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Night Thoughts

Blake's Iconographic Ruminations (and Iconological Revelations)[1]

1 INTRODUCTION

In the past year the opening of a major exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London, followed by one at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, has drawn attention to the paintings of the English poet and painter, William Blake (1757–1827). From time to time Blake's visual art has become fashionable, and he has always had a small group of constant followers, but his ambitions to be an artist renowned for historical painting on a grand scale were never realised. Ironically, the large Tate exhibition in small measure achieves the public presence for which Blake yearned throughout his life. And the new major scholarly biography, published in Spring 2001 through The Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art at Yale University Press, by one of the world's foremost Blake scholars, G.E. Bentley Jr will certainly help to consolidate Blake's position as a major eighteenth-century artist. Belated attention to Blake the visual artist may in part stem from the fact that his times have proven

deeply engaging for our own, as the proliferation of popular biography of eighteenth century figures and the profusion of contemporary novels set in the eighteenth century attest.

The market, the painter, the text

Blake was prolific, with well over two thousand of his paintings surviving. The intensity and the intimacy, and of course the small scale and detailed colouring, of many of these surviving works make them not particularly accessible to the exigencies of an enormous public gallery showing. Much of his work is book illustration, "illuminations," as Blake himself styled them, providing commentary on specific texts. Without a knowledge of the text which they originally accompanied his works become reduced to a gathering of rather odd if beautiful abstractions. It was through the text, which was generally a classic or a popular work, that the public arena for the visuals was created in Blake's time.

Since he made his living as a commercial engraver, those designs of Blake's which were guaranteed a public reception would have been encountered by viewers who had an interest in the text which they accompanied. Those works which Blake created in both text and design and printed himself on his own printing press were, on the whole, issued on demand and were then never really part of a public discourse.

Blake also created pictures for private patrons, many of these are of Biblical subjects, or of illustrations to Shakespeare, or Bunyan, or Milton. They are, like the designs which he created for his own press, illuminations rather than just illustrations, and as commissioned works they were most often created for patrons who were already sympathetic to his cast of mind. Such is the case, for example, with his great series of Biblical water-colours executed for Thomas Butts, and such also is the case with his exquisite water-colour designs to the *Poems of Thomas Gray*, drawn and assembled as an unique book, a birthday present for Nancy Flaxman, wife of his close friend, the sculptor John Flaxman. Blake laid each page of Gray's poems into a larger sheet of paper and then drew his designs around the text-box on each page. The result is an atemporal, "collaborative," Blake-Gray, unique work.

The poet, the painter

The process apparent in Blake's designs to Gray at the close of the 1790s was one which he had developed a little earlier for a project which has both a commercial and a private aspect. This project was a series of water-colours commissioned by the English publisher and bookseller Richard Edwards, and created by Blake sometime after 1794. (The paper on which the drawings appear is watermarked "J Whatman, 1794.") The commissioned drawings were the beginning, that is the first stage, of a commercial endeavour which occupied Blake for well over two years. Edwards hired Blake to make a design for each page of the international best-selling English poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), written by the mid-eighteenth century poet, Edward Young. Young's poem had become an international best-seller, translated into all the major European languages and illustrated by some of the premier book-illustrators of the day, including Charles Grignion, and also Francis Hayman. Both Blake and Edwards, not unreasonably, could hope to prosper from the project.

In the *Night Thoughts* text which Edwards gave to Blake there are over five hundred pages.[2] Blake did a water-colour for each page, and Edwards then selected from these drawings those he considered to be appropriate to a projected luxurious engraved edition of Young's poem. This was the plan, and the poem was to be published in four volumes with subscribers for each volume as it was issued. In the end, only one volume and a few dozen designs were published, and the two volumes of water-colours, a major work in its own right, which Edwards had had bound in a handsome red leather binding, were lost from view for decades. The drawings are now in London, in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, where they can be viewed by appointment, and 20 years or so ago they were also published in a large format, but not full-size, edition, with some of them reproduced in colour.

In this brief essay I would like to explore these *Night Thoughts* designs, placing them in context and examining some of the ways in which Blake used them as a kind of private notebook to which, as he had done with his marginalia

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[2] Nights I and III are second editions; the other seven nights are all first editions. Whenever I quote the *Night Thoughts* text I am citing these editions as they appear within Blake's designs. My page numbers refer to the composite work and my whole numbers are those which identify the pages within the sequence as a whole. Figures 1, 2, 22, 23, and 24 are reproduced from John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose & Michael J. Tolley eds. *William Blake's Design for Edward Young's* Night Thoughts: *A Complete Edition*. Co-ordinating editor David V. Erdman. Oxford: OUP, 1980.

in the various books which he annotated for his own library, he trusted his dissent from the politics, and the religion, and the science of his day.

The enormous group of *Night Thoughts* drawings was created at a pivotal time in Blake's career immediately after his Lambeth prophecies, including *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Europe, The Song of Los,* and so on, and they were also created at a time in Blake's life when he was undergoing profound religious and political revaluations. The commission came when England was making an enormous effort to catch up with European book production, and many new large scale projects involving illustrations to the Bible, to Shakespeare and to Milton were employing England's painters and engravers. It was a period of change not only in France, and not only in politics, but also in western European industrial methods. Revolution everywhere. And so it is no surprise that the *Night Thoughts* drawings, in addition to illustrating a poem which is not a narrative, but rather a series of meditations on life, death and the hereafter, might lead us into the everyday worlds of the illustrator, into politics, the visual arts, and science, as well as into more formal considerations of the relationship between text and design. In studying Blake's work we can attempt to re-construct and re-create the conditions under which he worked. Of course, we can never really know Blake's time, but through a process of sifting documents, and following hunches, we may in some way create a narrative which seems to make sense.

A working method

I have called my excursion "*Night Thoughts:* Blake's Iconographic Ruminations (and Iconological Revelations)," first, because I want to establish for myself with a vague title a little bit of room for exploration, and second, because I want to draw attention to a very old-fashioned way of working and a very old set of assumptions. These assumptions constitute a methodology as set out in Erwin Panofsky's *Meaning in the Visual Arts,*[3] and *Studies in Iconology,*[4] and they are arguments which stem from the first three decades of the twentieth century. Iconography, as Panofsky defines it, is quite simply the study of primary subject matter, both factual and expressive, in art history; it is the very opposite of deconstructionism which assumes from its ironic position that there is no

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[3] Erwin Panofsky. *Meaning in the Visual Arts.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1955.
[4] Erwin Panofsky. *Studies in Iconology.* New York: Harper, 1939.

meaning. Iconography also works at the other end from formalism which is the study of the formal aspects of a work of art.[5] Form does enter into meaning, or into the creations of meaning, but iconography concentrates on the humanistic, rather than the technical aspects of a work.

Iconographic identifications of form and their relations are the first stage of a process which leads to a recognition of the arrangement of images into stories. The next stage is the establishing of meaning or content which reveals attitudes, the attitudes of a nation, a period, a class, a philosophic persuasion, and so on. The form of these attitudes is a manifestation of principles which are symptomatic of what Panofsky calls "something else." This "something else" he identifies as "symbolical values," which are values manifest in a work, and which may even be unknown to the artist himself. These "symbolical values" are the object of iconology, which is synthesis rather than analysis. Using Panofsky, we may summarise the process of reading a work of art as

(1) identification of motifs (i.e. iconography);
(2) understanding of the relationship of the motifs as stories;
(3) interpretation of these motifs in a symbolic way (i.e. iconology).

I admit that this is a great simplification of Panofsky, but it does give us some principles for reading Blake's *Night Thoughts* designs, principles which I think are appropriate to Blake's own humanistic way of thinking.[6] What follows, then, in my essay will be a very general introduction to a pivotal group of Blake's designs, with analysis deriving from Panofsky's principles.

2 THE NIGHT THOUGHTS PROJECT: ITS FORMAL ASPECTS (ICONOGRAPHY)

Edward Young's poem charts a psychological journey, ostensibly precipitated by the deaths of several loved ones. In fact, *Night Thoughts* (1742–45) is not one poem, but several poems, presented in nine Nights, and held together by topics, by narrative voice, and by primary setting. By moonlight the narrator of *Night Thoughts* debates with Lorenzo, his alter-ego, the meaning of life. In the end, he finds consolation for mortality in the promise of the life divine. The poem is in a

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[5] Panofsky. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, pp. 28–29.
[6] For a searching and complex discussion of iconology incorporating more contemporary French critical practices, see W.J.T. Mitchell. *Iconology, Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

long tradition of what has been termed "Christian apologetics." But this is in no way to suggest the work is merely formulaic, or to diminish its powerful blank-verse paragraphs.

> Night-visions may befriend, (as sung above)
> Our waking Dreams are fatal: How I dreamt
> Of things Impossible? (could Sleep do more?)
> Of Joys perpetual in perpetual Change?
> Of stable Pleasures on the tossing Wave?
> Eternal Sun-shine in the Storms of life?
> How richly were my noon-tide Trances hung
> With gorgeous Tapestries of pictur'd joys?
> Joy behind joy, in endless Perspective!
> Till at Death's Toll, whose restless Iron tongue
> Calls daily for his Millions at a meal,
> Starting I woke, and found myself undone?
> Where now my Frenzy's pompous Furniture?
> The *cobweb'd* Cottage with its ragged wall
> Of mould'ring mud, is *Royalty* to me!
> The *Spider's* most attenuated Thread
> Is Cord, is Cable to Man's tender Tie
> On earthly bliss; it breaks at every Breeze.

> (Night I, pp. 13–14)

Night Thoughts is an imagistic poem, and perhaps excessively concrete. Young piles metaphor on metaphor. He calls the night stars the "manuscript of heaven," since it is from them we learn natural religion. In a single passage, he might introduce a long series of metaphors any one of which Blake might choose for illustration. Life in this world is called "the dim dawn," "the twilight of our day"; we readers give "to time eternity's regard / And dreaming, take our passage from our port"; the poet sees himself caught in darkness "the worm's inferior and in rank beneath / The dust I tread on"; and life is "like a vessel on a stream." Blake responded not only to the poem's spontaneous flow, its building of ideas and its recurring images, short narrative sections and impassioned dialogue, but also to its highly visual language which he humanises and from which he constructed his own vision. In Night IV, for example, Young questions the elements for the creator's presence:

Where art thou? Shall I dive into the *Deep?*
Call to the *Sun,* or ask the roaring *Winds,*
For their Creator? Shall I question loud
The *Thunder,* if in that th'Almighty dwells?
Or Holds He furious *Storms* in streighten'd Reins,
And bids fierce *Whirlwinds* wheel his rapid Carr?

(Night IV, p. 24)

Responding to the beauty of Young's passage, Blake drew a dramatic water-colour showing a prophet-poet, arms serenely folded across his chest, contemplating an energetic God of the Thunder and the Whirlwinds.

Blake worked intently on this project, and appears to have completed at least five drawings a week. The images are laid down in India ink and water-colour, with pencil sketching apparent underneath a few designs. The large Whatman sheets (measuring 16" x 12") surround the text box (9" x 6") which is mounted off-centre toward the upper left. Blake had to cope with the very real problem of making a design around a window. Not only must he adapt to margins varying recto-verso, but he must also think across pages verso-recto, and keep variety in mind as well. He gains visual force by pairing figures of a similar size, as in Night V (pp. 56–57), where the pairing pages show humans as slaves to the powerful male figure of Lucre, on one page, and the delicately rendered female figure of Fortune on another. Sometimes the text itself seems in motion because the size and position of the figures vary as they move around and through the text-box. Night VI, pp. 35–42, yields an interesting example of such a movement. A circle of figures, around the text-box on page 35, is followed by an ouroboros surmounted by a single figure in the lower left of page 36, a large "Daphne" figure, with root- and branch-like limbs, stretches up to the right of the text on page 37, a single figure stands on a cliff to the middle left on page 38, a solitary climber rises and reaches up out of a rocky landscape on the lower right of page 39, then a suite of designs emerges with Christ on the upper left, on page 40, and a castrated king in the middle right of page 41, concluding the entire Night and run of designs on page 42 with a shift of scale as an enormous Christ ascends, triumphant, up the left edge of the text while the soft figure of Death kneels with the text-box on his back. If we were to view the run of designs quickly as if each page were the frame of a film we could readily grasp the principle.

The commission must have been inspirational, for Blake is very much the technical innovator in these drawings. On one page he experiments with figure

and ground in a reverse ground technique, possibly suggested by wood-cut processes. For Blake who was committed to clarity, to what he termed "the wirey line of rectitude," a world where foreground and background are not distinguishable could only be a fallen one. The applied woodcut technique is found in several other drawings and used by him notably in defining water and chaos (Night VIII, p. 5; Night V, p. 31; Night IX, p. 73; Night IX, p. 36).

Although many of Blake's scenes are set in celestial or at least spiritual realms and his colour vocabulary reflects this spiritual dimension there are some pages where he employs what reads as naturalistic colour for the landscape. The coming together of an ideal and a "real" colour lexicon is remarkable and may have influenced the pre-Raphaelite painters who saw these drawings more than half a century after they were completed. (In fact, the first book-length study of Blake was written by William Michael Rossetti, brother of the poet and painter Dante Gabriel. The Pre-Raphaelites were instrumental in mounting the first major exhibition of Blake's work at the Burlington Club in London.)

Blake also links several pages running with similar ground. Occasionally he illuminates the text as the initial letter in a mediaeval manuscript might be illuminated. Or he might take a title-page (of which there are eleven, one for each of the Nights, as well as one for each of the two volumes into which the drawings were bound) as the occasion for a carpet page, as in the Book of Kells where design and colour overwhelm the text (Night VII, p. 64; Night IX, p. 9; Night II, p. 36; Night IX, p. 53).

Blake's relationship with Young's text is dynamic. Many of the designs seem to be simply illustrative, but when one considers the imagistic density of Young's verse one realises that even in the simplest of designs that Blake is making very specific choices. In Night VI, on page 32, for example, he agrees with Young's emphasis, following him closely as he shows the charming girlish figure of Vanity about to fall into the grave. The poet asks:

> Are there, who wrap the world so close about them,
> They see no further than the Clouds; and dance
> On heedless Vanity's phantastic Toe,
> Till stumbling at a Straw, in their career,
> Headlong they plunge, where end both dance and song?

In Night IX, on page 37 [Fig. 1], he expands on one of Young's impassioned passages on the planets, turning it to an expression of the relationship of age and

youth, or rather of age over youth, and seems to question Young's breezy optimism and confidence in an appropriately hierarchical cosmos.

