Perfection." *Neophilologus*, lviii. (1974), p. 334.

²³ Bradley's translation: "Then there was a clamour raised. Fugitive wretches surrounded the hill in clusters. The din mounted up, the hubbub of beings filled with anxiety. Many, the devil's spokesmen, shouted out and bragged outrageously."

hwæpre him þæs wonges wyn sweðrade;
 woldun þæt him to mode fore monlufan
 sorg gesohte þæt he siþ tuge
 eft to eþle...

(*Guthlac A*, 348–355a)²⁴

From this point of view, the evil spirits fight more for the soul of the saint than for a physical home, and this way Guthlac's hermitage can symbolise the saint's soul. The fight actually takes place in Guthlac's own heart and mind, and for this reason he cannot take care of the

devils in one fell swoop; as spiritual doubts, fears and terrors recur, the devils present him with a constant battle that cannot be won until his last trials prove him worthy and he vanquishes his own demons.²⁵

It is interesting to note that the reader can recognise Beowulf's dragon in the portrayal of the wild-flying enemies:

[...] Hordwynne fond
 eald uhtsceaða opene standan,
 se ðe byrnende biorgas seceð,
 nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleogeð
 fyre befangen; hyne foldbuend
 (swiðe ondræ)da(ð)...

(*Beowulf*, 2270–2275a)²⁶

Until Guthlac is able to conquer his own demons, he has to follow the teaching of his guardian angel, and as the repetition of a theme is a characteristic of this poem, Guthlac recalls the opening pictures of the salvation of the soul and the obedience of the mind:

²⁴ Bradley's translation: "They found Guthlac continually confident in the will of God, when, wild and on the wing, they, who inhabited secret dwelling, came seeking through the darkness of the nights whether his delight in that place was dwindling. They wished that a pining for human love would go to his heart so that he would set his course home again."

²⁵ Daniel G. Calder "Guthlac A and Guthlac B: Some Discriminations." *Anglo-Saxon: Essays in Appreciation*, ed. L.E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese. Notre Dame, 1975, pp. 65–80.

²⁶ Alexander's translation: "The Ravager of the night, / the burner who has sought out barrows from old, / then found this hoard of undefended joy. / The smooth evil dragon swims through the gloom / enfolded in flame; the folk of that country / hold him in dread."

[...] Hu sceal min cuman
 gæst to geoce, nemne ic gode sylle
 hyrsumne hige, þæt him heortan geþonc...
 (*Guthlac A*, 366b–368)²⁷

After this section, part of the poem is missing, and the story goes on with Guthlac's speech against the evil spirits. This speech, however, is not much different from his earlier declarations of faith.

In the following section, Guthlac's "travels" in the air starts. He is lifted up by the devils and they show him the blameworthy customs within the walls of the monasteries. Here the monastic and eremitic life is contrasted in a similar fashion with the first part of the poem, where the ascetic lifestyle was compared with others.²⁸ Guthlac, as always, wins a decisive victory in the word-battle. He points out that there is hope for human sinners, but the evil spirits will never find comfort. Guthlac shows a genuine understanding of human nature:

Ic eow soð siþþon secgan wille.
 God scop geoguðe ond gumena dream;
 ne magun þa æfteryld in þam ærestan
 blæde geberan, ac hy blissiað
 worulde wynnum, oððæt wintra rim
 gegæð in þa geoguðe, þæt se gæst lufað
 onsyn ond ætwist ylðran hades
 ðe gemete monige geond middangeard
 þeowiað in þeawum. Ðeodum ywap
 wisdom weras, wlencu forleosað,
 siððan geoguðe geað gæst aflihð.
 (*Guthlac A*, 493–504)²⁹

²⁷ Bradley's translation: "How shall my spirit come to safety unless I yield to God a listening mind so that to him the heart's thoughts..."

²⁸ *Guthlac A* lines 60–80 are contrasted with lines 81–92.

²⁹ Bradley's translation: "I, on the other hand, will tell the truth to you: God created young people and human happiness. They cannot bring forth maturity and fruit at the very first, but they take pleasure in the world's joys, until a term of years passes away in youthfulness so that the spirit favours the aspect and essence of a maturer status, which many men throughout the earth fittingly serve in their customary ways..."

These lines may call Guthlac's own conversion to mind. The saint could have spoken from first-hand experience, God's mercy had a decisive force in his change of lifestyle, as well.

In their final temptation the evil forces take Guthlac to the doors of hell. In Felix's version the torments of hell are described vividly:

Coniunctis itaque in unum turmis, cum immenso clamore leues in auras iter vertentes, supra memoratum Christi famulum Guthlac ad nefandas tartari fauces usque perducunt. Ille vero, fumigantes aestuantis inferni cavernas prospectans, omnia tormenta, quae prius a malignis spiritibus perpeusus est, tamquam non ipse pateretur obliviscebatur. Non solum enim fluctuantium flamarum ignivomos gurgites illic turgescere cerneret, immo etiam sulphurei glaciali grandine mixti vortices, globosis sparginibus sidera paene tangentes videbantur; maligni ergo spiritus inter favillantium voraginum atras cavernas discurrentes, miserabili fatu animas impiorum diversis cruciatuum generibus torquebant...³⁰

The poet of *Guthlac A* does not visualise the terrors of hell in a detailed way, since the devils appeal straight to Guthlac's mind:

Ongunnon gromheorte godes orettan
in sefan swencan...

(*Guthlac A*, 569–570a)³¹

As an ironic parallel with the opening picture of the poem, the evil spirits want to send Guthlac's soul into hell, almost in the same way as God's angel invited the blessed spirit to the eternal bliss of heaven:

Ne eart ðu gedefe, ne dryhtnes þeow
clæne gecostad, ne cempa god,
wordum ond weorcum wel gecyþed,

³⁰ Bertram Colgrave. *Felix's Life*, Ch. XXXI, p. 105. "Thus with all their forces joined in one, they turned their way with immense uproar into the thin air, and carried the afore-named servant of Christ, Guthlac, to the accursed jaws of hell. When he indeed beheld the smoking caverns of the glowing infernal region, he forgot all the torments which he had patiently endured before at the hands of wicked spirits, as though he himself had not been the sufferer. For not only could one see there the fiery abyss swelling with surging flames, but even the sulphurous eddies of flame mixed with icy hail seemed almost to touch the stars with drops of spray; and evil spirits running about amid the black caverns and gloomy abysses tortured the souls of the wicked, victims of a wretched fate, with various kinds of torments..."

³¹ Bradley's translation: "Cruelhearted, they tormented God's warrior in his mind..."

halig in heortan. Nu þu in helle scealt
 deope gedufan, nales dryhtnes leoht
 habban in heofonum, heahgetimbru,
 seld on swegle, forþon þu synna to fela
 facna gefremedes in flæschoman.
 We þe nu willað womma gehwylces
 lean forgielðan þær þe laþast bið
 in ðam grimmetan gæstgewinne.

(*Guthlac A*, 579–589)³²

Guthlac's determination to follow God's rule alone and his obedience bring him final victory. Now it is the saint's turn to threaten the evil spirits with the torments of hell, and this time the torments are depicted in even darker colours:

Sindon ge wærlogan, swa ge in wræcside
 longe lifdon, lege biscente,
 swearte beswicene, swegle benumene,
 dreame bidrorene, deaðe bifolene,
 firenum bifongne, feores orwenan,
 þæt ge blindnesse bote fundon.
 Ge þa fægran gesceaft in fyrndagum,
 gæstlicne goddream, gearo forsegon,
 þa ge wiðhogdum halgum dryhtne.
 Ne mostun ge a wunian in wyndagum
 ac mid scome scyldum scofene wurdon
 fore oferhygdum in ece fyr,
 ðær ge sceolon dreogan deað ond þystro,
 wop to widan ealdre; næfre ge þæs wyrpe gebidað...

(*Guthlac A*, 623–636)³³

³² Bradley's translation: "You are not worthy, no servant of the Lord purely assayed, no virtuous soldier well known for words and deeds, holy in heart. Now you shall sink deep into hell and not possess the light of the Lord in the heavens, the mansions aloft and a throne in the sky, because you have committed too many sins and evils in the flesh. Now we will pay the reward for each one of your crimes where it will be most loathsome for you, in the fiercest spiritual suffering..."

³³ Bradley's translation: "You are betrayers of trust: accordingly you have long lived in exile, inundated with flame, having been miserably deceived, deprived of heaven, despoiled of happiness, delivered up to death, ensnared by sins, without hope of life, that you would find a cure for

In spite of the terrors of hell, Guthlac is sure that he will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In confirmation of this belief, God's angel, St. Bartholomew appears and orders the demons to take back the saint to his home.

Guthlac's victorious arrival at his *beorge* is the opening picture of the final section of the poem. He possesses now the *sigewong* (victorious plain), which was the object he desired after his conversion to eremitic life,

and so it represents his higher hopes for spiritual achievement, on it, as well as through it, he projects his fears and doubts, and in his decisive winning of it we recognise the outer sign of an inner victory...³⁴

This home for his body also symbolises the perfect soul (*gæstes hus* [802]), and as the surroundings of his dwelling-place revive in this scene, so is the saint's soul reborn again:

Smolt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe,
fæger fugla reord, folde geblowen;
geacas gear budon. Guþlac moste,
eadig ond onmod eardes brucan.

(*Guthlac A*, 742-745)³⁵

God banished the evil spirits from that place, and in a similar fashion, Guthlac's soul became inaccessible for the evil forces. The poem culminates in the picture of the perfected soul. In the final part of the poem, the poet gives a marginal description of the saint's life after his glorious victory. Guthlac's death is not even mentioned, only the manner in which his soul was led to the eternal home. The poem ends in Heaven, step by step the poet widens his horizon, and using Guthlac's example he generalises his message. The pictures of the city of God, God's angels, and the redeemed souls reappear, and together with the description of the prologue create a frame to the poem. The closing, cosmic picture of *Guthlac A* (790-817) is very similar to that of *The Dream of the Rood*:

blindness. In ancient days you renounced this lovely creation and spiritual happiness in God when you rejected the holy Lord. You could not be allowed to go on living for ever in days of content, but contumely for your crimes you were thrust because of your presumptuous thoughts, into everlasting fire where you shall endure death and darkness, and lamentation into boundless eternity: never will you relief experience relief from it."

³⁴ Daniel Calder, p. 77.

³⁵ Bradley's translation: "Guthlac, blessed and resolute, could enjoy his dwelling place. The green sight stood under God's protection; the defender who came from the heavens had driven the devils away."

[...] ic wene me
 daga gehwylce hwænne me Dryhtnes rod,
 þe ic her on eorðan ær sceawode,
 on þysson lænan life gefetige
 me þonne gebringe þær is blis mycel,
 dream on heofonum, þær is Dryhtnes folc
 geseted to symle, þær is singal blis,
 ond me þonne asette þær ic syþþan mot
 wunian on wuldre, well mid þam halgum
 dreames brucan. Si me Dryhten freond,
 se ðe her on eorþan ær þrowode
 on þam gealgtreowe for guman synnum:
 he us onlysdæ ond us lif forgeaf,
 heofonlice ham. Hiht wæs geniwad
 mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodan;
 se Sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,
 mihtig ond spedig, þa he mid manigeo com,
 gasta weorode, on Godes rice,
 Anwealda ælmihtig, englum to blisse
 ond eallum ðam halgum þam þe on heofonum ær
 wunedon on wuldre, þa heora Wealend cwom,
 ælmihtig God, þær his eðel wæs.

(*The Dream of the Rood*, 135b–156)³⁶

³⁶ All the parenthesised references of *The Dream of the Rood* are to this edition: Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, eds. *Dream of the Rood*. London: Methuen. 1963. All the translations of this poem are from this edition: S. A. J. Bradley. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. London, Melbourne and Toronto: Everyman's Library, 1982. "[...] and I hope each day for the time when the Cross of the Lord, which I once gazed upon here on earth, will fetch me from this transitory life and then bring me to where there is great happiness, joy in heaven, where the Lord's people are placed at the banquet, where there is unceasing happiness; and will place me where I may afterwards dwell in glory and fully partake of joy with the saints. May the Lord be a friend to me, who here on earth once suffered on the gallows –tree for the sins of men. He redeemed us and gave us life, and heavenly home. Hope was renewed with dignity and with happiness for those who had once suffered burning. The Son was victorious in that undertaking, powerful and successful, when he came with a multitude, the company of souls, into God's kingdom, the one almighty Ruler, to the delight of the angels and of all the saints who had previously dwelt in glory in the heavens, where their Ruler, almighty God, came where his home was."

In both poems, the audience's attention is directed toward the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, the home of the righteous.

It is clear from *Guthlac A* that the poet is not primarily concerned with the life of St. Guthlac, but uses the example of his passion to illustrate one way in which a man who has faith may gain everlasting joy.

GUTHLAC B

Though there is still dispute over the relationship between *Guthlac A* and Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, scholarly opinion agrees on the fact that *Guthlac B* was based on the *Vita*, namely on its fiftieth chapter. This section of the Latin work deals with the saint's illness and death. Death scenes had already gained primary importance in the course of the narrative in the Latin prototypes (e.g. in Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*, in Jerome's *Life of Paul*, etc.).

Felix followed this tradition, but his death scene was closest to Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, and he might have borrowed from his predecessor. This was not an unknown phenomenon among the medieval hagiographers, since

[i]n this narrative frame, action becomes ritual, and specific action becomes specific ritual. For sacred biographers, there existed a veritable thesaurus of established approved actions, which they could employ in their text. The repetition of actions taken from Scripture or from earlier saint's lives (often this practice extended to appropriating the exact language) ensured the authenticity of the subject's sanctity...³⁷

In the same way, the poet of *Guthlac B* could turn to Felix's material freely. Unfortunately, *Guthlac B* is incomplete, and it is impossible to estimate the exact number of the lines lost.

Just as in the prologue of *Guthlac A*, the poet of *Guthlac B* starts his poem with a generalised cosmic view. He moves back in time to the creation, and the original sin of men. He uses Felix's starting theme, the inescapability of death. "Nam sicut mors in Adam data est, ita et in omnes dominabitur."³⁸ But he develops this topic further. He describes "earthly heaven," Paradise, the home of eternal joy. This is the only place in the poem where the poet diverges

³⁷ Thomas J. Heffernan. *Sacred Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 6.

³⁸ *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Translated by Colgrave, Ch. L, p. 152: "For just as death was prescribed in Adam so it is to have dominion over all."

considerably from Felix's material. The Fall of Man is described in beautiful alliterative lines (819–843a). But the idyllic picture is disrupted by the appearance of death, as a punishment for the disobedience of the first couple. In contrast with the first part of the prologue, dark visions dominate the description:

Sipþan se eþel uðgenge wearð
 Adame ond Euan, eardwica cyst
 beorht oðbroden, ond hyra bearnum swa,
 eaferum æfter, þa hy on uncyððu,
 scomum scudende, scofene wurdon
 on gewinworuld. Weorces onguldon
 deopra firena, þurh deaðes cwealm,
 þe hy unsnyttrum ær gefremedon.
 Dære synwraece sipþan sceoldon
 mægð ond mæcgas morþres ongyldon,
 godscyldge gyrn, þurh gæstgedal,
 deopra firena.

(*Guthlac B*, 851–863a)³⁹

Adam and Eve became exiles from God, and because of their sin mankind had to suffer, as well. This part of the poem is very important, it establishes the basic motifs that recur later.

One can trace a complex metaphorical pattern in the prologue to *Guthlac B*, which operates in the narrative on several levels. Images of a paradise with all its beauty gone pervade the prologue and extend throughout the poem; and partly-personified Death stalks through the action in several forms: as a separation of soul from body; as a drink mankind sips from the cup Eve gave to Adam; and as a thief in the night who unlocks life's treasure and steals it away.⁴⁰

³⁹ Bradley's translation: "Thereafter this homeland grew inaccessible to Adam and Eve; this radiant and most excellent of dwelling-places was snatched from them and from their children alike and their offspring after them, when, hurrying, in shame, they were thrust into an alien land, into a world of toil. For the action of the profound sins which rashly they had formerly committed they paid in the anguish of death. From then on, in the punishment of wickedness, women and men, guilty before God, would have to pay for their crime the penalty of their profound sins, through the soul's disseverance..."

⁴⁰ Daniel Calder, p. 70.

From the generalised picture of earthly hardship, the poet turns our attention towards those who tried to compensate for man's first sin, and among them Guthlac's figure appears at the end of the prologue (879). Bearing in mind the fact that the poet uses Felix's material it is not surprising that he refers to a written source, *us secgað bec* ("book tells us how" [878]).

After a short eulogy about the saint's fame (881a–893), the poet looks back on the different stages of Guthlac's life, and gives a sketchy description of the most important events. This epitome follows the outline of Felix's story. The attacks of the devils, where the picture of the battle-field appears (894–915) corresponds to chapter XXXVI; the obedience and praise of the birds (916–919) corresponds to chapters XXXVIII and XXXIX; Guthlac's healing of the sick in mind and body (919b–932a) has parallels in chapters XLI–XLII. It is clear from this part that Guthlac has already won the most decisive spiritual battles by the time the events in the poem start. These references to earlier plots in the saint's life might be proof against the supposition that *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* were actually one poem. Though it might be possible that *Guthlac B* was intended as a complementary piece, since Guthlac's death is only vaguely mentioned in *Guthlac A*, and the poet of the latter might have known this poem when he wrote his own version. However, even if *Guthlac A* might have presented some themes to illustrate the saint's life, the *Guthlac B* poet was still more influenced by Felix's account. The miracles that were performed after his victory over the host of devils are briefly mentioned, and finally Guthlac's own death is introduced quite abruptly:

[...] endedogor
 þurh nydgedal neah geþrunge,
 siþþan he on westenne wiceard geceas,
 fiftyngu gear, þa wæs frofre gæst
 eadgum æbodan ufan onsended,
 halig of heahþu. Hreþer innan born,
 afysed ond forsdid. Him færinga
 adl in gewod. He on elne swa þeah
 ungeblyged bad beorhtra gehata,
 bliþe in burgum –

(*Guthlac B*, 933b–942a)⁴¹

⁴¹ Bradley's translation: "The day of the ending of warfare and austerities as to the world, through death's inevitable dis severance, was now near advanced – fifteen years after he had chosen a

A new fight starts, on this occasion between Guthlac and Death. The theme of the separation of body and spirit appears here first, but this notion recurs again and again during the course of the poem, expressed by beautiful compounds. There are several poetic expressions for the body as the soul's container (e.g.: *bancofa* – 'bone dwelling' [942], *lichord* – 'body-treasure' [956], *banfæt* – 'bone vessel' [1193], *banhus* – 'bone house' [1367], *banloca* – 'bone enclosure' [980], *sawelhus* – 'house of the soul' [1030] *flæschoma* – 'fleshly covering' [1031], *greothord* – 'earthen treasure' [1266], etc.). At the same time the terms for death are very often compounds containing the word *gedal*, 'separation' as their final element (*gæstgedal* – 'separation of the soul and body' [1138], *deaðgedal* – 'separation of death' [963], *sawelgedal* – 'parting of soul and body' [1035], *lifgedal* – 'parting from life' [1046], *nydgedal* – 'forced dissolution' [934], *feorggedal* – 'separation from life' [1178], *þeodengedal* – 'death of a master' [1350]).

At the beginning of the third section Guthlac's courage and determination is emphasised. The fall of man theme reappears, but this time the *bittor bædeweg* (bitter drinking vessel) is offered to Guthlac. Death is depicted as a bloodthirsty warrior *wiga wælgifre* or as a monster-like creature like Grendel, when he sets off to get his prey:

[...] Swa wæs Guðlace
 enge anhoga ætryhte þa
 æfter nihtscuan, neah geþyded,
 wiga wælgifre.

(*Guthlac B*, 996b–999a)⁴²

St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians personifies Death as God's enemy: "And the enemy death shall be destroyed last."⁴³ The poet of *Guthlac B* was also influenced by this scene, and the personification of death and Guthlac's fight with it stand in the centre of his poem. Guthlac has foreknowledge of his approaching death, which knowledge is natural since the gift of prophecy was a characteristic feature of the saints.

dwelling-place in the wilderness. Then the Holy Ghost from the heights, the Comforter, was sent from above to the blessed evangelist. His breast was afire within, inspired with yearning for the onward path. Suddenly sickness invaded him, but even so with courage he waited unafraid for the sublime things promised, cheerful in those places of refuge."

⁴² Bradley's translation: "Just so had the cruel companionless thing, a warrior greedy for slaughter, approached closely, right up to Guthlac now, through the darkness of night."

⁴³ 1Cor. 15,26.

From the Antonian tradition in general, and from Bede in particular Felix had inherited a kind of dramatic setting and action for the dying days of a saint. But the setting and action he inherited were largely external in form and impersonal in affect: Descriptions of the saint's final temptations and fortitude, healing miracles and Oprescience of his own death, and consoling and instructive conversation with a servant or close friend.⁴⁴

The Guthlac poet redeveloped Felix's description both stylistically and thematically. This is particularly perceptible in the description of Guthlac's meeting with his servant Beccel, who remains unnamed in the poem. In the Latin version Guthlac offers consolation only once to Beccel, in the Old English poem there are four encounters between the two men, and the saint tries to encourage his servant on each occasion. Apart from consolation, the saint prophesies on his approaching death, and keeps the discussion centred on his final departure. This death gains primary importance in Christian cosmology. From the beginning of the poem, the *Guthlac B* poet uses the connection between Guthlac and prominent figures in Christian history. The most important people, who are mentioned, are Adam, Christ and Satan. Christ in traditional Christian typology is a second Adam, who redeemed the world and gave back what was taken away from the human beings. In a similar way,

[a]s the poem advances, the poet clearly shows how the saint's deeds reverse the destructive process that sin initiated. Becoming an obvious type of Christ, Guthlac ultimately re-enacts the redeeming, revivifying ritual of Christ's death and resurrection.⁴⁵

This typological parallel was further developed by the fact that Guthlac's "passion" from his sickness to his death is presented in seven days, followed by the eighth when Guthlac's soul travels to the eternal home. The historical fact reported by Felix, and also noted down by the *Guthlac B* poet, that Guthlac died during the Easter period, gives even more emphasis to the connection between Guthlac and Christ.

The perpetually recurring cycle of the seven-day week was a natural and immediate symbol for the normal course of history, while Christ's

⁴⁴ James L. Rosier. "Death and Transfiguration: *Guthlac B*." *Philological Essays*, Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt (The Hague, 1971), p. 84.

⁴⁵ Bjork, p. 91.

resurrection, as an event which prefigured the salvation of the just, obviously transcended history. At the same time the seventh day on which God rested after creating the world, was an immediate symbol of heavenly rest.⁴⁶

Guthlac in predicting his death uses elaborate pictures (e.g.: Death is an approaching warrior who departs the soul from body [1033b–1035a]). His steady faith and courage in facing death is contrasted with Beccel's grief and sorrow. In Old English society the bonds between lord and his thane were very important. The lord gave protection and in return he received unconditional loyalty. Without his lord, the warrior became a homeless exile. The possibility of this kind of separation fills Beccel with sorrow, in spite of his Christian faith in the existence of Heaven.

The fourth part of the poem starts with Guthlac's speech to his servant. The saint talks about the separation of his soul in a happier tone. Eternal joy is the heavenly reward that Guthlac will receive. This section is very important because there are explicit references to Christ's resurrection, and to his victory over death. It is Easter-day. Guthlac's Christ-like quality is indicated by the poet when he narrated how the saint (*eadga wer* – 'blessed man') in spite of his poor physical condition rose from his bed. His long speech here is the most memorable teaching in the poem because it carries the message of redemption.

In the fifth part of the work the picture of death is fully developed:

[...] Deað nealæcte,
 stop stalgonum, strong ond hreðe
 sohte sawelhus. Com se seofeða dæg
 ældum ondweard þæs þe him in gesonc
 hat, heortan neah, hildescurun,
 flacor flanþracu, feorhhord onleac
 searocægum gesoht.

(*Guthlac B*, 1139b–1145a)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Thomas D. Hill. "The Typology of the Week and the Numerical Structure of the Old English *Guthlac B*." *Mediaeval Studies*, xxxvii (1975), 531–536.

⁴⁷ Bradley's translation: "Death was drawing near; with stealthy steps it advanced, and, strong and cruel, it sought out the house of the soul. The seventh day came into existence for mortals since the flying volley of arrows in belligerent showers sank into him, burning, close to his heart, and unlocked the treasury of his spirit, it having been probed with cunning keys."

Guthlac as a real *miles Christi* fights bravely against him, but he is *awrecen wælpilum* (struck by the deadly dart). The poet describes the saint's agony elaborately. Guthlac gives his final instructions for his burial, and sends a message to his sister. This sister remains unnamed, though we know from Felix's version that she was called Pega. The fact that only the saint is referred to by name in the poem, indicates the poet's effort to make the audience concentrate on Guthlac's figure, and on his glorified death, alone.

There is a short digression from the death scene, when a response to the servant's question indicates that Guthlac was strengthened by the presence of a God-sent angel. This angelic visitation is the privilege of the saints, and it is also a proof for the saint's sanctity.

Guthlac's reference to the friendship between himself and his servant underlines the strong emotional bond between a lord and his thanes which existed in Anglo-Saxon society. The description of this relationship makes *Guthlac B* more "human." In the course of the encounters between Guthlac and his servant, the same themes reappear (separation of soul and body, heavenly joy, etc.), but they all point toward the same end, the final redemption of Guthlac's soul. There are four long comforting speeches set among four descriptions of advancing disease, and four expressions of grief on the servant's part. Each time a theme recurs it is developed further, and finally we arrive at the much-foreshadowed death of Guthlac. The saint remains firm till his last moment. Compared to Felix's Guthlac, who just "passively" leaned against the wall, the Old English warrior saint had *ellen on innan* (courage inside) until the very end.

Though he follows Felix's *Vita* the poet of *Guthlac B* gives an even more elaborate description of the miraculous phenomena that accompanied Guthlac's death. This passage is one of the most beautiful parts of the poem. The sweet odours, the blossoming flowers, the noble radiance recall somehow the picture of Paradise that was described at the beginning of the poem. The saint's happy mood, however, is contrasted with the pain caused by the darts of death. We are reminded once more of the struggle between Guthlac and Death. Again the saint rises, *eadig, elnes gemyndig* (mindful of his courage); takes the Eucharist and his soul leaves his body.

In the seventh part of the poem Guthlac's soul is taken to heaven by angels. The saint has accomplished his task in the world and for this reason he has

deserved his heavenly reward.⁴⁸ There is an interesting reference to the fact, that the saint's body grew cold. With this statement the poet further emphasises the irreversible separation of body and soul. This notion can also be found in *The Dream of the Rood*, where Christ's dead body is described in the same way: "Hræp colode / fæger feorgbold..." (*The Dream of the Rood*, 72b-73a).⁴⁹

It is also interesting that the flood of light that accompanies the two deaths is described with similar words, though *beam* means 'cross' in *The Dream of the Rood* and 'beam' in *Guthlac B*:

[...] Ða þær leoht ascan,
 beama beorhtas. Eal þæt beacen wæs
 ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic leoma,
 from foldan up swylce fyren tor
 ryht aræred...

(*Guthlac B*, 1309b-1312a)⁵⁰

And in *The Dream of the Rood*:

Duhte me þæt ic gesawe syllicre treow
 on lyft lædan leohte bewunden,
 beama beorhost. Eall þæt beacen wæs
 begotten mid golde...

(4-7a)⁵¹

The marvellous light and sweet smells are familiar from Felix's description; the Old English poet, however, talks about the trembling of the earth as an explanation for the servant's fear. With the description of the movement of earth the poet further emphasises the Christ-like character of his hero, since Jesus' death was also accompanied by an earthquake.

The servant's journey to the saint's sister gives the poet the opportunity to draw from the Old English commonplace: the themes of departure and arrival. Like the passage that described the surroundings of the dead saint, this part is also

⁴⁸ "What Adam took away from mankind and Christ restored Guthlac (B) likewise restores through his saintly life" (Calder, p. 78).

⁴⁹ Bradley's translation: "The corpse, the beautiful lodging place of life, grew cold..."

⁵⁰ Bradley's translation: "Then a light blazed out there, brightest among beams. This beacon quite surrounded the holy house, a heavenly incandescence raised straight up, like a fiery tower..."

⁵¹ Bradley's translation: "It seemed to me that I saw a wondrous tree spreading aloft spun about with light, a most magnificent timber. The portent was all covered with gold..."

highly ornamented (in Felix's version there is only a short reference to this journey). There are decorative variations, kennings: *wæghengest* ('wave-horse,' 1329), *wæterþisa* ('water-courser,' 1329), *brimwudu* ('sea wood,' 1331), *lagumearg* ('water horse,' 1332), *hærnflota* ('sea-ship,' 1333). The beauty of the repetitive variations is enhanced by assonance (e.g.: *sund-*, *sond-*) and the presence of rhymes (e.g.: *sond*, *lond*). It is not the aim of this paper to analyse the diction, metre and the language of this poem, but it is important to note down Schaar's remark: "patterns of repetition, recomposition and balance" are typical of Old English poetry in general, "but they are not often to be found in other individual poems with such consistency, in such density and profusion."⁵²

It is because of its use of language that scholarly opinion classify *Guthlac B* as part of the "Cynewulfian school," while *Guthlac A* bears greater resemblance to the older narrative tradition (*Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*).

The final part of the extant *Guthlac B* deals with Beccel's report to the saint's sister. In this section the loss of the servant's companion is described beautifully. Beccel's grief is similar to that of the lordless Wanderer:

Ne mæg werig mod wyrde wiðstondan,
 ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman.
 For ðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
 in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste;
 swa ic modsefan minne sceolde –
 oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
 freomægum feor – feterum sælan,
 siþþan geara iu goldwine minne
 hrusan heolstre biwrah, ond ic hean þonan
 wod wintercearig ofer wapema gebind,
 sohte sele dreorig sinces bryttan,
 hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
 þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
 oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wynnum.

(*The Wanderer*, 15–29a)

⁵² C. Schaar. "Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group." *Lund Studies in English*, xvii (1949), p. 41.

[...] Wyn eal gedreas!
 Forþon wat se þe sceal his winedryhtnes
 leofes larcwidum longe forþolian,
 “ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre
 earmne anhogan oft gebindað.
 Dinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe on cysse ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac.
 Donne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
 gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
 bapian brimfuglas, brædan feþra,
 hreosan hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged.
 Donne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
 sare æfter swæsne: Sorg bið geniwad.

(*The Wanderer*, 35b–50)⁵³

It is impossible to determine how much is missing from the poem, but if we accept the assumption that *Guthlac B* has strong links with Felix's *Vita* than it is presumable that the poet gave an account of Pega's journey to Guthlac's hermitage, of the saint's burial and perhaps of the discovery of the uncorrupted body some time later. But the message gets to the audience however, even in its unfinished form. Guthlac's life reflects the course of human history, and his death seems to anticipate the final resurrection. The saint imitates Christ through his blameless life, and in this way takes part in redemption.

⁵³ In Alexander's translation: "No weary mind may stand against Weird / nor may a wrecked will work new hope; / wherefore most often, those eager for fame / bind the dark mood fast in their breasts. / So must I also curb my mind, / cut off from country, from kind far distant, / by cares overworn, bind it in fetters; / this since, long ago, the ground's shroud / enwrapped my gold friend. Wretched I went thence, / Winter-wearied, over the waves' bound; / dreary I sought hall of a gold-giver, / where far or near I might find / him who in meadhall might take head of me, / furnish comfort to a man friendless, / win me with cheer." And "[...] Fallen all of his joy. / He knows this who is forced to forgo his lord's, / his friend's counsels, to lack them for long: / oft sorrow and sleep, banded together, / come to bind the lone outcast; / he thinks in his heart then he his lord / claspeth and kisseth, and on knee layeth / hand and head, as he had at otherwhiles / in days now gone, when he enjoyed the gift-stool. / Awakeneth after this friendless man, / seeth before him fallow waves, / seabirds bathing, broading out feathers, / snow and hail swirl, hoar frost falling. / Then all the heavier his heart's wounds, / sore for his loved lord. Sorrow freshens.

As we have seen, the Old English Guthlac poems show a considerable amount of originality, even though they owe much to the Latin hagiographic tradition. Their protagonist St. Guthlac, a *warrior* simply exchanges one form of warfare for another. This kind of fighting spirit probably impressed the Anglo-Saxon audience. In both of the poems Guthlac's fights stand in the centre of the work. In *Guthlac A* the poet describes the saint's victorious battle over the evil spirits of the marshland, in *Guthlac B* the heroic fight with Death is in the focus. The dark forces are very similar to Beowulf's monsters, they share the fact that in both works they are the outcasts of God, the seeds of Cain. In *Guthlac B* the evil spirits are even characterised in changing forms, one of which was a dragon:

Hwilum wedende swa wilde deor
 cirmdon on corðe, hwilum cyrdon eft
 minne mansceaþan on mennisc hiw
 breahtra mæste, hwilum brugdon eft
 awyrgde wærlogan on wyrmes bleo,
 earne adloman attre spiowdon...

(*Guthlac B*, 902-12)⁵⁴

This picture has a Biblical antecedent as well, since *The Book of Revelation* also portrayed Satan as a dragon.⁵⁵ Alongside the heroic ideal of the fighting champion and the epic imagery, the characteristic sentiments of the Anglo-Saxon society gain space as, well. The transitory nature of earth and the terrible state of the outcast creatures are expressed with words that are well known from the Anglo-Saxon elegies (*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*). The bond that requires loyalty and love between lord and thane is described in Guthlac's relationship to both God and his servant.

In *Guthlac A* the fight with the demons moves towards allegory. There is a cosmic perspective in which the reader can see the saint's internal battle. The fights happen in space, and with a circular structure the poem begins and ends in heaven. *Guthlac B*, on the other hand, tells us about the fulfilment of Guthlac's soul. The progress moves through time from Adam to Guthlac.

⁵⁴ Bradley's translation: "Sometimes raging like wild beasts they clamour in chorus, sometimes the evil and wicked ravagers would turn back into human form with the utmost din, sometimes the damned faith-breakers would be transformed again into the shape of a dragon."

⁵⁵ Rev. 12.

It is clear from the Guthlac poems' structure, language and style that these two poems have always existed as two distinct compositions by two different poets, though their placement in the Exeter manuscript suggests that someone wanted them to be read as a single account of the saint's life. But the forced tie between the poems does not hold them together, and the critics have concentrated on the two separate parts. One thing can be said, however: in both of them, the figure of the saint shares a common theology and achieves the same heavenly reward. Both poems fit in the wider context of Anglo-Saxon literature, but while *Guthlac A* "consecrates a place" *Guthlac B* "fulfils and redeems time."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Calder, p. 75.

Kathy Cawsey

Shepherds, Regents and Lecherous Widows

The strategies of power in Middle English literature

Medieval studies have progressed far since the 1960s, when D. W. Robertson declared that

the medieval world was innocent of our profound concern for tension [...] We project dynamic polarities on history as class struggles, balances of power, or as conflicts between economic realities and traditional ideals. [...] But the medieval world with its quiet hierarchies knew nothing of these things.¹

Far from being a homogeneous, stable world resting in the quiet equilibrium of a feudal society pervaded by an all-important church, England in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries experienced numerous wars (civil war between Stephen and Matilda, the baronial conflict which resulted in the Magna Carta, Simon de Montfort's rebellion, the 1381 uprising, the Wars of the Roses), challenges to the church's authority (the Wycliffite/Lollard movement, the struggles between Henry II and Thomas Becket, the conflicts surrounding the Great Schism), and serious social disruptions (the 1381 uprising, the land enclosure movement, the Labour Laws resulting from the shortage of labour after the bubonic plague). Robertson, in his vision of an "innocent," "quiet," Edenic medieval world, which sharply contrasts with a (fallen) twentieth century full of "polarities and tensions," is himself guilty of establishing a binary opposition, and projecting that

¹ D. W. Robertson, Jr. *A Preface to Chaucer*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 51.

opposition onto history. Robertson's image of the Middle Ages owes more to his own wish-fulfilment fantasies than to the medieval texts he studied.

Scholars do not need a "profound concern for tension" to notice the widespread conflicts within medieval society. One need only think of Langland's "fair feeld ful of folk" or the variety of Chaucer's pilgrims to realise that the hierarchies upheld by three-estate theories were not reflected in the reality of the fourteenth century. John Gower's vituperative denunciations of the 1381 uprising in the *Vox Clamantis* hardly suggest a society free from class struggle or tension: "The lofty sank down because of the lowly ones, and the valuable fell because of the lowly ones, since law and order were banished."² Gower goes on to describe the rebels as raving, rampaging beasts, and an acute sense of personal terror pervades the work.³ The chronicles of the day also detail the disruptions and conflicts of later medieval society, often using language remarkably similar to Gower's.⁴ Likewise, many lyrics and popular ballads address social or economic themes. The lyric "Man upon mold" from Bodley MS 29734 suggests that, far from being stable or rigid, the class hierarchies of the middle ages were open to movement and change: it advises the reader to save his money "If thou be a yeman, a gentilman wold be" or "If thou be a gentilman, and wold be a squier" or "If thou be a squier, and wold be a knight."⁵ This lyric implies that class status was determined at least in part by wealth, and was not divinely ordained by birth. Many songs and rhymes either acted as propaganda for or commemorated various social upheavals: for example, a Digby MS 102 lyric describes the commons

² Eric Stockton, trans. *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962, p. 61. For commentary, see Kurt Olsson. "John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and the Medieval Idea of Place." *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987), 27-61; Stephen Justice. *Writing and Rebellion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Susan Crane "The Writing Lesson of 1381." *Chaucer's England*. Ed. Barbara Hanawalt. Minneapolis, 1992.

³ See, for example, Eric Stockton, p. 82: "my halting tongue grew numb from a chilling fear [...] my tongue remained firmly tied because of the hostile circumstances. I was often inclined to declare my mind, but I was fearful of handing myself over to the enemy, and then my tongue grew hesitant."

⁴ See Stephen Justice for a thorough discussion of the reaction of medieval chroniclers to the 1381 uprising.

⁵ Maxwell Luria and Richard Hoffman, eds. *Middle English Lyrics*. London: Norton, 1974, pp. 115-116.

rebellng and warns, “whan craft riseþ a3ens craft, / [...] þan is a kyngdom most in drede.”⁶

One could argue that these examples, even the lyrics, are primarily political texts: as such they naturally foreground conflict and tension. What might surprise a Robertsonian critic, however, is the way in which the tensions of medieval society appear in texts that are not overtly, or even implicitly, political. In this paper I propose to analyse several texts that a New Critic would have no difficulty in classifying as ‘strictly literary.’ My approach will be influenced by the New Historicist assumption that for “any literary text to have appealed to any audience, it must, in some measure, represent, not a Mimetic Real, but an actual concern or interest in the social context of its production.”⁷ I hope to show that the tensions, conflicts and oppositions of the medieval world are inscribed even into texts that are not obviously political, that do not depict or respond directly to actual political or economic events.⁸

This paper will examine the two Shepherds’ Plays in the Towneley/Wakefield Corpus Christi cycle, the verse romance *Havelok*, the lyric “The last time I the wel woke” and William Dunbar’s poem “The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.” These works range from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth, from southern England to Scotland, from religious subjects to secular subjects, from ‘courtly’ literature to ‘popular’ lyrics. I choose a broad range of texts for two reasons: first, to show the way in which actual historical or social circumstances can be traced in diverse texts that do not pretend to be even subtly political; second, to demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which power may be used or situated, and yet nevertheless transgress traditional notions of power structures. The primary purpose of each text chosen is entertainment, although other purposes may be involved (as with the mystery plays, for example). The

⁶ Rossell Hope Robbins, ed. *Historical Poems*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, p. 40; cf. pp. 54–60; for commentary, see Stephen Justice; V. J. Scattergood. *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century*. London: Blandford Press, 1971, pp. 354–356.

⁷ Ralph Hanna III. “Brewing Trouble.” *Bodies and Disciplines*. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 14fn.

⁸ One could accuse me, of course, of ‘finding’ political agendas in these texts, because of my twentieth-century “concern for tension.” However, if literary studies are to have any validity whatsoever, one must work upon the assumption that there is something ‘out there’ which has some sort of objective reality; and that that ‘something’ – in this case a text – contains evidence (‘facts,’ ‘discourses,’ ‘tensions,’ ‘themes’) against which a scholar’s thesis about ‘conflict’ or the lack thereof can be tested.

texts are often humorous. While it is always difficult to identify humour or satire, especially at such a historical distance, humour is nonetheless an excellent indicator of topical concerns or interests (we would not find sheep-rot or pregnant villagers funny, but then a medieval person would not find Bill Clinton or political correctness jokes funny). Using indicators such as humour, complaint, censure, and so on, I will delineate the intersections of tension and conflict in these works, and argue that real-life social, economic and gender pressures are inscribed within each.

First, however, some terms need definition. By phrases such as 'economic conflict' or 'class struggle' I do not mean a revolutionary struggle between the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'proletariat;' nor do I only mean conflict between the traditional three estates. Both frameworks are too narrow and restrictive to capture the complexities of economic and social relations in the Middle Ages. Likewise, when I discuss 'gender conflict' I do not subscribe to a radical feminist definition, which tends to assume that women are always oppressed. Instead, I wish to use a more fluid conception of power relationships and social groupings, in which one individual might belong to several social classes at once; in which women might sometimes hold more power than men; in which conflicts are as likely within a class as between classes, and alliances can be formed across class divisions. I propose to look at "relations of force"⁹ rather than typical "class struggles" (implying that conflict might occur between groups that do not constitute a 'class,' and that not all uses of force result in struggle, but may in fact join to achieve a common goal); at "tactics" or "strategies of power"¹⁰ rather than simple "balances" or "imbalances of power" (implying the power is fluid and shifting rather than stable, and that it is deployed as a force rather than contained in an inert pool of strength). I will adopt a Foucauldian approach which posits that "power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation;"¹¹ and that 'class' and 'social status' can be understood as the way in which "one exercises power in a network in which one occupies a key

⁹ Michel Foucault. *The Care of the Self*. Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 67.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Harmondsworth, 1978, pp. 70, 73.

¹¹ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, p. 92.

position.”¹² This approach treats a literary text not as a piece of propaganda or dissent by one class or group, but as a point of intersection in which several different “lines of force”¹³ may meet, each exhibiting its own strategy of power.¹⁴ Even if one strategy is dominant, other potentially conflicting ones are still evident;¹⁵ voices which have little actual power ‘in the real world’ – the shepherds in the Towneley play, for example – can be nonetheless seen in a position of resistance that is itself a strategy of power.¹⁶ The forces behind such positions are often overlooked in approaches that examine only the overall ‘purpose’ or ‘goal’ of a text.

For example, literary critics have tended to emphasise the social or religious ‘objectives’ behind the medieval Corpus Christi plays. These dramas, sponsored by the merchant guilds of a town, were performed on the feast of Corpus Christi in a procession that wove through the streets, stopping at regular stations along the way. They were religious in content, staging Biblical stories such as the creation of the world, the flood, the Christmas story, the crucifixion, and the apocalypse. The plays, many critics argue, were designed to “express the

¹² Michel Foucault. *The Care of the Self*, p. 95.

¹³ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, p. 94.

¹⁴ Ross Murfin provides an excellent summary of Foucault’s approach: “Foucault seldom viewed power as a repressive force. He certainly did not view it as a tool of conspiracy used by one specific individual or institution against another. Rather, power represents a whole web or complex of forces; it is that which produces what happens. Not even a tyrannical aristocrat simply wields power, for the aristocrat is himself formed and empowered by a network of discourses and practices that constitute power. Viewed by Foucault, power is ‘positive and productive,’ not ‘repressive’ and ‘prohibitive.’ Furthermore, no historical event, according to Foucault, has a single cause; rather, it is intricately connected with a vast web of economic, social, and political factors” (Ross Murfin. “What is the New Historicism?” *The Wife of Bath*. Peter Beidler, ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1996, p. 119).

¹⁵ See Leslie Rabine. *Reading the Romantic Heroine*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985, pp. 3–4: “[Structuralism] ignores the multiple and conflictual nature of literary texts which do not emit a single message and do not have a single structure, although [...] one structure may dominate and hide the others. [...] A given historic moment is really a point at which a multitude of heterogeneous points intersect.”

¹⁶ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 95–96: “the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities [...] Are there no great radical ruptures, massive binary divisions, then? Occasionally, yes. But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings.” In this conception, the 1381 uprising would not be understood as a discreet event but as the culmination of many stratagems of power.

social bond and to contribute to social integration;"¹⁷ they were written "as part of a theological message, and were intended, no doubt, to be an act of teaching and worship combined."¹⁸ Performed from circa 1450 (although the unique manuscript is from about 1500) in Wakefield, Yorkshire,¹⁹ the Towneley dramas probably fulfilled all these purposes. Yet approaches that stress the goals 'behind' the plays sometimes miss the relations of force shaped *within* the plays: real social concerns such as the shepherds' poverty, the trials of enclosures and taxes, the lot of servants, as well as the goals of the merchant guilds and the religious establishment who produced the plays.

In both the First and the Second Shepherds' plays, which relate the Christmas story and the shepherds' discovery of the baby Jesus, the shepherds are desperately poor. Yet it is the poverty of fifteenth-century rural England, not of Biblical Judaea. One shepherd's sheep have all died of rot (12.38), a disease which regularly plagued medieval livestock,²⁰ and he is so poor his "purs is bot wake, / I haue nerehand nothyng / To pay nor to take" (12.45-47). The concerns of the shepherds are "poignantly real and immediate,"²¹ - the characters are cold, hungry, and struggling to make a living under desperate conditions. While medieval watchers may have interpreted these complaints symbolically, the cold as the lack of charity when men are separated from Christ and the barren lands as the barrenness of life without Christ,²² the depiction of the shepherds nevertheless acknowledges the trials faced by real English rural workers. Likewise, although the shepherds could be seen as foolish, lazy and negligent, and thus in contrast to the 'good shepherd,' Christ,²³ their sufferings remain genuine. The shepherds' troubles may be symbolic, used for a larger didactic purpose, but they are nonetheless inscribed with the repercussions of actual events. For example, the

¹⁷ Mervyn James. "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town." *Past and Present* 98 (1983) 1-14, p. 4.

¹⁸ Peter Happé. *English Mystery Plays*. London: Penguin, 1975, p. 11.

¹⁹ Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds. *The Towneley Plays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. xv, xix-xxii. All parenthesised references (by play and line number) are to this edition.

²⁰ Rosemary Woolf. *The English Mystery Plays*. London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul, 1972, p. 186.

²¹ Gary Schmidt. "Vides Festinare Pastores." *Neophilologus* 76 (1992) 290-304, p. 296; cf. 302; cf. John Speirs. "The Mystery Cycle." *Scrutiny* 18 (1951) 86-117, p. 107; Hans-Jurgen Diller. *The Middle English Mystery Play*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1992, p. 240.

²² F. P. Manion. "A Reinterpretation of *The Second Shepherds' Play*." *American Benedictine Review* 30 (1979) 44-68, p. 67.

²³ Robert Adams. "The Egregious Feasts of the Chester and Towneley Shepherds." *Chaucer Review* 21 (1986) 96-107, p. 102; cf. Rosemary Woolf, p. 186.

first shepherd in the Second Shepherds' Play is implicated in the power struggle that accompanied land enclosures. England's wool and cloth economy expanded rapidly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and with the shortage of labour after the black death, landlords found it more profitable to enclose land previously used for crops, and raise sheep.²⁴ The shepherd in the Second Shepherds' Play is a "husband" (13.15, 33)²⁵ not really a 'shepherd,' and his lands "lyys falow as the floore" (13.21) rather than being farmed.²⁶ Husbandmen, in contrast to shepherds, were small farmers who "husbanded" a plot of land; the land was used directly for crops and thus could support several families, whereas land devoted to sheep primarily benefited the lord. Cawley and Stevens suggest that the argument over right-of-way for non-existent sheep in the First Shepherds' Play "has a realistic background in the endless disputes over rights of common that are recorded in the manor court rolls of the period."²⁷ One of the 'lines of force' in the play, then, is the resentment of the husbandmen over the hardships brought by the enclosure of their land and its use as pasture.

Another point of conflict in the drama is between the husbandmen and the class above them, the retainers of the landowners. The shepherds are beset by "bosters and bragers," "byll-hagers" (12.79, 83), "gentlery-men" and "men that are lord-fest" who "refe vs oure rest" (13.26-29). They feel threatened by these men: one shepherd says, "If he hask me oght / That he wold to his pay, / Full dere bese it boght / If I say nay" (12.105-108). Another shepherd echoes this sense of threat: "Wo is hym that hym grefe / Or onys agane-says! / Dar noman hym reprefe, / What mastry he mays" (13.42-45). The "husbyandys" are "opprest" and held under; they are brought in "blonder" until it is a "greate wonder / And euer shuld we thryfe" (13.34, 36-39). Although these speeches fall into the genre of the traditional 'complaint,' they are "no mere sorrowful musical complaint [...] [there is] a note of vigorous protest against the oppression of powerful, rich and evil men."²⁸ The medieval practices of

²⁴ Christine Richardson. "The Medieval English and French Shepherds Plays." *Festive Drama*. Meg Twycross, ed. Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1996, p. 262.

²⁵ The manuscript in the first example reads "shephardes"; however, the rhyme requires "husbandys." The change might have been made by a later scribe who was unaware of the earlier social context.

²⁶ See Stevens and Cawley, p. 495.

²⁷ Stevens and Cawley, p. 485; cf. Hans-Jurgen Diller, 245.

²⁸ John Speirs. *Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition*. London: Faber & Faber, 1971, p. 336; cf. Rosemary Woolf, p. 191.

purveyance and maintenance tacitly underlie these complaints. Under these practices the lord “maintained” a group of liveried retainers, who then had relatively free reign to harass the labourers on the lord’s land. “He can make purveance / With boste and bragance, / And all is thugh maintenance / Of men that are gretter,” one shepherd complains (13.49–52), and another gripes that even if he gave the maintenance men his plough and wagon they would not be satisfied but would continue to make demands of him (12.90–91). Ironically, the shepherds then treat their own servants just as poorly. The shepherds in the First Shepherds’ Play almost refuse to give their servant part of the meal (12.284–292); the shepherds of the second play threaten Daw just as the maintenance men threaten them: “I shall make the full rad, / By the heuens kyng!” (12.254–255). Although these plays could in no way be considered mimetic depictions of reality, they contain traces of actual socio-economic conflict within the hierarchy of servants, shepherds/husbandmen, maintenance men and lords.²⁹

Social and economic complaint runs beneath the surface of other events in the Shepherds’ Plays, and provides much of the comedy. The humour here often points up underlying tensions, and plays on real anxieties and resentments. During the meal in the First Shepherds’ Play, in which the characters eat everything from the “foote of a cowe” to “a tarte for a lorde” (12.309, 339), the comedy comes from the bizarre mixture of foods. This mixture is implicitly coded by class: “The playwright’s mixing of high-class and low-class table delicacies makes a ludicrous gallimaufry.”³⁰ The fact that the scene is funny – that the audience would recognise the class coding of the various foods and acknowledge the absurdity of their being served in one meal – gestures towards the reality of social/class differences in medieval English society. Moreover, whether the meal is make-believe, as some critics have suggested³¹ or an actual miraculous repast, the enthusiasm with which the shepherds list the various foods, and the improbability of their ever being able to afford them, underscores their

²⁹ “The Song of the Husbandman,” one of the Harley lyrics, gives the opposite point of view – that of a husbandman a class higher from the Towneley shepherds, and the trials he faces attempting to collect rent payment from the people below him. Rossell Hope Robbins, pp. 7–9.

³⁰ A. C. Cawley. “The ‘Grotesque’ Feast in the *Prima Pastorum*.” *Speculum* 30 (1955), 213–217, p. 215.

³¹ A. C. Cawley, pp. 215–216; cf. Stevens and Cawley, p. 488n.

poverty.³² Another source of humour is the misappropriation of class-specific language: one character uses 'upper class' French words such as "restorité" and "appeté," and another character accuses him, "Yee speke all by clergé" (12.344–346).³³ The misuse of a discourse that is reserved for the upper classes, its placement in an inappropriate context, shows that the shepherds are acutely aware of social stratification and class hierarchy. Again, the fact that the audience members could be expected to understand the humour demonstrates that they, too, understood the rules of the social system, and easily apprehended class differentiation.

The sequence of Mak and the sheep-stealing in the second play is primarily a comic farce, yet it too is underscored by economic tension. Mak's motive is the many mouths he has to feed at home (13.350–355). Mak's actions are reprehensible, but arise out of his social circumstances: "he does what the three shepherds and probably many in the audience would like to do: he takes what is needed for an empty stomach as an immediate solution to personal injustice and misery."³⁴ The key joke – that Mak and his wife hide the sheep in the baby cradle, and even manage to persuade the shepherds to give the 'baby' christening gifts – has decidedly sinister overtones: the substitution of the baby for the sheep, which Mak and his family plan to eat, carries with it the suggestion that people of Mak's class are so poor they may be forced to eat their children. Thus even though the cycle dramas may have served the purposes of the merchant class and the religious establishment by portraying poverty as a positive state in the Christian framework (it is because of their poverty that the shepherds are the first at the Nativity),³⁵ and by suggesting that religious devotion (rather than social or political action) is the means to happiness, the concerns of the lower classes of medieval Yorkshire leave their traces in humour and complaints of the text. Although the shepherds might have little access to power in the real world, their needs and motivations form an important facet of the 'relations of force' within the Corpus Christi plays.

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³² The poems "Winner and Waster" and *Piers Plowman* passus XIII use elaborate feasts to satirise the rich in a comparable manner.

³³ See also 12.560–564.

³⁴ Josie Campbell. "Farce as Function in the Wakefield Shepherds' Plays." *Chaucer Review* 14 (1980) 336–343, pp. 340–341.

³⁵ F. P. Manion, pp. 63–65.

Written two hundred years earlier,³⁶ in a different part of the country and under different social circumstances, the verse romance *Havelok* traces power struggles that are radically different from the ones in the Shepherds' Plays. Literary critics tend to agree that the Corpus Christi plays promote the interests of the merchant guilds and the religious establishment; however, no such agreement exists about the 'purpose' or 'goal' of *Havelok*. Although a work of art may be created simply for its own sake, and does not need to promote particular interests, critics often attempt to place the *Havelok*-poet in a particular class by speculating about which class or social category might benefit from such a romance.³⁷ Such a strategy, however, ignores the multiplicity of 'lines of force' and 'strategies of power' operative in the poem. So, for example, Halverson argues that *Havelok* written from a "middle-class milieu," displaying the 'protestant work ethic' of the working middle class;³⁸ Staines contends that the *Havelok* is a "warning to the thirteenth-century English monarchy of the needs and demands of the lower classes;"³⁹ while Delany suggests that the poem, in its calls for good government and depictions of upward mobility, expresses the aspirations of the upper bourgeoisie and the knighthood.⁴⁰ By contrast, Stuart argues that *Havelok*'s "negative portrayals of unruly barons and its emphasis on the divine right of kings" served as a warning to the aristocracy;⁴¹ and Hirsch says that *Havelok* reveals "not so much what the lower classes thought of the upper, as what the upper classes liked to think the lower classes thought of them."⁴² The desire of

³⁶ Delany dates *Havelok* between 1272–1307; Stuart and Shepherd suggest 1295–1310; Sands says 1250–1300. Sheila Delany. "The Romance of Kingship: Havelok the Dane." *Medieval English Poetry*. Stephanie Trigg, ed. London: Longman, 1993, p. 174; Christopher Stuart. "*Havelok the Dane* and Edward I in the 1290s." *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996) 349–364, p. 353; Stephen Shepherd, ed. *Middle English Romances*. London: Norton, 1995, p. 3; Donald Sands, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986, p. 56. All parenthesised references are to Shepherd's edition and will be noted by line number.

³⁷ Christopher Stuart, p. 350.

³⁸ John Halverson. "*Havelok the Dane* and Society." *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971–72), 142–151, p. 147; confusingly, Halverson later argues that "*Havelok* seems to emerge from the lower levels, the peasant stratum" (p. 150).

³⁹ David Staines. "Havelok the Dane: a Thirteenth-Century Handbook for Princes." *Speculum* 51 (1976) 602–623, p. 602.

⁴⁰ Sheila Delany, p. 179.

⁴¹ Christopher Stuart, p. 350.

⁴² John Hirsch. "Havelok 2933: A problem in Medieval Literary History." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977) 339–349, p. 343. See also Susan Crane, who argues for a baronial audience and authorship: Susan Crane. *Insular Romance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 43–44.

established kings to secure the heritage of their young children; the needs of those minors once grown; the ambitions of guardians or regents; the hardships of thralls and labouring classes – all these knots of force and resistance interact in the text of *Havelok*, and emphasising one at the expense of the others obscures the subtleties of medieval power relationships.

The major site of contention in the romance is the crown. In *Havelok*, the English and Danish kings both try to secure power for their heirs using several strategies: choosing a powerful, apparently trustworthy guardian; assembling the guardian's peers to witness the choice; and eliciting solemn oaths from the guardian to safe-guard the heir and the inheritance. These strategies of power, however, are ineffective once the power – in the person of the king – is absent. The minors have little or no power themselves: Goldboru is imprisoned, and fed and clothed poorly; Havelok attempts to bargain his kingdom for his life, but Godard sends him to be killed and takes his kingdom regardless. This romance, then, presents a site of tension which is a real contemporary concern (the obvious historical analogy is Richard III and his nephews): how can one ensure the succession and protect the power of minors?

Most critics dismiss the two regents as the “evil Earl Godrich” and the “diabolical Godard,” whose usurpations “figurally re-enact the archetypal Christian conflict of good and evil.”⁴³ While such associations are operative in the text, this kind of reading does not recognise the relations of force that surrounded a medieval regent and his ward. The regent had the unenviable position of holding power for some twenty years, and then having to give it up and return to his former, subordinate position.⁴⁴ Moreover, like the king, the regent was interested in protecting *his* power and *his* children's heritage. Godrich wants to make his own son king of England: “Ich have a sone, a ful fayr knave: / He shal Engeland al have; / He shal ben King; he shal ben sire” (308–310; cf. 1075), while Godard decides he cannot allow Havelok to live if his children are to thrive, “Loverdinges after me / Of al Denemark micten he be” (515–516). As far as the regents are concerned, there is no obvious reason why Havelok and Goldboru should be rulers instead of their own children; as Godrich says, “Wether she sholde be / Quen and levedi over me? [...] Sholde Ic yeve a fol – a therne! – / Engeland, tho sho it yerne?” (292–293, 298–299). It is not at all self-evident why a young girl – a “fool” – should rule rather than a competent, powerful man, and many

⁴³ Sheila Delany, pp. 175–176.

⁴⁴ See Christopher Stuart, p. 356.

individuals in medieval society may have felt the same.⁴⁵ Godrich sees Havelok's re-assertion of Goldboru's rights as a disinheritance of *him*: "Hwat! wenden he to desherite me?" (2547). Rather than merely condemning Godrich and Godard as 'evil earls,' it is important to recognise the real political concern about regents' dynastic ambitions inscribed into the text of *Havelok*.

Other social concerns and class conflicts are also registered in the romance. Several critics have seen *Havelok* as a piece of propaganda for the 'lower classes,' a "vehicle for a critical overview of the contemporary political situation and the desires and complaints of the lower classes."⁴⁶ However, as Stuart points out, *Havelok* is similar to the American novels of upward nobility: "While they seemed to offer their readers the promises of future riches, this was conditional upon their readers' willingness to work endlessly and uncomplainingly for little immediate reward."⁴⁷ The text, then, may not so much express the complaints of the lower classes as reflect the wishes of the upper classes. Notwithstanding this, asking 'whose interests does this text serve' can obscure the many lines of force which slip through the text: while it is unlikely *Havelok* was written by the lower classes as a warning to the upper, nevertheless it contains the trace of their economic and social struggles. The thralls, represented in the text by Grim, are depicted as being motivated principally by a desire for freedom: for his freedom, Grim is willing to kill Havelok when Godard asks (530, 562). It is possible Grim realises how unlikely it is that Godard will actually give him his freedom,⁴⁸ for Grim's allegiance changes when he realises who Havelok is. One of the first things he says is "Thou shalt me, loverd, fre maken, / For I shal yemen the and waken - / Thorou the wile I fredom have!" (629-631). As a thrall, Grim has very little power: he cannot force Godard to fulfil his promises, and suffers name-calling and threats of hanging (682, 687). Even once he escapes from Denmark, he lives in an earth hut and the text emphasises that he "swank sore / for his mete" (788-789). However, a Foucauldian reading of *Havelok* demonstrates that even impoverished thralls form "mobile and transitory points of resistance"⁴⁹ that occasionally gain enough power to change society. In this case, Grim's actions

⁴⁵ Consider the contrast between John of Gaunt and Richard II, for example.

⁴⁶ David Staines, p. 607; cf. John Halverson, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Christopher Stuart, p. 354.

⁴⁸ Indeed, Godard refuses to fulfil his promises even though he is under the impression Grim has killed *Havelok* (681-684).

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 96.

help overturn the most powerful men in two kingdoms and, far from incidentally, make Grim's sons free and powerful lords.

Like the plight of the thralls, the hardships faced by ordinary workers are inscribed in *Havelok* – even if the portrayal appears to serve an upper-class fantasy about a cheerful, hard-working labour force. With the onset of famine Havelok is forced to go to Lincoln to search for employment. He has no clothes other than a piece of sailcloth, no shoes and no hose. He goes two days “fastinde” because “non for his werk wolde him fede” (865–866); on the third day he shoves down nine or ten other people to gain work, for which he receives a bit of food. This depiction is far from an idyllic image of medieval hierarchies: Delany observes, “Noteworthy in this passage are, first, the large number of unemployed [...] and, second, Havelok’s brutal fervour in shoving his hungry competitors into the mud.”⁵⁰ When Godrich tries to force him to marry, Havelok asks:

Hwat sholde Ich with wif do
 I ne have none kines thinge;
 I ne have hws, I ne have cote,
 Ne have I stikke, I ne have sprote,
 I ne have neyther bred ne sowel,
 Ne cloth but of an hold with covel.
 This clothes that Ich onne have
 Aren the kokes – and Ich his knave!

(1137–1146)

Despite working “more than he were a best” (944), Havelok has neither shelter, nor fuel, nor food, nor clothing, and he is forced to marry against his will.⁵¹ Although the romance suggests that this negative situation has arisen because Godrich is a bad ruler, nonetheless it demonstrates the real precariousness of life for the labouring classes.

A final line of force in *Havelok* is represented by Ubbe, the Danish noble who helps Havelok regain his throne. Once again, critics have argued in reference to Ubbe that the poem expresses the aspirations of the upper bourgeoisie;⁵² aside from the anachronism of applying Marxist terms to

⁵⁰ Sheila Delany, p. 180.

⁵¹ Goldboru, too, is forced to marry; many of the gender issues that arise in Dunbar (see below) are applicable here as well.

⁵² Sheila Delany, p. 179.

medieval society, however, one can make an equally strong argument that the poem expresses the aspirations of the king or monarchy.⁵³ While Ubbe is presented as a positive figure, it is because of his support of Havelok; upper class individuals (Godrich and Godard) who betray the king because of their own wishes for 'upward mobility' are invariably depicted negatively. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to note the strategies of power used by characters such as Ubbe. He has extensive power, protecting merchants commanding large groups of men. He is loyal to Havelok; yet in this he is, like Godrich, Godard, Grim, Havelok and Goldboru, acting in his own interests and working to increase his own power. Although he is one of the strongest lords in Denmark ("In al Denmark ne was no knith, / Ne conestable, ne shireve [...] That he ne com biforn sire Ubbe - / He dredden him so thef doth clubbe" [2285–2289]) his association with Havelok makes him even more powerful: by the end of the poem, Havelok places him in supreme control of all Denmark (2960). Ubbe is the one who makes Havelok a knight, and in the complex web of feudal loyalties, this places Havelok in the delicate position of owing allegiance to his own vassal. As well, Ubbe is truly a 'kingmaker,' for it is through Ubbe's power and military strength that Havelok regains both his throne and Goldboru's: "[Ubbe] made him King heylike and wel" (2229). Ubbe, then, is a central site of power in the tale, and may even be said to hold more power than his own king – for who makes a king can often unmake him. Ubbe's upward mobility, like the change in status of Grim's children, demonstrates that medieval hierarchies were not rigid and stable but were open to contesting and shifting; it also demonstrates that lines of power and influence can run counter to traditional class hierarchies (since Ubbe, in many ways, holds more power than his social superior, Havelok). *Havelok* contains many sites of force – the regents, Grim, Ubbe, Havelok himself – in a way that shows that power in medieval society was not solely 'top-down' but multi-faceted and complex.

* * *

Love lyrics – as opposed to kingship romances – seem an unlikely place to find political or social tensions. Yet the early fifteenth-century lyric "The last time I the wel woke,"⁵⁴ has genuine social struggles underlying its humour.

⁵³ Christopher Stuart, p. 350.

⁵⁴ The lyric is here reprinted according to Luria and Hoffman's edition.

*I have forsworne it whil I live
To wake the well-ey*

The last time I the well woke
Sir John caght me with a croke
He made me to swere be bell and boke
I shuld not tell-ey

Yet he did me a well wors turne;
He leide my hed again the burne
He gave my maidenhead a spurne
And rove my kell-ey

Sir John came to oure hous to play
Fro evensong til light of the day;
We made as mery as flowres in May –
I was begiled-ey

Sir John he came to our hous;
He made it wonder copious;
He seid that I was gracious
To beire a childe-ey

I go with childe, well I wot;
I schrew the fader that it gate,
Withouten he finde it milke and pap
A long while-ey

The carol falls into the *planctus* or “deceived young maid” tradition, in which a young girl makes her complaint that she has been deceived by a higher-class man, and is now pregnant. Lyrics are notoriously difficult to date or localise, and since they are largely anonymous, it is not easy to tell for what segment of society they were intended, and thus whether they are humorous or sincere, parodic or merely poetically exaggerated.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding, critics have tended to agree that, just as *fabliaux* were probably written for the amusement of the

⁵⁵ T. L. Burton. “‘The Fair Maid of Ribbesdale’ and the problem of parody.” *Essays in Criticism* XXXI:4, 1981, 282–298, p. 282.

upper classes rather than for the lower classes they apparently portray, so too the 'popular woman's songs' were likely written by men, in the Goliardic or satirical tradition.⁵⁶ Statements such as "alas I go with chile" are unlikely to be autobiographical, since there is little conceivable reason for such self-exposure;⁵⁷ instead, they were written by men speaking in a woman's voice to achieve a humorous effect.⁵⁸ Since the line "bryan hyf my name iet"⁵⁹ is written in the same hand after the lyric "The last time I the wel woke," and since the lyric falls into the tradition of "alas I go with chile" songs, it is probable that this song was written by a man (although the signature could be the scribe's), and hence may be read as humorous parody rather than realistic autobiography.

As such, we cannot expect the lyric to mimetically represent historical reality. At the same time, the song would not be considered funny if it did not have some social relevance. In the lyric, a young girl goes to the well and is "caght" by "Ser John" (4); in the last stanza she sings, "I go with childe, wel I wot" (19). However, unlike many other "I go with chile" lyrics,⁶⁰ "The last time I the wel woke" has overtones of force and class conflict. First of all, the man is called "sir" John: the lover is probably a knight or a lord, and thus is of higher social status than the young girl. Unlike many humorous songs, in which the girl seduces (or at least enjoys) the man's attentions, this girl was "caght" with a "croke" (4) and forced to swear "be bell and boke" she would not tell what sir John does to her (5-6). She has no romantic illusions about their encounter, saying, "he did me a wel wors turne" (7); her head is laid against the "burne" and

⁵⁶ Lois Bragg. "'Wulf and Eadwacer,' 'The Wife's Lament' and Women's Love Lyrics of the Middle Ages." *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift* 70, 1989, 257-268, p. 262; cf. Doris Earnshaw. *The Female Voice in Medieval Romance Lyric*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988, pp. 2, 14, 33.

⁵⁷ John Plummer, quoted in McNamer. "Female Authors, Provincial Setting." *Viator* 22, 1991, 279-310, p. 286.

⁵⁸ While I disagree strongly with Earnshaw, that "Gender is universally distinguishable in human speech" - she rather ludicrously uses male and female birdsong to prove her statement - I do think one could argue that there are traits more likely to be found in female speech that an author can exaggerate or exploit when he wishes to parody a woman's voice. Earnshaw, p. 54 n. 71.

⁵⁹ Richard Greene, ed. *The Early English Carols*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1935, p. 309. All parenthesised references to the lyric (carol 456 in Greene's edition) will be taken by line number from this edition.

⁶⁰ See, for example, lyrics 83, 86, 87, and 88 in Luria and Hoffman, pp. 84-86 (carols 452, 453, 454 and 457 in Greene).

sir John “gafe my maydenhed a spurne / And rofe my bell-ey” (8–10).⁶¹ The overtones of force in this description are disturbing, even though the girl later learns to enjoy sir John’s attentions and the gifts he brings. In the final stanza, however, she curses sir John, saying “I schrew the fader that [my child] gate” (20). The chorus of the lyric declares that she will no longer “wake the well-ey,” and in this there is the underlying implication that she is too afraid to go to the well anymore, whether from shame (over her obvious pregnancy) or because she is fearful of another, similar, encounter. Moreover, the singer expresses a concern rarely mentioned in the *planctus* genre: she is worried her erstwhile lover will not help her “fynde [the child] mylke and pap” (21). Even though this text is ostensibly humorous, the plight of single mothers with no support or income comes through clearly.⁶² The undertones of class conflict – the power of upper class men to rape lower class women without repercussions, and the problems those women then face – are lost if one classifies this poem as simply humorous fabliau, rather than tracing the workings of power in the text. Likewise, while the song in no way serves the interests of the lower classes, it nevertheless gestures towards some of their real concerns and complaints.

* * *

If one conceives of gender or class tensions as fields of relations, rather than specific struggles or conflicts, one can position the lyric “The last time I the wel woke” as capturing one group of forces; William Dunbar’s poem “The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo,” while still within the field of gender and class relations, delineates very different sites of conflict and manifestations of power. The poem is primarily a discussion of marriage between three women, yet the lines of force extend beyond these women to their husbands, their relatives, the audience and the whole late fifteenth-century Scottish framework of society and marriage. Critics tend to either condemn the women in the poem

⁶¹ Luria and Hoffman give “kell-ey” for Greene’s “bell-ey,” and gloss it as “maidenhead”; yet the reading “bell-ey” works, especially in the context of a young girl who might well feel her belly is being riven.

⁶² My interpretation of this lyric suggests interesting readings for other lyrics, for example “O Lord, so swet Sir John dothe kis” (number 85 in Luria and Hoffman). Although Bragg classes this lyric as a “frank expression of sexual desire” (Bragg, p. 262), the reappearance of “sir John” and the final line of each stanza, “I have no powre to say him nay” suggests a more ominous reading.

for their "greed and lust,"⁶³ for being "sunk in sin,"⁶⁴ or condemn the author (or narrator) as misogynistic, and the poem as the worst kind of anti-feminist satire.⁶⁵ By contrast, Priscilla Bawcutt notes that the poem "resounds with laughter, yet many critics (chiefly men) are unamused, and subject it to solemn and often hostile analysis."⁶⁶ Like the *planctus* lyrics, the humour in this poem points up real social concerns; yet this humour is broadly directed at both men and women, and in the midst of satirising its victim it acknowledges the victim's genuine grievances. Economic power, sexual power and social relations are intertwined in a complex web of force relations, and the way these relations play out are humorous since they capture and exaggerate elements of real social, economic and sexual struggles: "always behind the poem stands the reality of medieval marriage, with its special dangers for women. This reality of women's lives comes ever before us in the details enumerated by the married women."⁶⁷ Yet the 'dangers of marriage for men' are also present in the poem. "Dunbar delights in exploiting areas of social tension, between men and women, clerics and laymen, seculars and friars, Lowlanders and highlanders," Bawcutt writes,⁶⁸ and in the *Tretis* he exploits the tensions between men and women in a way that exposes the strategies of power and resistance that *both*, rather than just the men, use.

The first intersection of lines of force described in the poem is between the first wife and her old husband. The woman calls marriage "bair of blis and

⁶³ Deanna Evans. "Dunbar's *Tretis*: The Seven Deadly Sins in Carnavalesque Disguise." *Neophilologus* 73 (1989) 130–141, p. 133.

⁶⁴ Tom Scott. *Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966, p. 190.

⁶⁵ A. D. Hope. *A Midsummer Eve's Dream*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1970, p. 258; Edwina Burness. "Dunbar and the Nature of Bawdy." *Bryght Lanternis*. J. D. McClure and M. Spiller, eds. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989, p. 217; Deanna Evans, p. 130.

⁶⁶ Priscilla Bawcutt. *Dunbar the Makar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 325.

⁶⁷ Maureen Fries. "Medieval Concepts of the Female and their Satire in the Poetry of William Dunbar." *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1983) 55–77, p. 73; cf. A. C. Spearing. *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1993, p. 262; Tom Scott, p. 197; Priscilla Bawcutt, p. 345. See Judith Bennett. "Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide." *Culture and History 1350–1600*. David Aers, ed. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1992, p. 153; or Rosalind Marshall. *Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080–1980*. Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1983, p. 33, for a discussion of women's situation in Scottish marriages.

⁶⁸ Priscilla Bawcutt. "William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas." *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 1. R. D. S. Jack, ed. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988, p. 79.

bailfull” and describes it as being in “chenzeis.”⁶⁹ She is forced to have sex with her husband: “Thair ma na sayne me save fra that auld sathane, / For thocht I croce me all cleine fra the croun doun / He wil my corse all beclip and clap me to his breist” (102–104). She dares not cry out or “schout” for fear, “for schore of that auld schrew” (109, 110). To get what she wants, she has to trade sex for economic benefits: “or he clyme one my corse [...] I have conditioun of a curche of kersp all ther fynest, / A gown of engranyt claith right gaily furrit, / A ring with a ryall stane or other riche jowell” (137–140). All the same, the “baid” is “deir aboucht” (143). A medieval marriage was a place in which women had little power, and paid dearly for what few benefits they received. Legally, the husband controlled not only his property but whatever property the wife brought to the marriage or achieved on her own; a married woman was a “femme couverte,” and virtually did not exist in the law.⁷⁰ A wife could not sell or give away any of her property without her husband’s consent.⁷¹ The problems the wife in Dunbar’s poem describes, therefore, are – despite their humour – quite realistic: a wife would be unable to buy anything for herself, and would be forced to find some way of persuading her husband to buy it for her.

Yet the power in the poem is not solely on the husband’s side, for Dunbar clearly demonstrates that a ‘senex amans’ (an old lover) will have grievances as well. The young wife can withhold sex (even though she initially says she cannot, she evidently does [141]). Indeed, this ability to withhold sex is implicit in the commodifying of sex described above: if the wife could not refuse to have sex, she would be unable to trade it for economic benefit. Moreover, the young wife can take a lover, and the threat of this is a line of force she can turn to her own use. Alternately, she can simply call her husband names (as she does throughout her speech). Interestingly, much of the abuse centres around impotence: “Given the importance, both social, moral and economic, of successful male sexual performance, it is not surprising that several terms of abuse in Dunbar’s work should involve impotence.”⁷² The poem delineates “not only women’s desires but men’s fears – concerning sexual satisfaction, material possessions, and, above all,

⁶⁹ “The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo” ll. 51, 53; James Kinsley, ed. *The Poems of William Dunbar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. All parenthesised references are to this edition, quoted by line number.

⁷⁰ Judith Bennett, p. 153.

⁷¹ Rosalind Marshall, p. 33.

⁷² Edwina Burness, p. 218.

power.⁷³ The marriage of young women to older men was a reality in the Middle Ages,⁷⁴ and Dunbar clearly depicts the stagings of power at work within such a match.

The second wife also outlines real-life conflicts in her description of her marriage. She is married to a play-boy, a young man who has “bene lychour so lang quhill lost is his natur” (174). Someone married to an old man, she says, at least knows what she is getting; marriage to this kind of man, by contrast, is finding only “glase” in the “glemyng of gold” (202). Not only can she not get sexual satisfaction from her husband, but she faces the risk of venereal disease (the suggestion of syphilis is latent in the husband’s impotence) and must deal with the double standard that condemns a woman’s adultery but allows it in men. Another ‘line of force’ that played a part in a medieval marriage appears when the wife mentions that she is in a marriage arranged by her family: “my wekit kyn that me away cast / To sic a craudoune” (214–215). “Dunbar spares little pity for these women,” writes Spearing, “but here we get a glimpse of the relationships of power and money that really deprived most medieval women of a choice of partner.”⁷⁵ Daughters were used to cement economic or social alliances for the family, and “all but the poorest families had a vested interest in marriage.”⁷⁶ The space of marriage, then, becomes a political space, a site of intersection for various lines of force: the wife’s, the husband’s, the wife’s kin. The interests of all parties are at stake in this space, and a focus on the dominant interests (the husband’s) misses the negotiations of power that make up a marriage. The wife, her husband, and her family are all depicted as using different tactics of power to gain their own advantage in the marriage; and this contested space in the text reveals some of the concerns and dynamics at work within real fifteenth-century marriages.

The widow’s two marriages explicitly expose many of the economic, social and sexual strategies of power at work in the nexus of forces that was a medieval marriage. While a traditional feminist approach to the text would concentrate on the oppressions within the two wives’ marriages, it might not explore the lines of power the widow herself deploys, nor the way the men are subjugated to that power. The widow’s first marriage seems like the first wife’s

⁷³ Priscilla Bawcutt. *Dunbar the Makar*, p. 328.

⁷⁴ Tom Scott, p. 183.

⁷⁵ A. C. Spearing, p. 258; cf. A. D. Hope, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Rosalind Marshall, p. 24.

marriage, a young woman forced by her kin to marry a much older man; rather than fighting against the marriage as the first wife does, however, the widow uses the forces already within the marriage to her advantage. Her youth and gender, which first seem disadvantages, become tools to get what she wants. She pretends to dote on her husband and takes care of him until “his cheif chymys he had chevist to my sone, / Suppos the churll wes gane chaist or the child wes gottin” (292–293). The wife here appropriates social forces outside the marriage as well, for if the husband accuses her of adultery he risks exposing his own impotence. As a result of this deployment of social forces, the husband leaves his lands to another man’s child. Dunbar here depicts a real threat in a society in which older men married younger women, and yet blood heritage and family dynasties were important. For a man in a patriarchal society, few things could be more disastrous than leaving one’s property to another man’s child, and the fact that the husband does so demonstrates the extent of the widow’s power.

In the widow’s second marriage, economic and class forces are even more clearly at play. The widow is from a higher class than her husband: “we na fallowis wer in frendschip or blud, / In fredome na furth bering, na fairness of persoune” (298–299). This poses a problem in medieval marriage, for the woman is supposed to be inferior; in this marriage the ‘lines of force’ of social standing and the ‘lines of force’ of gender clash. The widow uses her higher birth as a power strategy against her husband, calling him names, making him scared of her and making him “subjeit and sett at myn bydding” (327). In the end, she makes him sign over his wealth to her children (again, an event which medieval inheritance laws generally worked to prevent), and mistreats the children of his first marriage. Metaphorically, the widow “gelds her husband and this suggests the husband’s complete humiliation, sexually and financially – with an implicit connection between the two. He is now bankrupt, or ‘superspendit’ [...] his resources ‘spulzeit’ or plundered, by his wife.”⁷⁷ In this case, the class conflicts within society have even entered a marriage, and the widow generally uses these forces to her advantage.

Yet the ‘lines of force’ are against the widow, as well. She still must have sex with someone she despises, and her only recourse is to pretend he is another man (390). Furthermore, she is still subject to social pressures, and cannot act freely. Even once she is a widow, presumably ‘free,’ she must resort to deception and trickery to get what she wants. Social norms and expectations

⁷⁷ Priscilla Bawcutt. *Dunbar the Makar*, p. 341.

prevent her from taking lovers openly, and her movements are constrained. She is constantly under the surveillance and the judgement of society; and the final line of the poem implicates the reader in these social forces, asking him to place *his* judgement on the three women. (The audience is explicitly male, since the question is “Quhilk wald ze wail to 3our wif?” [530].) The women in the tale will be redeemed or condemned by the judgement of the audience, and this judgement becomes yet another line of force. A reading that condemns the “greed and lust” of the three women, or their “base qualities,”⁷⁸ itself participates in the subjugation of these women to the social forces around them, rather than recognising the way in which those forces are deployed by and against the women. In this poem, marriage is a highly disputed site of intersection for economic, social, class and gender forces, and the reader himself becomes involved in the power relations at work.

⁷⁸ Deanna Evans, p. 133.

Natália Pikli

The Crossing Point of Tears and Laughter

A tragic farce: Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

The aged catch their breath,
For the nonchalant couple go
Waltzing across the tightrope
As if there were no death
Or hope of falling down;
The wounded cry as the clown
Doubles his meaning, and O
How the dear little children laugh
When the drums roll and the lovely
Lady is sawn in half.

(W. H. Auden)

The circus described by the Stage Manager in the Preface of Auden's *Commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest*,¹ provides a highly revealing picture of the theatre in general, while highlighting how Shakespeare's plays work on stage, and in the theatre of our minds. The dramatic effect of his plays evokes two universal signs of emotion: tears and laughter. On the surface, laughter and suffering associate themselves easily with other binary oppositions such as light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell – and in drama: comedy and tragedy. Still, they do not merely oppose but may cross each other, springing from the same roots. Tears of joy are made of the same material as tears of pain, and laughter may express pure joy or hide pain and misery.

¹ Excerpt from W. H. Auden. "The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*." *Collected Longer Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988.

The present paper focuses on such crossing points of violence, suffering and laughter,² first briefly highlighting some problematic points in their interrelation, then discussing these problems at greater length in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. The first section raises some questions concerning the nature and effect of violence and suffering in tragedies and in farce with Shakespearean examples. The second section discusses the interrelated notion of the grotesque, trying to provide a useful clarification of the term for interpreting Shakespeare. The third section discusses *Titus Andronicus* at greater length. After a short philological introduction, necessary to the "rehabilitation" of the play, the main grotesque motifs will be examined, in the play as a whole, in Titus' character, and on the linguistic-metaphorical level. Finally, the close analysis of one pivotal scene is given, which also presents how the method suggested by Thomson may be applied to Shakespearean plays.³

I

Suffering and pain, the dominant emotions and themes of tragedy seem enigmatic in many respects. The internal and external experience of pain might appear radically different – one suffers and the other may take pity or may laugh at him. Pain is not physical, tangible for the other. In addition, the manifestation of misery may give rise to highly comic moments: an old man with his hair dishevelled, raging in and with the storm, without our awareness what has happened to him may seem only a mad old man, helplessly comic in his appearance. However, when the same old man is King Lear, the inherent comedy in his situation becomes uneasy as it is intertwined with a feeling of sympathy, evoked by the poetry of the play, which drags us into his situation, and takes us inside his suffering while not allowing us to maintain a distance. But the effect is reversed when our detachment cannot be helped, when there is a chorus of railing and storming kinsmen for the mad father's hand, chopped off in *Titus Andronicus*.

² I use the notions of 'violence' and 'suffering' as belonging to the same group when compared with 'laughter,' since they are strongly connected. Violence causes suffering, while suffering often calls for (more) violence. Suffering may be made to seem comic, or is seen as comic, while violence may be used for comic purposes, cf. chases in farce.

³ "[...] any discussion of grotesque texts, if one is to show that they *are* grotesque, and why, must include the uncovering of comic patterns and structures." Philip Thomson. *The Grotesque. The Critical Idiom* 24. London: Methuen, 1972, p. 54.

Titus is not given the (dramatic) chance to rant with the effect Lear does: the multiplication (a basic comic device) and the shifting of the centre of suffering mark the scene as – at least potentially – comic. We watch suffering from the outside, the boundaries between us and the suffering hero is clearly felt, and we cannot help an uncomfortable urge to laugh. Suffering is thus made comic with a shift of perspective.