> Nor stands thy *Wrath* depriv'd of its Reproof,
> Or – un-upbraided by this radiant Choir;
> The Planets of each System represent
> Kind neighbours; mutual Amity prevails
> Sweet Interchange of Rays, receiv'd, return'd;
> Enlight'ning, and enlight'ned! All, at once,
> Attracting, and attracted! Patriot-like,
> None sins against the Welfare of the Whole;
> But, their reciprocal, unselfish Aid,
> Affords an Emblem of *Millennial* Love...
> Thus Man his *sov'reign* Duty learns in this
> *Material* Picture of Benevolence.

Although the elder figure pours liquid down into the waiting bowl of the younger, it is the younger figure whose world is largest, and who animates the bottom ground of the design. So Blake always presents his differences from Young's views. Perhaps this is most dramatically depicted in the ending where Young apocalyptically ends with "dreadful Midnight" reigning supreme, and Blake shows that this darkness is a mere prelude to a world where the biblical Samson, once blinded, is given vision again (Night IX, p. 119).

The designs interweave motifs, such as compasses, and butterflies, and display short narrative patterns. Night V, for example, presents a little epic where Death destroys all merriment (pp. 46–52). Night VIII shows the narrator's alter-ego Lorenzo being seduced by Frivolity, (pp. 43–44), and a Satan figure ominously seen viewing a banquet in Night VIII will then preside over the death of the revellers (pp. 63–64). Of these three examples, only the epic of death and mirth, in Night V, was present in the verbal material.

Young was an upper-class cleric with strong connections to his own class; his imagery reflects his social position, his interests and his time; the law, the theatres, the courts, ships and the sea, become in the designs a Blake-Young shared language. The later drawings are more dramatic than the earlier, as Blake responds to the flow of Young's imagery. Yet Blake will continue to disagree vehemently with some of Young's emotionally charged positions, his mathematical Creator, and quantifiable Universe. In Nights IV and IX, for example, Blake shows the consequences of Young's Natural Religion, his Deism, in his depictions of

imprisoned and over-burdened sun-worshipping indiscriminate Deists (Night IX, p. 42; Night IV, p. 15; Night IX, p. 80 [Fig. 2]).

While maintaining his independence, Blake at the same time complements each of the nine Nights by responding to its dominant image and mood. We can summarise this response in a brief schema:

Night I, On Life, Death and Immortality, concentrates on the bearded figure of Death and reinforces images of this life as a chain of metal or thorn, which binds man, in opposition to psyche figures who fly free.

Night II, On Time, Death and Friendship, introduces the figure of Time. Weights and balances often appear, as do pairs of figures.

Night III, Narcissa, is heavily elegiac. A Night burial and an overall theme of mutability are reinforced by frequent occurrences of various phases of the moon (see Night III, title-page and title-page verso).

Night IV, The Christian Triumph, is set to a large amount of yellow and orange wash. Figures are found leaping or rising. Areas of the page tend to be more open visually, and many sections are left unpainted.

Night V, The Relapse, presents night as a woman with her hands in a position of distress. A man is depicted under water. The night ends with figures caught in the throes of endless generation. Overall washes tend to grey; boats in water or figures tensed dominate the whole (see Night V, p. 60).

Night VI, The Infidel Reclaimed, presents arguments from nature for immortality. Blake washes the designs in cool blues, and shows us man in harmony with the animals (see Night VI, p. 25).

Night VII, The Infidel Reclaimed, Part II, presents arguments from man for immortality. Large stationary figures, mainly human, although not always so, are found more frequently here. Satan–Leviathan is repeatedly present.

Night VIII, Virtue's Apology, or The Man of the World Answered, picks up and brings together the figures of Christ, Time and Death. Poet and designer present clear alternatives; Christ is triumphant here.

Night IX, The Consolation, is a two-part journey. The first, "A Moral Survey of the Nocturnal Heavens," takes the reader on a tour of the milky way. It is breathtakingly written and illustrated (see Night IX, p. 83). Night is metamorphosed from a benighted figure in weeds of mourning on page 98, to a creature of beauty. Her dress of stars then becomes the very ground on which man dreams. Part 2, "A Night Address to the Deity," is an evocation of the Trinity. Blake ends emphatically with Samson pulling down the pillars of the Temple of Dagon; Young concludes with a prayer for immortality (Night IX, pp. 83, 98, 28–29).

As I have mentioned, the water-colours were bound into two volumes, Nights I–VI comprising the first, and Nights VII–IX the second. Blake planned for these bindings, since he designed for each volume a frontispiece, each a portrait of the resurrected Christ. The first, which became the title-page of Night IV of the Edwards edition of the engraved *Night Thoughts,* is of Christ pushing aside the heavy clouds as he mounts up from his cast-off grave clothes which remain below to be venerated by the angels who frame the lower page. In the second, He is the enlightener who awakens tormented figures in Death's realm of endless night. The last page of Night VI depicts Christ ascendent. And this design is linked with the end of Night IX, where, as we have seen, Samson, who in Biblical typology parallels Christ, triumphs over Death, and with sight restored, pulls down the Temple of Dagon. [Frontispieces, (whole numbers 1 and 264) and last page of Night VI (whole number 263)]

3 BLAKE'S POLITICAL NIGHT THOUGHTS (ICONOLOGY)

Blake's strongest response to the *Night Thoughts* is religious, not surprisingly, given the nature of the poem itself. In the 1790s Blake's own faith was in a process of change; he seems to have moved away from any organised religion, including the dissenting chapels of his family and his own earlier life, to a strongly individualised faith, as embodied in the major poems of his next ten years, *Milton* and *Jerusalem.*

Young's meditations are the reflections of a man who although a cleric lived very much in the world, but as worldly as he was his text comes from a more peaceful period nearly fifty years before Blake's tumultuous times. The designs were executed against a backdrop of London dissent, one vividly drawn by David Erdman in his book *Prophet Against Empire.* Erdman has shown

convincingly, plate by plate, line by line, Blake's debt to, engagement in, and transmutation of the radical politics of his own time: the impact of the American Revolution on his poetry, his exuberant response to the French Revolution, his pictorial and prophetic editorials against what Erdman calls the Pitt Terror. Like his contemporaries, Goya and Beethoven, "Blake saw the age of the spinning jenny and the balloon and the citizen army not primarily as an age of rising industry but as one of increasingly prodigious war and uncertain peace."[7]

Given their proximity to the Lambeth prophecies, and the great number of the *Night Thoughts* designs, it would be surprising if the political engagement of those Lambeth book did not enter this vast commissioned undertaking. And the importance to him of these *Night Thoughts* designs is demonstrated in the way Blake lets them share an iconography with his own privately printed works, something he never does with his highly conventional commercial book illustrations. This iconography includes groupings of figures, solitary characters, such as pilgrims with staves, and motifs, like thorns for a fallen world, serpents for a fall or imprisonment, flowers for joy, and lambs for peaceableness. It is an iconography so similar to Blake's private work that it is tempting to call figures within this series not by their *Night Thoughts* designations, such as the poet, or Death or Narcissa, but rather with names from Blake's own mythology.

Blake was not only a democrat, but he believed in the divinity of each person. His anti-Church and anti-State views find an outlet in these designs. Although the bulk of the *Night Thoughts* water-colours presents abstract figures, that is images embodying ideas, as viewers we also experience what read as actual portraits. Some are prominent political figures of the day, others simply faces which glimpsed convey a kind of reality suggesting they are drawn from life. It is this vague territory, a kind of enigmatic borderzone between the abstract and the real which is most intriguing and resistant to articulation. Partly through abstractions, but also through these portraits, Blake-illustrator sets up a covert narrative commenting on the repressive politics of his own time, the French Revolution and the series of reactionary laws in England instituted by the British Prime Minister William Pitt, and sanctioned by King George the Third. Among the well-known figures to appear in disguise in Blake's *Night Thoughts* are the King himself, Napoleon, and Charles James Fox, the Leader of the Opposition in the British Parliament. It is a rich area to mine, but it is vast; identifications are

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[7] David V. Erdman. *Blake: Prophet Against Empire.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. xi.

highly speculative, and corroboration can only be conjured by evidence outside the series, for example from satirical prints and straight portraits of dignitaries.

Politics enters the Blake's *Night Thoughts* gradually. The earlier Nights are perhaps deceptively simple. Blake draws out Young's passing allusions to kings and other rulers, and portrays them satirically. In Night I (p. 7) the figure of Oppression is connected with Monarchy and the State, through her spiky crown and chains, as well as with organised religion: notice her accessories of a Cardinal's cap and crook. That spiky crown will appear again and again on figures variously called Sense (V, p. 7), Lucre (V, p. 56), Fortune (VI, p. 28), the World, Vile Appetite and Earth (V, p. 30), but also, and this is an interesting exception, on the psalmist David (IX, p. 30). So that while the spiky crown is a warning, it needs always to be weighed in context. In addition to the obvious satire on rulers of any sort, Blake rarely lets pass an allusion by Young to war (Nights I, p. 17; V, p. 7; IX, p. 30; IV, p. 20).

Several political images echo Blake's Lambeth books. Page 16 of Night III, for example, is a redrawing of *Europe*, plate 11 (copy D, BMPR [Fig. 3]). In *Europe*, this figure is called Albion's Angel because he has acted the King's part in America. The small cross and orb at the top of his crown make it into a Papal tiara and Royal Crown of England combined. In the *Illuminated Blake*,[8] David Erdman identifies this figure as George III, but I am not certain whether that is correct. Yet I have no doubts about his counterpart in the *Night Thoughts*. Though the *Night Thoughts* text identifies him as Lucifer, his features are indisputably those of the King, and he reappears twice more in the designs in Papal costume (Night III, p. 16 [Fig. 4]; *Europe*, plate 11; Portrait of George III by Allan Ramsay [Fig. 5]; Nights VIII, p. 3, full design [Fig. 6] and close-up [Fig. 7]; VIII, p. 50; and James Gillray caricatures, 1784 [Fig. 8] and 1792 [Fig. 9]).

By the time Blake was at work on these drawings, Napoleon Bonaparte had come to power. The earliest satirical print of him in the British Museum collection is 1797, but his face was well-known before then. The siege of Toulon, where the English were defeated, was 30 November 1793, and Napoleon rose swiftly thereafter. The Italian campaign was 1795, and most of the early prints of him were Italian in origin. In *Napoleon in Caricature*, I, x (1911), A.M. Broadley argues that the first Napoleon portrait is late 1795, but I have found engravings, in BMPR, dating from 1794 (see Jacques Louis David's Napoleon portraits dating from 1797 and 1804 [Fig. 10]).

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[8] David V. Erdman ed. *The Illuminated Blake*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1974.

Several *Night Thoughts* faces are teasingly reminiscent of Napoleon. Night V, page 9 [Fig. 11], speaks of a war being waged in the individual soul and of the soul's pride at his own degradation. Blake's laurel-crowned soldier has the eyes and chin of Napoleon. In Night VII [Fig. 12], another echo appears, as the text mentions Caesar. In Night IX, the cloven-footed figure on a pedestal, like the Pope–George III figure from Night VIII (though with left-foot rather than right-foot deformed), again hints at Napoleon's features [Fig. 13]. The poem speaks expressly of Imperial ambition. The likelihood of this design's topicality is enhanced by the fact that it is an adaptation of Blake's own *Europe,* plate 5 (copy D, BMPR [Fig. 14]), where the face resembles both William Pitt and the King's son, Frederick, Duke of York (Night IX, p. 89 [Fig. 15]; *Europe,* plate 5, copy D).

Partly as an inheritance of the English Civil War, Blake lived in a culture. which discussed politics in Biblical terms. Some viewed the American Revolution as a secular Apocalypse, that is one which would overthrow poverty and cruelty.[9] Others saw it as *the* Apocalypse, as set out in the Book of Revelation. Similar views of the French Revolution prevailed in the 1790s. The millenarian Richard Brothers (1757–1824), for example, prophesied in 1795 against the war with France, addressing letters to the King, to William Pitt, and to his ministers. Brothers beseeched George III not to proceed with the war, and predicted the Apocalypse if he did. Arrested in 1795 and incarcerated for 11 years as a lunatic, Brothers' views were reiterated and expanded in several books by his lifelong friend and supporter John Finlayson. In *The Last Trumpet and The Flying Angel,* Finlayson identifies the Red Dragon as George III himself, and the Beast whose number is 666 as the members of the House of Commons (pp. 22–24; 1849) (see two caricatures showing biblical typology, 1795, 1799 [Figs. 16, 17]).[10]

Not surprisingly this kind of *odium theologicum* is an important part of the English scheme of satire against Napoleon who also was compared to the Dragon and identified as the Beast of Revelation. Between 1797 and 1815 prophetic broadsides, leaflets and prints made the comparison vivid. An 1809 brochure by Louis Mayer, with a frontispiece of a satirical plate of 1804, identifies Napoleon as the Apocalyptic Beast:

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[9] Erdman. *Prophet Against Empire,* p. 50.
[10] The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, has editions of Brothers' poems, prophecies and polemics.

His brutal and ferocious Dispositions are represented by the Body and Feet of a Tiger; his inordinate Desires by the Chest, Wings and Claws of a Dragon holding out Death and Slavery; his Head with two Horns symbolizes his civil and ecclesiastical Authority; and is intended to point out that though a Dragon and a Tiger have been the most dreadful and destructive of all real and imaginary creatures, yet even their horrid natures are surpassed by the sanguinary and rapacious Dispositions of that implacable Tyrant.

Simple arithmetic reveals that the number of monarch and ruler and warfare designs increases toward the end of Blake's *Night Thoughts,* and that they are increasingly associated with blood, death, struggle, and imprisonment, and contrasted with the serenity of eternity. By increasing the number of satirical subjects and of Biblical archetypes, Blake begins to leave behind his early generalisations and to focus his own obsessions on the Pitt Terror and the War with France. He was seeking a solution, one characterised in the movement of designs in Night IX with its magnificent Samson drawing, but clarified in the title-page to Night VIII, where each element of the Beast of the Apocalypse on which the Whore of Babylon rides engages with Blake's mental warfare against the forces of tyranny (Night VIII, title-page, whole number 345 [Fig. 18]).

It is an echo and counter-type of the title-page to Night The Third, the book of *Narcissa,* where Young's dead daughter becomes Blake's "Woman Clothed in the Sun," pregnant with the redeeming Messiah (from the Book of Revelation). Here, in Night VIII, as the opposing forces gather for the last battle the Scarlet Whore of Babylon appears. She is riding, as in the Bible, the Great Red Dragon crowned with seven heads and ten crowns. The figures on the extreme left manifest the Beast's power.

Reading clockwise we find the Scarlet Whore seated on the Dragon whose aspects are the Law – note the judge's wig; the Military (a steel-helmeted soldier), the Merchant Banks – the scaly, brutish, bearded red and gold image, the Church and the Monarchy – the bleary-eyed figure with triple mitre and orb, the ram's-horned crowned King, and the two ecclesiastically-hatted figures.

Remember that in this period it is Napoleon who most frequently embodies the Dragon from Revelation. A Rowlandson print of 1808, based on an earlier design, shows the seven-headed beast, the upper left figure representing Napoleon. Here in Blake's *Night Thoughts* we find Napoleon's features – the strong jaw, the prominent nose. This design is a view of the Apocalyptic Beast in line with the most popular satire of Blake's day (close-up of upper left figure from

15

Night VIII, title-page [Fig. 19]; close-up of caricature of Napoleon [Fig. 20]; full-frame of same Napoleon figure [Fig. 21]).

4 BLAKE'S SCIENTIFIC NIGHT THOUGHTS

When Blake came of age, almost every philosophical problem was approached in terms of the imagery and doctrines of Isaac Newton. It was a comprehensive system of invisible forces, invisible matter, an "almost" void of matter in motion, all mathematically provable, that is demonstrable. Blake railed against this devouring monster, this *systema mundi*, linking it with famine and political oppression: "Bring out number weight and measure in a year of dearth," he said in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (plate 7). The cry is echoed in *The Book of Urizen* (chapter 4), and continues into "Vala, or The Four Zoas."[11]

Within the *Night Thoughts,* a Blakean subtext emerges engaging with Young's Newtonian ideas. Blake co-opts the Newtonian iconography in three ways: he humanises the mathematical schema; he subverts the mathematical forces, rendering them as lifeless images of freezing and solidification, drowning or dense vegetation, and he materialises the immaterial.

In London, Blake lived not far from the shop of the instrument maker, scientist, and public lecturer, Benjamin Martin, and he undoubtedly saw some of the popular demonstrations of Newtonianism with their dazzling and expensive machines, cometaries, orreries, quadrants, tide-dials, microscopes, calculators, air-pumps. Although Young often alludes to such machinery; except for the odd compass, or scales, Blake never chooses to depict these machines. Young's Newtonian angels (Night IX, pp. 91–92, 509–510 [Fig. 22: p. 91]), schooled by Blake, put aside their geometry and learn to fly to "the coasts of bliss," meeting other beings, in other populated worlds.

In his manuscript fragment "An Island In The Moon," Blake satirises the scientists as a group of natural philosophers sitting around arguing about the ideas of Voltaire who had popularised Newton in France. In an hilarious take-off on Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks,* Blake's philosophers converse of "Queries in Philosophy" and enquire into "the works of Nature." "Then Mr Inflammable Gass ran & shovd his head into the fire & set his hair all in a flame & ran about

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[11] All quotations of Blake's own texts are taken from David V. Erdman ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

the room." Meanwhile the lawyer Steelyard sits at his table taking down extracts from "Youngs Night Thoughts," "The wreck of matter & the crush of worlds / as Younge says," as the whole company cavorts and sings:

> To be or not to be
> Of great capacity
> Like Sir Isaac Newton
> Or Locke...

Later at Mr Inflammable's house, these "happy Islanders" conduct an experiment: "while Tilly Lally & Scopprell were pumping at the air pump Smack went the glass [...] he ran out of the room, come out, come out we are putrified, we are corrupted, our lungs are destroyd with the Flogiston..." and so forth.

In the *Night Thoughts* Blake animates Young's references to Newtonian geometry and peoples the void of Newtonian space with human and angelic forms. Flying figures leap with ease across Young's orbs; figures "initiate in the secrets of the skies" (Night VI, p. 6) defy gravity. Loosing their shackles of Newtonian attraction (Night VI, pp. 8 and 10), they move as they will, in the vast "ocean" of unbounded Space (Night VII, pp. 60–61), and journey "on curious Travel bent" to other inhabited worlds (Night IX, pp. 87–88; and p. 100; Night VII, p. 49 [Fig. 23]).

Although it was argued that the "delightful science of optics" had enlarged and disclosed new worlds, Blake showed his viewers the sun as seen at the end of a powerful telescope, where a naked man imprisoned clutches his head while his whole body shackled at the ankle fills the flaming orb (Night VII, p. 15). And Blake contrast this materialist sun-prison with another view of the sun, only pages later, responding to Young's line, derived from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"A *Christian* dwells like URIEL, in the Sun." Here a magnificent full figure fills the orb and appears to make it move (Night VII, p. 67). Calling on the "Mathematic glories of the Skies / In Number, Weight and Measure, All ordained," Young conflates astronomy and economics in characteristic neo-Newtonian fashion (Night IX, p. 55). Blake turns Young's "Great Oeconomist" and his subjects into ghosts. Newton had described God's relationship to Space as if it were His "Sensorium," or His Body (Night IX, pp. 94–95). Blake transforms Young's glowing Globes into a human family, surrounding the living organic form of Christ as the Tree of Life (Night IX, p. 94 [Fig. 24]).

Finally, near the end of the poem, the poet calls on God as the "Cause of causes," "last link in the golden chain," the" father of mass," of "matter

multiform." The illustrator replies by presenting a carpet of myriad human beings with Christ as their radiant centre (Night IX, 109; 527).

Iconography has become iconology. Blake's anti-Monarchical, anti-State, anti-Newtonian narrative finds its completion in the image of the biblical Samson, his eyesight and his strength restored, pulling down the Temple of Dagon, the Temple of the temporal and the material. Mankind liberated from too mortal flesh becomes one in a radiant transcendental harmony.

Andrea Timár

Conversing Signs

Coleridge: *Effusion XXXV*

Veracity does not consist in *saying*, but in the intention of *communicating*, truth; and the philosopher who cannot utter the whole truth without conveying falsehood, and at the same time, perhaps, exciting the most malignant passions, is constrained to express himself either *mythically* or equivocally. When Kant therefore was importuned to settle the disputes of his commentators himself, [he replied,] "I meant what I said, and [...] I have something else, and more important to do, than to write a commentary on my own words."

<div align="right">(Coleridge, 1817)[1]</div>

Of all things that have to do with communicating ideas, what could be more fascinating than the question of whether such communication is actually possible? [...] I wanted to demonstrate that words often understand themselves better than do those who use them, wanted to point out that there must be a connection of some secret brotherhood among philosophical words that, like a host of spirits too soon aroused, bring everything into confusion in their writings and exert the invisible power of the World spirit on even those who try to deny it.

<div align="right">(Friedrich Schlegel, 1800)[2]</div>

The first version of *The Eolian Harp* appeared in 1796 under the title *Effusion XXXV* and was constantly revised by Coleridge until the final version of 1834. Though the focus of critical attention has always been on *The Eolian Harp* (1834), most readers considering the first version of the poem as "a mere philological

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[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Biographia Literaria.* London: Oxford UP, 1969, Vol. 1, Ch. IX, p. 101.
[2] Friedrich Schlegel. "On Incomprehensibility." In: Kathleen M. Wheeler. *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984, p. 33.

curiosity,"[3] the present paper will concentrate on *Effusion XXXV* (1796), and will bring into the foreground the *footnote* which supplemented it from 1796 to 1803.[4] The only critic who examined the note was Kathleen M. Wheeler,[5] but since she attached it to the 1834 version of the poem, my point of reference will be different from hers.

1796	1834
Effusion XXXV	**The Eolian Harp**
Composed August 20th, 1795,	Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire
at Clevedon, Somersetshire	

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on my arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-
              leaved myrtle
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And Watch the clouds, that late were rich
              with light,
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatched from yon bean-field! and the world
              so hushed!
The stilly murmur of the distant sea
Tells us of silence. And that simplest lute,
Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
How by the desultory breeze caressed,
Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-
              leaved myrtle
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And watch the clouds, that late were rich
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Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
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              so hushed!
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           And that simplest lute,
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Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings

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[3] J. Stillinger. *Coleridge and Textual Instability.* New York: Oxford UP, 1994, p. 27.

[4] The sixteen versions of the poem can be found in Stillinger, pp. 142–149.

[5] Cf. Stillinger, p. 241: "Wheeler, the only critic who discusses the note at length..." Stillinger alludes to Kathleen M. Wheeler. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981, pp. 83–90.

Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!

And thus, my love! As on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject lute!
Or what if all animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each, and God of All?
But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved woman! Nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.

Meek daughter in the family of Christ!
Well hast thou said and holily dispraised
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.
For never guiltless may I speak of him,
Th' Incomprehensible! save when with awe

Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
Where melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!
O the one life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where –
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so filled;
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
Is music slumbering on her instrument.

And thus, my love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
And many idle flitting phantasies
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
And what if all animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as over them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each and God of all?
But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,

I praise him, and with faith that inly feels;*
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wildered and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid!

And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!
Well hast thou said and holily dispraised
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.
For never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible! Save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and a most miserable man,
Wildered and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid!

Though the wording of the two versions of the poem is very similar, *Effusion XXXV*, on the one hand, is supplemented by a footnote, while on the other, it is devoid of those famous lines celebrating the "one Life" which will appear for the first time in the 1817 version of the poem. As the first appearance of the "one Life" theme, in 1817, exactly coincides with the withdrawal of the footnote, the exchange of the strange, disrupting note for a passage stressing the unity of being obviously reflects a shift of focus between the composition of the two texts.

In many ways, *Effusion XXXV* abounds in perplexing ambiguities that are hard to resolve in any reassuring synthesis. In what follows here, I will try to examine whether the poem can be subjected to a unifying analysis or put in parallel with the writings of the Romantic Ironists, especially Friedrich Schlegel. I will also try to demonstrate that the later valorisation of the symbol, going together with the insertion of the "one Life" theme and the withdrawal of the footnote in *The Eolian Harp*, might also be considered as a strategic – though ineffective – response to this early text that shows up language as a 'counter-spirit' escaping the mastery of the self.

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* L'athée n'est point à mes yeux un faux esprit; je puis vivre avec lui aussi bien et mieux qu'avec le dévot, car il raisonne davantage, mais il lui manque un sens, et mon âme ne se fond point entièrement avec la sienne: il est froid au spectacle le plus ravissant, et il cherche un syllogisme lorsque je rends une action de grâce. "Appel à l'impartiale postérité, par la Citoyenne Roland," troisième partie, p. 67. [Coleridge's own note.]

Interestingly, *Effusion* has been almost entirely excluded from the canon[6] although critics have always acknowledged that it set the pattern for some later pieces, identified as 'conversation poems.'[7] These include "The Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in Solitude," "The Nightingale," "Dejection, an Ode" and "To William Wordsworth" – though Coleridge actually called only one of them, "The Nightingale," a 'conversation poem.' Despite the fact that the impact of the denomination on contemporary reception has been so considerable that Tilottama Rajan even called attention to the "horizon of expectations called up by the 'genre' of conversation poems,"[8] *Effusion* has been neglected on the ground of its being devoid of the contextual influences which would permit to read it as a "serious philosophical statement."[9] However, even if the poem cannot be interpreted as a statement and if it may indeed be nothing else but "an entertaining anecdote of mental fantasies and married life played out within conventional gender roles,"[10] we might, nevertheless, endeavour to analyse it as a possible enactment of communication itself.

G. M. Harper, the first to identify the common pattern of the conversation poems, defines these pieces as Coleridge's "Poems of Friendship." More recent analyses have made the important point that these friendships, instead of being displayed in conversations, rather express the speaker's *yearning for* conversation and his desperate desire for response.[11] For although in the majority of these poems, the speaker does address a listener, this concrete, real person or friend generally remains absent and/or silent.[12] Furthermore, as these

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[6] Stillinger gives a comprehensive review of the reception of the poem on pp. 26–43.

[7] G.M. Harper was the first to identify the common pattern of theses pieces and he was the one who termed them 'conversation poems.' See his "Coleridge's Conversation Poems." In: M.H. Abrams ed. *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York, 1960, p. 189.

[8] See her analysis of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" in Tilottama Rajan. *The Supplement of Reading*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990, p. 115.

[9] Stillinger, p. 35.

[10] Stillinger, p. 35.

[11] S. Eilenberg. *Strange Power of Speech*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992, p. 22.

[12] "Critics have noted [...] that the interlocutors in the so-called 'conversation poems' tend to seem strangely absent: Sara Coleridge is 'pensive,' the baby is *en fans*, Charles Lamb is literally absent, as are Sara Hutchinson, the Lady, Wordsworth, William and Edmund..." (A. Bennett. *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999, p. 124). "*Frost at Midnight*, like the other conversation poems, never fully achieves its status as such, for it is at best a one-sided conversation" (J. Plug. "The Rhetoric of Secrecy." In: Fulford & Paley eds. *Coleridge's Visionary*

concrete listeners are, according to Bennett, for instance, all "strangely absent,"[13] the experience of Joy (the inter-communion of mind and nature) occurs, if it does, through a temporal and/or spatial deferral: through the mediation of an absent other.[14] According to Eilenberg, both the speaker's imaginary salvation and his poetic experience are entrusted to these listeners, generally transformed into an ideal poetic self.[15] Surprisingly, there seems to be no distinction made in literature between the absent listeners of the other conversation poems and the posited listener addressed in *Effusion*, though this latter one is both present and responsive – even if her answer is restricted to a "mild reproof" in the eye. So while the listeners of the other poems support the speaker's subjective poetic vocation, the posited listener's detached eyes in *Effusion* turn the speaker into an object (into an object for himself). Meanwhile, the presence of this listener (or of a *reflective* second self) does not only disrupt the workings of the imagination, but it also makes the speaker realise that creative activity in itself is far from being "translucent," it does not necessarily achieve its goal to unite two minds. As in his analysis of *The Eolian Harp* Philip Shaw argues, the "mild reproof" in Sara's eyes draws attention to the "failure of poetic language to realise itself."[16]

For the personification of the lute in *Effusion*, the translation of lifeless nature into another subject (a "subject lute") – that parallels the transformation, in the other conversation poems, of the other into an ideal self – is not only a means to overcome the alienation of subject from object,[17] since it should also mediate between the speaker and the listener. This listener, however, just like those of the other poems, represents indeed the "road to salvation": she is the repository of *meaning*.