Suffering may also appear as comic in itself – in comedy, or even more clearly in its extreme form: farce. In *The Comedy of Errors* the servants are constantly beaten and one of the main characters, Antipholus of Ephesus, is brutally “exorcised:” bound, abused, driven to rage, recalling words familiar from *King Lear*: “the fiend is strong within him” (IV.4.105), “I’ll pluck out those false eyes” (IV.4.102).⁴ We laugh at them, but our laughter is mixed with an uncanny feeling of pity, especially in Antipholus of Ephesus’s case, where violence is more excessive. In addition, in the clearly physical slapping and beating of the Dromios a basic question emerges: why do we laugh at somebody being beaten on stage? Is it only the Antipholuses who project – and thus try to eliminate – their inner misery by abusing and beating up an inferior, or are we doing the same while applauding the masters and jeering at their clowns, the clowns of a circus we can safely observe and enjoy from the outside? Though farce is not the genre which focuses on the character’s individual psychological credibility, archetypal fears and horrors are palpably felt within the hilariously comic and irresistible momentum of the play. Thus, comic suffering may become embarrassingly real, and tragic suffering may at times appear comic, even if the audience does not dare to laugh – the mere existence of doubt, the slight awareness of the potentially comic or tragic aspect is enough. The feeling of ludicrousness and pity mingle in “the ambiguous aura in which one may or may not laugh, but must perceive the laughter in the horror or vice versa.”⁵

The petty villains, representing the wicked humans on stage, often see the suffering afflicted by them as comic. Tamora’s sons, Chiron and Demetrius, whose will for wrongdoing is given concrete shape by the greater villains, Aaron and Tamora, obsessed with their ingenuity in raping and mutilating Lavinia, make cruel jokes at their victim, and become caught up more and more in the fun of it, ending up with exchanging a one-line banter with a cutting point:

⁴ William Shakespeare. *The Comedy of Errors*. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. R. A. Foakes. London and New York: Routledge, 1993 (1962).

⁵ Nicholas Brooke. *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy*. London: Open Books, 1979, p. 61.

DEMETRIUS So, now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak,
 Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.
 CHIRON Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so,
 And if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe.
 DEMETRIUS See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl.
 CHIRON Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.
 DEMETRIUS She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash,
 And so let's leave her to her silent walks.
 CHIRON And 'twere my cause, I should go hang myself.
 DEMETRIUS If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord.
 (II.3.1-10)⁶

These petty villains use (and release) a petty form of dark laughter. Joking at their victim's expense, they transgress a strongly held taboo. What is disturbing about their jokes is that at times we are apt to laugh with them, and share in this brutal taunting; the *id*, as Freud observed,⁷ has no inhibitions and tends to enjoy the liberation of repressed desires in the villains' black wit. Therefore in *Titus Andronicus* we recognise and appreciate the wittiness and aptness of Chiron and Demetrius's jokes pointed at the laughable impotence of Lavinia. The disturbing aspect of their jokes is that we do not dare to laugh since then we would sink to their level, and become joking rapists and murderers. Still, we cannot repel their jokes entirely as ones made in bad decorum – if we did, we would have little insight in the real nature of the play (and of our human psyche).

The great villains, like Richard III, Aaron, and Iago present another vortex of violence and suffering – their demonic laughter, and their rejoicing at destruction opens up a wider scope in the interpretation of the problem.⁸ The destructive – but mainly histrionic – humour of Vice is mingling with the metaphysical laughter of the Devil himself: his joy at total destruction, at the uncreation of creation, focusing on the nothing created out of something.⁹ Aaron,

⁶ All parenthesised references are to this edition: William Shakespeare. *Titus Andronicus*. The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series. Ed. Jonathan Bate. London: Routledge, 1995.

⁷ Cf. Sigmund Freud. *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*. Ed. A. A. Brill. London: Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1922.

⁸ The reception of either the petty or the great villain's laughter is a debatable issue. Nevertheless, the psychological motivations behind the villains' jokes and joy on stage and the audience's possible laughter have common origins.

⁹ Cf. Jean Paul (*Vorschule der Ästhetik*): "the most destructive humour is perhaps the annihilating laughter of the Devil," as quoted in Philip Thomson, p. 16.

being a character in an early and mainly experimental play, can confess this kind of laughter openly, while the villains of smarter times “share” their joy with the audience only in soliloquies or asides. And while we enjoy our intellectual superiority over the other characters, which makes us silent accomplices to the villain’s schemes, a chord of terror is struck as well. Their humour is truly frightening. Through it we catch a glimpse of the world of uncreation – the void or the chaos, which is but “a tale / Told by an idiot [...] Signifying nothing.”¹⁰

II

The complex relationship between violence and laughter demands the clarification of the interrelated notion of the grotesque. Accepting Thomson’s definition of the grotesque (applied mainly to its literary appearance),¹¹ it is the unresolvable and problematic juxtaposition of the seemingly incompatible, the laughable and the horrifying or disgusting, which juxtaposition creates a tension both within the work of art and in the response to it. “Horrible laughter” is the touchstone of the grotesque, no matter whether it is open, or only the possibility of it is realised.

The main question about the fusion of the comic and the horrifying is whether the grotesque imagery and attitude arising carry a metaphysical meaning, or serve a moral or satirical purpose. As Rhodes employs the notion in his book *The Elizabethan Grotesque*,¹² he discusses mainly occasional grotesque images within works which as a whole cannot be considered grotesque. These images – his “grotesque” – only serve as a device in the hands of a satirist.¹³ As opposed to this predominantly moral or satirical view, which concentrates on specific imagery as a means to a higher goal, my paper primarily focuses on the grotesque as a prevailing mode, an overarching vision in a work of art, as, for example, in Kafka’s works.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. Kenneth Muir. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997. (London: Methuen, 1951), V.5.26–28.

¹¹ During the examination of the grotesque and its affinity to the problem of violence and laughter, I will mainly rely on Philip Thomson’s comprehensive notion of the grotesque.

¹² Neil Rhodes. *Elizabethan Grotesque*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980. His main concern is Nashe’s pamphlets, and satirical journalism, though he goes on to examine some Shakespearean and Jonsonian dramas as well.

¹³ In his analysis of the Falstaff plays he takes a somewhat different position, and interprets this figure as a grotesque image of the play and the play’s central conflict as between Carnival and Lent, offering valuable insights. Still, as a whole, his handling of the grotesque seems restricted.

The metaphysical grotesque of this kind works as a powerful metaphor: through the flash of the abrupt and startling juxtaposition of two distant (semantic and emotional) fields, it reveals something that our rational and moral make-up cannot explain, which, however, calls to our deeper understanding of ourselves and our world. If the metaphysical gap the grotesque exhibits is bridged with morals, we are passing the depth (and its monsters) without looking down, remaining undisturbed, which is the surest sign that the grotesque does not work for us. If it works, it deeply disturbs the reader or spectator. The “alienating effect” of the grotesque, as Chesterton states,¹⁴ shakes us out of our old and comfortable beliefs and enables us (rather drastically) to see things anew.¹⁵ However, the way the grotesque works should not be equated with Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* – the grotesque does not allow the emotional distance and thus the rational contemplation of the things presented.

The “revelation” of the grotesque relies primarily on demonstration. The grotesque does not separate sheep from goats, does not divide the world into a vale of tears or a circus, but juxtaposes and fuses them. To the grotesque the world is simultaneously a vale of tears and a circus.¹⁶ Its strongly physical nature illuminates its closeness to the metaphor. The grotesque is anti-rational at its core, though a certain kind of intellectual awareness is indispensable as the grotesque fuses the real and the unreal in a special way. Its logic, though, is closer to that of the dream, relying more on intensity and association than the everyday logic of time and space. The very physical, palpable side of the grotesque, nevertheless, corresponds to our sense of reality while the strong irrationality of its exaggerations and fantasticality beckons to us with equal strength. As opposed to the fantastic, we do not suspend our beliefs in normality and reality altogether when confronted with the grotesque. The palpably physical side of the grotesque drags us into its world, not allowing the freedom of complete suspension and a more comfortable detachment. We are trapped within a frighteningly fantastic reality – or a palpably real fantasy, just as Gregor Samsa, who awakens one day in his own bed to find himself turned into an insect. This paradoxical nature of the grotesque threatens the comfortable analytical dualism, to which man is so prone

¹⁴ G. K. Chesterton as quoted in Philip Thomson, p. 17.

¹⁵ Though all great masterpieces of art inspire such a transformation of our views, the ways to achieve this effect vary considerably. The grotesque is only one of many.

¹⁶ Philip Thomson, p. 63.

– the creature with two legs, two arms, two eyes, and the ready notions of light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell.¹⁷

With the blurring of the distinctions between real and unreal, the grotesque creates a dangerous mixture. Danger arises from the elimination of the distance between things generally far apart, which, by threatening distinction, threatens the norms. The demonstration of the abnormal (cf. Bosch's or Brueghel's works) and the unnatural (a highly significant term in Shakespeare) underlines the notion of endangered norms. If the deviation of the norms is harmless, as in the case of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, we do not have the impression of the grotesque – the simply ridiculous, comic side prevails. When, however, the "abnormal" is menacing in some way, as in the figure of Malvolio or Shylock, the grotesque lurks behind the comic.¹⁸

When talking about the relationship between violence and laughter in Shakespearean plays, the term 'grotesque' proves very useful. The process of suffering becoming comic has strong affinity with, or appears in, grotesque images, like in *Titus Andronicus*, and what is more, this process may be associated with a (possible) concomitant metaphysical sense of the grotesque – as in *King Lear* for instance.¹⁹ The petty villains' laughter reflects the practical, psychological effect of it – the "barbaric delight" of the torturer who sees the plight caused by himself as a source of infinite jests. The great villains' laughter, though seemingly close to the latter, has stronger ties with the former – the metaphysical joy of the Devil himself presents the world (of goodness) as a cosmic joke, contributing to the sense of the universal absurd, the metaphysical grotesque.

III

Titus Andronicus is one of Shakespeare's most ambiguous plays. Not only its literary value but also its date and authorship have been questioned, producing a

¹⁷ Howard Daniel. *Devils, Monsters and Nightmares: An Introduction to the Grotesque and Fantastic in Art*. London, New York, Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1964, p. 18.

¹⁸ With regard to this differentiation between Malvolio and Aguecheek, I am indebted to Philip Thomson, p. 39.

¹⁹ Cf. Jan Kott. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski. London: Methuen, 1972.

wide range of opinions.²⁰ *Titus Andronicus* certainly appears to be an early play of Shakespeare. Beside the external evidence, his handling of the play supports the earlier date when he – as if in an examination showpiece – tries to prove his skill and his erudition in Ovid, Seneca, and some other classic authors, while outdoing the horror revenge tragedies of university wits, at times even with a touch of parody.²¹

The play is full of bright ideas in an embryonic form and of themes elaborated later in Shakespeare's mature works. Nevertheless, *Titus Andronicus* differs considerably from later tragedies, and these differences have often been accounted for as "mistakes" or failures. According to Stanley Wells,²² in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare fails to incorporate the violence in words, i.e. the action on stage and the words often do not match. However, as we will see, it is precisely this characteristic of the play which offers new possibilities in interpretation. The lack of psychological motivation, as István Géher points out,²³ may be considered

²⁰ For a collection and summary see G. Harold Mertz. *Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedy: Studies in Titus Andronicus*. London: Associated Univ. Press, 1996, and Philip C. Kolin, ed. *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*. New York and London: Garland Publ., 1995. By now, debates about the authorship of the play have finished, and no one doubts that it is Shakespeare's play. As to its dating, two clusters of critical opinion exist: 1589–90 or 1593–94, relying mainly on Jonson's gibe at old but still popular plays in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and some verbal allusions in contemporary plays (*A Knack to Know a Knave*, 1592 and *The Troublesome Reign of John King of England*, 1591). Although Henslowe's *Diary* lists a performance of *Titus Andronicus* on 23 January 1594, the earlier date of composition seems likelier, not only on factual, but also on stylistic basis, taking the specific character of the authorial composition of the play into consideration. The former one is favoured by Mertz as well in his recent comprehensive study on the play, where he concludes that the play was staged around 1590 with a possible date of composition of 1589, adding that "I do not believe that it was his first play, although it may have been his first noncollaborative effort at drama" (G. Harold Mertz, p. 197). The ambitious character of the play supports his claim, though it also incites Jonathan Bate's enthusiasm in his edition of the play in the New Arden Series to such an extent that he casts it among Shakespeare's more mature plays (Bate in his preface to the Arden Edition, p. 3).

²¹ In the critical tradition several critics agreed on the main classical and contemporary influences present in *Titus*: to the largest extent Ovid, then Seneca, especially his "aesthetics of violence" in *Thyestes* (R. S. Miola. *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, quoted in G. Harold Mertz, p. 174), Kyd's revenge tragedy of blood, Marlowe's soaring style in *Tamburlaine* (cf. Aaron's first soliloquy) and his tragic farce *The Jew of Malta*. Besides these, other minor classical allusions abound.

²² This idea was expressed in his lecture on *Titus Andronicus* given at the Eötvös Collegium, Budapest, 10th April 1997.

²³ Géher István. *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv. Tükörképünk 37 darabban*. Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1990, pp. 176, 179.

as another shortcoming of the play. No character is consistently motivated throughout the play, there are breaks in the character and in the flow of the action as well (e.g. Titus goes mad several times). Still, the play is exciting – the characters are true to themselves, their doings may be psychologically justified in the given situation, even if not throughout the whole play, thus offering interesting insights into human nature. In this respect as well, *Titus Andronicus* has strong affinities with the genre of the farce, and may be best understood as a tragic farce, with hardly any consistent individual psychological motivation. Rather, the play displays a mosaic of the human psyche, presenting archetypal situations, and the ensuing human reactions.

The ambitious use of the stage metaphors (the tomb, the pit) also support the claim for a young author with high aspirations, and the horrifically comic use of metaphors in their literal sense alludes to a young but talented poet with a good sense of humour.²⁴ *Titus Andronicus* is characterised by this excess: the young poet and playwright is testing the limits of his own powers and the inherent possibilities in the genre.²⁵ His quest offers challenging results – and a wide range of opinions in its critical evaluation, being called “a heap of rubbish” (Dover Wilson), “a deficient melodrama” (Charlton) on one hand, and celebrated as a great play by Jonathan Bate on the other.²⁶ Excess appears in *Titus Andronicus* on the topical level as well – the characters within the play are put to a test of their limits of endurance, and are made to bear the unbearable.

The problem of violence and laughter, together with the appearance of the grotesque, is tangible in several layers of the play. The story itself makes an unequivocal reception impossible: the nakedness of the violence presented on stage terrifies and repels us, the excess of it at times reaches almost comic

²⁴ For the ideas concerning the literal use of different kind of metaphors, and the comic arising from it, I am indebted to Tricomi's article in the *Shakespeare Survey* (A. H. Tricomi. “The Aesthetics of Mutilation in ‘Titus Andronicus.’” *Shakespeare Survey* 27 [1974] 11–21).

²⁵ Cf. D. J. Palmer. “The Unspeakable in Pursuit of the Uneatable: Language and Action in *Titus Andronicus*.” *Critical Quarterly* 14 No. 4, Winter (1972) 320–339. “Perhaps it was this sense of testing the limits of his poetic and dramatic resources that attracted Shakespeare to the subject at the beginning of his career, for his early work is characterised by its tendency to display rhetorical and technical virtuosity, as well as by a desire to emulate and outdo his models. The early Shakespeare is more prone to excessive ingenuity than to a lack of skill or inventiveness.”

²⁶ William Shakespeare. *Titus Andronicus*. The New Shakespeare. Ed. J. Dover Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948; H. B. Charlton. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948; Bate in the Arden Shakespeare Third Series edition.

(parodistic) proportions – its sheer and brutal energy, however, simultaneously drags us into the middle of the happenings, blocking a clear-cut impression.

Titus Andronicus is Shakespeare's first tragedy. Tragedy in its archetypal form is very close to the satyr-play, "a disorganised ribald farce."²⁷ Its main field of work, violence, has strong links with the main area of comedy – the carnival. Violence "is the excess that threatens to break through the surface of community,"²⁸ which demands a safe outlet: either in the form of the disorder of carnival or as "good violence" (Girard's term), i.e. ritual. Rituals channel and thus control the excess of violence, strengthening society itself – similarly to carnival where the forces of disorder are let full play for a given period of time, and finally, holiday being over, everyday can return with its day-world of order.²⁹ However, there are some problems with this seemingly neat division. "Good violence" means legitimised violence: ritual, war. Illegitimate violence, termed as criminal violence, threatens to upset society because it questions legitimacy, and bears the mark of revolution. If the distinction between "good" and "bad" violence is blurred, it is a symptom of an unstable society, whose values have started to dissolve,³⁰ as we can see clearly in the grotesquely "unnatural" scenes of *Titus Andronicus*.³¹

"Unnatural." this adjective appears again and again in the mutilation of the young, and finally at the killing of Lavinia, when Saturninus (one of the most unsympathetic characters of the play) exclaims: "What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?" (V.3.47). The unnatural, on the other hand, is the result of the aborted and perverted rituals, confusing the norms of society. The murderous events start at the tomb of the Andronici, by attending the proper burial rites of the fallen sons – proper, according to Roman norms but simply murderous and barbaric to the representatives of another society, the Goths. From this point on, the perversion of rituals continues, and even at the end *Titus Andronicus* and

²⁷ Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. New Jersey: Princeton, 1957, p. 292.

²⁸ René Girard as quoted in Naomi Conn Liebler. *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 17.

²⁹ Cf. Mihail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT, 1968.

³⁰ Revenge tragedies display precisely this problem, as we will discuss in more detail. Cf. also Eleanor Prosser. *Hamlet and Revenge*. Stanford: California, 1971.

³¹ Carnival raises the same problem: if the disorder of holiday becomes everyday, the whole idea of society is questioned – therefore a good king must banish the Lord of Misrule: Prince Hal at the moment of becoming Henry V must reject Falstaff.

Lavinia cannot be given a proper burial as they are missing parts of their bodies (not to speak of Aaron being buried alive, and Tamora thrown outside the city walls, as prey to ravenous birds).

The question of who is barbarous in Rome blurs the distinction between legitimised ritual ("good violence") and illegitimate murder ("bad violence"). Revenge, which dominates the actions in the play, in its excess of violence also threatens to overthrow the basic divisions between good and bad, just and unjust. Titus, who is looking for Astrae (Justice), becomes entangled in the vicious circle of revenge. Revenge is in itself problematic; the avenger has to discard the same god(s) he is appealing to for Justice. Hieronimo digs the earth to reach Justice, Titus sends arrows to the gods abiding in heavens – still, by taking the management of action into their own hands, they defy the same gods and assume their role, judging and taking lives away – without God's mercy.

Furthermore, the excessive violence incited by multiple revenge in the play creates a whole circus of avengers, chasing each other and devising increasingly horrible means of retribution. The potentially comic quality of this circus cannot be denied: excess threatens to turn into parody and the multiplication of avengers diminishes the emotional impact of the search for just retribution. That is why *Titus Andronicus* has been called a "revenge farce."³² Violence corrupts the most decent men – Titus, the greatest soldier of Rome, well trained in the art of killing, cannot help getting caught in the web of revenge and violence, contributing to its horror according to his power.

Extreme violence in tragedy thus raises several questions – with society dissolving, belief in divine providence, in a cosmic order, is melting away, and the characters on stage are left to wonder whether the gods delight in tragedies and whether the heavens are empty.³³

The main tenet of *Titus Andronicus*, revenge, and the concomitant excess of violence are made problematic. On the other hand, the extravagance and exaggeration of the play also create splendidly grotesque images – on both the linguistic and the theatrical-visual level. One of the most prevailing motifs in the play is that of madness, which, being potentially both ludicrous and terrifying, is

³² James Black. "Shakespeare and the Comedy of Revenge." *Comparative Critical Approaches to Renaissance Comedy*. Ed. Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1986, 137–51.

³³ Cf. Gloucester: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th'Gods." William Shakespeare. *King Lear*. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. Kenneth Muir. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. (1972), IV.1.36.

the perfect ground for the grotesque. The maniacal laughter of Titus in Act III Scene 1 marks the emotional climax of the play – as a reaction to a totally unintelligible and unsympathetic world – the void itself. Titus' laughter differs from simple hysteria, and its nervous, defensive laughter (with which Thomson equates maniacal laughter).³⁴ Hamlet and Edgar, the representatives of the latter, try to preserve something rational in the face of the void: they see it, the chasm has opened in front of their feet, but they do not succumb to its lure, they are fighting it still. Titus is an unreflective hero. He echoes the absurdity of existence for a terrible moment, but then recoils, and absconds from his experience by retreating to the formalised ritual of revenge – just as a conventional hero in a revenge tragedy. At the same time, however, he diminishes his stature as a full-fledged tragic character.

The grotesque focuses especially on the main character, Titus, although there are a number of other characters and situations which call for our (uneasy) laughter and a sense of the grotesque. Titus emerges as a tragic clown: he suffers in this circus of violence, and we laugh at him. However, his stance is different from that of a professional clown, who is endowed with a certain degree of consciousness. Although a professional clown may suffer as an individual but still make us laugh with his heart-felt though painted tears, there is an element of awareness in what he is doing. Before appearing in front of an audience, he paints his face – rendering a physical and visual expression to his act of suffering, and at the same time defending his personality by putting up a mask. The amateur, tragic clowns, like Lear and Titus, lack the defensive feature of awareness and of a mask: their faces are untouched by paint, and we cannot escape the feeling of real, heart-felt pity for them. The naked face suffers – and this image of plight intrudes our heart; the possibility of any detachment is blocked. Titus, however, mostly lacks Lear's cosmic burden of suffering, and the high poetry of his soaring madness, foreshadowing rather than forerunning the old king in several respects. Titus' pain is more physical and his poetry is more rhetorical, therefore we are more easily drawn to laugh at him.

The problematic fusion of laughter and violence appears on the linguistic level as well. Language itself is abused, metaphors, as well as the bodies on stage, are dismembered, their physical element is taken at face value with a horrible momentum of a jesting spirit in Aaron's case, and with maniacal stubbornness in Titus' speeches, brooding on repetitions of "hands" in a handless world. The

³⁴ Philip Thomson, pp. 52–53.

consistent and tragically comic wordplay casts its shadow on the whole atmosphere of the play. "If words become reality, if the way we use language shapes the world, the figures of speech are not just deadly dull, or clichés, but nightmares into which characters awaken," says Kendall.³⁵

The nature of wordplay in *Titus Andronicus* underlies its deeper commitment to the world of the comic. Snyder distinguishes between two kinds of wordplay: tragic wordplay, where "the primary function of the pun is to illuminate by its conjunction of meanings some aspect of the tragic action," a central paradox, theme; while comic wordplay, although it may make direct comment on the action, is "essentially self-contained," the characters and the audience enjoy it for its own sake in its own field of reference. Comic wordplay can be expanded into whole wit-passages, which is precluded in tragedy, where these passages would "deflect emotional concentration from the tragic situation."³⁶ The puns in *Titus Andronicus* are closer to the comic wordplay: Titus, in the famous fly-scene (III.2)³⁷ refers to "hands" six times in ten lines, in the company of his hand- and tongueless daughter, and (probably) passionately gesturing with his one remaining hand, as the other one has been chopped off in vain to save his sons' life:

How now, has sorrow made thee dote already?
 Why, Marcus, no man should be mad but I.
 What violent hands can she lay on her life?
 Oh wherefore dost thou urge the name of hands
 To bid Aeneas tell the tale twice o'er
 How Troy was burnt and he made miserable?
 O handle not the theme, to talk of hands,

³⁵ G. M. Kendall. "'Lend me thy hand:' Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989) 299-316.

³⁶ Susan Snyder. *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear*. New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979, pp. 33-34.

³⁷ The so-called fly scene, which first appeared in the Folio (although *Titus Andronicus* was so popular that it went through three Quarto editions in Shakespeare's lifetime), is probably spurious. Both external and internal evidence points to the fact that it was a later interpolation. (For further philological discussion of the problem, see Nicholas Brooke. "The Intrusive Fly: A Note on Act III Scene II of *Titus Andronicus*." *Filoloski pregled* 1-2. [Beograd, 1964] 99-102.) Still, the scene is interesting on its own merits, in the description of the oscillations and tensions of the unhinged mind, and in the combination of the serious and the comic, though it makes Titus' character even more fragmentary.

Lest we remember still that we have none.
 Fie, fie, how frantically I square my talk,
 As if we should forget we had no hands
 If Marcus did not name the word of hands.

(III.2.23–33)

We cannot fend off the existence of a black wit with the assumption that the so-called fly-scene depicts Titus' madness, and is only a symptom of a sick mind. Titus' use of language, though not the pun itself, refers to a consistently recurring phenomenon in the play – the abuse of language. The repeatedly recurring images of “hands,” however, become almost self-indulgent, and echo the wit-passages from the comedies. Excess appears here again in Titus' boundless emotion, and brings with itself a comic potential.

Figurative language works powerfully in the play – besides the recurring *figura etymologica* (handle–hand), different kinds of metaphor are used and abused – the most frequent is to take a metaphor literally, which practice is started by Titus himself:

MARCUS Be *candidatus* then and put it on,
 And help to set a head on headless Rome.
 TITUS A better head her glorious body fits,
 Than his that shakes for age and feebleness.

(I.1.188–191)

The other two most frequent figures of speech are the oxymorons (“irreligious piety”), which refer to a basically paradoxical and problematic interpretation of values, norms and rituals within the play, and the *pars pro toto*, so loved by Aaron (“Look by and by to have thy sons with thee / [aside] Their heads I mean,” III.1.202–203), which recalls the images of the missing body parts, the hands and heads irretrievably severed from the body.

Furthermore, the language is made problematic by its highly poetic quality. The Ovidian aesthetics of unutterable horrors and woes prevails in Marcus's speech on seeing the raped and mutilated Lavinia (which has baffled and repelled critics of decorum, but, as Deborah Warner's production of *Titus Andronicus* in Stratford proved,³⁸ can be performed effectively and persuasively).

³⁸ Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon, Swan Theatre 1987. Directed by Deborah Warner, Marcus: Donald Sumpter.

The Andronici are forced to bear the unbearable, and try to find ways to utter the unutterable – either with horrible jokes or by aestheticising what by its nature defies the aesthetic. The paradoxical task of speaking the unspeakable finds way in the grotesque juxtaposition of incompatibles: joke and horror, beauty and blood.

IV

Act III Scene 1 presents several aspects of the interrelation of tears and laughter, suffering and the comic, therefore its close reading seems highly useful when probing into the nature of the play. By this time through the series of misfortunes befalling his family, Titus' pride is reduced to self-humiliation.³⁹ For his two sons, who are charged with Bassianus's murder as a result of the ingenious plot laid by Aaron and Tamora, he kneels and begs for mercy to merciless Saturninus. Then he pleads to the Judges, who do not listen but leave him in a comically pathetic scene of suffering. "Andronicus lieth down, and the Judges pass by him," says the stage direction, highlighting Titus' debasement – the honourable warrior is lying on the ground, ranting, blind and deaf to outside reality: a moving and highly comic picture at the same time. The image of the ranting man is inherently comic, as such wrath means the complete degradation of the mind, man's prime pride – just like Hamlet, the "sweet prince of reason" suddenly realises after he gave full vent to his fury.⁴⁰

The inherent pitiful comedy of ranting is enhanced by the fact that his returning son, Lucius, calls Titus' attention to the fact that no one is by – twice in quick succession, but Titus only picks up his son's last line ("you recount your sorrows to a stone"), and transforms Lucius's literal meaning into the figurative language of a high flowing rhetoric style, developing a raging passion in the key of

³⁹ Jonathan Bate in his introduction to the play suggests that Titus learns and becomes human through suffering, but this claim seems a little far-fetched in this play. Titus does become more human, but at the same time, he also loses his humanity pursuing the horrid acts of revenge. Besides, his character is not consistently justifiable in terms of psychological development. Titus does have a road he follows throughout the play, but this road is filled with traps: psychological and structural inconsistencies.

⁴⁰ "[...] Bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous villain! / Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, / That I, the son of a dear father murder'd, / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, / Must like a whore unpack my heart with words / And fall a-cursing like a very drab, / A scullion, Fie upon't! Foh!" (William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. Harold Jenkins. London: Methuen, 1997. [1982], II.2.576–583).

“pleading to the stones,” arriving at the conclusion that stones are better judges than the tribunes of Rome. At first glance, his storming recalls Lear’s on the heath, with passion overwhelming judgement. However, Titus, in contrast to Lear’s poetically irrational passion, remains more rhetorical, developing a whole line of similes. “Yet plead I must” (III.1.35), says he, emphasising his need to verbalise and thus formalise his sorrow and suffering. The Andronici are obsessed with uttering the unutterable – and this retains a touch of rationalism in Titus. He is keeping just a pace back from the edge of the abyss of absolute suffering and complete madness.

Furthermore, Titus’ ranting is not consistently upheld. Suddenly he looks up, and asks a perfectly reasonable and practical question from Lucius: “But wherefore stand’st thou with thy weapon drawn?” (III.1.48). His sudden return to the world of reality (which is comic in its unexpectedness – a psychological or structural trap) is soon followed by another recourse to ranting, arriving at the powerful conclusion that “Rome is but a wilderness of tigers” (III.1. 54).

After he has given full vent to his sorrow, the raped and mutilated Lavinia is presented to him. The scene is a reverted picture of the reunion of Lear and Cordelia, where the daughter is not a balm for madness and sorrow, but a cause of them. Titus is faced with the problem that he should go mad again – it is both dramatic irony and deficiency that he should go insane twice in quick succession. Titus first resorts to Senecan Stoicism (“Let me see then,” “So she is”), and then displays an obsessed and in its passion cruel wit, erupting in a 15-line speech crammed full of references to hands which have been or will be chopped – in front of his handless daughter. As more and more causes for woe are presented to him, he finally finds the famous poetic metaphor for his fate, which was made central in productions stressing the serious aspects of the play:⁴¹

For now I stand as one upon a rock,
 Environed with a wilderness of sea,
 Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
 Expecting ever when some envious surge
 Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.

(III.1.94–98)

⁴¹ These productions paid special attention to evading the latent comic potential, eliminating the ambiguity of the play with immense cuts, cf. Peter Brook’s production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre with Laurence Olivier as Titus, 1955.

Yet, he cannot escape rationalism, and starts to recount the woes of the Andronici one by one. He is especially baffled with Lavinia's plight:

Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,
It would have maddened me; what shall I do
Now I behold thy lively body so?

(III.1.104–106)

The problem calls for one of the basic questions of the play – the collision of physical reality and literature, or bookish knowledge. The latter is highly significant for the characters, as they must be proficient readers to understand and react to the events, to survive and prosper in this half-real and half-book world, where a mutilated body is a “map of woe” that has to be interpreted.

Titus, however, is more concerned with what they shall do, and first proposes an unreal image of mutual mourning at a fountain, then quenching misery with afflicting further woes, “To make us wondered at in time to come” (III.1.136). His self-indulgent madness in these proposals, however, falls short of Lear's, whose madness is always tinged with sympathy – for his Fool, for Edgar. Titus, on the contrary, while giving full vent to his sorrow, only makes his daughter weep more, as the rational-minded Lucius observes.

As the chorus of the grief-stricken Andronici, led by Titus, reach the climax of suffering, the scene is becoming increasingly comic in its undercurrent. Marcus offers a napkin to dry Titus' tears, but as Titus aptly observes, it is too wet to dry any more tears. Marcus's sympathy is comically impotent, and its latent ridiculousness is enhanced by the repetition of the gesture – Lucius is offering an equally wet napkin to dry Lavinia's tears.⁴² The scene is simultaneously comic and pitiful, and Titus realises its ambiguous nature as well: “O, what a sympathy of woe is this, / As far from help as limbo is from bliss” (III.1.149–150).

The ambiguity of tone erupts into open farce when Aaron comes with the impossible offer that the two sons may be saved by a hand chopped off. A pathetically comic rivalry starts among the kinsmen with his proposal: who should sacrifice his hand – Titus, Marcus, or Lucius (Lavinia having no hands any more). The argument reaches comic proportions, gaining momentum as the lines

⁴² A dark variant of this gesture appears in *Henry VI Part 2*, when Margaret is offering the napkin soaked in Rutland's blood to his father, Gloucester, though the inherent comic potential of the impotence in the gesture is employed here for different effects – an evil joke.

are shortened. The comic pettiness of the argument is underlined by Aaron's (the spectator and outsider's) impatience: "Nay, come, agree whose hand shall go along" (III.1.175). Titus deceives his kinsmen with the old trick of folk tales – while sending them away to fetch an axe, he asks Aaron to chop off his hand. The aura of the scene is highly ambiguous. While we cannot deny its farcical nature, suffering is real enough to bar complete detachment of the emotions on stage: the distance necessary for laughter is there, but is not enough to enable us to repudiate these pitiful clowns of suffering. What is more, we are aware of the fact that Titus benevolently deceives his kinsmen only to be horribly deceived by a very literal-minded Aaron, who means only heads when promises to take back sons.

When the Messenger brings back the heads of the sons and Titus' hand, his words betray true emotions, and we are touched by genuine sympathy for the Andronici and Titus. The futility of his sacrifice gains a tragic overtone from the Messenger's, an objective outsider's, compassion. The nameless messenger has the same function as the nameless servant at Gloucester's blinding – their sudden and genuine emotional involvement in the horror on stage calls for a similar response from the reader or spectator, thus, by their unselfish humanity (which is otherwise so rare in these two plays), their words enhance the tragic effect.

The real horror of the mockery of sacrifice and sorrow, however, is loosened again by the ensuing strange substitution of roles. Marcus and Lucius rail for and instead of Titus, and even Lavinia pays her debt and kisses her brothers' heads, while the father stands dazed and silent, uttering only one of his most powerful lines of misery: "When will this fearful slumber have an end?" (III.1.253). Marcus, giving up his heretofore preferred function of reason in madness, resorts to a mad proposal worthy of Titus: "Rend off thy silver hair, thy other hand / Gnawing with thy teeth..." (III.1.261–262), and warns his brother: "Now is a time to storm. Why art thou still?" (III.1.264).

And Titus laughs: "Ha, ha, ha!" At this climactic point three things are brought very close to each other: utmost pain, laughter, and madness. Titus, for a moment, catches a glimpse of an absurdly meaningless universe. However, Titus is not Lear – and soon turns to a rationally controlled and ritually formalised form of madness: revenge. It is a turning point in his character and in the play. Brian Cox, the Titus of the Warner production summarises the hero's emotional and tonal change very sensitively: "You [...] as an actor [...] change direction from the path you were on, and take another, the path of gallows humour, of black,

nihilistic humour, very twentieth-century in its mood [...] After that laughter [...] he dies – in spirit. And he says to himself: ‘Oh, I’m dead. I’m a dead man, and I can do whatever I like – because I’m dead.’”⁴³ The astonishment of Marcus and Lucius at Titus’ unusual response arises from the fact that they are clinging to “a normalcy which no longer exists,” while Titus realises his only rational (but poetically less effective) way of going on in an irrational world, where “conventional moral order has been replaced by Aaron’s aesthetic disorder,” and takes the path of witty, vigorous, and successful actions to achieve his perfectly managed and appropriate revenge by the end.⁴⁴

From this moment on, Titus stage-manages the ritual of revenge: he makes his kinsmen kneel and vow, but the ensuing morbid procession of the living and dead, whole and part of the Andronici gives a horrible parody of the ritual. Titus and Marcus are going offstage with a head in their hands and Lavinia is asked to carry Titus’ severed hand between her teeth, as the literal picture of “a handmaid of Revenge.” The image is at the same time terrifying and ludicrous – the most powerful grotesque vision in the play, pointing to the absurd and ambiguous nature of revenge, and of the play itself.

Titus Andronicus yields many examples for the interrelation of the tragic and the comic, suffering and laughter. Nevertheless, the ambitious nature of the play (its “excess”) threatens to upset the poetical balance of the two, thus the tragedy drifts toward (self-)parody at some points. Later in his career Shakespeare used the same technique of mixing the tragic and the comic, tears and laughter in a more refined way, and with the virtuoso balancing of the two he created his greatest masterpieces.

⁴³ Brian Cox. “Brian Cox: *Titus Andronicus*.” *Players of Shakespeare 3: Further Essays in Shakespearean Performance by Players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*. Ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993, p. 184.

⁴⁴ These ideas appeared in Richard T. Brucher. “‘Tragedy, Laugh On:’ Comic violence in *Titus Andronicus*.” *Renaissance Drama* 10 (1979) 71–91, p. 86.

Monster-like Angel and Angelic Monster

“Custom” in Francis Bacon

That *monster, custom*, who all sense doth eat
Of habits *evil*, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on.

(Shakespeare: *Hamlet* III.4.163–7)

1 ORIENTATIONS

Hamlet lectures about the double faces of “custom” calling it once a “monster” and, later in the Closet Scene, an “angel.” When playing the moralist, and teaching his mother how to become virtuous, he makes use of the concept of “custom.” In his explanation, Hamlet asserts the double directions in which “custom” works. On the one hand custom is a “monster,” for it blurs the eye in the sense that when one becomes accustomed to wrong deeds, one will not be able to recognise them as wrong. On the other hand custom is an “angel,” for it helps one to become virtuous in the sense that through the practice of well-doing, one will become accustomed to virtuous actions.

The double faces of “custom,” however, did not solely exist on the Renaissance stage, but appear in Francis Bacon’s moral philosophy too. In this essay I will argue that “custom” was seen both as a monster and as an angel in his

texts.¹ I would also like to demonstrate that Bacon did not only repeat the traditional ideas about custom originating in Aristotle, but also gave it a new significance through the change of the context in which the discussion of custom emerges.

The new orientation was not on Bacon's mind from the beginning. The first treatment of "custom" in *The Advancement of Learning* is very much an Aristotelian approach to custom, as it deals only with the individual without explicit reference to the social context. The later essay, "Of Custom and Education," broadens the horizon of the discussion. The new orientation is not only individual and practical in its attitude, but also socio-politico-institutional. The elucidation of this context-shift is the other aim of the present paper.

2 "CUSTOM" IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

The first coherent meditation on custom appeared in *The Advancement of Learning*, Book II (1605) under the subdivision *De Cultura Animi*. Bacon lists some themes such as the natures and dispositions of men, affections, custom, exercise, habit, example, imitation, emulation etc. that have not been discussed sufficiently by previous authors and need elaboration. He also provides two examples to show what kind of approach is missing. One of these examples is on "Custom and Habit" (p. 260) or "Exercise and Custom" (p. 261).

2.1 Aristotle criticised

The embryonic essay that considers custom within the horizon of the individual consists of three parts. The first part is rather theoretical, criticising Aristotle on two accounts. Firstly, because Aristotle was not subtle enough when distinguishing between the objects upon which custom has and does not have influence. Bacon's second critical remark concerns the lack of practical advice in Aristotle.

¹ All parenthesised references pertain to *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Brian Vickers. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. "Of Custom and Education" is located in this edition between pages 418-420, and *The Advancement of Learning* between pages 120-299.

When arguing that moral virtues cannot be man's property by nature in the *Magna Moralia*, but are acquired by *ethos* ("habit," "custom"), Aristotle substantiates his thesis with reference to natural phenomena.

For instance, a stone and heavy things in general, naturally go downwards. If any one, then throws them up repeatedly, and tries to train them to go up, all the same they never would go up, but always down. Similarly in all other such cases.²

In the case of natural phenomena, mere repetition does not change the structure of the external world. The way things are integrated into the all-encompassing structure of the world cannot be modified at all. According to the structure (*physis*) of the sublunary world, stones are to move downwards, unless an external force moves them otherwise, because of their natural constitution. If the stone happened to move upwards in the sublunary territory without an external force, it would mean an absolute, or more precisely, substantial change in its composition. In this case, however, it could not ever be called a stone. Thus, substantial change can never be induced *via* habituation.

Bacon, on the contrary, claims that even some natural phenomena can be changed through custom. If we take a pair of gloves that at the beginning proved small, but after having forced them onto our hands several times, they may well become comfortable, then apparently they have changed their quantity: they were small once but now being of the appropriate size. We have thus natural objects, repetition, and change, i.e. some kind of habituation in Bacon's example.

Though the observation is acceptable that, phenomenally, we have something different here from what Aristotle states, Bacon is not absolutely right. In Aristotle the change is extreme: for the stone to move upwards without an external agent means a complete constitutional, substantial change. In Bacon's example, however, the change can only be subsumed under the category of quantity, as it does not effect the composition, the what-it-is-ness of the natural object under consideration. The things that can now be put on our hands are still called gloves: the essential properties that make a pair of gloves a pair of gloves remained untouched.

Bacon's misunderstanding of Aristotle becomes evident if his further examples are taken into consideration. To prove that natural things may well be

² Aristotle. *Magna Moralia*. I.vi, 1186a6-8. *The Works of Aristotle*. Vol. IX. Transl. George Stock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

modified by repetition, he refers the reader to the facts "that a wand will by use bend otherwise than it grew, and that by the use of voice we speak louder and stronger, and that by the use of enduring heat or cold we endure it better, and the like" (p. 260). Aristotle would not deny what Bacon states, he would even agree. Certain qualities can be modified *via* use, or repetition. Aristotle's argument is, however, about existential, substantial change and not qualitative or quantitative change. While the latter changes can be induced by repetitive practice, substantial change would not be arrived at *via* habituation.

Nevertheless, there is indeed some truth in what Bacon finds negligent in Aristotle. This truth does not, however, lie in his argumentation, but precisely in what misled him. In the *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle is very brief on this topic. He provides only one example as an illustration, and adds "[s]imilarly in all other such cases." Bacon, to make his stance clear, lists other examples believing that they are "such cases." But they are not. Had he consulted the *Ethica Nicomachea*, he would not have misunderstood Aristotle.

Aristotle in the *Ethica Nicomachea* adds one more example to make his point distinct and adds further reasons why virtue is not by nature in human beings. His example consists of two natural phenomena. He claims that

[f]or instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another.³

The reference to fire makes it clear that what is at stake is not quantitative and qualitative change but an exclusively substantial one, and this change cannot be achieved *via* custom.

To foster his aim, Aristotle refers to what human beings are born with, comparing the ability of sense perception to virtue. Aristotle claims that having virtues and the abilities of seeing and hearing differ considerably. In the case of the abilities, the ability must exist before we may use them. First, I can see, and secondly I can use this ability. The process takes place in a reversed order with virtues. First, I carry out virtuous deeds and then I become virtuous. Certainly, at this point Aristotle is rather vague because he does not explain this latter process in detail, only introduces the idea, and leaves the explanation for a later occasion.

³ Aristotle. *Ethica Nicomachea*. II.i.1103a19-23. *The Works of Aristotle*. Vol. IX.

It is important to show that Bacon was using the *Magna Moralia* and not the *Ethica Nicomachea* because this is how Bacon may be rescued from undue criticism. The former treatise is much briefer on certain issues that are discussed in more detail in Aristotle's other ethical works. Thus the misunderstanding on Bacon's part is less serious than it may seem at first sight.

This seemingly insignificant philological remark receives importance, because even such a distinguished scholar as Brian Vickers unconsciously misleads the naive reader on this issue. Vickers, in his otherwise extremely high quality commentary on Bacon's works, claims that Bacon's criticism is directed against the relevant part of the *Ethica Nicomachea*.⁴ Vickers's comment is odd, because some pages earlier, when explaining Bacon's Latin quotation of Aristotle, he does not only tell that Bacon's quotation pertains to Aristotle's *Magna Moralia*, but also adds that Bacon quotes from Valla's translation of the work.⁵ If Bacon used the *Magna Moralia*, *verbatim*, it would require further explanation why Vickers thinks that the critical remarks on Bacon's part aim at the *Ethica Nicomachea*.⁶ In the final analysis, thus, Bacon can only be charged with not using the right book of Aristotle, and not with making inappropriate critical remarks.

Though Bacon's critical remarks are based on a misunderstanding, his recognition of areas that Aristotle did not work out in detail suffices his intention. *The Advancement of Learning* Book II does not aim at revising the whole of human learning but rather at classifying it into eligible and manageable parts and at showing where the present state of a particular field of knowledge needs elaboration. So in this case, he has just shown that there have been attempts on this particular field of knowledge, but there are further steps to be taken. And he is right that Aristotle was extremely brief on certain matters. But it is not only Aristotle's sketchiness that bothers Bacon.

⁴ Cf. *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition*, p. 658.

⁵ *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition*, p. 656.

⁶ Vickers follows the critical tradition, which without exception refers the reader to the *Ethica Nicomachea*. See also Francis Bacon. *The Advancement of Learning*. Ed. Williams Aldis Wright. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900, p. 320; and Francis Bacon. *The Advancement of Learning*. Ed. G.W. Kitchin. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1915, p. 173; and the same edition with the Introduction by Arthur Johnston. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1973, p. 173; and Jerry Weinberger. *Science, Faith, and Politics. Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age. A Commentary on Bacon's Advancement of Learning*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 290.

2.2 The Need for Precepts

Bacon assumes that Aristotle was right in assigning a significant role to custom in ethics, yet the Greek philosopher failed to provide help how to change customs. This charge is to be accepted, but Aristotle is not necessarily to be blamed for being silent on this issue. Aristotle never wanted to provide a practical guidebook on how to behave well. He discussed the notions and principles of ethics on a level more abstract than that of a collection of practical advice. And it is also true that a text may well be completed or further extended into directions the author never intended to. This is, however, precisely what is at stake for Bacon. If there have been acceptable initial steps taken, then there is the obvious necessity to go further.

Thus, the second thematic part lists and explains precepts, axioms for the acquisition and change of customs. Bacon provides four precepts on how one may change one's customs. The first concerns the selection of the tasks to undertake. The second axiom concerns the mental states for carrying out virtuous deeds. The third repeats Aristotle's precept that one should move towards the contrary direction of one's natural inclinations. Finally, the fourth axiom concerns the natural inclination of the mind to avoid constraints and necessity.

The claim that Aristotle does not give enough practical advice further corroborates the belief that Bacon was using the *Magna Moralia* and not the *Ethica Nicomachea*. In the latter, Aristotle lists precisely four pieces of advice how to hit the mean,⁷ but none of them speaks directly about natural inclinations. Natural inclinations, however, do appear both in the *Magna Moralia* and in the *Ethica Nicomachea* in a different context, when discussing which extreme is more contrary to the mean.⁸ Bacon may have used these considerations as moral precepts. Nevertheless, the statement in the *Ethica Nicomachea* seems less a precept, as there are *bona fide* precepts following it. This evidence indirectly confirms the hypothesis that Bacon was using the *Magna Moralia*.

⁷ Cf. Aristotle. *Ethica Nicomachea*, II.ix.3–6, 1109a30–1109b13

⁸ The *Ethica Nicomachea* reads as follows: "[...] for the things to which we ourselves more naturally tend seem more contrary to the intermediate" (II.viii.8, 1109a13–14). The *Magna Moralia* similarly states that "[...] those things are more opposed to the mean to which we have a greater natural inclination" (I.ix.4, 1186b25–33).

2.3 The Need for Education

The practical part is followed by a concluding section in the *Advancement of Learning*, which forms the third part of the discussion. After having assured the reader that it is possible to continue the list of precepts, Bacon claims that if the acquisition of customs is inevitable, then one should not allow mere chance to govern the appropriation. On the contrary, it should be conducted on purpose, to aim at virtue

3 FROM THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING TO THE ESSAYS

The treatment of custom in *The Advancement of Learning* anticipates the later essay "Of Custom and Education" in three respects. Firstly, the idea that custom may change certain qualities of inanimate objects points toward the image which identifies men with lifeless statues and machines. In *The Advancement of Learning* inanimate objects serve as an opportunity to criticise Aristotle, whereas in the mature essay inanimate objects turn into images standing for men and asserting the overwhelming power of custom. Secondly, the two treatments claim that customs are not only given, but that they are acquired. Thirdly, as a consequence, it is also claimed that it is possible to consciously direct the process of acquisition. In other words, it is implied that there is an element of moral responsibility in the selection of customs. The responsibility is assigned to the individual in *The Advancement of Learning*, whereas it is placed upon institutions in "Of Custom and Education."

The shift of orientation seems obvious if we consider what happened to the treatment of custom that appeared in *The Advancement of Learning*. Firstly, Aristotle does not surface in any versions of the essay discussing custom. The precepts, or axioms, are deemed important because they do not disappear altogether, but are located in the essay entitled "Of Nature in Men." The latter essay precedes "Of Custom and Education" in all versions, i.e. the manuscript for the 1612 edition of the essays, the version published in 1612, and the revised edition that came from the press in 1625.⁹ What are kept from *The Advancement of Learning*

⁹ In the manuscript version, numbers 30, 31 (in No. 5106 of the Harleian manuscripts in the British Museum, referred to in *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Ed. J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, D.D. Heath. Vol. 6: *Literary and Professional Works*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1878, p. 536, and

in "Of Custom and Education" are the ideas of acquisition and moral responsibility with, however, a sharper edge in a different context.

4 "OF CUSTOM AND EDUCATION"

4.1 Different Editions of the Essay¹⁰

To show the historical change of interest and orientation, the analysis of the final version of the essay will suffice. It will be satisfactory, because on the one hand the manuscript version and the one published in 1612 are seemingly identical. And, on the other hand, the differences between the versions published in 1612 and 1625 are only emphatic, not thematic and can be classified under two headings: style and illustration.¹¹ The first type is stylistic:

1612	1625
This wee call Education: which is <u>nothing else but</u> an early custome... (p. 73)	This we call education; which is, <u>in effect, but</u> an early custom... (p. 419)
but doe not mende the seeds... (p. 73)	but do not <u>much</u> mend the seeds... (p. 420)
the force of custom copulate & conioind, <u>and in troupe</u> , is far greater... (p. 73)	the force of custom copulate & conjoined <u>and collegiate</u> is far greater... (p. 419)

The first two instances aim at taking the edge of expressions away: instead of saying the emphatic "nothing else but," in 1625 Bacon only states "in effect, but..." Or instead of "doe not mende" without qualification he writes "do not much mend." The third stylistic difference lies in making the flow of the sentence smoother, the rhetorical character more refined. The list of adjectives becomes

in A. Wigfall Green. *Sir Francis Bacon*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1966, p. 78); when first published in 1612 numbers 26, 27; in the version of the 1625 edition: numbers 38, 39.

¹⁰ The 1612 version of the essay "Of Custom and Education" can be found in *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Ed. J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, D.D. Heath. Vol. 6: *Literary and Professional Works*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1878, p. 73 (from now on "Of Custom and Education" [1612]). The 1625 version of the essay "Of Custom and Education" can be found in *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition*, pp. 418-20 (from now on "Of Custom and Education" [1625]).

¹¹ To easily envision the differences between the different editions consult Edward Arber, *The Harmony of the Essays, etc. Of Francis Bacon*. Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1895, pp. 366-373 though he is not sensitive to stylistic changes.

broken with a phrase: “and in troupe” in the 1612 version. This clumsiness is avoided in the later edition, where the phrase is substituted by an adjective with the same meaning.

The second type of difference lies in illustration.¹² A complete unit of seven sentences appeared in the version of 1625 to exemplify “the reign or tyranny” or “the force of custom” (p. 419) with five strange instances. Furthermore, the version of 1612 was supplemented by an illustration to demonstrate that it is easier to acquire customs at a younger age than later. Besides these stylistic and illustrative changes, the two versions are identical. Thus it will serve our purpose to examine only the last variant.

4.2 “Custom” in the Edition of 1625

The essay entitled “Of Custom and Education” has a symmetrical well-balanced structure. Though Wigfall Green is right in stating that the “impressive opening, smooth transition, and climactic end impress the reader of the essays,”¹³ this particular essay has two thematic divisions. The first structural unit discusses the function and overwhelming power of custom in a pessimistic, anthropological image. The second half presents custom in another light, dealing with the forms of acquisition of customs from an institutional point of view.

4.2.1 *The Power of Custom*

The first structural unit of the essay can be further divided into two parts. The first half provides the “impressive opening” establishing the anthropological aspect of the discussion. The second half of the first division furnishes particular examples. The unity of the first part is reached through the strict central idea, or image, proposing that men’s actions are lead exclusively by custom.

The opening unit locates “custom” among other psychological factors of human life, and makes this initial idea impressive through the use of rhetoric rather than a logical inference, contrast and variation, and parallelism. The very first two sentences pretend to offer a logical inference, providing statements connected with commas, and laying emphasis on the idea that men’s “deeds are

¹² Vickers demonstrates that the extension of the essays of 1612 was a characteristic way of developing the essays in his *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 218. Extensions most of the time point towards “concrete reference to either natural or human situations” (p. 227).

¹³ A. Wigfall Green, p. 85.

after as they have been accustomed" through starting the latter clause with a "but." After the seeming premises, a conclusion is introduced with a "therefore." I think, however, that Lisa Jardine's observation, pondering about the opening of another essay, is true for this one as well: "the progression is not reasoned but suggested."¹⁴ The sequence is not reasoned, or logical, because the pretended conclusion merely restates the divisions introduced in the preceding statements with a reference to an authority, namely Machiavelli. The divisions introduced in the first sentence are the following. Men's activities are divided into three fields: mental activity ("thoughts"), verbal activity ("discourse and speeches" or "words"), and physical activity ("deeds"). The different types of activities have diverse psychological movers. Mental activity is led by "inclination" or "nature," verbal activity by "learning and infused opinions" and physical activity by "custom."

To be convincing, Bacon restates, from different angles, the difference between thoughts and words on the one hand, and deeds on the other throughout the rest of the first structural unit. The second sentence recapitulates the idea with a reference to an authority, namely Machiavelli. The third sentence illustrates the thesis with Machiavelli's example. The fourth sentence lists counter examples and then reiterates the thesis through asserting that the counter examples do not refute the thesis, but are only exceptions. The fifth sentence recaptures the initial thought by naming the opposing opinion as "superstition." The last sentence rephrases the thesis once again, and asserts finally "the predominance of custom" over human physical activity. A fine pattern of variation, repetition and contrast adds to the emotional load and the implicit moral judgement:¹⁵ "to hear men profess, protest, engage, give great words, and then do just as they have done before" (p. 419).

Men's physical activity is represented as irrational, or at least unreflected on two layers. The first layer is notional. Once physical activity, i.e. deeds, are distinguished from mental activity (thoughts) and from verbal activity (words), and custom is differentiated from nature and learning, then deeds and custom cannot be related to reflection, or reason. The irrational, unreflected quality of physical action and custom is made emphatic through the imagery of the text, which is the second layer. If human action is bereft of thought and language, it is

¹⁴ Lisa Jardine. *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 228.

¹⁵ Cf. Brian Vickers. *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose*, pp. 139-140.

natural to depict men as “dead images, and engines moved only by the wheels of custom” (p. 419).

The overwhelming power of custom can also be extended to intellectual life, as Bacon notes in *The Advancement of Learning*. When listing and refuting the charges brought against learning by politicians, he at one point relates custom to blind obedience. The charge that “learning should undermine the reverence of laws and government” is refuted not with a logical inference, but with a seductive analogy taking away the credit of the thesis:

to say that a blind custom of obedience should be a surer obligation than duty taught and understood, it is to affirm that a blind man may tread surer by a guide than a seeing man by a light.

(p. 130)

Seeing and blindness as images of intellectual activity are opposed to each other to strengthen Bacon’s point. The man having the ability to see knows what he has to do, what kind of relationship he should have with laws and government, for he sees the significance of factors and thus can weigh things properly. In contrast with him, however, the blind man, who has just been tamed, cannot see through appearances, and does not know why he does things like this or that. This type of blindness qualifies custom in the adjectival phrase, casting light on the authority of custom from another angle than that of the essay itself.

The predominance of custom in human activity is further substantiated in the second structural unit of the first major division of the essay “Of Custom and Education,” with a collection of *exempla*. Custom does not only dominate human physical activity: at the same time one can also speak of the “reign and tyranny of custom” (p. 419). Custom appears here as a sovereign who, through various rituals, can give or take away life without the obligation to give reasons for the same. We read about Indians sacrificing themselves by fire, wives striving “to be burned with the corpses of their husbands” (p. 419), about Spartan youngsters whipping themselves at the altar of Diana, about Russian monks as a penitence spending the night in a vessel of water, which becomes frozen by the morning. But not only rituals of remote countries and ancient times are referred to, but a contemporary event is recalled as well. It was not all the same for an Irish rebel what kind of rope was to be used to hang him, because rebels had been hanged with one type of rope and not with another.

It is significant in the *exempla* that they are all about physical suffering in political or religious contexts. This is important, because it is not necessary to use suffering to illustrate the force of "custom." In Montaigne's essay "Of Custome, and How a Received Law Should Not Easily Be Changed"¹⁶ the majority of the examples to demonstrate the power of custom have nothing to do with suffering. In the Henkel-Schöne collection of emblems the two emblems that are concerned with custom are not preoccupied with anguish to communicate the might of custom.¹⁷ The significance of the painful side of custom may lie in the fact that the reference to suffering makes the power of custom more tangible and impressive.

4.2.2 *The Institutional Perspective*

We have seen so far the dominance of custom over human deeds. It has also been suggested that custom is a sovereign, even a tyrant, who demands an unreflected obedience from its subjects even in matters of life and death. If, however, this is true, then "let men by all means endeavour to obtain good customs" (p. 419). This idea forms the turning point of the essay, introducing its second structural unit.

Similarly to the first thematic part, the second is also divided into two halves according to the when and how of the learning of customs. The first half ponders about whether the appropriation of customs should be started at an early age or later. The answer is that "custom is most perfect when it beginneth in young years" (p. 419). The thesis is substantiated through two sentences of demonstration. The first example suggests that the bodily organs are more flexible at a younger age. The second example claims that learning is more difficult at an older age, and although there are counter examples, these are very rare. This unit consists of unreasoned, rhetorical corroboration as well as counter examples, similarly to the opening unit of the essay. This provides a symmetrical structure

¹⁶ Montaigne, Michel de Eyquen. *Essays*. Vol. I. Trans. John Florio, introd. and ed. L. C. Harmer. London: Everyman's Library, 1965, pp. 105-123.

¹⁷ *Emblemata, Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*. Herausgegeben von Arthur Henkel und Albrecht Schöne. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlesche Verlagbuchshandlung, 1978. The two emblems are from Dionysius Lebeus-Batillius. *Dionysii Lebei-Batillii Regii Mediomatricum Praesidis Emblemata* (1546) Nr. 40 "Gravissimum Imperium Consuetudinis" (p. 755) and the other is in Sambucus Joannes, *Emblemata, et ALIQVOT NVMMI ANTIQVI OPERIS*. Antwerp, 1564, S. 110, "CONSUETUDO PRAUA" (pp. 1321-22). For the influence of Sambucus (Sámboky) in Renaissance England consult László Varga. *Sámboky (Sambucus) János emblémái*. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1964, p. 221.

for the whole piece. In other words the third part of the essay serves as a second opening for a second discussion.

The second half of the second major division, thus, considers the role of social institutions in the process of the acquisition of customs. The first sentence introduces a partition, i.e. customs may be obtained either individually or in company. The distinction is significant because the latter process is much more efficient. The second sentence confirms the thesis with parallel structures, and restates it. The next sentence reasserts the idea with an emphasis on the role of institutions in making men virtuous, or at least planting the seeds of virtue in men. For morality cannot much be improved by political institutions later, "for commonwealths and governments do nourish virtue grown, but do not much mend the seeds" (p. 420).

The sentence that refers to the role of political institutions has a triple function. It places the discussion into a socio-political context, while the transition is made attractive through the imagery of gardening. The smooth and suggestive shift of context prepares the way for the "climactic close"¹⁸ of the essay.

The individualising, anthropological attitude of the essay has now been placed into a wider context. What is at stake now is not only the individual's virtue but the whole political state. The moral discussion has now been opened to a socio-political perspective in which the individual's virtue is formed first by an educational institution and then by the governing system of the country. The virtues that are planted by the educational institution can be strengthened by the governing system. The seeds, however, can hardly be changed.¹⁹ Seemingly, Bacon, the statesman has brought his preoccupation into the discussion through the new dimension.

The widening of the perspective has been made smoother via the extremely popular gardening imagery mentioned above. Men of letters used gardening imagery for a wide range of purposes in the Renaissance. As Ilva Beretta notes,²⁰ the garden could stand for "a prelapsarian Eden," for "a false paradise with all the habitual implications of temptation and sin," or for "a garden of love." The physical Renaissance garden supplemented the literary works with "new motifs

¹⁸ I have borrowed the phrase from A. Wigfall Green, p. 85.

¹⁹ Though the wording is more optimistic in the version of 1625 than it was in the earlier variants, still it presupposes the achievements of the educational institutions.

²⁰ Ilva Beretta. "The World's a Garden." *Garden Poetry of the English Renaissance*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia, 84, 1993, p. 12.

such as the garden as a philosophical retreat, the interplay between Art and Nature, and the garden as a reflection of man's spiritual life." For Bacon, the idea that the garden was a philosophical retreat and a reflection of man in plants was especially important.²¹ He even assigned an entire essay to the creation of gardens. It is also significant that the garden and gardening were frequently compared to the state and to the governing of the state. The customary analogies fell into three categories according to Peter Ure:²² 1, when the "elements of disorder in a state" are compared to "weeds;"²³ 2 the analogies of state and garden;²⁴ 3, "the uses of garden in ceremonies and pageants."²⁵ Bacon, thus, has made use of a very popular association in his essay "Of Custom and Education." He – intertextually – combined Beretta's and Ure's classification in which the philosophically ideal garden stands for the state or country in his image.

The garden or gardening imagery when considering the active side of the idea of custom is not unique in the Baconian *oeuvre* though. When meditating about travelling in foreign countries in his essay "Of Travel" (pp. 374–376), Bacon claims that "[...] let it appear that he doth not change his country manners for those of foreign parts, but only prick in some flowers of that he hath learned abroad into the customs of his own country" (p. 376). This last piece of advice for those who visit other countries proposes that the traveller should keep his eyes open to acquire only the worthy customs of another country. Some years earlier the same imagery in approximately the same context (travelling and custom) was applied by Bacon.

In a letter to the Earl of Rutland dating from 4th Jan 1596, Bacon referred to the similar aspects of custom with the imagery alluding to nature. He claims that "where these active virtues are but budding, they must be ripened by

²¹ Cf. Ilva Beretta, pp. 73, 164.

²² Peter Ure. "The Garden Scene." William Shakespeare. *King Richard II*. The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare Ed. and Introd. Peter Ure. Cambridge (Mass.), London: Methuen & Harvard University Press, Fifth Edition, 1961, pp. LI–LVII.

²³ Peter Ure, p. LII. He refers the reader to Henry Brinklow. *Complaynt of Roderyck Mors* (1546); Traiano Boccalini. *Advertisements from Parnassus*. Trans. Earl of Monmouth. (1657); Sir Thomas Elyot. *Governour* (1531); Plutarch. "Of Delay in Divine Punishment;" Matthew XIII; Shakespeare. *King Richard II* (III.4.48–52); *King Henry VI* (2, III.1.31–3; 3, II.4.21); furthermore in other historical plays such as *Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1, xiii.90–91) (1590); Peele. *Edward I* (I.2581) (1593); *A Knacke to Know a Knaue* (VI.543) (1592); *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (II.1687–95).

²⁴ Peter Ure, p. LII. He refers the reader to Thomas Dekker. *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606); Shakespeare. *King Henry V* (II.2.36–60), *King Richard II* (III.4).

²⁵ Peter Ure, p. LV.

clearness of judgement and custom of well-doing" (p. 71). Whereas in the preceding quotation the tenor was custom and the vehicle was the flower, here the metaphor changes. The tenor becomes virtue and the vehicle becomes the future flower. Custom becomes one of the particular means through which the potential flower becomes actual. Within the same letter, the negative aspect of custom is also revealed:

In manners and behaviour, your Lordship must not caught with novelty, which is pleasing to young men; nor infected with custom, which makes us keep our own ill graces, and participate of those we see every day...

(p. 72)

Here custom, instead of being the means of flourishing, is revealed as something that infects and causes destruction. This metaphor becomes even graver if it is recalled that only two years had passed after the plague attacked the Londoners in 1593–1594. The metaphor of decease and destruction is very similar to the ending of the essay "Of Custom and Education."

The function of the easily acceptable shift of context makes the criticism of the contemporary educational institutions sharper. Once the perspective has been opened to the state, the failure of the schools to teach morality is more striking. "But the misery is, that the most effectual means are now applied to the ends least to be desired" (p. 420). If only the individual's virtue had been at stake, the failure of educational institutions would have remained a personal problem, but here the inadequacy has much larger consequences.

The "climactic" end is, however, not the end of the meditation. Scholars agree that though Bacon's moral standpoint was made extremely clear and firm in his essays on morality, yet he did not make explicit what man ought to do.²⁶ He only identifies and analyses the problems, but does not provide an explicit solution to them. He leaves the readers free to decide for themselves. This freedom is not absolute though, as at least the direction into which steps are to be taken is encoded in the analyses. The reader has been convinced that the deeds of men are according to their customs. He is also persuaded that the educational institutions have a major

²⁶ Though the similar conclusions are arrived through different premises, consult A. Wigfall Green, p. 85; Lisa Jardine, p. 244; Ann E. Imbrie. "Defining Nonfiction Genres." *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*. Ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. Cambridge (Mass.), London: Harvard University Press, 1986, 45–69, p. 67.

role in the formation of those customs. Furthermore, he understands that if the present state of these institutions is not sufficient, then he can hardly go on sending his children to those schools without trying to do something about changing the institutions somehow. This freedom is similar to the one that one has, when one wants to cross the road, and listens to someone who assures him that the colour of the traffic light is red, and that traffic is heavy on the road. Certainly, he can cross the road, but actually few people would do so.

Nevertheless, it is true that Bacon does not specify what should be done. Not doing so, he has become very similar to Aristotle who he criticised in *The Advancement of Learning*. Bacon blamed Aristotle there, for not having provided enough number of precepts. And now some twenty years later, he acts in accordance with Aristotle in this respect. There can be at least two reasons why Bacon denied his earlier convictions.

The first reason for not relating precepts or particular directions in the essay lies in the generic determination of the essay itself. The essays of Bacon are of approximately the same size. This size – two or three pages – cannot be exceeded once one is as conscious of structure as Bacon is. To maintain lucid structural symmetry, the elegant analysis of a problem, and preparing for a striking ending excludes the possibility of composing longer essays than two or three pages. But to relate precepts he would have been compelled to exceed this size, and, consequently, the structural advantages of his essay, but especially the elegant and shocking ending would have been damaged. Without the well-prepared shock at the end, the essay loses being effective. Bacon, however, is aiming at effect and not at exhausting the reader with long meditations.

The second reason for being silent about specific moral instruction lies in the difference between general ideas and particular pieces of advice. One can imply general directions without having to define the goal of human behaviour. If, however, one sets out particular precepts, one should be able to define the goal of human activity first in terms of general ideas, e.g. defining what the good is for everybody. But this could not have been done in the culturally and socially fragmented late Renaissance England. Once there can be no agreement on what the general goal would be, then particular precepts cannot be provided either. The precepts are to be modified according to the particular needs, interests, and moral stances of the particular institutions. So the author, having shown the general defects of educational institutions, passes on the responsibility to the readers and especially to those who are in a position to effect changes in institutions.

5 CONCLUSION

So far we have accounted for how the change of perspective took place and shape in Bacon's writings. First we have seen how he started to meditate upon custom in his embryonic essay in *The Advancement of Learning*. Then it has also been shown how he treated the same topic in his "Of Custom and Education" some twenty years later.

It has been shown that Bacon makes room for a new perspective for the discussion of custom with a contextual shift, from the humanist, who develops Aristotle's ideas, to the statesman. His starting point is similar to that of the sceptic. Reason does not give light in practical matters, as the only thing that directs people at the moment of action is nothing else but custom. Once one has understood the power of custom upon human deeds, one should also accept that forming the right customs is of great importance. The most enduring and effective formation of customs is to take place in educational institutions. The results of education are later on to be strengthened by the whole of the social structure.

The sceptical problem concerning the role of reason in action is solved here through a distinction between the moment of action and the preparation for action. Reason is unable to help at the moment of action, because custom overrides its force, so we should forget about every form of ethical intellectualism. Reason has no place in guiding action on the spur of the moment of the action itself. But this does not necessarily mean that reason should absolutely be banished from the territory of action. The task of reason is to prepare the conditions under which good customs can be formed. This is the task of politicians, leaders of institutions, i.e. of those who are in a position to make decisions that affect the whole of society. So reason does have a place in practical matters, not in its actuality, but in the phase of preparation. When there is time to think and ponder about the right way of behaviour, it must be used well.

Thus, we have seen the method of the ethical discussion of the idea of custom. The method of presentation consists in setting into motion the different faces, notions of custom, and the contexts for the discussion. Both the angelic and the monster faces of custom have been depicted. We have also encountered the different notions of custom, namely when it is deemed to be something given, and when it has a significant role in the acquisition of virtues. Furthermore, both the individual, anthropological and the socio-politico-institutional contexts have been elucidated. It is precisely the concise unity of the motion of these factors that makes Bacon's writing fruitful and still valid.

If it is still valid, then there is one more question that we have to ask. If the essay is to identify and analyse a problem so as to direct the readers' thoughts, then it is in harmony with the essay itself to end the present analysis with a question. Are the most effectual means applied now to the ends most or least to be desired in educational institutions?

Gabriella Reuss

Veritas Filia Temporis, or Shakespeare Unveiled?

Charles William Macready's restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear* of 1834 according to his unpublished promptbook

1 INTRODUCTION

The gradual restoration of *King Lear* has already been immensely researched or touched upon by a great number of scholars and, of course, by all engaged in the study of the Victorian drama and stage. However, the immediate pre-Victorian era (often referred to, simply, as Victorian), that is, the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s, have received less attention so far. The early decades of the nineteenth century as a period of great changes in popular taste, attitude of performers and viewers to stage and literature are most thoroughly described in the works of J. S. Bratton. Her book on *King Lear* in the Plays in the Performance series¹ and her essay "The Lear of Private Life: Interpretations of *King Lear* in the nineteenth century"² are the most detailed summaries of what the text of the play had to suffer in the hands of actors pursuing applause. For reasons fully not answered as yet, it took one and a half centuries after its ill-famed "Ratification" before the play could eventually regain its original form on the English stage. The well-known breakthrough in this process was Charles William Macready's production

¹ J. S. Bratton, *King Lear*. Plays in Performance series, 1987.

² J. S. Bratton. "The Lear of Private Life: Interpretations of *King Lear* in the nineteenth century." *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*. Ed. Richard Foulkes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

of 1838 that first run the risk of including the Fool in the play. Macready's younger colleague and employee, Samuel Phelps, later followed this lead and mounted a version in 1845 that contained fewer cuts and fewer changes in the order of scenes.

However, Macready attempted a partial restoration as early as 1834. This performance, both revolutionary and experimental, is only mentioned in Bratton's writings. It has yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves.

On the one hand, the fact that the partial restoration of 1834 has not been well-known is due to Macready himself. According to his *Diaries*, he was not fully satisfied with his performance and later, as seen in the *Variorum Edition of King Lear*,³ he claimed that the play was not restored until 1838. On the other hand, the fact is due to the relative lack of available evidence that could raise and uphold scholarly curiosity. The single record we find for Macready, 1834 in Shattuck's descriptive catalogue of promptbooks leads us to "a studybook or preparation copy, heavily cut, the Fool deleted" with "Many curious marginalia, some in Latin and Greek." The copy, according to Shattuck, is preserved in "Victoria and Albert, Forster Library."⁴ To my knowledge, it is only J. S. Bratton so far who has taken the effort of taking a closer look at this, in my opinion, hardly legible copy.

This article, however, intends to introduce and focus on another text, hitherto unknown, which may have been the one upon which Macready built his 1834 experimental staging of *King Lear*. The text I found in the Bodleian Library Archives I suspect to be the promptbook of this performance. On the following pages I will attempt to prove my suspicions on the basis of the promptbook itself, Macready's *Diaries* and contemporary theatre criticism. A full, line by line comparison of the Victoria & Albert and the Bodleian copies would be ideal, but this has yet to be written. Consequently, concerning the Victoria & Albert copy I will have to rely on the descriptions of the Librarian at the Bodleian and those of J. S. Bratton's alongside my own photographs.

³ William Shakespeare. *King Lear*. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare. Ed. H. H. Furness. Philadelphia: Lippincott, c. 1880.

⁴ Charles H. Shattuck. *The Shakespeare Promptbooks. A Descriptive Catalogue*. Urbana & London: University of Illinois Press, 1965. p. 211. The phrase might be misleading: the book is in the Forster Collection of the National Art Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXTS

2.1 “Many curious marginalia”⁵

When citing the Shattuck *Catalogue*'s brief description of the Victoria & Albert copy, I have already referred to the difficulties we may encounter in case we venture to read it. Bratton, who has apparently worked on it considerably, found that the book, “that shows all sign of wear” betrays rather the author of the marginalia than the performance: Macready's

annotations of the role of Lear are [...] intensely personal, and concerned with the poetry, with his experience as a reader [...]. They are so private, so removed from, even opposed to, any idea of usefulness to a stage manager, that they are chiefly in Latin, with excursions into Greek. The learned languages are an extremely revealing affectation. He indicates by them that he thinks and writes about the play not simply as an actor, but rather as a scholar, and so “naturally” chooses to write in the scholarly tongues.⁶

In her book on the performances of *King Lear*, Bratton refers to the Victoria & Albert copy as a “preparation book.”⁷ The Librarian in his note (attached to the Bodleian copy) is of a similar opinion: it “is not a promptbook, but rather Macready's study book.”⁸ For the sake of simplicity and brevity I will, in the future, refer to this copy in the Victoria & Albert Museum as the study book. The Librarian's reserved account also considers the practical use of the volume: “It records the cuts which Macready made in the text for the production, and its hastily scribbled marginalia relate a few of the actor's ideas and self-instructions on the role. But it would be impossible to reconstruct this production from such a document.”⁹ Having seen the study book myself, I must fully agree with the Librarian that reconstruction is impossible on the basis of such a document. However, bearing Sprague's warning in mind, that “Even promptbooks are not

⁵ Shattuck. *The Shakespeare Promptbooks*, p. 211.

⁶ J. S. Bratton. “The Lear of Private Life,” p.128

⁷ J. S. Bratton. *King Lear*. “A Note on the Text,” p. xviii.

⁸ Librarian's Typed Three-Page Note attached to the Bodleian Promptbook. Not dated but is certainly later than 1965 (mentions Shattuck's *Catalogue*, 1965), p. 2.

⁹ Librarian's Note.

infallible guides to what actually happens on the stage,"¹⁰ we may have a better chance for the virtual reconstruction, or at least a little more guidance on the performance if we study the other volume, the copy in the Bodleian.

2.2 "Marking fairly the copy of Lear"¹¹

(a) *Whose book?*

A quarter leather book that counts 116 interleaved pages, the Bodleian copy is a Harding edition, "accurately printed from the text of Mr. Steevens's last edition,"¹² of 1798. The upper board detached, the title page shows E. J. Lowne's signed inscription with the printed label of the Christie's Macready Library Sale catalogue. Lowne must have admired Macready's achievements as actor, director and pioneer restorer of Shakespearean texts: he possessed a portrait of Macready by Briggs in his collection and his inscription in this volume also indicates his respect for the actor. Therefore the following inscription may well be taken as proof that the book belonged to Charles William Macready:

This (with four similar volumes contg "King John, Richard 3. Henry 5. + As you like it") was purchased at the Sale of Mr. Macready's Library, and presented to me by my dear friend for many years, John Lawrence Toole; thus pleasantly enhancing to me the interest and the value of the volumes.

July, 1879
E.J.Lowne

The lines imprinted on the inner title page that read:

195 Shakspeare, King John, As You Like It, Richard III., Henry V., King Lear, 5 vol. ALL MARKED FOR REPRESENTATION BY MR. MACREADY,

along with the catalogue label attached onto the title page, leave no doubt about the identity of the former owner of the book.

¹⁰ A. C. Sprague. *Shakespeare and the Actors. The Stage Business in his Plays (1660-1905)*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944, p. 297.

¹¹ *The Diaries of Macready*. Ed. Toynbee Chapman & Hall. 1912, Vol. I. p. 130.

¹² *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, to which are added notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens. 1773, 1778, 1793, 1798.

(b) Whose handwriting?

The identity of the person(s) who marked this legible promptbook, however, is yet unclear: there is full marking in ink over careful lineation (in pencil) and also some notes in pencil. The Librarian holds that these hand-written inscriptions come from two different hands: “the actual prompt annotations [in ink] were most likely made by John Wilmott, a prompter associated with Macready at this time,” while the “less legible notes in pencil and ink [...] are almost certainly Macready’s. These latter are almost entirely corrections and additions to the text.”¹³

Although the Librarian’s remarks on the authorship of the markings seem quite credible I am not fully convinced: Macready’s notes in his *Diary* lead me to believe that both inscriptions belong to the actor-director himself. On 4th May 1834 he wrote:

Lay in bed to rest, and at the same time to concentrate my thoughts more closely upon *Lear*, which I read through with great attention. [...] I settled my accounts, and set at once to work on the cutting, and then marking fairly the copy of *Lear* – a task to which I assigned about two hours, which has cost me seven or eight. I have finished it, and humbly hope for blessing on my work. Amen! Made it in a parcel for Cooper and sent it to him. Dressed and went out to dine...¹⁴

On the basis of this passage, it is, therefore, quite probable that it was Macready himself who made the “actual prompt annotations” by ink and Wilmott, his prompter had no hand in it at all. The hastily pencilled remarks, whose form is only slightly different from the penned ones,¹⁵ may as well belong to Macready since he makes no mention of anyone else working with the volume.

¹³ Librarian’s Note, p. 2.

¹⁴ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 130.

¹⁵ Perhaps only a graphological examination may provide us with reliable information.

3 THE PROBLEM OF IDENTIFICATION

3.1 The neat copy

Were the lines quoted above the sole appropriate reference to the "fair copy" in Macready's *Diary*, it would be difficult to avoid jumping to the logical conclusion that the Bodleian copy is identical with the "fair" one. Macready's lines seem to bear out my belief that he must have had a preparation copy, which he copied neatly on a later occasion. This is quite credibly supported by at least four reasons.

Firstly, because of the markedly short period he assigned to the task to himself, who was both famous and also infamous for his relentless thoroughness and perfectionism. Had he not had a marked copy for his own personal use previously, he could not have been able to cut and mark the piece "fairly" within only seven or eight hours.¹⁶ Secondly, though negotiations had been going on since 2nd May, it was not until he thought he had finally arranged his benefit night for *Lear*¹⁷ that Macready settled down to work. Thirdly, he mentions "cutting" beside marking fairly the copy of *Lear*. The Bodleian copy does indeed contain "cuts" in both the metaphorical and literal senses of the word. Since it is interleaved, the volume leaves enough room for such practical means of the actor-director's dramaturgy. This fact also accounts for why Macready needed another copy of the play apart from his own study book. Fourthly, sending a neat copy to the manager containing the arrangements for (and, in Macready's case, by) the star of the production, thus making it available for the other players was simply the customary theatrical practice of the day, one which evidently calls for a neat and legible version of topical arrangements. To sum up, it seems perfectly justified to think that there is one neat copy, which is identical with the one that was marked on 4th May 1834, and then sent to the manager Cooper, who also played Edgar. This is in all probability also the copy which I came across in the Bodleian Library.

¹⁶ Macready may have started the marking a day earlier (May 3rd), on the day of his accepting the date for his benefit night, but it is unclear whether it was the "fair copy" or not. His *Diary* reads: "Sat down to proceed with *Lear*, of which I marked a great deal" (Vol. I p. 130).

¹⁷ Macready had negotiations before cutting and marking fairly the copy, and had fights with the management of Drury Lane to have his benefit night in accordance with his contract: Bunn, the manager disapproved of this benefit night and raised difficulties while Cooper, the co-manager encouraged him. Therefore Macready was left unsure of the fate of the night until 15th May when, after nearly giving up the whole idea, he finally decided to take it with all its (possible) drawbacks.

3.2 Another neat copy?

Disturbingly enough, however, later entries of the *Diary* tell us of the intention of publishing the acting copy of *King Lear* and that Macready was working on such a copy. Two months after his performances at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, he

[c]alled at Miller's to inquire about the expense of publishing *Lear*; learnt that it would cost about £20, which is more than can afford; at the same time I denied the title of the Drury Lane managers to *Werner* as acted; the alterations are my property.¹⁸

This illustrates the value the copyright of the stage adaptation represented: it was essential to publish the current text of the plays, "as acted." Contemporary publishers often complain that only the acting copies of the hits of the day sold well while the original texts of the very same dramatic pieces did not excite great interest in the public. Hence it is not surprising at all that the lack of capital to run the risk of the publication did not seem to hinder Macready from commencing the work, evidently not giving up the idea entirely. Only a fortnight later, on July 25th, we read in his *Diary*: "Gave the rest of my day to the wearying, slow and unimproving task of preparing my acting copy of *King Lear* even to the last hour of evening."¹⁹

Macready's perseverance remained unbroken and bore fruit towards the end of the summer of 1834, although his attention must have been divided, because of the birth of his second daughter on 21st July. Further from this point, the *Diary* saw a good deal of his complaints on the work being tiring and monotonous. In the middle of the summer he wrote the following:

Resumed my slowly advancing work upon the prompt-book of *King Lear*, and am more reconciled to expending my time on these or any other of Shakespeare's works than on all the *Sardanapalus*es that ever were written.²⁰

Several days later: "Resumed the *ennuyant* employment of marking book of *King Lear*, and by dint of perseverance finished the third act,"²¹ and the next day:

¹⁸ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 164, dated July 12th.

¹⁹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 166, dated July 25th.

²⁰ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 170, dated July 31st.

²¹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 171, dated August 10th.

Rose in good time this morning, in the hope that I might get the start of the troublesome task of making up my promptbook of *Lear*; and immediately sat down to my desk on my coming downstairs...²²

until on August 18th he wrote with no little satisfaction: "Went home and got some tea as I looked over my bound book of *Lear*, which pleased me very much."²³

Presumably, the reason why he pursued the task was that he was to leave Drury Lane for the next season and become a freelancer, hoping for more bearable managers and less humiliating terms of acting in the country than in London where both patent theatres were in the hands of the money-grubber Alfred Bunn.²⁴ Trying to escape from Bunn, whom he refers to as "blackguard" or "knave" with utter pleasure in the Diary, Macready went to play *Lear* to Richmond, August 29th, to Dublin, November 17th during the autumn of 1834 and to Bath, January 17th, 1835. An acting copy or promptbook was essential for touring: the guest star sent his version to the theatre where he was invited to play in order that the local cast was able to, and was expected to, use it for preparation. Not only *King Lear* but the *Bridal* and *Sardanapalus*, his other successful roles and the hits of the day, were chosen for the tours in that summer; the notes in Macready's *Diary* allow us to suppose that the actor was to produce a clearly legible copy of these plays as well for the very same purposes. Before setting off on the tours, in June he began his "work of preparation for Dublin by marking the first act of the *Bridal*."²⁵ Then he ordered a new book of *Sardanapalus*²⁶ from Kenneth's bookshop and a few weeks later he started "to put *Sardanapalus* in acting form."²⁷ The function of the promptbooks in general is further testified by the following, recorded in the *Diary* on the occasion of Macready's return to London: "I had sent back to Willmott [prompter associated with Macready] the books of *Sardanapalus* and *King Lear* by which, I suppose, he [Bunn] learned that I was in town."²⁸

²² *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 171, dated August 11th.

²³ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 173, dated August 18th.

²⁴ Whom Macready considered as professionally incompetent.

²⁵ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 158, dated June 26th, *The Bridal* by Sheridan Knowles.

²⁶ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 160, dated July 4th, *Sardanapalus* by Byron.

²⁷ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 166, dated July 19th.

²⁸ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 184, dated September 30th.

Macready's rage was ferocious every time his partners prove short-witted or careless in their profession. We find several other remarks in the *Diary* connected to the fate of these neat copies, scribbled down on his tours in the course of 1834. In Swansea Macready was "disgusted with the impertinence of a man, called Edmonds, who refused to speak what the prompter told him."²⁹

The Dublin engagement provoked another angry grunt on the occasion of the treatment of his precious book of *King Lear*:

Went to the theatre to rehearse *Lear*, which I did very badly, and what is worse in very bad temper. Ridiculous as it is, I really believe the cause of it – at least principally – was the sight of my neat book in the dirty prompter's hands, suffering with every turning of the leaves.³⁰

Clearly, the situation was irritating for Macready, however amusing it may sound today, and this makes it most credible that the copy in question was a neat one indeed.

Thus the promptbook or acting copy, to which so much thought and work was devoted, fulfilled one of its two significant functions: it was used as the promptbook of the guest actor whose fame was the hall-mark of the production. Of the other function of this particular promptbook, namely, to serve as a manuscript for publication, I have no other data. Macready laid up the role of *Lear* in the years succeeding his touring season. All the same, he had attempted the part but few times only: it is quite conceivable then, that he, who mounted a new version four years later in 1838, this time including the Fool, in the course of time saw no point in insisting on the publication of the pioneering work.

4 "LEAR WITH SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT"

The 1834 restoration was indeed a pioneering venture, admittedly however, with a good deal of changes made in the order of the storm scenes and with the omission of the Fool. Nonetheless, for the theatre-goer it broke the succession of textual mutilations to *King Lear* at last, after one and a half centuries. Macready, already an actor of considerable renown at the time of the performance, indeed, not far from being fashionable, was able to bring about a change in public taste. His *Lear*, along with his other restorations, helped establish a new value, namely,

²⁹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 180, dated September 18th.