Languages. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993, pp. 27–41). See also: Rajan. *The Supplement of Reading*, pp. 117–135; and S. Eilenberg. *Strange Power of Speech*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992, pp. 22–25.

[13] Bennett, p. 124.

[14] Though they might prove fruitful, the implications of a psychoanalytic or of a feminist reading are beyond the scope of this paper.

[15] Cf. Eilenberg, p. 23.

[16] Philip Shaw. "Death Strolls Between Letters." In: Geoff Ward ed. *Romantic Literature From 1790 to 1830*. London: Bloomsbury, 1993, pp. 33–34.

[17] Cf. Jonathan Culler. "Apostrophe." *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca: Cornell UP 1981, p. 143.

Muft take an Air lefs Solemn : She complies :

Good-Confcience !—— at the Sound *the World* retires ;

Verfe difaffects it, and LORENZO fmiles ;

Yet has fhe her *Seraglio* full of Charms ;

And fuch as Age fhall Heighten, not Impair.

Art thou dejected ? Is thy Mind o'ercaft ?

Amid her Fair Ones, thou the Faireft chufe,

Thy Gloom to chace. — " Go, fix fome weighty *Truth* ;

" Chain down fome *Paffion* ; do fome *gen'rous Good* ;

" Teach *Ignorance* to fee ; or *Grief* to fmile ;

" Correct thy *Friend* ; befriend thy greateft *Foe* ;

" Or, with warm Heart, and Confidence divine,

" Spring up, and lay ftrong Hold on *Him* who made Thee."—

Thy Gloom is fcatter'd, fprightly Spirits flow ;

Tho' wither'd is thy Vine, and Harp unftrung.

DOST call the Bowl, the Viol, and the Dance,

Loud Mirth, mad Laughter ? Wretched Comforters !

Phyficians ! more than Half of thy Difeafe :

Laughter, tho' never cenfur'd yet as Sin

(Pardon a Thought that only *feems* fevere),

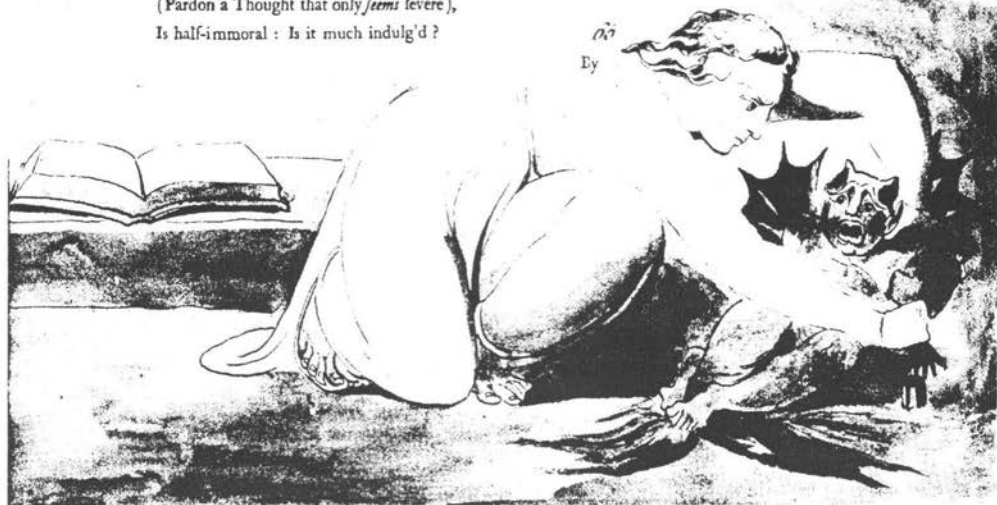Is half-immoral : Is it much indulg'd ?

By

FIGURE 1. Night IX, page 37

Exceeding fair, and glorious, for its Size,
But, elsewhere, far out-measur'd, far outshone?
In *Fancy* (for the *Fact* beyond us lies)
Canst thou not figure it, an *Isle*, almost
Too small for Notice, in the *Vast* of Being;
Sever'd by mighty Seas of *un-built* Space,
From other *Realms*; from ample *Continents*
Of higher Life, where nobler Natives dwell;
Less *Northern*, less remote from DEITY,
Glowing beneath the *Line* of the SUPREME,
Where Souls in Excellence make Haste, put forth
Luxuriant Growths; nor the late Autumn wait
Of *Human* Worth, but ripen soon to Gods?

YET why drown *Fancy* in such Depths as these?
Return, presumptuous Rover! and confess
The Bounds of Man; nor blame them, as too small:
Enjoy we not full Scope in what is *seen?*
Full ample the Dominions of the Sun!
Full glorious to behold! How far, how wide,
The matchless Monarch, from his flaming Throne,
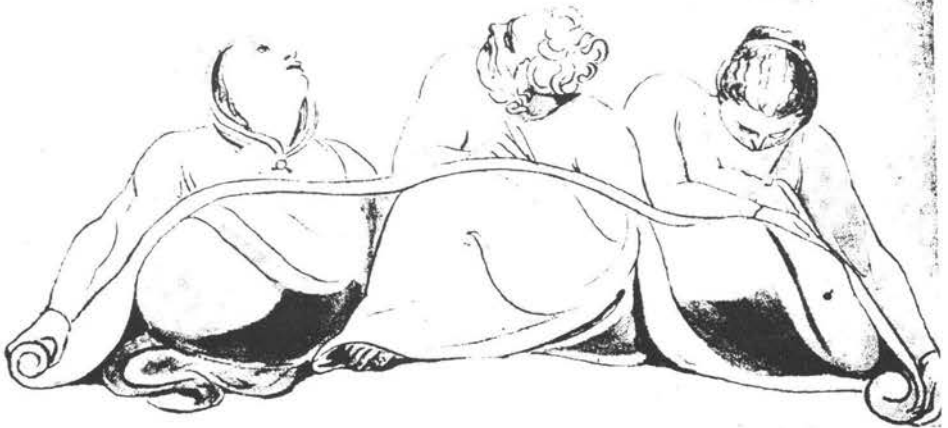Lavish of Lustre, throws his Beams about him,

Farther,

FIGURE 2. Night IX, page 80

FIGURE 3. *Europe,* plate 11

(16)

Glows my Resentment into Guilt? What guilt
Can equal Violations of the Dead?
The Dead how Sacred? Sacred is the Dust
Of this Heaven-labour'd form, erect, divine!
This Heaven-assum'd majestic robe of Earth,
He deign'd to wear, who hung the vast Expanse
With Azure bright, and cloath'd the Sun in Gold.
When every Passion sleeps that can offend;
When Strikes us every Motive that can melt;
When man can reek his rancour uncontroul'd,
That strongest Curb on Insult and Ill-will;
Then, spleen to *Dust?* the Dust of Innocence?
An Angel's Dust!---This *Lucifer* transcends;
When He contended for the Patriarch's bones,
'Twas not the Strife of Malice, but of Pride;
The Strife of Pontif Pride, not Pontif Gall.

Far less than This is shocking in a Race
Most wretched, but from Streams of mutual Love;
And Uncreated, but for love Divine;
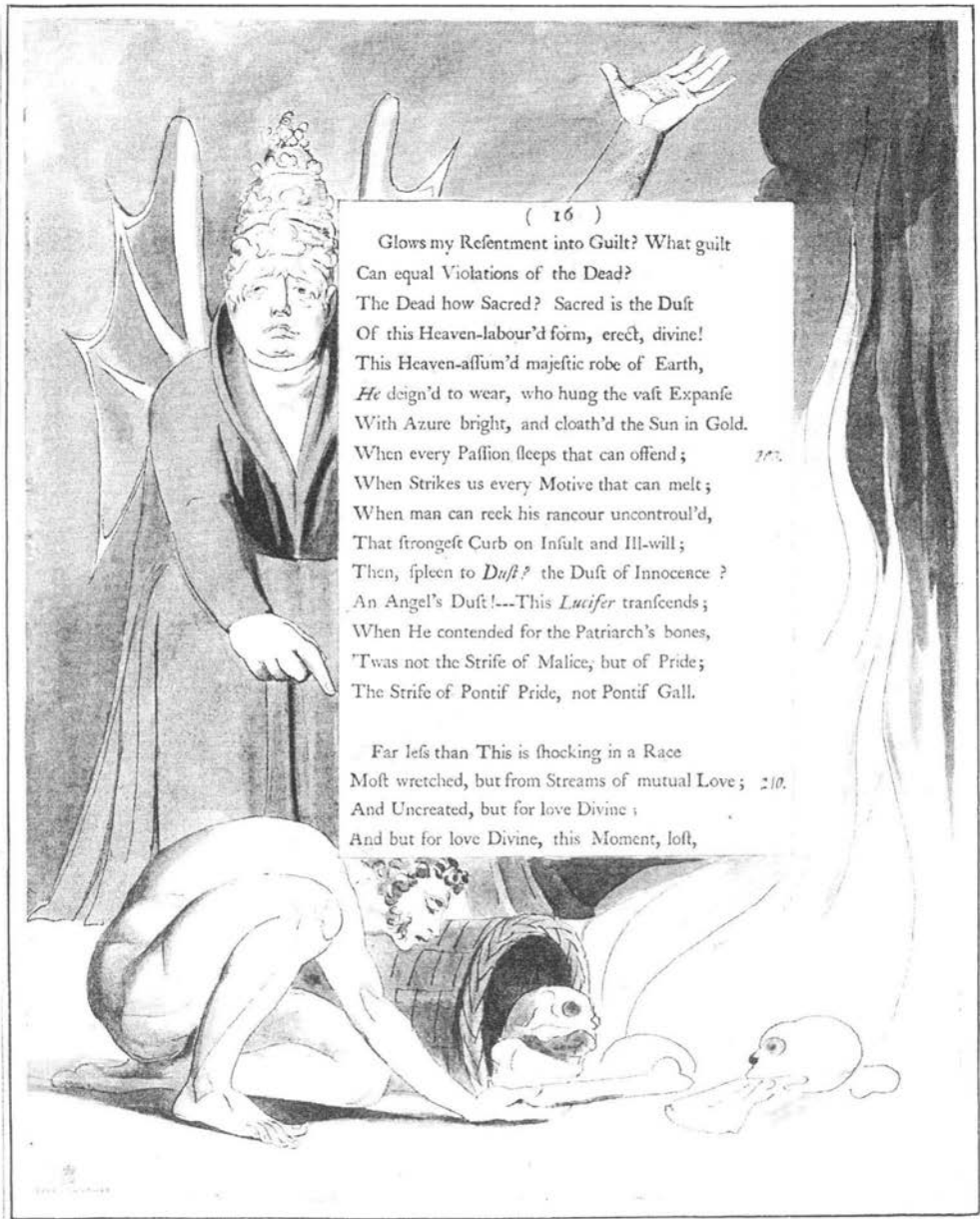And but for love Divine, this Moment, lost,

FIGURE 4. Night III, page 16

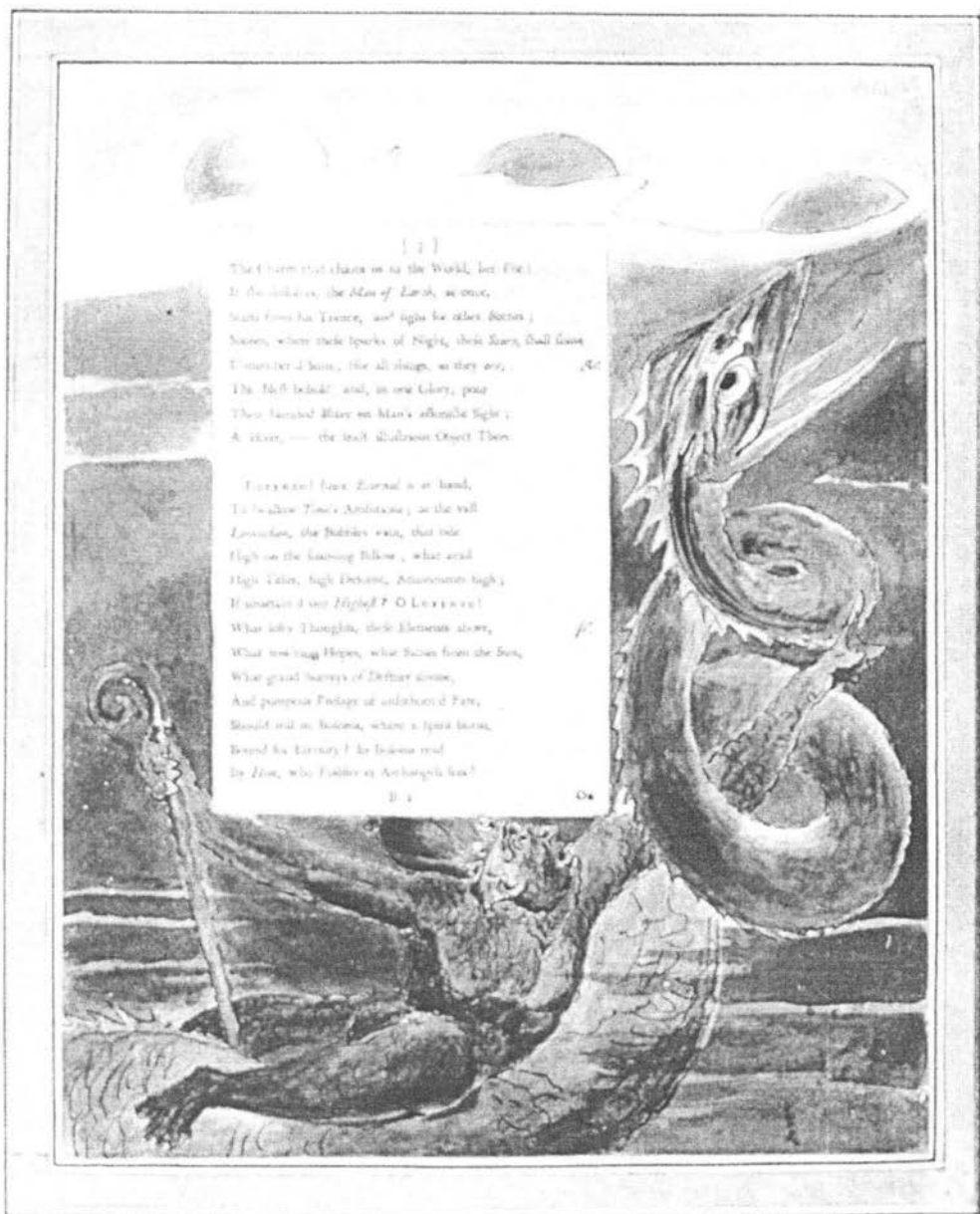FIGURE 5. Allan Ramsay: *Portrait of George III*

FIGURE 6. Night VIII, page 3 (full design)

FIGURE 7. Night VIII, page 3 (close-up)
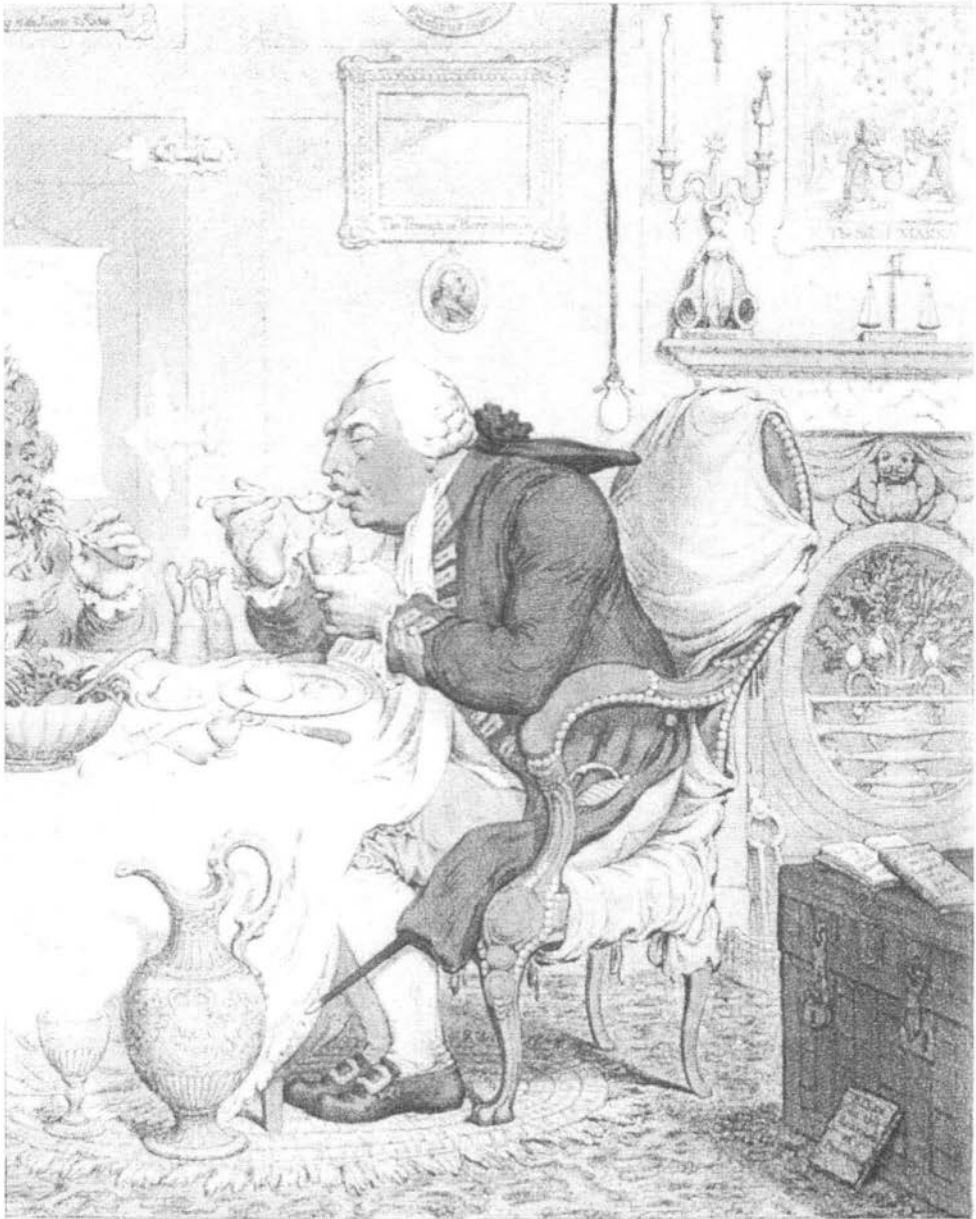
FIGURE 8. James Gillray's caricature (1784)

FIGURE 9. James Gillray's caricature (1792)

FIGURE 10. Jacques-Louis David: *The Coronation of Napoleon* (1804)

(9)

A thousand Opiates scatters to delude,
To fascinate, inebriate, lay asleep,
And the fool'd Mind delightfully confound.
Thus that which shock'd the *Judgment*, shocks no more;
That which gave *Pride* Offence, no more offends.
Pleasure and *Pride*, by Nature mortal Foes,
At War eternal which in Man shall reign,
By *Wit's* Address, patch up a fatal Peace,
And hand in hand lead on the rank Debauch,
From rank refin'd to delicate and gay.
Art, cursed Art! wipes off th'indebted Blush
From Nature's Cheek, and bronzes every Shame.
Man smiles in Ruin, glories in his Guilt,
And Infamy stands Candidate for Praise.
  All writ by Man in favour of the Soul,
These *sensual Ethicks* far, in Bulk, transcend.
The Flow'rs of Eloquence profusely pour'd
O'er spotted Vice, fills half the letter'd World.
Can Pow'rs of Genius exorcise their Page,
And consecrate Enormities with Song?
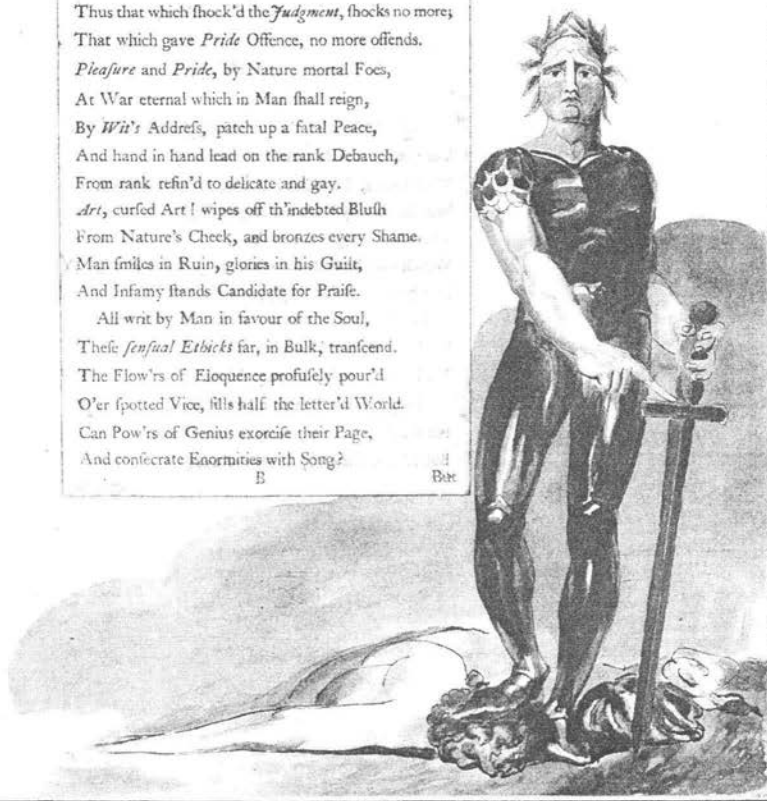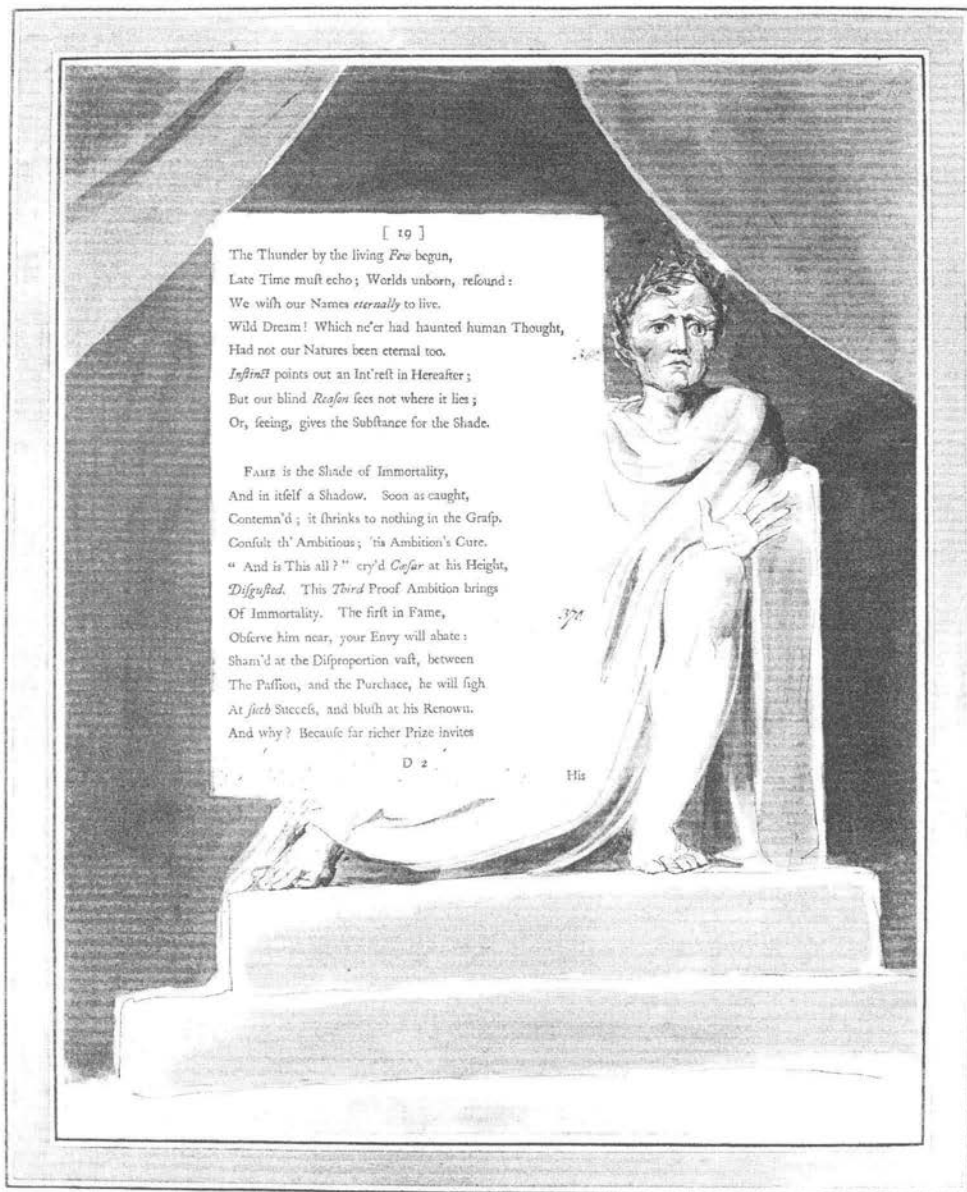
B   Bat
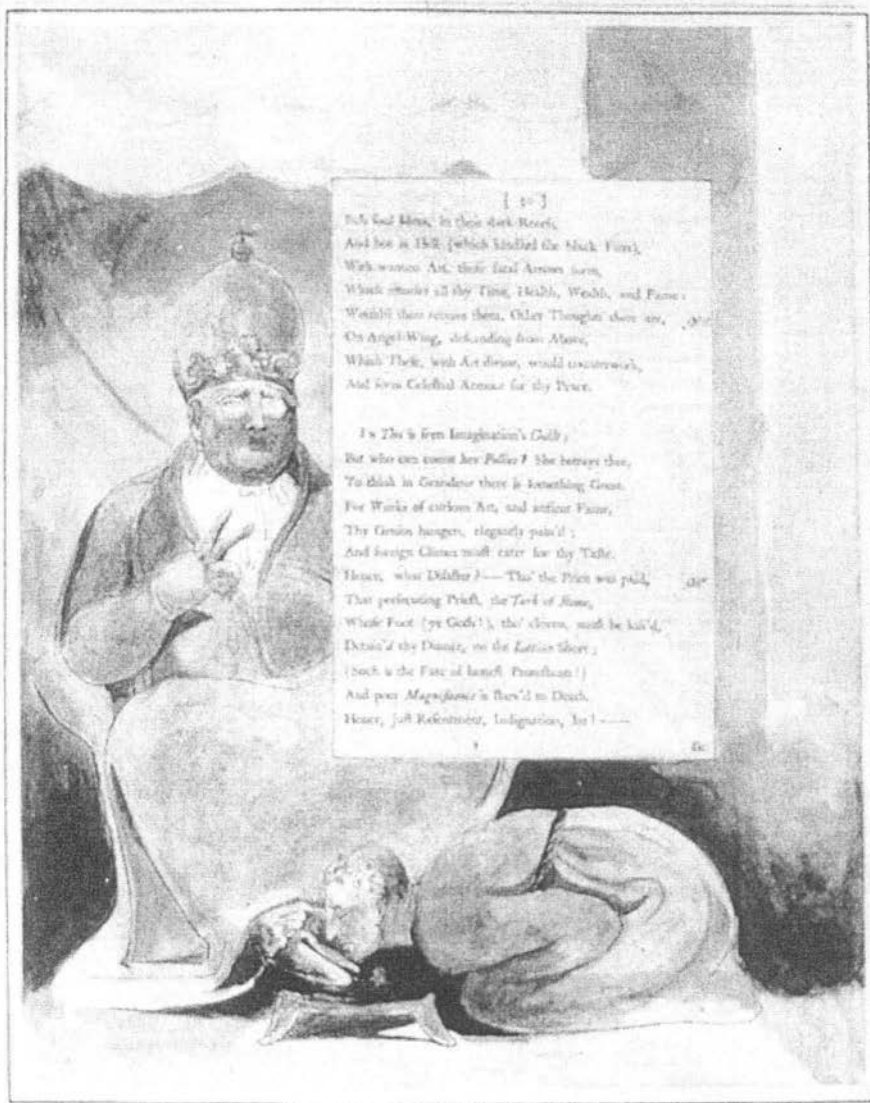
FIGURE 11. Night V, page 9

[19]

The Thunder by the living *Few* begun,
Late Time muſt echo; Worlds unborn, reſound:
We wiſh our Names *eternally* to live.
Wild Dream! Which ne'er had haunted human Thought,
Had not our Natures been eternal too.
Inſtinct points out an Int'reſt in Hereafter;
But our blind *Reaſon* ſees not where it lies;
Or, ſeeing, gives the Subſtance for the Shade.