³⁰ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 204, dated November 13th.

that the Shakespearean original was in fact enjoyable as a theatrical entertainment and much better than Tate's version that Macready in his *Diary* called the "miserable debilitation and disfigurement of Shakespeare's sublime tragedy,"³¹ and which appeared in *New Monthly* in Forster's less moderate wording, as "the ignorant trash of Mr Poet Laureate Tate," or simply as Tate's "disgusting version."³²

Macready's or Forster's conviction was of course neither unique nor pioneering in their time at all: not only the eighteenth century editors of the Shakespearean corpus but in fact the intellectual élite of the turn of the nineteenth century had the same conception. Nevertheless, their appreciation did not receive more attention, if it did at all, than any topic of small talk in fashionable drawing-rooms. Macready realised that the theatre offered itself as a perfect tool to communicate these ideas to large audiences and as an eminent Victorian he used this tool to instruct people and guide their taste. An erudite man of the theatre, a member of both the intellectual and theatrical élite, it was Macready's person that had a fair chance to connect theory and practice, literature and theatre, élite and public in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although in hindsight Macready's success did not come unexpectedly, he personally felt that he had put both his professional and financial existence at stake by the venture. Thanks to his established reputation and, very importantly, his powerful friends among men of letters, his pioneering restoration was rewarded by loud applause from most London papers. The review in the *Literary Gazette* whole-heartedly welcomed Macready's attempt:

Lear was performed agreeably to the text of its immortal author, and was a tragedy, not a melo-dramatic entertainment; a tragedy of the deepest pathos, ending as only such events as precede could naturally end, in desolation and death. To Macready's personation of the old king, we think the fittest epithet that can be applied is, that it was beautiful.³³

Not only the actor, but also the cult of original Shakespearean text received a considerable boost from the review in the *Athenaeum*:

³¹ *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from his Diaries and Letters*. Ed. Sir Frederick Pollock, Bart., one of his executors. London: Macmillan, 1875, Vol. I. p. 205.

³² "King Lear, 'as Shakespeare Wrote It.'" *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Vol. II. May, 1834.

³³ *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* Saturday, May 31, 1834. No. 906. pp. 379-380.

The senseless alterations which have so long been allowed to disfigure this mighty effort of genius, have been abandoned, and the pure taste of Mr. Macready has restored the Shakspearian text. We are not of the number of those who desire never to see 'Lear,' because of the impossibility of the part being perfectly acted: the standard of its perfection is in the minds of those who have read and studied it; and, although we despair of meeting with any actor so gifted as to come up to that standard, it is, and always will be, a matter of interest to us, to see how nearly any new aspirant of real genius can approach it. An actor may be looked for who shall do full justice to *Lear*, about the same time that an artist shall be found who can truly paint a rainbow; but we would no more exclude the one from the stage, than the other from a picture which requires it. Mr. Macready's *Lear* is well worth seeing – it is interesting, impressive, and instructive: in some respect we consider it inferior to John Kemble's, in others superior – in nearly all better than Kean's. [...] Mr. Macready's appearance in the part was by far the best we have ever seen [...] Mr. Macready's efforts were loudly and deservedly cheered...³⁴

While the *Athenaeum* did not miss the opportunity to refer to Charles Lamb's opinion tauntingly, the reviewer of the *Morning Post*, before he joined in singing Macready's praises, criticised the previously published acting versions, bought by the public in the playhouses (e.g. at Kemble's, Kean's, and Booth's):

Another excellence worthy to be remarked in the performance of this drama was that it was acted from the text of SHAKESPEARE. The acting copies of *King Lear* are worse than useless; some of the best scenes are omitted, and with the text such liberties have been taken as to mar, to considerable degree, the force and beauty of the language. MR MACREADY was rewarded with the enthusiastic approbation of his audience throughout his performance, and at the fall of the curtain, having been loudly called for.³⁵

The sole voice of discontent came from the stubborn young friend John Forster in *New Monthly Magazine* under a title which referred to the playbill: "King Lear, 'as Shakespeare wrote it.'" In his usual fiery temperament Forster straightforwardly found Macready's fidelity to the bard's original wanting, and mercilessly scolded Macready for his cowardice in cutting the Fool. However, it

³⁴ *The Athenaeum*. Saturday, May 31, 1834. No 344.

³⁵ *The Morning Post*, May 24, 1834.

was also Forster, whose earlier writings were crucial in inspiring Macready to dare to take on and restore *King Lear*. He noted the following in his *Diary* four months before the performance on reading one of Forster's articles: "[It] has had the effect on me of making me revolve the prudence and practicability of acting the original Lear, which I shall not abandon without serious reflection."³⁶

A decade after his first Shakespearean restoration (*Richard III*), the spring months of 1834 passed full of hesitation over the acting version of *King Lear*. Macready still needed to take heart from his other friends' stance. He consulted the poet of repute, John Hamilton Reynolds as late as May 3rd, only a day before beginning to mark a fair copy in May: "Called on Reynolds [...] who approved of Lear with Shakespeare's text."³⁷

For all his friends' encouragement, Macready was yet unsure of the reception by the audiences and did not dare to include the Fool, for which Forster, young and careless, practically told him off in the press. Forster strongly promotes the Fool, and indeed, he explains its role for the reader and theatregoer:

The Fool is one of the most wonderful creatures of Shakspeare. The picture of his quick and pregnant sarcasm, of his loving devotion, of his acute sensibility, of his despairing mirth, of his heartbroken silence – contrasted with the rigid sublimity of Lear's suffering, with the huge desolation of Lear's sorrow, with the vast and outspread image of Lear's madness – is the noblest thought that ever entered into the heart and mind of man. Nor is it a noble thought merely: it is for action – for representation: necessary to the audience as tears are to an overcharged heart – necessary to Lear himself as the recollection of his kingdom, or as the worn and faded garments of his power. [...] gigantic sorrows could never be presented on the stage without a suffering too frightful, a sublimity too remote, a grandeur too terrible – unless relieved by quiet pathos, and in some way brought home to the apprehensions of the audience by homely and familiar illustration. [...] Complete without him the tragedy can never be.³⁸

The impressive propaganda for the Fool inevitably calls forth the demand for an explanation by Macready:

³⁶ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 97, dated January 26th.

³⁷ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 129, dated May 3rd.

³⁸ *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 218.

Ah! Mr. Macready, why did you omit the Fool? [...] We must again ask you, Mr. Macready, why did *you* omit him? We can admit of no excuses. [...] We say that, though you have a right to abridge, you have no right to omit or transpose – and finally we say that, with your well-known love for Shakspeare, your fitness to appreciate his genius in its subtlest as well as its grandest shapes, and your absolute power of ordering what restorations you pleased on the late occasion, it was unworthy of you to stop where you did, when, to realize Shakspeare's divine purpose, you should at all risks have dared to advance farther.³⁹

It might as well be this not entirely positive reflection and the fact that Macready restored the Fool in 1838 that may partially explain why later Macready, as seen in the *Variorum* edition of *King Lear*, did not take pride in his 1834 venture.

5 CONCLUSION – THE BODLEIAN COPY

The hints in the *Diary* made during the summer of 1834 at the lengthy preparation of a promptbook of *King Lear*, which was at the same time ready for the press and was used on not more than three occasions all deter us from the previous assumption (3.1) and direct us towards a new one. In the light of the latter diary entries the reconsideration of what we know of the text is inescapable. The fact that the Bodleian copy is interleaved leads us to conclude that it might have been meant to be printed and complemented with plates⁴⁰. The fact that it shows hardly any sign of wear is due to the small number of performances. Thus I consider it highly probable that the Bodleian copy is not the one marked and cut in May in 1834 but the promptbook prepared for the press during the summer of the same year.

The volume preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum presumably served only as either a simple study book in learning Lear's role, or a draft for the neat version (based probably on the conflated text). Whether the Victoria & Albert copy is a draft for the Bodleian volume, it is not so easy to decide. However, there is one clue that may help: the Bodleian copy contains a minor character called Loctrine (speaking some of the words of the Fool and of a Gentleman) who is entirely Macready's creation here, borrowed from a play titled

³⁹ *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 220–221.

⁴⁰ The catalogue label further reinforces this, the local note on it saying: "interleaved prompt copy, wanting the plates."

The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine, once attributed to Shakespeare.⁴¹ Provided that Locrine appears in the study book as well, of which I have no data yet, this may lead us to consider the Victoria & Albert copy as the draft of the Bodleian one. Inevitably, to produce convincing evidence, a full, line by line comparison of the two copies is indispensable.

What could be the significance of a promptbook that belongs to a production which was not referred as a great achievement by its producer? Time has shown that the production which was the first step towards a full *King Lear* was in fact vital in prefiguring future restorations and making way for them. It took part in shaping the theatrical taste of the public: Macready went against the tide when in an age when melodrama flourished, he returned to tragedy. The tragedian cannot be blamed for his fancy for the spectacular: the productions that made a glittering, spectacular show of Shakespeare's plays and filled the playhouses with an audience equally glittering came only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Macready, it seems, made his restorations for his own sake, serving both his fame and art. As Forster, the contemporary saw it:

By suffering nothing but Shakespeare to be spoken, he has conferred a real service on literature and on the stage; and by his performance, unquestionably, he has added a great lustre to his professional reputation. We wish he would complete it by restoring the Fool! Meanwhile, let us endeavour to give to him the thanks he has already deserved.⁴²

⁴¹ *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine*. London, Printed by Thomas Creede, 1595. Anonymous, once attributed to Shakespeare on the basis of the quarto frontispiece which says: "Newly set forth, overseene and corrected, By VV.S." According to the editors, "the play was also included among the additional pieces added to the third folio of Shakespeare's works in 1664" (pp. v-vi), which served as the source for the fourth folio in 1685. "The initials W.S. on the title page of the quarto [...] may have been intended to connect the play with his name, though whether more than the overseership was implied is doubtful" (p. vi). Malone Society Reprints, Gen. ed. WW Greg. Printed for the Malone Society by Horace Hart M.A, at the Oxford University Press, 1908. - Interestingly enough, among the staged readings at the Globe February 28th 1999, inspired by Nicholas Somogyi's recent book (*Shakespeare's Theatre of War*); the program in *Globe Magazine* also attributed it to Shakespeare.

⁴² *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 221.

The Unreadability of the *Bildungsroman*

Reading *Jane Eyre* reading

I THE BILDUNGSROMAN AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE

He overlooked the whole ring of his life; only, alas, it lay broken in pieces in front of him, and seemed never to want to unite again.

(Wilhelm Meister, VIII, 7)

In his book on the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti wonders why there are only a handful of texts that correspond to the principles of the *Bildungsroman*, and why the classical *Bildungsroman* had a very brief life. His answer is that perhaps it was too perfect.¹ Focusing on the criticism written about this genre one may give a slightly different answer to Moretti's second question; namely, that it was required for the *Bildungsroman* to be too perfect, and that this requirement was set up by literary criticism. The *Bildungsroman* as a genre was brought into existence by definitions invented by literary critics by way of (mis)reading German novels of the 18th century, among them Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, which, even today, is considered to be the "prototype" of the genre. The term *Bildungsroman* was created and first used by Karl Morgenstern in 1810, that is, about fifteen years after the publication of *Wilhelm Meister*. Later, as more and more definitions were attached to the name, a genre came into existence

¹ Franco Moretti. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London: Verso, 1987, p. 72. All parenthesised references in the first part of the paper are to this critical work.

with its own theories and novels that supposedly belonged to the category. The bubble grew by the creation of many (and often opposing) definitions up to the point when critics realised that the classification of individual novels had become impossible and the term appeared to be rather useless.

The present paper is an attempt to approach the *Bildungsroman* and its theories from a post-structuralist, basically deconstructivist perspective. My assumption is that the *Bildungsroman* is constructed as a genre by its theories and definitions by way of deriving an abstract category from individual novels, and by supposing that the concept of the genre relates beyond the concept to particular works of literature. The method of specification used by the critical writings is to find the most important classificatory features on the basis of which novels can be treated as representatives of the genre. I will examine how the *Bildungsroman* is born in the critical texts written about it, and how one of the novels regarded as a *Bildungsroman* reads the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by the critical texts. This novel, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, will come into existence as a supplementary narrative generated in the course of the deconstruction of the theories of the *Bildungsroman*, and it will narrate the unreadability² of the narratives on the *Bildungsroman*, and also the supplementary nature of the *Bildungsroman* as a "perfect" form. In my interpretation I will start out from the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by the definitions of critical texts by reflecting on some attempts to define and thus to create the genre.

Chronologically not the first, but perhaps the most influential definition was offered by Wilhelm Dilthey in 1906. According to him, the theme of the *Bildungsroman* is the history of a young man "who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures,

² Paul de Man's concept of unreadability questions the possibility of closing off the reading process by a final, adequate interpretation, and also implies that the text can possibly engender several readings contradicting one another. The impossibility of closing off reading by finding the "referent" of the text is due to the figurativity of language. Figurativity causes blind spots in every reading, and these spots can only be revealed by subsequent readings. Although every text questions its own referentiality by proving to be figurative, referentiality is restored in that every text can be read as the "portrait" of its own referential indeterminacy (see de Man. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 188–220; Bókay Antal. *Irodalomtudomány a modern és posztmodern korban*. Budapest: Osiris, 1997, p. 424).

finds himself and his mission in the world.”³ Dennis F. Mahoney, relying on Karl Morgenstern’s first definition of the genre, proposes that instead of focusing on the development of the hero we should consider the novels’ intended effect on the reader, since the *Bildungsroman* depicts the *Bildung* of the hero, and together with that promotes the education of the reader.⁴ The category is further broadened by Jeffrey L. Sammons, who allows the inclusion of modernist works as well as novels that can be regarded as parodies of the genre. For him, it does not matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist is integrated into society or not.⁵ Feminist criticism extends the boundaries of the genre to include novels of female development as well, emphasising the differences in narrative pattern caused by the limited developmental options available to women.⁶

While the above definitions tend to broaden the meaning of the *Bildungsroman*, James Hardin, the editor of *Reflection and Action*, a collection of essays devoted to the *Bildungsroman*, denounces “loose” and “ahistorical” interpretations of the genre, and many essays in the volume try to use the term *Bildungsroman* in a more restricted sense, to designate novels in the tradition of *Wilhelm Meister*. On a closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that the *Bildungsroman* is a “phantom genre” with at most three novels in the *Wilhelm Meister* tradition.⁷ As far as Goethe’s novel is concerned, it was doubted if even this novel would fit into the category of which it is the prototype,⁸ which implies that the genre can easily be deprived of its prestigious origin.

The desire of literary criticism created the genre by defining it, yet, at the same time, made the *Bildungsroman* elusive by the very process of creation and definition. It seems that the reader, searching for its meaning, can hardly get closer

³ Cited by James Hardin. “Introduction.” *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991, p. xiv.

⁴ Dennis F. Mahoney. “The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the ‘Age of Goethe.’” *Reflection and Action*, p. 101.

⁵ Hardin, p. xxiii.

⁶ Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland. “Introduction.” *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Abel-Hirsch-Langland. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983, p. 11.

⁷ Mahoney, p. 100.

⁸ Cf. Thomas P. Saine. “Was *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* Really Supposed to be a *Bildungsroman*?” *Reflection and Action*, pp. 118–141; Hartmut Steinecke. “The Novel and the Individual: The Significance of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* in the Debate about the *Bildungsroman*.” *Reflection and Action*, p. 71; David H. Miles “The Picaro’s Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German *Bildungsroman*.” *PMLA* 89, 5 (1974) 980–992, p. 981.

to the *Bildungsroman* as a genre through its definitions. Since genres and genre theories are verbal constructs, they cannot help being figurative. With the (hopeless) intention of getting closer to the *Bildungsroman*, I will focus (mostly) on one particular text, namely Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World*, which I found the most elaborate and detailed among the critical texts I am reading in my paper. I will read this text by touching upon some of the points that it promotes as classificatory characteristics of the genre, treating these points as figures which the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures consists of, and doing a closer analysis of only two of them, namely *Bildung* and *self*.

The starting point of Moretti's narrative is that the *Bildungsroman* is a grand narrative, the symbolic form of modernity. The basis for this interpretation is that in the 18th century Europe entered the phase of modernity without possessing a culture of modernity, so it became necessary to attach a meaning to modernity. One (symbolic) solution was the identification of the latter as youth which came to be regarded as the most meaningful part of life in this period (p. 4).

Moretti attempts to determine the meaning of *Bildungsroman* by regarding it as a genre which emphasises the possibility of individual development and social integration, and which offers a model for the middle-class youth in these aspects of life. In the *Bildungsroman* individual development and social integration belong together as part and whole, and at their point of encounter and fulfilment lies maturity. In this conception the painful aspect of socialisation is missing.

It is also necessary that, as a 'free individual,' not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalise* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call 'consent' or 'legitimation.' If the *Bildungsroman* appears to us still today as an essential, pivotal point in our history, this is because it has *succeeded in representing* this fusion with a force of conviction and *optimistic clarity* that will never be equalled again.

(p. 16, last two emphases added)

In this interpretation, the *Bildungsroman* is treated as a sign which successfully represents the fusion of the external and internal, the individual's ability to abolish the difference between the inside and the outside. Thus it seems to be related to symbolic representation which, according to Jonathan Culler, implies "abolishing alienation within man, between man and the world, between objects or forms and meanings... In symbolic operation meaning is seen as something inherent, to be

drawn out of the depths of the object itself" (cited by Moretti, p. 61). But, Moretti argues, it is interpretation rather than alienation that is being abolished here. At the end of *Wilhelm Meister*, for example, Wilhelm has to denounce the position of the interpreter, and give up intellectual autonomy if he wants his story to have a "univocal, definitive, and totalizing meaning," given, in fact, by the Tower Society, that is, an external force which actually wrote Wilhelm's story (p. 62). The abolishment of alienation and interpretation presupposes the integrity and continuity of the personality, as well as the assumption that the process of integration can be represented, the story of internalisation can be told.

The problem with this argument is that the existence of the *Bildungsroman* would be impossible without alienation and interpretation. In most of the novels that belong to this genre one tells one's own story, thus, applying Gérard Genette's term, the narration is autodiegetic; not always on the extradiegetic level, but very often on the intradiegetic level.⁹ In *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* there is extradiegetic autodiegetic narration, but we have autodiegetic narrators on the second level of narration in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*: such is the narrator of the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," or of Wilhelm's childhood. Narrating the self automatically causes an alterity in the very self which is intended to be narrated as continuous and integral, since the roles of narrating self and narrated self (interpreter and interpreted) are created in the act of narration. Thus, by the very activity of trying to define one's self as a continuous whole, one also narrates the impossibility of the coherent self. The narrator must be alienated from the narrated self, which he creates by interpretation.

Belief in the creation of the coherent narrated self, in the protagonist's integral personality, is a requirement present in all the theories of the *Bildungsroman* I have been reading here. While stating that in the *Bildungsroman* the integrity of the personality is achieved, the critical texts, however, also point in the opposite direction. Moretti accounts for the *Bildungsroman's* resistance to Freudian analysis by contrasting the self-image of psychoanalysis and that of the *Bildungsroman*.

⁹ In *Narrative Discourse* Genette distinguishes between different types of narration. In the heterodiegetic type the narrator is absent from the story he tells, while in homodiegetic narration the narrator is a character in his story. In autodiegetic narration, a subtype of homodiegetic narration, the narrator is the protagonist. On the basis of narrative levels the narration can be extradiegetic (it takes place on the first level), intradiegetic (it takes place on the second level, that is, within the first level) or metadiegetic (it takes place within the second level) (See Gérard Genette. "Voice." *Narratology: An Introduction*. Eds. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. London and New York: Longman, 1996, pp. 172–189).

While psychoanalysis breaks up the psyche into “opposing forces” and looks beyond the Ego, the *Bildungsroman* attempts to build the Ego, to fuse or bring together the conflicting features of the individual personality (pp. 10–11). Nevertheless, when he discusses the four types of *Bildungsroman* on the basis of the Ego’s relation to various factors which endanger its unity, in the case of the French *Bildungsroman* he points out that this type of the novel emphasises the dangers of either a forceful Super-Ego, or an Id (p. 230, n. 7), thus placing the conflict, which in other cases takes place between the Ego and outside forces, within the divided psyche. Thus the definition of the *Bildungsroman*’s image of the self has its premise in the Freudian divided image of the psyche, even to the point of using the terms introduced by psychoanalysis to name the different parts of the human psyche.

Most theories of the *Bildungsroman* do not leave the etymology and connotations of *Bildung* unaccounted for, which concept, generally supposed to be a stable factor in interpreting the *Bildungsroman*, is closely connected to the emergence and formation of the coherent self.¹⁰ *Bildung* is generally interpreted as a typical pre-modern idea with a powerful influence on the image of the self and on the function of culture in human life, the relation between man and society. This idea is based on the belief in the possibility of the individual’s successful integration into society by accepting its ethic and culture, while also preserving the self as a coherent entity exposed to various social vectors in the course of *Bildung*.¹¹ By the period of Modernism, however, the concept of *Bildung* becomes highly questionable, and the ideal is attacked by many figures of the period, among them Nietzsche, Joyce, or Musil.

Different influential trends of cultural history promoted and popularised different aspects of the concept. Its well-established, “canonised” meaning is ‘shaping,’ ‘formation,’ ‘development.’¹² Many define *Bildung* as “shaping the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social

¹⁰ It is not (and cannot be) my intention to give an overall history of the concept here. In my reading, I rely on English language interpretations of *Bildung* and *Bildungsroman*. For a thorough account of the German connotations of *Bildung* see Brunner–Conze–Koselleck, eds. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Band 1: A–D). Stuttgart: Klett–Cotta, 1972, pp. 508–551.

¹¹ Bókay, p. 249.

¹² The *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the *Bildungsroman* on the basis of this connotation. In the dictionary, the *Bildungsroman* is defined as ‘novel of formation’ presenting the youthful development of the hero or heroine. The end of the formation process is maturity.

experience to the threshold of maturity,"¹³ a development coming not just from outside mentors but also a self-development which affects the whole human being, mind, body and spirit alike.¹⁴ Besides these often quoted and frequently promoted implications, however, one may find behind the general term many different connotations as well, which potentially question or subvert the unity (homogeneity) of its meaning. The terms *Bildung* and *bilden* had already been used by the medieval German mystics in the sense of "purging the soul of its impurities and forming it according to its divine model." In the 18th century the concept was secularised and used alongside the terms 'education' and 'enlightenment,' but, in contrast with education and the more reason-oriented term enlightenment, *Bildung* was thought to affect the entire self.¹⁵ Thus *Bildung*, on the one hand, figures a purgation process, a cleansing of the soul, returning to the natural, while on the other hand it implies quite the opposite process, which is formation, breaking with revered nature, and accommodating oneself to that very culture which was considered to be "dangerous," "deviant," a supplement to the natural state. It is also important to note that subsequent explanations of the word *Bildung* picked up the development aspect and neglected the purgation sense.

This suppression can possibly be explained on the basis of the pre-modern approach to nature and culture and the contradictory function of education in human life. This approach, based on Rousseau, promotes nature's primacy over culture; the natural state is considered to be perfect, which cannot, does not, have to be supplemented. In its relation to nature, education is exterior, something evil (yet necessarily there as a "dangerous supplement"), and it is outside the positivity to which it is super-added. Promoting the development aspect of *Bildung* may emphasise the importance of the individual's contact with culture, but it also implies a belief in a happy stage of life before the development starts, which Wilhelm Dilthey calls the "blissful state of ignorance." What the neglected purgation aspect may promote is a disbelief in a clean, natural innate stage; since the soul has to be purged of its impurities, the "natural" cleanness has to be *achieved* in *Bildung*, and only after this purgation process can formation start.¹⁶

¹³ Hardin, p. xxiii.

¹⁴ Mahoney, p. 109.

¹⁵ Mahoney, p. 109.

¹⁶ A similar disbelief in the primacy of nature is expressed by Jacques Derrida; in *Of Grammatology*, he cites passages from Rousseau's writing, and points out that it is Rousseau's text itself which emphasises the imperfect innate in the natural. Derrida's argument is that if nature needs a supplement then there is a natural weakness, a deficiency innate in nature. Childhood is the first

For many of its users the connotations of *Bildung* are over-optimistic. Humboldt's idea of the complete development of human potential that has beneficial effects on the state itself, or Novalis's concept of *Bildung* that is extended to that of the state,¹⁷ for example, imply a possible interpretation of *Bildung* as the development of the individual as an allegory of the development of the nation. Against these over-optimistic interpretations of *Bildung* feminism endowed the word with a different meaning, connected to the possibilities of the female individual. Here *Bildung* (or very often *awakening*, a term used together with or instead of *Bildung*) is very frequently a series of disillusionments or clashes with society, or the realisation of one's limited options in the world, of the impossibility of *Bildung* available for men; and even the "male" *Bildung* can be regarded as an illusion contradicting the actual human possibilities in culture.¹⁸

A further disruptive internal duplicity in the word *Bildung* is revealed in an incidental remark by Jerome Buckley, who, however, seems to be unaware of its meaning: the connotations of the word *Bildung* include 'picture' or 'portrait' as well as 'shaping' or 'formation' since the word is related to *Bild*, *Bildnis*.¹⁹ As opposed to the latter connotation, the former does not include change or development; it implies instead a static image.

Approaching the term from its more frequent connotations, namely 'formation' or 'education' will, however, lead to further contradictions, which concern the individual's relation to society. In Dilthey's sense of formation the protagonist, as I have quoted above, starting out from a happy state of innocence, finds his place in the world after gaining experience in society. Although innocence implies happiness, the hero has to break with it, and enter the world of experience. In Moretti, man has to willingly give up individual freedom in the process of social integration. How is it possible to convince the individual that it is worth entering culture, the "dangerous supplement?" Only if the contact with the supplement also promises happiness, claims Moretti. The classical *Bildungsroman* promotes happiness

manifestation of the deficiency that needs a substitute, which is education in this case. If nature needs substitution, if it is imperfect, if the sign, the written, culture make the world move, then nature as something desired and perfect emerges from culture as a supplement, thus nature becomes the supplement of art and society (Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp.146-7).

¹⁷ Mahoney, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸ Abel, p. 6. See also Susan J. Rosowski. "The Novel of Awakening." *The Voyage In*, p. 49.

¹⁹ Jerome Hamilton Buckley. "Introduction: The Space Between." *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 13-14.

as the highest value, which is offered as a compensation for giving up one's freedom.²⁰ The "compensation" (happiness) manifests itself in marriage at the end of the novel.

However, the achievement of the unity of the personality, breaking with happy innocence, entering the sphere of the "dangerous supplement" while also gaining happiness is indeed an ambitious enterprise, yet these are the requirements the *Bildungsroman* should meet. This image is indeed too perfect, although at many points it undermines its own perfection. Even *Bildung*, the concept on which most critical texts are based as their stable point, contains in itself several contradictory meanings: it is the desired goal of formation, the progress from the origin to the end, the promise that the (often) positive end, the complete formation and cultural integration of the individual can be achieved, as well as the knowledge of the impossibility of fulfilling such a desire, the consciousness of the inevitable failure of the enterprise. *Bildung* emerges from the analysis as an elusive metaphor. When it points to a meaning, that meaning in its turn will point to other possible connotations. These possible referents read one another, and, by way of interpretation, bring about more and more possible connotations, thus making the discourse of the *Bildungsroman* riven by internal contradictions.

Our reading, however, cannot stop at this point. If we continue reading the concepts in the focus of the critical texts, we will find that the *Bildungsroman* emerges from the texts which intend to create it as a discourse consisting of various figures that the theories regard as genre classificatory features. If, by thorough analysis, we go through all these figures in search of the "meaning" of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created in the critical texts, our reading, in its attempt to find the solid foundation for a possible definition, will be found to shift from figure to figure. The elusive and self-contradictory definitions will turn the direction of our reading to figures pointing from *Bildung* through modernity, youth, self and society to happiness and freedom that will open up other possible chains of supplements. Thus, instead of finding a solid point (the first appropriate figure which is thus no longer a figure) in the centre of the discourse of the *Bildungsroman*, our reading will follow a chain of figures that substitute one another and point farther and farther away from the *Bildungsroman*. Instead of being the "perfect," optimistic form it is assumed to be by Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* as a discourse turns out to be self-contradictory and elusive. While constructing the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures, its theories themselves bring about the deconstruction of their own narratives, and create the *Bildungsroman* as a deconstructive discourse. Thus the *Bildungsroman* is born as a "perfect" form in the deconstruction of

²⁰ Moretti, p. 8.

the critical texts that create it, and it comes into existence only as the desire, or the supplement of the above mentioned narratives. This supplement, however, can well be regarded as an allegory (in Paul de Man's interpretation of the concept) which narrates the elusiveness of the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures, thus narrating the unreadability of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by critical texts.²¹ Out of the deconstruction of the critical texts various supplementary texts emerge. These texts are novels interpreted by the theories as novels which conform to the criteria of the "perfect" genre.

From the possible supplementary narratives engendered by the deconstruction of the theories of the *Bildungsroman* I chose to read *Jane Eyre*. This novel is frequently read as a *Bildungsroman*, yet it will now be read as a text reading the narratives analysed above. Let *Jane Eyre* be here a new, unfamiliar text brought into existence by the previous narratives, which text, nevertheless, has existed before as a readerly, classical text in the Barthesian sense, determined by representation and the signified. The narratives on the *Bildungsroman* have already created *Jane Eyre*, and read it symbolically. In the course of the deconstruction of these narratives, *Jane Eyre* is born as a writerly text, which will denounce totalling meaning and present itself as a text based on the play of the signifier and differences, and which, as a supplement, may narrate the unreadability of the ideal *Bildungsroman*, the "optimistic" genre as it is desired by its theories.

II JANE EYRE AS A READING

You seem to me like Saul, the son of Kish, who went
in search of his father's asses, and found a kingdom.
(Wilhelm Meister, VIII, 10)

Despite the difficulties *Jane Eyre* presents to such readings, critics who read *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman* attempt, or rather strive, to create and read Jane's narrative as a development story, and promote *Jane Eyre* as one of the possible

²¹ When the readability of the narratives on the *Bildungsroman* is questioned, they point back to earlier texts (in this case to novels considered to be *Bildungsromane*) in search of a referent (but all in vain), and they engender a text (or subsequent texts) which narrates the unreadability of the first narratives. As Paul de Man puts it: "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree *allegories*" (p. 205).

referents of the term *Bildungsroman*. Moreover, the narrator Jane also reads her story according to the assumptions of this genre. It is not my intention here to prove that *Jane Eyre* is not a *Bildungsroman* (on this issue one can hardly make a decision because of the indeterminacy of the term), but rather to show how this very text, as a supplement, narrates the deconstruction of its readings as a *Bildungsroman*. On a closer scrutiny it seems that *Jane Eyre* and the critical texts tell a similar story: *Jane Eyre*'s text repeats the way the critical texts deconstruct themselves, and thus it allegorically narrates their deconstruction. These critical readings, among others, include texts by Helene Moglen, Franco Moretti, Karen E. Rowe, Janet H. Freeman, and Jane Eyre, considering the novel also as a reading (or allegory) of the fictitious author Jane Eyre's reading, that is, of a reading preceding the text. For this I shall examine some of the requirements established by these texts for *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman*, read them together with the narratives analysed in the previous section, and let *Jane Eyre*'s text reflect on them. As in the first part of my paper, I shall start with *Bildung*.

In the examination of the novel's relation to the *Bildungsroman* one may attempt to answer the question what idea of *Bildung* (if any) *Jane Eyre* satisfies. According to Helene Moglen, the novel is the "story of the heroine's psychological development," which presents the emergence of the integrity of the female self.²² In Karen Rowe's interpretation, *Jane Eyre* conforms in some respects to Buckley's definition of a "typical *Bildungsroman* plot" in that Jane as a child is in conflict with hostile forces, then leaves home, receives education, and seeks experience at Thornfield.²³ In this novel, however, the protagonist's growth and maturation are facilitated by the encounter with male sexuality and love that will change her "from a plain, lowly Jane into a beautiful lady of the manor." In contrast with the usual "male" *Bildungsroman* plot, the novel follows the pattern of the fairy-tale up to the point when the latter is subverted, since it cannot satisfy

²² Helene Moglen. "Jane Eyre: The Creation of a Feminist Myth." *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press, Ltd., 1984, p. 108 and p. 143.

²³ Jerome Buckley attempts to determine the main characteristics of the genre by abstracting from different novels a "typical" *Bildungsroman* plot, in which a child grows up in the country among many constraints placed upon his free imagination, and where his family, especially his father, is hostile to him and to the new ideas he has gained from reading. At an early age he leaves home for the city, where his real "education" begins, and where he experiences love, sexuality, and friendship. In the end he accommodates to the modern world, and gains maturity (p. 17). Buckley regards as *Bildungsromane* novels like *Wilhelm Meister*, *The Red and the Black*, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Mill on the Floss*, but excludes *Tom Jones*, and does not mention, for example, *Jane Eyre*.

the heroine's independence and human equality, which are gained at the end of the novel after breaking with the fairy-tale pattern.²⁴ Franco Moretti considers *Jane Eyre* a representative of the English *Bildungsroman*, which type of novel, in contrast with the continental type, can be characterised by the stability of narrative conventions and cultural assumptions.²⁵ Whereas these readings focus mainly on the formation of the narrated self, Janet H. Freeman follows up Jane Eyre's progress in storytelling and acquiring verbal skills, till in the end it becomes possible for her to narrate the autobiography properly. She considers Jane's autobiography as sufficient proof for Jane's successful development as a narrator: "The re-creation of her own life in her own powerful words completes Jane's history much more fundamentally than does her marriage with Rochester: the inevitable outcome of *Jane Eyre* is *Jane Eyre*."²⁶

These critics offer optimistic interpretations of *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman* and claim that *Bildung* in the novel affects the whole human being, including mind, body and spirit, and that in the end marriage, happiness, equality, and maturity are achieved.²⁷ The texts also imply that it is possible both for the narrator and for the narrated self to emerge from the development as complete and integral. Consequently, the narrator will be able to tell her true story, which is presented in the novel. Such optimistic interpretations are possible only if, on the one hand, one attributes too much value to Jane's reading of her own story, considering it as a privileged interpretation, and, on the other hand, if one chooses to interpret the novel teleologically, from the end back to the beginning, and to invest Jane Eyre with a developed character in the end, supposedly achieved as a result of the *Bildung* she has undergone in the novel. The readers of the *Bildungsroman*, with the happy outcome in mind, interpret the text as a representation of the hero's development resulting in a happy ending. Now I will start to follow this method, but with a closer look at the presupposed *telos*, and first I will read the tropes of the final happiness and equality at the end of *Jane Eyre*.

²⁴ Karen E Rowe. "Fairy-born and human-bred: Jane Eyre's Education in Romance." *The Voyage In*, pp. 70-1.

²⁵ Moretti, p. 181.

²⁶ Janet H. Freeman. "Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*." *Studies in English Literature* 24 (1984) 683-700, p. 698.

²⁷ For Jane's spiritual development see Barbara Hardy. "Dogmatic Form: Daniel Defoe, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, and E. M. Forster." *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel*. London: The Athlone Press, 1971, pp. 51-82.

1 The outcome

The above mentioned readings claim that happiness is achieved in Jane and Rochester's marriage, because they become equals in the end, so equality is the basic condition of happiness, which will be fulfilled. The text, however, says something different from its readings, even from Jane's authorial reading. Earlier in her text Jane states that she has no belief in marriage: "I don't want to marry, and never shall marry" (383),²⁸ yet in the end she says that perfect concord and happiness in marriage are achieved:

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

(pp. 445–6)

Although equality is stated later on, the text alludes to the Biblical creation story, where the woman, secondarily, is created out of the man's body. Reference to the first human couple implies Jane's identification with the role of Eve, that is the secondary, the traditionally inferior. Also, for Jane, to be together with Rochester is "as free as in solitude, as gay as in company" (p. 446). Being together is measured by the values of solitude and company, which implies the priority of these for Jane. Something similar happens in the case of talking and thinking: "We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and audible thinking" (p. 446). Here the activity to which talking is compared, which is taken for granted, in terms of which the narrator does the defining is solitary thinking. The text implies that the values of solitude are more basic for Jane than the values of being together with Rochester. Happiness in marriage has thus to be explained, justified, it is not accepted as something natural or self-evident, since it has to be defined in terms of solitary life. One possible reason for this can be the nature of marriages the protagonist encounters in the course of the novel. Most of them imply the feeling of disappointment for Jane: Miss Temple's marriage, which is followed by the teacher's leaving Lowood and Jane's feeling of losing Lowood as a home; the second marriage of Helen Burns's father; Jane's own

²⁸ All parenthesised references to the novel are to Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre (An Autobiography)* (1847). London: Penguin, 1994.

aborted marriage with Rochester; the total failure of Rochester's marriage with Bertha; St. John's lack of marriage with Rosamond Oliver, and his proposed marriage to Jane, which would evidently have ruined her. Thus the critics' claim of 'marriage as the emblem of happiness in the *Bildungsroman*' is contradicted by the text; the symbolic relation between the two stated by genre theories can be questioned.

For Jane, marriage can become the emblem of happiness only if there is equality in marriage, and this is what even Jane admits in her reading of the end of her story. The language Jane uses, however, challenges her reading of "perfect concord:"

Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close! for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me [...] Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. And there was a pleasure in my *services*, most full, most exquisite, even though sad – because he claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation.

(p. 446, emphasis added)

Rochester's mutilation and loss of sight at the end of the novel are interpreted by psychoanalytic readings as the loss of male power, that is Rochester's "symbolic castration," where the heroine's happiness is achieved. Some readings claim that with Rochester's mutilation Jane gains phallic power, and this is the point of their equality, the denial of difference.²⁹ Dianne F. Sadoff, however, challenges this psychoanalytic reading, and claims that Rochester's symbolic castration is a punishment which does not represent equality but Jane's fear of masculine power and her desire to oppress it, so it is this desire that castrates Rochester.³⁰ All these readings imply that Jane in the end either achieves equality with Rochester, or gains (or tries to gain) power over him.

²⁹ See Barbara Milech and Cecelia Winkelman. "My Nameless Bliss: *Jane Eyre* and the Intolerance of Difference." Unpublished paper presented at conference: "The Legacy of the Brontës 1847–1997," University of Leeds, UK 11–13 April 1997, p. 4; Sandra M. Gilbert. "Plain Jane's Progress." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*. Ed. Beth Newman. Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1996, p. 499.

³⁰ Sadoff, Dianne F. "The Father, Castration, and Female Fantasy in *Jane Eyre*." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, p. 528.

Such readings, however, including Jane's own, which claims equality, create further problems of interpretation. If we assume that there is equality between the mutilated Rochester and Jane in the end, it would mean that Jane at the end of her progress is also reduced if Rochester had to become "castrated" in order to become her equal. In this case Jane's progress cannot be complete, since, instead of her rising from a status of inequality to that of equality, it was Rochester who had to be reduced.

The text itself may offer a different reading of the question of equality or inequality in the passage cited above. It is Rochester's defect (incompleteness) that draws Jane near to him, and makes Rochester dependent on Jane. By losing his sight and his right hand Rochester loses the ability to read and write.³¹ Jane will read the world for him and write his story in her autobiography. (Note that Jane calls these "services.") Thus Jane becomes someone to complete Rochester's defects, someone added to Rochester: a supplement. Their relation is like that of text and supplement; Rochester, like the text without supplement, cannot even possess the illusion of completeness without Jane, as Jane and her story cannot exist without Rochester. Jane's happiness is achieved (if achieved at all) not in equality, but rather in this state of supplementarity, in the lack of totality, in the demystification of completeness.³²

Jane is presented in her text as a reader; she has to read nature and culture for Rochester, and she has to read her own story. She tries to give meaning to her own story as a development story by supplying the figure of happiness with referents like marriage and equality, but she is blind to her own text which challenges the referential determinacy of 'happiness' and 'equality.' It is not my intention to offer another reading which claims that the figure 'happiness' can find its referent in supplementarity; I would rather state that it is supplementarity which, in Jane and Rochester's case, narrates the elusiveness of happiness,

³¹ Helene Moglen calls the reader's attention to an interesting ambiguity, namely that earlier in the text (p. 426) we are told that Rochester loses his left hand, and later Jane contradicts herself by saying that it was his right hand that was destroyed (Moglen, p. 141). In this way Jane herself can foster more possible interpretations than she could if she accounted for a lost left hand. Also, it becomes possible for her and for critics to interpret it as Rochester's loss of power, which contributes to her equality with him.

³² Also, there is enough sadness behind Jane's happiness to make the very notion of happiness ambiguous. There are many deaths contributing to this final stage (Bertha Mason, John Eyre, Aunt Reed, John Reed), and it is Rochester's miserable state which, although makes Jane sad, still results in her happiness, since she can interpret the end of her story as the attainment of equality.

deconstructs the binary opposition of equality and inequality, and thus Jane and Rochester's marriage in the end becomes the allegory of the unreadability of the concepts.

A happy ending is not a factor accepted as a determining genre classificatory feature of the *Bildungsroman* by all the texts on the *Bildungsroman* I read in my paper, but it is necessary in novels of successful *Bildung*. For those who read *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman*, happiness achieved in equality is the *telos* of Jane's *Bildung*, an ending deserved by Jane. If happiness, both in itself and as a *telos* achieved as the result of *Bildung*, can be questioned, the possibility of a successful *Bildung* will also become rather uncertain, which may lead one to the suspicion that even those novels which are considered to be representations of the successful *Bildung* speak about their own disbelief in such a notion.

Despite Jane's optimism and belief in a development pattern, the text, unnoticed by Jane, expresses a disbelief in all these, and speaks against Jane's will. One such point among many is the elusiveness of the image of the happy family Jane presents at the end of the novel. Nina Schwartz points out how Jane's text shows the innate contradictions in the idealised completeness and harmony of the Victorian family.³³ Jane cannot notice, however, how her own family reproduces the same image, containing in itself the possibility of failure. Jane's treatment of Adèle repeats Jane's position in the Reed family (that of being different, being an outcast), and also the fate of Helen Burns, who was sent to the Lowood institution because of her father's second marriage. Adèle is also sent to school, where she starts to resemble the image of Jane as a child: "She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy" (p. 445). Thus Jane's family also engenders the different, the supplement, carrying in itself the threat to narrate the incompleteness of the "complete" to which it is super-added.

The effect of happiness at the end of the story is also diminished by Jane's concluding the narration with St. John Rivers's last words. Jane believes in her development story, as St. John believed in his own. The two stories, both of them read by its narrator optimistically, can be read together. Here is St. John's story narrated and interpreted by himself:

[religion] has cultivated my original qualities thus: From the minute germ, natural affection, she has developed the overshadowing tree, philanthropy. From the wild stringy root of human uprightness she has

³³ Nina Schwartz. "No Place Like Home: The Logic of the Supplement in *Jane Eyre*." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, pp. 549-64.

reared a due sense of the divine justice. Of the ambition to win power and renown for my wretched self she has formed the ambition to spread my Master's Kingdom, to achieve victories for the standard of the Cross. So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account; *pruning and training nature*. But she could not eradicate nature; nor will it be eradicated "till this mortal shall put on immortality."

(p. 371, my italics)

St. John interprets his life as a successful story of religious formation. Successful in that nature has been pruned and trained, general human values like philanthropy or divine justice have been developed, the natural, not perfect in itself, has been perfected "to the best account." Knowing the end of St. John's story, we may note that behind the optimism and the belief in a perfect development there lies the shadow that such a perfection can be completed only by the individual's death, where nature (the original state to be perfected) will indeed be eradicated. Ending the novel with St. John's last words makes one read Jane's and St. John's "development" together, and makes one read St. John's "story of development" as an allegory of Jane's story. This allegory narrates the contradictions in Jane's optimistic reading of her own text, and narrates the fact that Jane's interpretation, like St. John's reading, is a misreading blind to the impossibility of perfect happiness and concord.

If even Jane's final reading is a misreading, this questions the assumption that Jane as a reader (or narrator) of her story successfully develops, which in turn challenges Mahoney's and Morgenstern's notion of *Bildung* as the development of the reader.

2 Reader and narrator

Starting out from the assumption that Jane as the author is at the same time the first reader of her story, first I shall examine *Bildung* as the development of the reader. I will compare the final stage, (mis)read by Jane as a state of happiness based on equality, to earlier interpretations of the same notions in Jane's reading. The main turning points in the plot can be interpreted as moments of insight for Jane, moments when she as a character reconsiders the events happened thus far, re-interprets figures she uses, and also her own position as a reader of her story. Such a turning point is the aborted marriage after which Jane will re-read her whole love story with

Rochester, even though we must note that the reconsideration of the notion of equality between Jane and Rochester starts after their betrothal, when Rochester begins to treat Jane as one of his mistresses. Interestingly, however, Jane's way of reading and re-reading her love story is similar to *Jane Eyre's* way of reading and re-reading the narratives on the *Bildungsroman*.

Before the turning point, for a long time Jane interprets her relationship with Rochester as one of equality: "[...] though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (p. 174); "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, not even mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!" (p. 251). As Gilbert points out, Jane's love is strongly connected to a feeling of equality.³⁴ Her concept of love implies a possible spiritual communication in spite of the social difference between herself and Rochester, and a mental assimilation, the abolishment of difference between self and other. The self is defined in the other, and the other in the self. This identification with the other includes the whole human being (brain, heart, blood, nerves), all those factors which are to be developed in the *Bildungsroman*.

With Jane's disillusionment, however, the whole construction of images, that is, love's metonymic identification with equality, equality's interpretation as the assimilation of the self with the beloved (self and the other, inside and outside), turns out to be inapplicable to the Jane–Rochester relationship. It also becomes evident for Jane that she misinterpreted the figure of Rochester and treated him as an idol, a substitute for God ("I could not, in those days see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol" [p. 272]). After the disillusionment, a possible moment of insight, all the figures the love story was based on become subverted, and Jane re-reads her story from a different perspective:

I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's – which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle: sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms – it could not desire warmth from his breast [...] Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I thought him [...] Real affection, it seemed, he could not have for me, it had only been fitful passion; that was balked; he would want me no more. I should fear even to cross his path now: my view must be hateful to him. Oh, how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct!

(p. 294)

³⁴ Gilbert, p. 486.

Realising the unreadability of her own narrative of love in that the system of figures it had been based upon was not adequate in the case of her romance, Jane, in her re-reading, first attempts to make the story readable. She tries to read what she could not read before, the enigmas of the story ("I don't understand enigmas. I never could guess a riddle in my life" [p. 196]). Jane now tries to read the dreams she had before her wedding, or rather, lets the dream write her own re-reading of the love story. Committing the same mistake as before, she again reads her love figuratively through substituting the former (supposed) referent (equality, assimilation) with another one, the image of the suffering child she had in her dreams. Jane's dreams and her state of mind after the disillusionment interpret each other in an allegorical chain of figures. Jane's love is the concept to be given meaning and to be expressed figuratively. Jane's love, which was also Rochester's love when self and other were thought to be identifiable by Jane, is compared to a suffering child in a simile. For its sickness the child cannot even attempt to reach Rochester, its father. This simile points back to Jane's dreams where Jane, attempting to overtake Rochester on a long road in vain, has to carry a little child. While in the dream it is Jane who reaches out for Rochester, in the simile it is the little child who cannot reach his arms. The dream re-reads the simile, so it becomes possible to identify in a synecdoche Jane with the child as her love, that is the whole with the part. Now Jane can treat this system of tropes as an allegory of her present state of mind. In this allegory Jane (as the child as love) dares not attempt to reach Rochester (father of the child as love) because of the disillusionment, the realisation of separateness, the impossibility of interpreting her love as an assimilation of self and other, or equality.

Her mistake is not only to risk reading her story again figuratively and thus risk making the same mistake, exactly when she realises her blindness and denounces the mistake, but also to attempt to find a signified for love in the figure of the child in her dream. The dream, however, cannot give meaning to Jane's interpretation of love after the disappointment. The dream points to the unconscious, the unnarratable and unreadable, of which it is not a sign (since the dream hides rather than signifies), but a supplement narrating the inability of the unconscious to function as a referent. Thus Jane's search for the meaning of her love cannot come to an end in this direction. She finds herself in a hermeneutic circle, in which she tries to understand her new notion of love from her dream, but the dream is understandable only from the new notion of love.

When Jane re-reads the love story, she has to realise that the equality on which she based her love never existed in their relationship. One proof of the inequality is Rochester's secret: the story of Bertha Mason.³⁵ Jane knows that Rochester's language is enigmatic, it hides something she cannot know but wishes to know ("[...] and I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore [the eyes'] secrets and analyze their nature" (p. 187); "Your language is enigmatic, sir" [p. 139]). Nevertheless, she forgives him after his confession of the secret. The secret itself, however, remains half-told, which Jane cannot recognise for her trust in language; consequently, she will misread Rochester in the future too. When telling the story of Bertha, Rochester notes: "Jane, I will not trouble you with abominable details; some strong words shall express what I have to say" (p. 303). His language hides as well as reveals, and important details may remain untold that may support Bertha's right, or reveal the causes of Bertha's behaviour.

Another reason for the inequality that Jane has to realise is that it was always Rochester who directed the plot of the Jane-Rochester story which turns out to have been something like his experiment: "Impatiently I waited for the evening, when I might summon you to my presence. An unusual – to me – a perfectly new character, I suspected, was yours: I desired to search it deeper and know it better [...] Yet, for a long time, I treated you distantly, and sought your company rarely" (pp. 310–11). Rochester wants to fit Jane into his story, to use her to erase his past.³⁶ He believes that he can transform Jane into a means that would turn his story of corruption into a story of development, but what he does, instead, is to treat her as an object of his desire, like his other mistresses. Jane realises the impossibility of equality and changes the idea of bodily, mental, and spiritual assimilation into the possibility of an exclusively spiritual assimilation after death, ironically referring back to her own earlier reading of their relationship. "Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there" (p. 313).

After leaving Thornfield, Jane tries to substitute love with religious longing (for a long time felt for another substitute for God the Father, St. John) and veneration:

I felt veneration for St. John – veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned [...] I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by

³⁵ Gilbert, p. 488.

³⁶ Moglen, p. 123.

another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment.

(p. 413)

Denouncing St. John's substitution for God by questioning the idea that it is God's will that she should marry St. John, Jane returns in the end to her first, once rejected interpretation of love based on happiness in equality and spiritual, mental, and bodily assimilation, thus committing once more the same mistake ("the pulsation of *the* heart that beats in our separate bosoms" [p. 446]; "We talk, I believe, all day long" [p. 446]; "In spirit, I believe, we must have met" [p. 442]; emphasis added).

Thus we cannot say that Jane as the reader of her own story develops, since even if she is occasionally able to read her story critically she makes the same mistakes from time to time. One reason for Jane's committing the same reading error in the course of the novel can possibly be her trust in language, in Franco Moretti's interpretation of the *Bildungsroman*, an important requirement for the genre.³⁷ It is Jane's trust in language, her belief that language is capable of expressing the truth, which, ironically, hinders her development as a reader and narrator, and contributes to the impossibility of interpreting the term *Bildung* as the successful development of the narrator.

According to Moretti's theory, the *Bildungsroman* "strives to prove [...] that everyone – bastard child, woman, drunk, fugitive, pauper – has the right to tell her/his side of the story, to be listened to and receive justice."³⁸ In order to be listened to, this statement implies, one has to be able to tell one's story. Jane, both as a character and as a narrator, expresses this objective; in her quarrel with Mrs. Reed the child Jane promises that "I will tell anybody who asks me questions, *this exact tale*" (p. 39, emphasis added). Jane as narrator, with a belief in language and her narrating abilities, announces that "I am merely telling the truth" (p. 110).

The problem with this assumption lies not only in the inescapably rhetorical nature of language, but also in the impossibility of the existence of the true story to be told. Freeman reads Jane's story as the successful development of Jane as a narrator. During the process of Jane's education as a narrator, Freeman claims, she hears and re-tells her story again and again. Jane's story and Jane

³⁷ Moretti, p. 49.

³⁸ Moretti, p. 213.

herself exist in interpretations given by other characters. Jane tells different stories about herself to Mrs. Reed, Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Rivers, and Rochester, which stories are parts of the whole story narrated in the end. "All these narratives are noticeably limited in scope and intention, only partial versions of the complex narrative we ourselves are taking in as we listen to them."³⁹ In Freeman's interpretation, Jane in the end succeeds in narrating her truth by narrating her final text.

In my view, however, even this final version (Jane's autobiography) should not be taken for the reported truth; it is to be considered as a *sjuzet* meeting the requirements of narrative coherence. Franco Moretti, while aware of the elusiveness inherent in the binary opposition between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, still emphasises their importance in the English *Bildungsroman*. Truth and justice, in Moretti's interpretation, can be grasped best in *fabula*, since, as the English juridical commonplace puts it, 'Justice is as simple as truth.' *Fabula*, according to the formalist theory, is "logical, complete, chronologically consequential, objective – in a word, simple," as opposed to *sjuzet*. But *sjuzet*, which is connected to the villain in his theory anyway, is not merely a literary device, but functions as a counter-*fabula* the aim of which is to silence the original truth forever.⁴⁰ *Fabula*, however, as Jonathan Culler argues, is not the reality reported by discourse, not a true sequence of events out of which various *sjuzets* can be formed, but rather the product of *sjuzet* which can exist only in discourse.⁴¹ Thus one can argue that the story Jane Eyre narrates in the end is not her true *fabula* as it is. The moment when the *fabula* can be (re)constructed from the *sjuzet* (that is the moment when the mystery is supposedly solved) is not the revelation of truth, but only a device used for the narrator's justification of her motives and deeds. What Jane tells in the end is not an artistic arrangement of the elements of the true story but a narrative construction, a *sjuzet* from which one can construct a *fabula*, but this, as a secondary construction, can also be regarded as a *sjuzet*. This secondary *sjuzet* can be called history.

History, Wolfgang Iser claims, is the pattern that underlies the biographical form of the novel. The ordering of the elements is teleological; they

³⁹ Freeman, p. 685.

⁴⁰ Moretti, p. 210.

⁴¹ Culler, Jonathan. "Fabula and Sjuzet in the Analysis of Narrative: Some American Discussions." Eds. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. *Narratology: An Introduction*. London and New York: Longman, 1996, p. 95.

are bound together by the meaning of the end and presented in causal order.⁴² While a historical explanation is constructed, however, details that challenge this unity are suppressed. Coherent writing always implies not-saying besides saying.⁴³ One example from *Jane Eyre* is when, at the beginning of Chapter 10, the narrator mentions that she will leave eight of her Lowood years unaccounted for, since they will not contribute to the understanding of the end. Another example is the confession of Rochester mentioned earlier, when he hides facts about his relationship with Bertha.

The truth and the complete story thus cannot evidently be narrated properly, even if Jane attempts this and believes it possible. It is the plot and the requirements of a “coherent” narrative that dominate and guide Jane’s telling and reading of her story. In the sections that follow, many other elements of plot in *Jane Eyre* shall be re-read from this perspective; that is, as events that try to meet the requirements of narrative coherence and the plot structure of the *Bildungsroman*. I will start to read plot in *Jane Eyre* while examining other aspects of the *Bildungsroman*, namely the process of social integration as a process due to the individual’s free will, and the aspect of individual formation as a condition of the attainment of the coherent self.

3 Social integration: “as a free individual, not as a fearful subject”

Plot in *Jane Eyre* is interpreted by critics who read the novel as a *Bildungsroman* as an “allegorical journey of development,”⁴⁴ a pilgrimage the goal of which is maturity, independence, and equality with Rochester,⁴⁵ and, according to the norms of the *Bildungsroman*, social integration. The plot of Jane’s assumed development starts at Gateshead with Jane’s childhood. Even as a child, Jane is excluded from the society of the family by Mrs. Reed:

Me she had dispensed from joining the group, saying, ‘She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to *acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition*, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter,

⁴² Wolfgang Iser. *Sterne: Tristram Shandy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 2–3.

⁴³ Schwartz, pp. 550–1.

⁴⁴ Moglen, p. 117.

⁴⁵ Gilbert, p. 491.

franker, *more natural*, as it were – she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.’

(p. 9, emphases added)

As the price of the possibility of integration into a community, Mrs. Reed requires Jane to *acquire* a childlike behaviour, to learn to be natural, thus questioning the primacy of childhood as a natural stage of life. As Nina Schwartz points out, Mrs. Reed’s theory of childhood education resembles that of Rousseau, who defines human nature as essentially good, yet claims that education is necessary to perfect the (supposedly already perfect) child.⁴⁶ Mrs. Reed’s requirement is that in order to become social Jane should learn to be natural. Thus, an outside addition (learning, education) is needed for the original to become itself and be capable of socialisation. This idea of education and the natural, however, reads the contradictory medieval, non-canonised meaning of *Bildung* that implies both the purgation of the soul and its formation, which meaning may hide an innate disbelief in the primacy of the natural as clean and good, and thus imply the supplementary state of nature. Interestingly, it seems that this *Bildungsroman* reads against the canonised meaning of *Bildung*. Like Derrida, it reads Rousseau and reads the contradictions innate in ‘education’ as one possible connotation of *Bildung*. The idea of nature as a supplement, present at many points in *Jane Eyre*, may shed a different light on the *Bildungsroman*’s concept of socialisation happening in concord with the individual’s free will.

One such point can be found at the very beginning of the novel. “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day,” is how Jane starts her autobiography (p. 9). Jane is excluded from nature because of its hostility, because of the cold winter wind and penetrating rain which makes outdoor exercise impossible. Paradoxically, however, Jane seems to be contented with this situation: “I was glad of it; I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed” (p. 9). The reason for her gladness is the possibility of avoiding coming home to the family in which Jane has to feel herself inferior and despised.⁴⁷ Excluded both from nature and from society, the only option for her

⁴⁶ Schwartz, p. 555.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, p. 554.

remains reading Bewick's *History of British Birds*. This book can be read as the possibility of getting access to nature only through culture, as a mediator between the two which constructs nature through the letter, establishes nature as already written. Jane also notes the significance of the letter in understanding, producing, and giving meaning to nature:

I returned to my book Bewick's *History of British Birds* the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank [...] The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

(p. 10)

This very book, as a representative, not just of culture as Boumelha⁴⁸ points out but also of nature as a supplement to culture, is the object John Reed flings at Jane. It has the power to hurt as well as to educate, thus connecting the notions of nature, culture, education and suffering.

Other manifestations of nature as a supplement can be traced in the novel at points where nature can be present only through *prosopopoeia* or pathetic fallacy. Nature is given face, presented as a humanised entity, having a function in the narrator's interpretation of her own story, and also as a background reflecting the inner state of the protagonist's soul. It is a heavy storm that appropriately follows Mr. Rochester's false marriage proposal to Jane (pp. 254–5), and the beautiful weather next day suits Jane's happiness: "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" (p. 256). Jane, however, cannot read the fallacy of *prosopopoeia*, the optimistic device she uses when interpreting the world. One of the causes of the many deaths at Lowood is beautiful but hostile nature. "That forest dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fogbred pestilence; which quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into a hospital" (p. 78). Failing to learn from the hostility of nature, and committing the same mistake over and over again, Jane

⁴⁸ Penny Boumelha. "Jane Eyre." *Charlotte Brontë*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p. 65.

attempts to read Nature as her helper in the scene of her wandering in the moors after leaving Thornfield. When Jane leaves Rochester, remaining alone and without money, thus incapable of finding her place in human society, she feels that "I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose" (p. 319). Excluded from humankind, Jane tries to find shelter in an already humanised Nature, to which she gives a human face, the face of the mother.

Nature *seemed* to me benign and good; *I thought she loved me*, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at last, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price.

(p. 320, my italics)

Margaret Homans refers to the tone of doubt and disillusionment in this passage. Nature only seems benign, Jane desires to be loved by the "universal mother," desires to be her child, but she is just her non-paying guest.⁴⁹ Jane has to be disillusioned with the image of humanised nature, and recognise the fallacy of *prosopopoeia* by awakening to her bodily needs, unsatisfied and unsatisfiable outside society. Jane, as a human being, cannot find her place in nature, since nature proves that to become part of it is to die.⁵⁰ "I wished I could live in it and on it. I would fain at the moment have become bee or lizard, that I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here. But I was a human being, and had a human being's wants: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them" (p. 321).

After suffering from the false interpretation of nature which almost caused her death, Jane is forced to find her way back to human society if she wants to remain alive. If nature can be grasped only through interpretation, and if man cannot find his place in it, then there is no other option for the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* but to find his or her way in society; integration, thus, is not an optional but a necessary factor. The possibility of one's social integration as a free individual, the option of one's giving up freedom for the sake of a safer

⁴⁹ Margaret Homans. "Dreaming of Children: Literalization in *Jane Eyre*." *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 95.

⁵⁰ Homans, p. 95.

social state that the theories of the *Bildungsroman* promise seem to be too idealistic. What remains for the hero and the narrator is the belief that a successful social and individual formation is possible. In other words, what remains is to strive to write one's story as a successful *Bildungsroman*.

4 Self: insistence on unity as resistance to development

Besides social integration, however, the formation of the self as a coherent, integral entity (an important aspect of *Bildung*) is a crucial criterion in a novel considered to be a *Bildungsroman*. There are two basic points to be examined in this interpretation of *Bildung*. First, whether the self is really as integral in the novel as it should be to conform to the criteria of the ideal *Bildung*, and second, whether the self develops or not.

Helene Moglen calls our attention to the fact that Jane's self is divided at every separation, but the last act of separation (separation from St. John Rivers) contributes to the attainment of the integral self, and this integrity will be achieved in the union of Jane and Rochester.⁵¹ Sandra M. Gilbert also admits that there is a "frightening series of separations" within the self symbolised in Jane's dream by the little child interpreted by the critic as Jane's orphaned alter-ego she has to carry with herself. According to Gilbert, it is the "symbolic" death of Bertha that frees Jane from the tormenting furies and makes possible wholeness within the self, which comes together with a marriage of equality.⁵² To the question of coherence or incoherence, however, Jane's text may also offer an answer. It is often noted by critics that every moment of crisis or important decision is reflected in Jane as a conversation of opposing forces within her psyche, as a debate between sense and sensibility, Super-Ego and Id.⁵³ This, however, in itself contradicts the ideal of *Bildung*, which, according to Moretti, focuses on the Ego, and imagines the self as it gets impulses from various forces from the outside, from society to which impulses the self reacts. Here the outside influences cause a debate between the parts of the self.

⁵¹ Moglen, p. 114.

⁵² Gilbert, pp. 491-3.

⁵³ For the interpretation of the opposing parts within Jane's self see Doreen Roberts. "Jane Eyre and the Warped System of Things." *Jane Eyre* (New Casebooks). Ed. Heather Glen. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997, pp. 36-7.

From the many moments of crisis where such a conversation takes place, I will analyse one, Jane's decision to leave Rochester: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. [...] I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now" (p. 314). In order to care for the self, to be able to preserve the self, Jane has to make a division within the self in a reflexive act also signified by the reflexive pronoun, to create an 'I' which will take care of 'myself'.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, the division within the self is necessary if Jane wants to preserve the self; thus the strict binary opposition of coherence and incoherence is decomposed. Many other characters of the novel (like Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, St. John Rivers) are read by critics as forces which threaten Jane's self, which try to deprive the self from features important in Jane. Running away from Rochester is often interpreted as Jane's attempt to preserve the unity of her self which Rochester wanted to deprive of its aspect of masculinity.⁵⁵

Interestingly, however, in the passage cited above there are more than two 'I's' presented. There is an 'I' which cares for the self, respects the self and holds to the principles, and there is the 'I' of the *now* which is mad, friendless, solitary and needs care. As opposed to the 'I' of the *now* a past 'I' is also presented as an ideal, which needed no care, thus no division, since it was sane. Jane presupposes an ideal state of the self when the part which received the principles was the same as the part which was able to follow the principles. It is very difficult to tell from the text which is the ideal state of sanity Jane refers to in this passage. One can only think of the Lowood period, frequently regarded as a scene of Jane's exposure to self-discipline, but her Lowood education in outside values was rather vague, and questionable even for herself, which fact I will discuss in the next section of this paper. It seems, rather, that this ideal state of balance and unity within the self is a supplement emerging as Jane's desire from the division innate in Jane's self.

There are many examples which present a discourse between various parts of Jane's divided psyche, such as Jane's decision to find a place as a governess, the struggle between her calm self and her wild dreams while she teaches at Morton, or her hesitation whether to marry St. John or not. The question, however, is the achievement of a unity of the self in the end as a *telos* of *Bildung*, and the

⁵⁴ In *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man calls our attention to the differentiation between the nominative and the reflexive 'I,' created in the reflexive act (p. 165).

⁵⁵ Moglen, p. 128.

development of the self in the course of the novel. Let me start out from the *telos*. Although at the end of the novel there is no conflict presented that would divide the self by fostering communication between its parts, the novel, as an autobiography, should conclude with the act of narration in which the roles of the narrator and the narrated self are created. This, as it is claimed in the first part of this essay, automatically causes a division within the “coherent” self the narrator attempts to narrate, since the narrator has to be alienated from the narrated self in order to be able to tell its story.

It is often noted by critics, however, that Jane as a narrator strives to reduce the distance between her narrating and narrated selves by the lack of ironic distancing, which is otherwise a frequent device used in autobiographical novels.⁵⁶ Milech and Winkelman interpret Jane the narrator’s attempt to identify herself with the narrated ‘I’ as one manifestation of the ideal symbiotic union Jane seeks all through the novel. This desire for union presents itself in Jane’s creating her self-images from perceptions of the external world. In the process of constructing the image of the self, Jane turns to different objects (landscape, characters, paintings, dreams, mode of narration). The self defines itself by overtly identifying with “good” characters (like Miss Temple, the Rivers sisters) and objects, but the “bad” characters (like Mrs. Reed, the Reed children, Mr. Brocklehurst) are set in opposition with the heroine, so her identification with them remains repressed.⁵⁷ The desire for the ideal union is present in the novel in three basic forms: “Romantic transcendence (being one with nature), religious submission (being one with God), and romantic love (being one with a sexualized other).”⁵⁸

Jane’s earliest images of her self that we encounter in the novel are those of the scapegoat and the elf. She defines herself against the Reed family as an outcast, “a heterogeneous thing,” the “scapegoat of the nursery” (p. 17). As Nina Schwartz puts it, she is like Adèle in Jane and Rochester’s marriage; her function is that of the supplement in opposition with which the family can define itself as perfect, complete, and happy.⁵⁹ Jane’s identification with the image of the elf, however, can possibly be a result of Bessie’s stories, many of them fairy-tales,

⁵⁶ See Susan Sniader Lanser. “*Jane Eyre’s* Legacy: The Powers and Dangers of Singularity.” *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 182; Milech-Winkelman, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Milech-Winkelman, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Milech-Winkelman, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, p. 556.

which have a crucial role in Jane's self-definition. Bessie's stories function as alternative narratives for Jane, which she can use as possible models to accept or reject. Jane's mirror episode in the red room well exemplifies the importance of Bessie's narratives in Jane's "Ego formation:"

[...] the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers.

(p. 16)

This is an act both of alienation and self-identification. In the mirror Jane finds a tale instead of herself, an alien figure, the elf from Bessie's fairy-tales. After differentiating herself from the "bad" Reeds, the remaining option for Jane is to identify herself with the fairy. Thus, as Rowe also notes, it is not the self that Jane sees in the mirror, but the other, the fairy-tale hero, which functions as a possible figure for Jane to identify with.⁶⁰ Rochester, from their first meeting, very strongly relies on this image when he interprets Jane. He even re-writes their romance in fairy-tale patterns for Adèle, and in this story he will live with the fairy-Jane on the moon (pp. 265–6). Karen E. Rowe points out that when Jane leaves Rochester she denounces the self-image of the fairy-tale hero and her story subverts the fairy-tale pattern in order for the heroine to gain independence and human equality.⁶¹ After renouncing this self-image, however, Jane creates other self-images by using the same method of identification. Although it turns out that many of these images of herself are false, she continues creating new ones in the same way, substituting them for the old ones. Such images are that of the student in Lowood; the governess, "disconnected, poor, and plain;" her desired identification with Rochester as her equal both in Thornfield and Ferndean; and Jane Elliot, the village schoolteacher. All the objects and roles the self finds for itself to identify with will have to be given up for the sake of the final desired "equality" and "unity" with Rochester. In order to gain the desired happiness, Jane has to denounce her governess self, and make herself useful in only one

⁶⁰ Rowe, p. 73.

⁶¹ Rowe, p. 70.

direction. This end goes against the assumed goal of the *Bildung*, which is a developed state of all human potentials.⁶²

Milech and Winkelman emphasise that the fantasy of the symbiotic union, the desire for completeness, wholeness, the resistance to accepting the difference between the self and the other is a determining characteristic of an early stage of subject formation, the pre-oedipal stage.⁶³ An important characteristic process of this phase of life is projective identification, in which the nascent self-conceptions are realised as wholly good and wholly bad, and projected onto objects of the external world. The individual identifies with objects representing the good part of the psyche, while objects regarded as "bad" are rejected.⁶⁴ In Milech and Winkelman's interpretation, in the process of Ego formation from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal stage, the infant has to develop towards the acceptance of separateness and sexual difference, but it must also preserve the nascent self despite the losses of separation and differentiation. Thus the earliest tasks of the emerging self are development and defence.⁶⁵

Jane Eyre refuses to accept difference and separateness, and desires to preserve the ideal union. Thus, what happens in Jane's case is the rejection of

⁶² Personality in the modern age was believed to be divided between different realms of life in competition with each other, such as the intimate, the private, the professional sphere, etc. "Modern man is divided by a professional life and a family life which are often in competition with each other... The modern way of life is the result of the divorce between elements which had formerly been united..." (Philippe Ariés quoted by Moretti, p. 39). The culture of *Bildung*, however, is strongly connected to the belief in the cultivation of all spheres at the same time. Georg Simmel: "We are not yet cultivated by having developed this or that individual bit of knowledge or skill; we become cultivated only when all of them serve a psychic unity which depends on but does not coincide with them" (quoted by Moretti, p. 40).

⁶³ Milech-Winkelman, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Projective identification is also a characteristic process of what Jacques Lacan calls the "mirror stage." According to Lacan, the formation of the Ego points from the mirror stage (determined by the Imaginary register, a self-deceit in which the Ego defines itself in others) to the symbolic, oedipal stage, in which the unconscious is built up by symbols, and which phase is also influenced by the Imaginary (see Jacques Lacan. "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I." *Écrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1977, pp. 1-7; Milech-Winkelman, p. 22, n. viii). Jane's identification with objects and characters is similar to the infant's self-identification through the Imaginary in Lacan. Jane's attempts to define herself through the Imaginary will result in her misreading and polarising other characters, such as reading Rochester's figure in fairy-tale terms, or interpreting St. John's character according to stories she read ("I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes" [p. 388]) disregarding the fact that he chooses to become a missionary out of vanity and exhibitionism (see p. 358).

⁶⁵ Milech-Winkelman, p. 7.

development, of entering into and accepting the oedipal phase. By the very insistence on the achievement of a coherent personality by ending her story with presenting an idealised unity with Rochester and an attempted unity of the narrating and narrated selves, Jane also narrates allegorically her Ego's desire to resist development and remain in the pre-oedipal stage. It seems, paradoxically, that the development and the unity of the self, both important criteria of the *Bildungsroman*, cannot be present at the same time. Thus, instead of representing the heroine's *Bildung*, *Jane Eyre* narrates the intrinsic contradictions in the notion of *Bildung* as an overall development of the "Ego" and the attainment of the coherent self.

5 Plot: insistence on development

It must have taken much effort and optimism on Jane Eyre's part to create a plot which critics now interpret as something that satisfies the notion of the "typical *Bildung* plot" by using elements of plot pointing to decline and corruption rather than to development. Every major turning point in the plot (maybe except for Jane's leaving Gateshead as a child) is a step to undermine the heroine's development, or a step which, while pushing the protagonist forward and trying to contribute to formation, draws her backward at the same time. Nevertheless, critics usually interpret phases of Jane's life as "phases of development."⁶⁶

It is very common to read the Lowood scene as a phase where Jane learns patience, fidelity, serenity, and self-control from Helen Burns and Miss Temple.⁶⁷ Even Jane admits (but at the same time also questions) Miss Temple's influence upon her: "I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I *believed* I was content; to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I *appeared* a disciplined and subdued character" (p. 86, emphases added). The vagueness of her discourse is explained later: when Miss Temple leaves, Jane undergoes a transforming process; "My mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple – or rather, that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity – and that now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions" (p. 86). Thus, she enters into the Thornfield scene almost as passionate as she was before her education at Lowood. So the Lowood scene, together with depicting Jane's attempts to fuse into her character traits from the

⁶⁶ Cf. Moglen, pp. 105–45.

⁶⁷ Moglen, p. 117.

outside, also proves Jane's resistance to outside values, the failure to merge the external and the internal properly.

The major motive for leaving Lowood is Jane's sense of a scarcity of experience in a community closed out of real life, a community which Jane *succeeded* to be integrated into, nonetheless. She announces her wish to "seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (p. 86), to see the "real world." Leaving the community in which she was able to make herself accepted, and in which she felt "not unhappy" (p. 85), Jane will encounter experience only in solitary places (Thornfield, Marsh End, Ferndean). The biggest community she lives in is a village, Morton. Therefore, she sees rather little of the world she desired to know so much. Even the final scene of the novel when Jane claims to have attained happiness takes place outside society, thus questioning the idea of any kind of social integration.

The next turning point after leaving Lowood is Jane's flight from Thornfield, which even Franco Moretti interprets as a decision not really satisfying the requirements of the *Bildungsroman*. "Any *Bildungsroman* worthy of the name would have had Jane remain among the needles of Thornfield. But this would have meant facing the imperfect, debatable, and perhaps incorrect nature of each fundamental ethical choice. Better to begin all over again..."⁶⁸ And beginning all over again is in fact what Jane does after every turning point in her story, very well figured by choosing a new name in the Marsh End scene. Starting always anew, however, is a factor that undermines the existence of a continuous development.

It is at Marsh End where Jane's fortune changes, and up to this point her story seems a story of ordeal, of suffering and decay rather than development. What makes it even for Jane seem like a story of development is not really the new turn of events but, instead, Jane the narrator's efforts to read the story optimistically. One example of this is Jane's experience as a teacher at Morton school. At first she feels the job degrading, but her only option to experience development is to force herself to accept it, and seek some kind of happiness in her pupils.

I felt desolate to a degree. I felt – yes, idiot that I am – I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence [...] I know [these feelings] to be wrong – that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them. [...] In a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress and a change for the better in my scholars may substitute gratification for disgust.

(p. 355)

⁶⁸ Moretti, p. 188.

But for the efforts Jane takes to suppress her feeling of degradation and changing it step by step into a feeling of happiness, Jane's story could easily have become a novel about her sinking on the social ladder, and a story of failed development and integration. The final happiness at the end of the novel is, as we have already seen, just as ambiguous and dependent on Jane's self-conviction as her happiness at Morton school. Now, by using (and at the same time questioning) the teleological reading method of the theories of the *Bildungsroman*, I intend to explore the factors that lead to what Jane calls in the end happiness.

One factor is Jane's yielding to Rochester's voice and going back to her lover. Critics interpret this moment as the result of the supernatural machinery foreshadowing the final reward,⁶⁹ but others cautiously avoid dealing with the moral ambiguities of Jane's decision, which would contradict the frequent interpretation that Jane at the end of the Marsh End scene is morally and spiritually on a higher level of her development than she was in the Thornfield scene. The moral ambiguity underlying Jane's decision is the risk of adultery. When Jane hears Rochester's voice and starts searching for him, she does not know what has happened to Rochester and Bertha during her absence. Though conscience dictates against the morally false step and suggests her to seek information about him in the inn, she goes back to Thornfield first, hoping that Rochester is there, thus denouncing her earlier decision of leaving Thornfield and refusing to become Rochester's mistress. In spite of the supposed development that should have taken place between the two points in time, now it seems that Jane does not care about the moral evaluation of herself any longer: "Could I but see him! Surely, in that case, I should not be so mad as to run to him? I cannot tell - I am not certain. And if I did - what then? God bless him! What then! Who would be hurt by my once more tasting the life his glance can give me?" (p. 419) At an earlier stage of her supposed development, however, Jane's answer to the same question was different, and there, indeed, *was* an answer: "Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do? Still indomitable was the reply: 'I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man'" (p. 314). Thus the earlier grammatical question is turned into a rhetorical one. It is only fate or a supernatural power (which can well be the coherence of plot) and not her developed state of mind that prevents Jane from becoming an adulteress. Only when she cannot find Rochester in

⁶⁹ Hardy, p. 63.

Thornfield is she informed that Rochester lost his mad wife and lives alone, blind and mutilated, in Ferndean.

The moment when Jane hears Rochester's voice, however, can be interpreted differently from being merely a result of the work of divine Providence. Besides Providence or fate there are other superhuman powers brought into the game of narration, such as narrative coherence, or yielding to the requirements of plot. Thus, instead of saying that Jane went back to Rochester because she heard his voice, we could also say that Jane heard Rochester's voice in order to be able to go back to him, in order to have the reason for going back; putting it differently, to yield to the requirements of the plot of a development story. With the knowledge of the impossibility of happiness in a marriage with St. John Rivers and the death surely waiting for her in India, Jane's only hope to re-shape her story as a story of happiness and the only hope for her story to ever reach a happy ending is to *hear* Rochester's voice and to try to satisfy the love that remained unfulfilled. Another advantage of this solution is that Rochester's voice is a reply to Jane's prayer at the moment when Jane almost submits herself to St. John's will: "Show me, show me the path!" – I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement the reader shall judge" (p. 414). Thus Jane's prayer is answered, Jane, as many times before, is worthy of God's attention, so she can interpret her religious development as a story of success, too.

Another factor leading to Jane's supposed happiness in the end is her becoming financially independent. So money (not earned but gained suddenly, as if by chance) is a basic factor that underlies Jane's feeling of happiness. Disillusioning as it is, the hero of the *Bildungsroman* could never gain independence but for this sudden change in her social status. Now Jane can share her wealth with Diana and Mary, and she can free them as herself is now freed from the servitude of work, so she can become a benefactress, as Moglen points out;⁷⁰ but it is important to note, however, that it is only through this sudden inheritance that all this could happen, only by means of money transferred to the hero and not earned by the talents of the individual. The money was left to Jane by will of her uncle not in acknowledgement of her personal merits (since John Eyre did not even know Jane), but, as Nina Schwartz also emphasises, as a result of familial antipathy and the uncle's revenge of which Jane was only a means and

⁷⁰ Moglen, p. 135.

beneficent.⁷¹ And, taking the story (re)constructed from the plot into consideration, it indeed turns out that this was wealth Jane originally could have had, it was her right to regain it, so what happened was not a rise from a lower to a higher social state, but a return to the state before the disinheritance, to the “natural” Jane,⁷² or, rather, striving to achieve this state all through the story, following Mrs. Reed’s advice.

It is Jane’s sudden inheritance and her false step together with other factors and mistakes like the uncle’s death, Rochester’s mutilation, Bertha’s death, Jane’s signing the portrait, Jane’s writing to her uncle, etc. that lead to the final outcome.⁷³ Not even a sacrifice is necessary for “happiness” on Jane’s part. As she puts it, “Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content” (p. 440). Thus the *Bildungsroman*’s idea of happiness as a compensation for sacrifice is contradicted. It is, therefore, not the protagonist’s *Bildung* in any sense that brings about a deserved happiness in the end. Instead of development, formation, or education, it is rather the lack innate in these, that is, the part of Jane that remains unformed, together with good fortune and plot requirements, that settles everything. The *Bildungsroman*, instead of giving account of its belief in *Bildung* and promoting it as a necessary process the hero has to go through in order to be settled, questions both its importance and its necessity. As Friedrich puts it in *Wilhelm Meister*, “Basically the whole thing seems to say nothing less than that, in spite of all his mistakes and all the dumb things he does, man, guided by a higher power, still reaches a happy end.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Schwartz, p. 562.

⁷² Boumelha, p. 72.

⁷³ As Milech and Winkelmann also point out, it is not the heroine’s development, not her growing self-knowledge that generates plot, but her lack of self-knowledge, “lack of insight into her own desires and motives” (p. 14). Such lack of insight will bring about leaving her money in the coach and wandering penniless as a beggar, thus contributing to a further decay in her social career, and also to her becoming rich, since she accidentally signs her name on a portrait, letting St. John identify her. Not only her self-knowledge but also her habits of moral judgement remain rather undeveloped, especially in that she reads characters that can be counted as her rivals for affection, like Adèle, Blanche, the Reed sisters, as vain, stupid, and shallow, without acknowledging that she is jealous of them.

⁷⁴ Cited by Saine, p. 132.

6 “Portrait,” or (the impossibility of a) conclusion

The connotation of *Bildung* which *Jane Eyre* resists the least seems to be that of ‘purgation and formation.’ I do not assume that formation in any sense takes place in the novel, but this connotation, like *Jane Eyre*’s text, narrates the self-contradictory nature of the notion of education, and the resistance to the belief in a perfect, natural state. Thus *Jane Eyre*, which is often characterised as a novel representing successful *Bildung*, speaks about its own disbelief in such a notion, narrates the incompleteness, the imperfect nature of the *Bildungsroman* as an ideal form. We must not forget, however, that together with disbelief, both the critical texts and the novel(s) claim a desire for the “perfect,” optimistic formation story. In this way, the *Bildungsroman*, using a connotation of *Bildung* indicated by Buckley, becomes the portrait both of the desire for the “perfect” form and the texts’ knowledge of its impossibility, and also a portrait of the process in which the successful form is born as a supplement in the course of the deconstruction of the texts which attempt to create the successful form. Thus it is the *Bildungsroman*, born in this process of deconstruction, that will narrate the unreadability of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created in its theories.

Such a reading, however, cannot and must not stop at this point. The generation of supplementary texts is endless: readings generate novels, and novels generate interpretations. The roles of text and supplement are interchangeable. The difference between any novel considered to be a *Bildungsroman* and its readings as a *Bildungsroman* together with *différance* working within the texts generate further texts that function as narratives “about” the gap between the novels and its readings. Such texts (including Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*) narrating the impossibility of the desired *Bildungsroman* will bring into existence as supplements the theories of the *Bildungsroman* with the desire for the *Bildungsroman* as an optimistic form.

György Kalmár

She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed

Rider Haggard's Victorian romance
about *She*, the veil, and the subject of *mâladie*

"Come," said Ayesha, after we had gazed and gazed, I know not for how long, "and I will show you the stony flower of Loveliness and Wonder's very crown, if yet it stands to mock time with its beauty and fill the heart of man with longing for that which is behind the veil..."

(Rider Haggard)

This function of speech [...] is no less than the function of indicating the place of the subject in the search for the true.

(Jacques Lacan)

Truth is a woman!

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

In his "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient," Lacan writes about the insistence of a signifying chain in the unconscious that reproduces itself and which is that of dead desire.¹ In his analysis we can see the subject as the slave of language, caught and defined in this very insistence of the signifier.² My central concern here – the

¹ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits. A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York and London: Norton, 1977. (Probably this is why the word "instance" in the French title was translated as "insistence" in the version published in David Lodge's *Modern Criticism and Theory*, while simply given as "agency" in the above quoted English edition of Lacan's *Écrits*.)

² "[...] the subject, too, if he can appear to be the slave of language is all the more so of a discourse in the universal moment in which his place is already inscribed at birth..." (Jacques Lacan. *Écrits*, 148).

insistence of the figure of the veiled woman as a metaphor of truth – can be well described in Lacan’s terms. This metaphor, a piece of signifying chain, keeps coming back through the history of literature and philosophy,³ eternally repeating itself and with itself the whole structure of the subject, the other, the quest for truth, and the place of *jouissance*, a dynamic structure driven by the dead desire of the subject inscribed in this very metaphor. The text in which I am going to keep spying on the workings of this image, Rider Haggard’s *She*, is a fine example of this eternal return: an exemplary case on levels of both the signified and the signifier, as well as in its history of reading. As in all similar cases, the narrative may give us as much insight into theory as vice versa, offering a kind of surplus of theory (*plus-de-théorie*), which comes from the pleasure of the dialogue of different languages, and which is at one and the same time the productive driving force and the incurable sickness, the *jouissance* and the nuisance of interpretation.

What follows, therefore, is not a reading of a novel in a classical sense. Haggard’s text is a con-text in which this little piece of a signifying chain, this metaphor (*truth is a veiled woman*) may be seen at work. My interest is that of gender studies and cultural studies: how is this patriarchal, phallogocentric imagery set up? Which are the mechanisms of the signifier that create this mythology – our reality – called Western metaphysics?