FAME is the Shade of Immortality,
And in itſelf a Shadow. Soon as caught,
Contemn'd; it ſhrinks to nothing in the Graſp.
Conſult th' Ambitious; 'tis Ambition's Cure.
" And is This all?" cry'd *Cæſar* at his Height,
Diſguſted. This *Third* Proof Ambition brings
Of Immortality. The firſt in Fame,
Obſerve him near, your Envy will abate:
Sham'd at the Diſproportion vaſt, between
The Paſſion, and the Purchaſe, he will ſigh
At ſuch Succeſs, and bluſh at his Renown.
And why? Becauſe far richer Prize invites

D 2   His

FIGURE 12. Night VII, page 19

FIGURE 13. Night VIII, page 50

FIGURE 14. *Europe,* plate 5
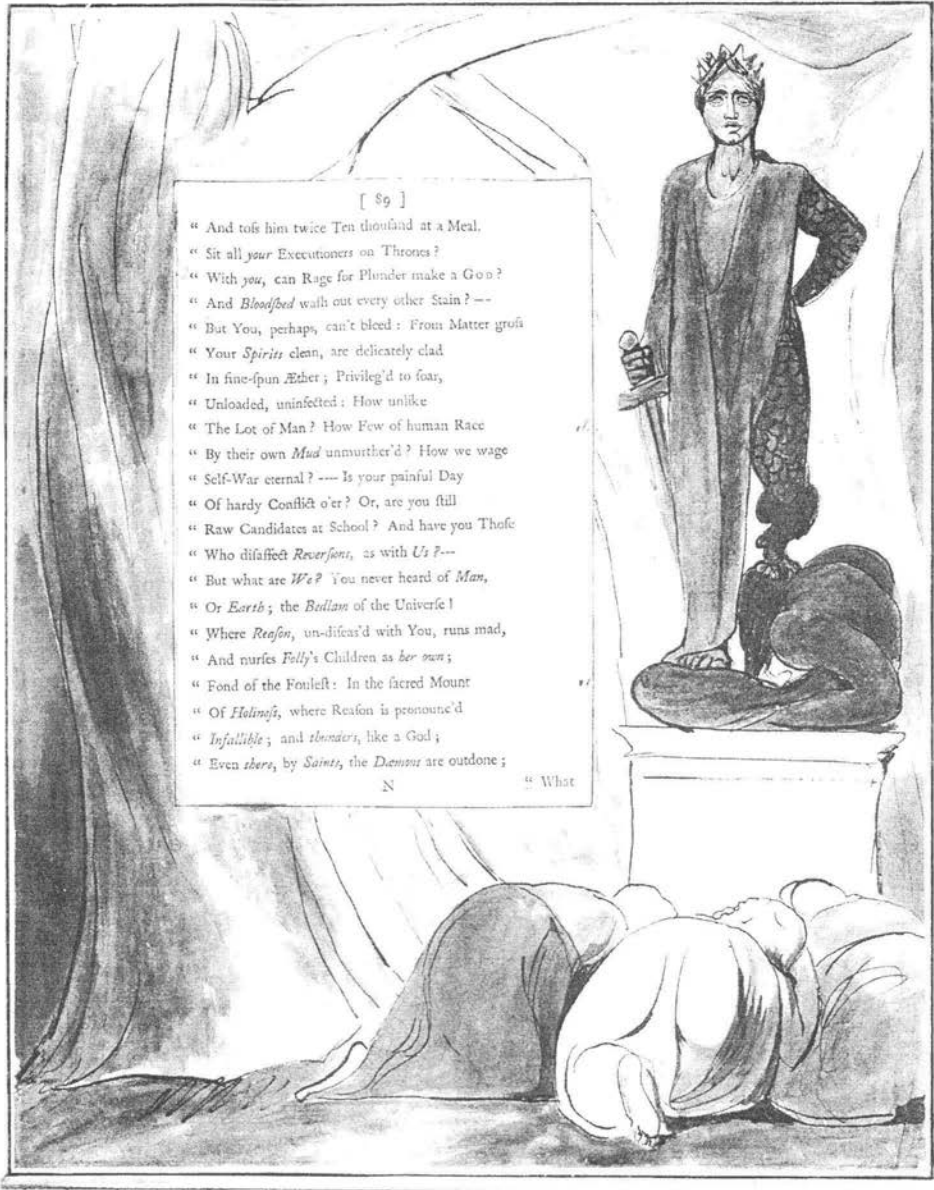
[89]

" And tofs him twice Ten thoufand at a Meal.

" Sit all *your* Executioners on Thrones?

" With *you*, can Rage for Plunder make a GOD?

" And *Bloodfhed* wafh out every other Stain? --

" But You, perhaps, can't bleed: From Matter grofs

" Your *Spirits* clean, are delicately clad

" In fine-fpun Æther; Privileg'd to foar,

" Unloaded, uninfected: How unlike

" The Lot of Man? How Few of human Race

" By their own *Mud* unmurther'd? How we wage

" Self-War eternal? ---- Is your painful Day

" Of hardy Conflict o'er? Or, are you ftill

" Raw Candidates at School? And have you Thofe

" Who difaffect *Reverfions*, as with *Us*?---

" But what are *We?* You never heard of *Man*,

" Or *Earth*; the *Bedlam* of the Univerfe!

" Where *Reafon*, un-difeas'd with You, runs mad,

" And nurfes *Folly*'s Children as *her own*;

" Fond of the Fouleft: In the facred Mount

" Of *Holinefs*, where Reafon is pronounc'd

" *Infallible*; and *thunders*, like a God;

" Even *there*, by *Saints*, the *Dæmons* are outdone;

N   " What

FIGURE 15. Night IX, page 89

FIGURE 16. Biblical typology (1799)

FIGURE 17. Biblical typology (1799)

FIGURE 18. Night VIII, title-page

FIGURE 19. Night VIII, title-page (close-up of upper left figure)

FIGURE 20. Caricature of Napoleon (close-up)

FIGURE 21. Caricature of Napoleon

[91]

And if he finds, commences *more* than Man ?
O for a Telescope His Throne to reach !
Tell me, ye Learn'd on *Earth !* or Blest *Above !*
Ye searching, ye *Newtonian*, Angels ! tell,
Where, your Great MASTER's Orb ? His Planets, where ?
Those *conscious* Satellites, those *Morning-Stars,*
First-born of DEITY ! from Central Love,
By Veneration most profound, thrown off ;
By sweet Attraction, no less strongly drawn ;
Aw'd, and yet *raptur'd*; *raptur'd*, yet *serene* ;
Past Thought, illustrious ; but with borrow'd Beams ;
In still *approaching* Circles, still *remote*,
Revolving round the Sun's eternal SIRE ?
Or sent, in Lines direct, on Embassies
To Nations — in what Latitude ? — Beyond
Terrestrial Thought's Horizon ! — And on what
High Errands sent ? — Here *human* Effort ends ;
And leaves me still a Stranger to *His* Throne.

FULL well it might ! I quite mistook my Road,
Born in an Age more Curious, than Devout ;
More fond to fix the *Place* of Heaven or Hell,
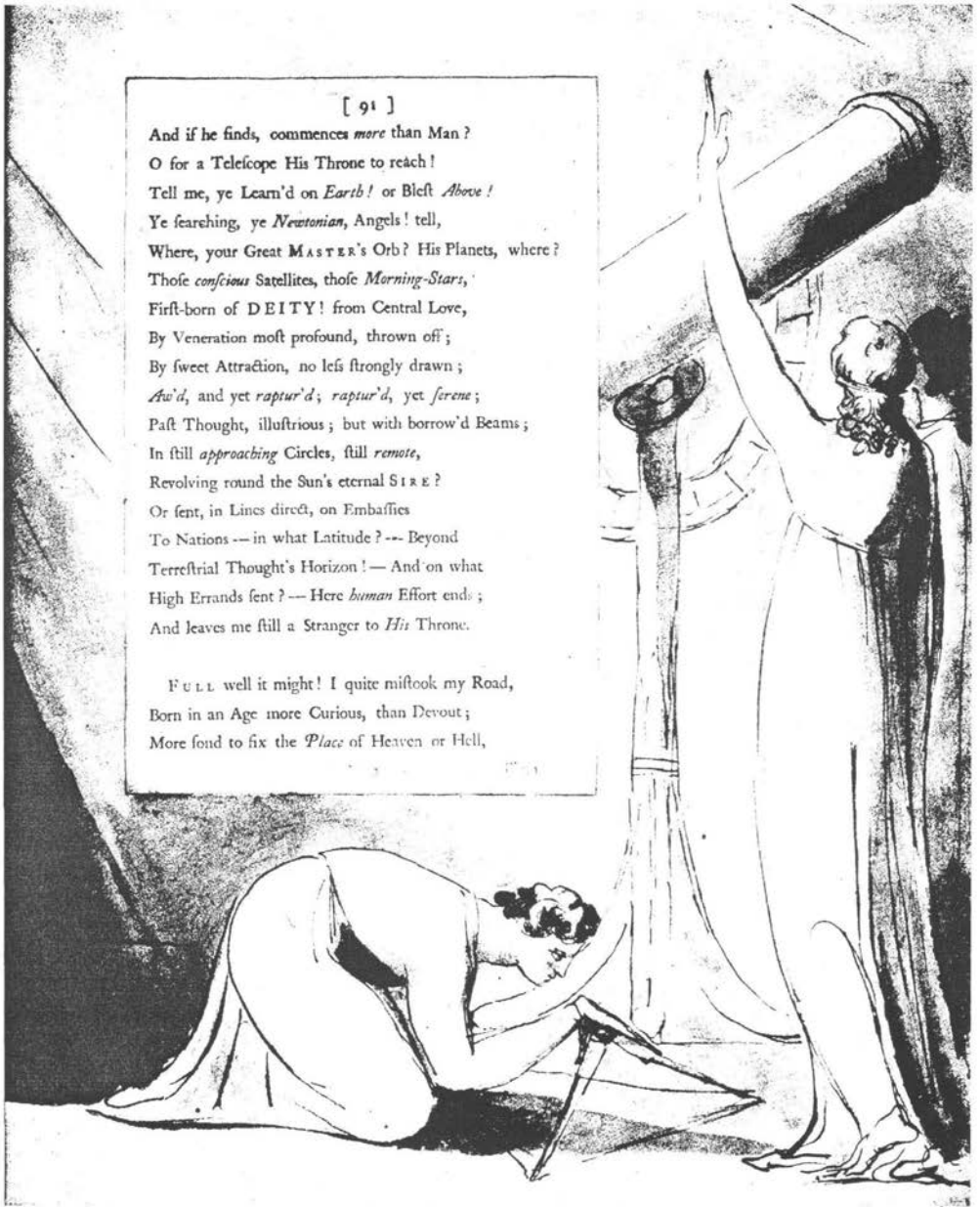
FIGURE 22. Night IX, page 91
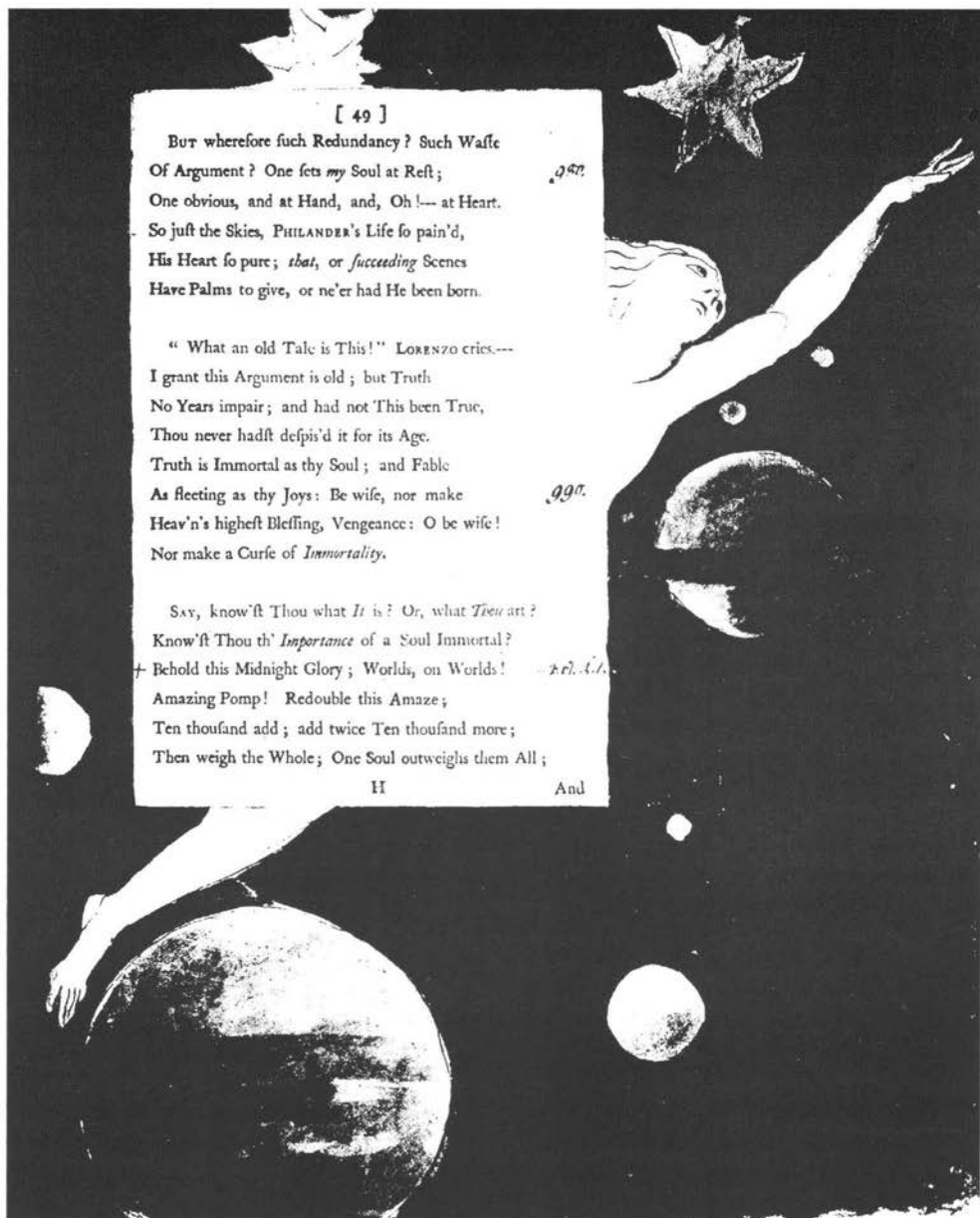
[49]

But wherefore such Redundancy? Such Wafte
Of Argument? One fets *my* Soul at Reft;   *950.*
One obvious, and at Hand, and, Oh!--- at Heart.
So juft the Skies, PHILANDER's Life fo pain'd,
His Heart fo pure; *that*, or *fucceeding* Scenes
Have Palms to give, or ne'er had He been born.