Feminism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and deconstruction share an interest in the critical analysis and re-writing of this phallogocentric imagery. They join forces here, communicate and debate on the basis of and *a propos* this text. What results from this ‘round table’ of critical, post-structuralist theories will not be a unified, well-built and well-dressed-up reading of *She*. But in a sense this whole – feminist, deconstructive – struggle is against such an easy-to-consume understanding of woman, of the one to be known, of every other (*tout autre*).⁴ Thus, this text, just like the theoretical ones quoted in it, will be both a study into and a struggle against this *homo-logic* of the culture we inherited. While examining the workings of the metaphor in focus and the text, it will offer a series of metaphors (coming chiefly from theory) that may provide different understandings of truth, woman, the other, the subject of the quest, and, of course, *She*.

³ For more about the insistence of this metaphor in Plato, Chaucer and others see my essay “A női test igazsága: A női test mint az igazság metaforája a patriarchális diskurzusbán.” *Vulgo* 1–2 (2000).

⁴ In his recent book, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), Jacques Derrida focuses precisely on this problem: the non-murderous understanding of the other as wholly other (*tout autre*).

THE ETERNAL ROMANCE

The mythical status of She is indisputable.
 (C. S. Lewis, *Of This and Other Worlds*)

Rider Haggard's *She* has never been out of print since its first publication in 1887. Through the dozens and dozens of editions, serialisations, radio, TV and cinema versions it has inspired a whole series of generations, leaving its mark on – what Jung would call – our collective imagination. As we shall see, the images of the novel seem to be capable of cross-examining some of the most prestigious theories of the subject and textuality that we have in what is generally called post-structuralism.

Of course, like in all such cases, the question of the chicken and the egg – that is, the question of which was first – can rightly be raised: has the novel become so popular because it expresses something strong, basic and influential of our ‘collective unconscious,’ or is it rather the text that shaped so much our imagination that we cannot but conceptualise and imagine entities of our psychic and cultural life according to its pictures? In other words, has the novel's symbolic structure *expressed* something already in us, something ‘deeply human,’ or has it *created* a ‘psycho-symbolic’ structure corresponding to its own symbolic one that for some reason or other ‘worked out well?’ So well, actually, that we still find it hard to get rid of it, or imagine things in other ways.

No doubt, just as in the case of the chicken and the egg, the answer is impossible. What we have knowledge about, what we *may* know about, is a state (of mind, of imagination, of affairs) into which *She* is already inscribed. We are always already in this discourse, in the insistence of this metaphor. To tell who was the ‘real’ subject of enunciation – whether *She* enunciated ‘us’ or we did her – is not possible. What we experience is the feeling that *She* has always already been written into ‘us,’ *She* is in us, *She* is a part of us. As if we had been living this romance ever since we learned what it is to desire, as if we had always been living this story. As if *She* were about us, and our lives were about *Her*. And this is one of the cases when this ‘us’ does not necessarily only refer to male subjects, since the matrix of sexual relations that we face in the text affects the life and identity of women as much as that of men.

So when we read *She*, we read our own history, our own process of 'subjectivisation.' Our interpretation has to face a sort of epistemological undecidability: we can never tell in which moments we are caught in the hold of this metaphor (and therefore in the phallogocentric tradition), and when we are re-writing it in new directions. This ambiguity is well represented (doubled) in the case of the signifier *She*. Haggard's romance and its main female character bear the same name, *She*, both written with a capital S and in italics. The book, an object of our everyday life, and the figure created by its fictional world cannot be distinguished on the level of the signifier. The two ontological orders, the things that the text may do with its readers and the things that the character may do with the other characters, are often difficult to keep separated. My 'intention' is to keep these ambiguities alive, open, and to find the ways in which a critical interpretation – that is by definition aims to be as free of the inherited phallogocentric imagery as possible – can reinterpret this metaphor of the veiled woman *precisely* by sustaining the ambiguities that threatens to collapse the critical distance necessary for (the illusion of?) such an interpretation.

THE STORY

One (undoubtedly gloomy and mysterious) English night L. H. Holly, a fellow-to-be of a college in Cambridge (the narrator) is visited by his only friend, Vincey, who announces to him that he is going to die and would like to make Holly his heir. He should raise his only son (aged five) and take care of the family heritage, the most interesting part of which is a large box, which becomes the *object* of mystery, an uncanny thing entering Holly's life. The box should be opened on the twenty-fifth birthday of his son, Leo.

Holly accepts the offer. Vincey leaves, and by the next morning is found dead. Holly raises Leo, and on the twenty-fifth birthday they open the box. It contains another, older box, which contains another (etc.). What they find in the middle of this row of boxes is a potsherd with ancient writings on it, and several other texts, on the basis of which a most mysterious story is revealed to us. The story on the potsherd is written by Amenartas, a princess of Egypt. She and her husband, Kallikrates, flee from Egypt. In the middle of Africa they meet a strange nation the Queen of which falls in love with Kallikrates. She (*She* is also called Ayesha, and *She-who-must-be-obeyed*) takes

them to a mysterious place where she enters some strange phenomenon that she calls the pillar of life and emerges sublimely beautiful. She asks Kallikrates to 'slay' his wife and be her husband, and when covering his eyes and holding on to his wife he resists, she kills him in her anger. The writing of Amenartas is to ask her son (and all her descendants) to take revenge on their father, find and kill the mysterious queen, who is said to be living forever, protected from the natural causes of death. In the rest of the papers we can read the story of the family – or, more precisely, the story of the sons of the family (which fact accidentally gives the impression that from then on the family had only male members, history really being *his story*) – from the time of the Egyptian empire up to the twentieth century, the story of the quest that no member could complete so far. The task of Leo is of course to accomplish this age-old task of revenge, to go back to the depths of Africa and find the murderer of his ancestor.

Holly (who decides to accompany his adopted son), their servant, Job, and Leo set out on the journey, and after several adventures arrive at the strange nation (where Leo falls in love with a beautiful girl, Ustane), and then at the very court of *She-who-must-be-obeyed*. It turns out that the story was true, and she really has extraordinary powers, just as she has extraordinary beauty and wisdom. *She* is a woman no mortal man can resist. In Leo *She* recognises the reincarnation of Kallikrates, the lover she has been waiting for all these centuries. *She* kills Ustane and wants to make Leo immortal too, so that they can rule the world together. Of course Leo cannot resist her charms, revenge (for the founding – first – father or Ustane) is out of the question. *She* takes them to the 'pillar of life,' where she gained her supernatural beauty and immortality, but when she steps into it again so as to show Leo that it is not harmful, the fire undoes the work it has done more than two thousand years ago, and she becomes old, like a mummy, small and monkey-like in a few minutes, then dies. In her last words she asks Leo to wait and search for her, and promises to come back, to be born again for him, to fulfil their love.

Job dies at this shocking sight and the two adventurers return to England, absolutely shattered, only to leave again for central Asia, to find peace of mind (and maybe *She*) there.

THE WRITING OF THE OTHER WOMAN

It is with the appearance of language
[that] the dimension of truth emerges.
(Lacan, *Écrits*)

As one may see, this mysterious and romantic story is started by a piece of writing on an ancient potsherd. It is an uncanny object in the middle of the series of boxes, surrounded by the other, later writings. It is at the same time the characters' (and the reader's) object of desire, object of curiosity, and *the little piece of the real* in the diegetic reality of the text (in the Lacanian sense) that organises around itself the chains of signification. But in this case the real is not made meaningful (symbolic) through the enunciation of the Father, but through a piece of *female writing*. It is at the same time written *by* a woman, and *about* a woman. In this story the feminine takes all the structurally important positions around the male readers: subject and object of enunciation, writer and topic, murderer and the one in mourning, the one taking away and the one giving life. It is her discourse, her writing that defines the world of the male characters, a world in which these above positions lose their clear lines of distinction, ends meet, the one to be killed may become the one to be loved, the one who writes may be the same as the one who is written about. The characters move in a feminine world. The feminine text that they find in the middle of the boxes may correspond to the 'eternal feminine'⁵ being they find in the middle of Africa.

Something is planted into the male readers by this writing that they can never get rid of. They think that they were attracted by the sublime beauty of *She*, of the materialised ultimate object of desire, but eventually one can clearly perceive that they were already enchanted and entrapped at the moment of *reading about* her. This piece of feminine writing calls the story to life, just as it

⁵ In the interpretation of *She*, expressions like "eternal feminine" or "*écriture féminine*" become trapped in aphoristic double binds: *literally She-who-must-be-obeyed* is an eternal feminine being, just like the writing of Amenartas is a feminine piece of text. Yet, the connection of these expressions with the historical/ critical terms, that is, with their figurative meanings (which have become basic ones in feminist criticism) is quite shaky. The relation of the figure of *She* to the patriarchal fantasy of the 'eternal feminine' and that of Amenartas's writing to the feminist concept of *écriture féminine* – at least at this point – seem to be coded in undecidability. The figural/ cultural/ critical meanings of these terms can be both affirmative and deconstructive of the literal meanings established on basis of the text. For more on this problem see the end of this part.

calls the 'souls' of the characters to life. Without this story there would be no novel (no romance), and there would be no character.

Holly and Leo were dead before the *story-of-the-woman-about-the-woman* awakened desire in them. Desire is opened in them like a question is opened. They want to find the answer to the mystery just as they want to find *She*. Question and answer, desire and fulfilment, writer and reader, text and interpretation, subject and object of desire, signifier and signified, a void and its filling: this is the set of terms, the matrix or topography that seems to structure the production of meaning at this point. In a peculiar way the text seems to follow a proper Lacanian logic: desire and a symbolic order (of questions, doubts, opinions and possible answers) are generated by the same thing (*Thing*), at the same moment. It is desire that calls this order to life and it is a symbolic structure that defines the workings of this desire. Together they create the text, a text told by a man in the middle of all these mechanisms, by a subject created by this desire and this order.

What the female text at the topographical centre (and diegetic beginning) of the novel does to these characters, the way it envelopes them in a symbolic structure (in a story) is nothing but placing a piece of *fantasy* in the middle of their hearts, a kind of demon (*daimon*) that defines a *telos*, which is the union of the subject of desire with its object, the subject of questions with its answer, the subject of (the lack of) knowledge with its truth. This *fantasy* (a *phantasm*⁶) of union at the hypothetical end of their lives becomes the structuring centre of their stories. They are pierced by this writing, and it is this wound that constitutes them as subjects (characters), just like it is this wound that makes them 'proper' men. Their (pre-symbolic) wholeness is broken by this text that cuts a whole right in their middle and writes the fantasy of the *other woman* there. It is a gesture that castrates and initiates them as men at the same time. Makes them sick, ill, and gives them a hope of healing. In this sense being male (*mâle*) and being sick (*malade*) are one and the same thing. The sickness is that of the lack (*manque*), the same lack that makes them desiring, questioning and questing subjects, emasculating and 'masculating' them at the same time, that is, defining the *par excellence* condition of the subject in the Lacanian sense. The story of these male

⁶ "[...] fantasm [...] is the form on which depends the subject's desire" (Jacques Lacan. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. 1959-1960. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Ed. Jacques Alain Miller. Translated with notes by Dennis Porter. New York and London: Norton, 1992, p. 99).

subjects will always be a story of illness (*mâladie*), of a sickness called desire, of a sickness called the subject.

The object of union, the medicine (that caused the illness in the first place, like a 'true' *pharmakon*), *She*, is elevated to the position of *the Thing (das Ding)*,⁷ the ultimate object of desire. The reason for finding her – revenge or love, stabbing or making love to – becomes secondary and undecidable, just like the distinctions between the female subjects of writer and character, subject and object of enunciation. *She is jouissance*, *She is absolute*, *She is at the beginning and at the end*, relating to her must be love *and* hate, admiration *and* fear. *She is the (hypothetical) place where the subject can heal, where the lack is filled. She is the star and the 'black hole' around which the planets of the characters revolve.*

And here one arrives at the point where the writing of the other woman that the male characters read starts working in a 'truly' Derridean way, like a *pharmakon*, something that causes illness and at the same time is apparently the only way of healing it. On one hand it is the piece of writing that makes the characters the subjects of *mâladie*, that pierces them, working as a trigger of desire, and, on the other hand, this text offers the only way of easing this lack by giving directions how to reach *She*, the feminine at the ends of signification, beyond the limits of the masculine world. As we shall see, the act of reading in this scene of the novel is an act of *pharmakeia*, poisoning, when another substance (the other's substance) is poured into the self, creating an unstable mix, an illness, a strange-tasting cocktail that is the human subject as we know it. Interestingly enough, this place of poisoning and mixture in the novel, the point where ends meet and borders become fluid is also the spot where Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Derridean theory of textuality meet.

As one may read in the *Plato's Pharmacy* section of Derrida's *Dissemination*, writing in Plato's *Phaedrus* (and from then on) is associated with the qualities of the *pharmakon*:⁸ something that helps remembering, yet being a substitute for remembering makes people forget, something that helps 'living speech' spread and survive, yet kills it as immediate, 'living' sense, and, opening

⁷ See the chapters on *Das Ding* in Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (p. 43–70).

⁸ It is Socrates who compares the writing brought by Phaidrus to *pharmakon* (meaning medicine and poison at the same time), a means of seduction in the Platonic dialogue as well. (See: Plato. *Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias, and Symposium, with passages from the Republic and Laws*. Trans. with an Introduction and Prefatory Notes by Lane Cooper. London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938.)

the supposedly closed system of meaning to numberless new interpretations, corrupts it. One of the effects of this double-edged phenomenon is precisely the above seen blending of opposites. Writing is an in-between (like it is a kind of messenger between the sexes in the novel), one that changes the things it was situated between.

“Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath.”⁹ This terrain between life and death, presence and absence, this place playing and moving around in the undecidability of its in-betweenness is precisely the realm of desire in the Lacanian sense. When there is writing, the (fake) presence of what is written announces the presence of the referent, of something that is absent at the time of reading. We read about something (in this case about *She*), we can see this ‘thing,’ but we cannot touch it: we feel, we sense but we cannot really reach (the final sense). The *Thing* of writing is in front of us but worlds away. Writing sets us on a quest for the ultimate signified that we are searching for through the text, but the result is inevitably a failure: the thing can never be ours more than we can be subjects of the piece of writing read. It is this seductive character of the piece of writing on the potsherd that sets off desire in the characters and the story with it.

We have already seen that the piece of female writing and the seduction it accomplishes brings a change into the well-set order of the male characters. In Lacanian terms I have called it piercing and wounding, the creation of a lack that has to be filled along the paths offered by the *pharmakon*-text that has caused the wound in the first place. Derrida’s theory of textuality may serve with another metaphor for this event, giving a slightly different account of the situation. According to him:

In order for these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply *external* to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition.¹⁰

When the male characters (whose life up to that point is the most orderly) read the piece of female writing (in which the order of opposites is challenged by the

⁹ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 143.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination*, p. 103.

similarity or sameness of subject and object of enunciation), when the words of the other (out there) are poured into the ears of the subject (in here) – as poison is, as we have learned from Shakespeare – the chains of ordered signification (an oxymoron, by the way) are upset. One element will not be simply external to its pair, the basic rule of signification (understood in the Saussurean sense as play of differences) is violated. The matrix of signification is changed at a point, one of the elements of its chain of associations is turned inside out. The centre of the novel's male subjects, the heart of these characters, will be inhabited by the female other, by *She-who-must-be-obeyed*, and this change at one element of the chain will start a whole row of changes, that sweep through the text like a wave, turning inside-out each and every element reached. In a way the novel is nothing but this wave of changes in the chain of signification and the life of the characters. It does not stop until it has reached its end (or got back to its beginning), until everything is turned inside out, until the characters are swept from England to the centre of a volcano in the centre of Africa, until they are swept out of their rational minds, common sense values, misogyny, order and consciousness: till a moment of absolute loss.

All this is started by the little piece of writing of the other woman, coming from another time and another continent. Wounds made by a woman who bears texts and lives in texts, changes caused by a text about a woman and borne by a woman – no wonder that the self-sufficient presence of the male characters is lost forever. For how could a *mâladie* be cured that is treated by the same *pharmakon* that caused it?

Our (inevitably metaphysical) way of thinking, which cannot do without defined origins, becomes perplexed here. Where is this so called feminine writing (or *pharmakon*) coming from? Where is the traumatic real that sets off signification? Where is the impulse coming from that makes the first sentence happen? And what can we do with the detail that this writing is coming from a woman? How can we understand this gendered myth of the birth of the (always already existing) subject of *mâladie*? Can the thing (Thing) outside the symbolic be gendered? If it cannot, is it possible that what we read through the eyes of the characters is always already a phallogentric reading, a male interpretation of the meaningless moment/eternity of the real before the first moment of time? But if the primordial trauma of a male order *can* come from a gendered other – like the text of *She* suggests – how can one (born into this order) know anything about it?

THE THING IN THE MIDDLE

As it is noticed by Norman Etherington too, the author of the critical introduction of the 1991 critical edition of *She*, the most obvious and most often occurring structure of the text is that of the Chinese nest of boxes (xvii).¹¹ It is a structure that appears both as a thematic element and as a principle organising the main plot. Undoubtedly, it is an element in case of which one can easily witness the structural turning into the semantic. Among the examples of its occurrences one could list Vincey's already mentioned boxes; the quest of the characters deeper and deeper into the depths of Africa; the courts of the Temple of Truth in the ruined ancient city of Kôr (where *She* takes the adventurers); Ayesha's caves in the middle of a volcano, surrounded by rocks and then marshes; Ayesha herself, wrapped in her veils; and finally the line of narrators: Haggard (the name of the author) – the fictional 'Editor' (who gets the manuscript from Holly) – and Holly, the narrator (who is inspired by Amenartas's writing and Ayesha).

Of course this structure allows for a series of allegorical interpretations. When the reader or the characters work through the layers constituting it, it can be a journey back in time (like in case of the boxes of Vincey, and the journey into Africa); one from the outside to the inside; from the symbolic to the imaginary (maybe from a point of the real through the symbolic and the imaginary back to a point of the real); from the conscious to the unconscious; from the literal to the figurative; and from the accidental to the essential. No doubt one could organise interpretations of the novel around any of these allegories.

What is (what would be) common in all these interpretations, something that connects them through a characteristic of the very structure that they start from, is that the most important 'thing' can always be found in the middle. The centre of these layers is always on another ontological level, and the thing (Thing) occupying it is always a very special one. The potsherd and its writing constitutes a totally different reality than the late nineteenth century room in Cambridge, Ayesha is of a different order of beings than the other characters, the statue of Truth in the middle of the temple in Kôr makes the characters face the ultimate laws and limits of their existence, and the kingdom of *She* is moved by entirely

¹¹ All parenthesised references are to this edition: Rider Haggard. *The Annotated She. A Critical Edition of Rider Haggard's Victorian Romance with Introduction and Notes by Norman Etherington*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

different laws than that of England. This thing is always that of desire, but not simply the Lacanian *objet petit a*. It is something that is the *object* and the *abject* at the same time, a thing the coming (becoming presence) of which must annihilate the subject qua subject. It is the Thing that – becoming the *telos* – organises the structure around itself, but also that which is capable of destroying the structure, once reached. The best example of this is the character of *She*.

'*She-who-must-be-obeyed*' is the perfect name of the object of desire (*objet-petit-a*) raised to the position of the *Thing*, the ultimate key to one's *jouissance*. She lives in an inaccessible place in the depths of Africa ('the dark continent'). One has to travel through seas, deserts, marshes, rooms of her temple, the curtains of her 'chamber,' and her veils to reach her. In a very much emphasised way she is the centre of the world of the novel. *She* is the fantasy that would fill the lack in the lives of the males on quest, yet it is made clear that no human being can survive her embrace. This double nature, the synchronic existence of opposites that is the characteristic of the Thing, is also shown in her descriptions. Holly depicts her as "terrible but most fascinating" (98), "sublime," "evil," "half-divine" of an "awful loveliness" (105). *She* is of a human and superhuman order. *She* is transgression. *She* is the *object* and the *abject* at the same time, one that would bring the fulfilment and the destruction of the subject. *She* is the woman all men kneel in front of to beg for her love, yet a woman that swears to be the faithful servant of her husband. *She* is called simultaneously *She-who-must-be-obeyed* (the most sublime name), and – thanks for the playfulness of the signifier – in the language of the people she rules *Hiya*, that one can understand as 'Hi ya,' that is, the most colloquial term one may call a woman. *She* is the most beautiful woman ever seen, but when she steps into the fire the second time she becomes also the most horrible one. It is precisely this meeting of the opposites, this "awful beauty" (a phenomenon strictly analogical to how ends meet in the case of the piece of feminine writing) that constitutes her as the Thing, object and abject, basis and ultimate closure of meaning, sustainer and the only possible destroyer of the symbolic order. *She* is the object 'beyond the pleasure principle.'

At this place, in this beyond of the order, psychoanalysis and deconstruction can meet for a second time. The thing that is missing, but in the phantasm of characters would make everything complete (in this case *She*), which Lacan would call the Thing or *das Ding*, is very close to the Derridean concept of the supplement. The concept of this thing that is missing in the order, but when added to it brings about its de(con)struction seems to be very similar in Lacan,

Derrida and the novel. *She-who-must-be-obeyed* is the supplement of the (dead) male order, just as writing is the supplement of speech, and poisoning is that of curing. When *She* first appears in the novel in the writing of Amenartas she also sets off the dynamism of the supplement the role of which should be to make the dead system run, but can only make it limp. It is of another order so it can never fit perfectly into the given one. That is why there is no perfect order or smoothly going system: something is either healthy, balanced, perfect but dead without movement or change, or sick (*malade*), off balance, imperfect, limping but living, going somewhere (in the hope of getting cured of its limp that is the possibility of its life). This movement (travelling, significance) is caused and made possible by the limp of the order, which is nothing but the supplement, the part that does not fit, its sickness. This seems to be the same structure and the same dynamism in the cases of the Lacanian subject and the Derridean concept of textuality. The subject is defined by its lack just like speech is defined by its need for its supplement, writing, and the row of *objects-to-fill-the-lack* is infinite in the same sense as the row of supplements and the supplements of supplements. Derrida's words about the workings of the supplement can be equally true about the Lacanian subject's relation to *das Ding*, and the role of *She* in the novel:

the supplement [in our case *She*] is not, is not a being (*on*). It is nevertheless not a simple nonbeing (*me on*), either. Its slidings slip it out of the simple alternative presence/absence. *That* is the danger. And that is what enables the type always to pass for the original. As soon as the supplementary outside is opened, its structure implies that the supplement itself can be "typed," replaced by its double, and that a supplement to the supplement, a surrogate to the surrogate, is possible and necessary.¹²

The story of the supplements (and their supplements) is the same story as that of a quest for the (lost but never had) Thing that would cease the lack. Our characters are right in the middle of this dynamism, living as long as in need of an *other*, their supplement, their object of desire. As we shall see in this case they will not only circle around this needed other of the order, but also will fall right into its abyss.

¹² Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination*, p. 109.

AYESHA VERSUS LACAN

There seems to be a strange sort of wrestling going on between Ayesha, the woman mesmerising all men, the figure of the ultimate object of desire, and her male interpreters, first of all, Holly, the narrator. Maybe *She* is just an object of male fantasy, created by men. Yet, in spite of (or *because of?*) her ontological undecidability *She* has a strong grip on these men, and, as we have seen, these men are actually created by her (as men). This may give rise to this odd competition, in which quite important issues are at stake, like understanding, power, the power of understanding (ourselves and the other), being the *phallus* (that is, the ultimate desired object), and, last but not least, ontological primacy. Amusingly enough, Jacques Lacan, the 'ultimate' interpreter and '*sujet supposé savoir*' of issues of desire plays a role very similar to that of Holly, the heart-broken, clumsy-in-love narrator.

First of all, Lacan's description of the location of *jouissance* utilises the very same images that Holly does in his description of the 'location' of Ayesha. Let us see the truly telling Lacanian passage: "[...] *jouissance* presents itself as buried at the centre of a field and has the characteristics of inaccessibility, obscurity and opacity; moreover, the field is surrounded by a barrier which makes access to it difficult for the subject to the point of inaccessibility, because *jouissance* appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive..."¹³ It is quite obvious that Holly (describing *She* beyond seas, deserts, marshes etc.) and Lacan are talking about the same land, that of *She*.

This has at least two important consequences. If we read *She* from the point of view of Lacan's text, we realise that it is '*différance*' written into the symbolic order, civilisation's discontents, the *drive* and *desire* generated by its (constituting) *lack* that leads the novel's characters to *She*, to her domain. According to Lacan, the main function of the pleasure principle is to keep a distance between the subject and his (her) *jouissance*, a distance that on the one hand is close enough to maintain a level of energy necessary for the life of the subject, and, on the other hand, big enough not to let the subject be one with *jouissance*, not to let him (her) be swallowed by it. *She* is precisely this *lacking jouissance* of the misogynist civilisation of the male characters, around which it is organised. When they decide to go on a quest, they only follow the pleasure principle in its everlasting circulations around the impossible object. The

¹³ Jacques Lacan. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 209.

astonishing thing that happens is that this quest becomes a *real* one, that is, it takes the characters beyond the pleasure principle, right into the impossible object of *jouissance*.

The other consequence – that the above similarity of imagery between the Lacan text and that of the novel may lead one to realise – can be gained if one reads the Lacan text from the point of view of *She*. This would obviously be the realisation that when Lacan aims to create something like a (meta-)theory of desire, he cannot transcend or rise above his object (in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung*), but rather – held by the strength of the signifier – builds his theory from the same material, same imagery, and on the same level as that of the wishful fantasies that he analyses (that he may imagine to ‘draw upon’). In other words, his discourse is written by the same forces of desire that have written the poetry of chivalric love, or romances, that is, he is mesmerised and enchanted by the figure of *She* the same way as Holly is. If Lacan reached the maxim of there being no meta-theory, reading him through *She* one can realise that there is no real meta-desire (*plus-de-désir*) either, the characteristics of the theory of desire (and the desire of theory) are the same as that of the desire of *She*.

Given this, Lacan’s (sometimes slightly misogynist) statements about ‘woman’ gain an ironic double edge of meaning, undercutting his (sometimes truly admirable and annoying) confidence. In the case of sentences, like “You have to admit, that to place in this beyond [of the pleasure principle, in the realm of the Thing] a creature such as woman is a truly incredible idea”¹⁴ one must smile a little, because Ayesha’s example suggests that misogynists such as Holly and Lacan (Holly calls himself that on page 61) may very well be surprised when love strikes, that is, when the structures of desire, which they both seem to have thought themselves superior to in some ways, start working, and their rational knowledge (even of this very structure) does not prevent them from falling prey to it. Here is something that the similarity of the discourse of Lacan and Holly may teach psychoanalysis: theory and meta-theory, desire and the desire to become a master of (that is, above) desire are structured in one and the same way. Misogynists and psychoanalysts fall prey to desire (*She*) just like anybody else, if not more. Love dupes everyone, and it may dupe the *non-dupes* (who err) twice, since without them, without the misogynists, woman would never have become Woman, the Thing that rules all.

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 214.

THE FOLLY OF HOLLY

[...] what is important is not that the subject know anything whatsoever.

(Lacan, *Écrits*)

Indeed, the narrator, Ludwig Horace Holly, is a fine example of the *non-dupe* who constantly errs. As a narrator, he is of the same kind as Dr Watson of Arthur Conan Doyle, someone with a limited point of view who clings on to his common sense rationalism and empiricism though driven by the mysteries like anyone else. He is small so that we can see the greatness of his other, Holmes or Ayesha, and he is a man of common sense only to be subdued by a higher order. The text of *She* is full of his sceptical remarks about the seriousness of the quest, but even he has to admit it sometimes that it is as essential to him as it is to Leo.

“Why had I been such a fool as to leave them [his safe rooms in Cambridge]? This is a reflection that has several times recurred to me since, and with ever-increasing force” (40) – writes Holly, and in his lamentations the reader may ‘hear’ the similar statements of Robinson Crusoe and all other voyagers who become subjects (of novels) only because of their much-lamented decisions that throw them into the abyss of desire. Of course there is no real answer to this ‘why.’ The subject is a subject only as long as he desires, and starts on a quest to fulfil his desire. As we have seen, being a manly adventurer (*mâle*) is the same as being sick (*malade*), lacking something, being wounded. The characters and narrators are *always already* wounded, subjects of *mâladie*, that is precisely why they can be characters and narrators. Holly’s *why* is the ultimate signifier of the fate of the subject *qua* subject, drawn by the whirlpool of his desire.

THE PHILOSOPHER, THE CAVE AND SHE-WHO-MUST-BE-VEILED

In the narrator one may recognise not only Lacan, but all philosophers and theory-makers on the quest for the sublime Truth of their imagination. The (rational, male) philosopher who started his career in the caves of Plato (being deceived by the shadows on the wall), now – driven by his completely irrational desire – returns to the caves and temples of ancient Kôr, following

Ayesha.¹⁵ What he finds there is of course nothing else but the sign of his being deceived again. Ayesha, the sublime beauty, whom he has been chasing through the world turns into a hideous little monkey, and the statue of Truth in the middle of Kôr claims nothing but its own inaccessibility. It may be worth quoting this scene in its entirety, since it undoubtedly constitutes one of the central and most significant scenes of the novel:

“Come,” said Ayesha, after we had gazed and gazed, I know not for how long, “and I will show you the stony flower of Loveliness and Wonder’s very crown, if yet it stands to mock time with its beauty and fill the heart of man with longing for that which is behind the veil,” and, without waiting for an answer, she led us through two more pillared courts into the inner shrine of the old fane.

And there, in the centre of the inmost court, that might have been some fifty yards square, or a little more, we stood face to face with what is perhaps the grandest allegorical work of Art that the genius of her children has ever given to the world. For in the exact centre of the court, placed upon a thick square slab of rock, was a huge round ball of dark stone, some twenty feet in diameter, and standing on the ball was a colossal winged figure of a beauty so entrancing and divine that when I first gazed upon it, illuminated and shadowed as it was by the soft light of the moon, my breath stood still, and for an instant my heart ceased its beating.

The statue was hewn from marble so pure and white that even now, after all those ages, it shone as the moonbeams danced upon it, and its height was, I should say, a trifle over twenty feet. It was a winged figure of a woman of such marvellous loveliness and delicacy of form that the size seemed rather to add to than to detract from its so human and yet more spiritual beauty. She was bending forward and posing herself upon her half-spread wings as though to preserve her balance as she leant. Her arms were outstretched like those of some woman about to embrace one she dearly loved, while her whole attitude gave an impression of the tenderest beseeching. Her perfect and most gracious form was naked, save – and here came the extraordinary thing – the face, which was thinly veiled, so that we could only trace the marking of her features. A gauzy veil was thrown round and about the head, and of its

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of Plato’s allegory of the cave from a similar point of view see: Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Also see: Michelle Boulous Walker. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body*. London: Routledge, 1998.

two ends one fell down across her left breast, which was outlined beneath it, and one, now broken, streamed away upon the air behind her.

"Who is she?" I asked, as soon as I could take my eyes off the statue.

"Canst thou not guess, oh Holly?" answered Ayesha. "Where then is thy imagination? It is Truth standing on the World, and calling to its children to try to unveil her face. See what is writ upon the pedestal. Without doubt it is taken from the book of the Scriptures of these men of Kôr," and she led the way to the foot of the statue, where an inscription of the usual Chinese-looking hieroglyphs was so deeply graven as to be still quite legible, at least to Ayesha. According to her translation it ran thus: -

"Is there no man that will draw my veil and look upon my face, for it is very fair? Unto him who draws my veil shall I be, and peace will I give him, and sweet children of knowledge and good works.

And a voice cried. 'Though all those who seek after thee desire thee, behold! Virgin art thou, and virgin art thou go till Time be done. No man is there born of woman who may draw thy veil and live, nor shall be. By Death only can thy veil be drawn, oh Truth!'

And Truth stretched out her arms and wept, because those who sought her might not find her, nor look upon her face to face."

"Thou seest," said Ayesha, when she had finished translating, "Truth was the Goddess of the people of old Kôr, and to her they built their shrines, and her they sought; knowing that they should never find, still sought they."

"And so," I added sadly, "do men seek to this very hour, but they find not; and, as this Scripture saith, nor shall they; for in Death only is Truth found."

(175-176)

As it can be seen, what is written at the centre of the text is nothing but the inaccessibility of the centre. The winged woman is another metaphor of the ultimate object of desire, just like *She*. Both are veiled and both live within surroundings showing the structure of the Chinese nest of boxes. Both are figures who finally unveil themselves (Ayesha in her hideous death, Truth in enunciating her own inaccessibility and the structure of impotent longing in which it (she) situates the subject). They are metaphors of each other, just like Amenartas and all the important (beautiful) female characters. They enchant the adventurers, but finally show them what is behind the veil of their projection. These final scenes

constitute the moments when the imaginary that has become the reality of the characters becomes *real*. From this perspective, the writing on the statue gains a double meaning. "By Death only can thy veil be drawn" – this could mean on the one hand that one can only experience Truth after death, when s/he ceases to be a subject (constituted precisely by the lack of Truth). But, on the other hand, it can also mean that it is only Death (personified) that is able to unmask Truth, which interpretation would clearly foreshadow the *denouement* of Ayesha's death, when the hideous monster of the real (that *She* has always already been) tears off her beautiful imaginary appearance, and shows its *real* face. This latter reading of the sentence would also serve as a sort of post-structuralist 'conclusion,' according to which Truth (or Woman with a capital w) has to die for us (as something accessible, pleasurable, the presence of sense, meaning, or an intelligible message) before we can see its true (*real*, meaningless, incoherent, *impossible-for-the-subject-to-possess*) face.

All this also means, of course, that the other name of *She-who-must-be obeyed* is *She-who-must-be-veiled*. It is the veil, the layer of the projections of the imaginary that may turn the real object (of horror) into the sublime imaginary beauty worth following. Those who admire and pursue Truth, Beauty, Woman, etc. have to keep the veil untouched. It is impossible to be a thinker, a philosopher, a *non-dupe*, unless one dupes himself into the world of the shadows on the wall of the cave. The wisdom of the philosopher is precisely constructed by his folly. As Ayesha says: "Ah, Holly, for all thy wisdom – for thou art wise – thou art but a fool running after folly" (128). Of course the word 'for' in "for all thy wisdom" means rather 'because of,' rather than 'in spite of.'

WITHIN HER WORLD

One of the points of reading where this story of the male subject on his quest after his desire becomes more than a smoothly polished, mirror-like illusion of an allegory (in which everything seems to be so tidy, united and univocal) is when we realise how much the *materiality of the text* communicates something unexpectedly meaningful from the perspective ~~we~~ we have taken. When reading the novel attentively, the reader may notice that it is not only in the line of narration that the female envelops the men on quest (inspired by the writing of a woman they are led to another), but this 'feminisation' of the story's *arche* and *telos* is repeated within the very body of the quest. Our adventurers do not simply go

from the feminine to the feminine (or rather: from the lack of Woman created by the writing of the other woman to the even more radical and even more ambiguous lack of Woman, which itinerary involves all the problems of the symbolic's relation to lack, the imaginary substitute and the place of the real), it is not just by the sameness of beginning and end that they are in the (unequivocal) embrace of the feminine (in this case seemingly dominating in all three domains of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real), but also by the very materiality of the world they live in, which is the same as the materiality of the text, and, in all senses of the word, the materiality of *She*.

When the adventurers are in Africa, getting closer to where *She* lives, the text shows more and more examples of what one may call the imagery of the female nude. The river that takes the men to *She* (her metonymy) is already sexualised: "Presently the moon went down, and left us floating on the waters, now only heaving like some troubled woman's breast..." (41). The house of *She-who-must-be-obeyed* is of course a volcano with an enormous (!) crater. This mountain, with its "grandeur," "solitude," "majesty" (85), together with its openness to the sky becomes a perfect metonymy of *She*, the phallic but desiring woman who inhabits it. Its top not only reaches but seems to "kiss the sky" (85). (No wonder that the first remark of the narrator when seeing it is "It is wonderful... But how do we *enter*?" [85, my italics].) When *She* leads the men to the depth of the volcano (the double of the first in many senses) where the pillar of life is, they enter "the very womb of the Earth, wherein she doth conceive the life that ye see..." (189). Since this central cave is not only called the womb of the Earth, but that of the volcano too (199), the two become synecdoches of each other, both feminine and enveloping.

This characteristic of the text is so strong that even the central phenomenon that the adventurers find in the last (and central) of the caves, the pillar of life, despite its phallic name, seems feminine in its nature:

We stood in the third cavern, some fifty feet in length by perhaps as great a height, and thirty wide. It was carpeted with fine white sand, and its walls had been worn smooth by the action of I know not what. The cavern was not dark like the others, it was filled with a soft glow of rose-coloured light, more beautiful to look on than anything that can be conceived. But at first we saw no flashes, and heard no more of the thunderous sound. Presently, however, as we stood in amaze, gazing at the marvellous sight, and wondering whence the rosy radiance flowed, a dread and beautiful thing happened. Across the far end of the cavern,

with a grinding and crashing noise – a noise so dreadful and awe-inspiring that we all trembled, and Job actually sank to his knees – there flamed out an awful cloud or pillar of fire, like a rainbow, many coloured, and like the lightning bright. For a space, perhaps forty seconds, it flamed and roared thus, turning slowly round and round, and then by degrees the terrible noise ceased, and with the fire it passed away – I know not where – leaving behind it the same rosy glow that we had first seen.

“Draw near, draw near!” cried Ayesha, with a voice of thrilling exultation. “Behold the very Fountain and Heart of Life as it beats in the bosom of the great world. Behold the substance from which all things draw their energy, the Bright Spirit of the Globe, without which it cannot live...”

(189–190)

This part clearly indicates a feminine principle of life working in the narrative’s universe. The world, its materiality and its substance are all feminine. It is also clear that the ‘pillar of life,’ the symbol of the substance of life has the same structural position in the text’s topography as Ayesha, or the statue of Truth. When we find the pillar in the third, final cave, we meet the same structure of the Chinese nest of boxes that we had to face at most of the important parts of the novel. This also indicates that these things occupying the central position are mutual images (or figures) of each other. This is only confirmed by the similarity in the use of adjectives, since Ayesha, Truth and the pillar of life are all described as beautiful and beyond the beautiful at the same time which results in adjectives like “dreadful,” “beautiful,” “awe-inspiring,” “marvellous” and “awful” next to each other. This means that the sublime Woman, Truth, and the Substance of Life are all one and the same thing, *das Ding*, the piece of the real that keeps coming back to the same place in different shapes of the imagery. To a place – one has to add – that is by definition empty at the heart of the (*mâle/malade*) subject of the signifier.

Ayesha’s characterisation of the pillar of life also serves as an appropriate description of the work of desire in psychoanalytic theory. Her words about the central thing (Thing) that is “the substance from which all things draw their energy” would make Lacan happy, since according to him the desire of this central (lacking, always already lost) object moves all subjects, and all other objects (“all things”) gain importance (even existence) for the subject only as long

as they serve as metaphors and metonymies of it, as long as s/he wishes and hopes to re-find the lost (original) object in them.

It may need to be added that it is not only the narrator, Holly, who is obsessed with the female body, who creates this female world. The sublime body of *She*, just like the statue of Truth or the pillar of life, are 'out there' in the diegetic reality of the novel. Ayesha – as the above quoted piece clearly shows – speaks the words of the same imagery.

This implies that the whole text (together with the fantasy of its male characters) is strongly sexualised. One could say that it exists only as long as it is sexualised, only as sexualised, as if this was the material from which it was built. As if the whole world the adventurers enter were a woman, as if *She* the character were a synecdoche of *She* the text, and the body of the novel were analogically built to that of the woman at its centre.

The male subjects of the novel were always already the subjects of *She*, subjects of this peculiar *mâladie*, subjected to a fantasy constitutive of what they perceive as reality. They were always already parts of a great plot, puppets in a great show, written by desire. The whole 'show,' the whole world they inhabit (and believe to be real) was called to life by desire. Without *She-who-must-be-obeyed* there would be no quest, no hero, no material reality, no space to go on quest, no time to live, no Africa, no 19th century, no change, no movement, no character, no plot, nothing.

But can a character (like Holly, Leo, or any of us) ever face this fact? Can any of us ever notice that our story is written by an external force, that it follows patterns plotted by someone else? May we ever realise that we, subjects of a certain cultural/linguistic/discursive order can live with the subjectivity that we consider as our own only since we are subjected to certain metaphors? And finally: can we ever find out where these metaphors are coming from, that is, is it possible to find the plotter behind the invisible plot called reality?

And do we get a different answer once we are taken *beyond the pleasure principle*?

THE COLONIAL OTHER

The morning after surviving the terrible storm the adventurers see the first sunrise in Africa. The face that the "other continent" shows them at the dawn of their stay is doubtless of an allegorical nature:

At length the heralds and forerunners of the royal sun had done their work, and, searching out the shadows, had caused them to flee away. Up he came in glory from his ocean-bed, and flooded the earth with warmth and light. I sat there in the boat listening to the gentle lapping of the water and watched him rise, till presently the slight drift of the boat brought the odd-shaped rock, or peak, at the end of the promontory which we had weathered with so much peril, between me and the majestic sight, and blotted it from my view. I still continued, however, to stare at the rock, absently enough, till presently it became edged with the fire of the growing light behind it, and then I started, as well I might, for I perceived that the top of the peak, which was about eighty feet high by one hundred and fifty thick at its base, was shaped like a negro's head and face, whereon was stamped a most fiendish and terrifying expression. There was no doubt about it; there were the thick lips, the fat cheeks, and the squat nose standing out with startling clearness against the flaming background. There, too, was the round skull washed into shape perhaps by thousands of years of wind and weather, and, to complete the resemblance, there was a scrubby growth of weeds or lichen upon it, which against the sun looked for all the world like the wool on a colossal negro's head. It certainly was very odd; so odd that now I believe that it is not a mere freak of nature but a gigantic monument fashioned, like the well-known Egyptian Sphinx, by a forgotten people out of a pile of rock that lent itself for their design, perhaps as an emblem of warning and defiance to any enemies who approached the harbour.

(42)

The first characteristic in this description that may occur to one is the strong imagery of light and darkness that creates a universe of clear-cut binaries. Of course light and darkness form a hierarchical binary, in which light stands for God's grace, while darkness stands for the inferior powers of evil. When the negro's head blots the light from the characters and overshadows them, it becomes evident that they have arrived to an alien, 'godforsaken' land, that of darkness and evil. Their whole existence seems to be overshadowed by this image of the fearsome other.

From the point of view taken before in this essay it may be meaningful to realise that it is the "drift of the boat," that is the river – which the night before was "heaving like some troubled woman's breast..." (41), that is, a clearly feminine

entity, a metaphor of *She* – that takes the men under this shadow, away from the majestic “he” of the light.

The connotations of evil are only confirmed when we see this dark face against the “fire of the growing light behind it.” Nevertheless, (maybe for the sake of less attentive readers) Job notes on the next page that “I think that the Old Genelman [sic] must have been sitting for his portrait on them rocks” (43), obviously referring to Satan.

These circumstances tend to bring together the different images of the other of the educated, white, Anglo-Saxon, male, Protestant subject, connecting African blacks, woman, and the devil, that is, the others of colonialism, gender and theology. If we consider that the hair of the ‘negro’ is referred to as “wool,” bringing in an image of animality, we may say that the picture is complete.

It is only the last ironic detail of this description – from the point of view of colonialism and the construction of the colonial other – that all these fearsome elements and fiendish characteristics, together, of course, with the commonplace features of a black man’s features, are only there “to complete the resemblance” with the real, living blacks. In other words, the description, while taking its detours in the above listed several domains of otherness, preserves the rhetoric of having a real referent in the blacks of Africa.

Undoubtedly, this first view of the other continent implies that what the adventurers are going to encounter there is something absolutely alien, radically other. Indeed, the reader may encounter strange people with strange customs, but – as it often is the case in this genre – all these things seem artificial, like necessary but strikingly *unreal* painted backgrounds behind the ‘real’ action of the text. It is not that much the promise content in the quoted passage that is going to be continued in the series of adventures, but rather its way of signification, its mode of constructing the self and its others. The black (“bastard”) people of the Amahagger, the ‘primitives,’ only serve their *white* queen; and the high civilisation on the ruins of which they live was that of white people. The stranger the customs of the Amahagger are, the more their descriptions smell with the inbreeding, claustrophobia and self-centeredness of the imagination of the European self.

However, the best examples of the function of the colonial other are offered by some obviously unmediated points of the narration. When we read a part about the ruins of the ancient city Kôr that have not been seen by anyone for

thousands of years the narrator is forced to explain in a footnote why the Amahagger, who inhabit the land, do not visit or destroy it:

Billali [a tribe leader of the Amahagger] told me that the Amahagger believe that the site of the city is haunted, and could not be persuaded to enter it upon any consideration. Indeed, I could see that he himself did not at all like doing so, and was only consoled by the reflection that he was under the protection of *She*. It struck Leo and myself as very curious that a people which has no objection to living amongst the dead, with whom their familiarity has perhaps bred contempt, and even using their bodies for purposes of fuel, should be terrified at approaching the habitations that these very departed had occupied when alive. *After all, it is only a savage inconsistency.*

(172–173, italics mine)

What we may see in this passage, which is an explanation in a footnote added to the main text, is that inconsistencies of the narrative are explained by “savage inconsistency.” In other words, the problems of the narrative are solved by a projection. The ‘savage’ will be the place where all knots on the logic of (the white man’s) narration can be solved, made straight. Or, to use another metaphor, the ‘savage’ constitute a nameless space, or a faceless material, a kind of joker in the deck of cards of the narrator, with which all problematic spaces can be filled out, into which anything can be projected. In this sense the alien, the ‘other people,’ serve as a kind of helper, phantasmic support of the narrative that is able to maintain its unity and consistency. The symbolic structure of the (colonial) narrative needs this consistent support of the phantasmic other of the ‘inconsistent savage’ to maintain its own integrity.

In the novel, in spite of the promises of the ‘negro’s head,’ in the depths of the other it is always the same, the self, the *true* self that is found (ruins of a white ‘high’ civilisation, a beautiful white queen), the phantasmic metaphors and metonymies of the Thing that should be at the core of the self. All the others – slaves, aboriginals and white servants – are only to support this tale of the (castrated) I finding (and losing without possessing) its missing part, its phantasmic wholeness in another land. But without them, without the ‘digression’ through darkness, ‘odd’ people and their “savage inconsistencies” the narrative could not exist, but would collapse without a moment’s existence into solipsism, into the black hole of a short circuit.

THE PLACE OF THE REAL

If Rider Haggard's *She* is extraordinary amongst the hundreds of similar works of the age it is that because of the twist at the end that probably hardly any other text accomplishes.

In *She* the imaginary becomes the reality of the characters, they can encounter the ultimate object of male desire. But this probably would not make *She* too special. What makes it truly fascinating from the psychoanalytic point of view is that this object of fantasy at the place of *das Ding* is de-veiled, when after two and a half millenniums of deception *She* shows her *real* face. Of course I am talking about the scene in the cave when *She* steps into the fire for the second time in her life.

As it has been shown above, the ontologically superior place in the text is always the place in the middle, the last of the Chinese nest of boxes. The cave where Ayesha leads her admirers is the last – and therefore most important – of these. One could say that it is *the place of the real*, where the imaginary beauties are demystified, de-veiled, where the imaginary becomes real.

The similarity between this scene and the one with which the history of philosophy started, the one in Plato's *Republic*, is truly remarkable. As Irigaray has shown it in her much-quoted analysis, in this scene at the beginning of philosophy the only real thing is the materiality/ maternity of the cave that the men sitting in it never seem to notice since their imagination is constantly occupied by the images and shadows projected to its wall. It was then that *She* first went into the fire, and that these men started to look for her in the works and wonders of this fire instead of trying to understand the real of the situation. It was this two and a half thousands of years that wrote the history of philosophy with the hands of the deluded men who never cared (or dared) to look at the cave, but chased her sublime images. But after all those years *She* comes back to the cave with her men and steps into the fire for the second time. Now they can see what made her sublime, what caused their delusion. And they can also see the whole process (of 'sublime-ation') undoing itself, getting rid of the veil, of the sublime appearance, and showing her real face, the beyond (or obverse, or price) of male fantasy. A sight that makes them unconscious for some time (falling out from the structure of the subject), kills Job, and makes Leo's hair turn grey...

One could say that the cave was the only real thing from the very beginning, which is also the place of the real, where things show their real face, where stories start and end. After all those years it turns out that the 'reality' of

the light has been constructed by desire and the *phantasm* of *She*. This ‘reality’ was born in this womb-like cave, and now dies at this place too. It is the real of the mother’s womb, the real of the beginning and the end, the ultimate place where the delusions created by lack, the fantasy filling this lack, and the Thing’s symbolic substitutes disappear. When *She* turns into a terribly old, horrible, monkey-like creature the history of philosophy, the history of the subject of *mâladie* reaches its logical end.

AFTER THE FALL

The place of the real is where the pillar of life meets the human world, where it comes again and again to start and finish stories. When it comes to undo the sublimation that caused the existence of *She* a story ends, the characters fall out of consciousness for a time. *She-who-must-be-obeyed* is dead, the ultimate object of desire is lost. But after a time the adventurers come to their senses, come back into a subject form that can speak and write (Holly’s narrative is written after the events). In other words, a new story has begun.

One may rightly ask the question: what has changed through the veiling of the object? And this is undoubtedly one of the central questions here.

The answer of Lacanian psychoanalysis would probably be that one can never tell. What we read is an account written after the fall, and it is hard to know whether the order before was any different. One could also argue that the object that has been lost has never been truly present. If it is lost it means that it has always already been lost, or, at most, it had existence only as something in the act and in the moment of just being lost. And – like in the case of the murdered primordial father in the psychoanalytic ‘myth’ of Freud – its death has only strengthened its hold on us.

In this sense Rider Haggard’s *She* is a story of genesis, a story that tells us of the loss of the object (that has never been present/ presence) at the beginning of the world that we know. A story about the (eternal, ontological) loss that defines the condition of the subject. From this point of view, the insistence of the text’s central metaphor – that of the veiled woman – is nothing but another effect (and constitutive of) the dead desire of the subject that I have mentioned at the beginning apropos of Lacan. After reading the story of *She* and the subjects of *mâladie* the metaphor of truth as a veiled woman seems to be the metaphor of the metonymic structure of the subject “eternally stretching forth towards the *desire*

for something else."¹⁶ This is the condition of "being caught in the rails [...] of metonymy,"¹⁷ the metonymic sliding of gap-filling fantasies (figures) at the place of the Thing, which is the same sliding of the signifier that produces the history of literature and philosophy above the meaningless face of the real.

In the novel this 'real face of the real' is quickly repressed (the characters go on another quest to find the reincarnation of the lost *She*) and replaced by a fantasy: "In forms that are historically and socially specific, the *a* elements, the imaginary elements of the fantasm come to overlay the subject, to delude it at the very point of *das Ding*."¹⁸ With this the story obviously gets back to its point of origin, to the point that is probably the beginning of all stories (like that of the story stretching from Plato to Derrida), when a fantasy stands in place of the lacking Thing and makes the characters leave on a quest to find it. All these events seem to follow each other like inevitable phases of the building and re-building of symbolic universes based on the insistence of certain signifying chains and the productive lack of the central object, the object that was lost without ever being present, and will never be found again.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits*, p. 167.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits*, p. 167.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 99.

“Doorways to things beyond”

The question of religion in Walter Pater’s works, with a special focus on *Marius the Epicurean*

During the 19th century the erosion of the Christian tradition¹ and the individual’s secure place within it made it necessary for artists and thinkers to reinterpret the human condition and to find an adequate framework for this reinterpretation. The task which the Romantic generations faced was the redefinition of their relationship to both religion and art. Therefore, in the Romantic Age, a period of transition into Modernism, the harvest of a long process, started in the 17th century and nurtured during the Enlightenment, was finally reaped. “Most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry:” Matthew Arnold’s famous statement² captures precisely this Romantic tendency. Although the passage of time has refuted his prophecy, the attacks of writers like T. S. Eliot against Arnold are not wholly justified, because this remark, even if wide of the mark, still contains a realistic reference to the human condition. Human beings, he says in the same passage, are in need of consolation: “We have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.”

In hindsight, we can see that Arnold was right in that humanity does need consolation, and if religion does not provide universally accepted parameters any longer, other things will take its place. For the Romantics it was nature and art that acquired profound spiritual significance: nature becoming a source of

¹ A significant step in this direction was the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, and the subsequent rise of agnosticism.

² Matthew Arnold. “The Study of Poetry.” *Essays in Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1925, p. 2-3.

mystical experience, and the artist, most often the poet, taking the role of initiator into spirituality. These developments within Romanticism were carried to the extreme in Modernism. As Wordsworth in *The Prelude* uses the quasi-religious language of devotional poetry in his poetic quest for identity (the self remaining the only stable phenomenon among the loss of certainties), so James Joyce uses Christian liturgical language to describe poetic inspiration in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (the “priest of eternal imagination transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life.”³).

Around the end of the 19th century, this high appraisal of art led to the aesthetic movement, signalled first of all by the names of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. In spite of the fact that the view of Pater as the “guru of aestheticism”⁴ is mostly passé in scholarly circles, he is seldom seriously dealt with in the context of his relationship to religion. It seems, however, that Pater was as preoccupied with the question of religion as most Romantic and early Modernist writers. On the following pages I will examine in what ways this preoccupation shaped his art.

Pater’s notorious *Conclusion* to his collection of essays on *The Renaissance* appeared in 1873 and immediately earned him the label of Epicurean rebel, enemy of the traditional beliefs held by the Church. Even today, scholars, not unjustifiably, use this text to demonstrate the author’s precocious Modernism and even Postmodernism. Talking about the impossibility of certain knowledge due to the perpetual flux of physical reality around us, and to the isolation of the individual (“each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world”⁵) Pater certainly seems to reflect the anxiety of a modern mind.

F. C. McGrath points out that Pater’s influence was twofold, leading into two distinct directions: besides his negative notions of perpetual change his lifework was imbued with “more positive yearnings to achieve through art, culture and religion some stability amid the flux.”⁶ The modernist paradigm that he constructed out of Pater’s texts, however, relies heavily on the “negative” side, as do most other analyses of Pater’s works. McGrath’s concentration on the patterns of subjectivity, relativism, scepticism, primacy of sensory perception etc.

³ James Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Wordsworth Classics, 1992, p. 170 ff.

⁴ Jules Lubbock. “Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*. The Imaginary Portrait as Cultural History.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983) 166–190, p. 166.

⁵ Walter Pater. “Conclusion.” *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 151.

⁶ F. C. McGrath. *The Sensible Spirit. Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986, p. 15.

is convincing in that this was the heritage of this great synthesiser which actually flowed over into the intellectual climate of his successors, the early Modernists. Admittedly, this makes the interpretation of his *Marius the Epicurean*, in which Pater made the most successful attempt at achieving an artistic and existential wholeness and harmony, quite difficult. Jules Lubbock claims, for instance, that the reading of *Marius* as a "corrective statement" of Pater's personal philosophy⁷ would be an oversimplification of the issues, as it was far from Pater's intellectual temperament to present any "formal thesis."⁸ Lubbock argues that Pater presented doctrines with so masterly a detachment that his own views were almost impossible to determine, and he quotes one of Pater's pupils, who remarked that Pater's ideas remained "very much a mystery, even after *Marius the Epicurean*."⁹

No wonder then, that we find so many opposing statements and interpretations in the literature on Walter Pater. Any great intellect, especially in such an age of transition and turmoil, is contradictory and paradoxical in his thinking, therefore the result of different approaches to his work will be especially determined by the chosen perspective. Gerald Monsman, for instance, in his book *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography*¹⁰ has chosen a psychological approach – influenced by Freud and Jung, but also by deconstructionists – pointing out that the patterns found in Pater's fiction are grounded in his early childhood; whereas Jules Lubbock argues that to place too much emphasis on the autobiographical aspect of *Marius* and Pater's other imaginary portraits is questionable. Instead, he perceives *Marius* as cultural history, analysing the influence of Hegel and J. S. Mill in Pater's thinking. He concludes by saying that more recent commentators have come to regard Pater's work "as literature rather than cultural history," but abandoned to literary critics it has been misinterpreted.¹¹

⁷ Jules Lubbock, p. 168.

⁸ In a letter Pater writes: "As regards the ethical drift of *Marius* [...] I did mean it to be more anti-Epicurean than it has struck you as being" (*The Letters* 78. 22 July. 1883, p. 52) but, as Lubbock points out, Pater went on to say that he was none the less glad "that you have mistaken me a little on this point, as I had some fears that I might seem to be pleading for a formal thesis..." Jules Lubbock, p. 168.

⁹ Edward Manson. "Recollections of Walter Pater." *Oxford Magazine* 25 (7 November 1906), p. 61. Quoted in Jules Lubbock, p. 169.

¹⁰ Gerald Monsman. *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography*. New Haven and London: Yale University, 1980.

¹¹ Jules Lubbock, p. 190.

In contrast to Monsman and Lubbock, I will examine Pater's works strictly as texts of literature. Though it is an important critical task to assign the place of an author in the context of the history of ideas, sometimes it is at least as important to direct a fresh inquiry at the literary works themselves, and let their present impact act on our imagination and on our deepest human aspirations.

The present study takes its basic assumption from Northrop Frye, who based his theoretical work on "the assumption of total coherence"¹² in literature, on the hypothesis that "literature is not a piled aggregate of 'works,' but an order of words."¹³ My aim is to look for archetypal patterns, and to show the drift of the work, in this case, *Marius the Epicurean* towards a "centre of imaginative experience."¹⁴

Marius can be described as a search or quest, led by the desire to make sense of the human condition. As this is one of the common aims of art, philosophy and religion, examining the interaction of artistic and existential/religious aspects can be expected to cast light on the work in question. The archetypal force of the quest pattern itself may have led Pater to blend his aestheticism with existential and spiritual concerns in this story.

Marius, as a "history of the soul," begins with Marius's religious experience of early childhood (observance of the old Roman religion "sustained by a native instinct of devotion" [p. 38]¹⁵) and ends on the threshold of another possible religious experience: an encounter with early Christianity in Rome. The hunger for making sense of reality will accompany Marius on his spiritual journey. Once a schoolboy in Pisa, urban life and his friendship with the poet Flavian leads to the abandonment of the old family beliefs, and to the adoption of a kind of "undergraduate aestheticism" (Lubbock). The search for a philosophical articulation of his position follows later; at this stage it is described by Pater simply as a "spirit of unbelief," the egotism and eagerness for experience so typical of young people, which often leads to "early corruption" (p. 65). Participating in Flavian's artistic activities, Marius discovers the beauty and the pleasure springing from the making and the enjoyment of art, specifically literature. But then his friend's death brings into focus his never ceasing awareness of the "tyrannous

¹² Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*. London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 16.

¹³ Frye, p. 17.

¹⁴ Frye, p. 117.

¹⁵ All parenthesised references are to this edition: Walter Pater. *Marius the Epicurean*. London: Penguin Books, 1985.

reality of things visible" (p. 62), which in turn, awakes in him the need for severer, philosophical reasonings. He draws on the philosophies of Heraclitus and Aristippus (founder of Cyrenaic philosophy), and the position he articulates is basically the same as that expressed by Pater in the *Conclusion*: a "philosophy of the despair of knowledge" (p. 99), built on the notion of permanent change ("flux"), and the consequent call to "fall back upon direct sensation," to be "absolutely virgin towards experience," to become a "perfect medium of perception" (pp. 109-115). However, the drama of the human condition is that this desire – "to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy"¹⁶ – is unattainable, and to capture eternity in a moment of sensory experience is doomed to failure because of our finiteness in time. I will now consider some of those ancient elements in the human experience which question the pursuit of pure aestheticism and are powerfully expressed in *Marius* and elsewhere in Pater's works.

THE REALITY OF EVIL

Witnessing the cruel slaughter of animals in the Roman arena, and the indifference of the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius to the sight, Marius becomes painfully aware "of a crisis in life, in this brief, obscure existence, a fierce opposition of real good and real evil around him" (p. 170). It is not only the Emperor's Stoic asceticism which offends "Marius's Cyrenaic eagerness to taste and see and touch" (p. 147), but even more the inability of Stoicism to handle the question of evil. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius's ascetic indifference will break down at the first real trial: his children's sickness. On the other hand, the Epicurean aesthete will also avert his eyes in face of the obscurity of existence, in other words, he will avoid the question of evil.

Pater's moral preoccupations, most clearly expressed in *Marius*'s spiritual development, were perfectly in line with earlier Romantic dilemmas concerning the problem of evil. Although the Romantic tradition was characterised by the belief in the perfectibility of man and in the infinite possibilities of human nature, it has also been pointed out that the question of evil and its anthropological interpretation was one of the fundamental problems of Romantic thinkers. Evil in the world, and the experience of sin and guilt led to a recognition of the finiteness

¹⁶ Walter Pater. "Conclusion," p. 152.

and limitation of human experience.¹⁷ Driven by this dilemma, both Coleridge and Wordsworth finally renounced pantheistic freedom and embraced Christian orthodoxy, the latter giving poetic expression to his choice in his *Ode to Duty* (Me this unchartered freedom tires / I feel the weight of chance desires).¹⁸ Although that kind of commitment seemed to be incompatible with Pater's temperament (as we will see later in *Marius*), the anxiety can be similarly traced back to the loss of a religious framework.

The acute recognition of the problem of morality leads Marius to emphasise the moral component in Cyrenaic philosophy, which will result in the curtailment of the absolute individualism of his own youthful Epicureanism. To find some common moral ground, he is compelled to modify his earlier creed of the momentary, sensible apprehension of the individual being "the only standard of what is or is not" (p. 109). In other words, he realises the need to get beyond the cell of one's own personality, which he has condemned as daydreaming earlier (p. 117). The movement beyond subjectivity, in turn, will call for a modification or curtailment of his concept of personal freedom, "in concession to the actual manner, the distinctions, the enactments of that great crowd of admirable spirits, who have elected so, and not otherwise, in their conduct of life" (p. 188).

The moral awareness of an aesthete like Pater will inevitably bring into focus the question of the ethical in art. Thus, Pater was understandably preoccupied with the "entanglement of beauty with evil," as he was acutely aware of the "fallenness of sensuous experience," the "dubious, double root" of all artistic creation and aesthetic enjoyment.¹⁹ Monsman points to the presence of a paradoxical figure, the Archangel in Pater's writings, who is a divine epiphany and a murderous lover at the same time: "an ambiguous force malign and protective." In art there is always a dangerously close wrestling with evil, and so ultimately, with death.²⁰

¹⁷ Analysing the episode of stealing a boat when a child in Book I of *The Prelude*, Ágnes Péter points out that for William Wordsworth the recognition of infinite freedom was accompanied by feeling guilt and the consequent limits of human life. Ágnes Péter. *Roppant szívárvány. A romantikus látásmódról*. Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1996, p. 139.

¹⁸ Péter, pp. 145–150.

¹⁹ Gerald Monsman, p. 140.

²⁰ This preoccupation can be traced back to Romanticism, see Ágnes Péter's remark on Keats: the creative process itself is one of the deepest form of knowing, coming close to a kind of death. (Ágnes Péter, p. 171.)

DEATH

Most of Pater's imaginary portraits end with the death of the protagonist. The force that moves Marius onwards from one stage of development to the next is death. Death thus becomes a structural, organising principle in the work: first the death of his mother (followed by his departure from the family villa), the death of Fabian (followed by Marius first serious philosophical search); and finally Marius's own death. His life "had been something of a *meditatio mortis*, ever facing towards the act of final detachment" (p. 288) .

Of course evil, sin and death are aspects of the same ancient reality in a culture informed by the biblical tradition. They upset the Greek "balance" and mar ideal beauty; they constitute the existential rupture, the hindrance of that wholeness and harmony towards which the human search is directed. We learn that the first death in Marius's life (his mother's) makes him a questioner. This is the cause of the fundamental dilemma of aesthetes like Pater, who are haunted by the "pagan sadness," by the sentiment that the pleasures of the senses slip out of our hands, in spite of our yearning for their permanence. Describing in his essay on Winckelmann a universal pagan sentiment, the broad foundation of all religions, Pater beautifully writes: "It is with a rush of home-sickness that the thought of death presents itself. He would remain at home for ever on the earth if he could."²¹ Marius, at Flavian's deathbed, tries to "fix in his memory every detail, should any hour of forgetfulness hereafter come to him with the temptation to feel completely happy again" (p. 101).

For Pater a most glorious attempt for home-making on the earth was the Renaissance. "It helped man onward to that reassertion of himself, that rehabilitation of human nature, the body, the senses, the heart, the intelligence..." He saw it

as a counterpoise to the increasing tendency of medieval religion to depreciate man's nature, to sacrifice this or that element in it, to make it ashamed of itself, *to keep the degrading or painful accidents of it always in view...*²²

(my italics)

²¹ Walter Pater. "Winckelmann." *The Renaissance*, p. 129.

²² Walter Pater. "Pico della Mirandola." *The Renaissance*, p. 27.

But in these quotes from his essay “Pico della Mirandola” the basic paradox of humanness is exposed again: the degrading and painful elements are there, and making sense of life is to reunite what the degradation has separated. In other words, it is necessary to face evil and deal with it so that the reassertion of humanness will become possible. The unattainable purpose is to reconcile the *yes* and the *no*, the two equally necessary answers to humanness. Although Pater was undoubtedly more attracted to the “yes” pole of the paradox, in at least one of the imaginary portraits we see an extreme example of asceticism. Sebastian van Storck, in his detached pantheism inspired by Spinoza, makes an attempt to achieve the “equilibrium” by “*tabula rasa*,” by completely dying to self. His intellectual tendencies

seemed to necessitate straightforward flight from all that was positive. He seemed, as one may say so, in love with death; preferring winter to summer; finding only a tranquillising influence in the thought of the earth beneath our feet cooling down for ever from its old cosmic heat...²³

Sebastian, with his strange inverse mysticism or *via negativa*, can even be conceived of as the counterpart of most of Pater’s other heroes (including Marius) who live under the spell of the “sense of the splendour of our existence and of its awful brevity.”²⁴

Becoming thus aware of the “degrading and painful” elements of life (i. e. evil and death), Marius realises the restrictions of his philosophy.

It is one of those subjective and partial ideals, based on vivid, because limited, apprehension of the truth of one aspect of experience (in this case, of the beauty of the world and the brevity of man’s life there) which it may be said to be the special vocation of the young to express.

(p. 181)

Marius’s life can also be seen as a metaphor for the development of humanity in that his youth can be conceived of as parallel with the antique Greek world, the youth of humanity, as Pater has written elsewhere: “Let us not regret that this unperplexed youth of humanity, satisfied with the vision of itself, passed, at the due moment, into a mournful maturity...”²⁵

²³ Walter Pater. “Sebastian Van Storck.” *Imaginary Portraits*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1905, pp. 98–99.

²⁴ Walter Pater. “Conclusion,” p. 152.

²⁵ Walter Pater. “Winckelmann.” *The Renaissance*, p. 134.

The "mournful maturity" Pater refers to here is of course Christianity, with which Marius will be acquainted in the final stage of his life. His encounter with Christianity is preceded and prepared by an exposure to Apuleius and his Platonism, which seems to him somewhat too facile in its assumption of a "celestial ladder from heaven to earth" (p. 224). In Marius's eyes it is the kind of mystical vision which fails to do justice to the actual world and to the human body, thus representing the philosophical opposite of Epicureanism. After these extremes, the early Christian experience, mediated to him by his new friend, Cornelius, a young Roman soldier, seems to have a synthesising power hitherto unknown during his philosophical and existential search. I will dedicate the rest of my paper to the analysis of different aspects of this experience, concentrating on Marius's visit to an early Christian act of worship at the Roman matron Cecilia's house.

THE DESIRE FOR UNITY

Gerald Monsman has convincingly demonstrated that some qualities of the Paterian text (*Marius*) tend towards postmodernism (its ultrareflective nature, "the ceaseless shuttling back and forth between all possible levels"²⁶ etc.), yet the yearning for unity, the possibility of which is denied by Postmodernism, is a Romantic quality, carried to its final point in the Modernist attempts at totality.

It dissolves, diffuses and dissipates, in order to recreate; – Coleridge wrote of the secondary imagination – or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events *it struggles to idealize and unify*.

(my italics).

Monsman himself has remarked that in *Marius* visionary wholeness takes the place of the disintegrating flux, and at any rate, Pater's dialectic is far from Derrida's defiant playfulness. Instead, it is a dramatic wrestling to make sense of experience and find a centre for it.

As I have stated earlier, art and religion are often employed to the same end: to recreate the broken unity, to regain the lost harmony (Monsman), to find a centre, over and against the disintegrating effects of the world of the flux. Monsman is right to point out that Pater has glimpsed this elusive wholeness in

²⁶ Gerald Monsman, p. 6.

the aesthetic object, and that by idealising life, art for him has achieved “the conquest and reconciliation [...] between the antinomies of life and death, beauty and horror, the real and the imaginary...”²⁷ Yet the text of *Marius* suggests that Marius/Pater yearned for more than the elusive wholeness of aesthetics. By imaginatively depicting a sacred moment of history, in *Marius the Epicurean* Pater seems to have created a myth of the perfect integration of culture, art and religion. The point about this sacred moment is exactly that these aspects cannot and should not be separated. Although it has been pointed out by many scholars²⁸ that Marius’s experience of the church at Cecilia’s house, his observance of the liturgy is primarily aesthetical, it is powerful enough to fill him with “hope against hope,” and to awake the moral drives inherent in his nature. Similarly, though we know that the Cecilia in *Marius* is a complete fabrication, Pater, according to Lubbock, “seems to have aimed to produce a conjectural reconstruction of a *real woman*, some of whose attributes might have led to her adoption as the patron saint of music, just as others might have given rise to the ascetic martyr of the legend” (my italics).²⁹

Cecilia’s house endowed with this mythic quality becomes for Pater the great organising metaphor for art and life; a single vision of unity: an artistic ideal and a transcendent presence, appearing, however elusively, in one single form. Pater, all through his life’s work, searched for a door leading out of the hopelessly relativistic world of the senses (“Marius [...] yearning [...] in that hard world of Rome, and below its unpeopled sky, for the trace of some celestial wing across it,” or later: “a certain longing for escape [...] for a lifting, from time to time, of the actual horizon” [p. 233]), and in the vision at Cecilia’s house, he seems to have caught a glimpse of a wider reality.

The whole episode is introduced by a beautiful unity of imagery: first, quoting Swedenborg, Pater speaks of the unity of the soul and her house with all the visual aspects of a concrete building, and these visual objects themselves become “powers of apprehension,” and thus “doorways to things beyond,” “the germ or rudiment of certain new faculties, by which she, dimly yet surely, apprehends a matter lying beyond her actually attained capacities of spirit and sense” (pp. 225–226). Thus a few minutes later the quite ordinary conversation between Marius and Cornelius acquires metaphorical and symbolic significance:

²⁷ Gerald Monsman, p. 33.

²⁸ See Michael Levey’s *Introduction* to the Penguin edition of *Marius the Epicurean* (1985).

²⁹ Jules Lubbock, p. 187.

Cornelius, opening the door to another dimension, and the question "Would you like to see it?" points towards a possible reconciliation between sense and spirit, between the here and the beyond. On the second occasion Marius arrives at the time of the mass, and has a chance to follow the liturgy, which, as a religious act, has the same significance as a work of art: it builds a bridge between the visible and the invisible, apprehending unseen realities through the senses. It is like the activity of the painter who sets a "window or open doorway in the background of his picture" (p. 233).³⁰

By the event of the mass, the supreme Christian ritual of European culture, the story acquires archetypal significance in the last, climactic section. As I interpret Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes, a literary work has archetypal significance if it expresses a form of the *quest myth*, pointing at deep and common human desires for fulfilment. The reason for this is that primitive *ritual* is interpreted by Frye not simply as an attempt to influence natural processes but as an attempt "to synchronize human and natural energies," i.e., to build up what we call civilisation, to make "a total human form out of nature," and this specifically human pursuit is impelled by the desire for redemption, which for Frye basically means the *desire* for human fulfilment and for a better world than the actual. This is exactly Marius's desire: "innate and habitual longing for a world altogether fairer than that he saw" (p. 61), "the vision of a perfect humanity in a perfect world" (p. 293). The basic expression of this desire is human *dream* (the "conflict of desire and actuality"), and "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth."³¹ Myth is the source of religion, and of literature in a later phase, which also means that what Frye calls the "central quest myth" ("a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being"³² going through some kind of a fall and death, then revival or resurrection) is common to both literature and to the major religions. The common element, I would say, is the archetypal desire for redemption or fulfilment, and it is this that has driven Marius up to the point I

³⁰ The union of visible and invisible by Christian liturgy is stressed in an earlier piece of fiction (*The Child in the House*): "he [Florian] remembered gratefully how the Christian religion [translates] so much of its spiritual verity into things that may be seen..." Quoted in Michael Levey's *Introduction* to the Penguin edition of *Marius the Epicurean*, 1985.

³¹ Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 104-112.

³² Northrop Frye. "The Archetypes of Literature." *Modern Theories of Literature*. Ed. David Lodge. London New York: Longman House, 1972, p. 429.

have shown above. His dream³³ is not that of an individual dreaming his own world, but by the power of art – independently of authorial intentions – has been gathered up into the ancient rituals and dreams of humanity and thus given the form of myth. The archetype of tragedy is the myth of the dying god(s) as part of the quest myth.³⁴ So with the re-enactment of the death of Christ (the mass) the story of Marius approaches the mythic mode (the first historic mode according to Frye, the starting point of literature) to end up masterfully in tragic irony: Marius's death "by accident." Paradoxically, however, his death, with all the irony, is again a repetition of the ritual, and Marius is unmistakably a Christ-figure (the two events could even be perceived as being in a typological relation). Thus we can venture to say that *Marius the Epicurean* exhibits some of the qualities of the greatest modern literature, namely those of Joyce and Kafka, because here we can witness the same return of modern irony to myth which Frye pointed out in connection with those writers.³⁵ This seems to mean that the

³³ The epigraph on the title page of "Marius" (from Lucian: "A winter dream, when the nights are longest") has been interpreted in several ways. Monsman characteristically thinks that "to call the novel a dream is to affirm its nature as artifice – as a structure turning back upon itself" (p. 57). This statement can be applied to much literature, and does not necessarily contradict my interpretation, i.e. that the dream element in great literature corresponds to deep and common human desires.

³⁴ Frye's description of the quest myth and his whole theory of archetypes admittedly owes much to J. G. Frazer's work, especially to *The Golden Bough*. His output "is indispensable for a book like this," Frye wrote in his first study on the Bible (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. San Diego New York London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1982, p. 35), but then he also clearly distinguished his own notion of literary archetype from both Frazer's anthropological and Jung's psychological approach (see *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 108–112, and *The Great Code*, pp. 35–38). It is not possible to present his argument within the boundaries of this paper (for his relationship with Jung and Freud see János Kenyeres's excellent discussion in "Northrop Frye and contemporary literary theory," *The Anachronist* 1998, 248–266, pp. 252–254), but his main point is that the literary critic is interested in archetypes (or rather in myth which contains them) not as the source or origin of literature but as its content. It is one of Frye's basic convictions that the stubborn permanence of archetypal patterns cannot be adequately explained either historically or psychologically. Frye's assumption (on which he built his whole critical work) is that they are "continuously latent in the order of words" (*Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 109). His emphasis on the lack of any satisfying rational explanation for the order of archetypes strengthens my own point that Marius/Pater's search in the direction of religion is not necessarily an escape from a more radical and a more sincere point of view, but an integral necessity of being human.

³⁵ Analysing his fifth fictional mode (irony) and pointing out that "the archetype of the incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society," Frye comes to the very interesting conclusion that modern, ironic literature, which "begins in realism and dispassionate observation," "moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and

dying god figure is the archetypal basis for this curious paradoxical unity of the tragedy and irony of life, and the end of *Marius the Epicurean* one remarkable artistic expression of it. This closing episode also highlights one neglected aspect of the Christian tradition: the "accidental" death of Marius (archetypally: the death of Christ), as a metaphor for the death of the self exhibits a holy irony, a certain lightness and humour or easy detachment, with which the soul should relate to herself and to her situation here on earth. Needless to say, it is to Pater's artistic merit that both the tragedy and the irony of death (and of the human condition) bear equal weight here.

THE GREAT POSSIBILITY

As we have seen, this moment of visionary wholeness, this opening to things beyond is derived from the recreation of a myth. Myth here is understood in the sense described by Frye: it is a narrative which relates not to the actual, but to the *possible*³⁶ (historically, myth is first religious, then, recreated by literature, it becomes poetical). It relates to the same lifting up of horizons that Marius desires, such a desire waging battle with his visual temperament ("he must still hold by what his eyes really saw" [p. 225]). In the words of Frye: "this may not be what you would have seen if you had been there, but what you would have seen would have missed the whole point of what was really going on."³⁷ That Pater was preoccupied with *the possible* as an opening provided by both art and religion is clearly seen from *Marius* and other of his works as well. At the Roman feast preceding Marius's first visit to Cecilia's house, a Socratic dialogue (The *Halcyone*, once attributed to Lucian) is read out, in which Socrates says:

[...] methinks we are but half-blind judges of the impossible and the possible. We try the question by the standard of our human faculty, which avails neither for true knowledge, nor for faith, nor vision. Therefore many things seem to us impossible which are within our reach; partly through inexperience, partly through the childishness of our minds.

(pp. 220-221)

dying gods begin to reappear in it. Our five modes evidently go around in a circle. This reappearance of myth in the ironic is particularly clear in Kafka and Joyce." (Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 42-43.)

³⁶ Northrop Frye. *The Great Code*, p. 49.

³⁷ Northrop Frye. *The Great Code*, p. 48.

He then goes on to draw a parallel between the activity of the Deity, and the activity of the human artist to point out that there is no limit to what is possible.

In a similar manner, Frye talks paradoxically about faith as the reality of hope and of illusion, starting with “a vision of reality which is something other than history or logic, and on the basis of that vision it can begin to remake the world.”³⁸ In spite of his changing views, religion has remained for Pater the Great Possibility, the “sacred ideal” for the perfection of man.³⁹ His vision of early Christianity is a vision of hope, a vision of the possible: the dream of the regeneration of humanity. Marius saw in the early church “that regenerate type of humanity, which, centuries later, Giotto and his successors [...] were to conceive as artistic ideal” (p. 235). Pater, in fact, detects a cyclical principle of dying and coming to life in the history of culture: the Renaissance being the eternal metaphor for the rebirth.

It was the old way of the true *Renaissance* – being indeed the way of nature with her roses, the divine way with the body of man, perhaps with his soul – conceiving the new organism by no sudden and abrupt creation, but rather by the action of a new principle upon elements, all of which had in truth already lived and died many times.

(p. 228)

Analysing the Paterian vision, a multiplicity of levels can be identified: the mythic archetype of the dying god or Christ figure is reflected in the processes of nature (mythic or ritual level), in the fate of one man, Marius (personal level) and in the renewal of civilisation (level of cultural history, to do justice to Jules Lubbock as well).

QUASI-MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE?

The vision of Cecilia’s house, which is at once a vision of artistic ideal and an opening towards *the possible* (the transcendent), is preceded and reinforced by Marius’s strange spiritual experience through which he comes close to a kind of monotheistic faith. First he is pondering on the level of the intellect the

³⁸ Northrop Frye. *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 1991, p. 63.

³⁹ In *Gaston de Latour* (1888) he is talking about “recognitions of a great possibility which might lie among the conditions of so complex a world.” Walter Pater. *Gaston de Latour*. London: 1910, p. 112–13.

hypothesis "of an eternal friend to man, just hidden behind the veil of a mechanical and material order [...] ready perhaps even now to break through..." and then he actually experiences a presence: "some other companion, an unfailing companion, ever at his side throughout." "Must not the whole world around have faded away for him altogether, had he been left for one moment really alone in it?" (pp. 208-210). Then Marius identifies this presence with the being the Old Testament calls Creator, the Greek philosophers Eternal Reason and the New Testament the Father of Men. The experience is preceded by Marius's musings on the need for a communal but strongly personal basis for morality which I have examined earlier, thus it can also be seen as an ultimate answer to that need in the person of this "eternal friend to man," this "unfailing companion" (p. 210).

It is legitimate to interpret these experiences as psychological as long as the term is not used in an exclusive sense. All *experience* (aesthetic, religious, and emotional) is psychological in that it takes place within the human psyche. But on the basis of the text it does not seem justified to rule out right from the start a theological interpretation of Marius's experiences, claiming as Monsman does that this presence is first and foremost Marius's double, and his sense of identification with his double "provides an expanded consciousness of selfhood beyond the range of his personal experience."⁴⁰ Monsman's claim, as well as McGrath's insistence on Marius's experience (and on Stephen's epiphanies in Joyce's *Portrait*) being "quasi-mystical," "clearly aesthetic and psychological rather than religious," betray the reduced perception of the full-fledged modern mind which excludes the possibility of a spiritual dimension. McGrath has written that Pater "de-Romanticized German idealism [...] by rejecting its transcendental claims and applying its insights exclusively to the finite psychological world of individual experience."⁴¹ On the one hand, this statement eliminates one pole of the tension inherent in Pater's thinking. On the other hand, as I will show in the last section, the "individual experiences" recorded in the whole body of Pater's work suggest a recurring archetypal pattern and thus acquire a depth and a communal aspect largely lost to alienated modern man. Therefore, we do well to perceive a multiplicity of dimensions in Marius's ambiguous and complex experience, in which the ambiguity and the irony are, if you like, the modern elements.

One thing that can be known for sure about Marius's visions is that they have changed him, which again points outside the domain of pure aestheticism.

⁴⁰ Gerald Monsman, p. 30.

⁴¹ McGrath, p. 10.

McGrath typically comments that after his experience in “The Will as Vision,” Marius “quickly retreats to the relativistic world of the senses,”⁴² whereas in the text itself we read: “[...]the experience of that fortunate hour, seeming to gather into one central act of vision all the deeper impressions his mind had ever received, *did not leave him quite as he had been*” (p. 217, my italics). Of course this is a dramatic experience for Marius: after the encounter with Cecilia he struggles with the tension of his temperamental Epicureanism (being the eternal outsider) and the desire to become involved. For this eternal outsider, “the image of Cecilia, it would seem, was already become [...] like some matter of poetry, or of another man’s story, or a picture on the wall” (p. 277), but the opposite desire is referred to more than once, and Marius indeed makes up his mind to do something, for the first time in his life of observation. In reality, he does two things: he tries to talk to Marcus Aurelius about the persecution of the church (but fails to see him), and finally he sacrifices himself for his friend, Cornelius.

THE ACT OF SACRIFICE

Marius’s final act brings us back to the motif of death and the deepest existential and artistic paradox which accompanied Walter Pater throughout his work. There were two aspects to his worldview as an artist. One was the humanist ideal, the yearning for the perfection of man, for the “harmonious development of all the parts of human nature, in just proportion to each other” (p. 241). The other was the fact that he could not help expressing a much more desperate, dramatic view of humanness in his own art, a view of human nature as divided or split in itself. He objected to the latter in calling it asceticism: “moral effort as essentially a sacrifice, the sacrifice of one part of human nature to another, that it may live more completely in what survives of it” (p. 241), yet the act of sacrifice (which is in a way an ultimate and by no means harmonious answer to the human plight) has haunted him throughout his work. As we will see later, the pattern of sacrifice appears in his works as giving someone’s life for the sake of another.

Temperamentally, Pater (and his hero, Marius) was attracted to the harmonious aspect of Christianity (which certainly has a place in the Christian tradition, as the theologian Richard Niebuhr pointed out in his book *Christ and*

⁴² McGrath, p. 234.

*Culture*⁴³). It was this aspect which later gave rise to humanism. In this view, Christ is the human ideal, and man can be perfected through his example; there is no forced opposition between the soul and the body, the church and the world, instead there is peace and harmonious development.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, Abélard, one of Pater's favourites, is listed in this category by Niebuhr. Nevertheless, such a cultural view of Christianity always remains in tension with more dramatic, and traditionally more significant theologies which place more emphasis on evil and the brokenness of man, and great art tends to display the same tension.

Pater's wish for harmony and for the realisation of full humanness necessarily led him away from the purely aesthetic experience of ecstatic perception towards the existential realm in which action has priority over perception. Full humanness calls for something more solid than the flux of impressions, and there are hints in *Marius* that this fullness is related to sympathy and love. In one of the last chapters preceding his death, Marius entertains the recurring thought of "a certain grief in things as they are" (p. 274), meaning primarily death, old age and evil in the world, as a kind of summary of his inquiries into the nature of reality. The only counterbalancing factor turning the scales in favour of harmony, concludes Marius, is the power of sympathy, or in stronger terms, love. "I would that a stronger love might arise in my heart," he exclaims (p. 274). He seems to be thinking of a certain equalisation: if one received as much as he gave in terms of care or love, this would compensate for what he has lost or suffered. Thus *love* between humans is the only way to "touch absolute ground amid all the changes of phenomena [...] touch the eternal" (p. 275). At the very end of his musings he refers to "one of those suffering yet prevailing deities, of which old poetry tells," and closes with the hope that "there is a heart, even as ours, in that divine Assistant of one's thoughts - a heart even as mine, behind this vain show of things" (p. 275).