" What an old Tale is This!" LORENZO cries.---
I grant this Argument is old; but Truth
No Years impair; and had not This been True,
Thou never hadft defpis'd it for its Age.
Truth is Immortal as thy Soul; and Fable
As fleeting as thy Joys: Be wife, nor make   *990.*
Heav'n's higheft Blefling, Vengeance: O be wife!
Nor make a Curfe of *Immortality*.

Say, know'ft Thou what *It* is? Or, what *Thou* art?
Know'ft Thou th' *Importance* of a Soul Immortal?
Behold this Midnight Glory; Worlds, on Worlds!   *rel. i.i.*
Amazing Pomp! Redouble this Amaze;
Ten thoufand add; add twice Ten thoufand more;
Then weigh the Whole; One Soul outweighs them All;

H   And

FIGURE 23. Night VII, page 49

[94]
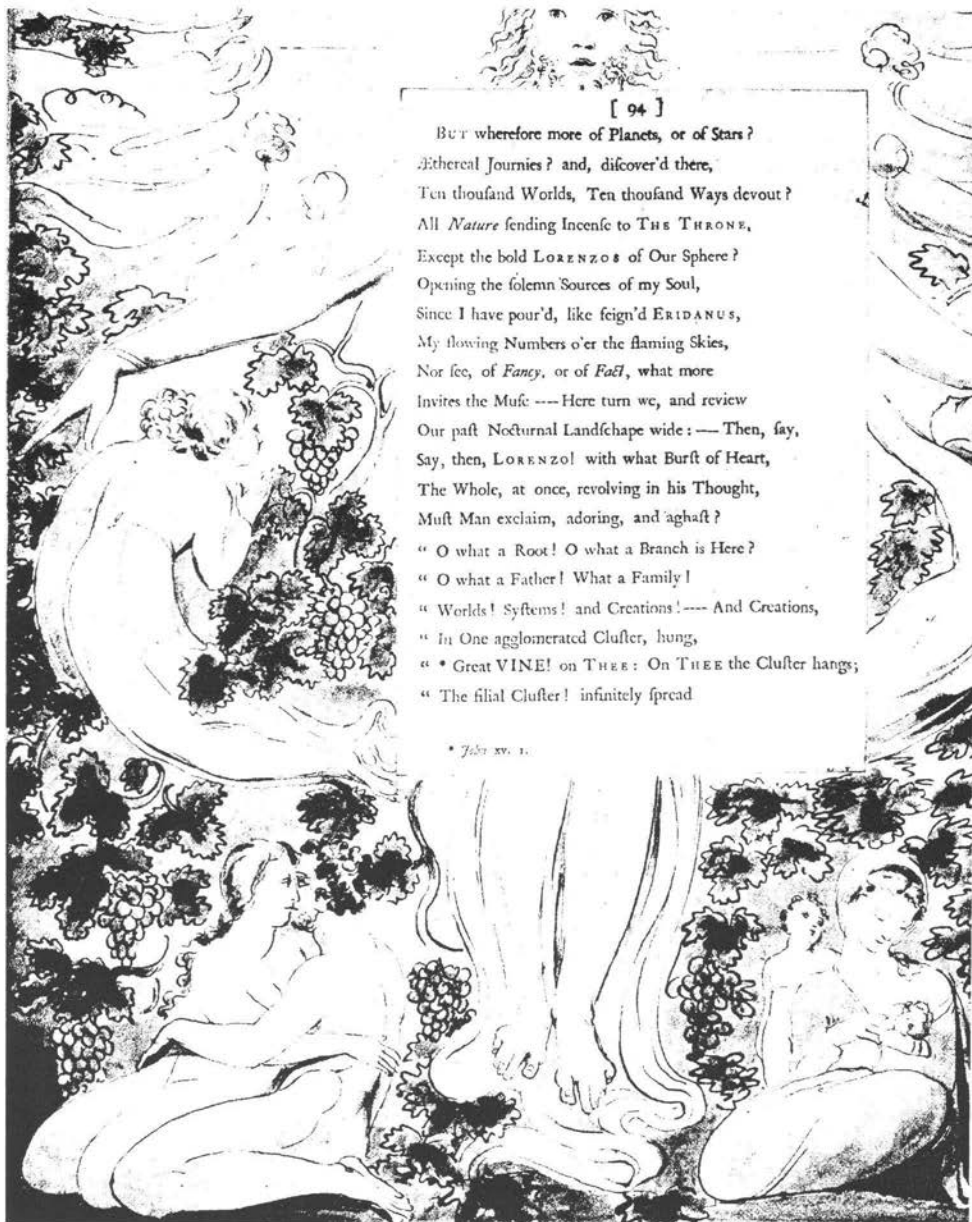
But wherefore more of Planets, or of Stars?
Æthereal Journies? and, discover'd there,
Ten thousand Worlds, Ten thousand Ways devout?
All *Nature* sending Incense to THE THRONE,
Except the bold LORENZOS of Our Sphere?
Opening the solemn Sources of my Soul,
Since I have pour'd, like feign'd ERIDANUS,
My flowing Numbers o'er the flaming Skies,
Nor see, of *Fancy*, or of *Fact*, what more
Invites the Muse ---- Here turn we, and review
Our past Nocturnal Landschape wide : ---- Then, say,
Say, then, LORENZO! with what Burst of Heart,
The Whole, at once, revolving in his Thought,
Must Man exclaim, adoring, and aghast?
" O what a Root! O what a Branch is Here?
" O what a Father! What a Family!
" Worlds! Systems! and Creations!---- And Creations,
" In One agglomerated Cluster, hung,
" * Great VINE! on THEE: On THEE the Cluster hangs;
" The filial Cluster! infinitely spread

* *John* xv. 1.

FIGURE 24. Night IX, page 94

PRISON: SARA

Tilottama Rajan argues that in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, reality-effects (such as specific details about the place and the circumstance of composition, and the address to an auditor transforming writing into speech), as well as the references to real people refigure fiction as life.[18] Coleridge's conversation poems, apart from being preceded and followed by concrete references to real life, are also framed by a realistic scenery: they begin with the establishment of a physical setting and conclude with a return to this setting as if transfigured by the creative imagination. Kathleen Wheeler suggests that scenes like cot, cottage and bower at the beginning of the poems equal unimaginative perception, conventional language and dead metaphor,[19] but Rajan also notices, in an analysis of *This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison*, that the bower, for instance, represents a "stimulus to creativity."[20]

In *Effusion*, Sara's bodily presence seems to belong to the realistic scenery which physically encloses the speaker. The touch of her cheek on the speaker's arm reinforces both the speaker's sense of the physical world and of the corporeal boundaries of his self. It necessarily contrasts the hearing of the sound, which, in turn, will entail the visionary experience. The feeling of touch goes together with allegorical discourse (language drawing attention to its own status as an artificial construct – "Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love"), which latter returns, together with the sense of physical boundaries and reality-effects, in the second part of the poem (from line 41), where the speaker is mirrored in Sara's eyes as a "sinful and most miserable man." The listener's piercing look and her inescapable corporeality disrupts inner vision and triggers an explicitly allegorical mode of discourse restating temporality.[21]

Meanwhile, though Sara's emphatic presence could be interpreted solely as a kind of prison confining the speaker to temporality (or, as we will see later, as a warning against the disruptive effects of time on any effort to unify an ephemeral matter, or the materiality of signs, with an eternal idea), it also provokes the need for communication. Thus, both stimulating and marking the end of poetic

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[18] Cf. Tilottama Rajan. "Displacing Post-Structuralism: Romantic Studies after Paul de Man." In: *Studies in Romanticism* 24 (Winter 1985), p. 454.

[19] Wheeler. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry*, p. 142

[20] Rajan. *The Supplement of Reading*, p. 114.

[21] See also Shaw, pp. 33–34 and Paul de Man. "The Rhetoric of Temporality." *Blindness and Insight.* London: Routledge, 1993, p. 207.

activity, it can also be linked to the subtitle ("composed August 20th...") stressing both that composition originates at a specific time and place and that the poem itself is finished.

Hence, the title "Effusion" (a pouring forth, an unrestrained utterance, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) that seems to challenge the primacy of the object over the subject,[22] does not only exhibit the movement of "phantasies" (or of "vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring")[23] but also stands in opposition to the subtitle and to the listener's bodily presence. However, the questions why effusion turns out to be inadequate to maintain the communication with the listener and, ultimately, what makes it impossible for poetic language "to realise itself" remain to be answered.

EFFUSION: THE LUTE

Firstly, I would like to expand what has already been argued by Tilottama Rajan concerning the deconstruction of the symbol by allegory in an analysis of *The Eolian Harp*. Doing this, I will try to demonstrate that the efforts made for the construction of the symbol in the later versions of the poem might be considered as a rescue against the allegorical and ironic nature of language laid bare by *Effusion*. However, since the reading of this early poem and the remark on its successive rewritings might indeed appear to be the mere justification of some late 20th century theories, what I would like to show is that Coleridge's "defensive strategy" might not be rooted in "self-mystification"[24] but in an account taken of the dangers inherent in language.

In her analysis of *The Eolian Harp*, Rajan claims that the image of the harp which is meant to suggest the modulation from an explicitly allegorical language to the true voice of symbolic feeling is in fact a "rather artificial personification ..., which marks a reversion to the eighteenth-century poetic diction eschewed by Wordsworth and Coleridge in their attempt to create a more natural, more 'real'

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[22] As Rajan puts it: "The original title 'Effusion XXXV' suggests an outpouring of sentiment not grounded in the object onto which it is projected" (Rajan. "Displacing Post-Structuralism," p. 470).

[23] I will try to avoid the use of the word "imagination" on the one hand because Coleridge, in the 1790s, was still under the influence of Hartley's associationism, and on the other because the concept is so charged with "romantic ideologies" – also rooted in Coleridge's later writings – that it would be impossible to use it without further clarification.

[24] De Man. "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 208.

language."[25] Though one could object that the word "hark!" addressed to the listener suggests that the language is *not* purely figural, and *is* based on perception,[26] we will see later that the traces which reveal writing *counterfeiting* oral communication also point to the artifice of the harp image – of the trope for natural sound. To this, we could add that since both the subject matter of the passage translating the sound of the lute into language, and language itself exhibiting the spread of similes and metaphors reach their climax in the image of Paradise, lines 12–25 do not only reveal but also explicitly thematise the desire, in poetic language, to achieve a natural source where the sign can coincide with its object, that is, where it can "partake of the Reality which it renders intelligible." However, the fact that no poetic words can be "natural" is unveiled again at the very moment when the poetic image itself seems to suggest the contrary.

As it is well known, Plato's *Ion* exerted a great influence on Coleridge. Critics tend to interpret *Kubla Khan*, for instance, as an example of that influence and see in Coleridge's poet the representative *par excellence* of the poet Socrates describes in *Ion*. Similarly, the "twilight Elfins" in *Effusion* and in *The Eolian Harp* who

> Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
> Where melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
> Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
> Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing...

might also be reminiscent of Plato's poet: a "light and winged thing" whose "melodies (...) are gathered from rills that run with honey, out of glens and gardens of the Muses [that] they bring as the bees do honey, flying like the bees."[27]

Thus, desire is endless: firstly, language can never be "natural" since it can reach nothing else but a text, secondly, it can never be "original" since they can never be anything else but the *repetition* of an always already existing prior text. These quite general claims, at the same time, do not explain why the proliferation of signs imply the risk of remaining incomprehensible, and/or disapproved not

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[25] Rajan. "Displacing Post-Structuralism," p. 471.

[26] Cf. De Man's comment on the allegorical language of *La Nouvelle Héloise:* "Rousseau does not pretend to be observing. The language is purely figural, not based on perception" (De Man. "The Rhetoric of Temporality," p. 203).

[27] E. Hamilton & H. Cairns eds. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978, p. 220.

only by the traditional community represented by Sara, but also by the speaker himself.

In Coleridge's poem, there appears to be something evil, something wicked in temptation and desire – as well as in the quasi-androgynous unification of the harp (imagination) and the breeze (inspiration):

> How, by the desultory breeze caressed,
> Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
> It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must needs
> Tempt to *repeat the wrong!*
>
> (my italics)

In the same way, the "twilight Elfins" make a "witchery of sound" and the birds' wings are "untamed," devoid of mastery. Furthermore, when the harp image is transposed to the speaker (whose gender becomes also confused), the "thoughts uncalled and undetained" traversing his "indolent and passive brain" are "wild and various as the random gales..." It seems that the poet Plato describes in *Ion* does not only serve as a pre-text for Coleridge's poet as for the melodies he gathers from the "gardens of the Muses," but also concerning his state of being "possessed," of being "in ecstasy."

For what we can read here, on a narrative level, is that the speaker who tries to persuade his wife about the existence of some "intellectual breeze, / At once the soul of each and God of All" becomes in fact possessed by the tempting maids of his imagination, and, engaging in "idle flitting phantasies," unites, in language, with an emphatically female principle. The caress of the breeze or the half-yielding maid which make one think of a still unsatiated desire and, necessarily, of the ideal, platonic love, might even be considered as an ironic hint at the opening scene of the conjugal love where Sara's cheek is "reclined" on the speaker's arm. As a result, Sara's reproof might not only suggest that she is not an understanding, "ideal" listener but also that the speaker's pretension to become "a naked spirit"[28] is in fact related to the "wrong": in the concluding part of the poem ("A sinful and most miserable man, / Wildered and dark"), the adjective "wildered" might refer back to the "wild and various" phantasies, as well as to the

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[28] In his letter to John Thelwall, on December 31, 1796, after having remarked that this is "the favourite" of his poems, Coleridge claims that he has made up his mind that he is "a mere apparition, a naked spirit" (quoted in I.A. Richards ed. *The Portable Coleridge*. London: Penguin Books, 1950, p. 254).