Through delicate hints then, human compassion and love becomes a pointer to, or at least a hope for a suffering and loving divine heart. Considering the fact that in the remaining chapters attention will fully turn to Christ and Christian martyrdom, the paradox is fully stated: the way to harmony lies through disharmony. Love, in its cosmic function of the restoration of harmony,

⁴³ H. Richard Niebuhr. *Christ and Culture*. Harper and Row Publishers, 1975. He describes this particular kind of Christian attitude in the chapter "The Christ of culture" on pages 83-115.

⁴⁴ "Sociologically they [the 'cultural Christians'] may be interpreted as nonrevolutionaries who find no 'cracks in time' - fall and incarnation and judgement and resurrection." (H. R. Niebuhr, p. 84.)

must necessarily be pursued to its extreme point, sacrifice. We can discern this paradoxical pattern of the human condition in some of Walter Pater's stories: in that of Amis and Amile; in the story of Sebastian van Storck, who dies while saving a child from drowning; and in the story of Marius who dies giving his life for his friend (which is the greatest expression of love, as the Gospel of John says). Such an act is paradoxically close to suicide and thus to a final negation of life (Van Storck's temptation), yet at the same time by imitating a divine pattern of love this is the supreme opening to "things beyond."

This antinomy at the heart of Pater's interpretation of reality is the clue to solving the "unexpected and incongruous tragedies which conclude his portraits."⁴⁵ This also explains his attraction to the story about the friendship of Amis and Amile. The central motif of that story is vicarious sacrifice: first Amis takes Amile's place in a tournament, delivering him from death, then Amile, by the command of the angel Raphael, slays his own children to wash Amis, sick with leprosy, in their blood. This story illustrates for Pater the paradoxical fullness of the Renaissance, which "has not only the sweetness which it derives from the classical world, but also that curious strength of which there is great resource in the true middle age."⁴⁶

This significant statement well illustrates my main point: Pater's need as an artist and a human being to balance the Arnoldian "sweetness and light" of the classical world with the "curious strength" of the Christian pattern of sacrifice. I have stressed that Pater recoils from drama and crisis, yet all his works are dramatic, given that evil involves crisis, and the way to love through sacrifice involves crisis as well. Rather than being merely his personal dilemma, this is a general characteristic of the human condition. Thus, in the last section of *Marius*, Pater concludes by a ritual expression of this dilemma, condensing it in the archetypal Man, the Founder of Christianity:

And last of all came a narrative [...] displaying, in all the vividness of a picture for the eye, the mournful figure of him towards whom this whole act of worship still consistently turned – a figure which seemed to have absorbed, like some rich tincture in his garment, all that was deep-felt and impassioned in the experiences of the past.

(p. 248)

⁴⁵ Gerald Monsman, p. 33.

⁴⁶ Walter Pater. "Two early French stories." *The Renaissance*, p. 10.

Pater preferred the "Good Shepherd, serene, blithe and debonair, beyond the gentlest shepherd of Greek mythology; a king under whom the beatific vision is realized of a reign of peace" (p. 238). He preferred "born Christians" to those becoming Christians "under some sudden and overpowering impression, and with all the disturbing results of such a crisis" (p. 240). And yet, for Marius,

the most touching image truly that had ever come within the scope of his mental or physical gaze [...] was the image of a young man giving up voluntarily, one by one, for the greatest of ends, the greatest gifts; *actually parting with himself, above all, with the serenity, the divine serenity of his own soul.*

(p. 250, my italics)

This passage is, at the same time, a precise description of what Marius ends up doing. The eternal outsider, the Epicurean observer, parting with himself, with the serenity of his soul, identifies with his friend. He re-enacts the archetypal pattern. In his case, as I have said, the act is coloured by irony (in a sense, Marius is certainly a "martyr to honest uncertainty"⁴⁷), and thus strikingly modern epistemological and existential anxieties are woven into the expression of something ancient and human.

⁴⁷ Michael Levey. "Introduction." *Marius the Epicurean*, p. 23.

Unorthodox Theists: Thomas Hardy and Percy Bysshe Shelley

An attempt at interrelating certain aspects of Hardy's work with those of Shelley's may not entirely prove abortive. One of Hardy's most widely anthologised poems, *The Darkling Thrush* bears significant resemblance to one of Shelley's most widely anthologised poems, *Ode to the West Wind*. Robert Langbaum in his *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* considers the imagery of *The Darkling Thrush* to be a modern counterpart to the Romantic scenery. The forest-lyre of Shelley's *Ode* turns into a set of tangled bine-stems, scoring the sky like strings of broken lyres and the ethereal skylark of the Shelley poems appears as a frail, gaunt bird's body wasted by age.¹ The contrast is outstanding. Yet Shelley's poetry should not be conceived as entirely canopied by the enthusiasm still present in the *Ode*. Even if scenes beaming with the light of spirit and beauty abound in Shelley's verse, even if Thomas Hardy preaches a gloomy world, there are instances in the poetry of Shelley that might have provided the seeds of Hardy's greyish plant, there are "obscure clouds moulded by the casual air" there,² that might have provided for the rainy background, too. The famous question of 1819, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" acquires a sombre, ironic tint with *The Sensitive Plant* in 1820:

When winter had gone and spring came back,
The Sensitive Plant was a leafless wreck;
But the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and darnels,
Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels.

(114-7)

¹ Robert Langbaum. *Thomas Hardy in Our Time*. London: Macmillan, 1997, p. 51.

² P.B. Shelley. *The Triumph of Life*. 532.

Harold Bloom writes of Thomas Hardy as of a poetic mind that came to life through its clash with Shelley's poetry. In *A Map of Misreading* Bloom asserts that the central meter-making argument in Hardy's poetry, "the sceptical lament for the hopeless incongruity of ends and means in all human acts" bears the pervading influence of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*.³ It is Shelley's vision of a "captive multitude," of old men and women "foully disarrayed, shaking / Their grey hairs in the insulting wind;" his sickness in the face of "the world and its mysterious doom," his grief over the way "power and will / In opposition rule our mortal day," over how "God made irreconcilable / Good and the means of good,"⁴ that must have echoed long in Thomas Hardy's memory, along with lines such as "Great and mean / Meet massed in death, who lends what life must borrow,"⁵ until he put *Nature's Questioning* on paper, leaving no doubts about a similar vision granted to him as well:

Meanwhile the winds and rains
And Earth's old glooms and pains
Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.
(26-28)

Both Shelley and Hardy had a strong affinity with matters hidden in Death's backyard. Their poetry is densely populated with spirits, presences, memories, and ghosts. Shelley's presences are like a "pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream," they are "glimmering incarnations / Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies."⁶ Hardy's ghosts are pale images wandering in deserted houses, echoes of voices that would never die away, past episodes that like "sick leaves reel down in throngs," like "white stormbirds wing across" the poems.⁷ A considerable part of their poetic output suggests that both were ready to venture into border-areas of this and the other world. They were equally interested in matters of love and death, and their respective views provoked like outrage among their contemporaries.

Topics related to sexual conventions as well as metaphysical speculations – especially if the latter disclosed religious doubts – seem to have been extremely

³ Harold Bloom. *A Map of Misreading*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 24.

⁴ P.B. Shelley. *The Triumph of Life*. 119, 165-6, 244, 228-31.

⁵ P.B. Shelley. *Adonais*. 185-6.

⁶ P.B. Shelley. *Adonais*. 117, 111-2.

⁷ Thomas Hardy. *During Wind and Rain*. 7, 14.

delicate to tackle during the creative period of both the authors discussed here. Those who were brave enough to publicly put their views forth in a direct, sceptical, antagonistic manner were also liable to bear severe consequences.

Percy Bysshe Shelley found himself expelled from Oxford University on writing his pamphlet *On the Necessity of Atheism* and exhibiting it in the shop-window of an Oxford bookshop under a pseudonym. Germs of the poet's early materialism and later idealism are equally present in this prose piece:

There is no God. This negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe remains unshaken.⁸

The rebuke he was subjected to for his too enthusiastic response to William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, which he probably first read in Eton in 1809, was only the beginning of a process which soon reduced Shelley to the status of a "monster" in the eyes of those who claimed to be treading the righteous path.⁹ His radical political views, which except for those held by Blake and William Hazlitt, were the most consistent of those times,¹⁰ his misunderstood unconventional attitude towards love and women severed for good most social contacts for Shelley in England, turning him into an outcast.

Thomas Hardy had all his creative life been struggling with the morasses of social conventions. As he put it, he was being harassed within the boundaries of style and form, whereas the real reason for the hostile critical reception lay in his own distinctive views upon the nature and order of the universe.¹¹ Unlike Shelley, who had never tried to disguise facts about his private life, Hardy led a

⁸ P.B. Shelley. "The Necessity of Atheism." *Selected Essays on Atheism*. Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972, p. 5.

⁹ Shelley's views on the perfectibility of man, on his susceptibility to perpetual improvement also originate in Godwin's *Enquiry*, which, according to Timothy Webb (*The Violet in The Crucible*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 3), he planned to translate into French. Godwin's ideas were obviously not a chance 1809 experience for Shelley. The 1820 *Letter to Maria Gisborne* still mentions the philosopher approvingly. The influence of Godwin, traceable in the development of the Romantic spirit, may reveal further implications if thoroughly researched.

¹⁰ Carlos Baker. *The Echoing Green*. Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 105.

¹¹ (On *The Dynasts*) "[...] in spite of some notable exceptions, the British Philistine is already moved by the odium theologium in his regard of it, though the prejudice is carefully disguised..." "[...] though the critics are in doubt what to say, they have been fairly respectful, but I wish they would not disguise their objection to the philosophy under the cloak of an objection to the form." *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Samuel Hynes ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, III. p. 99.

life of carefully guarded privacy, and in order to avoid ulterior investigations, he had arranged for a biography, formally written by his second wife, Florence Emily Hardy, amassed and dictated in fact by himself. These tactics have, in the long run, obviously led to a heightened interest of later critics in the facts of Hardy's hidden life.¹²

During the nineteenth century, writes Carlos Baker, his love poetry and short lyrics helped to establish a stereotype of Shelley as

[...] Ariel, a fleet-footed, rosy-fingered messenger from another world, who never stayed in one place long enough to invite or permit intellectual analysis or appraisal.

W. H. Auden, on the other hand, was dissatisfied with Shelley's poetry, as he "never looked at or listened to anything except ideas."¹³ Before discovering the indebtedness of *The Triumph of Life* to Dante's *La Vita Nuova* and before admiring Shelley's terza rima and his precision and economy of image, T. S. Eliot was wondering about how far it was "possible to enjoy Shelley's poetry without approving the use to which he put it" that is, without sharing his views and sympathies, some of which Eliot did "positively dislike."¹⁴ In 1984 Baker laments over the fact that most Shelley criticism has been devoted to "literary source hunting and bibliographical fact hunting" and stresses the importance of considering Shelley as the "visionary philosophical poet," in the line of descent from "the mythmaking Plato, through Dante and Milton, up to Blake and Coleridge, and on to the later Yeats."¹⁵

As regards the history of its reception, Hardy's work seems to have usually been assessed in the light of the critics' commitment to certain ideologies or literary theories. On one side he is dismissed as a "minor" poet by Richard Blackmur and F.R. Leavis, who, while praising the modernist sacred monsters, have hardly got a good word to say about his commonplace, unmelodious poetry.

¹² Robert Gittings in *The Young Thomas Hardy* 1975, significantly altered the perceptions of a large number of readers who had assumed, perhaps too casually, that Hardy's family background, as described in *The Life* he had prepared for Florence Emily, had been truthfully rendered. Gittings's research, much of it conducted for the first time, identified an alarming number of lies and artful misstatements in Hardy's account. Harold Orel. *The Unknown Thomas Hardy: The Lesser Known Aspects of Hardy's Life and Career*. The Harvester Press, 1987, p. 5.

¹³ Baker, p. 112, 32.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot. "Shelley and Keats." *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 95.

¹⁵ Baker, p. 112.

Then he is used as a “stick with which to beat the modernists,” as Langbaum puts it. J. Hillis Miller and Harold Bloom rank Hardy among the most influential poetic minds of his century, in his inspired, varied and minute treatment of everyday life’s basic matters.¹⁶

In their views upon religion and divinity, both Shelley and Hardy professed opinions far from being orthodox. They both, unorthodox theists developing new deistic systems, have imposed their own vision of the universe, and they both have adopted a somewhat sceptical view in doing it. Shelley prophesized the possibility and the supremacy of a humanity living harmoniously due to Universal Benevolence, and not due to the fear of hell or of public opinion, the “code of custom’s lawless law.”¹⁷ He believed most humans were lost in a malefic labyrinth because of their ignorance of the true way. He believed that acquainting them with ideal worlds would open their imagination towards living in one.¹⁸ The poet has the task of enlightening his flock of readers. Yet the militant enthusiasm of the young Shelley reached moments of despair too, even in poems of purest imagination as *The Witch of Atlas*:

Error and Truth had hunted from the Earth
All those bright natures which adorned its prime,
And left us nothing to believe in, worth
The pains of putting into learned rhyme.

(51–4)

Hardy was far from thinking he would be able to convert people through the power of his words. Still, he had carefully poured his vision into his novels, poems and *The Dynasts*, the epic drama he regarded to be his masterpiece. He did this despite his strong resentment of hostile criticism, despite his conviction,

¹⁶ Langbaum, p. 36; J. Hillis Miller. *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*. Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 78; Harold Bloom. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 24.

¹⁷ P.B. Shelley. *The Witch of Atlas*. 541.

¹⁸ “The imagination [...] acquires by exercise a habit [...] of perceiving and abhorring evil. [...] The only distinction between the selfish man and the virtuous man is that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow limit, while that of the latter embraces a comprehensive circumference.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. D.H. Reiman, S.B. Powers ed. New York: Norton, 1977, p. 189.

before he would put a single word on paper, that his lines were going to stir the shallow waters of Victorian public opinion. And they did.¹⁹

The Dynasts, Hardy's longest poetic work, is also the one that carries much of his philosophy. The term has always been controversial with Hardy. He states in several of his prefaces and letters that whatever his work contains, it does not count as philosophy, it being merely a mass of 'moments of vision,' of momentary impressions, recordings of fleeting states of mind. Yet then he mentions himself not only the philosophy behind the drama, but also the 'philosophy of life' shaped in previous volumes of verse.²⁰ Hardy's cautious attitude might be due to his horror of being instantly labelled and classified on basis of a superficial glance thrown over his writings.

Thomas Hardy has been called an atheist several times. Nevertheless he was not. He considered himself to be a "harmless agnostic" taken by the "literary contortionists" in their "crass illiteracy" for a "clamorous atheist." He attended church more or less regularly throughout his long life, in spite of his view that "the days of creeds are as dead and done as the days of Pterodactyls."²¹ His constitution required much sounder evidence for being able to accept Christian dogmas ("I have been looking for God for fifty years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him," he wrote in an 1890 note included in his *Life*), yet he viewed the Church as an emotional centre of cohesion, a link with tradition and a vehicle of public worship which should not be suspended with,

¹⁹ Hardy's 3 August 1907 *Letter to Clement Shorter* excellently illustrates the critical turmoil around his work and the way he perceived it: "I endeavour to profit from the opinions of those wonderful youths and maidens, my reviewers & am laying to heart a few infallible truths taught by them: e.g., -
That T. H.'s verse is his only claim to notice.

That T. H.'s prose is his real work.

That T. H.'s early novels are his best.

That T. H.'s later novels are his best.

That T. H.'s novels are good in plot & bad in character.

That T. H.'s novels are bad in plot & good in character.

That T. H.'s philosophy is all that matters.

That T. H.'s writings are good in spite of their bad philosophy.

This is as far as I have got at present, but I struggle gallantly on." *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. R. Little Purdy, Michael Millgate eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, III. p. 266.

²⁰ Hardy. *The Collected Letters*. III. p. 255.

²¹ Florence Emily Hardy. *The Life of Thomas Hardy*. London: Macmillan, 1962, p. 332.

despite its institutional abuse of the purest early Christianity.²² As for the universe, he adopted and modified Schopenhauer's vision of the will to live, and transformed it into the notion of the Immanent Will, of which he wrote "I believe too, that the Prime Cause, this Will, has never before been called It, in any literature English or foreign." The term *will* was not the only one Hardy considered for his purpose. Being questioned several times on his matter of choice, he wrote that other terms, as unconscious formative activity, urgency or impulse had also occurred to him, but he chose will, about which

[...] in the lack of another word to express precisely what is meant, a secondary sense has gradually arisen, that of effort exercised in a reflex or unconscious manner. Another word would have been better if one could have had it, though "power" would not do, as power can be suspended or withheld & the forces of nature cannot.

(*Collected Letters*, III. p. 117.)²³

In *The Dynasts* Hardy managed to combine two of his grandest projects: the literary rendering of the Napoleonic Wars, an *Iliad* of nineteenth century Europe, as he put it, and the exposition of his specific views upon the working of the universe.

The span of Napoleon's reign Hardy chose to orchestrate ranges from 1805 to 1815, ten years of glamour and misery on every side partaking in the War, a perfect stage for the demonstration of a superior "Immanent Will," which

[...] works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
Seem in themselves its single listless aim,
And not their consequence.

(*The Dynasts*, I. Fore Scene)

²² "If the doctrines of the supernatural were quietly abandoned tomorrow by the church & "reverence & love for an ethical ideal" alone retained, not one in ten thousand would object to the readjustment, [...] & our venerable old churches & cathedrals would become the centres of emotional life that they once were." Thomas Hardy. *The Collected Letters*, III. p. 5.

²³ The Immanent Will had already been discussed at length by Eduard von Hartman in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, translated into English in 1884, and by Schopenhauer, in his *The World as Will and Idea*, read by Hardy in its 1890 translation. J. Hillis Miller. *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, p. 117.

The concept was not a new one in Hardy's poetry.²⁴ Quite a number of his poems signal the presence in the world of a superior power, "Vast Imbecility," "Great Face behind," indifferent to the suffering of humanity:

Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?
(*Nature's Questioning*, 13-6.)

I talk, as if the thing were born
With sense to work its mind;
Yet it is but one mask of many born
By the Great Face behind.
(*The Last Chrysanthemum*, 21-4.)

The myth of this Will having deserted the world, having put its cares off is present in the poems and in *The Dynasts* as well. It slightly resounds of the story of the Fall, for Hardy blames not the Will for the state of things he seems to perceive – as this strange entity is *ab ovo* blameless, having no aim, no logic, no passion, no rule – but humanity:

The Earth of men – let me bethink me... Yea!
I dimly do recall
Some tiny shape I built long back
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)
So named [...] It perished, surely – not a wrack
Remaining, or a sign?

[...]

And 't is strange – though sad enough –
Earth's race should think that one whose call
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff
Must heed their tainted ball!

(*God-Forgotten*, 11-6, 33-6.)

²⁴ *The Dynasts* came out in three series, in 1903, 1905 and 1907, while Hardy published his first book of poems in 1889.

As one sad story runs, It lends Its heed
To other worlds, being wearied out with this;
Wherefore its mindlessness of earthly woes.
Some, too, have told at whiles that rightfully
Its warefulness, Its care, this planet lost
When in her early growth and crudity
By bad mad acts of severance men contrived,
Working such nescience by their own device.

(*The Dynasts*, I. Fore Scene)

Possible examples for these bad mad acts are certainly abounding in the period covered by *The Dynasts*. The epic drama is also made a vehicle of Hardy's comments upon human vanity, immorality and the spirit of the flock, on basis of which the masses are governed by the kingly heads of Europe towards a chaotic state that much resembles the one into which the Unconscious Will thrusts humanity:

I see red smears upon the sickly dawn,
And seeming drops of gore. On earth below
Are men – unnatured and mechanic-drawn –
Mixt nationalities in row and row,
Wheeling there to and fro
In moves dissociate from their souls' demand,
For dynasts' end that few even understand!

(*The Dynasts*, II. 6. 3.)

Be Hardy's Immanent Will as inedite as he in several of his letters claims it to be, the reader might ponder over some lines of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* that pencil the presence of a similarly terrifying blind figure that is supposed to govern the earthly turmoil:

All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded [...] little profit brings
Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor [...] [...] that these banded eyes could pierce the sphere
Of all that is, has been, or will be done...

(99–104)

A specific kind of view unites the elements of Hardy's epic drama. For one thing, the narrative is presented as viewed by "Spirits" from above, the whole human show becoming thus somewhat insignificant. Throughout this perspective the organic character of the universe becomes visible, a fact that much reminds one of Shelley's description of the same attribute, on different grounds, though:

Spirit of the Pities

Amid this scene of bodies substantive
 Strange waves I sight like winds grown visible,
 Which bear men's forms on their innumerable coils,
 Twining and serpentining round and through.
 Also retracting threads like gossamers –
 Except in being irresistible –
 Which complicate with some, and balance all.

[...]

Spirit of the Years

These are the Prime Volitions, – fibrils, veins,
 Will-tissues, nerves, and pulses of the Cause,
 That heave throughout the Earth's compositure.
 Their sum is like the lobule of a Brain
 Evolving always that it wots not of;
 A Brain whose whole connotes the Everywhere,
 And whose procedure may but be discerned
 By phantom eyes like ours; the while unguessed
 Of those it stirs, who (even as ye do) dream
 Their motions free, their orderings supreme;
 Each life apart from each, with power to mete
 Its own day's measures; balanced, self-complete;
 Though they subsist but atoms of the One
 Labouring through all, divisible from none...

(*The Dynasts*, I. Fore Scene)

While Hardy sees the world as a huge anthropomorphic organism, where everything falls into place in constructing the overall pattern momentarily designed by the Immanent Will,²⁵ Shelley conceives it in its uttermost unity, within which every particle resembles the whole, and everything contributes to the resulting harmony:

There's no atom of yon earth
But once was living man;
Nor the minutest drop of rain,
That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
But flowed in human veins.

(*Queen Mab*, 211-5.)

The merging of the human and natural elements in Shelley's verse is also traceable on the level of such modifiers as "smiling air," "wakeful stars," "enamoured air," "waking dream," "young moon," "casual air." Elements of nature bear human-like characteristics, while mortals are viewed through a set of features taken from the natural environment. People are "Numerous, as gnats upon the evening gleam," man is borne as "one of the million leaves of summer's bier." Man and nature are animated by the same power as "living winds [...] flow / Like waves above the living waves below."²⁶ The association of the two entities occurs in *Epipsychidion* as the female and male principles of nature sublimate at the apogee of visionary experience:

Be this our home in life, and when years heap
Their withered hours, like leaves, on our decay,
Let us become the overhanging day,
The living soul of this Elysian isle,
Conscious, inseparable, one.

(536-40)

Shelley is noted for his ability to illustrate the nature of thinking through effects of musicality and light, to create a sort of landscape of the mind, to populate his Nature with concepts of ethics and philosophy and to describe the

²⁵ "The nether sky opens, and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure, the Alps shaping like a backbone, and the branching mountain-chains like ribs, the peninsular plateau of Spain forming a head." *The Dynasts* I. Fore Scene.

²⁶ P.B. Shelley. *The Triumph of Life*, 46, 51.

latter in terms of natural phenomena. Hardy is an artist in catching the instances of human presence in nature.²⁷ In his rendering, man and nature are in a somewhat hierarchical relation, as nature is always a fiddle on which human spirits play the tune, is always the instrument for revealing the intricacies of a state of mind:

The black, lean land, of featureless contour
Was like a tract in pain.

(A Meeting With Despair)

When I look forth at dawning, pool,
Field, flock and lonely tree,
All seem to gaze at me
Like chastened children sitting silent in a school...

(Nature's Questioning)

Wanly upon the panes
The rain slides, as have slid since mourn my colourless thoughts.

(A Commonplace Day)

A glowing fire
Is life on these depressing, mired, moist days
Of smitten leaves down-dropping clammily,
And toadstools like the putrid lungs of men.

(The Dynasts, I.4.5. Napoleon)

The same set of similar and different elements appears to the inquiring eye when taking into consideration the attitude of the two authors towards institutionalised Christianity.

Shelley's adventure with Christianity mostly broke off with his attempts to translate Pliny's *Natural History* at Eton, the chapter "De Deo" of which had defined his unorthodox stance that brought the first blow upon him by the time he dreamt of 16-year-old Harriet Grove, his cousin, who chose the security of her parents' views instead of the inflamed ideal of the poet. Shelley's letters written to

²⁷ An object or a mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by Unconscious nature. Hence clouds, mists and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold or the print of a hand. Florence Emily Hardy. *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p. 126.

Thomas Jefferson Hogg in the aftermonths of the break-off of their engagement are full of untempered attacks on the cult that had stolen his sweetheart. His hatred for Christianity, which formerly had merely been a point of view open to discussion (see his letters written to his father from Eton), may have lost its adolescent ardour, nevertheless he wrote *Queen Mab* under the spell of anti-Christian rage, and produced a line of argument against the rigidities of the cult that he himself regretted later:

Falsehood demands but gold to pay the pangs
 Of outraged conscience; for the slavish priest
 Sets no great value on his hireling faith:
 A little passing pomp, some servile souls,
 Whom cowardice itself might safely chain,
 Or the spare mite of avarice could bribe
 To deck the triumph of their languid zeal,
 Can make him minister to tyranny.

(*Queen Mab*, 197–203.)

Here obviously it is not the metaphysical implications of Christianity that Shelley focuses on. It is clear enough that he basically has a distaste not for religion, but for those who made it up and have been busy keeping it alive, perverting it according to their own needs. The anti-Christian voice softens into idealist musing over the nature and essence of immortality, while the poet, unlike a “mighty mechanist” who would breathe “soul into the iron heart / of some machine portentous,” yields to the impulses of an “infancy outlasting manhood,” thus:²⁸

So I, a thing whom moralists call worm,
 Sit spinning, till round this decaying form
 From the firm threads of rare and subtle thought –
 No net of words in garish colour wrought,
 To catch the idle buzzers of the day –
 But a soft cell, where, when that fades away,
 Memory may cloth in wings my living name
 And feed it with the asphodels of fame,
 Which in those hearts which most remember me
 Grow, making love an immortality.

(*Letter to Maria Gisborne*, 5–14.)

²⁸ P.B. Shelley. *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, 16, 18–9, 73–4.

The youngster poet's zeal prevails only in his critique of the abusers of whatever ideal:

Or those in philosophic councils met
 Who thought to pay some interest for the debt
 They owed to Jesus Christ for their salvation
 By giving a faint foretaste of damnation
 To Shakespeare, Sidney, Spencer and the rest
 Who made our land an island of the blest.

(27-32)

And this is the point where the views of Shelley and Hardy are in total agreement. Both were sceptical about the validity of Christian dogma, and both saw way too clearly the uses it had been put to during the turmoil of its history. Nevertheless neither of the two denied the world a higher divinity. In January 1811 Shelley wrote to Hogg:

The word God has been and will continue to be the source of numberless errors until it is erased from the nomenclature of philosophy. [...] It does not imply 'the Soul of the Universe, the intelligent and necessarily beneficent actuating principle.' This I believe in; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are in themselves arguments more conclusive than anything which can be adduced that some vast Intellect animates Infinity.

According to J. Hillis Miller, in baroque poetry we can witness the crucial moment

[...] of a change from a poetry of presence to a poetry of allusion and absence; [...] the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem to many writers a time when God is no more present and not yet again present, and can only be experienced negatively, as a terrifying absence.²⁹

To the common experience of a withdrawal, of a disappearance of the Divinity from the world, both authors responded by developing their own concepts of an immanent spiritual presence in the universe, neither was capable of accepting the state of a *terrifying absence*. Even if unconscious, blind and uncaring,

²⁹J. Hillis Miller. *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers*. Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 17.

the Immanent Will of Thomas Hardy is still an Entity in action, a supreme cause and explanation to all earthly events. He did not believe much in human perfectibility as Shelley most certainly did, yet Hardy too had made his compromise by speculating over the possibility of this Immanent Will gradually becoming conscious and thus more merciful. He ended his *Dynasts* on this tone, but regretted doing so when the First World War broke out and the world seemed to have been governed by forces more irrational than ever. Shelley was convinced that most deities were no more than projections of the psychological needs of those who believed in them.³⁰ In his view, God was created in the image of man and not the other way round:

Some moon-struck sophist stood
 Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
 Fill heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood
 The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
 His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown...
 (Hellas, 46-50.)

It was the moral degradation of Christianity that drove Shelley on other paths, the implicit ugliness of his contemporaries in the ugliness of their God. His repulse to moral aspects of his age are clearly enough exposed in his *Essay on Christianity*:

Mankind, transmitting from generation to generation the legacy of accumulated vengeances, and pursuing with the feelings of duty the misery of their fellow-beings, have not failed to attribute to the Universal Cause a character analogous with their own.³¹

Shelley did for a time maintain his militant attitude of the youthful enthusiast who wrote revolutionary pamphlets in Ireland, to be scorned by the very Irish themselves, but lost much of his ardour during his years of exile. The thought of a vast body of verse that would convert readers and win them for the ethereal world of beauty seemed to steadily fade.

By the time Shelley began to change his point of view, realising that the world

³⁰ I.V. Chapple. *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Macmillan, 1986, p. 78.

³¹ P.B. Shelley. "An Essay on Christianity." *Selected Essays on Atheism*, p. 19.

[...] is not so much more glorious than it was,
 That I desire to worship those who drew
 New figures on its false and fragile glass

As the old faded. – Figures ever new
 Rise on the bubble, paint them as you may;
 We have but thrown, as those before us threw

Our shadows on it as it passed away...

(*The Triumph of Life*, 245–251.)

he set out on one of his numerous sea-journeys, one that never led him back into the world of senses.

Despite the harsh crusades conducted against his unorthodox views, Hardy lived to become the living monstre sacre of English Literature, and had never ceased to re-create, to explain the meanings of his past, of his work, of his words. He remained faithful to his perhaps most poignant feature, his duplicity. He knew his fellows too well to trust them. His age never really understood how to make a distinction between the facts of a writer's work and elements of the life or conduct of the same person. Struggling now and concealing then, Thomas Hardy had basically kept the sceptical attitude characteristic of many of his poems, but had also kept a bitter feeling about the order of things too:

what we gain by science is, after all, sadness. [...] The more we know of the laws & nature of the Universe the more ghastly a business we perceive it all to be – & the non-necessity of it. As some philosopher says, if nothing at all existed, it would be a completely natural thing; but that the world exists is a fact absolutely logicless & senseless.

(*Collected Letters*, III. p. 5.)

Tamás Juhász

The Voice and the Facts

Ideological transactions in Conrad's *Secret Agent*

Father, can't you see I am burning –
(Freud: Interpretation of Dreams)

I

Derivatives may explain origins, the after-reading effect may illuminate the recently completed text, and even the non-literary after-life of a literary narrative can shed light on the original material. Such is the case with Alfred Hitchcock and Joseph Conrad. In 1936, the former turned the latter's novel from 1907 into one of his several films to feature espionage. The script of *Sabotage* differs significantly from its literary source: among other alterations, it confines much of the plot to a movie-theatre run by the central married couple. Film-watching and its supporting technical apparatus are thus assigned a pivotal role: the proprietors of the cinema actually live behind a huge screen, a time-bomb is delivered along with film-canisters, and the tragic events are ironically played against the laughter of an audience that enjoys Disney's murderous bird cartoon, *Who Killed Cock Robin?* Undercover as he is, the detective-character is caught eavesdropping behind the projection screen, and will soon be forced to give up his disguise. Hitchcock's adaptation explicitly focuses on matters of representation inside his fictional world: on the differences between illusion and reality, on the way illusions (of cinematic identification) can be produced on a massive scale, and, as the detective's story shows, on changes in one's identity effected by the apparatus that

disseminates such illusions. The use of the sabotage motif and the foreign agents raises issues of political manipulation.

Paradoxically, it is by means of these diversions that the master director remained loyal to the spirit of the source text. His vision of a home that is like a movie-theatre is only seemingly a roundabout way to the truth Conrad expressed, which can, in fact, be better grasped if the Hitchcockian version is considered. Let this concern with the world of images mark the course of the present literary investigation and explain its concentration on issues of identification.

Mechanisms of doubling, seducing and, most importantly, promising affect more than the mere imagery or symbolism of the novel. They become formative elements of what is equally fundamental to both Conrad and Hitchcock's spy thriller: the plot. In *The Secret Agent*, the very opening of the story-line hinges on the main character's need to assume the radically new role of becoming an active terrorist, and planting a bomb at the Greenwich Observatory. Yet, the translation of Verloc's professed anarchistic views into action is not without difficulties. Subsequent to Vladimir's threat to dismiss him unless he carries out this "act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable" (67),¹ he leaves the embassy perplexed and devastated, and most of the further complications derive from his incompetent handling of this strange commission. Unease and crisis soon shatter Verloc's fragile family. It is suggested in the very first chapter that the marital tie between Winnie and her husband is a purely economic arrangement, yet the narrator takes his time to make this point clear. Whereas the cleavage between man and wife is obvious from the beginning, the full balance-sheet is only revealed in Chapter Eleven, when, facing the crisis in its entirety, Winnie is forced to re-consider what she calls a "bargain" (233) between her and her husband. Counting Winnie's losses, the narrator uses a boat metaphor to outline the woman's original options of prospective husbands as well as economic means:

[There was] a young man wearing his Sunday best, with a straw hat on his dark head and a wooden pipe in his mouth. Affectionate and jolly, he was a fascinating companion for a voyage down the sparkling stream of life; only his boat was very small. There was room in it for a girl-partner at the oar, but no accommodation for passengers. He was allowed to drift away from the threshold of the Belgravian mansion while Winnie

¹ All parenthesised references are to this edition: Joseph Conrad. *The Secret Agent*. London: Penguin Books, 1984. All italics in quotations from Conrad are mine.

averted her tearful eyes. He was not a lodger. The lodger was Mr Verloc, indolent and keeping late hours, sleepily jocular of a morning from under his bed-clothes, but with gleams of infatuation in his heavy-lidded eyes, and always with some money in his pockets. There was no sparkle of any kind on the lazy stream of his life. It flowed through secret places. But his barque seemed a roomy craft, and his taciturn magnanimity accepted as a matter of course the presence of passengers.

(220)

In other words, it is for her family's, and mainly for Stevie's sake – from Verloc's point of view, for that “encumbrance” (48) of a brother-in-law's sake – that she married Verloc. What she receives in exchange for this sacrifice is equally businesslike: “Mr Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved – that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief *possession*” (174). This, of course, is something unpleasant to face or talk about, therefore the insincerity that characterises their lack of interest and communication is a consequence of the dishonesty of the original deal. Winnie's conviction that “things do not bear looking into very much” (175) and her “philosophical, almost disdainful incuriosity” (216) are expressed so often in the novel that they deserve the name of “the foundation of their accord in domestic life” (216). On the woman's part, a self-created, self-imposed and self-deceiving conviction substitutes for love: “[...] Mr Verloc was *good*. [Stevie's] mother and his sister had established that ethical fact on an unshakeable foundation. They had established, erected, consecrated it behind Mr Verloc's back, for reasons that had nothing to do with abstract morality” (171).

Except for the profound affection between Winnie and Stevie, the spirit of dependence over and above understanding pervades all interpersonal relationships in the household. Though willing to “provide for this fellow, too” (83), Verloc “extended as much recognition to Stevie as a man not particularly fond of animals may give to his wife's beloved cat; and this recognition, benevolent and perfunctory, was essentially of the same quality” (72). The reference to his spouse's person is an appropriate analogy, for the disastrous speechlessness between Winnie and her husband remains equally unbroken between provider and his male dependent: “Mr Verloc perceived with some surprise that he did not know really what to say to Stevie” (83). The lack of confidence penetrates even the mother–daughter relationship. As “a move of deep,” yet completely hushed up “policy,” the “heroic old woman” (161) decides to remove herself from her

family and gains admission to an almshouse for widows. The act, inexplicable and never confided to anyone as it is, has its clandestine motivation: a "directly dependent position" for the boy is to be achieved, one that will settle him "permanently for life" (162).

The characters are then in quite complicated positions. Winnie is a deprived woman in several senses of the word: with her youth, "full bust, in a tight bodice" and "broad hips" (46), she is a person of erotic attraction, yet she finds no proper outlet either sexually or socially. In Chapter Twelve, she refers with horror to the seven years while she was "a good wife to him, the kind, the good, the generous - And he loved [her]" (244). Her loneliness, though clear from the beginning, becomes particularly painful after her mother's departure. Once separated from her blood relatives, she became "a very friendless woman" (239) who, in a mental search for a friendly face, can only come up with her charwoman.

Verloc's position is complicated in different ways. He maintains simultaneous ties with the Russian Embassy, the British police, France, British anarchists and the secretive customers of his sex shop. Political ideas seem to play no role for him, the prospect of relatively easy living is more tempting: "He had been guided in the selection of this peculiar line of business by an instinctive leaning towards shady transactions, where money is picked up easily" (82). Yet the notorious incompatibility of (double) espionage-related duties imposes a distressing burden on him "with a force approaching to positive bodily anguish," for "[t]here is no occupation that fails a man more completely than that of a secret agent of police" (84). Ironically enough, it is his secretiveness that he genuinely shares with his wife: as Winnie remains silent about the true mechanism of their marriage, so does he conceal his sources of income. She is not the only person to be kept ignorant: the various political factions know, understandably, nothing about Verloc's simultaneous commitments - the only exception is police officer Heat, but even he, for the most part, is informed in his private, rather than his official capacity.

The actions of Winnie's mother are in line with the ways her daughter and son-in-law try to establish themselves in society. Like the couple, she too chooses perversely roundabout, clandestine and yet somewhat logical means to improve her son's future chances. Her departure is a symbolic removal of the coherence that a mother provides for a family. It delegates a more distinct motherly role to the childless Winnie, which, in turn, will contribute to the

unfortunate pairing off of Stevie with his poor father surrogate of a brother-in-law (see p. 221). Her unwarranted decision to abandon her family exemplifies something that governs the acts of the major characters as well: her confusion about her status and choices, in other words, reality and illusions. This is no abstract moral judgement: even her own daughter fails to understand her, for in reality, there is no pressing need for her to leave the family behind – much the same way there was no real need for Winnie to marry Verloc, and, as confirmed by the police officers themselves, for Verloc to become the sole executor of the commissioned bomb attack.

The congeniality of these strategies encourages the reader to understand the story as reflecting the efforts of its characters to establish their *subject positions*. Located between conflicting needs and demands, these persons' positions call for the supplement "subject-" in various senses of the term. As indicated above, the troubles arising are a matter of both *subjection* and *subjectivity*: the main characters are *subjects* in an intricate cobweb of dependencies and exchanges where their subjugation is further intensified by the way their subjectivity perceives and responds to their actual conditions. It is the desire for the consolidation of these positions that governs the illegal, deceptive and in the long run (self-)destructive steps that the characters take. Quite literally, the novel is then about the creation of subject positions in modern capitalist society, and, as it will be argued later on, it is not only true in thematic, but also in linguistic as well as structural terms.

II

Many may read the narrative as a conservative success story: as the Assistant Commissioner boasts, the police are so quick and efficient that they find the culprits "in less than twelve hours" (209). He is also quite right in saying that they have been dealing with a "domestic drama" (204) because Vladimir, the non-domestic evil angel behind the attack, never meant to implicate the Verlocs as a family, in fact, he is astonished to learn that the renowned secret agent is married. Moreover, the instigator represents a foreign power (just how foreign is discussed by Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner on page 209, where the cornered diplomat drops hints at the legal exemption granted to embassy territories in host countries).

A battle can only be won if the enemy's whereabouts are known: the above arguments tend to locate, and thereby restrict the sphere, causes, and even

dangers of (political) crime. The text, however, resists such reductions. It is rich in analogies between those attributes of legality, half-legality and outright illegality which, at first sight, may appear to be disparate entities. These parallelisms intensify the tightness and unity of this remarkably coherent novel, and, by virtue of their all-embracing nature, encourage the reader to move beyond the success story theory, and seek out intriguing social implications with a claim larger than mere domesticity.

In the first place, there are structural analogies of which the characters themselves are usually not aware, which are only available for the reader. The least tangible, yet most conspicuous, is the portrayal of politics with its legal as well as illegal manifestations and of its location the city, as impersonal, even hostile. For Conrad's London, with its alcoholic charwomen, maimed cab drivers, various forms of "irremediable decay" (167) and "odious multitudes of mankind" (269), is a place where people are faceless and labour is alienated. Although the "rags of the dirty men harmonized excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers' ink," the machineries of commerce and information - "with their wares from the gutter" (101) - effect a deep rift between the individual and the capitalist establishment around him. Jacques Berthoud perceives this link mainly between anarchism and the modern metropolis:

The almost dehumanised preoccupation of the anarchists with principles, systems, and abstractions is the analogue of the impersonal, dehumanised city - that immense abstraction - where the anarchists feel their social targets to be most heavily concentrated. By sheathing the novel in the anarchist apparatus, Conrad creates at once the air of conspiracy and desperation, of individual men and women struggling vainly to assert their identity, to make themselves felt, their presence known, amid the overwhelming anonymity of city life.²

Yet, various episodes call for the inclusion of legal, though not desirable, politics into this analogy. Heat's attempt to charge the paroled convict Michaelis with the explosion he knows he is innocent of is only one example of the little regard the establishment has for individual lives. Placed in this context, it is no wonder that the Professor, with his particular blend of intelligence and madness, comes to recognise that the "terrorist and the policeman both come from the

² Jacques Berthoud. *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 171.

same basket" (94), that "revolutionists" are equally "slaves of the social convention" (93). These statements will find their echo in the words of yet another character: although Heat's intention is to sharpen the difference between anarchists and policemen, in doing so, he underlines the congeniality between the police and more regular criminals: "he could understand the mind of a burglar, because, as a matter of fact, the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer" (110). The opposition between policeman and anarchist is further loosened up by the equally ironic application of a flattening epithet to both of them: whereas Heat is proclaimed to have "moral support" (113) behind him, the Professor also deserves the label "moral agent" (104). Words, motifs and situations initially associated with the underworld reappear in those segments of society which the criminals aspire to antagonise. The poor vision of Privy Councillor Wurmt, Chancelier d'Ambassade (54) will find its counterpart in Secretary of State Sir Etherald's weak eyes (201), who, incidentally, is twice described as "revolutionary" (149, 201) as those conspirators whose suppression is his job. Verloc's confrontation with his new superior Vladimir is echoed by Heat's unsettling dialogue with the new Assistant Commissioner. As Cedric Watts points out, physical unease combines with hostile feelings against upper-class newcomers with a foreign background at both meetings.³

Moreover, the seemingly disparate social entities share surprisingly similar character traits. The Professor (radically illegal), Verloc (a *petit bourgeois* hovering between legality and illegality), Heat (firmly legal middle-class) and Sir Etherald (legality and the establishment incarnate) offer a representative sample from the social scale to demonstrate this point.

Most conspicuously, all the four characters share vanity as a motivating force. The Professor, who "fearlessly confronted [...] all his enemies [...] in a supreme satisfaction of his *vanity*" (104), is a representative of "the most ardent of revolutionaries [who] are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind – the peace of soothed *vanity*, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience" (102). Verloc seems to have taken his wife's undeserved love for granted, for when their final and only showdown breaks out, he feels "hurt cruelly in his *vanity*" (229), "hurt in the tender spot of his secret weakness" (231). A couple of steps up the social hierarchy, detective Heat is shown to be one of those police officers who derive a "satisfactory sense

³ Cedric Watts. *The Deceptive Text*. Brighton: Harvester, 1984, p. 115.

of superiority [...] from the unofficial but intimate side of their intercourse with the criminal classes, by which *the vanity of power* is soothed [sic], and the vulgar love of domination over our fellow creatures is flattered as worthily as it deserves" (132). Even the very representative of the conservative establishment is not quite exempt from that kind of self-love that disconnects rather than connects: when meeting subordinates, it is with "*haughty eyes*" (201) that he receives them.

Vanity requires a selective way of seeing things: the way egotistic people cling to their self-image makes them less prone to adjustment and more liable to abstractions. The examples are again all-embracing. Anarchism as well as terrorism is based on disregard for differences of any kind between randomly targeted human beings, moreover, it is often accompanied by a suicidal extension to the assassin's own self: "What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence" (95), claims the Professor, the most abstract-minded of all the characters. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham formulates it, the man's chilling and paradoxical boasting about his invulnerability – a "dream [...] of dynamite" – is ultimately "the dream of logocentrism."⁴ Verloc, who "lacked profundity" (213), is incapable of such ideological convictions, yet his alliance with anarchism, the complete exchange of his political identity for pay-checks, and the reduction of his marriage to a sexual and economic arrangement reveal him to be prone to a less conscious type of abstraction. Heat's moral indifference when the identity of the real perpetrator is in question has already been mentioned: "he is an old departmental hand [...] [for whom] the plain duty is to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can on some slight indications" (146–7). Finally, Sir Etherald's weak vision is in symbolic harmony with his repeated desire to avoid emotional particulars ("Spare me the details" [143]): he only wishes to confront a carefully censured version of political reality.

III

Disaster then clearly exceeds the sphere of mere domesticity. Since its real and potential contributors have been shown to encompass several social strata, the very underlying workings of society may be connected to the catastrophic outcome. The real subject matter of the novel is then politics in its broadest

⁴ Geoffrey Galt Harpham. "Abroad Only by a Fiction: Creation, Irony and Necessity in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*." *Representations* 37 (1992) 79–103, p. 92.

possible sense. It explains why Eloise Knapp Hay claims that *The Secret Agent* “expresses Conrad’s fundamental political convictions with greater clarity and simplicity than any novel he wrote.”⁵ But what are the responsible social mechanisms exactly? Just preceding Winnie’s killing of her husband, a scene in Chapter Eleven sheds light not only on the impending murder, but also on the causes of this, as well as other instances of victimisation. In it, Winnie reflects on the end of the businesslike agreement which made her provide Verloc with wifely care in exchange for the provisions Verloc made for her brother, her mother and herself.

Her face was no longer stony. Anybody could have noted the subtle change on her features, in the stare of her eyes, giving her a new and startling expression; an expression seldom observed by competent persons under the conditions of leisure and security demanded for thorough analysis, but whose meaning could not be mistaken at a glance. Mrs Verloc’s doubts as to the end of the bargain no longer existed; her wits no longer disconnected, were working under the control of her will. But Mr Verloc observed nothing. He was reposing in that pathetic condition of optimism induced by excess of fatigue. He did not want any more trouble – with his wife, too – of all people in the world. He had been unanswerable in his vindication. He was loved for himself. The present phase of her silence he interpreted favourably. This was the time to make it up with her. The silence had lasted long enough. He broke it by calling to her in an undertone:

‘Winnie.’

‘Yes,’ answered obediently Mrs Verloc, the free woman. She commanded her wits now, her vocal organs; she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body. It was all her own, because the bargain was at an end. She was clear sighted.

(233)

The passage encapsulates several of the images that pervade the whole novel. In it, four motifs appear with weight and frequency: seeing (im)properly, bargain, personal autonomy, and addressing the other. A brief survey of their interrelation here and elsewhere in the novel can help us better to understand the way in which domestic and social realms are organised in the narrative.

⁵ Eloise Knapp Hay. *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 241.

The most often repeated image of seeing and blindness is described as a hallmark of truth and error. It is claimed that an experienced eye can recognise the truth carried in physical reality – the change on Winnie’s face – and that a less acute vision – like Verloc’s – can mistake it. The reason for this *misrecognition* lies in perception that centres on the perceiver’s own self: the husband, in his “unanswerable vindication,” is convinced that he is loved for himself. Verloc then fails to see his own self properly. As a consequence, his similarly imaginary relationship with his surroundings prevents him from seeing – that is, understanding – his wife.

The bargain idea has been partly formed by the motif of seeing (im)properly. Besides interest, it is the characters’ distorted self-image that made the two parties strike a deal which could not have gone worse. Vain Adolph and blindly trustful Winnie mutually misrecognise the efficiency of their unspoken agreement: it is the quasi substitute father-figure Verloc who, of all people, has failed to provide for Stevie; in turn, Winnie declares herself to be “free” of contractual obligations.

The resulting sensation of autonomy is couched in similarly bodily terms: Winnie’s new existential freedom is experienced through her control of her brains, vocal cords and muscles. But because her “perfect control” is described as “preternatural,” and because it paves the way for a murderous act to deprive the woman of whatever freedom she had left, Winnie’s clear-sightedness turns out to be as ill advised and illusory as Verloc’s complacency. Her misrecognition of her body and her situation is but a variant on her husband’s mistaken idea of his own importance.

Finally, Verloc’s lamely authoritative address of Winnie will recapitulate the symbolic charge of the previous motifs. By using a firm yet tender tone, as becomes a husband, he tries – belatedly – to *interpellate* the woman into a subject position reserved for understanding, i.e., the obedient wife. His resort to this strategy is a logical consequence of their marital history: by signing her copy of the contract, it was Winnie herself who has placed him into the typical husband position of Western patriarchal societies. The narrative significance of the verbal act lies in its falsity. As if through some borrowed magic power, the husband tries to render her wife someone or something that he suspects – with a vague sense of guilt – she is not any longer.

It is here then that the word *interpellation* needs elaboration. First used by theoreticians who were interested in the creation and dissemination of ideology in

terms of psychology and linguistics, such as Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser and Michael Pêcheux, it became a term to designate the manipulative force inherent in the inevitably social use of language. For them, interpellation is a matter of transmission of certain beliefs, “whereby” individuals are “called upon to identify with certain subject positions,”⁶ a process which Lacan described as “that by which I make pass into the other the faith that is mine.”⁷ Who is the “I” and who is the “other”? The transmitters are those who represent a given social formation, e.g. democracy, or that which justifies this formation, e.g. God’s will, the interest of mankind, or universal moral sense. Their calls and imperatives will be decoded as personal messages by (one of) the millions of people whose work is needed for the preservation of this particular formation. In capitalism, for example, people “freely” and “voluntarily” exchange their labour, and although their complete insignificance as individuals in the huge social machinery – no one cares who gets the work done as long as the work is done – might depress and demoralise them, they continue, as Althusser put it, to “work by themselves.”⁸ Contribution without being driven mad is possible, because society not only pays its “employees” money, but it also pretends to recognise the fact that they are autonomous, unique and irreplaceable. The deception is not to be conceived of as a conspiracy-type of thing: it is a matter of people’s use of language, rather than of ill will. For subject-positions come to one, inevitably, in the form of language: it starts with a child’s acceptance of the word “I,” can range, through several instances, from the pleasing sensation associated with one’s being called by name to pride in job title.

This perspective on the never-ceasing, speech-related flux of deals between individuals and their social context is in many ways congenial with Conrad’s vision in *The Secret Agent*. Althusser, who redefined ideology as “the representation of the subject’s *Imaginary* relationship to his or her *Real* conditions of existence,”⁹ was preoccupied with the necessarily illusory nature of the deal,

⁶ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 24.

⁷ Jacques Lacan. *Le Séminaire, Livre III: Le psychoses*. Paris: Seuil, 1981, p. 343. This seminar of Lacan’s has not been translated into English; the above translation was created by Mark Bracher in his book (*Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 29).

⁸ Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: New Left Books, 1971, p. 169.

⁹ Louis Althusser, p. 167.

and it is precisely this type of deception that underlines Verloc's creation of clear ideological roles for his spouse and himself. Moreover, the all-embracing claim of the definition(s) help the reader understand what happens in the non-domestic sphere – the scene above with Winnie and her husband has only been selected because it offers a domestic cross-section of what happens on a much larger social scene. As Verloc has mistaken his economic usefulness for his being “loved for himself,” so are several other characters lured into believing in the importance, or outright indispensability of their positions which are in fact governed by financial or political interest. The tools of misrecognition and deception remain the same: seeing and interpellation. Through a number of tailor-made addresses, these characters are called upon to identify with certain subject positions, and if they do, society recognises them as persons. A brief survey may demonstrate how several such positions have been produced in this very dialogic novel.

When the topics of spying and policing are introduced, the whole of English society is characterised by an imaginary view of its real conditions. Anarchists and the secret police function in a strange symbiosis to alternately impose a sense of threat and protection on the “menaced social order” (52). Whoever contributes to this show does so with a belief in his mission. The Professor's role as a “moral agent” has been mentioned, and his prosecutor Heat, “in his pride of a trusted servant,” is conscious of “having an authorized mission” (113). Even the double agent Verloc falls back on his excellence in espionage at the peak of his marital crisis: “A man like me! [...] Some of the highest in the world got to thank me for walking on their two legs to this day. That's the man you have got married to, my girl! [...] The old Baron knew what I was worth to his country” (217). The most innocent of all, Stevie dies in “the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise” (236).

The text, which has above been called “dialogic,” deserves this epithet in yet another sense: its sequence of addresses and responses has a particular retrospective direction, and, as a consequence, is determined by a past situation. The reader learns how variants on deceptive interpellations had been directed on the characters in a more or less distant past. Brief references reveal that the now so harsh and demanding foreign embassy used to hold Verloc in high esteem (58, 59), in other words, it satisfied his narcissistic desire for recognition to compensate him for his services. As the Embassy repeatedly addresses Verloc, his response is governed by a desire to comply with the narcissistic self-image Vladimir's predecessors lured him into establishing. The first interpellation then created a

fundamentally deceptive, yet temporarily pleasing situation whose inner conflicts – as in dramatic works – were nevertheless bound to be revealed upon repetition. It is to be emphasised that Verloc, though acting under pressure, is by no means forced into executing the attack himself. In his defence lawyer's speech to Winnie, he dwells on the deadly danger his non-compliance would have incurred, yet his connections with the police, his feasible plan of fleeing abroad, and, most informatively, the outsider Heat's diagnosis of his foolishness render such risks less, and Verloc's will to involvement more significant.

In Winnie's case, the bearings of the past on the present become manifest in a late episode. Long exposed to Ossipon's seductive glances, the woman finally turns to the man for love, assistance and protection. Her "saviour," a former medical student, gets her on an outbound train and stops, right before they part ways, to examine her face "scientifically." The "earnestness" of the gaze is a product of Ossipon's curiosity about what he calls a "murdering type," yet the desperate Winnie reads it as "devotion" (259). Like her dead husband did, she responds to the Other's interest with a self-centred and eventually self-destructive zeal, only possible because these advances had an unwelcome, yet clearly recognised prehistory.

One can then add to the earlier proposed thesis that the novel not only discusses or describes the difficult establishment of subject positions, but it offers a highly dramatised version of the process. It stages, on the level of fictional present time, such instances of interpellations to which the characters fail to respond adequately, and it is dramatic, because their failure stems precisely from the same narcissistic zeal with which they answered such addresses in the past.

IV

When propounding his concept of social exchanges, Althusser put Lacan's observations on the primordial experience in ego formation (the so-called mirror-phase¹⁰) to dense metaphoric use, and suggested that the elaborate system of

¹⁰ Lacan originates and shifts the phenomenon of misrecognition beyond private life from the so-called mirror phase. The respective psychoanalytic narrative attributes one's perception/sensation of oneself as a unified and autonomous body to this stage. According to this, approximately one-year-old children with quite rudimentary bodily co-ordination confront their mirror images and come to be fascinated by the image's perfect compliance with their movements. The pleasurable experience is fundamentally deceptive, because it offers a sense of mastery and coherence that are in fact not there.

takings and givings, recognitions and promises in social life is analogous to the fundamentally deceptive relationship to emerge between the individual and his or her mirror image. What the two have in common is the pleasing sensation of a type of autonomy that exists, if viewed objectively, neither socially nor physically.

As for the novel, the earlier quoted example of a marital-existential crisis has been claimed to suggest a similar constellation. The passage, which brought the motifs of seeing, achieving freedom, bargaining and addressing the other into a focal point, suggests that the transmissions of beliefs – more politically put, interpellations in ideology – have their roots in an ostensibly less social sphere, that of the body. For it is its own reflected image to give the earliest confirmation to the self: the subsequent favourable social feedbacks will, in a less direct way, only re-enact these original impressions. Then it is no wonder that Conrad, in his concern with the lures and traps of social address, chose to intimate his characters' narcissism, their aspirations to establish themselves at and outside home, in conspicuously visual terms.

The first example of this strategy is the establishment of Verloc as a pornographer and an anarchist in one person. His combined flat and store caters to two, only seemingly different clientele, and the link between the two is subtly suggested by the use of identical or similar words. Adolph Verloc is called the "seller of shady," i.e. pornographic "wares" (47), and the same noun will designate the Professor's lethal detonator, the anarchist "ware" (91). For a full catalogue of these correspondences, one should read Brian W. Shaffer's informative essay.¹¹ The implication of this metaphorical unity of pornography and politics goes beyond the mere suggestion of decline and disintegration, because it sheds light on the main political theme of the book, which is man's responsiveness to such promises of power and recognition that have been formulated in bodily terms. Pornography is, one might say, the quintessential imaginary order inasmuch as its very marketability hinges on that – in reality non-existent – element of mirroring which has been shown to characterise ideological interpellations and their receptions:

This will leave a lasting imprint in the individual's memories, and evoke the insatiable narcissistic desire to elicit similarly unconditional love and recognition in whoever's mirror-like glance she or he reciprocates.

¹¹ Brian W. Shaffer. "Politics and Pornography in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*." *Journal of English Literary History* 62 (1995) 443–466.

[...] all women, men are assured, ultimately desire to have done to them exactly what men desire to do to them. By reinforcing the masculine conviction that such complementarity is the natural order of things, pornography encourages men to seek and demand women whose desire is simply a mirror image of their own...¹²

This explains, then, why both pornographic and revolutionary literature in the shady store are characterised as “arousing” (45) and “promising” (46) – they promise power and autonomy. But this sense of control is erroneous. When men buy erotic pictures in Verloc’s store, they commit the well-known sexual fallacy of mistaking the representation of a person for the person herself: “Now and then it happened that one of the faded, yellow dancing girls would get sold to an amateur, *as though she had been alive and young*” (46).

Promises of a visual kind continue to saturate the texture of the novel. It begins in the household where Winnie finds an “easy way” to her husband’s heart through a seductive glance and encompasses, as all other domestic examples do, the political realm. The strategic value of a good visual position becomes particularly apparent in the crucial interview between Verloc and Vladimir. The latter abuses the spy through disparaging his rhetorical abilities (“We don’t want a voice. We want facts...” [p. 61]). As tension grows, the narrator indeed shifts focus in his description from comments on how the adversaries speak to something more fundamental in their struggle to assert themselves: how they look. The bullying Vladimir decides not to view his victim face to face but “in the glass over the mantelpiece.” When the employee stumbles on an unwitting impudence, a hush falls, in which

[f]or some thirty seconds longer Mr Vladimir studied in the mirror the fleshy profile, the gross bulk, of the man behind him. And at the same time he had the advantage of seeing his own face, clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills, and with the thin, sensitive lips, formed exactly for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which made him such a favourite in the very highest society. Then he turned, and advanced into the room with such determination that the very ends of his quaintly old-fashioned bow necktie seemed to bristle with unspeakable menaces.

It is no accident that the politician’s merits are listed, of all places, here. Seeing one-self as reflected by the non-self provides an extension of the limits of the “I,”

¹² Mark Bracher, p. 97.

therefore Vladimir will corner his opponent right after summoning strength from a glance of his ideal self. Conrad's juxtaposition of a quasi dual scene with visual ornamentation is then emblematic of the interrelation between narcissism, power and political manipulation that the novel as a whole proposes.

Another scene reveals the least hot-headed character of all, the Assistant Commissioner to be captive to a visually evoked interest in his own identity.

Meanwhile, the Assistant Commissioner was already giving his order to a waiter in a little Italian restaurant round the corner – one of those traps for the hungry, long and narrow, baited with a perspective of mirrors and white napery [...] In this immortal atmosphere the Assistant Commissioner, reflecting upon his enterprise, seemed to lose some more of his identity. He had a sense of loneliness, of evil freedom. It was rather pleasant. When, after paying for his short meal, he stood up and waited for his change, he saw himself in the sheet of glass, and was struck by his foreign appearance. He contemplated his own image with a melancholy and inquisite gaze, then by sudden inspiration raised the collar of his jacket [...] He was satisfied by the subtle modification of his personal aspect caused by these small changes.

(151-2)

The passage focuses on the wonder, astonishment and imperative that emerges from an encounter with one's mirror image: the officer, confounded by the gap between his reflected and supposed self, derives satisfaction not only from the act of viewing, but from his ability to live up to the ideal his own projected self imposes on him. He changes his appearance, gets "a little wet, a little splashed" (152), and places himself into what Lacan called an "erotic relationship:" "it is in [this experience where] the human individual fixes himself upon an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form in which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego has its origin."¹³ For misrecognition, the will to see oneself as a form which the self is not, is necessary for survival. Man can only act as an autonomous subject if he perceives himself to be one, man can only tolerate his insignificance in capitalist society if he postulates his singularity, and man can only be truly successful – as top detective Heat and top politician Etherald are – if they fail to take cognisance of elements

¹³ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1977, p. 19.

that might stain their vision and therefore hinder their work: justice, in the first instance, the details and emotional corollaries of a case, in the second.

The satisfaction of being reflected derives not only from direct self-duplicates. The other's gaze is another scene for the individual to recognise itself, and the vital function of this experience is revealed in the novel by episodes where the sought-for acknowledgement is denied. Paradoxically, Winnie uses a visual metaphor – “Things do not bear much *looking* into” – to explain the efficiency of their business arrangement of a marriage. Her statement proves to be applicable in the short run only. The bedtime scenes, where the couple resorts to the candle motif with its familiarly fatal connotations from *Othello*, provide the comment's refutation. In bed, Verloc and Winnie's minimum dialogues repeatedly end on the call “Put out the light.” When both the light and the chance to see each other disappears, Verloc irrevocably renounces his rising intention to talk, for the first time in his life, confidentially to his wife. The suffocating memory of this element of the marriage will be uncannily acted out after Winnie's revenge, when she sends Ossipon back to the house: “Go in and put that light out, Tom. It will drive me crazy” (252).

The couple's inability to see, address and recognise each other in their respective gazes is given dramatic intensity at their final confrontation: whereas Verloc was “*looking* fixedly at his wife,” Winnie was “*looking* fixedly at a blank wall.” Symbolically as well as literally, not being looked at means the end of any individual, particularly of self-centred Adolph Verloc. Narcissism, long known to be associated with aggression, has its destructive supplement this time too: the shop-keeper's fanatically murderous partner, the Professor is also shown to be – again in an emphatically visual way – simultaneously greedy for recognition and deprived of it. The last sentence in the narrative describes him in a condition where “Nobody *looked* at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly...” (267).

Yet another character, Ossipon's story offers an interesting inversion of the visual-economic dealings between Winnie and Adolph. Whereas the couple's marriage hinged on not *looking* deep into anything, and ended in the husband's not receiving any looks at all, Ossipon has set “shamelessly inviting eyes” (220) on her from the beginning, and deserved Winnie's desperate outburst: “Who would *look* at me if you don't?” The seeming opposition between not looking (Verloc) and looking deceptively (Ossipon) collapses into the cruel irony which assigns Winnie the same fate in both cases: to be used sexually. Ossipon's brisk transition from the will to flirtation to the desire to get rid of her is emblematic of the

novel's concern with gazing, identification and the ego formation related to it. He discovers the dead body because he, partly encouraged by Winnie, has peeped inside the Verlocs' drawing room, "looked in without a thought, without intention, without curiosity of any sort [...] looked in because he could not help looking in" (250). The sentence and what follows exemplify the inevitability of one's involvement in visual lures, their relation to the love that is expected of the other, and the trap and the frustration these have in store for the gazer. Although the con man Ossipon's fate is by no means typical of the rest of the characters, his accidental act of viewing is – power and self-definition are inextricably bound up in the novel everywhere. The womaniser's curiosity is governed by his will to mastery: in trying to make love to another man's wife, he peeps inside a house he wants to own – in making out Verloc's body, he makes out the man whose stead he wants to be in, and recognises, symbolically, the morbid reflection of his own (dead) self.

V

In the middle of Chapter Ten, the Assistant Commissioner reports the new developments of the case to the Secretary of State in words more insightful than he means them to be: "[Verloc] felt himself to be threatened. Formerly, you know, he was in direct communication with old Stott-Wartenheim himself, and had come to regard his services as indispensable. It was an extremely rude awakening. I imagine that he *lost his head*" (203). With this last colloquialism to correspond, among other things, to Stevie's decapitation, he has indeed hit the nail on the head. For this story of vain and masterful egos discusses not only how narcissistic feelings come to be generated in modern Western societies, but it also takes a dramatic interest in the consequences of the over-inflation of these feelings inasmuch as the plot and imagery derive the metaphorical and literal losing of the head from the way individuals come to regard their services as "indispensable." What kind of vision is there in the background?

Distinct as they are, narcissistic pride in one's coherence and physical disintegration can be seen as "alternative states" within the same process of ego "construction."¹⁴ As mentioned in a note earlier, images and reminiscences of earliest life with no bodily co-ordination haunt human imagination in Lacanian

¹⁴ Malcolm Bowie. *Lacan*. London: Fontana Press, 1991, p. 26.

theory. The experience, which the theoretician described as the "fragmented body" (*le corps morcelé*) underlies the individual's desire for a unified self and survives as memory. At critical times, when the long attained ideal of the self's coherence comes under threat, the memory is reactivated and the fantasy of the "body-in-pieces" emerges. In other words, the mirror phase is "responsible" for these tormenting images "retroactively," for "anxiety about fragmentation" arises as a "consequence of loss of narcissistic identification."¹⁵

In its "combination of time and shock" (99) manner, the novel envisages the struggle of its characters to establish their positions in strikingly similar terms. Conrad carries the discord between their self-image and respective versions of social reality to the point where it translates into discord within the body itself. Motifs of physical disintegration saturate the text as persistently as the earlier cited examples of narcissism.

The majority of them centre on Verloc. His bodily discomfort during the crucial interview with Vladimir is amply detailed. Having been called "very corpulent" (56), his "physiognomy" underwent a "doleful change" (58) with a hand that "hung lifelessly" (57), a nape that "became crimson," and lips that "quivered before they came wide open" (59). Now he cannot but "los[e] his head" (203). When, at the end of a long and disastrous day, the exhausted man chooses to still his hunger and face his wife's inarticulate sorrow at the same time, the motif of eating invites renewed attention to the bodily aspect. Taking food in a situation like this is callous: it can be seen as a symbolic effort to fill a kind of vacancy that is more closely related to moral integrity than to nutrition.¹⁶ Ironically, the same carving knife that served his physical confirmation will bring about his ultimate disintegration.

It is not Verloc alone whose troubled self-identity is couched in bodily terms. The by no means narcissistic Stevie has one problem in common with his victimising brother-in-law: he too finds it difficult to relate himself to the external world, and when he makes an attempt, his try assumes a fantastic, grotesque form, not necessarily ill-intentioned, but certainly ill-advised. Winnie's brother, who fails to understand why cabmen cannot but whip their horses and why the police are not supposed to do anything about it, is ignorant, on a very concrete level, of

¹⁵ Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Karnac Books, 1988, p. 252.

¹⁶ Herman M. Daleski. *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977, p. 163.

causal relations in the world around him. So has Verloc been shown to be: his deed, which Sir Etherald and the Assistant Commissioner call "fantastic" and compare to a "ferocious joke" (203), is determined by his inability to identify the true cause – his usefulness, rather than his person – of the high regard he enjoyed politically as well as domestically. In both cases, the mistakes will come home to roost and destroy their bodies.

Such a lot awaits Stevie from the very beginning: accounts of his past prefigure his death by explosion. The reader is told how the former office boy "was discovered one foggy afternoon, in his chief's absence, busy letting off fireworks on the staircase," how he "touched off in quick succession a set of fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, loudly exploding squibs" (49). The closer the narrator moves to the climactic moments, the more unmistakable these images of bodily disintegration become. "[I]nnumerable circles" depict "cosmic chaos" in Stevie's "mad art" (76), his outrage at the story of a brutal German military officer "tearing half-off the ear of a recruit" (87) make the "boy" pick, informatively, the carving knife that will eventually kill Verloc, as early as at the end of Chapter Three. It is also here that the proximity of accounts on his sense of justice to the first appearance of the candle motif equates him symbolically with "light" in the dark world of social injustice. Though with difficulty, Verloc decides to have the light put out and then to lie, with no sleep to come, in the darkness he himself fears (87). The situation is not only Othelloesque, but also Macbethian: the torture of sleepless nights is momentarily revealed by a wrongly interpreted, self-fulfilling prophesy. For it will be Winnie who provides the fatal clue in encouraging her husband to take Stevie along his walks. When she remarks that her brother "would go through fire for" Verloc (177), she unwittingly voices the terrible truth that has been lurking behind their domestic cobweb of lies and deceptions. Stevie will indeed go through fire for the man who "might" as well be his "father" (179), only to end up being "what may be called the by-products of a butcher's shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner" (107).

Though less emphatically, the breaking up of Winnie's ideal world too has its bodily manifestations. To underline the fragility of her position, she swings, as it were, back and forth between states of coherence and incoherence. She experiences a new sense of freedom before she strikes, feels a regained "control of every fibre of her body," yet when the deed is done, "[h]er personality seemed to have been torn into two pieces, whose mental operations did not adjust themselves very well to each other" (228). The subsequent fragmentation indicates

a symbolic return to her former captivity in marriage. For it was then that her curiously silent, non-communicative personality was given some minimum substantiality with references to her hair, hip, face and eyes – parts of her body that never combine into a whole and remain, for spectators such as Verloc and Ossipon, raw material for the imaginary construction of an ideal woman. Later again the unified self version comes. Once a person that she can cling to appears, Winnie perceives herself – repeatedly and obviously erroneously – to be autonomy incarnate: she describes her predicament to Ossipon in “disjointed phrases” and imagines “her incoherence to be clearness itself” (248).

As was the case with narcissistic misrecognition, the fantasy of *le corps moraclé* also embraces several levels of society. Karl Yundt, an old “toothless” terrorist (74) makes the following comments on the social body: “Do you know what I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic [...] They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people – nothing else” (80). The remark will gain a prophetic value when the shreds of Stevie’s body are compared to “an accumulation of raw material for a cannibal feast.” The cruel vision of bodily disintegration finds an articulation at several points of the text: in the spirit of necessity in which the cabdriver – himself maimed – beats his horse, in references to how Stevie was misused by his own father, and in the way Etherald and Heat, quasi-conspiring to investigate the case behind the Assistant Commissioner’s back, weaken the police and thereby, indirectly, the *body politic*.

VI

The Lacanian vision of split personalities torn by narcissistic desires affects more than the plot structure and the imagery of the text. It has bearings – among other segments of the text – on the perspective from which the story is told. Except for the pervading sense of irony, this stance is difficult to attach either to a character or to an (implied) storyteller’s position, whereby the author created a particular kind of narrative consciousness. This fact has elicited various critical responses, mostly in relation to the artistic value of the book. Though it is generally acknowledged that *The Secret Agent* is Conrad’s best-written novel in terms of narrative craftsmanship, it is also a fact that this tale of great suspense, precision and surprise has proved to be less popular than the author’s other major

achievements. Leo Gurko¹⁷ attributes this to the very limited space the reader has for identification with the numerous, yet generally unattractive or indifferent characters. The insight is quite true: the tragic Winnie and Stevie are characters for whom one feels pity, but no motivation arises for empathy. The Assistant Commissioner is the fictional person who comes closest to the role of a model: his sobriety, professionalism and, most importantly, his sense of justice can well evoke feelings of respect. Yet, all this is insufficient for a depository of the reader's sympathetic feelings. The officer's merits are related to his excellence as a public servant, and do not go beyond that: the narrator reveals very little about him as a person and chooses to repress, quite significantly, even his name. Honest as he is, he too is inextricably bound up with the system as all the characters irremediably are.

With no person to identify with, with the almost equal length of description given to the high number of characters outside the Verloc family, it is easier to understand Joyce Baines' often-quoted complaint¹⁸ about the novel's lack of a "unifying theme," as well as his implicitly stated dissatisfaction with the lack of a central narrative consciousness. Indeed, there is no dominant psychological perspective to mediate and filter events in the narrative. But is this a flaw? No, it is not. For in a text which dramatises the difficulties of the self in relating to its social surroundings, such a narrative construction merely re-enacts those obstacles that hinder the individual in his or her endeavour. In other words, the reader is prevented from identification the same way, as the narcissistic self-projections of the characters are shown to be problematic.

Conrad has used further narrative devices to address, implicitly, issues of identification. So obvious and so consistent from the beginning, his biting irony serves this purpose. He persistently applies certain standard phrases to introduce the mention of a name, and in repeatedly calling, for example, Verloc "the celebrated secret agent" and Michael's "the ticket-of-leave apostle," he creates a miniature linguistic cross section of the ongoing transactions of desire and acknowledgement between individuals and their social context. These terms of address do what the social interpolations mentioned earlier do: they address the individual in a way that is inconsistent with their actual positions. They lie, because Verloc is not celebrated, and there is nothing apostolic about Michael's either. The two men are in fact deplorable cogwheels in a large capitalistic

¹⁷ Leo Gurko. *Joseph Conrad: Giant In Exile*. New York: Macmillan, 1979, p. 167.

¹⁸ Joyce Baines. *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960, p. 340.

machinery with an exclusively political (alternatively, economic) use, but to be able to live with that, they need the “great and saving illusion”¹⁹ that they are more than that. Obviously absurd, these verbal tags expose the discrepancy between the characters’ real and imagined subject positions, thereby contributing to the sense of alienation already established by the setting and the rest of the imagery.

The choice of London also contributes to the elaboration on the establishment of subject positions as the main subject matter of the novel. To dwell on the dialogic exchange of economic-political use on the one hand, and personal recognition on the other, Conrad could not resort to his exotic settings, but he had to choose the Western city he was the most familiar with by 1907, London. As again Gurko argued, it was only this “great, teeming, grimy city” which proved to be the appropriate format for the “incohesiveness” and “split that exist within the lives of the individual characters.”²⁰

The city is significant not only because such deals mark a more integral part of life there than elsewhere, but also because the need to find one’s way around there, literally as well as socially, is more pressing and more challenging than in smaller places. Conrad’s characters spend much time roaming in the metropolis, which underlies, in narrative terms, their mental efforts to find their way on the larger socio-geographical chart. The main example is again Adolph Verloc: his morning walk marks the beginning of the story line proper. Though moving towards the this time specific destination of the embassy building, this trip foreshadows the agent’s subsequent, aimless walks in despair. Facing a severe identity crisis and a hostile political apparatus, the man’s roaming can be seen as fictional versions of what Fredrick Jameson called “cognitive mapping.”²¹ The phrase, which designates a psychological process by which individuals place themselves on a mental map and find their way around in large cities, has its applicability for other characters as well. The Professor’s ominous walks, Stevie’s risk of getting lost and Winnie’s confusion about the best route to escape from Brett Street symbolically mark the characters’ desire for an extension of their selves as well as their efforts to position themselves as subjects on a chart which is not geographical.

¹⁹ Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 119.

²⁰ Leo Gurko, p. 173.

²¹ Fredrick Jameson. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 51.

But Conrad goes beyond the mere symbolism of walking. To enhance the text's coherence as well as ironic impact, he imposes the catalogue of imaginary social and emotional recognitions on the suffocatingly real, almost claustrophobic social configuration. The two charts overlap and render the characters' roaming and flights emblematic, not only of their efforts to establish themselves in general, but also of their specific moves to meet circulating ideological messages, i.e. recognise themselves as addressees of concrete interpellations. In other words, the spatial moves of the characters can be seen as the physical version of their efforts to position themselves at a point where they become the targets of an otherwise impersonal call.

Thus, space becomes heavily charged with an ideological impact. It is also clear from the way Conrad structured what he appropriately described as "the story of Winnie Verloc" (41), the narrative, which centres emotionally on the illusions and sufferings of a woman, is squeezed into an irremediably male world where the first and the last words are "Mr" and "men." It is this masculine frame that holds – like a cupboard a dead body – the woman who herself became an accomplice to many deceptions. She cannot achieve freedom, because her imprisonment is a matter of ideology encoded into language, and its paralysing effects no speaking human can escape.²² Wasted between the cogwheels that the repetitions of the word "mister" mark as subject positions, she finds it impossible – in her very limited space for movement – even to rid herself of her wedding ring that is lost, in a puzzling and unrealistic way, *twice* (198, 267).

Finally, a few words should be said about the technical side of the detection. That the clue for the detectives is literally a *written address*, which is then returned to the *sender*, highlights important aspects of the Conradian vision of social existence. Though motivated by the noble intention of securing a better future for her brother, Winnie's mistaken marriage to Verloc comes home to roost in "less than twelve hours," and provides a symbolic shortcut to truth from which the couple have been deviating so long. With all its crime detection connotations, the case looks like that of a secret text reaching its decipherer. At this point, the reader is likely to recognise a liberalised version of Lacan's famous

²² Confirming Winnie's innocence, Hitchcock commented on the climactic scene between her and her husband: "I wanted to make the murder inevitable without any blame attached to the woman. I wanted to preserve sympathy for her, so that it was essential that she fought against something stronger than herself" (Alfred Hitchcock. "Director's Problems." *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews*. Ed. Sidney Gottlieb. London: Faber and Faber, 1955, p. 241.

slogan according to which “The letter will always arrive at its destination.” But what does the enigmatic closing sentence of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” mean exactly? What does it imply for Winnie’s doomed act of writing?

It is in this statement that the readers of Poe and Lacan discover a concise summing up of the kind of reasoning which identifies man as the pre-determined recipient of a distantly launched communication. The folk-tale-like, almost miraculous logic whereby somebody recognises himself, of all people, as the lucky or damned addressee of a prophecy, scheme or plan, “lays bare the very mechanism of a teleological illusion.”²³ The illusion is one of being selected: whereas the individual believes to be reached by a tailor-made message, it is in fact his belief that renders him the recipient. As Barbara Johnson puts it: “A letter always arrives at its destination *since its destination is wherever it arrives.*”²⁴ The case is then that of the above-discussed matter of misrecognition, with two major implications for Stevie’s address sewn in his coat so that does not get lost.

Firstly, it may be claimed that the Verlocs’ reception of the surviving address is a metaphor of their liability to become addressees of ideological interpellations. The way they both launch Stevie on a disastrous route where they end up becoming senders and addressees at the same time is but one particular instance of how they initiate other processes to identify themselves as recipients of social messages that they themselves have – at least partially – issued. The point is – and this is what creates the very Conradian mixture of pathos and irony – that they do not know about their authorship or *agency*: the characters’ need to assert themselves will be presented in a particularly ironic light when, facing his wife, Verloc repeatedly mentions “conspiracies of fatal destiny” (216). Morally, by far the greater responsibility lies on him; artistically, however, it is Winnie’s suggestion about her husband and brother’s walks together that dramatises the inevitably domestic origin of all foreign-looking mail. She receives what she herself has posted. In Slavoj Žižek’s words, “the letter that the subject put into circulation ‘arrives at its destination,’ which was from the very beginning the sender himself: the letter arrives at its destination when the subject is finally forced to assume the true consequences of his activity.”²⁵

²³ Slavoj Žižek. *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 10.

²⁴ Barbara Johnson. “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida.” *The Purloined Poe*. Eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, p. 248.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, p. 13.

Secondly, it is an integral, by no means accidental feature of the novel's design that the terrible discovery reaches Winnie on a tactlessly revealed newspaper sheet. Such sheets have been described earlier: they are "damp, rubbishy and soiled" (101). Their sinister return in connection with randomly circulating messages direct attention to those modern social mechanisms that are capable of addressing (interpellating) large masses of a given population. Winnie's deeply personal encounter with the impersonal media bears a strange analogy with the way Verloc recognises himself as the sole executor of a mad political necessity. Both cases capture the moment when a general message finds its particular receiver, when one cannot but become the reader, and therefore the shaper of his or her life-story. There is, of course, a major difference, and it is a matter of gradation and personal responsibility: whereas Winnie is smitten by all the chillingly final consequences of her husband's gullibility, Verloc, at the beginning of the crisis, has failed to use his prudence in a blameworthy enough fashion.

Yet, the novel is not a story of homicide. Emphasising Verloc's ignorance, Conrad is more interested in the extenuating circumstances than in blaming the culprit. It is again the newspapers that symbolise these evil, yet extenuating circumstances. The man, himself a secret agent, is powerless against the machinery of which papers are the fine emblems: the more potent agency and secrecy that derive from the implacability of these institutions overwhelm the individual. No wonder then that Verloc is repeatedly and emphatically described as "hopelessly inert" (87). Why, of all paralysing effects, is inertia proposed? The motif of newspapers, these sources of immense information, may make one remember Baudrillard. "Information," reads the relevant passage, "dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total *entropy*."²⁶

To be granted, the social formation outlined in the novel is not yet a part of the French sociologist's wild world of radically proliferating signs. The world is not a deceptive sign-labyrinth, yet the main male character comes close to getting lost in as such: his duties as a double-agent place him at the intersection of several, often incompatible messages and interpellations, and explain Conrad's emphasis on that spirit of inertia, or entropy. His insistence becomes explicable in terms of his concern with the supposed autonomy of the characters, for that is what inertia eventually affects. In this respect, Verloc's designation as a secret agent is clearly

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, p. 100.

ironic, since he manages to act neither secretly nor in harmony with his supposed integrity. Behind his accidental-looking personal fate, loom the incalculable interventions of a threatening ideological apparatus, with more potency, that is, more efficient *agency* than what might be attributed to any individual, “celebrated” as he is. Thus the title of the novel simultaneously designates Verloc’s position as a spy as well as the agency (that is, potency) of political ideology which, so inseparably bound up with language, social law and the tools of its own large-scale dissemination, cannot but remain secretive.

Baudrillard locates the origin of entropy not only in information flow itself, but also in the result of this flux: the happy erasing of the distinction between the real and the imaginary discussed earlier. But the distinction is nevertheless there, and the tension between what is real and what we would like to see as real is sometimes bound to reach an explosive point – this time literally. Since our interest is in how it happens, Baudrillard’s concept of “*implosion*” appears to be serviceable: his description of the process of social entropy finds its strangely appropriate echo in Conrad’s narrative on the Greenwich Park explosion. In Best and Kellner’s particular paraphrase, the phenomenon reads as if it had been meant to describe the novel itself:

the masses become bored and resentful of their constant bombardment with messages and the constant attempts to solicit them to buy, consume, work, vote, register an opinion, or participate in social life. The apathetic masses thus become a sullen silent majority in which all meanings, messages, and solicitations implode as if sucked into a black hole.²⁷

This hole is the outcome of a disastrous exchange between the implacably secret agency of interpellating promises, and their addressee. Verloc, so proud of his voice, fell prey to voices quieter yet much more potent than his own. His story confirms Edward Said’s view, which claims that the “Conradian encounter is not simply between a man and his destiny,” but between “speaker and hearer.”²⁸ One can add that the two alternatives are perhaps not all that different: *The Secret Agent* is a novel where destiny assumes the form of a blindly circulating message.

²⁷ Best and Kellner, p. 121.

²⁸ Edward Said. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 44.

Zsuzsa Angela Láng

“After such knowledge, what forgiveness?”

The quest for spiritual integrity in “Gerontion” and the *Book of Job*

The prevalent mood of suspension between physical reality and a self isolated by its own monologue has caused most critics to interpret “Gerontion” as the rhetorical disintegration of the self trapped by its own egotism.

Eric Sigg, claiming that “there is an express criticism and scepticism in ‘Gerontion’” and that it is “a portrait of religious disillusion and despair,”¹ mainly argues that Gerontion’s discourse at times makes no sense and that it represents the disintegration of his consciousness.² The focus of Sigg’s analysis is history that is to be discerned in the poem, and regards certain aspects (“decayed house,” “the goat coughs,” “the woman sneezes,” Gerontion has lost his five senses) as references to World War I.³ He also adds that the poem “may restate a nineteenth century American history as a historical Fall.”⁴

Ronald Bush draws a parallel between “Gerontion” and Henry Adams’s *Education*, which Eliot reviewed around the time he wrote “Gerontion.” Bush also stresses some features that will be highly relevant to the present analysis, such as the cancelled epigraph taken from Dante’s *Inferno*, the role of winds in “Gerontion,” the isolation of Gerontion “caught in the trap of [his] own

¹ Eric Sigg, *The American T. S. Eliot, A Study of the Early Writings*. Cambridge, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 171.

² Sigg, p. 180.

³ Sigg, p. 173.

⁴ Sigg, p. 176.

rhetoric”⁵ and the “unexplained feelings of guilt.”⁶ The question of fear and the use of pronouns is also treated, but these elements are mostly held against Gerontion, explaining his behaviour as the individual’s evading the moment of having to face reality.

“The consciousness in ‘Gerontion’ after all is not offered as healthy, sane and wise; who would wish to be he, and what endorsement then is being asked for the thoughts of his dry brain in its dry season?” asks Christopher Ricks,⁷ but he also presents a novel interpretation of lines 7–10 (“And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner, / Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp, / Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London”), namely that the Jew, the owner, is Christ. He also quotes Piers Gray, who describes the poem as “the meditation of a soul contemplating its own disintegration, disintegration both physical and ideal,” and shows that “the structure of the poem’s meditation is intimately but subversively related to the metaphorical structure of Paul’s teaching.”⁸

Ronald Tamplin writes of the characters that they are “lightly sketched but together establish a continuum of which Gerontion himself is the fullest expression.” Tamplin lays special emphasis on the “ruminative and rambling” words, out of which Eliot creates his world, that is, in this case “a claustrophobic void [...] the more vacant because so various...”⁹

Although the features this paper will focus on have been observed by critics, the present approach aims to add a new aspect to the previous interpretations of the poem, in the sense that critics so far have used these features as proof for the disillusionment and the sceptical overtone they find in the poem. Some of these features (and the cancelled epigraph Bush refers to¹⁰) focus on the “suspended” condition of the individual. Although the title suggests an ironic representation of old age, which the underlying frustrated eroticism throughout the poem emphasises, it also implies man’s insignificant role within a larger system. This sense of meaninglessness of a human life generates Gerontion’s self-enclosure in the void he has fallen into. This ‘Fall’ is not explained at all by his

⁵ Ronald Bush. *T. S. Eliot, A Study in Character and Style*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 36.

⁶ Bush, p. 26.

⁷ Christopher Ricks. *T. S. Eliot & Prejudice*. London, Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994, p. 29.

⁸ Ricks quotes from Piers Gray. *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922*, p. 211, in Ricks, p. 29.

⁹ Ronald Tamplin. *A Preface to T. S. Eliot*. London & New York: Longman, 1992, p. 129.

¹⁰ Bush, p. 33.

thoughts, just as his thoughts – be they generated by World War I or personal failures – cannot be explained in terms of human logic or rational thinking.

The greatest disillusionment in the poem lies in the fact that Gerontion is looking for answers to universal questions that seem far too complex to be answered in human terms. The invocations “Think now,” “Think at last,” which Bush calls “hysterical” attempts to urge himself do something he is unable to do, and the line “I have not made this show purposelessly” carry an intense volition that is blocked by circumstances for which Gerontion is not responsible.

Sigg seems to contradict himself when he asserts that the “key figures in Eliot’s early poetry are all more ‘aware’ than any other person they come into contact with.” He includes Gerontion in this category and says that their ability to act is diminished, but the ability to see is increased, by which he means gaining deeper insight and knowledge.¹¹

Contrary to Christopher Ricks’s claim that “‘Gerontion’ is a poem about sacrifices, pre-eminently the sacrifice made by Christ and the ones offered to him,”¹² I propose that the poem is essentially about the betrayal rooted in the ignorance of man and his desire to justify this ignorance. In this sense, the conflict the individual faces when succumbing into an existential despair of the kind Gerontion experiences can be truly re-experienced through the re-considering of Christ’s Passion and of Job’s chastisement.

The *Book of Job* can provide a reading of “Gerontion” that highlights the process of the quest of the individual for personal-spiritual integrity in the context of powers that are beyond the control of man – in Job’s case God’s duel with Satan and, implicitly, with mankind, and in Gerontion’s case the workings of civilisation and History – the reasons of which are not revealed neither to Job nor to Gerontion. Both Job and Gerontion have to suffer for reaching a higher spiritual level where they are able to face themselves honestly, and face whatever the future holds for them. The *Book of Job* is especially relevant to Eliot’s poem, since the values it operates with in depicting the individual’s struggle against both the earthly and the celestial powers is closer to human understanding than the much deeper process Christ is destined to undergo.¹³

¹¹ Sigg, p. 217.

¹² Ricks, p. 125.

¹³ The difference between the two may also lie in the relationship between the two Testaments and also in the possibilities of interpreting them by viewing one through the other. A possible “juxtaposition” may be sought for in the way Blake interprets Job in his *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, where Christ’s figure is perceived as Job’s experiencing the closeness of Divine power. The

Job 7:6: [M]y days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

Job 7:7: O remember that my life is wind, mine eyes shall no more see good.¹⁴

The only direct reference to the *Book of Job* in "Gerontion" in "Vacant shuttles / Weave the wind" (ll. 29–30)¹⁵ clearly exemplifies the role of *wind* in the poem. The wind also suggests the movement of ethereal things, such as thoughts, ghosts, the spiritual world, as is suggested by the epigraph Eliot eventually decided to cancel. The cancelled epigraph comes from Dante's *Inferno XXXIII*: "*Come 'l mio corpo stea / nel mondo su, nulla scienza porto.*"¹⁶ Dante's line suggests the dichotomy of soul and body, of the spiritual self and the physical self. Bush interprets this cancelled epigraph as words that "foreshadow the alienation of Gerontion's mind from his body, and dramatize the isolation of his consciousness from the world of sense."¹⁷ Dante's words also evoke the image of Hell, where the sinners' sight is impeded because of the wind of Satan's wings. As Bush notes, the dominant element in "Gerontion" is "a Dantesque cold wind that blows in the vacuum between self-consciousness and the inner life." Bush also mentions that "another major component to the winds in 'Gerontion' [...] is the movement of empty talk – a speech that has become unmoored from its emotional strings and has degenerated into rhetoric."¹⁸

In the *Book of Job* the wind is mentioned with a similar meaning. As opposed to other books of the Bible where the wind is used for God's words or voice, in Job the wind is used both by Job and his "friends" as a metaphor for vain talk and meaningless words (Job 6:26, Job 8:12, Job 15:2). The other use of wind is related to God's destructive power and anger (Job 21:18, Job 27:21, Job 30:15, Job 30:22). In "Gerontion" the wind is not only "empty talk" and destruction,¹⁹ but also part of the desiccating elements. Although Bush states that water is not a

Swedenborgian idea of Job's being a precursor of Christ is also worth mentioning but falls beyond the perspective of the present analysis.

¹⁴ All citations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version.

¹⁵ All parenthesised references are to the respective lines of "Gerontion" as published in the following edition: T. S. Eliot. *Collected Poems 1909–1962*. London: Faber & Faber, 1974 (reprinted 1983), pp. 39–41.

¹⁶ "How my body stands in the world above, I have no knowledge."

¹⁷ Bush, p. 33.

¹⁸ Bush, p. 34.

¹⁹ Gerontion, ll. 67–71: "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled/Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear/In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits/Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn, / White feathers in the snow..." cf. Job 30:22: "Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance."

dominant element in "Gerontion," it is present by its virtual absence. In the first lines of the poem Gerontion is described as "an old man in a dry month, / [...] waiting for rain" (ll. 1-2). Rain is a Christian-Judaic symbol of salvation and hope (Job 5:10-11, Psalms 135:7, Job 29:23, Job 38:25-7); we find the same idea in Job 29:23 ("And they waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain") where Job identifies himself with the rain, when describing the way he used to be respected by the other members of his community. Both in "Gerontion" and in the *Book of Job*, past and present are contrasted through the images of the lack and the presence of water. Gerontion's denial of having had a glorious past:

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies fought...

(ll. 3-6)

by the use of the negative forms becomes the negative image of Job's enviable status within his community. This contrast also indicates the same diminishing process the title alludes to. Gerontion is a Job-like character, altered by the civilisation process, a process through which personality, values and experiences lose their essential meaning and importance. The imaginary "hot rain" and "marsh" refers to the total absence of any possible hopeful and promising future that might have existed in the past.

Lack of water in most cases implies death (Job 14:10-11) and deprivation: the situation in which Job and Gerontion find themselves (Job 30:3). Snow, another form of water, is mentioned in a similar sense in "Gerontion:" "White feathers in the snow" (l. 71). This image suggests coldness, death, betrayal (cf. Job 6:15-6), and humility and purity (cf. Job 9:30-31).

In this wind both characters are in a desperate situation. Their physical existence is shattered:

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.
[...]
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use them for your closer contact?

(ll. 15-6; 59-60)

Since he has lost all five senses, Gerontion's ability to experience reality is very limited. He appeals to his ability to think and re-evaluate his experiences. By the line "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch," he is alienated from his own body and physical existence; this is also a reference to civilisation by echoing Henry Adams's statement that society "has no right to feel it as a moral reproach to be told that it has reached an age when it can no longer depend, as in childhood, on its taste, or smell, or sight, or hearing, or memory."²⁰ Memory is mentioned earlier, in "I have no ghosts" (l. 30), with "ghosts" referring to memories of the past, people and events recalled. In this sense, Gerontion is entirely dissociated from both past, present and future, thus implying a sense of eternity encapsulated in the moment described. Still, this moment the reader is tempted to perceive as a "present moment," cannot be referred either to past, or to future.

Job 17:13: If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.

The shattered physical situation of Gerontion is also described through the metaphor of the house. The body is frequently referred to in the Bible as a house, as in John 2:2²¹ or in Luke 11:24.²² In the *Book of Job*, *house* refers primarily to the grave (Job 7:13, Job 30:23) or to personal well-being, including physical health (Job 20:28, Job 21:9). A closer reference to one's physical existence is in Job 7:10.²³

Not only is the *house* in "Gerontion" of crucial importance because it describes the setting, but it also belongs part and parcel to the general atmosphere conjured up in the poem. Thus, "My house is a decayed house" could refer to Gerontion's decayed body, or "draughty house" – in relation to "windy knob" and "ghosts" – would refer to the meaninglessness of human physical existence, especially if we consider that *house* could also mean the grave, as Job 17:13 shows:

I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house

²⁰ Henry Adams. "Mont Saint Michel and Chartres." *Novels, Mont Saint Michel, The Education*. New York: The Library of America publ. by Literary Classics of the United States, 1983, p. 468.

²¹ John 2:2: "But he spake of the temple of his body."

²² Luke 11:24: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry laces, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out."

²³ Job 7:10: "He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more [after death]."

Under a windy knob.

[...]

We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house.

(ll. 30-32; 49-50)

The "rented house" implies the relationship of a *tenant* and an *owner* within the house. The idea of the house standing for the body would project the tenant-owner relationship onto the personality, representing the two sides of the human spirit: the essentially human and the divine. The *tenant* is Gerontion himself, his very human essence, together with its faulty and frail side, whereas the *owner* described in "The Jew squats on the window sill, the owner," followed by lines 9-10 in sermon-like rhetoric that resembles the Creed of the Apostles, seem to prove Ricks's statement that this "owner" is Christ himself.²⁴

My house is a decayed house,
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.

(ll. 7-10)

Not only is this Christ, but it is also a reference to God within the framework of a Judeo-Christian myth of passion and human suffering. The sermon-like diction, or prayer-like rhythm in Gerontion also stresses this universal aspect of the human experience, since the prayer - the Creed in this case - foregrounds the shared ritual of a community whose cohesive force rests in the power of a God thought to be listening to the verbal act of a prayer, he himself not bothering to answer in plain words, although he is the Word himself (John 1:1). He communicates with "signs," that tend to lose their meaning through constantly being interpreted and re-interpreted.

Job 33:14: For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.

Job 33:15: In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed...

The issue of signs coming from God and the direct manifestation of the Divine is crucial both in Job and Gerontion. As Elihu lectures Job (Job 33:14-15), God does not speak face to face with man, so Job cannot expect anything

²⁴ Ricks, p. 29.

of this kind in order to gain justice from God himself, since God is above the human world, far too much beyond our perception to tackle the problems of such insignificant beings as “anyone born of woman.” Indeed, in the Old Testament God cannot be seen face to face, but only heard, as Moses is told not to go too close to the blazing bush (Exodus 3:2–5), “And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:6). Later it is only Moses who is allowed to be close to God (Exodus 24:2); God talked “out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness” (Deuteronomy 5:22); Balaam is warned by an angel when his donkey turned off the road three times (Numbers 22:22–36); Joshua is spoken to through the “commander of the army of the LORD” (Joshua 5:13–15), and Samuel is entrusted with a message for Eli in a dream (1Samuel 1–21).

The people did not question the Lord’s authority to convey his messages into signs. From this point of view it is essential that in the *Book of Job* we find man’s questioning God’s ways. In the three comforters we find the traditional human attitude towards the Divine teachings, and accordingly, they preach total piety and humility in order to escape the afflictions that were sent upon Job. On the other hand, Job asserts that his faith is not like theirs, and that he knows well that even the righteous are punished and the sinful very often escape God’s chastisement. At the same time, he does not give up his faith: he maintains that he is righteous without acknowledging sin he did not commit. Since he is not understood by his comforters, he expects God to clear him of the accusations of his friends, which He eventually does. God speaks out of the whirlwind, and finally Job sees Him face to face: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5).

Commentators debate over this appearance of God. Rob Sheldon, for instance, builds his theory around the argument between Job and Elihu, and says that the argument is basically about the chain between Heaven and Earth, God and Man, being broken. Job states that the chain of communication does not work properly, whereas Elihu, claiming that he is defending God’s position, says that man cannot even expect this chain to work properly because man is necessarily exposed to God’s will. Therefore, man cannot expect a face-to-face communication with God, since it would “swallow up” man, in this case, Job. God’s interrupting the argument by speaking from the whirlwind proves just the opposite, and not only does He speak, but in the end He also appears. Sheldon

argues that the appearance was made only for Job, as a proof of the Lord's choosing Job as his prophet, as He did with Moses or Samuel:

So we see that it was typical for God to speak through an intermediary, a prophet, though perhaps it was not typical for the final recipient to be present with the prophet. This identification of Job with the office of prophet is confirmed in the last chapter where God commands Job to pray for his friends. Thus God's speech to Job could be construed as a prophecy to be passed to his friends.²⁵

The other controversy about God's appearance is that the friends may not have seen the Lord, only heard Him, and that the true message for Job was the appearance itself:

Job apparently does not credit the *words* in God's rebuke, but the *appearance* of God himself. Thus I interpret this as evidence that the words were directed toward the others, but the vision was the message for Job.²⁶

Job is clearly a person chosen by God to mediate His Truth to mankind. In this respect, it is essential for the reader to witness the celestial trial situation presented at the beginning, and also God's appearance at the end, however vehemently modern and post-modern commentators discard these parts as probably not authentic.²⁷ In the beginning, Satan voices the opinion and doubts of those humans who need a proof of God's existence in order to believe in Him. Job is posited by God as an example, so that Satan and mankind could see the Truth about His existence. Job is therefore torn between the Truth as interpreted by man and the Truth as resting with God. In a sense, Job is suspended between the realm of Heaven and Earth. His previous lamentations on hoping that he would eventually see God after his death (Job 19:25-7)²⁸ may show that the

²⁵ Rob Sheldon. "The Book of Job: A multiperspectival approach to the problem of evil, the suffering of the righteous, and the justice of God. A theodicy." Rob Sheldon, MA Religion, Westminster Seminary, 1999, <http://cspar181.uah.edu/RbS/JOB/j24.html> (Job as Man on Trial) (12/26/1999).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. René Girard. "The God of Victims." *The Postmodern God: a Theological Reader*. Ed. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pp. 105-115.

²⁸ Job 19:25-27: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

experience is a vision of death. Job's vision of God is therefore a vision of his own longed-for death, the desire to come close to God's Truth and to break with the one represented by human society.

A similar desire is present in Gerontion, too. After having experienced all the so-called truths under the pretext of which man committed the vices that have led to wars and inequities throughout the world, there is no point in looking for rational explanations behind the happenings directed by History or Fate or God. All events are the result of man's arbitrary interpretations of the "signs" coming from a realm that falls beyond his control, that is beyond human comprehension. God, as a concept that clearly fulfils this criterion, is misinterpreted, either deliberately or out of sheer ignorance. The human desire to be able to control one's fate generates the craving for "a sign," which, in turn, is inevitably misinterpreted because of the mere fact that if sought in the realm of the incomprehensible, signs fall beyond human comprehension. This incomprehensibility, on the other hand, can be resolved only if one understands that the sign has to be sought for inside, within one's personality. The essence of this could be best illustrated with Levinas's argument about the *infinite*, as not only meaning non-finite, but also in-finite.²⁹

Mankind's inability to understand the deep meanings of signs coming from God is expressed in the following lines in "Gerontion:"

Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'
The word within a word unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvenescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger...

(ll. 17-20)

The reference to the sign (God's answer) is to Luke 2:12-14 and to Luke 2:34. The image of Christ as the infant Jesus implies the duality of Christ, as a being both human and divine. Its divine essence, though, is dependent on the Almighty Father, as human will is also shaped by His will. Thus, "The word within a word unable to speak a word" is directly connected to the Father, a reference to God known from the Old Testament. The Word (i.e. God) is not able to speak a word, only to give a sign through Jesus, leaving thus mankind (and Jesus and Job, for

²⁹ Emmanuel Levinas. "God and Philosophy." *The Postmodern God: a Theological Reader*. Ed. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pp. 58-59.

that matter) in an ambiguous state of understanding or misunderstanding at their own choice.

The duality of the human and the divine in Christ is also present in the reference to Revelations 5:5 in "Christ the tiger" coming at the time of the ceremony of the lamb.³⁰ The image in lines 21-23 evokes the ritual of the sacrament of communion (cf. Luke 22:19-20); by using the verbs in the passive the sense of betrayal and passivity of the victimised Christ is emphasised and so is the failure of Christ's sacrifice and mankind's inability to understand the spiritual benefit of sacrifice and of love as prophesied by Jesus:

In the juvenescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers...

(ll. 19-23)

On the other hand, this image is also the anticipation of "reconsidered passion" in line 41. Reconsidered and re-evaluated by man, the ceremony itself becomes "adulterated," distorted, thus mankind is unable to take advantage of Christ's sacrifice. The atmosphere of betrayal is created by the shadow-like images of Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist and Fraulein von Kulp:

To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.

(ll. 22-29)

This may be regarded as a distorted image of the apostles pondering over the person of the treacherous disciple: "And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing" (Luke 22:23). The listing of these

³⁰ Christ himself is identified with the Lamb, as in John 1:29.

characters is often considered the series of dream-like images of guilt and the "representations of unconscious anxiety."³¹ The essence of guilt can be more easily understood by relating these lines to Christ's betrayal, an element to which the poem directly alludes by the expression "flowering judas" in line 21.³² In the pattern of the betrayal-motif in the Gospels, Judas was foreordained to perform this role: Judas took the blame for all those who would have betrayed Jesus consciously or unconsciously. In this sense, Judas is also made a scapegoat, not by the community, but by the divine power. In Job the betrayal is performed by Elihu, who, in the name of God, accuses Job of sinfulness. By not having a clearly defined person to take this blame, in "Gerontion" the betrayal is dissipated onto the whole mankind. By using the symbolic names, Eliot creates an atmosphere of suspense, where the question of who is to be blamed for the betrayal of values is never answered.

Job 21:22: Shall any teach God knowledge?

Job 42:3: Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

The concepts of knowledge and forgiveness can be interpreted both in human terms and according to Christian criteria. In the *Book of Job* the comforters lecture Job on the grounds that they speak on behalf of traditional knowledge, according to which God is a just God and would not afflict Job if he were righteous. In this sense, Job has to acknowledge his sin, or else, God is not a just God. Since Job persists in stating his innocence, the comforters find Job guilty of blasphemy, since Job must think that God is being unjust when punishing him. On the other hand, Job is the only one who readily accepts that God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, a being Who is free to do as He pleases, and a being Whose value order does not permit Him to be just or unjust, Whose existence is not limited by the boundaries of such finite beings as humans are. Opposed to the knowledge represented by the comforters is the knowledge represented by God, knowledge that falls beyond human comprehension. The infinity of God's knowledge is described in God's speech out of the whirlwind, a speech that does not answer Job's or his friends' speeches and arguments in any

³¹ Bush, p. 40.

³² This startling image of the "flowering judas" and the "irony of Judas" is dealt with in Gertrude Patterson. *T. S. Eliot, Poems in the Making*. New York: Manchester University Press, Barnes and Noble Books, 1971, p. 129.

way. God, by His mere reaction and appearance proves to Job that He is present. In Job's vision God becomes a reality he never ceased to believe in. The comforters, on the other hand, get what they deserve, the "reward" they expected from the God they imagined for themselves: they encounter a God who is punishing them for not speaking the right words.

On an inner level, man is responsible for whatever he creates for himself. God, with his Divine power has enabled man to create his world. As Adam named the animals in the Garden of Eden, humans were enabled to name the elements of the world that surrounds them. Within this world, they created an image of the God they would believe in, whose name could not be pronounced. Nevertheless, man, in his desire to possess the named, gave a name to signify this God, and as a consequence, lost the ability to possess knowledge of its essence. As the desire to control the real world grows, we become less capable to control our inner worlds. This is why the gap between spiritual existence and physical reality has grown to such extent that it is nearly impossible to transcend. Such a transcendental experience is death, so crucial in the New Testament as to become the ultimate proof of Christ's transcendental being.

Apart from the human concept of knowledge, the Old Testament primarily tells us of knowledge coming from God, and maintained and interpreted by man. The concept which the New Testament introduced is forgiveness.³³ Forgiveness is also an ambiguous term, since it is based on the idea that God punishes the sinful and forgives the righteous, and everyone gets what they deserve. This is to be considered an entirely human concept of reward, also reflected in the Apostles' Creed voicing the human desire to have a God that is just. The images we have of God are in this sense different. As Girard states, we ought to distinguish a God of Victims and a God of Persecutors. The God of Victims is the one that is able to forgive, and teaches forgiveness through his prophets (Job, Christ). The God of Persecutors is the God man wants to believe in, like the one conjured up by the comforters in the *Book of Job*, or the one in whose name Christ was nailed to the Tree.³⁴ Depending on our image of God, we will experience the God we deserve. In this sense, God is an internal visualisation of our beliefs of ourselves.

³³ There have been attempts to make a distinction between the two Testaments on similar grounds by van Ruler; for a detailed analysis see D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 1976 (1991). [Hungarian translation: D. L. Baker. *Két szövetség, egy Biblia*. Budapest: Hermeneutikai kutatóközpont, Harmat Kiadói Alapítvány, 1998, pp. 57–60.]

³⁴ Girard, pp. 105–115.

What Job experiences, is the infinite dimension of his own personality, the discovery of God within himself. For Gerontion, the apocalyptic vision of himself as a gull being whirled beyond the Arcturus, dissolving in the universe, is also a vision of a desired death, as the only possible solution to man's inability to comprehend the workings of the powers that fall beyond his control. In Job, God's appearance is essentially human, it is perceivable in human terms, and it re-establishes the chain of communication that was previously assumed both by Job and by Elihu as having been long broken. In Gerontion, lines 48–61 may stand for Gerontion's imagined talk to his God, i.e. History seen as a powerful goddess.

The passage on History in "Gerontion" starting with the rhetorical question of "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" (l. 33) has led many critics to interpret the entire poem as a disillusionment with World War I, implying that Eliot's scepticism and religious disillusionment is voiced in these lines. Although the author's life cannot be dissected from his work, the feelings generated by the negative war experiences should be viewed in a more general way. If "Gerontion" is an example of a masterly choice of persona, that is, of a persona that is depersonalising the author, then this persona's reflections on history are also to be depersonalised. History in "Gerontion" is made into a powerful but treacherous goddess, and it can also be given a general aspect that is central to the Judaic tradition. In Judaic thinking God is present in history, and history is God's presence or affirmation in time: this is an undeniably experienced reality in Judaism, even if theologically it is not or cannot be defined as such.³⁵

History is thus equalled with Providence, Fate with an omnipresent God, worshipped by man. This image is profaned by the overt sexual imagery throughout the passage, relying on the absurdity of a profane cruel goddess worshipped by a "decayed little old man," as the name 'Gerontion' itself would translate. This passage, however, distinctly reminds one of Job's discontent with God's judgement in the Old Testament. Job alludes to the fact that he knows he is being innocently punished by God, and also adds that not only does God afflict the innocent, but He also lets the sinful get away with their sins unpunished. Job is also discontent with his "comforters," who are trying to talk him into admitting sins that may not even be known to himself. Job may well be right in asking the rhetorical question Gerontion puts forth: "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" However, with the allusion in "These tears are shaken from the

³⁵ Fernando Joannes. *A zsidó vallás*. Budapest: Gondolat, 1990, pp. 57–8.

wrath-bearing tree" (line 47) to Blake's *A Poison Tree*, where wrath is brought by a human being onto his foe, to the human's undeniable joy, we also have the interpretation of forgiveness by man. The Christian concept of God's forgiveness in the Apostles' Creed, and the teaching of man's forgiving "those who trespass against us" in the Lord's Prayer also implies God's justly afflicting or rewarding man. This is exactly the dilemma Job encounters in his own situation, and this is what Gerontion reflects on when presenting the History-goddess as an apparently unjust divine power. However, it is the fault of mankind that they cannot seize the opportunities offered by history and/or God, since they have misinterpreted and devalued the values and essence of historical and religious existence. With the human experience as we know it, one is unable to forgive and, at the same time, cannot expect forgiveness from above either.

Job 40:8: Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?

The *Book of Job* provides us with a context that yields to the interpretation of the next passage from "Gerontion" as a dialogue with God. Job longs for a conclusion, for an explanation to his afflictions, but he realises that neither his wife, nor his comforters (that is, no human being) can provide an explanation for his sufferings, it is only God whose explanation Job would readily accept. Similarly, Gerontion also wishes to reach some sort of a conclusion, an explanation to all the vices mankind has to put up with.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
 We have not reached conclusion, when I
 Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
 I have not made this show purposelessly
 And it is not by any concitation
 Of the backward devils.
 I would meet you upon this honestly.
 I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?
 I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
 How should I use them for your closer contact?

(ll. 48-60)

Gerontion's contemplations on his state resound Job's perseverance in his innocence and his keeping the integrity of his faith. He does believe that God is not afflicting him without a good reason (cf. "I have not made this show purposelessly") and he is also convinced that it is still God from whom the affliction came (cf. "it is not by any concitation / Of the backward devils"),³⁶ he means to face the charges honestly ("I would meet you upon this honestly") and to receive the answer from God himself. He has lost everything (by "passion" meaning not only physical ability, but also the Passion of Christ) and by having been disrupted from his physical existence, there is no point in any further suffering, for he is too weak to bear it any longer.

Lines 65–73 could be contrasted to the last few chapters of the *Book of Job*:

What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn.
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

(ll. 65–73)

The reference to the spider and the weevil are an ironic counterpoint to God's description of the Behemoth and the Leviathan, representing his utmost power and infinite greatness. At the same time, the spider and the weevil also represent the very same immense power by the sheer impossibility of changing their ways. The spider and the weevil are both engaged in irreversible activities, and however fragile and ephemeral they are, they will not "delay," they are hopelessly bound for the completion of their fates. By enlisting the different elements (individuals by their names, the gull, feathers, an old man) we get the apocalyptic vision of destruction generated by a supernatural power (cf. Job 30:22). The punishment implied in the fate of De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel is nevertheless opposed: trying to object to this sort of punishment, Gerontion identifies himself with the gull "against the wind," that would inevitably lead to the "dissolving of his

³⁶ If we consider the initial situation of the inward monologue, these lines may be taken as God's reassuring assertions as imagined by Gerontion.

substance" into "white feathers in the snow." White implies innocence, and so does the image of the bird and of the white feathers. At the same time, snow, as the other form of water, suggests hope, in this case one that has cooled, a long-forgotten desire, or an ultimate solution. The image of the gull against the wind also implies a fight fought on one's own, the feeling of someone completely abandoned. As Job in his vision of God experiences the vision of his own longed-for death, this image in "Gerontion" is also the projection of the desire to break with human existence and transcend into the realm of death.

The sense of betrayal is present throughout the whole poem. Mankind has abandoned the individual personified by Gerontion, the same way as Job and Christ were left on their own and betrayed. Nevertheless, in this experience he encounters God within himself, the divine dimension of the human being. After such knowledge, he will be able to exercise the power of forgiveness, to live together with his thoughts that would no longer generate fear or pain.

The ending of the poem ("Tenants of the house, / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season") returns to the original idea of an inward monologue, thus explicitly showing that the poem is about a spiritual conflict of the individual. As opposed to the conventional ending in the *Book of Job*,³⁷ the ending of "Gerontion" is technically an affirmation of the irreconcilable gap between reality and the spiritual world. In reality the conflict has been diminished into mere thoughts, dryness returns. However, the vision was complete, the understanding of human folly and incomprehension and of the sense of betrayal has been reconciled by the power of knowledge and forgiveness.

René Girard's reading of the *Book of Job* provides us with another perspective that reveals further questions of the powers that are at work on the level of human righteousness. Girard interprets Job in the light of the Gospels, by considering the Dialogues the crucial part of the story, and equates it with the persecution of Christ. He says that in both cases it is the community that causes the central characters' death by setting the "scapegoat mechanism" at work. Both Job and Christ are first adored by their respective communities, and suddenly they turn against them, at the root of which there is the "mimetic desire" of the

³⁷ The Epilogue is a controversial issue in connection with the *Book of Job*, nevertheless, Wes Morrision sees it as a projection of "inner grace:" "The happy resolution in the Epilogue may also be viewed as an external symbol of an inner grace - of the enlightenment that Job has achieved." <http://cspar181.uah.edu/RbS/JOB/Home.htm> (Wes Morrision on *The Book of Job*) (12/26/1999).

community to obtain the power of their idols. Girard also distinguishes between the logic of the God of victims and the logic of the God of persecutors.³⁸

In this distinction, I see the duality of the human and of the divine, since the God of victims is the God in Whose name Job and Christ act and speak, whereas the God of the persecutors is the one in the name of which the persecutors determine Job and Christ's death. There is a deep truth in Girard's statement that the two stories are essentially about the scapegoat mechanism that is the foundation of all human societies; yet in these two stories the questions of righteousness and martyrdom cannot be solely explained by the scapegoat mechanism and with the triangular mimetic desire. Both in *Job* and in Christ's Passion the central issue is the clash of the God of victims, God as He is, and the God of persecutors, God as interpreted by man. Power in this context can be defined by the counters any divine value order operates with, that is, by righteousness and forgiveness. In both cases, the conflict is mapped as a trial, where God's power is at stake as opposed to Satan's. Satan, the Accuser, voices the disbelief of all those humans who doubt the benefits of righteousness, whereas God provides his best advocates to prove that they are wrong. In both cases, the setting of this trial is placed into the world of man, and the solution is utterly left to the workings of the human society. Whereas Girard regards everything in *Job* but the Dialogues as the rest that "conceals the guilt of all men, including our own, in seeking out scapegoats,"³⁹ the narrative framework is essential because it makes it clear to us that it is not only the human community that produces this very mechanism, but "the satanic principle on which [...] all human communities are based."⁴⁰ By calling it "satanic," Girard clearly employs a discourse that alludes to the celestial powers and the conflict between God and Satan.

As Girard also observes, another important similarity between the two stories is the fact that both Job and Christ are perfect victims: both of them are left alone completely, and the community "at least passively, join in society's outburst." One is tempted to believe that it is not desire that is at the heart of the matter, as Girard claims, but rather the way men choose their victims. In both stories the persecution starts when Job and Christ, respectively, are deserted, where there is no possibility of any other choice but death. The other choice of

³⁸ Girard, pp. 105–115.

³⁹ Girard, p. 111.

⁴⁰ Girard, p. 111.

both victims would be to consent to the accusations, that is, to act against their beliefs and principles. By choosing to maintain their "integrity" (Job) or "the Logos of the God of Victims" (Christ), they inevitably provoke the community's outrage against themselves. But the persecution is always directed against the weakened and already helpless victim. Victims have to be innocent, and they both have to be aware of it, and this they both have to assert and demonstrate. The powerful persecutors recognise the moral strength behind the weakness as something they virtually lack. The Pharisean community does not turn against the blind man in Matthew's Gospel for the mere fact that he is blind (they thought that it was a punishment for some sin the blind man or his parents had committed), but because his sight was restored by Jesus because of his faith. There is a strong incomprehensibility of the divine that generates the "desire" to destroy the morally strong. On the other hand, righteousness and forgiveness can only be demonstrated against the exact opposites of these values, that is, against untruth and violence.

The essential difference between the *Book of Job* and Christ's Passion is that in Job righteousness is rewarded in this world whereas Christ's reward belongs to the afterworld. Even in Christ's case, this reward is manifested to man through the Resurrection. This is clearly an indication of the intent to make the divine will visible to man. It is not by chance that Jesus' Passion is carried out to the ultimate death of the victim, whereas Job does not literally die. In both cases, it is the moment of revelation that is the reward for the victim. The victim does not need proof of his own innocence, but needs the acknowledgement of the divine power to which he stayed true. The rest is for the human society that again and again proves to be ignorant of what God's Kingdom means. It is also instructive for the human society to learn about the consequences of their own deeds.

Both Job and Christ are on their own in the clash of two different views of religion, the Truth of God and the Truth of Man, the latter being man's interpretations of God and religion. If this clash of different views is stripped of the elements of the story that link the parables or mythologies to the value order in the context of which humans are able to comprehend the message, we may claim that the very same conflict may take place on the level of the individual, as an interiorised dramatic conflict between one's knowledge rooted in traditional wisdom and one's recognition of what the true knowledge consists of. By experiencing such a psychological and moral conflict, one can attain a new

spiritual integrity in which one can rise above the limits human existence imposes on them, and only in the possession of this ability will one be able to understand forgiveness.

In "Gerontion," we find the expression of discontent with values and morals as interpreted by man, and with the impossibility of mankind's moral improvement in its present state. This is expressed by the atmosphere of suspension between the realm of Heaven and Earth, Past and Present, Divine and Human, through the persona of Gerontion, an old man waiting for his longed-for death. In his contemplations, the mythical experience of Job's and Christ's sacrifice ("scapegoating") returns as what the individual experienced in the twentieth century, equally deserted and left on his own in the midst of despair and disillusionment. The quest for spiritual integrity requires that the individual recovers the God within himself, and thus understands the concepts of knowledge and forgiveness, upon which the proper moral stand rests. Gerontion, as a universal character representing the average human mind, shares the fate of both Job and Christ. In this sense, Gerontion's question, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" clearly marks the boundary where the individual turns upon his past experiences and sets off to experience the Revelation of the truth of forgiveness. His transcendental vision of his own death leads to the final reconciliation with his – and mankind's – past.

Tamás Bényei

White Light: J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* as a war story

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man. For WAR, consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time, is to be considered in the nature of war; as it is in the nature of weather [...] All other time is PEACE.

(Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan I.18.8)

War narratives as a rule follow a logic that is based on a paradoxical premise. War is depicted as a set of circumstances or a condition of existence that is the opposite of peace, that is, of ordinary existence: it is extreme and excessive, unreal, distorted, the opposite of what goes on in a civilised human community. On the other hand, war is seen as an ontologically superior realm or condition inasmuch as it allows an insight into something “deeper” than normal existence. War is supposed to yield a deep knowledge about life, a knowledge that could not be acquired in the condition that is called “peace.” The other place (which can be and often is war) is the opposite of ordinary reality, yet it is also more real, a condensed, more intense version of reality.

In narrative terms, this (ontological) difference is usually articulated by means of an initiation story: war is another place (in cases where the war is going on in an exotic or colonial setting, “other” in many other senses, too) into which a reasonably callow protagonist is introduced. His introduction invariably becomes an initiation by the end of which the war-weary veteran, the returning soldier and survivor cannot be unproblematically reinserted into his old life because of his unbearably great knowledge: war veterans are all Marlows and

ancient mariners, bearing upon themselves the marks of that “beyond” from which they have come back. This implies that war initiation narratives somehow “exceed” the confines of ordinary stories of initiation: they imply an unnaturally accelerated process of maturation, where the crossing of the line between innocence and experience leads not to a state of maturity but to premature oldness. The temporal dislocation caused by this structure is often seen and recontextualised by referring to it as “pathological,” but it is also, in narrative terms, privileged, simply because it establishes a gradation in levels of authenticity, reality, experience: even if there is too much knowledge condensed in one place, this place will be the narrative centre of the world, the site of “reality.” Hence the tradition that the pathological state of returned soldiers and war victims (e.g. Holocaust survivors) is seen and revered as reflecting a deeper knowledge or awareness: war trauma might be said to be caused by an overdose of reality.

These narratives are usually stories of (cultural, political, anthropological) critique that expose the deluded myths of the world and civilisation of peace. The dark knowledge afforded by the war disturbingly reflects back upon the world of peace that is initially configured as the opposite of the war condition. Introduction to war is often accompanied by a spatial journey, war is exiled to the dark peripheries of the civilised world (or it is produced automatically by the lawlessness of primitive existence). In such narratives, darkness, war, and periphery turn out to be constitutive of peace and light: the insight afforded by war turns out to be also an insight into peace which becomes a version of war instead of its opposite (for it is naturally the superior truth of war that contaminates or spills over into the paltry truth of peace and not the other way round). The lesson of such narratives could be formulated in Derridean terms: “there is no outside of war” (Il n’y a pas de hors-guerre). War is not the opposite of peace but its excess or other, suppressed, dissembled or disguised by something called “peace.” “The horror” is not limited to Africa or Vietnam, and the revealed truth, as in Conrad, is as often social and political, as it is psychological. The return of the soldier (especially from distant parts of the world) is also the return of the repressed, and it is the horror of this knowledge that is embodied in his ghost-like figure: he has been contaminated by the otherness, darkness of (colonial) war.

Empire of the Sun creates the conditions of its readability by offering itself as a representative of war narrative conceived as cultural and anthropological

critique. Is "the Empire of the Sun" like "the heart of darkness" in this sense?¹ Is it an alien place that is gradually revealed as that which we have always known only did not like what it told us? The fact that Ballard's novel has a child for protagonist does not exclude the possibility of reading it along these lines: viewed like this, *Empire of the Sun* would look something like a cross between *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies* (with a touch of *The Quiet American*), even more brutal in that it reveals an internal darkness (or a piece of the sun) in children as well as, or rather than, in adults.

This contextualisation of the novel raises the following questions: first, does the narrative follow the logic of an initiation story? Is this a war narrative using the spatial logic suggested in its title only to deconstruct the very binary opposition that is set up by positing a boundary, and therefore two kinds of existential space? Second, how is this translated into the spatial structure of Jim's subjectivity? Does Jim enter the empire of the sun only to recognise himself in it and realise that he has always been in there, that there is no outside? Consequently, is the empire of the sun also, or primarily, a psychological space? Third, do we read Jim as a "returned soldier," as the embodiment of a knowledge that is best suppressed or repressed? Does our reading repeat what happens to Jim in the course of the narrative, his figure allegorically standing for "war" and the reader painfully recognising her/himself in Jim?

These questions place Jim's subjectivity into the centre of the reading activity. His subjectivity – the stake of the text – is what doubles the reading process: we read the horror of the empire of the sun as well as Jim reading and assimilating this horror. The key is clearly to establish relations of internality and externality: if Jim is an "unusual" child recognising himself in war scenarios (the war is internal as well as external), the interest of the reading becomes psychopathological (the study of a sick child) and the empire of the sun is domesticated as a radically alien space, its alienness partly transferred to the sphere of psychopathology. If the war is read as an internal as well as external experience (something that Jim imagines or projects as well as something that happens to him), the entire world of the novel is transformed into a place of psychological

¹ The connection is also made in one of Ballard's autobiographical sketches, when he jestingly compares his return to Shanghai to Marlow's revisiting of the Heart of Darkness. Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews*. New York: Picador USA, 1996, p. 173.

allegory.² No matter which of the versions we prefer, Jim's war experience is Jim's Progress, and the various places and figures along the way would be deciphered allegorically as things neither fully external nor fully internal, as possibilities or potentialities within Jim that are realised in the half-projected scenarios of war. The novel, although clearly allegorical, hesitates between the external and internal decipherments, and thus the places and figures in the text retain their allegorical dimension without, however, being rendered to either of the poles that would provide them with a closure.

INNER SPACE

This hesitation of the text (and of its reading) already indicates a necessary ambiguity towards the initiation logic which presupposes a dichotomy, or at least a hierarchy between various degrees or intensities of reality. Though returning in its articulations to the logic of the initiation narrative, *Empire of the Sun* cannot fully commit itself to such hierarchies simply because its place is not different from the spatial setting that characterises Ballard's earlier fiction. This novel takes place, takes its place in Ballard's "inner space," a locality that is "neither portrait nor landscape, but something in between."³ Much has been said about the Baudrillardian insight into post-modern hyperreality in Ballard's fiction; what needs to be stressed in the present context is the fact that "inner space" is, its name

² The question of reading also has a metapoetical aspect, relating to Ballard's oeuvre. *Empire of the Sun* has been read as the key to Ballard's work. In this sense, the novel repeats and allegorises the reading experience of Ballard's work: "empire of the sun" becomes the earlier work of which now we are being shown the origin. In the face of the central tradition of reading (and domesticating) Ballard's novel, Roger Luckhurst has shown beyond doubt that *Empire of the Sun* cannot possibly be read and domesticated as the autobiographical key to Ballard's early, ostensibly more experimental and unpleasantly "sick" work, as the text that renders the idiosyncrasies of the earlier Ballard somehow humanly understandable and therefore more acceptable – if not artistically, at least as a personal document. Luckhurst has demonstrated that *Empire of the Sun* is nothing of the kind: despite its more accessible formal strategies and autobiographical subject matter, this text is no less radical in its emphasis on the erosion of stable subjectivity and its dependence on pre-formed images and systems of representation (see Roger Luckhurst. "Petition, Repetition, and 'Autobiography: J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women*." *Contemporary Literature* 35.4 [1994] 688–708, pp. 699–700 *et passim*). In this reading, the dilemma of external vs. internal is repeated on a "higher" or more abstract level without being resolved.

³ Colin Greenland. *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1983, p. 34.

notwithstanding, a thoroughly phenomenological place, the domain "where the inner world of the mind and the outer world of reality meet and fuse."⁴ In its undecidedness or endless mutuality between interiority and exteriority, Ballard's inner space seems to resemble Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "phenomenal field." "This phenomenal field is not an 'inner world,' the 'phenomenon' is not a 'state of consciousness,' or a 'mental fact,' and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition in Bergson's sense."⁵ It is important that in this model the world is not simply the product of subjectivity: "it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external."⁶

Similarly, Ballard's inner space is not a wholly psychological realm: it is a place where the outside world, the individual's desires (and/or pathology) and the culturally processed, pre-formed images and discursive systems meet, merge and spill over into each other. Jim's world – even before the outbreak of the war – is the space defined by this triangle of world, desire, and image. The war begins as a war of images in the German and Allied propaganda newsreels that are a continual and irrepressible presence in Shanghai, insistently clamouring for attention. The films penetrate Jim and he begins to dream of war: "At night the same silent films seemed to flicker against the wall of his bedroom in Amherst Avenue, and transformed his sleeping mind into a deserted newsreel theatre. During the winter of 1941 everyone in Shanghai was showing war films. Fragments of his dreams followed Jim around the city; in the foyers of department stores and hotels the images of Dunkirk and Tobruk, Barbarossa and the Rape of Nanking sprang loose from his crowded head" (11).⁷ A process of incessant spilling over is described here, where the pre-formed filmic material is worked over subliminally in Jim's dreams, and the composite products of his dreams and the films in turn begin to seep into the world around him: "The whole of Shanghai was turning into a newsreel leaking from inside his head" (14).

The source of these images that occupy Jim's dreams is ultimately human, but this vague and unlocatable source is similarly caught up in the same endless

⁴ J. G. Ballard. Introduction to *Crash*. New York: Vintage, 1985, p. 3.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 57.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. 61.

⁷ All parenthesised references are to this edition: J. G. Ballard: *Empire of the Sun*. London: Granada, 1985 [1984].

triangular circulation that subverts the whole notion of origin. Ballard's world, as David Punter put it, is full of "discarded images:"

Everywhere we have implanted icons – photographs of dead film stars, records of murderous and murdered presidents – supposing that, in the cultural flux, they can be discarded when the time is ripe. But they have a greater material presence and force than we had dreamed: indeed, it is the icons themselves which seep into our dream-time, which provide the points of reference against which our action takes place, and refuse conveniently to slide away into the sand-dunes when we try to elbow them aside.⁸

The images, themselves the products and representatives/representations of inner space, produce subjectivity; the process, however, is not one of simple absorption or consumption. The affective investment (in Ballard, this investment is by definition libidinal) with which a particular subjectivity turns towards the images and objects of the world (or the world and objects of images) is always unpredictable, depending on the triangular flux. The result is an infiltration, a mutual seeping, an erosion of subjectivity as pure interiority. It is in this way that "reality" is being produced: it is neither fully the product of subjective fantasies, nor that of mass-produced images: a composite, symptomatic product, its various elements are more or less powerfully charged or cathected by subjectivity. The images cannot be said to "represent" an outside world or express an inner state: there is a circulation of signifiers along these poles, traversing subjectivity as well, producing it and being produced by it. Inner space is in fact the end of intimacy as pure interiority: "When the young soldier showed him the newspaper he carefully studied the photograph of fighter-bombers taking off from the Japanese carriers, scenes that he seemed to remember from his own dreams" (53); "The terrain of trenches [outside Shanghai] seemed to have sprung fully from Jim's head" (156). This is not simply the insight that even our dreams and desires are mass-produced,

⁸ David Punter. *The Hidden Script: Writing and the Unconscious*. London: Routledge, 1985, p. 10. In *Empire of the Sun*, such images or icons include – apart from the moving ones of the newsreels and Hollywood films – the ubiquitous posters of Chiang Kai-shek, as well as the "partly dismantled faces of Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh" on the cinema hoarding (59) and the spate of advertisements and all-American images in the American magazines stocked by Basie and dropped from the bombers. Jim is an avid and fascinated consumer of all these images and icons: empty inside, he is the perfect perverse consumer, created by the other's desire, in that he immediately and fully absorbs the images (see Dennis A. Foster. "J.G. Ballard's Empire of the Senses: Perversion and the Failure of Authority." *PMLA* 108.3 [May 1993] 519–32, pp. 528–9).

pre-empting "any free or imaginative response to experience,"⁹ but a fundamental ambiguity of the phenomenological field of inner space that is retained throughout the text: Jim is manipulated by the images and slogans that he so readily devours, but the world takes its place in the zone that is neither a prefabricated cultural system nor the projection of individual psychopathological desires.

"Will modern technology provide us with hitherto undreamed-of means for tapping our own psychopathologies?"¹⁰ asks Ballard. In his work, desire moves along this triangular circuit and moves the circulation. When Ballard speaks about "the death of affect,"¹¹ I think what he means – certainly what we see in his fiction, including *Empire of the Sun* – is not the death but the displacement or transferring of affect from human objects onto the objects of the physical world as well as onto images (and, in Jim's case, words). With the erosion of pure interiority, all the composite objects of this inner space are susceptible to being erotically charged. It is in this sense that Ballard talks about the need to psychoanalyse what used to be the external world: since it is a composite, and symptomatically produced, text, Ballard suggests that it must be read as a dream-text,¹² supposing the presence of a latent level behind or beneath the manifest text of the world that is compounded of materials from extremely different registers and ontological spheres: wishful projections, fantasies, real and imagined memories, "real" objects, etc.

This is the space of the novel's world, the space into which war intrudes – or which produces the intrusion of war into itself. The relevance of the initiation scheme, which involves a crossing of boundaries from one realm into the other, depends on the place of war in the inner space of the novel – that is, in the space that incarnates and is incarnated in Jim's subjectivity.

THE MEANING OF WAR: NARRATIVE RULES

War seems to intrude into Jim's life as a cataclysmic disruption of the world, depriving him of all the stable points of his existence: his parents and servants as well as his home. War is chaos, the removal of boundaries that so far seemed to be inviolable. During the tortuous truck journey that takes a group of European prisoners across long tracts of the no man's land inside and around Shanghai (this

⁹ Ballard, Introduction to *Crash*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Introduction to *Crash*, p. 6.

¹¹ Introduction to *Crash*, p. 1.

¹² Introduction to *Crash*, p. 5.

is one of the eroded boundaries), Jim watches the sky in search of his favourite stars, but “[a]fter a few minutes he was forced to admit that he could recognize none of the constellations. Like everything else since the war, the sky was in a state of change. For all their movement, the Japanese aircraft were its only fixed points, a second zodiac above the broken land” (146). It is a cosmic disruption, involving social displacement (Jim is forced to socialise with people like Basie when “his entire upbringing could have been designed to prevent him from meeting” them [97]) and an existential displacement as well: “walls of strangeness” (50) spring up, separating him from the rest of the world, “[a] peculiar space was opening around him, which separated him from the secure world he had known before the war” (76; see also 65–6).¹³ Read in terms of an initiation narrative, the walls of strangeness might represent the necessary stage of solitude and estrangement that precedes initiation, the death of the old self that makes way for the new. On the other hand, this intermediary or transitional stage (of death) does not seem to want to end in the novel, and Jim’s awareness of the walls of strangeness and the condition of separation might simply indicate the fact that he is already on the other side, at home.

War also represents a new world in the sense that what happened before its outbreak becomes irrelevant – and this is important in the context of the initiation narrative –: knowledge equals “war knowledge,” experience equals “war experience.” This is obvious, for instance, when Dr Ransome appears in the detention centre: “Jim decided that he had entered the war at a later stage than Basie and himself. He had probably come from one of the missionary settlements in the interior, and had no idea of what went on at the detention centre” (129). It is due to this war knowledge that Jim is able to earn the fear and respect of even the adult British prisoners: Jim *knows* something they are not aware of, and therefore also allegorically embodies something which they do not like to see: in the camp, for many of his fellow-prisoners he is the “war-child,” the allegorical representative of the war itself, who is often waved away, as if the adults were afraid of being contaminated by some unspecified war virus (the most dramatic example of Jim’s extra knowledge is the episode when he begs water from the Japanese soldiers and drinks it all himself, but only because he knows that the Japanese soldiers will appreciate his joke and reward him with another bottle of

¹³ This dislocated world allows unexpected reversals: Jim is hit by a Chinese amah, and he acknowledges this fact by noting that these women must be strong (68); while he is prowling the streets he is taken for a beggar boy (his first, scaring, mirror image in the novel) (78).

water which he will be able to distribute among the others, aware that his own survival wholly depends upon the group's survival. Jim *knows* that his cruel joke is appreciated only by the Japanese and none of the British prisoners [135]). The distance separating him from the rest of the world is here reconfigured as the distance between himself and his old world ("already Jim felt himself apart from the others" [136]). In terms of the binary initiation logic of war stories, Jim somehow embodies experience as opposed to the others' innocence: it seems that he has gone deeper into the world of war than his fellow Europeans.

As the suspension of certain rules, the war also brings changes that might be welcome for Jim: a series of increasingly more serious transgressions. When he lives on his own in the flat of his parents, their absence is at first not really noted by him: he continues to occupy his accustomed place in the symbolic system of the family, content with the visible traces of his parents (her mother's footprints visible in the talc strewn on the floor), playing his games with the accustomed toys in the accustomed hours and taking his accustomed seat at the family dining table. His small transgressions begin when he takes his model aircraft down to meals; then, fulfilling an old desire, he bicycles around the flat. This process is finally acknowledged by him when he thinks of Basie in terms of his difference from his father: "At home, if he did anything wrong, the consequences seemed to overlay everything for days. With Basie [whom he endows with authority] they vanished instantly. For the first time in his life Jim felt free to do what he wanted" (120).

War, thus, as a removal of barriers, also means the removal of repressive barriers. At one point Jim is watching what could be called the signifying processes of war: the gradual, diligent removal of bombed-out buildings and ravaged machinery and their unpredictable migrations and transformations into the huts and dwellings of the village people. "These strange dislocations appealed to Jim. For the first time in his life he felt able to enjoy the war. He gazed happily at the burnt-out trams and tenement blocks, at the thousands of doors open to the clouds, a deserted city invaded by the sky" (127). These dislocations are the displacements made possible by the totally free circulation of all the components that make up the objects of the world: there is no limit to what can be transformed into what, the regulations of (social, symbolic) movement are all suspended. The grammar of the war, the semiotics of war economy is thus struc-

turally similar to the workings of the primary process: the war creates a (partly psychic) space where the language of the pleasure principle can operate freely.¹⁴

The new freedom, represented by the authority of Basie (it has to be noted that he shares this authority with Dr Ransome, who, with his Latin conjugations, does seem to stand for the symbolic order in the camp) is also evident in the narrative organisation of the text.¹⁵

The nuclear event (no pun intended) of the novel is the explosion of the atomic bomb, an event that is supposed to put an end to the condition of existence called war and instead ends up perpetuating it. It is an event that is not over when it has occurred, an event that cannot be said to have an end. The centrality of the nuclear explosion seriously affects the imagery of the novel, as well as its conditions of narrative, in two fundamental ways. On the one hand, events in the novel are without contours (a fixed beginning and end): the explosion forms a hollow at the centre of the text, a gap that spills over into the entire fictional world, into all the major images that dominate Jim's experience of the world/war. This structure cannot be explained by calling it a network of pre-figurations and flashbacks: the narrative and figurative organisation of the text resembles the workings of nuclear fallout: the event, fractured into a myriad pieces, settles upon the entire narrative world, contaminating and inhabiting all its images.

¹⁴ For all its inadequacy, the metaphor of the primary process well indicates the ambiguity concerning inside and outside in the novel. If the war "speaks" in the language of the primary process, it immediately becomes allegorised as a personification. Where the primary process is spoken (or speaks), there has to be a desiring agent behind this language. Again, the question comes down to identifying that which speaks this language, to a decision between external and internal allegorising. On the semiotics of the primary process, see Kaja Silverman. *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, 67-9.

¹⁵ It should be noted that Jim's parents, the representatives of symbolic authority, are extremely pale figures from the start. We first see them on their way to a party, wearing entirely unserious fancy dresses (the mother dressed up as a pierrot and the father as a pirate), and even before the war the most stable reference points in Jim's psychic world seem to lie elsewhere, outside the symbolic circle of the family. The task of remembering his parents in the camp seems little more than a self-willed element of his survival strategy. The stability of Jim's home at the start of the novel is similarly questionable: he is an English boy who was born in China and has never seen his homeland (his imaginary England consists entirely of popular icons); on the other hand, as a member of the English community, barred from the rest of Shanghai by a boundary that is not only geographical but also social, existential and ontological, he cannot experience the city as his home either.

On the other hand, the explosion works like the negative of an event in Lyotard's sense:¹⁶ it institutes an order of (non-)narrativity that has nothing to do with previous orders of narrativity, and, by contaminating the entire narrative, it provides the 'model' – a radical fragmentation and discontinuity – for each event in the novel.

The most typical narrative micro-unit of the novel is the *encounter*, especially in the vagrant, itinerant sections that make up about half of the text. Locked into the borderline zone of Shanghai and its surrounding area, Jim strays out of one chance encounter into the other, meeting people of all kinds in terms of nationality, class and age. For instance, after his departure from the Olympic Stadium and walk back to the Lunghua Airfield, he meets (or he thinks he meets) the Japanese kamikaze pilot he has admired so long. The pilot is crazily and pointlessly beating the sugar cane and the nettles with his stick, but presents the starving Jim with a mango. Then he cuffs Jim on the head, "waving him towards the perimeter fence as if warning him away from contaminated ground" (281). A few pages later, Jim encounters a group of Chinese soldiers; instead of shooting Jim, they simply look through him and march on (290). Jim then encounters an American fighter with its ejection ports open, "and it occurred to him that the pilot might kill him for fun" (291). Instead, the pilot waves to him and flies off. When he reaches the camp, Jim meets a group of Englishmen who have entrenched themselves in the safety behind its fence. Their leader, Lieutenant Price, instead of admitting Jim into the camp, shoves him away, punching him in the chest with his bandaged hand (293). These four chance encounters (each with the representatives of one of the four nations that acquire allegorical significance in Jim's world) end differently, and there seems to be no way of guessing what is going to happen in each case. Two persons or groups of persons encounter in the no man's land that is the periphery of Shanghai, and the outcome is an act of kindness, a friendly acknowledgement of the other's presence, total indifference and violent hostility respectively (it should be added that Jim is a "blank" in all cases, as well as a child, which means that the active aspect of the encounter is decided by the other party). The outcomes, however, are not different in terms of affective investment. These are encounters between two "objects" or entities in a force field, and what comes out of them is entirely unpredictable, no matter how we try to read them: nothing in our previous knowledge of the text could provide

¹⁶ See Geoffrey Bennington. *Lyotard: Writing the Event*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, pp. 107–8.

us with a clue as to what will happen. Psychological motivation or continuity is out of the question in the case of three of these events – the Japanese pilot, as a “character,” could be but is not, an exception –, so we must fall back, either upon our extra-textual knowledge of “human nature” or, what is more likely, upon the allegorical reading models provided by the text as to how to read each of the nationalities. This allegorical knowledge, however, does not work either: it seems that in the “encounter,” allegorical possibilities of interpretation (that is, reading possibilities that would make use of formerly acquired knowledge and narrative continuity) are simply inoperable, burnt out by the immediacy of the event. This, of course, should give us second thoughts concerning the allegorical predictability of nationalities that other strands in the text appear to promote.

An earlier chapter is called “An End to Kindness.” In the encounter between Jim and the pilot, the giving of the mango is no kindness in the sense that it cannot be explained with reference to the feeling or affection known as kindness;¹⁷ it is not the result of a disposition, thus it cannot be explained either by the relationship pertaining between the two characters or by their “character.” “Kindness,” giving the mango, is simply one among a set of possibilities that appear when any two characters meet, irrespective of nationality or previous connection; the chances that the pilot beats Jim’s head into a pulp or that he ignores him completely are equally high or low.¹⁸ An aleatoric logic governs the encounters, and thus any encounter is a totally random event not only in the sense of having been brought about by the randomness of war but also in the sense that it has no consequences regarding the further course of events.

The suspension of narrative rules applies also to “continuous” relationships. Basie’s betrayal is perhaps the most dramatic example. In the detention camp, Basie seems to be about to leave in a truck towards one of the prison camps (the detention centre is a place where the sick and weak prisoners are brought to die, and only the few sturdy survivors are taken to prison camps), while Jim is left

¹⁷ The act of giving the mango is random, but it finds its place in Jim’s internal world as one in a series of seductions by death (like Mrs Philips’s sweet potato given to Jim on the way to the Stadium).

¹⁸ Unwilling to handle this radical discontinuity of character and intersubjective relationships, Spielberg’s film invents a friendship between Jim and the young pilot, inserting the episodes in which they perform acts of kindness for the other (Jim returns the pilot’s model glider from inside the camp, and the pilot saves Jim’s life when he is planting the pheasant trap) into the narrative continuity of “friendship.” The giving of the mango thus becomes “motivated” in terms of a narrative of a friendship, and the subversive discontinuity in Ballard’s novel is domesticated.

behind. Basie immediately "adopts" two English boys instead of Jim, but his spectacular betrayal has no consequences in Jim: "Jim watched him without resentment. He and Basie had collaborated at the detention centre in order to stay alive, but Basie, rightly, had dispensed with Jim as soon as he could leave for the camps" (127). What has happened before has no relevance at all to what will happen, not even in terms of the psychic continuities of guilt or resentment or gratitude; relationships are not conducted in this way. The past does not define the present, and, consequently, a fundamental discontinuity is revealed in "character" as well. This is obvious if we consider how Spielberg's film version handles the same episode. At this point the film once again balks at the implications of the novel's narrative texture: Jim is spectacularly outraged by Basie's betrayal, throwing a childish tantrum, hysterically appealing to Basie who, apparently unperturbed, looks away, bearing the silent disapproval of the British prisoners on the truck. What is more, the film stages a second act of betrayal when Basie, despite his earlier promise to Jim, deserts from the camp without telling him. Jim once again has a hysterical fit. These additions in the film transform the totally unpredictable relationship between Jim and Basie into a continuous narrative and, as a result, make a "character" out of Basie: a knowable person with motivations and "traits" that prepare us for his actions instead of the more sinister implications of the totally random, quark-like creature in the novel who exists in suspended animation between his acts that are not the products of a certain (psychological) disposition or narrative prehistory but of a concatenation of various unpredictable circumstances.

These are the narrative conditions prevailing in the "inner space" experienced by Jim. The question remains, of course, as to the extent to which all this is exterior to Jim's subjectivity. In other words, Jim's "strangeness" has to be addressed.

JIM AND THE ALLEGORIES OF NATION

Many readers are shocked by Jim's unemotional, muted response to human relationships and affairs as well as by some of his disturbingly unlikely affective attachments. Is Jim's subjectivity abolished or made inhuman by the war? Is he like the boys on Golding's island, the little beast emerging as soon as the repressive laws of civilisation are suspended? Is he a strange, "perverse" child who recognises himself in the landscape and narrativity of the war? This amounts to asking

whether he is supposed to be different from us or be our representative. Is he an allegorical figure of war as difference from us, or war as something in all of us?

The incident with the water suggests that he is different from the other Europeans who remain wary of him throughout the war. He is exhilarated by the war which he often thoroughly enjoys; he grows relatively stronger in the camp, acquires a certain authority – true, an authority of dubious value – among its inhabitants, and refers to the year 1944 as the happiest year of his life (165, 166, 180). Jim's affective life is not non-existent. As with other typical Ballard protagonists, his affections are transferred or displaced into various unusual channels: a fascination with words and images, an overawed interest in war technology, especially aircraft (this in itself is not supposed to be unnatural in male children) and an apparently unaccountable enthusiasm for the Japanese soldiers. It is especially this last infatuation that is hard to accept. There is of course an element of opportunism in it, as the Japanese are Jim's only chance of survival, but one senses a more disturbing element in this strange fascination. Jim's first relevant observation already suggests a deeper layer: "he admired the Japanese. He liked their bravery and stoicism and their sadness which struck a curious chord with Jim, who was never sad. The Chinese, whom Jim knew well, were a cold and often cruel people, but in their superior way they stayed together, whereas every Japanese was alone" (23). The Japanese are thus allegorically presented right from the start as the mirror images of Jim in terms of a fundamental homelessness and solitude. They – or at least their displaced representatives in conquered China – are a nation of existentialists who have somehow come to terms with the irreducible solitude of man.¹⁹ Bearing in mind

¹⁹ In this passage, the Japanese are defined in their opposition to the Chinese, but a postcolonial reading could use Jim's observation as a comment on the subjectivity of the colonial conquerors. In this sense Jim, unlike the rest of the British community, experiences the colonial presence of the conqueror as a condition of fundamental homelessness and displacement, and he is the only European who is able to recognise himself in the melancholy of the Japanese. The hostility of the English community to Jim could thus also be read as an inability to face, not simply the war, but the fact that colonial existence is always already war existence – what is more, a kind of war existence where the circulation and apportioning of violence happens in entirely unpredictable ways: "the stories of colonialism – in which heterogeneous cultures are yoked by violence – offer nuances of trauma that cannot be neatly partitioned between colonizer and colonized" (Sara Suleri. *The Rhetoric of English India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 5). Suleri's conception of the colonial encounter, an event dominated by "the migrant moment of dislocation" (5) and completely dispensing with chronology (7), would be another possibility for a reading of the narrativity of the novel (Hiroshima would then become the ultimate and paradigmatic act of colonial violence),

this "metaphysical" aspect of Jim's attraction to them, it is logical that, for Jim, the par excellence Japanese is the Japanese pilot: his admiration comes to be focused on the figure of a young Japanese kamikaze pilot (189), an obvious and unsettling mirror image. The figure of the pilot represents something essential in what the Japanese seem to stand for in Jim's psyche: "Jim realized that he was closer to the Japanese, who had seized Shanghai and sunk the American fleet at Pearl Harbour. He listened to the sound of the transport plane hidden behind the haze of white dust, and thought again of carrier decks out on the Pacific, of small men in baggy flying suits standing by their unarmoured aircraft, ready to chance everything on little more than their own will" (136). Just like Jim in the water incident, who was "prepared to risk everything for the few drops of water" (136). The Japanese pilot is the existentialist who does everything in the constant awareness of death, of the absolute risk involved in action and ready to risk his self in the solitary struggle against the universe, even willing his own death: the logical culmination of flying (and this gives a disturbing colouring to Jim's otherwise "regular" or "normal" fascination with it) is thus the suicidal mission of the kamikaze flight.

The figure of the kamikaze pilot suggests an even more disturbing aspect of Jim's obsession, and links his admiration for the Japanese to his interest in the technology and machinery of flying. As Dennis Foster remarks (528-9), the relationship between the kamikaze pilot and his machine is extraordinary in the sense that the pilot is part of the weapon: the destruction of the target brings about the simultaneous destruction of the weapon and the pilot in a single discharge. Early on in the novel, Jim leaves behind the frivolous fancy-dress party of the English community to prowl an abandoned aerodrome, and enters the fuselage of a Japanese fighter that was shot down. Jim has been obsessed with the wreck for months, trying to persuade his father to take it home. Inside the "cave of rusting metal" (31), he is overcome by a strange excitement:

A potent atmosphere hovered over the cockpit, the only nostalgia that Jim had ever known, the intact memory of the pilot who had sat at its controls. Where was the pilot now? Jim pretended to work the controls, as if this sympathetic action could summon the spirit of the long-dead

although it would supply the traumatic spatiality and temporality of the narrative with a perhaps unnecessarily narrow final referent. We are certainly justified to read *Shanghai* as the par excellence colonial space, a traumatic field of displacements, full of the dead who refuse to disappear; it is, however, not inevitable to regard the colonial experience as the only colouring of the text's trauma.

aviator [...] He lifted himself from the cockpit and climbed on to the engine cowling. His arms and shoulders were trembling with all the confused emotions that this ruined aircraft invariably set off in his mind. Giving way to his excitement, he picked up his model glider and launched it into the air. (31)

Jim fills the space within the machine that was once occupied by the dead pilot. This rusty cave is an oddly maternal space that is perfectly filled out by the contours of the pilot's crouching body. In this strange scene (the cave might be another possible allusion to the rite of passage at the centre of initiation rituals) that prefigures the grotesque struggle with the dead Japanese kamikaze pilot towards the end of the novel, Jim attempts to raise the dead pilot by means of filling his space and repeating his actions. That is, he imitates, replaces the dead pilot in order to bring him back to life, in a scene that remains ambiguous in its implications: there is a strong suggestion that what motivates Jim is his fascination for the pilot who, through his death, has been absorbed into his flying machine, and it remains uncertain whether his strange affinity connects him with the live or the dead pilot (the pilot as part of the machine). The most disturbing element of the episode is the fact that this is "the only *nostalgia*" Jim has ever known: the only instance when a painful memory of something establishes a psychic continuity as interiority in Jim establishes this interiority in the space occupied by death.²⁰ "The intact memory of the pilot" that fills the space of the cockpit might refer to the pilot's memory somehow magically entering Jim (perhaps via the memory of the machine itself) or Jim's memory of the pilot he has never seen. In either case, the only reference to a loving relationship with the past (nostalgia) refers to a past that is entirely alien, placing it outside what one would think of as the space of Jim's interiority. The ambiguity of the scene is indicated also by Jim's climbing out of the wreck: this travesty of a birth that is in fact the result of the

²⁰ In the temporality of war, nostalgia is defined by Jim as a particularly dangerous condition, a fixation on/of the past which, as I have tried to show, is simply not relevant in war conditions. Jim thinks with a certain disdain of the English prisoners, who name parts of Lunghua Camp after famous parts of London (167; the strategy recalls that of another Golding hero, Pincher Martin on his barren rock), wasting their time on nostalgia (168) instead adjusting to the requirements of war. In the camp, succumbing to nostalgia every now and then is like a hobby for Jim: he looks after Mr Maxted "out of nostalgia for his childhood dream of growing up one day to be like him" (177). It is probably not by chance that the death march to the Stadium is dominated by the partnership of Jim and Mr Maxted, and that in the Stadium, Mr Maxted becomes one of the most powerful figures of death in the novel.

imitation of death fills him with "confused emotions" that, in the full context of the novel, might be described as erotic.

Jim's fascination for machines is more unambiguously eroticised in his admiration for American planes. "Jim thought intently about the B-29s. He wanted to embrace their silver fuselages, caress the nacelles of their engines. The Mustang was a beautiful plane, but the Superfortress belonged to a different order of beauty" (223). The American planes, however, first appear in the novel (and in Jim's psyche) as silver angels of death, of a seductive and beautiful death, projected by Jim's delirious mind in the detention camp well before they actually begin their attacks against the Asian continent. In the first half of the novel, "seeing the American planes" is the hallucinatory experience of near death and the planes do not lose this affective value or connotation even when, in the second half of the novel, they become a ubiquitous "real" presence in the skies over Shanghai. Jim sees them as erotic objects of streamlined beauty (he is certain that the ventral radiators "had been put there for reasons of style alone" [192]) only after they had been associated with death in his feverish dreams. It is the sight of their beauty that convinces Jim that the Japanese have lost the war ("However brave, there was nothing the Japanese could do to stop those beautiful and effortless machines" [197, see also 223]). In the victorious American aircraft, the relationship between man and machine undergoes a further change: now the beautiful machine is infinitely superior to the pilot. It is the planes that fly and Jim wonders how people as unassuming as the American inhabitants of the camp might be able to operate these complex machines (223). The American planes thus represent a further stage in the evolution of the machine, a stage characterised by a beauty that has hardly any need of human co-operation: if the wreck of the Japanese bomber had absorbed the subjectivity of the dead pilot, in the American planes there is no longer anything to absorb. If the Japanese planes stand for the sudden, "heroic" extinction of the personality through a union with the machine, the American aircraft are born out of the erosion of personality in the first place. They represent different versions or styles of death, the American one being far more advanced.

If we continue the allegorical reading of the nationalities in the novel, the Chinese represent a different attitude to death. They appear as a formless mass characterised by a lack of individuality. The mass is silent but threatening – this is indicated by the fact that when some of its members assume individuality, they invariably bring physical danger (like the amah who hits Jim or the young

Chinese boy who pursues him in the streets of Shanghai, threatening him with mutilation). They are like a shapeless mass of matter, filling out all the available space in its anonymity, their multitudinous presence crushed up against all the boundaries, borders, fences and perimeters (179–80, 291).²¹ If the Japanese and the Americans are connected to flying, the Chinese, crouching motionlessly on the ground and not even looking up into the sky, represent gravity and weight, a powerful downward pull. That the Chinese are also connected to death in Jim's mind is obvious from the very beginning: the coffins returned by the tide are referred to in the very first paragraph of the text and become a pervasive presence throughout the novel (11, 29, 40–1, 89, etc.). The cyclical return of the coffins indicates the continuous and irrepressible presence of the dead in the world of the novel, also evident in the fields around Shanghai that are either abandoned battlefields or interspersed with countless burial mounds from which the dead are insistently returning; "the rotting coffins projected from the loose earth like a chest of drawers" (29): it seems that the land of the living and the land of the dead are not properly demarcated.

The Chinese subvert this most important boundary or demarcation line of the novel in other ways as well. First, they are very closely linked with the material world of objects that surrounds them and from which they emerge, but not in the mystifying way that suggests an intimacy between the natives and their homeland, an intimacy incomprehensible and unattainable for the colonisers and invaders. They are associated throughout with one of the novel's most pervasive motifs, that of (organic and technological) debris, refuse, rubbish, waste: the Chinese (exemplified by the multitude of beggars that populate Shanghai like some undergrowth) literally grow out of the debris of the world (like a secretion) and in their turn generate or secrete new rubbish and waste. Jim's cubicle in the camp, protected by its makeshift screen constructed out of refuse, resembles "one of the miniature shanties that seemed to erect themselves spontaneously around the beggars of Shanghai" (172). The Chinese are one with their land in the sense of joining the process of its endless production and recycling of waste material. The Chinese are indistinguishable from other matter: they are silently transformed into waste matter and they return to be recycled and reused in the process that is mightier than any of them. They are themselves waste matter, the debris that is interminably secreted by the land: therefore the difference between death and life is a matter of little interest in their world (as it is imagined and

²¹ See Foster, p. 528.

figured by Jim).²² Jim is aware of this from the start: speculating about the public hangings, he decides that the Chinese enjoy the spectacle of death "as a way of reminding themselves of how precariously they were alive" (57).

The wisdom of the Chinese is primarily "ecological:" they are human wastage, endlessly regenerating, but also the recyclers of wastage (the beggars live on others' waste). They are the scavengers of this world, and Jim, enthralled by the primary process of the war, is duly fascinated by "the tireless ability of the Chinese to transform one set of refuse into another" (187) and thus start a new cycle. If the signifying process of the war makes possible the free circulation and metamorphosis of all the component elements, its primary materials *and* agents are the Chinese: to become a beggar in the symbolic network of the novel (both Jim and Basie become beggars at one point [113], and so does Dr Ransome [134]) is to become one of the Chinese, indistinguishable from the circulating matter. The metamorphosis perhaps indicates the personal realisation that one is waste material, dead as well as alive all the time, and the acquisition of the ability to enter the process of recycling, to use the rest of the waste matter that makes up the world. This insight appears more radically in the second half of the novel, connected to other images of death in Jim's psyche. Supposing that Jim's fascination with the Japanese, Chinese and Americans is a fascination with death, with an awareness of death that is lacking from the English, one could say that the three nationalities represent three forms of dying: the Japanese pilot dies an existentialist, "heroic" (but not patriotic) death, willing the total extinction of his self in a single moment of discharge. The "American death" is the hallucinatory, beautiful surrender of the self in the face of the beauty of technology and images. The Chinese do not die because they are never fully alive: their life is a slow process of dying in the sense of being transformed into the variety of waste material that is called dead.

This scheme would seem to lend itself to narrative articulation in terms of an initiation story. Jim is initiated into the world of death, confronted on his way

²² It is important to note that we are not talking here about some exoticising valuation of the oriental unity, where death is valued as an indispensable, organic part of the cyclical life process: far from a pristine domain of ancient wisdom, this is a waste-land, a disaster area, an inner space that is covered in the wreck and debris of war, where the constant presence of death in life is not the intimation of some metaphysical unity. This is basically a dead world, if Jim desires it, it is so at least partly because he has been fed images of the dead world. Naturally, the Japanese and Chinese of his imaginative landscape are *his* Japanese and Chinese only, or rather the images of the Japanese and Chinese that are emotionally invested by him.

with representatives of dying/death. The problem is that there is not one but several stories of initiation here. One style or conception of dying does not delete another, and in fact each experience of death can be read as a moment of initiation. Such proliferation of rites of passage reflects the general breakdown of narrative continuity in the novel. There are several other factors as well that work against the possibility of conceiving the novel as an initiation narrative.

THE RETURN OF THE DEAD AND THE RAISING OF THE DEAD

As I have suggested in my discussion of the narrativity of the novel, the tidy and allegorical national characterology in terms of styles of dying and attitudes to death breaks down in the face of individual events. Death is appealing to Jim in all of its forms, and the central episodes or experiences of death combine the Chinese and Japanese insights into death and dying. The brutal public execution of the coolie who is beaten to death by the Japanese soldiers is one such episode. The execution is a show put on by the Japanese to teach a lesson to their European prisoners: not to assert their power over them but to demonstrate their disdain and superiority (that is why one wonders why the makers of the film chose to replace this scene with two acts of senseless brutality against the prisoners themselves: the savage assaults on Dr Rawlins [Dr Ransome's name in the film] and Basie). This lesson is well taken by Jim (228), but the deeper effect of the execution becomes evident only later. What appeals to him is the way the coolie dies: he does not try to resist but starts a private ritual of dying, singing "that strange sing-song that the Chinese made when they knew they were about to be killed" (227). The Chinese coolie uncharacteristically raises his face to the sky (228) and continues to sing even as the blood is trickling from his mouth. This is not heroism or bravery but a peaceful and smooth passage into death. That is why "the prospect of being killed excited" Jim (238). Wondering about the exact nature of this excitement, he recalls the dying coolie: "For a few last moments, like the rickshaw coolie who had sung to himself, they would be fully aware of their own minds" (238). What appeals to Jim in the execution is the fact that the Chinese coolie took control over his own death, thereby transforming it into the moment of the fullest possible self-presence, where the willing of the extinction of the self could become the most powerful, in fact the only, manifestation of the self's strength.

Death has two contrasting but equally alluring aspects for Jim (or rather, Jim's fascination with death has two major components and both find their correlatives in the inner space of the novel). First, it is the disruption of identity, no longer experienced as a threat for an already eroded subjectivity. The allure of the incessant work of displacement and transformation that goes on in this world is the allure of total immersion in the primary process of metamorphosis, even if this immersion lacks the ecstatic tone of Bataille's celebration of the dissolution in the process of existence by sacrificing discontinuous, individual existence.

On the other hand, the allure of death is the allure of fixity, of the end to endless displacement and metamorphosis, of recycling. These aspects of death correspond to the two phases of death identified by Georges Bataille. In the first phase, that of decay, "death is that putrefaction, that stench [...] which is at once the source and the repulsive condition of life"²³ (80). The second phase is that of whitened bones that "no longer have the intolerable look of decomposing flesh" (80).²⁴

Empire of the Sun is dominated by the first aspect of death, by threatening and alluring images of decomposing bodies that are not yet distant enough from what is called life to be wholly different, but the other component of death is also present. Early on in the novel, when Jim walks among the lidless coffins returned by the earth of the burial mounds, he is

struck by the contrast between the impersonal bodies of the newly dead, whom he saw every day in Shanghai, and these sun-warmed skeletons, every one an individual. The skulls intrigued him, with their squinting eye-sockets and quirky teeth. In many ways these skeletons were more alive than the peasant-farmers who had briefly tenanted their bones. Jim felt his cheeks and jaw, trying to imagine his own skeleton in the sun, lying here in this peaceful field within sight of the deserted aerodrome.

(29)

²³ Georges Bataille. *The Accursed Self*. New York: Zone Books, 1986, p. 80.

²⁴ Bataille, p. 80. In J. G. Farrell's *The Singapore Grip*, a novel concerned with the same period and area (British citizens during World War Two in the Far East), Shanghai appears as the opposite or double of British Singapore: a land of chaos, disorder, "a constant reminder, a sort of *memento mori*, of the harsh world which lay outside the limits of British rule" (London: Book Club Associates, 1979, p. 75). The most pervasive symbol of the transgressiveness and excess of Shanghai is its multitude of "exposed corpses:" "In 1937 more than twenty thousand bodies had been found on the streets or on waste ground in the city. By 1938 with the help of the war the number of corpses collected had risen to more than a hundred thousand *in the International Settlement alone!*" (Farrell, p. 75).

The most seductive images of death imply a smooth, gradual process of dying, the traditional notion of death as a desired peace, as relief from painful change. The sweet potato given to Jim by the dying Mrs Philips is one such seductive fruit of death ("Death, with her mother-of-pearl skin, had nearly seduced him with a sweet potato" [251]). The other agent of peaceful death is Mr Maxted who, dying in the Stadium, simply does not let Jim go with the others. Jim pretends to be dead in order to survive (272), repeating the primeval magic rite of mimicking the object of fear. "Defense in the form of fear is a form of mimicry," write Horkheimer and Adorno. "Every reaction of petrifying is the archaic scheme of survival: life pays the duty of its survival by becoming like the dead."²⁵ From this moment of mock death – the logic of initiation would have us say – Jim does not differentiate between the living and the dead. This is, once again, the empire of the sun, of the second sun, another border crossing that leads there.

The novel's world is organised by a number of boundaries and borderlines, and this network of perimeters and fences and zones is overshadowed by the fundamental boundary that separates life from death. If we conceive of the novel as a war narrative that is articulated as an initiation story, with the obligatory borderline that separates innocence from experience, ignorance from knowledge, then the passage into the empire of the sun is a passage into a world where death is not an irruption into life but part of it: the crossing of a boundary leads to the region where the primary boundary has already been crossed and is continually subverted. The two major narrative tropes of the novel are "the return of the dead" and "the raising of the dead," and both imply a transgressive crossing of the boundary that is uncrossable (or where crossing has always been a one-way traffic). The basic difference between the two is the difference of agency: the return of the dead is a natural process that is independent of the participants, whereas the raising of the dead conceives the crossing of the border as a miracle, a transgressive act, the violation of the laws of the world. I have already suggested that the lands of life and death are not properly demarcated geographically, the dead constantly spilling back into the world of the living (as with the burial mounds, or in the camp where the buried corpses stick out from below the thin layer of earth that has been scraped over them [205–6, 234]).

In the second half of the novel, the demarcation is subverted in another sense. Jim learns from Mrs Philips that the soul leaves the body before it is buried

²⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984, p. 205.

(207), and this enables him to subversively imagine death not as an instantaneous passage or crossing but as a process whose beginning and end are not entirely clear. If it is impossible to say where death begins and where it ends, then it is also impossible to say who is dead and who is alive: different creatures represent different stages of death. Hence the proliferation of ambiguous intermediary figures throughout the second half of the novel, including Lieutenant Price, referred to as a "corpse" (307) and a "spectre" (306) "raised from the dead" (304), "the first of the dead to rise from the grave and start the new war" (304), and the Belgian woman who is "resurrected" by Dr Ransome: "Dr Bowen had said that she was dead, but Dr Ransome squeezed her heart under her ribs and suddenly her eyes swivelled and looked at Jim. At first Jim thought that her soul had returned to her, but she was still dead" (207). It is also this subversive temporal spreading of the process of death that enables Jim to think of himself and of others as already (partly) dead: "Jim's soul had already left his body and no longer needed his thin bones and open sores in order to endure. He was dead, as were Mr Maxted and Dr Ransome. Everyone in Lunghua was dead. It was absurd that they had failed to grasp this" (238). "Perhaps they were already dead? Jim lay back and tried to count the motes of light. This simple truth was known to every Chinese from birth" (249). This is what he refers to as "the real meaning of war" (238). By conceiving of death as a gradual process involving in fact two deaths, a gap is opened in life through which death enters and, in turn, "a small space" (339) can be opened in death through which the soul may return.

If the narrativity of the novel seems to work against both allegorising and reducing the text to the logic of an initiation story, the pervasive and ambiguous imagery of death has a similar destabilising effect. The numerous and often discordant elements of Jim's fascination with death are combined in two powerful images that dominate the second half of the novel. The first is the figure of the American pilot whose fighter explodes over Lunghua, his burning body hurling down towards the airfield. The burning figure in the sky introduces the sun imagery that is so pervasive in the novel and culminates in the second sun of the atomic bomb.²⁶ "Jim could see the burning figure of the American pilot still strapped to his seat. Riding the incandescent debris of his aircraft, he tore through the trees beyond the perimeter of the camp, a fragment of the sun whose light continued to flare across the surrounding fields" (193). The burning pilot and his

²⁶ The sun imagery is actually introduced a few pages earlier when Jim feels his warm plate like a "piece of the sun against his chest" (182).

burning machine emit a “halo” of light that somehow remains lingering over the paddies. “For a few minutes the sun had drawn nearer to the earth, as if to scorch the death from its fields” (194). Jim reads the death of the pilot in terms of his own death, the prospect of which he welcomes (194). The “archangelic” (200) pilot is incorporated into his imaginative world and serves as raw material for imagining his own death:

He imagined himself at the controls of one of the fighters, falling to earth when his plane exploded, rising again as one of the childlike kamikaze pilots [...] One day Jim would become a wounded pilot, fallen among the burial mounds and armoured pagodas. Pieces of his flying suit and parachute, even perhaps his own body, would spread across the paddy fields, feeding the prisoners behind their wire and the Chinese starving at the gate [...] Jim stared into the sunlight outside the dispensary window. The silent landscape seemed to seethe with flames, the halo born from the burning body of the American pilot. The light touched the rusting wire of the perimeter fence and the dusty fronds of the wild sugar-cane, bleached the wings of the derelict aircraft and the bones of the peasants in the burial mounds. Jim longed for the next air raid, dreaming of the violent light, barely able to breathe for the hunger that Dr Ransome had recognized but could never feed. (201–2)

This fantasy of his own death combines almost all the images that dominate the novel. The death of the American pilot becomes Jim’s death (the repetition of Jim’s occupation of the wrecked fuselage), which is in turn imagined as part of the endless cycle of falling and rising that entails a metamorphosis, thus it is conflated with the kamikaze death, the explosion of the self (foreshadowed by the “jewelled icon of a small exploding boy:” Jim’s “star-like image” reflected in the cracked mirror while he is standing in one of the abandoned European flats in Shanghai: “pieces of himself seemed to fly across the room, scattered through the empty house” [63]). This solitary, violent death is transformed into the Chinese “ecological” death, the process of becoming recyclable waste material that will be used to feed the less dead (like the excrement in the camp that is used to fertilise Dr Ransome’s kitchen garden), indistinguishable from the other bits of the falling debris. The light that is issued by the dead body becomes a halo that stays in the sky for the rest of the novel, merging with the white light of the nuclear explosion of which it turns out to be the premonition: the fragmented body is transformed into light and illuminates a landscape of death and devastation (derelict aircraft and white bones). The whole image is animated by Jim’s desire,

a longing for the next air raid, a "hunger" that is correctly identified by Dr Ransome as a desire for death.

The other dominant image, apparently more closely connected with the fixity aspect of death, is that of the runway of bones. When Jim and the group of European prisoners arrive outside the Lunghua camp, they are first taken to the airfield where a concrete runway is being constructed by Chinese prisoners. The whole construction site is covered in a pall of ashy white chalk dust (158, 159) that covers everything and everybody who is connected to the construction. Among the prisoners, Basie and Jim immediately join the Chinese coolies: they pick up pieces of stone to take them to the runway, and the "chalky powder" begins to settle on them instantly. Jim stares at the "white surface of the runway" (159) and fantasises that the Chinese are laying down their chalk-white bones "in a carpet for the Japanese bombers" (160). They are building their own body into the airfield, eroding or crumbling slowly as the runway is being built, and from the mass grave new aircraft will rise. In an apocalyptic vision Jim imagines the bodies all going to the pit and imagines himself following them. At this point he refuses to die this eroding, Chinese death and opts for the Japanese style of dying: he begins to run towards "the shelter of the [Japanese] aircraft, eager to enfold himself in their wings" (160). At this moment, a major rupture occurs, and the circumstances of Jim's and the others' survival are never fully explained. The moment is one end to Jim's life; the radical narrative rupture suggests – yet another point of passage – that the camp section is a new existence whose connections with what went on before are tenuous.

The runway of bones keeps haunting the rest of the novel (188) as a possible form of Jim's death: "The whiteness of the runway excited Jim, its sun-bleached surface mixed with the calcinated bones of the dead Chinese, and even perhaps with his own bones in a death that might have been" (233). The allure of this death is present, however, mainly in the form of a fallout: the omnipresence of the white dust that first appears in his mother's deserted room, covered in talcum powder (62; this is also stressed in the film where the footprints against the white powder evoke the overexposed negative image associated with the nuclear bomb). During the death march to the stadium, "a fine film covered their uniforms and webbing, and reminded him of the runway at Lunghua Airfield" (253); as he is lying beside the dying Mr Maxted, the glimmer of the night raids

“cast a damp sheen over Jim’s arms and legs, another reminder of that fine dust he had first seen as he helped to build the runway at Lunghua Airfield” (259).²⁷

The white dust or powder is revealed to be the same as the white light, the fallout that pre-exists the nuclear explosion. The whole world is covered in the afterglow of the atomic flash: “Its white glare still lay over the road of their death-march from Lunghua, the same pale light that he could see in the chalky fade of the stadium and in Lieutenant Price’s lime-pit skin” (314). “A white glaze covered the derelict land [...] Jim remembered the burning body of the Mustang pilot, and the soundless light that had filled the stadium and seemed to dress the dead and the living in their shrouds” (276). This is the powder that covers Basie’s face and the strange white hue of Lieutenant Price’s skin, the ubiquitous white sheen that is now the precondition of seeing, the zero degree of experiencing the world. This is brought home at the very end of the novel, when the whitish glaze reappears on the giant movie screens that show images of war to the Chinese. “The second of the screens, in front of the Palace Hotel, was now blank, its images of tank battles and saluting armies replaced by a rectangle of silver light that hung in the night air, a window into another universe” (350). When nothing is projected onto the screen, this nothing is in fact the ever-present white sheen that covers the word, the degree zero, the precondition of representation, a silver light that incorporates the *screen* among the images of death that populate the novel. The empty screen itself becomes another representation (and representative) of the white dust and white light.

This transformation takes place in the empire of the sun, which turns out to be the empire of the second sun. The white sheen or glaze, the white dust that settles on everything, and the silver rectangle of the empty screen, are all synecdochically identical with the light of the second sun. *Empire of the Sun* presents a world illuminated by the light of the second sun, a thoroughly anti-Platonic place. Whereas in the Platonic parable the sun is the idea of the good and of truth, its clarity allowing direct, unobstructed vision and revealing the objects of the world in their deepest truth, in the empire of the sun, in this world illumi-

²⁷ A few further instances of the motif of the airfield. As Mrs Vincent lies dying in the stadium, “[t]he night’s rain had washed the last of the dye from her cotton dress, giving her the ashen pallor of the Chinese labourers at Lunghua Airfield” (265). It is to the runway that Jim walks back from the stadium with the intention of finding peace and safety (277–8), of lying down quietly among the derelict aircraft (283).

nated by the second sun, light occludes instead of revealing, derealises the world instead of confirming its reality.

Jim looked down at the powdery talc that covered his legs and shoes, like the undertaker's talc blown on to the bones of a Chinese skeleton before its re-burial, and knew that it was time to move on.

By late afternoon this layer of dust on Jim's legs and arms began to glow with light. The sun fell towards the Shanghai hills, and the flooded paddy fields became a liquid chessboard of illuminated squares, a war-table on which were placed crashed aircraft and abandoned tanks. Lit by the sunset, the prisoners stood on the embankment of the railway line that ran to the warehouses at Nantao, like a party of film extras under the studio spotlights.

(253-4)

The dust, here identified as properly belonging to creatures neither alive nor dead (a skeleton before its re-burial), turns into a layer of light that covers the world, making film extras out of the group of prisoners, and a "mirage" out of their personal belongings in the stadium (263). It is as if Ballard had continued Plato's parable in an unlikely direction: one sun gives truth and life, as well as the possibility of proper naming, but two suns are too much light: after the explosion, the prisoners are "sitting on the floor of a furnace heated by a second sun" (267). The second sun is described as "a piece of the sun" (274) and the light cast by it is "the shadow of another sun" (332). In a world where light kills instead of giving life, a total breakdown of what is the essential ontological boundary in the novel becomes inevitable: Jim, as well as all the other characters illuminated or overshadowed by the light of the second sun, is dead as well as alive; eating becomes a dangerous, contaminating and cannibalistic process. To eat in the presence of death is to devour death, to become one with it; at the same time, food invariably feeds death (303-4).

In the climactic scene of the novel, Jim's grotesque tussle with the dead Japanese pilot, his "imaginary twin" (337), all these images are brought together. Jim first wants to bury the body, that is, to establish and reinforce the boundary between them. It is also obvious that, with the end of the war, Jim is burying part of himself, a double that stands for his war-part or death-part. He is attempting to bury his death wish. Jim then tries to eat, in order to empty the tin can with which to dig a grave for the pilot, but finds himself once more unable to eat in the presence of death, imagining that the canned meat is alive: "This was food that

would devour those who tried to eat it" (339). Suddenly scared of the consuming power of the dead pilot, he punches its face: the violence to the dead body creates a semblance of life in it (a quivering lid, fresh blood pumped from a wound), and this is the profane, disturbing miracle of raising the dead. It is through the attempt to kill the pilot more fully that he seems to be brought back to life. "For the first time since the start of the war he felt a surge of hope. If he could raise this dead Japanese pilot he could raise himself, and the millions of Chinese who had died during the war" (340). Beginning to fantasise about raising all his dead, he keeps pumping: "His hands and shoulders were trembling, electrified by the discharge that had passed through them, the same energy that powered the sun and the Nagasaki bomb whose explosion he had witnessed" (340). It is a strange resurrection that is powered by the atomic bomb, and it is a strange raising of the dead that begins by the raising of the figure of death. The episode with the Japanese pilot is obviously an internal fight (not unlike Humbert Humbert's grotesquely and gruesomely unreal scene with his double, Quilty, in *Lolita*). If the scene begins by Jim trying to bury that part of himself which represents death or a desire for death (burying or killing thus paradoxically amounting to an assertion of life), Jim's vision of raising the dead becomes the sign of his inability to exist outside the empire of the sun: to raise his double, to give life to it, is to succumb to his fascination with death. He wants to "raise the Japanese aircrew lying in the ditches around the airfield, and enough ground staff to rebuild a squadron of aircraft" (340). That is, he wants to perpetuate the war, to live forever in the empire of the sun.

This is the final paradox of the empire of the sun: the act of raising the dead becomes the expression of a profound, ambiguous fascination with death. In his desire to be a miracle worker, Jim wants to resurrect the possibility of his own death.

All these styles and seductions of dying represent various aspects of Jim's fascination with death. The power of the novel resides in the radical undecidability of the origin of this fascination. Jim, the "war-child" (209), is in some way a figure of death but this allegorical function is fractured into shards: he is different from the others and is the others, this fascination with death is disturbing because of its unlocatable origin in the phenomenal field, because we cannot entirely blame it onto an outside world that corrupts or distorts Jim's psyche, but nor is it the projection of Jim's psychopathological perversion or death wish. Jim is certainly not an allegorical figure of a collective death wish.

There are too many border crossings, too many deaths and returns from the dead for the initiation logic to remain intact. The novel is not the account of his allegorical journey from a world of life ("peace") into a world of death ("war").

Nor is it, however, the allegorical story of his journey or passage from the state of not knowing this into the state of knowing this. "Heart of Darkness"-type of deconstructive initiation stories use the narrative form in order to subvert it: the two realms that are immediately established by the narration of an act of passage ("peace" and "war," say) are posited only to spill over into each other. The spilling reveals the essential secret identity of the suppressed sphere of darkness and the centre that gains its identity from the suppression of such darkness. Nevertheless – I am loosely following here Paul de Man's account of the workings of text as allegorical narrative²⁸ – such narratives repeat or reproduce the very error that they expose: by placing in the centre of the narrative (perhaps only as a narrating voice) a subjectivity who experiences the deconstruction of the binary opposition as a moment of insight, the two realms of innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge (the knowledge of the untenability of initiation narratives), are re-established as authentic, nameable moments in the story of the self. We have seen that Ballard's narrative does not allow this recovery of binarism and the concomitant narrative organisation. The narrativity and imagery of the world under the second sun, the structure of the "inner space," do not allow the transferring or displacement of authenticity from the first level of the narrative to a higher level. Jim, the central consciousness in the novel whose subjectivity is clearly the stake of the text, is not a "returned soldier," because his subjectivity is not a closed space that can be examined detached from the space it inhabits, and because the narrative logic of the novel does not allow the continuity that would be implied by the psychological logic of crossing the borderline between innocence and experience.

²⁸ Paul de Man. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 162, 199, 205.

The Narrative Paradox

The virus of nothingness in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*

Watt is not an easy novel to describe, summarise or paraphrase. According to Hugh Kenner this is so "since the style of *Watt* is the most efficient that can be discovered for expounding that kind of material *Watt* contains."¹ The text intrudes into the mind of the reader forcing him to begin to think like Watt, in infinite series of permutations. Therefore, Kenner goes along in saying that "the analyst whose stock-in trade is his skill at putting his author's matter before his reader in pithier or less redundant language will find no purchase here."² Form and content are not easily separated, each can and must be explained away in terms of the other, but the circularity of the argument will be closer to the insane attitude of endless investigation celebrated in the novel than to the ordinary world of logic and reason.

The novel consists of four parts and an Addenda, and describes Watt's quest, the long and tedious journey he undertakes to arrive at Mr. Knott's country house where he will be one of an always arriving and departing series of servants, spending an undisclosed amount of time on the ground floor, after which he is on duty on the first floor for a time, until another servant arrives, and he is relieved and departs, back into the world from where he came.

The first and the last part describes Watt's arrival and departure, the second is dedicated to his stay on the ground floor and accordingly the third is about his time spent on the first floor. Each of the first three parts contains a longer passage

¹ Hugh Kenner. *A Readers Guide to Samuel Beckett*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 76.

² Kenner. *A Readers Guide to Samuel Beckett*, p. 76.

which is in no apparent relation to the story. In the first section we have the short statement of Arsene, Watt's predecessor, relating the story of his own stay in Mr. Knott's house. The second part contains the genealogy of the wretched Lynch clan, a family of twenty-eight, which has the strange goal of achieving the collective age of a thousand years. In the third part Arthur, the next in line of the servants, tells the story of Mr. Ernest Louit's fraudulent investigations into "*The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts*" which culminates in Louit's examination, conducted by a committee of five.

During his stay in Mr. Knott's house Watt undergoes a profound change. Though aided by logic he attempts to understand everything, he notices that he is unable to understand, much less to describe what is happening to him, and gradually loses control of his self, his language and his mind, not necessarily in this order. The motives of his quest are undisclosed, just as his background or his future. What exactly he looks for or finds in Mr. Knott's house is not known. What he will find he is unable to explain or understand, but he is just as unable to understand his own inability of understanding, so he is locked into a vicious circle, madly constructing useless explanations and intricate patterns which he then discards in favour of other patterns or explanations which he will discard once again, until gradually the very language will become a set of such useless explanations, something to be disposed of.

THE PARADOX: "NOTHING WITH THE CLARITY OF SOMETHING"

When he goes into Mr. Knott's house, Watt is actually on a quest. This might not be apparent at the very beginning, but Arsene, Watt's predecessor makes it clear towards the end of his monologue, when, preparing for departure, he gives Watt a final warning, which can be read as an encouragement:

And now for a little along the way that lies between you and me Erskine will go by your side, to be your guide, and then for the rest you will travel alone, or with only shades to keep you company, and that I think you will find, if your experience resembles mine, the best part of the outing or at least the least dull, even though the light falls fast, and far below the stumbling feet.

(*Watt*, p. 62)³

³ All parenthesised references are to this edition: Samuel Beckett. *Watt*. London: Picador, 1988.

This is a rather Dantesque goodbye, and also a reference to consolation Knowledge gives to Everyman. "Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide."⁴ Erskine will turn out to be a sorry Virgil, and a rather peculiar kind of Knowledge, madly running around the corridors of the house, up and down the stairs, in infinite search of the elusive Mr. Knott. Arsene does not make a secret of the dangers of the journey: when one walks among the shades and the "light falls fast," the possibility of losing the right track and becoming a shade is a likely prospect. There are further suggestions in the novel which attest Watt's likely transformation into a shadow. The inquisitive Mr. Hackett begins the tirade of questions aimed at the discovery of Watt's past with the following unquestionable statement: "One does not part with five shillings to a shadow" (*Watt*, p. 19). Watt's changed attitude towards the sun also supports this possibility. At the beginning we find that "For if were two things that Watt disliked, one was the moon, and the other was the sun" (*Watt*, p. 31), but in the third part a footnote informs us about a change in this attitude: "Watt liked the sun at this time, or at least supported it. Nothing is known about this volte-face. He seemed pleased that all the shadows should move, not only himself" (*Watt*, p. 151). It is not clear whether Watt thinks about himself as a shadow at this time, but the suggestion is there.

Failure is a definite possibility, and if we take a look at the circumstances of Watt's arrival, when forty-eight pages before he was first hurled into the novel (by an angry tram conductor), we will see that he did not move, just lay there "on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it" (*Watt*, p. 14).

This does not seem to be a very promising start for a journey, and one is reminded of Mr. Belacqua Sloth, another of Watt's predecessors, the hero of *More Pricks than Kicks*, and another reference to Dante in his person, who bears the curse of constant laziness. Watt is not lazy, he is merely exhausted. For Belacqua the rest in the shade by the side of the road is permanent in the fourth Canto of Dante's *Purgatory*. Watt will get up, and leave the scene, but later on, he will yield to the temptation of the ditch once again, though not because of laziness but out of pure necessity.

But he had not continued very far when, feeling weak, he left the crown of the road and sat down on the path, which was high, and edged with

⁴ "Everyman." *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. Ed. A. C. Cavley, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959.

thick neglected grass. He knew, as he did so, that it would not be easy to get up again, as he must, and move on again as he must. But the feeling of weakness, which he had been experiencing, was such that he yielded to it.

(*Watt*, p. 31)

The feeling of weakness proves too strong for Watt, but he is constantly aware of the imperative nature of his journey.⁵ He goes on because he cannot help going on. His attitude resembles that of the Unnamable, who utters those famous words at the end of the *Trilogy*: "where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."⁶

Going along roads is a constant occupation for Beckett's heroes, slowly and taking great pains, suffering from every step, on crutches, in wheelchairs, on bicycles, but they will go along further and further till the very end. Watt gets up and continues, he will go on, never minding that his quest will turn out to be a failure, never minding the constant abuse he is subjected to, never minding the exhaustion and suffering. At the end of the novel we will see him lying on the floor of a waiting room, sleeping, but as soon as they wake him up (by emptying a slop bucket over him) he will get up, and will patiently ask for a ticket, at first only till the "nearer end" of the line, but then he changes his mind, and says that the ticket should be till "the farther end." Perhaps a mere slip of the tongue, but it could as well be the sign of a stubborn, invincible inclination. Watt does not despair, he has every reason why he should, but he does not. He goes on.

When in the *Three Dialogues* Beckett talks about the paintings of Tal Coat, he objects to the notion that Tal Coat or Matisse should be called revolutionaries, because he feels that they only managed to disturb "a certain order on the plane of the feasible." When he is asked to elaborate what other plane there should be, he answers that although logically there could be none, the true artist has no choice but to turn away from it all the same being "weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road." Asked what remains to such an artist, a despairing and proud Beckett asserted that "[t]he expression that there is nothing to

⁵ Upon first seeing him, Mr. Hackett gives an intuitive rendering of Watt's attitude to his journey: "The thought of leaving town was most painful to him, [...] but the thought of not doing so no less so. So he sets off for the station, half hoping he may miss his train. [...] Too fearful to assume himself the onus of decision, [...] he refers it to the frigid machinery of time-space relation" (*Watt*, p. 19).

⁶ Samuel Beckett. *Trilogy*. London: Picador, 1979, p. 382.

express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."⁷ Watt cannot help going along on the "dreary road." But once he arrives in Mr. Knott's house he will have an ample share of the nothingness to be experienced, expressed and understood.

Like that of Godot, Watt's and Mr. Knott's names provoke interpretation and lead critics into wondering about the nature of whatness and notness. Watt's name is seen like a question,⁸ Mr. Knott's as a negative answer.⁹ Watt is the inquisitive probing force of discovery, Mr. Knott is notness incarnate, wrapped in a neat parcel tied up with a Gordian knot.¹⁰ "Change all the names" reads one entry of the Addenda. But just as in Godot's case, the names are specially well chosen. Watt is on a quest, and he fails, perhaps because Mr. Knott is not called Mr. Kyess.

Watt's problems begin with the first "fugitive intrusion" into Mr. Knott's house, the arrival of Galls "father and son." The two gentlemen have come "all the way from town" to "choon the piano" which task they dutifully attempt to accomplish,¹¹ and then depart. For Watt this becomes an episode of extreme importance, though he is not able to grasp the reason of its importance. His ordinary perception is changed and he is forced to look for meaning in the occurrence:

⁷ Samuel Beckett. *Disjecta*. New York: Grove Press, 1984, p. 139.

⁸ Two interesting examples for interpreting Watt's name: Hugh Kenner suggests that if the book is really indebted to the theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein, then the protagonist's name is in fact nothing but a compromise "between What and Witt" (Hugh Kenner. *Samuel Beckett: a Critical Study*. New York: Grove Press, 1961, p. 58). According to John Pilling, "One of the gestalt psychologists Külpe, had an assistant named Watt whose discoveries suggested that our behaviour is so conditioned by our original intention that any secondary elements that are part of our consciousness are effectively without content" (John Pilling. *Samuel Beckett*. London, Henely and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 130). Watt is a good choice for a name because it encourages a wide range of interpretations.

⁹ John Butler Lance links Mr Knott to Heidegger: "Heidegger asks if anyone has looked into the ontology of 'notness,' and here surely is Watt attempting it in his speculations about Mr 'Knott.' Even before he has come properly face to face with Mr Knott, Watt's narration (or Sam's or Beckett's) is stiff with the word 'not'" (St. John Butler Lance. *Samuel Beckett and The Meaning of Being, A Study in Ontological Parable*. London: Macmillan Press, 1984, p. 47).

¹⁰ One example of this kind of interpretation: "[The novel] answers the question 'What?' by 'Not!' as Watt, for unknowable reasons, enters the service of Mr. Knott" (Francis Doherty. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1971, p. 19).

¹¹ Here we have another failure - while the piano is in a rather grave condition as "The mice have returned [...] Nine dampers remain [...] and an equal number of hammers [corresponding only in one case] [...] the strings are in flitters." The Galls do not fail to draw the consequence: "The piano is doomed [...] the piano-tuner also [...] the pianist also" (*Watt*, p. 69). It seems that they not only recognise their own failure, but on this basis they also revert to the liberty of prophesising doom.

Yes, Watt could not accept [...] that nothing had happened, with all the clarity and solidity of something, and that it revisited him in such a way that he was forced to submit to it all over again, to hear the same sounds, see the same lights, touch the same surfaces, as when they had first involved him in their unintelligible intricacies.

(*Watt*, p. 73)

Watt is unable to understand or explain, because nothing is not something to be explained and understood. It is a negative, which cannot even be defined, as it negates understanding, and is incomprehensible. It should be dismissed. Watt feels this need, and strives for the possibility of dismissal, but the vision of nothing is visited on him, and he has no choice but to attempt to understand it. But understanding only works within the realm of logic, and Mr. Knott's premises seem to transcend those boundaries.

Steven J. Rosen sees Watt's attitude as a "hostility to meaning" and he writes that the narrator "describes a discovery of meaninglessness, or nothing."¹² Rosen is misled by the general and shallow nature of the term "nothing," and immediately associates meaninglessness with it. Watt's problem is the contrary, he would easily dismiss a meaningless nothing, but he happened to have the misfortune of stumbling upon a meaningful nothing, which is almost a something, and accordingly, he is convinced that there is a meaning, but he is unable to find out just what exactly that meaning could be.

Watt's experiences might prove to be unimportant, might be dismissible, rejecting them would be an easy solution of the problem, but Watt would rather "turn the other cheek" than turn away. Watt suspects the existence of a meaning, and he needs an explanation regarding the nature of that meaning. Any explanation would do, but an explanation is definitely needed. "Watt could not accept them for what they were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with those" (*Watt*, p. 73). Seeing "nothing" might be the mystical experience in search of which Murphy ties himself into the rocking chair, but Watt is not Murphy and "because of his peculiar character," he will not be able to realise that he is elevated from the "plain of the feasible" and continues walking on the road till the very end, failure or no failure.

¹² Steven J. Rosen. *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1976, p. 62.

Watt believes that Nothing is something which should not be seen, a transcendence, and once he has seen it, he is helplessly locked in the paradox, oscillating from nothing back to something, and from something back to nothing, without end.¹³ This oscillation is present in the novel well before Watt's confrontation with nothing. The way he enters Mr. Knott's house is one of the best examples in this respect:

The house was in darkness. Finding the front door locked, Watt went to the back door. [...] Finding the back door locked also, Watt returned to the front door. Finding the front door locked still, Watt returned to the back door. Finding the back door now open, [...] Watt was able to enter the house.

(*Watt*, pp. 34–35)

One may wonder after how many attempts would Watt finally have given up. How the door was opened will never be known, neither by Watt, nor by anybody else, turning it into one of the few miraculous and undisclosed secrets of the book. Watt is prone to oscillation,¹⁴ and this attitude will lock him into the paradox.

Faced with nothing, the only possible solution would be an explanation, a way "to elicit something from nothing" (*Watt*, p. 76) because for Watt "to explain" always means "to exorcise" and sadly enough this is the only thing which carries such a meaning, and accordingly, when Watt is unable to explain, he is unable to exorcise, and when he is unable to exorcise, he is possessed, possessed by nothing.¹⁵

Watt is in a loophole, enclosed by his own stubborn inclination to understand. It seems that there is no way out, yet his situation is not entirely without hope (after all, he managed to get into the house) and the chance for failure is always a possibility.

¹³ Hans Joachim Schulz links this Beckettian paradox to Hegel's paradoxical conclusion expounded in *Wissenschaft der Logik*: "The positive and the negative are identical – A simple reflection?" Much of rhythm of the Beckett novels is that of the movement of the negative into the positive (and vice versa)" (Hans-Joachim Schulz. *This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian Approach to the Novels of Samuel Beckett*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1973, p. 13).

¹⁴ Though he seems to understand its futility. When on the station he sees the porter wheeling milk-cans up and down the platform, there and back again his reaction is the following: "He is sorting the cans, said Watt. Or perhaps it is a punishment for disobedience or some neglect of duty" (*Watt*, p. 24). This remark evokes the image of Sisyphus, which is immediately blended with the slapstick of the situation, producing a sample of the sinister humour of the novel.

¹⁵ The catatonic Mr. Endon, whom we encounter in *Murphy*, is such a character, he is entirely possessed by nothing, he is "within" for good and all, he does not communicate with the outer world as he has nothing to communicate, or the nothing he has cannot be communicated.

Watt learned towards the end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happened, learned to bear it even, in a shy way, to like it. But then it was too late.

(*Watt*, p. 77)

By the end of his stay, Watt will fail, and be victorious in his failure, presenting a compromise, managing, in a way, and against all odds to "elicit something from nothing."

SPEAKING ABOUT THE UNSPEAKABLE: COMMUNICATION AND NARRATION

Logic and logical methods, or at least the know-how of a logical approach are burnt into Watt's brain, and he will utilise it, for attempting to create formulations of his experiences, and if necessary, to repair the subsequent "cracks" in the resulting formulation.¹⁶ Of course a paradox defies formulation, the two conflicting statements cancel each other out, Arsene's speech is full of mystical sentences like "Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it" (*Watt*, p. 42), but for Watt accepting such nonsense will not be possible until the very end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house.

Watt's mechanical struggle with Nothing conveys an air of the slapstick, but his mundane and mechanical methods are efficient in their inefficient way. His problem is the basic Beckettian problem of seeing the unseeable, knowing the unknowable, and speaking about the unspeakable, and his partial success¹⁷ in these grave endeavours will prove that this is in some ways possible. "But to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill and Watt was not always successful, in his efforts to do so. Not that he was unsuccessful either, for was not" (*Watt*, p. 74).

¹⁶ At this point, the underlying grim humour of the issue must be stressed. What follows is very close to a philosophical argument – when analysing Watt's problem and solution, we will be touching issues of epistemology and ontology, and utilising parallels found in philosophical thought is a tempting possibility (cf. St. John Butler Lance, p. 122), but our aim in reconstructing Watt's system of thought lies only in the devastatingly damaging and humorous consequences all this will have on the structure of fiction, that is, in the novel.

¹⁷ The consequences of a total failure are reckoned with: "No he [Watt] could never have spoken at all of these things, if all had continued to mean nothing, as some continued to mean nothing, that is to say, right up to the end" (*Watt*, p. 74). And, accordingly, Watt will not be able to give Sam any examples of this kind.

His method is what Vivian Mercier calls the "the philosophic equivalent of sleight of hand or rule of thumb."¹⁸

For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite.

(*Watt*, p. 74)

This kind of success will have severe consequences (besides permanently degrading man to the level of a termite), as the structure of "ordinary" somethings will also be impregnated by nothing, and the uncertainty of information, the unreliability and difficulty of communication typical of this kind of discourse will be manifest virtually everywhere, as there will be no way of differentiating between something and nothing. Most of Watt's problems, his paranoid uncertainty, or the breakdown of naming and language he will experience, originate from this uniformity.

Murphy, Beckett's previous novel, begins with a curious sentence, which seems to affirm the cyclical repetitive routine of time, flatly denying the possibility of change. "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new."¹⁹ At the end of the first part of *Watt*, we find a sentence which asserts the opposite: "[A]ll the gold and white and blue would fill the kitchen, all the unsoiled light of the new day, of the new day at last, the day without precedent at last" (*Watt*, p. 63). Contrasting these two sentences is a lucrative way for pointing out the basic underlying difference between the two novels. It seems that the "nothing new" can turn into a "day without precedent," the fixed circle of predestination can somehow be broken.

Murphy was beset with his own paradox, and communication between him and Mr. Endon was not possible. The game of chess broke down, Mr. Endon would stick to his secret, undisclosed set of rules, in vain did Murphy offer his pieces for sacrifice, the repetitive ritual guaranteeing that Mr. Endon's pieces would get back into their starting position could not be broken, and the only thing Murphy could glimpse in the black of Mr. Endon's pupils was the reflection of his own self. Mr. Endon was the world within, and Murphy was the world without and they were hopelessly and absolutely separated.

¹⁸ Vivian Mercier. *Beckett/Beckett*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977, p. 167.

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett. *Murphy*. London: Picador, 1973, p. 5.

Just like Murphy and Mr. Endon, Watt and Sam (another "meaningful" name) also meet in some sort of an asylum, but here holes can be found in the intricate system of barbed-wire fences, and a communication between Watt and Sam is possible.²⁰ What is more, this communication turns out to be crucial with regards to the novel, as we gradually find out that in fact Sam is the narrator, or at least one of the narrators.

Information is problematic, this is made clear at the very beginning. Arsene describes the story of his meeting with a gentleman, who makes a big effort and produces his watch (casting down a great many layers of clothing, just like Mr. Knott will do later on), to tell the time which according to him is "seventeen minutes past five exactly, as God is my witness."²¹ Arsene does not always finish the stories embedded in his monologue, but this time he gives us the punchline, followed by the consequences the issue implies for him: "A moment later Big Ben (is that the name?) struck six. This in my opinion is the type of all information whatsoever, be it voluntary or solicited" (*Watt*, p. 44). We may notice how uncertainty intrudes into Arsene's speech at this very moment, as demonstrated by the question in the parentheses. But this is just half of the problem. The receiving end in the communication is beset by impatience, indifference and misunderstanding. Watt does not pay attention to Mr. Spiro, to Arsene, to Erskine or to anyone else.

Sam, on the other hand, is (or at least seems to be) a good listener. After all, he manages to patch together Watt's story, though he is careful to provide a detailed list of the difficulties involved in the process. Time is the first deterring factor: "When Watt at least spoke of this time it was a time long past, and of which his recollections were [...] less clear than he would have wished." This is followed by the imperfect nature of human memory: "Add to this the notorious difficulty of recapturing at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place." The third problem is presented by speech itself: "Add to this the obscurity of Watt's communications, the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax, as elsewhere recorded." External conditions are also far from ideal: "Add to this the material conditions in which these communications were made." And, as the story has to be retold by Sam, all of

²⁰ Some critics (cf. St. John Butler Lance, p. 25) see this as an advance, but it may well be a mere consequence of a shift in focus, which does not justify any kind of value judgement.

²¹ We should bear in mind the policeman's answer to a similar claim made by Mr. Hackett: "God is a witness that cannot be sworn" (*Watt*, p. 6).

these problems occur once again: "Add to this the scant aptitude to give of him to whom they were committed" (*Watt*, pp. 71–72).

Narration is problematic, and what is more, the narrator is aware of the problematic nature of narration. After listing the problems, he finishes with a disclaimer, which can be read as a warning:

some idea will perhaps be obtained of the difficulties experienced in formulating [...] the entire body of Watt's experience, from the moment of his entering Mr. Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it.

(*Watt*, pp. 71–72)

Here the narrator steps in the light, attracting a great deal of critical attention, but most critics will find that the narrative structure of the book cannot be convincingly accounted for on the basis of the quasi "ignorant" or "unreliable" narrator model, as presented by Sam.

Abbot H. Porter is puzzled by the fact that contrary to this disclaimer the narrator talks about things which Watt could never have told him. "There are things narrated which Watt could never have told Sam. So round it goes, like the voices in Watt's head – we are never sure whether they are coming from the inside or from the outside."²²

David Watson explains the "narrational unreliability" of the text as the consequence of a "fundamental problematisation of the very notion of subjectivity" and argues against the presence of an "ignorant narrator" on the grounds that "the degree and nature of the narrator's ignorance and 'amnesia' quite literally defy belief" in addition to which the text "often employs discursive forms of knowledge which are totally incongruous with the notion of a literally 'ignorant' narrator – in some ways the narrator's problem lies in knowing too much."²³

Vivian Mercier sees *Watt* as a transition between the omniscient narrator utilised in *Murphy*, and the first-person narrator employed in the *Trilogy*. Accordingly, he believes that the book still suffers from the presence of such an omniscient narrator.²⁴

It seems that the narrator is not omniscient, yet he is not ignorant either. Omniscience disowns the existence of nothing. As soon as ordinary reality is tainted

²² H. Abbott Porter. *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973, pp. 64–65.

²³ David Watson. *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 11–12.

²⁴ Vivian Mercier, p. 9.

by nothing, omniscience is no longer a possibility. The first part, or rather the first half of the first part, up to Arsene's monologue, is constructed on an omniscient basis, indeed it does not differ in a great deal from *Murphy*. Footnotes are present, commenting on the text. But the omniscience is broken as soon as Watt arrives into Mr. Knott's premises, because neither Watt nor the reader will ever find out, exactly how Watt managed to get into Mr. Knott's house.

Omniscience is broken; Watt's suffering cannot possibly be described in such a way. Arsene's monologue which concludes the chapter is followed by Sam's, but this shift in narration is not disclosed until quite some time later, till the appearance of the Galls and the emergence of nothing forces the narrator to make the cited disclaimer, and, as a consequence, to reveal himself. Sam's monologue attempts to faithfully reconstruct Watt's battle against nothing, yet his comments on and interpretations of Watt's story will uphold the attitude of the omniscient narrator, without the actual omniscience. For Sam maintaining the air of omniscience is not difficult, because Watt in all his struggle and suffering thrives for a form of omniscience, an explanation which would account for the totality of the world he experiences.

Sam's contract only lasts for the time Watt spends in Mr. Knott's house (he makes this clear at the point he emerges), that is, the second and the third part of the novel. In the last part the omniscient narrator of the first part will return, but the battered mask of omniscience can no longer be convincingly upheld, more and more hiatuses appear in the manuscript. Watt's own incapability of omniscience shatters the possibility of omniscience for good and all, and the novel concludes in a total breakdown of the forms of fiction: the Addenda, the fragments of which according to a footnote were not incorporated in the novel because of "fatigue, and disgust" (*Watt*, p. 247). Here the bones of the novel are laid bare, showing how the actual construction is done, shattering the last illusion of omnipotence.

Sam's narration is framed by the narrative of the unnamed narrator of the first and last part, and the footnote-comments constitute a frame which contains the whole of this embedded structure. This feature gives the book a formal unity, and at the same time manages to destroy the very last hope of such formal homogeneity. Most of the footnotes aim to clarify some issue of the text, but the often insanely parodistic manner of these intended clarifications just manage to make the matters worse. In this respect they resemble Watt's constant explanations, which become more and more complicated and redundant, without any increase in their usefulness, as the basic irrationality they attempt to explain defies explanation as

such. The footnotes ridicule the essence of the editorial approach, and make fun of the very notion that such violent intrusions into the structure of the novel would be able to clarify the contents and amend to the inherent chaos which reigns within.²⁵

The insecure nature of the text also intrudes into the footnotes in other ways, not merely the parody. One of the footnotes may be cited as a fitting example. The story of the Lynch family includes a complicated set of calculations. These are preceded by the following footnote: "The figures here are incorrect. The consequent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous" (*Watt*, p. 101). And indeed, if one adds up the ages of the members of the family, the result will be nine hundred and seventy eight instead of the nine hundred and eighty reported in the text. The figures are incorrect, indeed, two years are missing. This mistake is noticed by Hugh Kenner, he sees this as a justification for the presence of the footnote, and a reference to non-Euclidean geometry.²⁶

Before the footnote in the general list, Liz, Sam's wife is listed as "Liz née Sharpe aged thirty-eight years" (*Watt*, p. 99). She is the first to die and the loss of her passing is described in the following way: "This was a great loss to the family Lynch, this loss of a woman of forty good-looking years" (*Watt*, p. 102). The footnote was right, the numbers (or rather Liz's age as given before the footnote) were incorrect. This accounts for the missing two years, and the validity for the first half of the footnote.

But in the "consequent calculations" which come after the footnote, the mistake is corrected, and indeed if we manage to follow the syntax of the calculations,²⁷ we may find that far from being "doubly erroneous" they are in fact meticulously correct. This proves the second half of the footnote to be "erroneous." Anyway, how can anything be *doubly* erroneous? Or is this to be interpreted as a negation of a negation which is in fact an affirmation, referring in an obscure way to the fact that the calculations are not erroneous at all? Patricia Waugh believes the footnote, she writes that "even if the figures were not in some epistemological

²⁵ At this point a comparison to Flann O'Brien is inevitable. In *The Third Policeman* footnotes are utilised in a strikingly similar manner. At some points the novel behaves as a biography of the mad scientist De Selby, and three different commentators of his work are permanently referred to in the footnotes.

²⁶ Hugh Kenner. *A Readers Guide to Samuel Beckett*, p. 79.

²⁷ The sentence: "Till changing in twenty over twenty-eight equals five over seven times twelve equals sixty over seven equals eight months and a half approximately, if none died, if none were born, a thousand years!" (*Watt*, p. 101) can be deciphered in the following way: $(20/28 = 5/7) \times 12 = 60/7 = 8.5$ approximately, the correct sum being just over 8.571428.

doubt, the reader's attention has anyway been called to the ontological status of the fictional text."²⁸ Beckett's tricky use of the double error manages to undermine the ontological status of the text and the footnote alike. Both are wrong, both are correct, neither is wrong, neither is correct.

Watt is unable to come to terms with nothing; this will affect his story, which is the story Sam tells, which constitutes the two middle parts of the novel. Watt's ignorance affects the whole of the novel. The different layers of narration behave in a transparent manner, and the paradoxical nothing constituting the core of the novel has a radiating power which shines through all these layers, and accordingly, each layer is influenced by the others, ignorance may aspire for the pretension of omnipotence, and the complex nature of existence may turn omnipotence into impotence.

Vivian Mercier quotes an interview, where Beckett compares himself to Joyce saying:

This kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past.²⁹

Watt is perhaps the first of Beckett's writings where ignorance and impotence are handled in such a way that the consequences of these issues are addressed in their totality. In *Murphy* the chaos of existence led to Murphy's death, but the structure and form of the novel was not affected by it. In *Watt* the paradox of something coexisting with nothing behaves like a virus, an infection which alters reality, influencing the form and structure of the novel in a devastatingly radical fashion.

²⁸ Patricia Waugh. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London, New York: Routledge, 1984, p. 44.

²⁹ Israel Shenker. "Moody Man of Letters." *New York Times*, 6th May 1956, sec. 2. p. 3, quoted in Vivian Mercier, p. 8.

Paul Stewart

When Now?

Samuel Beckett's *Footfalls*, theatrical chronology and memory

10:17, Wednesday morning of the 3rd November 1999 in Lefkosia, Cyprus. In short, now. A breeze, and one can begin to detect a slight chill beneath the otherwise blue sky. The clocks went back four days ago. The now evolves as evolves reveals itself across the screen of the computer in my office. And now the office is now, or was, for was is now. Now now.

There is a play by Samuel Beckett called *Footfalls*, written between 2nd March 1975 and November of that year, first published in 1976 and first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London on the 20th May of that year; it has been part of the repertoire of Beckett's shorter plays ever since.

Footfalls is a play in four movements, enacted between a figure on stage, May, and a voice off-stage, that of May's mother. Throughout the first three phases, May (her age given as being somewhere in her forties), who is dressed in a long, distressed, pale grey dress, paces the dimly lit front of stage with obsessive precision, her feet shuffling upon the boards. The first movement is a dialogue between the pacing May and the voice of the mother. The mother is ailing, and yet she admonishes May for "revolving it all" in her mind. A darkness, punctuated by a chime, separates the first movement from the next in which only the voice off-stage speaks. The voice directs the audience's attention to May's repetitive pacing and provides a touch of invaluable information; that the strip upon which May walks was once carpeted, but that it was removed as May "must

hear the feet, however faint they fall;"¹ that May still sleeps, but standing with her head resting upon the fourth wall through which the audience watches. Darkness and a fainter chime. "Sequel" heralds the third motion in which May relates the tale of Mrs Winter and her daughter Amy. Mrs Winter is disquieted by a sense of something amiss at Evensong. Her daughter cannot help her: "I was not there." Yet Mrs Winter insists: "I heard you say Amen. [...] How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there?" The tale closes with Mrs Winter admonishing her daughter: "Will you never have done [...] revolving it all?" Darkness, a still fainter chime, and the fourth movement reveals a stage with "no trace of May" (p. 403).

As with so many of Beckett's later, perhaps more elusive, works, the literature surrounding *Footfalls* has often been of an explanatory nature. James Knowlson and John Pilling in *The Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* included this "miniature and delicate drama" in a consideration of the "Ends and Odds" of drama after *Endgame*. Knowlson (responsible for the drama section of the volume) delicately traces the development of the play and its theatrical impact, arguing that for an audience *Footfalls* "could succeed in the theatre at a level which involved the senses and the emotions rather more than it did the intellect."² However, on more composed scrutiny, the play reveals an extraordinary level of parallelism and juxtaposition of sound and silence, combined with tantalising textual suggestions which fail to coalesce into an explanation of the events witnessed. Knowlson argues that May "is Beckett's own poignant recreation of a girl who had never really been born,"³ a concept that comes from a lecture given by C.G. Jung which Beckett attended in the mid-thirties,⁴ and adds: "If Jung's girl patient has haunted Beckett for so long, it is

¹ Samuel Beckett. "Footfalls." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990, pp. 397–403, p. 401. All parenthesised references are to this edition.

² James Knowlson and John Pilling. *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. London: John Calder, 1979, p. 222.

³ James Knowlson and John Pilling, p. 223.

⁴ The interest in the possible influence of Jungian psychoanalysis in general and the lecture which Beckett attended in particular is worthy of explanation. The lecture in question was given in London on 2nd October 1935, whilst Beckett was receiving treatment with the psychotherapist, Alfred Bion. Jung's mention of a patient whose troubles stemmed from never truly having been born are used to their fullest extent in Beckett's radio play *All That Fall* (1956). Mrs Rooney recalls attending a lecture given by "one of these new mind doctors" in the hope "he might shed a little light on my life long preoccupation with horses' buttocks." She continues her story: "I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her

because she epitomized for him a permanent sense of existence by proxy, of being absent from true being."⁵

This purportedly Jungian aspect of the play has come in for great attention, and might even be said to now form part of the Beckett critic's stock issues. Rosemary Pountney in her *Theatre of Shadows*,⁶ also takes the Jungian moment into account, whilst perhaps best illustrating the most common critical approach to the play; the delineation of Beckett's painstaking structural conception. Not only does *Footfalls* rely on cyclic and linear patterning, but also on those of movement and rest, and sound and silence. Such work brings us a valuable increase in understanding of the movements and emotional motions of *Footfalls*, at the same time as understanding Beckett's theatre in terms one might think more appropriate to music, but which prove to provide admirable insights. Interpretation *per se* has been passed over as a perhaps naïve pursuit; the gap being filled with a consciousness of pain, longing and the inability to resolve mental or emotional distress which the play certainly bears witness to and creates within the audience.

The difficulty of interpreting *Footfalls*, of unlocking quite why it is so powerful a piece of theatre, has not prevented the critic's ability to know a considerable amount about the gestation and presentation of the work. Pountney's volume helpfully includes a detailed description and discussion of Beckett's drafts of *Footfalls*, which reveal the author's methodology:

His careful planning, his rigorous and repeated self-analysis while structuring a text, his steady enrichment of language, [are] evident as matters of general practice. At the same time [...], the content of the text tends to move from direct to indirect statement, leaving the greatest possible latitude to the audience's imagination.⁷

unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. [...] When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with her was she had never really been born" (*Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*, pp. 195-96). That the lecture stayed in Beckett's memory for some time is almost certain; what significance we thereby place upon it, is not.

⁵ James Knowlson and John Pilling, p. 228.

⁶ Rosemary Pountney. *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-1976*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988.

⁷ Rosemary Pountney, p. 288.

Helpfully, perhaps, one has recourse when writing of *Footfalls* not only to the text in performance – despite the scarcity of such – but also to rehearsal reports, the printed text, and the drafts of the play in what amounts to a chronology of development.

The question of chronology, which forms the substance of this article, is raised by a brief section in the third movement of the play. May is telling her story. Or telling her story of another mother and another daughter:

([May] *Resumes pacing. After one length halts facing front at L[eft]. Pause*)
 Old Mrs Winter, whom the reader will remember, old Mrs Winter, one late autumn Sunday evening, on sitting down to supper with her daughter after worship, after a few half-hearted mouthfuls laid down her knife and fork and bowed her head. What is it, Mother, said the daughter, a most strange girl, though scarcely a girl any more...

(p. 402)

Now: Old Mrs Winter, whom the *reader* will remember? The audience of a play, at a precise location on a specific date, at a specific time, hears that they, perhaps, should not be the audience but the reader. As a reader they would be able to remember this Old Mrs Winter. They could leaf back through the pages of the text, find Old Mrs Winter and so be reminded.

This option to remember textually is not open to the audience of the play, and this rather basic fact creates a number of consequences. We would like to think, and do think, that one views a play rather differently than one reads a text upon which performance is built. The book is a complete object. The end of a novel may be problematic, we may feel that more is to be explained or that the story could be usefully continued, but it undeniably physically ends. The physicality, the thereness, of the book, is one of its great strengths in that even upon picking up a volume for the first time, without even so much as reading a word, we know what will be read is literally and figuratively bound. On finishing this bound, finite, physical object, we then have the luxury of recourse to the continuing thereness of the book, to the possibility of it being re-read, made present, or re-presented, once again.

An aside. In *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida writes of the objections to writing spoken by Thamus in the *Phaedrus*. King Thamus takes on the role of judge of this new art, and upbraids Theuth, his master of arts, for being somewhat disingenuous in his defence of writing:

[...] since you are father of written letters, your paternal goodwill has led you to pronounce the very opposite of what is their real power. The fact is that this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written, using the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves rather than, from within, their own unaided powers to call things to mind. So it's not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered.⁸

Thamus' objection can be characterised as being that writing poses a danger to memory, precisely because it functions as an aide memoire: "it is precisely by pointing out [...] that the *pharmakon* of writing is good for *hypomnhypos* (remembrance, recollection, consignation) and not for *mnmnr* (living, knowing knowledge) that Thamus in the *Phaedrus*, condemns it as being of little worth."⁹ We do not have to remember, because the text will always remember for us. There is a sly joke here on Beckett's part. The audience is told it should be a reader, because then they would remember Old Mrs Winter, when the act of reading about Old Mrs Winter means one need not remember at all.

In contrast to the continuing inanimate thereness of the written, the theatrical experience is one in which immediacy is the chief good. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., in his study of narrative comprehension in the theatre, has stated the difference admirably:

On the more fundamental levels of perception and cognition, and in terms of narrative function, the author's presence is *not* felt in the theater as it is felt in so many ways in the printed text. The movement from script to performance liberates the play from its exclusively linguistic embodiment: language becomes speech, directions become *mise-en-scène*, implied presence becomes performance reality. Production realizes the play as something outside the printed text, and as such it stands on its own, shaped only invisibly by the text it seeks to embody.¹⁰

When writing of Beckett's later plays (particularly *Not I* and *Footfalls*), Garner emphasises the very theatricality of them, the manner in which "Beckett effects an unprecedented disclosure of the theatrical moment, allowing it a substance and a

⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone, 1993, p. 102.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, p. 91.

¹⁰ Stanton B. Garner Jr. *The Absent Voice: Narrative Comprehension in the Theater*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989, p. xiv.

place within his action unrivaled in the dramatic canon [through a] theatrical heightening of the present's inertness."¹¹ Of the final movement of *Footfalls*, in which the stage is empty but filled with the resonance of presence, Garner writes:

The revolvings of figure and voice yield to the performance field that has supported them, a space that constitutes their theatrical ground of being and that asserts (in this final image) the essence of *mise-en-scène*. By boldly closing with an image of the stage, Beckett brings to the forefront that immediacy that is the ground of all drama...¹²

Garner's terms and his reading of *Footfalls* are quite revealing as to why Beckett's reference to a privileged reader within the dramatic context of the play is upsetting: the author's presence is *not felt in the theatre*. Normally this is a theatrical boon, allowing for the increased immediacy of a drama unfolding before us on a fully realised, no matter how scantily dressed, stage. In *Footfalls*, however, this is felt not as the removal of a textual restriction but as nothing less than a lack. The audience does not have access to that authorial, or textual, presence which appears to be the condition for fully understanding what is occurring upon, or perhaps now behind or beyond, the stage. As such, the theatrical space is revealed not as autonomous and complete within itself, but as dependent and hence lacking.

Why should the reference to some prior text, and an enjoinder for an audience to perform the functions of a reader be of itself upsetting?¹³ Clearly, one could argue that there is nothing remarkable in Beckett reminding the audience in the theatre that there is a text beyond the play that is seen before them now. We all know that the most common condition for theatrical representation is first the presence of a text to be performed. We are relieved by this, even: if we did not fully understand *King Lear*, we can always pick up a copy in the theatre book shop and read what we first saw on the stage. We are not so naïve as to think that the play simply appears before us. However, and again as Garner's insights make clear, there is a condition placed on the text if theatrical representation is to occur:

¹¹ Stanton B. Garner Jr, p. 150.

¹² Stanton B. Garner Jr, p. 167.

¹³ For example, Garner does mention the Old Mrs Winter line in which the reader is mentioned, but does so only as an example of "the formulaic constructions of literary narrative" (p. 165) with which May tells her story. He does not address the issue of the literary within the theatrical context, nor of the reader; a consideration which might lead to a complication of Garner's emphasis upon Beckett's prime concern with theatrical immediacy.

it must disappear. If the theatre's chief strength lies in its immediacy, in the power of embodiment or of realisation of action and language in real time, then any previous incarnation must needs be suppressed. The overt presence within a theatrical context of the play's previous existence as a written text threatens the theatre's claim to autonomy and damages the sense of immediacy which the audience expects. To use an amateurish analogy, there is nothing more upsetting or embarrassing for an audience sat to an amateur production than the hissed lines of the prompt from the wings when the actor on the stage dries. All our belief is shattered, and the realisation of theatrical time and space is destroyed by the realisation that the stage is surrounded by dressing rooms, wings, technicians, and a script. Immediacy, therefore, is dependent upon the absence of the written. The play text must absent itself awhile if the performance is to enjoy any life at all. The sacrifice of the text, perhaps.

A further aside. Beckett translated *Footfalls* into German and directed its new incarnation at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, Berlin, in 1976. Walter D. Asmus, the director nominally in control of *That Time* and *Footfalls*, during that time made detailed notes of events in rehearsal.¹⁴ (The rehearsals were always between 10.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m.) Asmus' record provides a valuable insight into the interaction between the author and those charged with performance. As might be expected, the actress playing May, Hildegard Schmahl, who was becoming increasingly involved in "politically motivated theatre," had some difficulties in getting her performance correct. Understandably she wanted some form of motivation for her character's words and actions, yet Beckett was famously chary of giving such tips. The Old Mrs Winter difficulty arises and the difficulty appears to have been about the reader therein. In order to help, Beckett first tries to place the written in terms of May's character. Beckett was reported (in writing) as saying on Thursday, 2nd September 1976: "One can suppose that she has written down everything which she has invented up to this, that she will one day find a reader for her story - hence the address to the reader." Still Beckett insists on the importance of the written. On Monday, 6th September, Ms. Schmahl appears to be still unhappy, and Beckett tries a different tack: "It shouldn't give the impression of something already written down. May is inventing her story while she is speaking." This little insight into the instructions given to one of the many Mays is a curious slide in which Beckett gradually shifts

¹⁴ Walter D. Asmus. "Rehearsal Notes of the German Premiere of Beckett's *That Time* and *Footfalls*." *The Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 2 (Summer, 1977), pp. 82-96.

his explanations with the possible aim of making them seem less upsetting to the theatrical context. Beckett's use of the reader is, I am arguing, beyond performance, but such cannot be the motivation for the woman who says it upon the stage, for Beckett's structural use threatens the immediacy of the actress' stage utterance. The two motivations – of the playwright and the actress – must be different. Put another way, Beckett knows he must absent himself if the actress is to perform theatrically. So the sacrifice of the text may also mean the sacrifice of its author. In the production in Berlin, this meant a tactical withdrawal on Beckett's part, as on Thursday, 16th September he told the increasingly frustrated Schmahl that "I will leave you alone for a few days." He duly did.

We return to now, and now is, perhaps more than any other aspect, precisely what is upset by Beckett's mention of the privileged reader. The audience is made aware of the absent text, and thereby also aware of a certain lack in what they are witnessing on stage. They are not able to perform the action which the play recommends. They cannot remember as a reader remembers. All they have is the action upon the stage which unfolds in a series of nows; a series of actors' nows and a series of the audience's nows. Now May moves from right to left, now she stops, now she says "Old Mrs Winter, as the reader will remember..." The audience has little choice, and expects no less than to be taken along a chronological journey, a narrative in which the time of the play, no matter if it employs devices such as the flash-back, or characters referring to a past, moves forward. The time of the stage is the time of the actors and the audience. We are all caught in this inexorable march into the future which is constantly subsumed by the present. One could say that the presence of the theatre is dependent upon the present; therein lies its unique claim to immediacy. More than any other medium, the theatre has the power of representing things in a here and a now shared by the play, the actors and the audience.

The privileged reader of *Footfalls* reveals a question of what is the now of theatre. The audience within the theatrical now is informed that there is a *then* antecedent to this now. They are told now that they should perform an action which recalls the absent text, the text which occurs beyond the now of performance and the absence of which is essential for theatre's ability to perform now and now and now. The present of the play indicates a prior textual presence in which, one hopes, one might find the means to fill the lack of knowledge in this matter of Old Mrs Winter. The audience is confronted with the realisation that the realisation they see before them now is insufficient. And in that very

moment when May says "Old Mrs Winter, as the reader will remember," in that precise, shared theatrical now it is implied that only another now, that of the written, can satisfy the apparent lack. The absent text completes a stage absence, and the now of theatrical presentation is threatened by the repeatable, representable now of the text.

In this situation which I am delineating within *Footfalls*, the audience is caught between two claims of chronology. On the one hand, we have the chronology of the theatre. This is happening now. The audience understands, witnesses and shares this now as it slips into further and no less immediate nows. Yet one of these nows refers to a now in which the audience does not share: the now of the written, which within the chronology of the theatre comes before the now of the stage. The discomfort of this perhaps lies in the audience's belief in their own privileged position within the theatre. They are accustomed to being first hand witnesses to current events. Yet, in *Footfalls*, the audience is made aware that their now of sitting in the dark watching the stage is not the ideal now of the play; there may exist the perhaps more fulsome, more understandable now of the written.

The necessary condition for theatrical immediacy is the absence of the written text, and it is this immediacy which Beckett threatens. It is perhaps worthwhile to note that the necessary condition for this article is the existence of the text in the absence of theatrical immediacy. The continuing possibility of repeatable nows which the text promises makes possible my writing about that text and your reading it now. Now and now and now has become the possibility of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.¹⁵ Could the same have been done if there was only the immediacy of the nows of theatrical performance?

Yet a writerly smugness would not be appropriate here, for Beckett is not so black and white as not to leave such matters a little greyed. Sitting in the dark of the stalls the audience may struggle to remember any prior mention of Old Mrs Winter in the preceding twenty minutes or so of stage action, and fail to remember any such, but the reader, who, after all, is meant to be able to remember, will actually fare no better. There is no prior mention of Old Mrs Winter.

¹⁵ Rosemary Pountney also detects a *Footfalls* / *Macbeth* axis at work: "Although there is no reason to suppose that Beckett had Shakespeare in mind when he wrote *Footfalls*, the whole play is extraordinarily realised in these lines from *Macbeth*: 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow [...] it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing'" (Rosemary Pountney, pp. 67-68).

The text of *Footfalls* does not and never has had a prior mention of Old Mrs Winter. One could, if one were so inclined, note Rosemary Pountney's comment that "the content of the text tends to move from direct to indirect statement" and look to the drafts of the play, tracing the trace of Mrs Winter back to a more fulsome source. The search would be a vain one, for throughout Beckett's drafts for this play, there is no indication of Mrs Winter, no matter how indirect, until May mentions her and commends her to the reader's memory. (Half way through *Footfalls*, May takes possession of her own voice, and that of her mother is once again consigned to silence. It is this speech which will mention, for the first time, Old Mrs Winter. The speech begins with a single word. "Sequel." The audience or reader may well seek well, but that does not mean they will find Mrs Winter or the ideal now of the play.)

So, Beckett reminds the audience of the existence of a text behind the representation they see before them and refers them to this absent text, whilst at the same time referring them to a text which is not only absent from the stage but also from the play text. The audience faces a double absence: of the play text, and of the text that actually remembers, the text in which Old Mrs Winter does appear. Yet Beckett's use of the privileged reader has as its target more than just the audience in the theatre. The readers will also find themselves in the situation of not being witnesses to a prior textuality. This lack will not be filled by searching out and reading the *actual* prior text of *Footfalls*; the drafts. As such, Beckett has created a regression of absence, and this regression of absence threatens the immediacy of the theatre, and hence its life, at the same time as threatening the claims to permanence of the written. The immediacy of the theatre – the memory of which is, in Derrida's terms, *mnmnrr*, or living, internal memory – and the continuity of the written – of *hypomnhyppo*, or alien, fixed and monumentalised memory – are not able to contain and thereby explain the beyond in which a prior Old Mrs Winter does exist and from which she can be remembered. Beckett plays within the possibilities of the theatre and of the written and indicates a lack, or an inability on their part to approach that which lies beyond them. We are sucked into a swirl of beyonds.

There is, perhaps, a further possibility as to why May mentions her ideal reader, why she casts her narrative as written rather than as a displaced but ever recurring memory which she cannot help but revolve in her poor mind. Derrida and 'Thamus' objections to writing are here again pertinent. It will be remembered that Thamus claimed that writing was a danger to living memory, that those who

practised living, internal memory, *mnmnl*, in which events are called to the mind by the mind, would find their faculty damaged by the permanency of the written. Memory through writing is dependent upon external, alien stimuli which remind. As such, the written is the vessel of memory as it replaces *mnmny* with *hypomnhyo*; living, knowing knowledge with the fixed, monumental and dead. As Derrida puts it: "If one takes the king's word for it, then, it is this life of the memory that the *pharmakon* of writing would come to to hypnotize: fascinating it, taking it out of itself by putting it to sleep in a monument."¹⁶

For May, the written thus offers a way of overcoming the living memory which she seems incapable of overcoming. The written is a way out of the cycle of repetition, of forever revolving it all. Once written, the memory becomes alien and external, dead within a monument of inscription. May, herself ghostly but kept alive by her own memory, motions towards the avenue of escape that writing offers. If only the *mnmnn* from which she suffers could be substituted with the inanimate *hypomnhyo*, May could then forget, for then the reader would remember, prompted by the lifelessness of the written. The reader will remember (*hypomnhyo*) so May need no longer remember (*mnmns*). Trapped in the immediate life of the theatre, and with no true remembering text, May will continue to tread the boards of the stage, her living memory re-presented by the nows and nows and nows which her feet, no matter how faint they fall, will mark.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, p. 105.

Donald E. Morse

Sensational Implications: Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952)¹

I like Utopian talk, speculation about what our planet should be, anger about what our planet is.
(Kurt Vonnegut)

Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* falls within one of the longest and strongest suits in twentieth-century science fiction. "From H. G. Wells to Samuel Delany, science fiction is full of utopias, dystopias, ambiguous utopias, and 'heterotopias.'"² As Kermit Vanderbilt observes, "*Player Piano* is astonishing for the richness of utopian and dystopian matter in this first major outing of the writer who would soon own the best utopian imagination in American literature since World War Two."³

¹ An earlier version of this essay will appear in the 1999 Conference proceedings of the International Conference in the Fantastic in the Arts. All references to *Player Piano*. 1952. New York: Dell, 1980 will be given parenthetically in the text.

² Brian Attebery. "Fantasy as an Anti-Utopian Mode." *Reflections on the Fantastic*. Ed. Michael Collings. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 5. Krishan Kumar maintains that utopias are in decline in the twentieth century, but as Barbara Goodwin points out "he does this only by discounting a healthy number of recent science fiction and feminist utopias." ("The Perfect and the Perfected." Review of Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford: Blackwell, n. d., *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 July 1987: 786). Vonnegut's book is one of dozens within the science fiction and/or fantastic mode.

³ Kermit Vanderbilt. "Kurt Vonnegut's American Nightmares and Utopias." *The Utopian Vision: Seven Essays on the Quincentennial of Sir Thomas More*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1983, 137-173, pp. 139-140. Vanderbilt lists the typical elements of a utopian novel—all, of which, he claims, are present in *Player Piano*. "The new post-industrial civilization will be, customarily, a socialistic commonwealth of rational men and women, with wisely planned urban communities,

In *Player Piano*, the world, having passed through the First Revolution where machines took over man's manual labour, and the Second Revolution where machines took over all human routine work, is now about to undergo a Third Revolution where machines will do all the thinking. The huge computer, EPICAC XIV—the one the president of the United States with not the slightest trace of irony refers to as “the greatest individual in history” – sits in the Carlsbad Caverns in Colorado determining all of the country's needs from the number of refrigerators to be manufactured this month, to the kinds of books people should read, to the types of educational degrees universities may offer.⁴ Vonnegut used as his model for the all-wise, all-powerful machine the first digital computer, the “Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator” or ENIAC. Developed at the University of Pennsylvania's Moore School of Electrical Engineering from a proposal by John Presper Eckert and John W. Mauchly and weighing in at thirty tons with eighteen thousand vacuum tubes, the first public demonstration of ENIAC occurred on February 14, 1946. It was followed by a series of lectures at a conference in Philadelphia, summer of 1946, which led in turn to the widespread adoption of stored-program which eventuated in the modern electronic computer. Only a few short years later, Vonnegut extrapolates from these events to create EPICAC XIV. In *Player Piano* the United States has become a planned society run by corporations for profit.⁵ But this governing by computer results predictably in an increasingly sterile American society – a society with no real place or need for humans. As Norbert Wiener, who is often referred to as “the father of cybernetics,” caustically observed in his popular book, *Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, “the average human being of mediocre attainments or less has nothing to sell that it is worth anyone's money to buy.”⁶

maximum individual freedom, socially oriented education, material abundance (with wise conservation of natural resources), non-alienating and non-competitive day labor and professional life, self-transcending leisure time for recreation and the arts, effortless virtue, dynamic social stability, permanent peace, and gratifying love” (p. 140).

⁴ The computer's name, EPICAC is awfully close to Ipecac, the children's medicine used to induce vomiting, as several commentators have noted.

⁵ Vonnegut's economics in *Player Piano* are intriguing. He postulates private socialism where the corporations, not needing to compete because of being monopolies, nevertheless are government regulated. Although there are no taxes on things, there is a heavy tax on machine labour.

⁶ Quoted in Hugh Kenner. *Dublin's Joyce*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956, p. 163. Vonnegut was well aware of Wiener's work borrowing his first name for the “crass medical genius,” Dr. Norbert Frankenstein in his play *Fortitude* (Kurt Vonnegut. *Wampeters, Foma & Granfaloons*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1976, pp. 43–64) and quoting from his work both in interviews and in *Player*

In *Player Piano*, a discerning visitor from another culture, the Shah of Bratpuhr, the spiritual leader of six million people, correctly identifies all the citizens of this new ideal United States as "Takaru" or slaves.

The power and wealth of the United States, which grew through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in large measure thanks to an amazing outburst of creative technology and invention, remains almost synonymous with the machine. The machine may take the form of the car that provides the famous American mobility while contributing heavily to American personal isolation. Or it may take the form of the telegraph/telephone, or more recently, the "net" that tied the country together through instant communications. Or it may be the various electronic media machines (radio, movies, and television) that shifted the emphasis from news to instant event. Or it may be any of the vast array of techniques that transformed agriculture into agribusiness, the company into the multinational corporation, or the sleepy stock market into that behemoth of arbitrage, leveraged buy-out, and institutional investment of the new turn of the century.

Instead of building temples, we build laboratories;
 Instead of offering sacrifices, we perform experiments;
 Instead of reciting prayers, we note pointer-readings;
 Our lives are no longer erratic but efficient.⁷

Lewis Mumford as early as 1934 stated in his prescient study, *Technics and Civilization*:

Mechanization and regimentation are not new phenomena in history: what is new is the fact that these functions have been projected and embodied in organized forms which dominate every aspect of our existence. Other civilizations reached a high degree of technical proficiency without apparently, being profoundly influenced by methods and aims of technics.⁸

Piano (13). Hughes believes that "Vonnegut appears indebted not to Wiener's 1948 monograph *Cybernetics, or the Control and Communications in the Animal and the Machine*. 1948. New York: MIT Press and Wiley, 1961, but to its popularization, *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Cambridge, Mass: Riverside Press, 1950). The latter was revised and toned down in the second edition (1954) after *Player Piano* was published. No mere catalog of borrowings can reveal Vonnegut's assimilation of the 1950 edition..." (David Y. Hughes. "The Ghost in the Machine: the Theme of *Player Piano*." *America as Utopia*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. New York: Burt Franklin, 1981, p. 113, n. 4).

⁷ W. H. Auden. "For the Time Being." *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. New York: Random House, 1976, p. 287.

⁸ Lewis Mumford. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934, p. 4.

In the United States of *Player Piano* and especially in Vonnegut's *Ilium*, where Paul Proteus tries but does not really succeed in becoming his own person, a "free man" remains squarely within and controlled by a society dominated by such technics. The novel thus satirises both the over-dependence on technology and the over-reliance on the expertise of technocrats.

Sheppard contends that "because technology is inextricable from twentieth-century man's life and has profoundly changed him, Vonnegut cannot reflect upon contemporary man's metaphysical anguish without also commenting upon his technology."⁹ But the reverse may be even truer in that Vonnegut cannot reflect upon the role of technology in the twentieth century without also reflecting on human metaphysical anguish, especially as exemplified in Paul Proteus.

Proteus's flailing about, trying to be at home in Homestead, buying a farm that he cannot run, and attempting to be the Messiah of the saboteurs all reflect his blind desire to become a conscious being, to become fully human. The corporation, on the other hand, wants him to be its ideal manager – bright, but completely within the corporate mould. His wife, in her turn, wants him to be her ideal husband – loving but totally dedicated to succeeding in the corporation. The revolutionary Ghost Shirts want him to be their ideal leader – famous, but selflessly dedicated to their cause. None of these – the corporation, his wife, the Ghost Shirts – wants him simply to be or to be for himself alone. Needless to say, no one ever asks what he wants. The wonder is that he does not become like his fellow workers: alcoholics, dropouts, or flunkies – the hollow shells of wasted men, "Leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw."¹⁰ When the corporation or his wife is not using Paul, then the revolutionaries are. The latter write letters in his name, issue manifestos he does not know if he agrees or disagrees with, and act generally as if he were their Messiah – a role he definitely does not wish to play. If he does not really know what he wants to be or become, Paul at least knows that he does not want to be a lone human manager overseeing machines.

Vonnegut's book is a plea for human beings to be what they are able to be best: human – which is, frail and strong, thick-headed and intelligent, cruel and kind, failing and succeeding, hating and loving. This belief in the humanness of human beings will become a constant in all of Vonnegut's later novels and stories.

⁹ Sallye J. Sheppard. "Kurt Vonnegut and the Myth of Scientific Progress." *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* 16 (1985) 14–19, p. 15.

¹⁰ T. S. Eliot. "The Hollow Men." *The Collected Poetry of T. S. Eliot*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952, pp. 56–59, ll. 3–4.

It is also his warning against that ancient human desire for perfection, especially perfection in society which all too often, as in this novel, leads simply to sterility. Aldous Huxley, similarly worried, chose for the epigraph to *Brave New World* a telling quotation from Nicolas Berdiaeff's *Slavery and Freedom*: "Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on ne le croyait autrefois. Et nous nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement agossante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive?"¹¹

In *Player Piano*, the corporation, working to establish its notion of utopia here on earth actively opposes any belief in the importance of variety in humans and their experience. All in the name of making everything as easy as possible for everyone and granting everyone a far greater degree of certainty than is usually possible in a non-planned, unregulated, free society. The good life in *Player Piano* will be achieved thanks to the corporation responsible for running everything in Ilium, which, in return, demands complete loyalty and service. Such loyalty and service are, however, not just expected, they are required. Vonnegut satirises the kind of husband-wife working relationships that may and often do result from such expectations in the meaningless conversations which take place daily between Paul and Anita. Proteus proves the upwardly mobile, aspiring young husband, while his wife, Anita - "Ilium's Lady of the Manor" (12) - dutifully spends all her time and energy plotting ways to boost him up the corporate ladder. Vonnegut's sharp satiric eye neatly skewers his target as Anita dresses Paul for success by buying him clothing identical with that of those who appear just a bit higher up the ladder. She then coaches him on how to behave at meetings, how to effectively deliver speeches, and how to conduct himself on various social occasions. Anita and Paul's juvenile relationship reflects the price of the certitude promised by an EPICAC XIV-run society. The theologian, Paul Tillich, observed

¹¹ [In a rough translation: "Utopias appear far more realisable than we had formerly believed. And now we find ourselves facing a question equally painful in a new kind of way: How to avoid their actual realisation?"] Quoted in Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. 1932. Harmondsworth, MS: Penguin, 1955, p. 5. Vonnegut "borrowed" the familiar utopian plot from *Brave New World*, as Huxley, Vonnegut claims, had in his turn "ripped [it] from Eugene Samiatan's *We*" (*Wampeters, Foma & Granfaloons*, p. 261). The publishing history of *Player Piano* reflects Vonnegut's fortunes as an author since of the original hardcover edition "less than a third of its first printing of 7600 copies was purchased (and most of these, Vonnegut insists, in Schenectady). The next year, however, the Doubleday Book Club prepared a cheap edition of 15,000 copies, which sold very quickly to its subscribers; a second printing of 5000 was soon ordered. And in 1954 came the book's greatest success [...] Outfitted with a luridly futuristic cover and re-titled *Utopia-14*, the Bantam paperback [...] hit the stands in numbers exceeding 248,000" (Jerome Klinkowitz. *Kurt Vonnegut*. New York: Methuen, 1982, p. 40).

that “men will quickly commit themselves to any cause that promises certainty in their existence.”¹² The all-knowing computer in *Player Piano* not only promises but delivers such certainty but at some cost. The Shah several times points to an obvious cost when he “equates American society with the noxious materialism suggested by the nephew’s name [...] Khashdrahr (‘cash drawer’) Miasma.”¹³ Another but not quite so apparent cost of this utopia lies in what is absent from the world of *Player Piano* and what is often overlooked in creating such a good life in a perfect world. The noted Irish writer, Francis Stuart pinpointed this lack when we wrote “Where everything is seen as making life easier for all, there is no room for grief, pain and doubt, in which are the roots of a thriving organic consciousness.”¹⁴ Stuart’s prescription holds true for individuals but it also proves important for fiction. As Kevin Alexander Boon emphasises, “Vonnegut’s fiction [especially in *Player Piano*] points to the confluent boundary between the morbid and the sublime where humor and grief are inevitably conflated.”¹⁵

In extrapolating from the present to create his future utopian society, Vonnegut includes a satiric, highly amused look at the morés of the corporate world as he had observed them while working for the General Electric Company. One of his prime satiric targets – on which he scored a direct hit – was the North Woods summer festival where General Electric executives had to go and play the silly games described in hilarious detail in *Player Piano* (see especially 181–194). “The island was shut down after the book came out,” Vonnegut boasts in various interviews.¹⁶ “So, you can’t say that my writing hasn’t made any contribution to Western civilization.”¹⁷

¹² Paul Tillich. “Critique and Justification of Utopia.” *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Ed. Frank Manuel. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966, p. 307.

¹³ Sallye J. Sheppard. “Signposts in a Chaotic World: Naming Devices in Kurt Vonnegut’s Dresden Books.” *The McNeese Review* 312 (1986) 14–22, pp. 18–19.

¹⁴ Francis Stuart. *The Abandoned Snail Shell*. Dublin: The Raven Arts Press, 1987, p. 19.

¹⁵ Kevin A. Boon. *Chaos Theory and the Interpretation of Literary Texts: The Case of Kurt Vonnegut*. Lewiston, New York: Mellen Press, 1997, p. 111, n. 86.

¹⁶ Kurt Vonnegut. “A Talk with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.” with Robert Scholes. *The Vonnegut Statement*. Ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer. New York: Dell Publishing, 1973. 90–118. Reprinted in William Rodney Allen. *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1981, p. 113.

¹⁷ Vonnegut, Kurt. “Two Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut” with Charlie Reilly, *College Literature*. 7 (1980) 1–29. Reprinted in Allen, p. 199. Vonnegut was chosen Man-of-the-Year on the 25th anniversary of the GE Alumni Association which is composed of people like himself who worked for GE then went on to other professions (Kurt Vonnegut. “A Skull Session with Kurt Vonnegut.”

Juxtaposed to the corporate world in *Player Piano* lies Homestead where ex-workers and those with minimal jobs live and where revolt may be incipient but life itself is as dead as it is at the top of the corporate organisation chart.¹⁸ Here there is no dignity in labour, no virtue in an honest day's wages, no reward for exceeding expectations. Instead, people realise that the corporate world wishes to use their labour as cheaply as possible and will replace them with more reliable machines whenever and wherever possible, not stopping to count or even acknowledge the human cost of those dismissed, fired, or forced to quit. This point becomes clear early in the novel when Bud Calhoun is fired because he had invented a machine to replace him and so made himself redundant (62-65). Much of Vonnegut's theme of the exploitation of human workers and of machines that make people redundant leaving behind a pile of human rubble with little or nothing to do appears familiar from some nineteenth- and many twentieth-century British and American writers. John Ruskin, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, and J. R. R. Tolkien, and American writers from Mark Twain through the muckrakers and after – all attacked the human waste caused by technology and Big Business. Like the best of these writers, Vonnegut goes beyond speculation and like most of them, describes both the atmosphere of the corporation and the ethos and values it promulgated based upon careful observation. "It was a genuine concern that drove me to write my first book," he claims.¹⁹

While working at General Electric, he recalls

One day I came across an engineer who had developed a milling machine that could be run by punch cards. Now at the time, milling machine operators were among the best paid machinists in the world, and yet this damned machine was able to do as good a job as most of the machinists ever could. I looked around, then, and found looms and spinning

Interview with Hank Nuwer. *South Carolina Review*. 19 (1987) 2-23. Reprinted in Allen. 240-264, p. 247). Paul Keating, in *Lamps for a Brighter America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1954), claims that General Electric's Association Island, the model for Vonnegut's The Meadows was used extensively between 1910 and 1930, but by the 1950s was no longer in use (see David Y. Hughes, p. 110). Whatever the historical facts, Vonnegut's satire on corporate culture and its excesses succeeds admirably.

¹⁸ While there is no evidence Vonnegut is echoing Emily Dickinson in using "Homestead" ironically as the name for a lost Eden, their use is strikingly similar: "The Bible is an antique Volume – / Written by faded Men / At the suggestion of Holy Spectres – / Subjects – Bethlehem – / Eden – the ancient Homestead..." (Emily Dickinson. "The Bible is an antique Volume –." *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. [Vol. 1-3] Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958, Vol. 1, pp. 1065-1067, ll. 1-5).

¹⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, "Two Conversations," p. 4.

machines and a number of textile devices all being run the same way and, well, the implications were sensational.²⁰

These sensational implications are realised in *Player Piano* as this future, electronically run society places the good of the corporation and the *full employment of machines* ahead of human needs and desires, including the human necessity for meaningful work. “[T]he only safeguard of order and discipline in the modern world is a standardized worker with interchangeable parts. That would solve the entire problem of management,” says The President in *The Madwoman of Chaillot* by Jean Giraudoux²¹ – a sentiment echoed and re-echoed throughout this novel. In *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), Vonnegut explores this issue further through the ultimate machine-run civilisation of Tralfamadore, whose people originally made machines in order to free human beings from work:

This left the creatures free to serve higher purposes. But whenever they found a higher purpose, the purpose still wasn't high enough.

So machines were made to serve higher purposes, too.

And the machines did everything so expertly that they were finally given the job of finding out what the highest purpose of the creatures [humans] could be.

The machines reported in all honesty that the creatures couldn't really be said to have any purpose at all.

The creatures thereupon began slaying each other [...] And they discovered that they weren't even very good at slaying. So they turned that job over to the machines, too. And the machines finished up the job in less time than it takes to say, "Tralfamadore."²²

As Zoltán Abádi-Nagy notes “Tralfamadore turns out to be a dehumanized planet with a machine civilization: what they can teach man is that man should not learn from them.”²³

Against nineteenth century popular belief, Ralph Waldo Emerson vigorously and correctly maintained that “society never advances,”²⁴ yet there are

²⁰ Kurt Vonnegut, “Two Conversations,” p. 200; cf. *Wampeters, Foma & Granfaloons*, p. 261.

²¹ Jean Giraudoux. *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. Trans. Maurice Valency. In *Jean Giraudoux: Four Plays, Adapted, and with an Introduction by Maurice Valency*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1958, p. 17.

²² Kurt Vonnegut. *The Sirens of Titan*. New York: Dell, 1959, pp. 274–75.

²³ Zoltán Abádi-Nagy. “Ironic Historicism in the American Novel of the Sixties.” *John O'Hara Journal* 5.1&2 (N.D.) 83–89, p. 87).

²⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Self-Reliance.” *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures*. New York: Library of America, 1983, p. 279.

always those, such as the twentieth-century behaviourist psychologist, B. F. Skinner, who promise societal advancement in return for merely surrendering unwanted human dignity and unneeded individual freedoms. As the Shah of Bratpuhr keenly observes in *Player Piano* surrendering such freedoms in the name of "progress" or comfort or efficiency reduces people from their once proud status as free citizens in a democracy to "takaru" or slaves. But those who believe and belong to the Skinnerian utopia, *Walden Two* (1948) "entertain no nonsense about democracy." "This is a totally planned society, structured so that a self-perpetuating elite shapes to their specifications the inhabitants of the world they control,"²⁵ and those inhabitants should be grateful. John Pierce invented an excellent term for this kind of thinking. He called it "the hubris of altruism;" that is, the "blind pride in seemingly benevolent ideals," which must be imposed on humanity "for its own good."²⁶ From a wealth of historical examples of this kind of utopia Pierce selects John Calvin's Geneva and Pol Pot's Democratic Kampucheatwo where "the practical consequences of the hubris of altruism" were much in evidence. "It is important," Pierce adds, "to remember that both might still be regarded as noble ideas had they not succeeded so thoroughly."²⁷ Hence the imposition of Skinnerian values and techniques on a population essentially not consulted either about the values themselves or about participating in such a noble experiment. Had they been so consulted, there might have appeared that lone individual or even a group who like Bartleby would "prefer not to" participate in the noble experiment. It is against this kind of planned society dedicated to a certain set of values however benign or well meaning, that anti-utopian literature, such as *Player Piano* is often written. Vonnegut, in contrast to Skinner but much like Emerson, remains a non-believer when it comes to societal progress or the necessity for controlling society.

If Vonnegut continues very much aware of the almost absolute centrality of machines for late twentieth-century American society, he also insists on their right use. In his view, machines are both a proper and a necessary subject for the contemporary American writer. "Machinery is important. We must write about it,"

²⁵ Robert C. Elliott. *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 150. All references to *Walden Two* are to Skinner, B. F. *Walden Two*. New York: Macmillan, 1948.

²⁶ John J. Pierce. *Foundations of Science Fiction: A Study in Imagination and Evolution*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 168.

²⁷ John J. Pierce, p. 168.

he affirmed in one of many interviews.²⁸ But Vonnegut's point in *Player Piano* so familiar from American history, philosophy, theology, politics, and literature is that machines and technology are or should be the means by which humans gain – not lose – their freedom. Machines are not now nor should they ever become simply ends in themselves. Ralph Barton Perry argued that “even ideas and skills do not suffice unless they are linked with the purposes for which they are used, or the feelings which give them value.” He continues, “It is necessary, furthermore, that these purposes and feelings should be shared, in order that they may afford a basis of reciprocal action. When thus socialized and charged with emotion, durable ideas constitute the essence of culture and of civilization.”²⁹ Machines, therefore, do not need to be “preserved from dissolution” only their “essential formulas and aptitudes should be remembered, in order to be re-embodied in new machines.”³⁰ Not any specific machine itself then but *the idea* of that machine should remain paramount. At the end of *Player Piano*, for instance, bitter irony resides in Bud Calhoun's immediate repairing of the orange soda machine. Those repairs, made as the revolution has barely concluded, become Vonnegut's sharply etched image of the failure of this individual and all like him to distinguish between the means and ends for which this machine and every machine was invented. He is about to do himself out of a job once more by preserving this specific machine rather than internalising his knowledge of it. Bud has become a true *takaru* or the slave of the machine. As such, he exemplifies Lewis Mumford's contention that Europe and America became unlike other cultures that “had machines; but [...] did not develop ‘the machine.’ It remained for the peoples of Western Europe to carry the physical sciences and the exact arts to a point no other culture had reached, and to adapt the whole mode of life to the pace and capacities of the machine.”³¹ In Ilium this process reached its zenith in the machine-run society.

The novel's title, *Player Piano*, derives appropriately from a machine, the player piano, invented in the nineteenth century and perfected in the twentieth. The late Tony Tanner most succinctly summarised the ominous quality of this symbol for the novel. “A piano player is a man consciously using a machine to produce aesthetically pleasing patterns of his own making. A player piano is a

²⁸ Kurt Vonnegut. “Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.” Interview with John Casey and Joe David Bellamy. *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers*. Ed. Joe David Bellamy. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974. 194–207. Reprinted in Allen. 156–165, p. 157.

²⁹ Ralph Barton Perry. *Puritanism and Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1944, p. 27.

³⁰ Ralph Barton Perry, p. 27.

³¹ Lewis Mumford, p. 4.

machine which has been programmed to produce music on its own, thus making the human presence redundant."³² In an early chapter of the novel someone observes that "watching them keys go up and down [...] You can almost see a ghost sitting there playing his heart out" (28). David Hughes, in developing the player piano as an ideal image and symbol for Vonnegut's satire, discovered that "the heart of a player piano, the perforated music sheet, was invented in 1842 [...] and by about 1890 it was brought to perfection in the United States." He concludes that this image "affords Vonnegut the blend he wants of nostalgia, technical proficiency, and corporealization of the spiritual world."³³ This blend will reappear even more poignantly in *Galápagos* (1985) when Zenji Hiroguchi programs Mandrax, the super computer, to reproduce the intricacies of ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging which his wife, Hisako teaches. Hisako loses not only her pride but also her very reason for existence. "Her self-respect has been severely crippled by the discovery that a little black box could not only teach what she taught, but could do so in a thousand different tongues [...] ikebana turned out to be as easily codified as the practice of modern medicine."³⁴ Vonnegut thus makes crucial to *Galápagos* his argument and its consequences about the uselessness of human beings first outlined in *Player Piano* and which later became central to several short stories as well as *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965).³⁵ The Shah in *Player Piano* wishes to pose a simple question to the giant computer, "What people are for?" (277). What indeed are humans for if machines can duplicate not only their music and work, but also their arts and sports?³⁶ This question haunts all of Vonnegut's fiction from *Player Piano* to *Timequake* (1998). But for Vonnegut there is no going back on technology, unless nature itself, deciding it has had enough of human destruction should enter the picture as it does in *Galápagos*. In *Player Piano*, perhaps more acutely than elsewhere in Vonnegut's fiction, this issue of the right role of machines and their right relation to people illustrates the difficulty American society has often shown in identifying clearly right means to achieve good ends. *Player Piano* as a mid-century anti-utopia, illustrates, albeit negatively, the right role of technology and machinery

³² Tony Tanner. *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p. 182.

³³ David Y. Hughes, p. 114, n. 20.

³⁴ Kurt Vonnegut. *Galápagos*. New York: Dell, 1985, pp. 68-69.

³⁵ Kurt Vonnegut. *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. 1965. New York: Dell, 1970, see especially pp. 21-22.

³⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, *Galápagos*, p. 71.

within the goals and values of human civilisation while at the same time arguing passionately for the sacredness of human beings.

Robert Elliott contends that after World War II, the Bomb, and the holocaust "we will never again be able to create imaginative utopias with the easy confidence of the nineteenth century; the terror to which the eschatological vision applied to human affairs has led in our time forecloses that possibility."³⁷ Yet at the end of the twentieth century the American public and its leaders still fall prey to imagining that society or its organisation can be perfected. Many still believe naively in that recurring human delusion which the poet, e. e. cummings so graphically called: "the foetal grave / called progress."³⁸ "[T]he dystopia in *Player Piano* looks much more ominous to us in the 1990s than the ones in Huxley and Orwell."³⁹

In the second half of the twentieth, as in the first years of the new twenty-first century American society appears dominated by the multinational corporation, "the only social unit of which our age is capable,"⁴⁰ and clearly needs to heed the warning embedded in *Player Piano*'s extrapolation from current trends and values. Not to do so may well mean being condemned to live in a city much like Vonnegut's Ilium – something that appears an all-too-real prospect for millions of Americans. *Player Piano* thus remains Vonnegut's plea for bringing into being an American society composed of individuals who have discovered shared purposes and feelings, who distinguish clearly between means and ends, who affirm the truth that American culture is neither true nor utopian, but partial and imperfect. Above all, this society must be run not by corporations or by machines but by and for free citizens.⁴¹ These themes emerge again and again in Vonnegut's later novels and stories, as they will preoccupy Vonnegut for the rest of his writing career.

³⁷ Robert C. Elliott, p. 101.

³⁸ e. e. cummings. "you shall above all things be glad and young." *Poems 1923-1954*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954, p. 345, lines 12-13.

³⁹ David Rampton. "Into the Secret Chamber: Art and the Artist in Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard*." *Critique* 35 (1993) 16-26, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰ Jean Giraudoux, p. 17.

⁴¹ Yet, as his introduction to *Slaughterhouse-Five* some fifteen years after *Player Piano* makes abundantly clear, Vonnegut cannot be overly optimistic about the prospects for American society and culture. "[...] I crossed the Delaware River where George Washington had crossed it [...] went to the New York World's Fair, saw what the past had been like, according to the Ford Motor Car Company and Walt Disney, saw what the future would be like, according to General Motors" (Kurt Vonnegut. *Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York: Dell, 1969, p. 18).

Defiance Against God

A gay reading of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin

In this paper I will attempt to give a gay reading of James Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Basically, I have a double aim. Firstly, I wish to take part in the formation of the Gay Literary Canon with my focusing on a novel by Baldwin where the homosexual content is not perceived as obvious, and is thus marginalised by most gay literary critics. Secondly, I hope to contribute to the academic emergence of Gay and Lesbian Studies in Hungarian scholarship.

First I propose to explain the critical term "gay reading," the tool I use in my reading. Then I intend to show how otherness and self-identity, the central themes of Baldwin's works, intersect in a homophobic society. Next, with a more provocative point, I suggest an analogy between blackness and gayness; not only because both of them are outcasts, but also because they are portrayed as sources of the possibility of forging one's higher self-identity. Finally, I will give a detailed reading of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* concerning sexuality. I hope to show that the mechanism of racial hatred and homophobia can be paralleled as long as the racist and heterosexist society looks upon the black and the gay man as alien "other" – as "nigger" and "faggot."

Gay and lesbian literary criticism is mostly interested in the literary aspect of sexuality. Our reading of a literary text is not to be considered valid today before sexuality in and around it has been addressed to challenge the cultural determination of the heterosexist values that are everywhere celebrated as if they were values per se. The method gay literary criticism uses is gay reading, and the interpretative position of the "gay reader" can be occupied by a woman or a non-gay man; by referring to her/him as "he" is just the product of an oversimplifica-

tion. The gay reader does not only read for inscriptions of his own condition, for texts that will confirm a social and private identity established on a desire for other men, because in that case (s)he could not be a woman or a non-gay reader.

Gay reading is based upon the common experience of male homosexuals. These people are constantly besieged by signs, making them particularly skilful readers. The structures of secrecy and disclosure that organise gay male experience lead them to scrutinise the behaviour of other men for signs of same sex desire on multiple levels. Not only do gay men consume signs, but they also produce them. To mark their identities, they use a variety of signifiers with a homosexual meaning which only those initiated into this subculture are capable of decoding. The gay critic reads literary texts searching for signs about homosexuality hidden in the subtext, and in many cases, when the gay reader is a gay man himself, his reading will become also a hunt for histories and identities that subconsciously trace a desire felt not by the author but by the reader, who is most acute when searching signs about himself.

James Baldwin's vision of otherness is very closely related to the vision of the self, thus the search for self-identity, the identity of a black gay man in a racist homophobic society is one of the central themes of his works. Almost all his main characters are involved in an agonising quest for the self. Reaching an authentic self and forging an identity depend on self-knowledge and, according to Baldwin, this can be achieved through suffering. If suffering is endured creatively, it can offer the possibility of obtaining a genuine sense of identity. Hence suffering has a humanising power and redemptive effect. Blackness and gayness can correspond to each other in Baldwin's fiction, as both of these are social constructions, and they also assume metaphorical functions; they are both sources of agony as well as means of redemption, and the forging of a self-identity.

In "The Black Boy looks at the White Boy," Baldwin says:

I think that I know something about American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been.¹

The male homosexual is also menaced by definitions of manhood that are used to denigrate his existence and individual dignity. Baldwin is passionately involved with the problems of both racism and homosexuality, so that his portrayal of

¹ James Baldwin. "The Black Boy looks at the White Boy." *Nobody Knows My Name*. London: Corgi, 1965, p. 172.

racial conflict within the society often lends special authority to his analysis of that society's sexual stereotypes, and vice versa. He testifies to the difficulties of achieving a satisfying personal identity in a society which superimposes its conceptions of the "Negro" or the "faggot" upon individuals and which creates erroneous images of people only to persecute them with those same images.

When heterosexual prejudice joins forces with racial convictions, the complexity of the individual writer's work is lost in a set of emotional generalisations. Cleaver, for whom homosexuality is a "sickness," attacks Baldwin by likening him to the black homosexual who, deprived of his masculinity by worship of the white man, turns his self-contempt on other blacks, while fawning on his white lover.² Cleaver colludes in the white man's myth of the Negro's sexual potency, to dismiss the black homosexual as a traitor, a carrier of some white "disease." The knowledge that Baldwin, as one who has been menaced by it, claims about American masculinity, has an authority which in turn menaces the preferred images of manhood, both black and white. He puzzles over his own definitions in ways which explode the idea of narrowness in the experience of a racial and sexual minority. In his analysis the Negro or the homosexual are "inventions," or, as we would say today, constructions which reveal, ironically, more about the mainstream culture. Just as he portrays the African American, so the heterosexual confronted with his "blackening" of the outcast homosexual can be brought to a greater self-awareness. This idea is made satirically explicit in Baldwin's remark in *Dialogue with Nikki Giovanni*:

People invent categories in order to feel safe. White people invented black people to give white people identity. [...] Straight cats invent faggots so they can sleep with them without becoming faggots themselves.³

In various ways Baldwin's novels reflect the difficulties of individuals for whom the question of personal identity bears an urgent relation to that of social survival, because of their colour or sexuality. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* explores the extent to which inner drives can be contained within the available, approved models of society. One of the aims of Baldwin as a writer, very much like those of Henry James, another figure in the American gay canon, is to examine the problem of learning to live in a society whose manners, conventions and pre-

² Elderidge Cleaver. "Notes on a Native Son." *Soul on Ice*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, p. 111.

³ James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni. *A Dialogue*. London: Penguin Books, 1973. pp. 88-89.

judices often threaten individual integrity. It seems to be of crucial importance in Baldwin's works to come to terms with that society's demands and to be able to make the necessary compromises without giving up one's essential self determined by race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, to be clear about one's identity.

When *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was published in 1953, racial issues were as concerns most literary critics acceptable, but homosexuality was not and so the homosexual content is hidden in several codes which I intend to decipher in my reading. Many gay literary critics neglect Baldwin's first novel, not even mentioning its homosexual theme. I found only in *History of Gay Literature* a few lines referring to the possibility of a gay reading of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.⁴ The homosexual content is not obvious for the heterosexual reader, but this is what makes it more challenging for the gay critic to give a gay reading of the novel.

In his first novel, Baldwin gives the reader an account of a young man's turbulent adolescence in which intimations of his homosexual awakening are structurally integrated into the process of a seemingly religious conversion. In what follows, I would like to prove that the central event of the novel, Johnny's conversion, functions as a kind of realisation of his homosexuality as well as his defiance against God. God in the novel does not seem to be the God of love, but, like any oppressor, gives the rules to the oppressed and confines their lives with limitations. God in this context appears to be emblematic of the white, heterosexist society; consequently, it seems to me that though *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is a novel written by a black writer about black people, set in Harlem and in the deep South, it is yet not essentially only a "Negro novel" but one of a more universal meaning.

With his first novel, Baldwin opened a new chapter in the history of mainstream African American literature, as O'Neal claims.⁵ Baldwin may be seen as a black American writer to distance himself from the Black Church by his overt portrayal of its lack of authentic Christian commitment. Baldwin's treatment of homosexuality as the most acceptable form of love was not compatible with Christian teachings; he not only shocked black scholars but also opened a

⁴ Gregory Woods. *A History of Gay Literature*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.

⁵ Sondra A. O'Neal. "Fathers, Gods, and Religion: Perceptions of Christianity and Ethnic Faith in James Baldwin." *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*. Ed. F. L. Standley and Nancy V. Burt. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1988, p. 140.

new way for non-Christian African American literature deprived of Biblical foundation.

Baldwin's childhood and the fictional parallels in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* obviously indicate the autobiographical references, such as the religious elements along with the writer's hatred for his stern stepfather, a Pentecostal preacher.

In his long essay, *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin undoubtedly says that in his first novel he was writing out of his own experience.⁶ Yet in his childhood he experienced the victimising white power and the degradation and brutality of the Harlem ghetto. For him, who was growing up in Harlem, damnation was a real danger. In his above-mentioned essay Baldwin gives account of his childhood fears:

For the wages of sin were visible everywhere, in every wine-stained and urine splashed hallway, in every clanging ambulance bell, in every scar on the faces of the pimps and their whores, in every helpless, newborn baby being brought into this danger, in every knife and pistol fight on the Avenue.⁷

Gayle suggests that "no writer knows the ghetto or its people better than Baldwin, and the frequent depictions of the city in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* express the squalor, the impersonality, poverty and the various crimes that threaten with corruption."⁸ The Black Church offered shelter and refuge to Baldwin from the terrors of the streets, thus safety and God became synonymous for him, and the Church served as a kind of survival strategy when he was young.

By the time *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was ready for publication, Baldwin had formally broken away from the Church in Harlem; indeed, by 1954 he was no longer a member of any Church. However, this formal renunciation of the ministry was by no means a reliable indication that he had truly won that freedom from the terror of sin which the break was meant to imply. Macebuh says that despite Baldwin's break with the Church, the habits of his thought formed over a period of twenty years were not to be ignored totally merely by a formal declaration of separation.⁹ I will try to show how Baldwin's need to

⁶ James Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Dial Press, 1963.

⁷ Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time*, p. 34.

⁸ Addison Gayle. "Cultural Nationalism: The Black Novelist in America." *Black Roots Bulletin*. Vol.1. (1971), p. 7.

⁹ Stanley Macebuh. *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*. London: Michael Joseph, 1973, p. 51.

destroy the apocryphal vision of the life which the Church had taught him led in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* to a compassionate but heretical representation of the religious life in the novel.

From the beginning of the novel it is clear for the reader that the writer's use of religious symbolism is of central importance. The title is the first line of a Negro spiritual, which refers to the gospel, the good news, that Jesus Christ is alive. The subtitle of Part One is "The Seventh Day," another Biblical allusion that sets the particular situation of the fourteen-year-old John Grimes' conflict with his stepfather about family relations, Christian belief, and racial attitudes into a very broad context. "The Seventh Day" refers to the creation story of Genesis. Johnny's fourteenth birthday is like the seventh day of creation: both mark the end of a creative process, the moment at which a completed whole emerges – in Johnny's case through the awakening of self-identity. The essence of this religious symbolism is to keep the reader aware that the main character's struggle in society is full of elements of supposedly universal significance.

Johnny's stern stepfather, Gabriel, has a speaking name in Biblical terms. His name literally means "God's messenger." This can be seen as Johnny's defiance against the vengeful God, who, in the character of Gabriel, embodies white homophobic society. Johnny both fears and hates his stepfather, and so he also makes an attempt to break away from his ties to Gabriel's God and from the ties of theological terror. However, God is an abstraction against whom/which rebellion does not seem to make too much sense in practical terms, so Gabriel, who in many respects is identified with God, becomes the actual object of Johnny's fear and hatred. Johnny's loathsome feelings become more and more intense as he gradually perceives his emotions in such a way that homosexual love is a real, conceivable possibility, one that he realises to be questioned, even negated by Christian theology. The negation of the possibility of love is extended from the personal to the communal level, and it becomes the root of oppressions of minority groups in society. Fear and despair serve as base of the protagonist's defiance which culminates in his "getting a new religion."

It is the technique of flashbacks that Baldwin uses to portray the lives of the "saints," through which one gains a perspective of Johnny's conversion. The definition of sin is construed from various aspects in the novel as well as the sin of the characters. All the major characters who pray in the church are, in some way, sinful.

Let me give examples of the characters' sin to illustrate my point. Florence, Gabriel's sister, is dying of cancer, and it is her fear of death that drove her to the evening prayer, where she asks God for forgiveness of her sins. When she was quite young, she left her dying mother and she came North in the hope of making her life better; she left her brother alone to nurse their mortally ill mother. If we consider Florence's sin as hateful malice against Gabriel, Gabriel's is, despite his pretensions to moral rectitude, that he is basically unable to love anybody. Elisha's sanctity is "corrupted" by his innocent affair with Ella Mae, and his sexually motivated love for Johnny.

Johnny realises his "sin" when he wakes up on the morning of his fourteenth birthday. His feeling guilty seems to weigh on him heavily as he is convinced that nothing can save him. Johnny came under the influence of a new Sunday school teacher, the seventeen-year-old Elisha, the nephew of the pastor. On the occasion of their first meeting Johnny's reaction is immediate, it is as if he exchanged his fear of God for his admiration and love for Elisha:

[...] he was distracted by his new teacher, Elisha [...] John stared at Elisha all during the lesson, admiring the timbre of Elisha's voice, much deeper and manlier than his own, admiring the leanness, and grace, and strength, and darkness of Elisha in his Sunday suit, [...] But he did not follow the lesson, and when, sometimes, Elisha paused to ask John a question, John was ashamed and confused, feeling the palms of his hands become wet and his heart pound like a hammer. (13-14)¹⁰

Johnny's reaction here is depicted in the same way as a heterosexual boy's when he falls in love with a girl at first sight, so it seems possible that Johnny admires Elisha with homoerotic love. The actual cause of his desperate fear of damnation is that roughly at the same time as he first meets Elisha, Johnny begins to masturbate – or in his view to "sin" – to the accompaniment of homoerotic fantasies:

He had sinned. In spite of the saints, his mother and his father, the warnings he had heard from his earliest beginnings, he had sinned with his hands a sin that was hard to forgive. In the school lavatory, alone, thinking of the boys, older, bigger, braver, who made bets with each other as to whose urine could arch higher, he had watched in himself a transformation of which he would never dare to speak. (20)

¹⁰ All parenthesised references are to this edition: James Baldwin. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

This transformation is not only the development of his sexual self at puberty, but also the increasing realisation that a significant aspect of his burgeoning sexuality is focused on the bodies of older boys, Elisha most of all. Already assumed guilty about his sexual transgression, he is then all the more guilt-ridden when he interprets the fantasies that accompany these moments of transgression. Not only is he becoming a sinner, but also his sin is that of the sodomite. At the end of Part One of the novel, Johnny tries to find out what Elisha might be thinking about and doing in bed:

And he watched Elisha, who was a young man in the Lord. [...] What were the thoughts of Elisha when night came, and he was alone where no eye could see, and no tongue bear witness, save only the trumpet-like tongue of God? Were his thoughts, his bed, his body foul? What were his dreams? (69)

There is a kind of hope involved here, to a certain degree, that Elisha's bed and body are indeed foul, maybe foul enough in an ideal world to deserve sharing. One may conclude, here, that when he goes to bed, Johnny's own thoughts and body are also "foul" with his fantasies about Elisha.

I suppose that Johnny's "sin" is not a guilt of the flesh but a fundamental one that disturbs the "proper" relationship between man and God. His sin is not merely that he has become aware of his desire, but that, in refusing to admit his guilt by falling at the feet of God, he placed himself in opposition to God:

The darkness of his sin was the hardheartedness with which he resisted to God's power; in the scorn that was often his while he listened to the crying, breaking voices, and watched the black skin glisten while they lifted up their arms and fell on their faces before the Lord. For he had made his decision. He would not be like his father, or his father's fathers. He would have another life. (20)

In spite of his defiance and his determination to have another life, Johnny remains as much a victim of his fears of God as those who are willing to accept his power. Johnny's relationship with God is primarily characterised by fear, but it is also fear that serves as a basic element in his complex relationship to his stepfather, Gabriel. The reader is given sufficient account of Gabriel's hatred towards his stepson. Johnny is not the offspring of an immaculate conception, for he is the son of a bondswoman, Elizabeth.

Conceiving her life, Elizabeth has experienced both fall and redemption. With Richard, whom she was going to marry, she brought an illegitimate child

into the world, but through Gabriel her sin is retrieved. She fell in love with Richard and came North with him to Harlem, where they worked and hoped to get married soon. One night he is arrested and accused of a crime he has not committed. When denying the accusation, he is beaten up savagely by the police. When he is finally released, he commits suicide. After this tragic event Elizabeth retreats from life. Her subsequent marriage to Gabriel is a form of penitence for her "sin," her having given birth to an illegitimate child.

When Gabriel prays on the night of Johnny's conversion, his thoughts of his own youth come back, of his boring marriage to Deborah and his short, adulterous affair with Esther. At the age of sixteen, Deborah was raped by white men. Gabriel marries her, a woman considered unattractive by the neighbours, with the hope of controlling the sexual desires of his flesh. However, he soon enters into an adulterous relationship with Esther, to whose pregnancy he cannot respond in a responsible way: he neither supports Esther, nor reveals the truth to Deborah. Esther dies at childbirth and later her son is killed in Chicago. Soon after the death of Gabriel's illegitimate child, Deborah dies childless. Gabriel moves North, where he meets and marries Elizabeth, and he promises her to raise Johnny as his own son.

In Johnny's mind the objects of his fear are ultimately inseparable. In terms of their threat to his existence, there is no significant difference between God, Gabriel, and the racist and heterosexist society that emerges as a threat to destroy him. The God in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* appears vengeful and loveless; similarly, Gabriel is also driven by insane and self-consuming hatred, as he is not able to love.

The contents of Gabriel's life seem to be a moral evasion; his family and his friends exist for him merely as a contrastive basis for his pretentious sanctimoniousness. He hates his sister, Florence, because she has always refused to support his assumption of his own moral superiority. When she is praying in tortured pain in the church, he is very pleased as he thinks that God's vengeance finally catches her and brings her low:

Gabriel turned to stare at her, in astonished triumph that his sister should at least be humbled. [...] She knew that Gabriel rejoiced, not that her humility might lead her to grace, but only that some private anguish had brought her low. (73)

Gabriel is unable and unwilling to face the darker side of his own self. He is the secret father of an illegitimate child and at the same time a preacher of the

gospel. In order to perpetuate his sanctimonious image, he sacrifices everybody's life around himself. His relations to women are mostly characterised by an egocentric drive to destroy the co-operative engagement that can transform sexual intercourse from passion to love. He never regards his wives or Esther more than neutral mediums through whom his being the Lord's anointed one can be demonstrated and justified. He feels as if his women should be obligated to him forever for being the chosen vessels through which his heroism must flourish. Gabriel's misogyny is quite obvious; he despises Elizabeth, as well as Deborah, his first wife, because in his eyes they are "fallen women."

Gabriel's principal victim is Johnny, Elizabeth's illegitimate child, in whom he sees his own sin. When he disowns her son, he disowns the darker side of his self, too. Bone says that his psychological attitude is white.¹¹ The mechanism Gabriel uses throughout the novel is the scapegoat mechanism, which is part of the nature of any oppression. Gabriel is to some extent equivalent to God, so he can be identified with the white homophobic society. He thinks that he is immaculate, so to say "white," without any stain. If he is the saintly, the saved, the elected, then logically there must be the evil, which is the black. He would rather the illegitimate child paid the price of his sin.

From the point of view of Christian teachings, one would expect the God of this novel to avenge himself on Johnny and Elisha, as he did on Richard and Elizabeth. If we consider that the two boys love each other, and yet their love does not come to an end as abruptly as Richard's love for Elizabeth, there is the suggestion at the end of the novel that their love grows rather than dies. I think this is so because homosexuality, in Baldwin's works, is portrayed as the only valid form of love. From this point of view one can easily understand why heterosexual intercourse in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, as well as in Baldwin's other novels, is often depicted as brutal – when, for example, Deborah is raped, or when Gabriel makes love to her later; when he has intercourse with Esther, and when Johnny observes his parents in bed, it is always portrayed to the reader as an ugly and disgusting show.

Premarital sex is seen in Gabriel's dreadful theology as sin, consequently Elisha is scolded for his harmless affair with Ella Mae. For him, then, homosexuality should be much more hateful, since it does not have any potential of producing offspring, and practically, Johnny and Elisha's wrestling incident

¹¹ Robert A. Bone. "The Novels of James Baldwin." *Images of the Negro in American Literature*. Ed. Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966, p. 273.

happened in the temple of God. It seems that both boys enjoyed physical closeness to each other while wrestling, so Baldwin's description of the two boys' incident appears homoerotic. It is worth mentioning here that in Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room*, it is also a wrestling match which serves as a prelude to the main character's first homosexual love-making. Since homosexual love in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* remains only a possibility, the highest peak of the corporal intimacy between Johnny and Elisha stops at the level of wrestling. Gabriel did not know about the two boys' wrestling incident in the temple, but it must be his heterosexist obtuseness that prevents him from seeing the erotic element in Elisha's evangelical zeal.

It is not until the end of the novel that Johnny's relationship with Elisha re-emerges as a significant theme, although it is clear that Elisha has remained an outstanding presence in Johnny's thoughts throughout the narrative. In Part Three, Johnny is lying in front of the altar, and a series of visions pass through his mind. His Freudian fantasies of damnation express the state of the soul when pushed into outer darkness by a punishing father, who is the emblem of the white, homophobic and hostile society.

When Johnny is "saved," he is still trying to negotiate a space in which he would live possibly as a gay man, somewhere between his resentment of his father and his desire for Elisha. It is Elisha's voice that guides him through his confusion, and it is his promise of prayers for his "little brother" that helps to diminish Johnny's anguish, and it is his kiss that resolves and ends the novel:

And he kissed John on the forehead a holy kiss. [...] The sun had come full awake. It was waking the streets, and the houses, and crying at the windows. It fell over Elisha like a golden robe, and struck John's forehead, where Elisha had kissed him, like a seal ineffaceable forever. (254)

In my interpretation, Johnny is confirmed in his homosexuality by the kiss, and this kiss is merely an irreversible first step towards complete sexual union with another man or other men, and in religious terms is less "holy" for that.

Many critics, like Gérard, describe Johnny's conversion as the acceptance of his blackness.¹² I agree with Gérard with the addition that blackness and homosexuality in the novel correspond with each other concerning the protagonist, Johnny. His conversion is not only accepting his blackness but, as it is ex-

¹² Albert Gérard. "The Sons of Ham." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 3, Summer 1971, p. 161.

pressed in the last lines of the novel (“‘I’m ready,’ John said, ‘I’m coming. I’m on my way.’”), also his homosexuality.

Go Tell It on the Mountain is not a religious novel, although assuredly religion is a significant aspect of it. The novel is a lyric celebration of the struggles of such weak characters as Johnny and Elisha, who realise their true potentials in life through their love for each other. Homosexual love, especially when it expresses itself in the temple of God, is the highest form of defiance against God, since it seeks to invalidate the power from external forces expressed in the theological form which oppresses people.

At the beginning of the novel, Johnny’s sin is that he tries to substitute God with Elisha and to exchange his fear of God for his admiration and love for Elisha. At the end, when Johnny is lying on the “threshing floor” in front of the altar in psychic pain, it is Elisha’s intervention that rescues him from the abyss. Quite ironically, when Elisha is sure that Johnny has been “saved,” there is indeed the indication of Johnny’s release from the power of God’s vengeance. Love in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* remains only a possibility. The novel closes with Baldwin’s giving notice of the liberating power from theological terror, through Johnny and Elisha’s discovery of a new, heretic, but more congenial religion, the religion of love.

Gabriella T. Espák

Mabo and the Paradigm-Shift in Australian Historiography

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the beginning of a paradigm-shift in the field of European-Aboriginal relations in Australian historiography. The change was completed in 1992 by the decision of the High Court of Australia in *Mabo v. Queensland (No.2)*, which sanctified the findings of new historians, and codified – thus completed – the paradigm-shift. The change in historiography was not exclusively a self-generating process, but it was the result of multiple factors: new historical research generated by anthropology, jurisdiction, and politics. As Noel Pearson put it in his Opening Address at the Mabo Conference in London (1996):

There are three things which seemed to me to be emerging signs of prospects of reconciliation in Australia. Firstly, there has been the revolution in our understanding of the country's history to which historians such as those who are attending this conference have contributed, as well as numerous indigenous oral historians. Secondly, there has been the decisions of the High Court of Australia in the Mabo Case, and thirdly, there was former Prime Minister Paul Keating's landmark speech at Redfern Park in December 1992, where he admitted the truths of the past on behalf of the Australian government and people.¹

Since the early 1970s there has been a movement to deconstruct the colonial vista. The works of conventional historians came under attack, and new

¹ Noel Pearson. "Land Rights and the Mabo Decision in Australia." *Aboriginal Land Rights: Australia and the Mabo Judgement Conference*, London: Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, U of London, 18-19 Apr. 1996. p. 6.

historians began to fill in “the great Australian silence”² by giving voice to the Aboriginal experience of the past of the continent. The “return of the Aborigine” was accompanied by a corresponding acknowledgement that they had been prior to the British, and the event of colonisation came to be interpreted as invasion rather than discovery, settlement or occupation. Overall, the legitimacy of the British claiming the land of Australia was brought into question. The new paradigm represents the coming of the Europeans in terms of dispossession, violence, racial discrimination, destruction, exclusion, exploitation, and extermination. Works with opposing views on European–Aboriginal relations were published side by side in the decades between 1970 and 1990, until finally in the *Mabo* case and the consequent Native Title Legislation the results of historical research found their way into law and politics. The *Mabo* decision crowned the development of Australian historiography between 1970 and 1992: a new historical paradigm had emerged.

First published in 1962 and followed by a revised edition in 1970, Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* introduced the concept of scientific paradigms into contemporary academic life. Although its basic premise is in natural sciences, this historio-philosophical treatise became one of the much discussed and most influential studies in the field of humanities. Without discussing Kuhn’s theory, this paper will apply his terminology of “paradigm,” “crisis,” “anomaly,” “revolution,” and “paradigm-shift” to the Australian historiographical revolution in the last three decades. To fulfil this aim, it will first be necessary to describe the concept of paradigm.

A paradigm is a framework within which “normal academic research work”³ takes place with its own system of methodological norms. The paradigm also works in a sociological way: it organises the academic world and defines an academic canon. The community of scientists and scholars maintains and protects the paradigm by following it in their work and prescribing it to future generations of scholars in textbooks, handbooks and examinations. In Kuhn’s words:

² The expression “the great Australian silence” was created by the eminent Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner in the 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures to describe the lack in historical and anthropological discourses.

³ The term “normal academic research work” is adapted from Kuhn. “Normal” here means “mainstream.”

These [paradigms] I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.⁴

When normal science or scholarship loses its way and cannot ignore any longer the anomalies that have disrupted traditional practice, extra-ordinary research begins, which leads either to the adjustment of the paradigm, or, if even more anomalies emerge, to a substitute-theory. Extra-ordinary research forces new responsibilities and a new working framework upon the academic world. Kuhn calls such changes in scholarship "scientific revolutions." The new theory is accepted as a new paradigm because it can dissolve anomalies more successfully. The old paradigm as opposed to the new one is not necessarily better or worse in terms of ethical judgement, and thus colonial views about Australian history that are now stigmatised as conservative and obscurantist could have been considered at the time of writing as modern. Therefore, these works should not necessarily be condemned. It is only natural that paradigms compete with each other, during which the formerly modern or canonical views become obscurantist and the provocative is newly accepted as modern.

The greatest social and political change in the field of Aboriginal affairs in Australia took place at the end of the 1960s, after the 1967 Referendum had eliminated racist clauses from the Commonwealth Constitution and gave power over from the states to the Commonwealth government to legislate for Aborigines. This involved giving full citizenship rights to the indigenous inhabitants, including the right to vote without restrictions and be included in the census. The Australian people supported the Referendum by over 90% yes votes, which gave equal political rights to the indigenous people, but did not automatically involve equal treatment, an end to discrimination, or access to land rights. Nevertheless, the greatest historical significance of the Referendum was that it acknowledged the presence and survival of the indigenous peoples in Australia, and after long decades of protection and assimilation, politically overrule the general assumption that the Aborigines were "a dying race." It, however, did not affect the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the foundation stone of Australian law and history. Thus, in the first major court case about Aboriginal land rights, the *Gove* case of 1971,⁵ Justice Blackburn refused to recognise Aboriginal native title to land, because he was not prepared to overrule

⁴ Thomas S. Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 1960. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996, p. x.

⁵ *Millirpum v. Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth*. *Federal Law Review* 17 (1971) p. 141.

established Privy Council precedent. His legal opinion rested on his interpretation of history, including *terra nullius*, as much as on his assessment of the law. He ruled that historical revision could not be used to change legal principles which were made at a different point in time.

The Referendum was initiated by the Holt government (1966–67) partly under pressures from the socio-political realities of Australian life that had piqued the United Nations,⁶ and partly as a result of the findings of anthropological research. These acted as catalysts at the launch of a paradigm-shift in historiography. Prompted by them, new historical research began to excavate the “dark side” of Australia’s past to enable contemporary society to answer such crucial questions as: Why do Aborigines die in large numbers in spite of the welfare measures of the patronising government? Who owns the land the Aborigine live on? Was Australia occupied peacefully or invaded with force?

However, it was not until 1992 with the High Court’s decision in *Mabo v. Queensland (No. 2.)* that the findings of the new history went into legal and political acceptance. In this courtcase, three members of the Meriam people (Murrey Islanders), indigenous inhabitants of Mer (Murrey Islands) situated in the north of Australia, reclaimed their lands from the Queensland government on the basis of continual and continuous occupation. The Islands were colonised by Queensland, which claimed sovereignty in 1879. The High Court decided that the native title of the Meriam people to their land was not extinguished by this step of the Queensland government, nor by any measures executed since 1879. The High Court declared the myth of *terra nullius* false. Meaning “no one’s land,” the Latin phrase refers to the common belief that the land of Australia belonged to no one, that it was not occupied by anybody before the white people came. This was declared false, as the High Court of Australia ruled that the Meriam people possess rights to their land, i.e. the islands they live on, on the basis of prior occupation.

A radical reinterpretation of history carried through the last thirty years provided a critical underpinning for the legal resolution ushered in by *Mabo*. In turn the judgement itself is also a major contribution to Australian historiography, which will influence the way history is taught and researched in the future. The land rights movement and the corresponding court cases provided an opportunity for the birth of a new historical paradigm based on the works of

⁶ F.G. Clarke. *Australia: A Concise Political and Social History*. Murrumbidgee, NSW: Harcourt Brace, 1992, pp. 302–303.

C. D. Rowley, Henry Reynolds and others. The number of anomalies discovered by them in the interpretation of Australia's past called for further research. The demand for reinterpreting the history of the continent was strengthened by the *Gove* case (1971). In *Mabo*, however, as Reynolds puts it:

The High Court rejected the concept of *terra nullius* because it was so out of harmony with contemporary opinion and concern for indigenous rights in both international law and the domestic law of comparable countries. [...] But the *Mabo* decision is not just an ending. It is also a beginning. While the abandonment of *terra nullius* has extracted Australian jurisprudence from one set of historico-legal problems, [...] it is now in the midst of another one.⁷

After 3 June 1992 a new paradigm came to be accepted by academics, the law and politics, therefore it is reasonable to call the period after 1992 the *Post-Mabo Age*.⁸ *Mabo* marks a borderline: a new paradigm had emerged.

The survey of major history books written before and after 1970 shows significant differences between the works of "conservatives" (canonised historians unchallenged until the late 60s) and "attackers" (historians who started to shatter the paradigm in the early 70s).⁹ Histories before the 70s tend to be overwhelmed by – in Kuhn's phrasing – the normal academic activity of data collection. Substantial and bulky volumes of complete histories of Australia are published by historians who impose a "span" on the data to emphasise Australia's progress, the British legacy, geographical determinism, or other overall patterns that regulate the history of Australia. Noticeably, this is done with the help of literary skills, or to the least, very fine stylistic competence. "The author is distinguished in the fields of both history and creative literature," and "the book is based on extensive research and careful analysis," reads the jacket of Marjorie Barnard's *A History of Australia* (1962).¹⁰ The strong commitment to being stylish is likely to be the legacy of Sir William Keith Hancock, whose *Australia* (1930)¹¹ determined the

⁷ Henry Reynolds. *The Law of the Land*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1992, pp. 195–196.

⁸ See "post-Mabo period" and "post-Mabo archeology" in Mudrooroo. *Us Mob: History, Culture, Struggle: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1995, p. 219.

⁹ I adapt the distinction between "conservative" and "attacker" historians from Raymond Evans et al. *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland*. Race and Aboriginal Studies series. Brookvale, NSW: Australia & New Zealand Book, 1975.

¹⁰ Marjorie Barnard. *A History of Australia*. 1962. Australian Classics series. London: Angus & Robertson, 1980.

¹¹ W.K. Hancock. *Australia*. London: Ernest Benn, 1930.

standard of Australian historiography for more than three decades. Hancock's influence was unavoidable also because he wrote a primary school history textbook for a generation of children to grow up with.¹² Regarded by many as "one of Australia's finest ever historians,"¹³ he emphasised the need for "span" and ignored occasional slips of facts if they did not support the theme of the book or if they seemed marginal. His basic themes were "change," "progress," and an appraisal of the monarchy. His works allowed hardly any space for Aboriginal prehistory and contemporaneous history, taking for granted the extinction of its practitioners:

The advance of British civilisation made inevitable "the natural progress of the aboriginal race towards extinction" - it is the soothing phrase of an Australian Governor. In truth, a hunting and a pastoral industry cannot co-exist within the same bounds. [...] It might still be possible to save a remnant of the race upon well-policed local reserves in Central and Northern Australia. [...] From time to time it [the benevolent Australian democracy] remembers the primitive people whom it has dispossessed, and sheds over their predestined passing an economical tear.¹⁴

The tendency of being theme-oriented at the cost of undesirable facts and details, however, cost dearly by the 1970s. It led to the suppression of one major fact: that the Aborigines have rights on the continent due to prior occupation, and these rights were taken away from them in government-supported frontier violence. Emerging new histories from the 70s go back to the archives and to direct fieldwork to rediscover the silenced facts.

Pre-1970 Australian historiography abounds in legendary figures and mythmaking treatises. Manning Clark, another father figure of national history, was also noticed for generously and notoriously ignoring factual mistakes he made in his history. Being a great teacher and an exceptional character, he took the liberty of ignoring petty details for the sake of overall tendencies, and was to receive sharp criticism from some contemporaries and posterity in the mid-1990s

¹² W.K. Hancock. *Two Centuries of Change: An Elementary History for Young Australians*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1934.

¹³ Trevor J. Daly. "Discovering Hancock: A Profile of an Australian Environmental Historian (W.K. Hancock)." *Limina* 4 (1988) 69-84, p. 69.

¹⁴ W.K. Hancock. *Australia*, p. 33.

for "his cavalier attitude towards his evidence."¹⁵ Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) has suffered no less severe attacks for dismissing the Aborigines and women from his story of the formation of a national identity. Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966) rapidly dismisses the question of Aboriginal resistance as a "relatively mild threat,"¹⁶ thus taking the side of "occupation" as opposed to "invasion" in the debate. Even in his more recent books and journalism, he has denied the relevance of the colonial Aboriginal past to the present:

My view is that we should be proud of much of the *ancient* Aboriginal history of this land; we should be proud of much of the British history of this land.¹⁷

In other words, he is willing to praise Aboriginal history as a separate entity as long as it does not interfere in time, space or events with the Australian past of his traditional narrative, i.e. the paradigm of Australian history beginning from 1788. Bain Attwood concludes that

Blainey's allowance for this pre-colonial past is relatively unimportant, for it is either deemed to be already past or it is assumed that will eventually become so in effect, and so is incommensurate with the British Australian past which, by comparison, is conceived of as part of the ongoing Australian present.¹⁸

Certainly no two books of the pre-1970 period are identical and equally ignorant of the central role of race relations in Australia's past. General features, however, are easily deductible from a summative reading of these works.

They start the chronology of Australia's history from the European discoverers and the arrival of the First Fleet of convicts in 1788. They devote virtually no place for Aboriginal prehistory, so consequently, there is no place for describing European-Aboriginal relations in colonial times either. There is no acknowledgement of the conflicts that resulted from the co-existence of the black

¹⁵ Carl Bridge. "Manning Clark and the Ratbag Tradition." *Australian Nationalism Reconsidered: Maintaining a Monocultural Tradition in a Multicultural Society*. Ed. Adi Wimmer. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1999, p. 236.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Blainey. *The Tyranny of Distance*. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966, p. 132.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Blainey quoted in Bain Attwood. "Mabo, Australia and the End of History." *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*. Ed. B. Attwood. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996, p. 109.

¹⁸ Bain Attwood. "Mabo," p. 109.

and white races. The settlement of Australia becomes a remarkably peaceful event, devoid of violence on the frontier. Colonisers fight with the land and not its inhabitants. Pioneering settlers conquer large portions of the empty outback, which, in turn, forms the Australian character: the bush becomes the centre of the national ethos. Geographical or environmental determinism forms the fate of the white people. From the perspective of a white-centred historiography, the Aboriginal experience of the past can be ignored as insignificant in the progress of the Australian nation. Accordingly, the Aborigines do not seem to belong to the past of modern Australia. Russel Ward gives voice to this conviction in the preface of his *Australia: A Short History* (first published in 1965):

This book seeks to stress those elements in Australian history which have been most influential in giving the inhabitants of the country a sense of their own distinctive identity, and so in making a new nation.¹⁹

If the existence of Aboriginal civilisation on the continent is dealt with in more than half a page, the emphasis is always on the helplessness of the primitives in the face of the superior British civilisation. Aboriginal-white relations surface in central policies only; relations are limited to some description of contact through missions, governmental policies, and protecting institutions. His subchapter entitled "Mild Aborigines" illuminates Ward's conception of a frontier without firearms where there was no violence between Europeans and Aborigines because of the latter's unwarlike nature:

One difficulty that Australian pioneers [...] did not have to contend with was a warlike native race [...] men seldom had to go armed on the Australian frontier.²⁰

Some descriptive features of the general histories before the paradigm-shift include a small-case spelling of the words "aboriginal," "the aborigine," and "natives," because they were not recognised as a people, let alone peoples. Rather, the policies of the protection era (1890s–1940s) preferred segregating them to reserves, so that they could be taken care of as children or wards for their own good. Neither history, nor the law, nor politics regarded them as a people with cultural, proprietary or political rights on the continent. The assimilation era (1940s–1960s) brought some concern for the plight of the unfortunates in the

¹⁹ Russel Ward. *Australia: A Short History*. Walkabout Pocketbook series. Sydney: Ure Smith, 1975, p. vii.

²⁰ Russel Ward, pp. 25–26.

form of improving social conditions, but no revaluation of their role in the nation's past and present. A tell-tale conclusive sentence of Barnard's *A History of Australia* created a wide uproar among the Aboriginal people of Australia:

Gradually we may become one people. The most practical thing that those who criticise native policy could do would be to marry an aboriginal, bring up their half-caste children to marry white again, and so assist nature's remedy of assimilation.²¹

Book covers also emphasise peaceful and progressive colonisation. A common pattern is to represent Sydney Cove and one of the first governors surveying the landscape with a sailing ship in the background so as to acknowledge and maintain the link with Britain. The powerful symbolism of such an image is even more evident when it comes into confrontation with the silenced undercurrent of Australian history. The front cover of the fifth (1975) edition of Russel Ward's *Australia: A Short History* displays a photograph of Sydney Harbour with the Opera House and an ocean-liner passing by, presumably symbolising Australia's progress in the last three centuries. Definitely not a larger time-span because Ward does not give voice to the Aboriginal (pre)history of the continent. The titles of the first and second chapters are "Australia today" and "Convicts and currency, 1788-1821," which shows that the first marked date as well as a period-start in Australian history is 1788. The content, thus, is in sharp contrast with the name of the *Walkabout* Pocketbook series and its logo: an Aboriginal X-ray painting. Even the titles of the chapters are underlined with a symbolic snake figure as an obvious reference to Aboriginal culture and art. The attempt of the publisher to include the Aborigine into Australian culture is not reflected in the content of the book which is clearly about the political history of white Australia.

A major theme of post-Mabo history, the Aboriginal experience of the past was virtually absent from the old paradigm. It is not that it was unknown: the coexistence of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in the country was an everyday social reality in Australia, however politically suppressed the facts and the implications were. But the part the Aborigines had played and were later doomed to play in the formation of the continent was regarded as insignificant compared to the progress made since the coming of the white civilisation. Occasional attempts to assess race relations reflect a lack of research not only

²¹ Marjorie Barnard, p. 666.

because of ideological reasons, but because of the lack of sources. The *Historical Records of Australia*,²² the multi-series and multivolume collection of government documents that historians relied on extensively, does not seem to have given adequate support to (any) researchers on this topic. The topic of Aboriginal (pre)history and culture, as well as European-Aboriginal relations belongs to the category of “the great Australian silence” at this time. W.E.H. Stanner

described this silence as ‘a cult of forgetfulness’ or ‘disremembering’ that had been ‘practiced on a national scale.’ [...] And, as well as there being a silence, there had also been a silencing: ‘the great Australian silence,’ Stanner argued, ‘reigns [over] the other side of a story,’ an Aboriginal history, the telling of which, he recognised, ‘would have to be a world [...] away from the conventional histories of the coming and development of British civilisation.’²³

Before rejecting the claims of the Yolngu clans to native title to their lands in the *Gove* case (1971), Justice Blackburn examined past evidence, and concluded that there had been no public recognition “that the relationship of the aboriginals to the land of the colony posed any serious problem.”²⁴ It is not surprising that he came to such a conclusion, given the silence of the old paradigm of Australian history on this crucial issue. Supported by new research, the *Mabo* decision (1992) brought an entirely different conclusion. Moreover, the majority of judges in the *Wik* case (1998) relied on the legacy of *Mabo* when they decided that the pastoral leases in front of the Court are a product of Australian history. Without going into detail on this specific case concerning one aspect of native title, let me point out that the judges relied exclusively on historical material before 1849. The primary sources used by them testify deep concern for Aboriginal property rights and legislate against the violent expropriation that took place on the frontier in those days. The *Wik* case reveals the strength of the new historical paradigm in two major points: (1) that the judges used sources that were rediscovered by new historians, and relied exclusively on the version of history according to the new

²² *Historical Records of Australia*. Ser. I-IV. Vol. I-XXVI. Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1912-1925.

²³ Bain Attwood, ed. *In the Age of Mabo*, p. xiv.

²⁴ *Federal Law Review* 17 (1971) p. 255. quoted in Henry Reynolds. “Whose Land? Recognition of Aboriginal Ownership and the Promise of Compensation.” *The Land and the People: The Wik Lectures*. Ed. Richard Morton. Carlton, Vic.: History Institute, 1998, p. 28.

paradigm; (2) that since *Mabo* it became acceptable and “foundational” to use “a distinctive reading of history” “in the formulation of legal norms.”²⁵

The late 1960s saw the rise of a new generation of historians, who derived their fresh perspective from formidable studies in anthropology. C.D. Rowley observed that

a few young historians are beginning to work in the field of Aboriginal affairs, but it is mainly the anthropologists, in their attempts to explain how things got the way they are, who have been forced to write history.²⁶

The intrusion of anthropology into historiography became absolutely necessary at a point of time when “the great Australian silence” was becoming suffocating. Under the social and political pressures of the late 1960s, the old historical paradigm arrived at the stage of crisis. Attitudes, ideologies, methods, sources proved to be incapable of solving anomalies that surfaced whenever, in the atmosphere of political liberation, black and white voices clashed. As the old paradigm denied any relevance of an Aboriginal past to the present and failed to recognise the root of the problems in colonial history, a new discipline was called in to help. Anthropologists gathered data during fieldwork in day-to-day immersion into Aboriginal culture. Ronald Berndt kept his anthropological treatise *The World of the First Australians* deliberately descriptive so that the facts accumulated by individual scholars could serve as a foundation for well established new research instead of speculation. The findings accumulated in approximately three decades made him call out for the importance of having a “good grasp of the ‘facts’ of a situation before theorizing about that situation.”²⁷ Directed by C.D. Rowley, the Aborigines Project of the Social Sciences Research Council of Australia (1964–1967) was the first independently financed and controlled survey of Aborigines throughout Australia. As the first centrally governed survey in the field, it must have been a fertile source of new ideas for anthropology, historiography and, as a result, for politics – a kind of catalyst revealing anomalies and undermining the conservative paradigm. Surfacing

²⁵ High Court Justices quoted in Frank Brennan. “The Land and the People Today: Reconciliation.” *The Land and the People*. Ed. Richard Morton, p. 50.

²⁶ C.D. Rowley. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. Sociology and Anthropology series. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1972, p. 48.

²⁷ R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt. *The World of the First Australians*. 1964. Sydney: Lansdowne, 1977, Foreword, n.p.

anomalies included outstanding high rates of mortality, poverty, criminality, unemployment, health and housing problems, and all forms of racial discrimination on the one hand, and rich, vivid and diverse cultures with strong oral traditions of their attachment to the ancestral land on the other hand. The answers that old histories gave to problem-solving questions proved to be totally inadequate. In fact, both asking and answering such vital questions as “Why do Aborigines die in large numbers in spite of the welfare measures of the patronising government? Who owns the land the Aborigine live on? Was Australia occupied peacefully or invaded with force?” fell outside the scope of the old paradigm. Following the political changes after 1966, Rowley’s primary aim in *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* was to write a survey of Aboriginal affairs for practical use in policy making:

This survey should, I believed [*sic*], be as comprehensible as possible, offering a coherent view of past and present policies and practices, since there were no Australia-wide studies which could offer background on the situations which would have to be considered by policy makers...²⁸

He also predicted that the problem of dealing with the Aboriginal question in Australian society “is bound to become a major political issue,”²⁹ and his prediction came true in the movements for human and land rights for the Aborigine that resulted in the *Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act* (1975) and the *Commonwealth Native Title Act* (1993).

Rowley’s work is not another general history of Australia, although the scope it covers is not limited in time or space, understandably as a result of the overall survey the author directed. To the contrary, it is limited in topics. Rowley devotes a whole book to discovering fields of history that earlier historiography was practically silent about. “Failure of colonial administration,” “destruction,” “injustice,” are keywords from the titles of chapters and subchapters of his work, which were soon accompanied by “resistance,” “exclusion,” “exploitation,” “extermination,” “genocide” in articles and books by other anthropologically trained or infected historians, such as Kenneth Maddock, Raymond Evans, and Henry Reynolds.

²⁸ C.D. Rowley, p. v.

²⁹ C.D. Rowley, p. vi.

Besides enunciating that "the frontier in Australia has been marked with a line of blood,"³⁰ works of the new paradigm break down, or at least question, concepts of "progress," "assimilation," and "freedom." Maddock exemplifies the emancipation attempts of the Australian Aborigine with that of the German Jews to illuminate the nature of assimilationist policies, and to revise the established view about assimilation as a process. He writes,

if these criteria are all [i.e. progress is quantitative and accumulative in time (cf. Kroeber, *Anthropology* 1923)], then to defend Aborigines against assimilation is to hold out against progress.³¹

He suggests that the concept of "progress" in history needs to be revised. It is a compelling demand brought to the surface by anthropological research work, and completed, though in another field of study, by Thomas Kuhn's famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962, 1970).

Books of the new paradigm rely on a huge stock of previously unpublished sources and manuscripts to explore questions left in silence by earlier generations of historians: race relations and violence. New concepts are introduced, old terms gain new working definitions: legal and political anomalies demand redefining who an Aborigine is,³² what "freedom" is, what "possession" means. Most significantly, the British "occupation" of Australia is redefined to imply invasion or conquest. Accounts of "peaceful settlement" are discredited. The chronology of the history of the continent is expanded to 40,000 BP (more recently to c. 100,000 BP) and books treat this period accordingly: 1788 is not a starting date any longer. The new paradigm brings a new perspective, that of the other side of the frontier. Young researchers come from outside the prestigious Melbourne or Sydney schools, most often from the northern regions where racial tension is the most acute. They often serve the shocking new facts in a passionate style. Not only the facts, but also the accompanying language is often deliberately shocking:

The Aboriginal has been 'written out' of Australian history; the tragic significance of conflicts have long been bowdlerized and forgotten. Yet, even if vicariously, our guilt remains, as does our responsibility.

³⁰ Kenneth Maddock. *The Australian Aborigines: A Portrait of their Society*. Sociology and Anthropology series. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1975, p. ix.

³¹ Kenneth Maddock, p. 181.

³² C.D. Rowley, pp. 341-342.

Aboriginal attitudes take on a new dimension in the light of history, and no policies should be formulated except in that light. This is a book to stir the sleeping white Australian conscience.³³

The authors find it important to classify their predecessors historiographically so as to define their own position. Raymond Evans distinguishes two groups: conservatives and attackers. Looking up the references attached to the representative names in the endnotes, one can come to an interesting, though not too surprising, conclusion. The publication dates belonging to the works of the conservative group give the following sequence: 1964, 1966, 1966, and 1966. The attacks are dated 1970, 1972 and 1973. Since there is a clear caesura observable between these two groups of dates, Evans' volume supports my conclusion that the paradigm-shift in Australian historiography began around the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

The products of new research are dressed into new outfit. Tell-tale visible features such as book covers, typeface, publishing series, titles and headings disclose the content. Covers portray Aboriginal Australians, scenes of contact on the frontier, or patterns of Aboriginal art. The word "Aboriginal" cannot go without capitalisation in any of its forms, what is more, "Australian Aborigines" are gradually referred to as "Aboriginal Australians." More recently "indigenous/Indigenous peoples" is becoming the neutral term, and individual tribal names like "Warlpiri," "Yolngu," "Koori," "Nyoongar," etc., are used to professionally and politically acknowledge diversity. New knowledge is first published in new series, such as *Sociology & Anthropology*, and *Race & Aboriginal Studies*. A substantial chapter on Aboriginal culture leads the sequence of events in general histories to provide foundation for an understanding of the consequent contact history. The proportion of writing on Aboriginal matters in such general histories does not go under 10%, and the topic is always very well indexed. Titles and headings display words like "invasion" and "dispossession" on the one hand, and "self-determination," "reconciliation," on the other.

The coming of the new historical paradigm was necessarily politicised, because it attacked the foundation stone of the existing legal and political order. Considerable political activity, journalism and public debate accompanied its intrusion into academia. The High Court's decision in *Mabo v. Queensland* (1992) and the subsequent *Commonwealth Native Title Act* (1993) declared conservative

³³ C.D. Rowley, back cover.

views of history untenable. Through these events, Aboriginal people officially entered the history of Australia, which caused a series of articles in *The Age* as a form of public debate between Geoffrey Blainey and Henry Reynolds. Since in Blainey's imagination, and in the narrative discourse he represents, Australia is "one nation – one continent,"³⁴ and the area of land is identified with the idea of nation, he opposes the Mabo decision on the basis of the following argument:

In that long north-south corridor of Aboriginal lands there are only a couple of gaps of any size [...]. If, in 10 or 50 years' time, the Aborigines should move towards self-determination, this corridor could be the nucleus of a nation. [...] If the possession of land was as vital to individual survival as in 1788, we could easily respect the plea that today's Aborigines be granted their share, even more than their share. But today the ownership of land is not vital for the survival of any Australian family.³⁵

In his answer, Henry Reynolds points out a major weakness of Blainey's argument which is based on a misinterpretation of the past and a purposeful unwillingness to acknowledge any simultaneous existence of Aboriginal and European histories:

[Blainey's] most substantial criticism of the court is that the six judges who affirmed the existence of common law native title did so by projecting the standards of the present on to the fundamentally different world of 1788. But nothing is further from the truth. There was a clear recognition in the practice and the law of the British Empire that indigenous people had a form of title to their land based on their prior occupation.³⁶

Henry Reynolds' career is one of the classic examples of the new history. It also illuminates how the study of history can shape the legal and political practices of a country.³⁷ Anthropology took the initiative in the field of studying history in the late 1960s, whereas the 1980s saw the new perception of history leading jurisprudence out of the maze of practical problems. Born as a Tasmanian,

³⁴ Geoffrey Blainey. "Land Rights for All." *Age*. 16 Nov. 1993, n.p.

³⁵ Geoffrey Blainey. "Land Rights," n.p.

³⁶ Henry Reynolds. "Laws of the British Empire Recognised Form of Native Title." *Age*. Nov. 1993, n.p.

³⁷ A coincidence is that Henry Reynolds' wife, Margareth Reynolds became a Senator for Queensland.

Reynolds spent most of his research career at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland. He is the author of the prize-winning *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981), as well as *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (1987), *The Law of the Land* (1987), and several other volumes, the most recent of which is *Why Weren't We Told?* (1999).³⁸ He was a member of the Ministerial Reference Group on Aboriginal Education, frequently provides informal advice on land rights claims, and has been a respected commentator on Aboriginal history in the media for many years. The exposition of his radical views in the media has made him a common target for conservatives in the general society. Recently he has been dealing with what is currently the most controversial question relating to *Mabo*: pastoral leases. It is largely to his findings that the *Wik* judgement (1998) acknowledged the non-extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases, which cover a large portion of the land of Australia. Therefore, the issue is of great legal and political consequence. It is also of great historical interest because pastoral leases were created by the policies of the colonial office in the 1840s.

Reynolds' critical stance in historiography has been noted from the very beginning of his academic career.³⁹ C.D. Rowley's work inspired younger historians, including him and Raymond Evans, to address the themes of white violence and Aboriginal actions. Reynolds argued for a variety of Aboriginal strategies – resistance, accommodation and appropriation – in the face of the European presence. His most famous work, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, was first published by James Cook University, Townsville in 1981. Another expert in the field, Richard Broome writes that it is

a classic work which revealed how the traditional ideas of reciprocity, sorcery, exchange, and so forth, shaped the active and varied responses of Aboriginal people to Europeans on the frontier. This work dispelled the

³⁸ Henry Reynolds. *Why Weren't We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth about Our History*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1999.

³⁹ "One academic historian, Henry Reynolds has, however, recently attacked head-on those who have written 'the Aborigines [*sic*] out of our history [...] [and] also written out much of the violence,' in a short, though illuminating article entitled 'Violence, the Aborigines [*sic*] and the Australian Historian.' He has since supported this challenge with a thoughtfully chosen selection of documents, which, along with Rowley's chapter in *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, pays particular attention to race relations in Queensland for the first time. He is especially critical – and understandably so – of Ward's conception of a frontier without firearms and quotes examples from Queensland to show that it was 'never safe to go unarmed,'" writes Raymond Evans, p. 35.

passive image of Aboriginal people and brought them to the centre of frontier history.⁴⁰

The front cover of the book deserves deeper analysis. It displays an etching presumably from the early nineteenth century ("Aborigines surprised by Camels," without date), which shows two groups of people facing each other in the bush, the Australian frontier. Aboriginal men are standing with their back to the observer of the picture, facing the group of pioneering white men with their camels and packages. The blacks are holding their boomerangs still but ready to protect their women and everything that may be behind their back, though the picture does not show more. The observer unconsciously assumes the blacks' point of view. One is obliged to see the frontier from the Aboriginal perspective, because the perspectives of the picture force one to. This is "the other side of the frontier," meaning another perspective, as well as another interpretation of frontier history. As a sign of change between 1965 and 1981, it is worth mentioning that, in spite of their enormous conceptual differences, both Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* and Henry Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* were awarded the Ernest Scott Prize for the most distinguished work in Australian, New Zealand and the Colonial Pacific history.

Although the caesura between the two paradigms of history was obviously in the early 1970s, I suggest that the actual change of the paradigm was sanctioned by the decision of the High Court of Australia in *Mabo v. Queensland* in 1992. In social sciences, the changing of a paradigm is not the achievement of a single person, and thus it is very difficult to define when it began. It is always a long process. Something started in the 1970s that came to its close with the *Mabo* decision, which gave the legal verdict: a new paradigm was born. It belongs to the nature of paradigms that their change never comes without a sign. A growing number of inextricable anomalies precedes the change of the old pattern which, therefore, needs to be adjusted to answer the problems. In a period of crisis the new kind of solutions that come from outsiders or "attackers" challenge the paradigm in power. The change comes at a moment when the new framework provoked by the various new solutions becomes capable of answering most of or all the anomalies, and so eventually it becomes recognised, accepted and acknowledged. This happened with the *Mabo* and *Native Title* legislation, which legalised the change. In the meanwhile, books projecting conservative views and

⁴⁰ Richard Broome. "Historians, Aborigines and Australia: Writing the National Past." *In the Age of Mabo*. Ed. Bain Attwood, p. 69.

silences in their narratives were republished several times by major publishing houses and re-edited by their authors. Works with opposing views about European-Aboriginal relations were published side by side in the decades between 1970-1990, even as late as in the 1980s.

What is the nature of this new paradigm, then? At the most fundamental level it is characterised by the return of an Aboriginal past which had been suppressed by the dominant history through the means of silencing and disremembering. The "return of the Aborigine" to the history of Australia has profound consequences. It destroys the myth of "the youngest continent" by dramatically changing the chronology of Australian history, as well as the role of its protagonists: Aborigines become the first discoverers of Australia instead of Europeans. The past three decades have seen an enormous growth of interest among Aborigines in history, resulting in a discourse now commonly known as Aboriginal History. Among other things, this includes oral histories recorded by elderly people, younger Aborigines expressing their past in the field of arts, and Aboriginal spokespersons proclaiming rights of ownership to the aboriginal past.⁴¹ Bain Attwood summarises the essence of the change in powerful words:

it undermines the theory of peaceful settlement as well as the notions of British justice, humanitarianism and egalitarianism which were central to the Australian nationhood and identity constructed by the earlier history.⁴²

The political solution that the old paradigm gave to the anomalies was protection, paternalism, and assimilation. Inaugurated by the Keating government (1991-1996),⁴³ the new solution is Reconciliation: the official policy concerning Aboriginal relations, which involves a healing integration, if not a peace treaty, between the two cultures. Many Australians now believe that the understanding of their common past holds the key to Australia's future. The *Mabo* decision and

⁴¹ See, for example, Labumore (E. Roughsey), *An Aboriginal Mother Speaks of the Old and the New*. Eds. P. Memmott and R. Horsman. Fitzroy, Vic.: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1984; J. Davis and Mudrooroo Narogin et al., eds. *Paperbark: a collection of Black Australian writings*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990; paintings by Gordon Bennett; J. Ryan, *Mythscape: Aboriginal art of the desert* and *Paint Up Big: Warlpiri women's art of Lajamanu*. National Gallery of Victoria; Mudrooroo, *Us Mob*. The list is by no means complete.

⁴² Bain Attwood. "Mabo," p. 104. For the Australian self-image, see Russel Ward. *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1958.

⁴³ Note that Prime Minister Paul Keating's speechwriter was a historian, Don Watson.

the *Native Title Act* of 1993 have justified this belief. The emerging new paradigm of history cannot be dismissed simply as a “black armband view of history,”⁴⁴ to raise a feeling of guilt in the white Australian public. Its implications are much deeper than that. I firmly believe that the unfavourable political changes since 1996 (John Howard’s conservative Liberal/National Coalition government, or Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party) will not reverse the new paradigm. Nationalist and chauvinist political voices can reiterate obsolete views, but they do not bring up new anomalies and do not ask for new solutions. The new paradigm rewrote Aborigines into Australia’s past to enable them, as well as non-indigenous people cope with the future. By 1992 a scientific revolution changed the historical view of the academic community in which it occurred. The changing paradigm necessarily effected the contents and structure of textbooks and research works. In 1992 Aboriginal Studies was introduced into the school curriculum to educate further generations in accordance with policies on social justice and equity. A new generation of children may puzzle their curious parents with matter-of-fact answers, stating: “Well, we can do it [the school assignment] about anything, I thought I might do it on the white invasion!”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Blainey’s coinage “to describe the trend in Australian historiography toward focusing on hitherto neglected aspects of the country’s various histories of oppression.” Kerryn Goldsworthy. “‘Ordinary Australians’: Discourses of Race and Nation in Contemporary Australian Political Rhetoric.” *Australian Nationalism Reconsidered: Maintaining a Monocultural Tradition in a Multicultural Society*. Ed. Adi Wimmer. Tübingen: Stauffen Verlag, 1999, p. 220.

⁴⁵ Fr Frank Brennan SJ’s 9-year-old niece in Scrine, Gil, dir. *Talking Native Title & Reconciliation: Aboriginal and White Australians Speak Out*. Bendigo, Vic.: Video Education Australia, 1997.

Apocalypse without End

Morton D. Paley: *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999)

After his many studies on individual authors and poems, Morton D. Paley in this book tackles a much broader subject: the topos of "the imminence of an apocalypse that will be succeeded by a millennium" in English Romantic poetry. His book is a conclusion to an especially fruitful career (on Blake, Blake's *Jerusalem*, Coleridge's later poetry and English Romantic painting, to mention only a few of his most important works) and is a synthesis of present-day Romantic scholarship, reformulating earlier questions and introducing considerations that will allow a new whole to be constructed out of them. However, as a book on the 'End' necessarily shows, a conclusion is very often also a beginning and a middle. Paley's work is, similarly, a synthesis as well as a continuation and – hopefully – a new beginning in the author's career.

The questions raised in *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* are firmly rooted in a critical tradition that Paley himself has contributed to create. More closely, his project is based on M. H. Abrams's definition of Romanticism as the age

of secularisation of biblical paradigms. "Much of what distinguishes writers I call 'Romantic,'" Abrams writes in his fundamental book *Natural Supernaturalism*, "derives from the fact that they undertook, whatever their religious creed or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes and values which had been based on the relationship of the Creator to his creation, but to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature."¹ By examining how "apocalypse and millennium are envisaged on the historical plane, in nature, or within the self" in Romantic poetry (p. 2), Paley follows the Abramsian thesis – a statement that has by now become one of the most traditional (and questionable) starting points in Romantic studies.

Paley's reading of some of the texts, however, seems to contradict the overarching Abramsian definition. For instance, secularisation becomes highly dubious with relation to Blake, whose prophetic books – according to an earlier remark by Paley – combine 'literal,' 'allegorical' (historical), 'moral' (psychological) and 'anagogical' (cosmic) layers of meaning.² By focusing on particular poems, Paley allows the texts to contradict in similar manner general statements about Roman-

ticism. He is very often ready to emphasise the 'otherness' of a text such as Byron's "Darkness" (a poem that does not preserve biblical schemes but offers an alternative to them). This is because Paley does not intend to reach any clear-cut definition himself; he is much more content with calling attention to ambiguities in the texts and to critical disagreement in their reading. A typical example of this method is his treatment of "The Stone and the Shell" episode in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. After comparing diverse interpretations of the passage (according to which Imagination is either threatened by apocalyptic forces or is an apocalyptic force itself), he concludes that "they could be viewed as providing several related vantage-points on the 'deluge now at hand'" (p. 164). He also refers to approaches (like feminism) that are outside his scope; in this way he does not suppress but provokes further thinking on the reader's part.

Paley's fondness of indeterminate meanings and open-ended questions suggests his indebtedness to deconstructionist thought. However, the approach that most influenced his basically traditional (Abramsian) work is New Historicism. Even though he does not adopt a New Historical theory of history, he relies on achievements of New Historicism (works by

Nicholas Roe and E. P. Thompson, among others) to a great extent. The subject matter of his book almost predestines him to do so, for apocalypse in English Romantic poetry is, without exception, linked to the French Revolution, *the* apocalyptic experience of the period. Paley is very careful to map – with the help of historical works and New Historicism – the English ideological climate before, during and after the Revolution, paying special attention to the shifting evaluation of the events that explains their shifting representation in Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth and later Byron, Shelley and Keats. By pointing out the inconclusiveness of revolutionary experience, he is able to explain why the French Revolution appears as an endless apocalypse in many Romantic texts. He also reconstructs the literary debate between radicals and conservatives over the 'proper interpretation' of the Revolution and calls attention to intertextual links between these argumentative books and pamphlets (Burke's *Reflections*, for instance) and the poems he deals with.

The questions raised by Paley are complex and difficult to handle. Not only because political and ideological features of the age and their manifestation in works of art are complicated problems, but also because political aspects are inextricably linked to theo-

logical-philosophical and literary problems: these together determine the construction of apocalypse-millennium schemes in literary works. All the three aspects are many-faceted in themselves, and thus all of them must be handled delicately. To mention just the most important, neither apocalypse nor millennium can receive a straightforward definition that could be used throughout, because the two themes are represented in several different ways in the Old and New Testament with and without each other. Paley chooses to rely primarily on the apocalypse-millennium scheme of the Book of Revelation – however, this book is itself “a work that seems to offer total vision and structural wholeness but that actually dissolves into fragments in reading.”³ The conceptual framework becomes even more fragmentary when we consider how many kinds of interpretations have been proposed for the Book of Revelation. M. H. Abrams names the literal and the spiritual approaches,⁴ while Kermode distinguishes between an imminent and an immanent End.⁵ Paley follows both of these critics when he shows that Romantic adaptations of the pattern tend to shift from external to internal interpretations. However, by doing so he has to ignore problems that cannot be explained by the concept of internali-

sation – Blake’s claim, for instance, that “the Last Judgement is not a Fable or Allegory but a Vision” (E 544) remains uninterpretable in these terms.⁶

Beside addressing questions of history and theology, Paley has to account for an enormous amount of literature in and about the apocalyptic mode; works that – like Milton’s *Paradise Lost* – greatly influenced Romantic treatments of the theme. After these comes the real kaleidoscope: the chaos of Romantic renderings of the topos. The permutations that Paley examines seem to follow as many strategies as intertextuality can; they vary from prophetic affirmation of apocalypse and millennium (Blake: *Jerusalem*) to satire of contemporary society (Coleridge-Southey: ‘The Devil’s Thoughts’), from reluctant prophecy (Coleridge: ‘Ode on the Departing Year’) to ironical negation of apocalyptic knowledge (Byron: *Cain*) and a mocking of millenarian beliefs (Byron: *Don Juan, III*). In between, there are the fascinating border cases such as Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* or Keats’s *Hyperion*, fragments that simultaneously affirm and reject apocalyptic revelation. Such a wide range of texts cannot be handled together; this is why Paley reads each poem separately and analyses the apocalypse-millennium relationship

anew in each particular case. As a result, his book is slightly fragmentary, but this quality reflects the important characteristic of his subject matter.

The framework of the book – the concept of ‘Romantic poetry’ – is not less elusive than the apocalypse-millennium pattern. However, Paley relies on the traditional notion of Romanticism as a coherent whole; he does not take into account that the movement has started to dissolve into several different ‘Romanticisms’ for contemporary critics and has even been claimed to be “a posthumous movement,” a projection into the past.⁷ He uses the traditional concept as a working tool without further justification or questioning of its validity. Similarly, he does not reconsider the relevance of the canon. Even though many critics have proposed different classifications of the authors or insisted on an expansion of the canon, Paley deals with only the canonised six ‘masters’ of Romantic poetry. Even his passage on Mary Shelley – one of the most important and fascinating parts of his book – remains an addendum to the chapter on Byron.

The structure of the book is based on this traditional concept of Romanticism: one chapter for each of the six ‘masters.’ However, Paley does not intend to give a full picture of the career of these poets. He focuses on a

few works by each poet that possibly have apocalyptic or millennial associations (although, as I have mentioned, the definition of ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘millennial’ remains the most important question of the book). The chapters on Blake and Coleridge (Paley’s earlier field of study) offer the most detailed readings, while the chapter on Keats is rather a raising of questions and introducing suggestions than a complete analysis. The slightly unbalanced and rigid structure of the book is corrected by frequent cross-references between the chapters; in this way the poems appear not as isolated enterprises but as interrelated units that may participate in the same (radical) discourse and echo or contradict each other in many ways. One of the most fascinating motifs that Paley follows throughout his readings is the image of the snake; it is an emblem of the Fall and of Evil but also an emblem of Christ, a symbol of recurrence (the snake biting its tail, or the *ouroboros*) but also of bursting out from the cycle of history (the two-headed *amphisbaena*); it is also a popular revolutionary symbol – related to apocalypse either as a political, or as a theological or philosophical concept in many ways. Its frequent occurrences create a link between several texts that Paley deals with, while the distinctions among its various mean-

ings make this a thread as intricate and winding as the snake itself.

The greatest merits of Paley's work lie in his careful and thorough method of 'uncoiling' such serpents. He collects relevant material with the utmost care for all the poems he examines, turning to previous critics (sometimes questioning their validity), and adding to them his own findings. In this way, he reconstructs several relevant contexts for each poem (the political, ideological, biographical and intertextual surroundings of a work, for instance) and interprets the apocalyptic-millennial scheme of the poem in the light of these contexts. His method sometimes resembles that of an archaeologist: he pieces together details and evidence with extreme accuracy. His findings are, similarly, sometimes as solid and valuable as those of an archaeologist (his new interpretations for the name 'Demogorgon' in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*).

One feels that some scepticism is lurking behind this method that makes Paley's work akin to neopositivism. It seems that he doubts whether criticism can arrive at any valid generalisation about Romanticism and goes on to use traditional concepts because he cannot be certain that the new generalisations are any

better. This scepticism has undoubtedly been motivated by the diverse and elusive nature of Romantic poetry and by Paley's great familiarity with Romantic thought. He does not want to lose the details for the sake of abstractions. He does not want to put an end to a debate that is inherently endless. The coherence and reliability of this approach makes his book both valuable and a refreshing reading among many contemporary works that offer ground-breaking concepts without self-criticism and accuracy.

VERONIKA RUTTKAY

NOTES

¹ M.H. Abrams. *Natural Supernaturalism*. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1971, p. 13.

² Morton D. Paley. *Energy and Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970, p. 63.

³ Christopher Burdon. *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700-1834*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 29.

⁴ Abrams. *Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 56-65.

⁵ Kermode. *The Sense of an Ending*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966, p. 25.

⁶ The Abramsian concept of internalisation has been called into doubt by many critics, most recently by Christopher Z. Hobson in his *The Chained Boy: Orc and Blake's Idea of Revolution*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, London: Associated Ups, 1999.

⁷ Marilyn Butler. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981, p. 2.

Born a Woman and Made a Woman

Women's narratives and their authority

Sélei Nóra: *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd: 19. századi angol írónők* [19th century English woman writers] (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1999)

Nóra Sélei's book is a rare new work of literary and feminist studies in Hungary. It is not only about six novels by 19th century English women writers, but poses such questions to the discipline, to reading texts, that are still very rare in Hungarian academic works and proclamations. The majority of literary scholars and critics seem to maintain that the study of literature can and must be separated from the study of things that are "outside" the text, that a text can and must be read without considering the historical and cultural circumstances among and of which it speaks. They thus want to retain the notion of a universal science, keep the notion of "value" unchallenged, as if value judgements were not culturally and historically specific.

Feminist practice, and feminist studies with it, must challenge the universalist stance of this kind of discourse by exposing its inherent dual-

ism. Feminist scholars have been arguing that the universalist stance (with its conflation of the masculine to represent the human and the confinement of the feminine to a secondary position of devalued "otherness") rests upon a classical system of dualistic oppositions, such as, for instance: active/passive, rational/irrational, universal/particular, masculine/feminine. They argue that this dualistic mode of thinking creates binary differences only to ordain them in a hierarchical scale: if the speech of men is what is universal, then the speech of a woman is either similar to it, and then she approaches universality as an exception in her similarity; or, if it is different in any way, it is particularly *of women* – hopelessly other from the stance of the masculine/universal norm. Of course, for a long time these possibilities were not at all self-evidently given to women. The novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë were well-received by critics until their sex was revealed: as women novelists, they became shocking and immoral.

What emerges in post-structuralist feminist re-readings of critical stances and literary works is a radical redefinition of the text and of the textual away from the dualistic mode: away from the artificial separation of "inside" and "outside," aesthetics and politics. The text is approached by

these critics as both a semiotic and a material structure, that is to say not as an isolated item locked in a dualistic opposition to a social context or to an activity of interpretation. The text must rather be understood as a chain reaction encompassing a web of social relations. Séllei's interpretations of the six novels she has chosen entail a series of questions about the concept of women in the 19th century, about places from which to speak, about the possibilities of women to have their own narrative, about their relationship to their sexed and sexualised bodies, merged with very close readings of the texts. What is at stake in this textual practice, therefore, is not only the activity of interpretation but also that of decoding the network of connections and effects that link the text to an entire sociosymbolic system. What we are faced here is, in other words, a new materialist theory of the text and of textual practice. Séllei seeks out connections and effects that move beyond existing intellectual and paradigmatic frames in Hungarian literary studies.

Her study, which focuses on semiotics, spaces, bodies and modes of speech, shows to what extent the existence of a woman writer's voice was not self-evident in the 19th century. As she elucidates in the introduction, the formation of a women's tradition nec-

essarily rearranged literature and its history. And the rewriting of history necessarily displaces the hegemonic history which poses itself as objective knowledge: it creates an alternative history, displaying that any history is necessarily fictional (p. 15). The knowledge of rewriting of history is based on this critical self-consciousness. The 19th century writers whose works are interpreted in this book, however, were not conscious of this: they had to carve their way through contradictory frames, and create a place from which to write, a narrative which contains their vision of the world and of the contradictory frames. Thus it is often a doubleness that marks their texts: a double consciousness, a submission to and a critique of frames (either those of gender or those of a genre), a submission to and a critique of the linguistic markers and codes they use.

As the introduction stresses, almost all of the women writers began to publish under male pseudonyms, except for Jane Austen who hid herself (was hidden) as "A Lady" and Elisabeth Gaskell who published as Mrs. Gaskell - marking herself as a wife and a mother. The introduction and the texts Nóra Séllei chose to translate and publish in the Appendix, help to situate the writers and their works: the apologia written by Jane Austen's

brother, which is based on the reduction of the figure of his sister as a writer, Robert Southey's uncle-like advice to Charlotte Brontë, stating that writing is not at all a womanly profession, the uproar of critics when they found out that the authors of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* were not men, and the immediate politicisation of the woman who moves beyond the boundaries that are set to her gender, show what these writers had to face and elude while necessarily internalise as well. The place from which their speech originates is necessarily that of a counter-speech, and is marked by this doubleness: they inevitably have to use a patriarchal code, but to what extent it remains patriarchal and to what extent they eventually change it is a question that comes up again and again in Séllei's interpretations.

The male character in George Eliot's short story, *The Lifted Veil*, who does not behave according to the norms he should comply with, and thus does not fit his immediate environment, seems to question essentialist notions of gender roles – yet, at the same time, the short story reflects and reiterates the commonly used myth of the “dangerous female,” and the writer often dissociated herself from feminism. This inherent dualism is very significant in the works interpreted by

Séllei: they often fluctuate between a reiteration and a rewriting of patriarchal stories. It is not possible not to reiterate them – as Séllei says, “this is what is coded in the nature of power” (p. 27). Luckily, the voice of dissent, the speech from its “outside” is also coded in power – and this compliance with and critique of gendered power relations is what links these authors and their works to one another.

Nóra Séllei's aim, as she puts it in the introduction, is both to re-read texts that are canonised and often interpreted, and to find works that are forgotten: the reinterpretation of well known texts displays the characteristics and possibilities of feminist interpretation, while it is also a basic theory of feminist literary criticism that there are hidden and forgotten texts which are worth re-reading (p. 31). Her main questions focus upon the relationship of the novels to then existing paradigms, and their dissimilarities to or displacements of those paradigms (in order to make available fictive spaces to women), and to what extent rewritten paradigms became more appropriate to the narratives of women who had a different vision of society and women's place in it than male writers. Thus it is inevitable that Séllei reflects upon cultural and social questions of the 19th century, and that the dialogue of social, cultural and

structural questions shapes her interpretations.

Her reading of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* raises the question of the connection between choices in narrative typologies and political attitudes. Contemporary readings of Richardson and Fielding also explicitly thematised this conjunction. As Claudia Johnson elucidates, sensitivity was a term reformists often used, while conservatives condemned it, because they held it responsible for the spreading of moral relativism and radical individualism instead of suggesting compliance with social control. At the same time, however, sensitivity was also a favourite term of Burkean reactionaries, who wanted keep feelings and emotions in the frame of the family, as opposed to individual thinking (quoted on pp. 57–8). Jane Austen's novel, which is the first she intended to publish, but the last that actually was published, maintains an ongoing dialogue with sentimental and Gothic narratives. This dialogue is full of irony: the novel turns to these other narratives with the subversive attitude of parodying them – and this dialogue is also the fictive space in which it places itself. It is a parody of Gothic fiction, which is about that which cannot be uttered according to the laws of language – the laws of the female characters' lan-

guage. Nóra Séllei shows how Austen weaves her attitude to the political and moral debates about the types and proper forms of behaviour and upbringing of women into her narrative, through playing with existing frames of narration.

Séllei's interpretation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* concentrates on the writer's critique of the romantic creator/genius. According to her reading, the author's main question concerns the place of the monster, and she traces its location in the mind of the monster's creator. The closer reading of the creator's attitudes shows that Frankenstein not only transgresses the limits of knowledge, but does this in compliance with an aggressive vision of approaching (winning over) nature and science. His forceful penetration into that which he desires denies the subjectivity of the other. The psychoanalytic readings of his dreams (in which he kills his mother and his love) and his relations show that in the psychic space he dwells in there is no love or any possibility of a real interpersonal relationship, only desire that nevertheless denies what it desires, the desire to possess, and a solipsistic self-containedness. One of the major problems that Frankenstein has to face concerns physicality and embodiment. Séllei, with a fine and well-considered move, reads the position of

Mary Shelley as an author as that of the monster: the silenced being regarded as the other, the desired and disregarded object of a genius's love. She does this through an additional reading of the first preface to the novel, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley (in which he refers to the author as "he," without actually naming "him"), and Mary Shelley's second preface, written more than a decade later, in which she turns to the familiar self-denial of a being denied.

Contemporary critics of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, who, after learning that the author was a woman, regarded the novel as rude and indecent, because of the tone of its autobiographical narrator, and accused her of "moral Jacobinism," "Chartism and revolt," recognised the tone of the woman narrator as potentially revolutionary (even though the narrative does not refer to politics at all, cf. pp. 140-1). The very act of giving voice to a female figure, the creation of a narrator who strives to write her own story as opposed to the ways, tones and narratives prescribed for her, is a political act (just as prescriptions are political). This led Séllei to highlight the problem of finding a different voice and writing a different narrative than what is expected in the chapter about this novel. It is possible to read the novel as the creation of a

narrative about the narrator as opposed to all other histories that try to narrate and confine her. The relevance of this reading is most astonishingly shown in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel written by Jean Rhys (Nóra Séllei mentions her in a footnote), in which Rochester's wife, the madwoman, narrates her version of their story. Séllei concentrates on the methods of silencing in this chapter – her close reading reveals scenes and expressions which show the difficulties of the narrator's intention: giving voice to herself, and being able to direct her story.

To re-read *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, Séllei chose metaphors of space, houses and bodies as points of departure. By claiming – in contradiction to traditional interpretations – that there is not a self-evident and symmetrical opposition between the two generations of the characters and especially between the two houses, the Earnshaw and Linton families, she displaces what has been formerly central in most analyses, and concentrates on the characters' relations to the order that shapes their bodies and the spaces they dwell in. Central to her re-reading are the place of illnesses in the narrative and a psychological rendering of the relationship of woman characters to eating and their body. Another major element of feminist criticism and Séllei's reading is that

they explicitly regard seeing as interested – Séllei thus also broadens the interpretation of the narrators' position.

In the chapter about George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Séllei relies on interpretations that regard the novel as the re-writing of the tradition of the Bildungsroman. Like other writers, Eliot had to write her narrative according to given, traditional forms of narration, but as they would have negated her as a woman, a different subject with a different place in society and the sociosymbolic order than men, she also had to re-form that tradition. Like many characters in the other novels read by Séllei, her central character, Maggie Tulliver does not find the space offered by existing narratives liveable. She does not recognise herself in the narratives that she is advised to accept: she wants to leave those texts and live another story (p. 282). As she cannot find the possibility to live a life more suitable for her, she is doomed to die – as is her brother, who is similarly confined by rules that define his place. None of them can live in a dialogue with the system of norms they live among as individuals: and indeed, no one in the novel can. Séllei mentions the seemingly contradictory fact that women are the most stout-hearted defenders of the social order in the novel: which

is not a real contradiction, in the end, as they have to prove their own value and to prove that there is some kind of value in their submission. This gives them the feeling of having some power – which is, however, represented in its frailty in the narrative: they can only use it to rule over the household and to overstress insignificant regulations. In this way, the story shows the defects of existing norms, but does not, cannot offer a way out, other than the death of the main characters. The contradiction that Nóra Séllei also showed while interpreting Eliot's short story in her introduction, lives on here – and it corresponds to the contradiction George Eliot had to face as a woman writing as a woman while using a male pseudonym, as a woman writing about the difficulties of individuals who cannot comply with the existing gender norms, while refusing all kinds of feminist arguments.

What comes into the focus in the chapter about Elisabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* is the language of a community that consists mostly of women, its code systems, and its gradually growing openness to change and inclusiveness. As Séllei says, the first sentence of the novel has a "militantly feminist" tone, as it stresses the separatedness of Cranford women, which is "strengthened by the

notion of a mode of life that is declared to be sufficient for them" (p. 321). The adjective is questionable in itself (why the "world of presence, undisturbed by any lack or desire" is *militant*, if not because the existence of such a world is threatening to the existing social order), but the series of domestic images in this very first sentence also contradict it: the image of amazons is immediately smoothed away by the description of their activities – they rent apartments, plant flowers, keep geese, discuss literature and help whoever gets into trouble... On the very next page Séllei herself says that indeed, they do not even have power over themselves. Their order is based on that of the late Mr. Jenkyns, and any disturbance of that order (the order of petty rules that regulate all their everyday activities) seems to be dangerous for them. However, the loose structure of the narrative moves through a series of disturbances of this order, and the novel can be read as a utopia of inclusiveness: the ideal of the narrative is not the separation of the sexes according to an essentialist norm, but the deconstruction of the "naturalness" of gendered norms of behaviour.

A slipping into often used patterns of expression can also be found at other places in the book; this shows

how difficult it is to write in a way that contradicts naturalising tendencies at all points. In quite a few parts, Séllei uses expressions like "feminine narrative" or "female voice," "feminine characteristics" (while talking about Latimer in *The Lifted Veil*), or uses the term "feminine principle" without quotation marks or any reference to the non-naturalness of these adjectives, thus leaving gaps in her text that contradict what she otherwise does in her comments and readings: the conscious and well-argued problematisation of these categories. Séllei, one of the still very few feminist literary scholars in Hungary, is to a considerable extent in a similar position to the woman writers she chose to re-read. In a part that does and does not belong to the text of the book, the two pages 'Acknowledgements,' she reflects the tone of the 19th century woman who began to write. The first paragraph talks about the writer's doubt concerning her *authorship* (which is a rare feature in Hungarian literary criticism, and one can only wish more critics would doubt the *authority* of their speech), and the last, a somewhat apologetic paragraph states that her husband took on more responsibilities while she was writing (the point of comparison remains unspecified) – again a sentence that marks her as a woman for whom it is

not at all "natural" to write a book-length study.

There is another recurring, and related, but probably more significant slip in the study, though. In the introduction to this review of Séllei's work, I stressed the crucial importance of a new way of reading in feminist criticism: the deconstruction of the borders of what is "inside" and "outside" the text, the irrelevance of this false dualism that builds a border between what is aesthetic and what is political, while there is no such border. Literature, as public speech or writing is political through and through. Séllei's readings do disrupt the boundaries between "literary" and "ideological" when she reads texts as parts of a wider sociosymbolic system. At certain points, however, she seems to disrupt her own reading, suggesting that the two can be separated in some way. "Both if we approach the world of the novel from an aesthetic, or from any kind of political/ideological point of view;" in sentences like this, she seems to try to dualise what is non-dualistic in her interpretations: how could one separate what is aesthetic and what is political in the choice of narrative strategies of the novels interpreted,

and in their reworking of those strategies, so as to create a narrative space for a subject who has a different view of the social order than what is dominant, for example? This reasoning could easily lead to the dismissing of Séllei's own readings as "only" political - what is most probably done by that most ideological group of critics who strive to depoliticise aesthetics. By writing that feminist criticism steps "out" of the borders of literariness "in a narrow sense," and that aesthetics is "ideally" apolitical (pp. 369-70), she maintains a contradiction that is created in order to preserve the universalist stance of the realm of the aesthetic and its being closed to what is "outside."

But what marks the book in the end, despite these few slips which seem to contradict the author's intentions, is one of the last sentences about the presence of the political in all kinds of cultural discourse, and Nóra Séllei's careful reading of the chosen texts and their contexts. This study of 19th century woman writers shows what feminist literary criticism can bring to the field of literary scholarship, offering points of departure that render engaging and informative re-readings of texts.

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