"footless and wild" melodies of the imagination, while the word "sin," though it can indeed be taken ironically, can also be read literally: the speaker was possessed by a 'female' principle enticing him into escaping his wife conjugal love and earthly morality. Sara's disapproval, therefore, has *both* a comic and a serious effect.

As far as language is concerned, it is the attempt to *express* the Eternal and the Ideal ("the soul of each, and God of All") which, from the perspective of a second, reflective self appears to be sinful and vain: poetic language can rescue itself neither from temporality (it cannot be but the repetition of anterior signs), nor from the semantic ambiguities which permit that the frivolous outdo the sacred in one and the same discourse.

All the more so, since in the 1796 version of the poem, the passage from the speaker's "phantasies" to the affirmation of the "one intellectual breeze" is not without a hitch:

> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject lute!
> *Or* what if all animated nature
> Be but organic harps...
>
> (my italics)

"Or" changes into "And" only in the later versions, where the symbolic power of the first part becomes underpinned by the addition of the "one life" theme, and, as it was mentioned above, the footnote is already withdrawn.

Hence, *Effusion* seems to lay it bare that being possessed by one's own imaginings might not only imply the loss of the mastery of language and of the self in the proliferation of connotative signs: the loss of the unity of meaning might challenge the belief in the unity of Being as well.

Consequently, the (re)possession of Sara and the stress on a traditional religious faith goes together with the regain of control over language: the connotative, semantically ambiguous discourse becomes denotative, the distance between sign and its object acknowledged, and language, instead of enacting the unsatiable desire to reach its source, resists temptation and renounces originality. On the other hand, however, the surrender to Sara also suggests a choice: as if her eyes, considered as a figure of self-reflection demystifying the workings of the mind, did not only remind the speaker of his fallen state or of the dangers of "ecstasy" (of a possible proliferation of language that he might become powerless

to control) but also reassured him of the existence of physical boundaries which could render the mastery over language possible.

SPEECH AND WRITING/PRISON AND EFFUSION

Coleridge, in Chapter XXIV of *Biographia Literaria* will clearly point to the advantages of the physical presence of the speaker.

> [B]ut lastly and chiefly, for the excitement and temporary sympathy of feeling, which the recitation of the poem by an admirer, especially if he be at once a warm admirer, and a man of acknowledged celebrity calls forth in the audience. For this is really a species of Animal Magnetism, in which the enkindling reciter, by perpetual comment of looks and tones, lends his own will and apprehensive faculty to his auditors. They *live* for the time within the dilated sphere of his intellectual being. It is equally possible, though not equally common, that a reader left to itself should sink bellow the poem, as that the poem left to itself should flag beneath the feeling of the reader.[29]

This passage suggests that only the presence of a speaker can render writing transparent, since "the poem left alone" might be misunderstood in the absence of a reciter who could make it unambiguous. Interestingly, the extract also bears the impact of Plato's *Ion,* but, as opposed to *Effusion,* it does not comment on Plato's poet, but on Plato's rhapsode, the declaimer of the poet – who is the central figure of the dialogue having such a great impact on Coleridge.[30]

Though Nigel Leask,[31] for instance, alludes to a possible similarity between Plato's poet and Coleridge's own image of himself as a poet, we might

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[29] Coleridge, Vol. 2, Ch. XXIV, pp. 211–212.

[30] In *Ion* Plato stages a dialogue between Socrates and the winner of the contest of rhapsodes, Ion. The rhapsode is a declaimer of poets who "understands the poet's thought," whose "gift," according to Socrates, is neither art (in the sense of techne) nor knowledge (in the sense of epistheme), but "a power divine." This impels the rhapsode "like the power in [...] the magnet": the magnet attracts a chain of iron rings, by imparting to the first ring a force that enables it to attract another ring, so that a chain of rings be formed. To the magnet Socrates compares the Muse, to the first ring the poet, "possessed" by the Muse and brought to "ecstasy," to the middle ring the rhapsode, "possessed" by the poet, and to the last ring the audience, who, in turn, is brought to "ecstasy" and is "possessed" by the rhapsode (Hamilton & Cairns, pp. 216–228).

[31] Nigel Leask. "Shelley's Magnetic Ladies: Romantic Mesmerism and the Politics of the Body." In: S. Copley & J. Whale eds. *Beyond Romanticism.* London & New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 60–61.

suppose that *Effusion* actually suggests a different problematic: that of the impossible desire of being the poet and the rhapsode at the same time. For in this conversation poem, language meant to share the poetic experience is far from mesmerising its auditor. Silence, murmur, pouring, sound, music and babbling escape the listener and language translating them into images only discloses its own semantic ambiguity. Conspicuously, the inarticulate sounds transform into speech ("speak of him"), bidding ("biddest me") and praise ("praise him") only in the second part of the poem, with the resumption of an explicitly allegorical mode of discourse, and with the renewed accent on corporeality and oral communication ("possess / Peace and this cot, and *thee*"). The rhapsode is missing, since while in the first part of the poem the translation of music into language fails to take "possession" of the listener, speech, in the second part, abandons the attempt to express the "poet's thought."[32] Thus, if we reconsider all that has been said about "effusions," we might conclude that in this conversation poem, silence, babbling and the "witchery of sound" cannot be associated with speech, but can rather be considered as a kind of *writing* that escapes the unity of meaning.[33]

All the more so, since in spite of the apparent reestablishment of oral communication in the second part of the poem, the speaker does "repeat the wrong" (with all its connotations discussed above) just in the middle of passing a sentence upon it: the index alluding to the ambiguous writing of a French woman – attached as a note, as a supplement to the poem – unexpectedly disrupts the oratory, and the poem's being *as if* it was oral communication suddenly reveals itself. Meantime, the footnote does not only escape the posited listener's hearing but also her Medusa-like eyes, the very gaze which, having reminded the speaker

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[32] Cf. note 30.

[33] It might be of interest to remark that in his later years, well after the publication of the well-known, exegetical passage of *Lay Sermons* (1816–17) in which he characterises the symbol as the "translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal," (Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Stateman's Manual, Lay Sermons.* Ed. R. J. White. London, Princeton: Routledge, 1972, p. 30) Coleridge seems to challenge again the idea of "translucence." In *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1829), he asserts the subversive, evil force of the literal threatening the symbol – the symbols of the *Scripture:* "the understanding the same symbols in a literal i.e. phaenomenal sense, notwithstanding the most earnest warnings against it, the most express declarations of the folly and danger of interpreting *sensually* what was delivered of objects *super*-sensual – this was the rank wilding, on which 'the prince of this world,' the lust of power and worldly aggrandizement was enabled to graft, one by one, the whole branchery of papal superstition and imposture" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *On the Constitution of the Church and State.* Ed. J. Colmer. London, Princeton: Routledge, 1976, p. 120).

that 'he does not only look but is also looked at,' could exert a control over language.

MME ROLAND

Before turning to the interpretation of the footnote, it might be useful to make a brief summary on the structure of *Effusion*. We have seen that the poem exhibits the inter-relatedness of two semantic fields, one of them connoting finitude, composition, control and oral communication, and the other one connoting endlessness, proliferation, the state of being possessed and writing. The alteration of the two is also displayed by the structure of the poem: though it seemingly shows a return-upon-itself circular unity, the second, concluding part. is interrupted by a reference to the footnote, which actually appears at the very end of the poem.

The fact that the quotation opens an intertextual space already links it to the thematic field of effusion opposing all the implications of Sara's presence. Furthermore, this quotation is taken from Mme Roland's memories:[34] from a piece written in prison by a French woman, by an absent "stranger" – who was, by the way, a very good companion to her husband, again in contrast with Sara. Apart from the fact that both the footnote and lines 12–25 of poem figure language as fleeing from but confined by a (metaphorical or literal) prison, the note also mirrors the constant struggle in the poem between possessing (i.e.: "*My pensive Sara,*" "to possess thee") and being possessed (i.e.: "Full many a thought uncalled and undetained, / ... / Traverse my indolent and passive brain"): it can either be considered as an extract that the speaker tries to appropriate incorporating it into his own text, or as an ambiguous supplement that escapes the main body of the poem.

The passage from Mme Roland's *Appel à l'Impartial Postérité* reads as follows:

> L'athée n'est point à mes yeux un faux esprit; je puis vivre avec lui aussi bien et mieux qu'avec le dévot, car il raisonne davantage, mais il lui manque un sens, et mon âme ne se fond point entièrement avec la sienne: il est froid au spectacle le plus ravissant, et il cherche un syllogisme

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[34] Mme Roland, even more than her husband, was one of the moving spirits of the Gironde. She was arrested during the Jacobin Terror and wrote her memories in prison before being executed by the Revolutionary Tribunal, in 1793.

lorsque je rends une action de grâce. "Appel à l'impartial postérité par la Citoyenne Roland," troisième partie, p. 67.

The English translation of the memories, made by J. Johnson, was published in 1795, when the original appeared in France:[35]

> The atheist is not, in my eyes, a man of ill faith: I can live with him as well, nay better than with the devotee, for he reasons more; but he is deficient in a certain sense, and his soul does not keep pace with mine; he is unmoved at a spectacle most ravishing, and he hunts for a syllogism, where I am impressed with awe and admiration.[36]

The wording of the footnote is not devoid of ambiguity. It is not evident whether the clause after "mais" [but] refers back to the "athée" [atheist] or to the "dévot" [devotee].

In her analysis,[37] Kathleen Wheeler argues that "the placement of the dependent clause suggests that it [the whole elaboration] is of the *dévot.*" This claim, I think, is questionable. First of all, it is interesting to remark that both in Mme Roland's text and in its first translation, a semicolon is placed between "davantage" (more) and "mais" (but). This semicolon somehow became, in Coleridge's note, a comma. So Mme Roland's text, that Coleridge might have read, is the following:

> L'athée n'est point a mes yeux un faux esprit; je puis vivre avec lui aussi bien et mieux qu'avec le dévot, car il raisonne davantage; mais il lui manque un sens, et mon âme ne se fond point entièrement avec la sienne: il est froid...

This semicolon suggests that it is the atheist, rather than the devotee, who is "deficient in a certain sense." Obviously, we cannot decide whether Coleridge's miscopying was intentional or unintentional. Not even whether the edition he had in hand was a good print or a bad one. All that we know is that the footnote makes an allusion to another text (differing from it only by a semicolon) and that this deliberate intertextual play activates two texts simultaneously. On the other hand, we might also regard the opposition between the devotee and the atheist as

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[35] See Stillinger, p. 37.

[36] Marie-Jeanne Philipon Roland de la Platière. *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity by Citizeness Roland, Wife of the Minister of the Home Department.* London: J. Johnson, 1795, Part 3, p. 112. Quoted by Stillinger, p. 240.

[37] See Wheeler. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry,* pp. 86–90.

an anticipation of the later distinction between the Platonists and the Aristotelians: in this case, it might also be difficult to associate syllogism, used in Aristotelian logic, with religious devotion. But even if we take neither the source nor Coleridge's later writings into consideration, the description remains, at least, ambiguous.

The whole passage which the sentence was taken from might also be worth taking into account:

> Dans le silence du cabinet et la sécheresse de la discussion, je conviendrais avec l'athée ou le matérialiste de l'insolubilité de certaines questions; mais, au milieu de la campagne et dans la contemplation de la nature, mon coeur ému s'élève au principe vivifiant qui les anime, à l'intelligence qui les ordonne, à la bonté qui m'y fait trouver tant de charmes; lorsque des mers immenses me séparent de ce que j'aime, quand tous les maux de la société nous frappent ensemble comme pour nous punir d'avoir voulu son plus grand bien, je vois au delà des bornes de la vie le prix de nos sacrifices et le bonheur de nous réunir.
>
> Comment? De quelle manière? Je l'ignore; je sens seulement que cela doit être ainsi.
>
> L'athée n'est point a mes yeux...[38]

Conspicuously enough, the subject matter of Mme Roland's text and the poem itself is very similar; it can either signal an early plagiarism of Coleridge's or the fact that plagiarism comes inevitably from the effusion of writing. But more importantly, the passage as a whole reveals that in the sentence which became Coleridge's footnote, the hierarchy between the devotee and the atheist is twofold.

On the one hand, they are compared on the basis of the question 'who is better to live with?' In this respect, the text favours the atheist which suggests

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[38] Paul de Roux ed. *Mémoires de Madame Roland.* Paris: Mercure de France, 1966, p. 258. ["In the silence of the closet and in the dryness of the discussion, I would agree with the atheist or with the materialist upon the insolubility of certain questions; but, in the middle of the countryside and in the contemplation of nature, my heart overcome with emotion rises up to the life-giving principle that animates them, to the intelligence that organises them, to the goodness that makes me find so much delight in them; when immense seas separate me from the one I love, when all the wrongs of society strike us at the same time as if they punished us for having wished its greatest good, I can see beyond the boundaries of life the price of our sacrifices and the bliss of our reunion. // How? in what way? I do not know; I only feel that it must be thus. // The atheist is not, in my eyes a man of ill faith..." – my translation.]

indeed that the footnote alludes to Sara (the devotee) in a disapproving way. Furthermore, given that Sara cannot "hear" the footnote and that it is written in French (so she would probably not even understand it), the note can indeed be regarded as a wink at some ideal *reader*. In addition, both the "coy maids" of the speaker's "phantasies" and Mme Roland can be considered as outcasts in a community represented by Sara and by (metaphorical or literal) imprisonment itself. As far as sensitivity is concerned, however, Mme Roland claims that the one who is "impressed with awe and admiration" "at a spectacle most ravishing" is better than the one who "reasons more." Interestingly, the lines "For never guiltless may I speak of him, / Th' Incomprehensible! Save when with awe / I praise him, and with faith that inly *feels*" are reminiscent of the source text or of its first translation: the faith in the "Incomprehensible," "that inly *feels*" parallels Mme Roland's "How? in what way? I do not know; I only feel that it must be thus," while the words "with awe I praise him" call into mind Johnson's (mis)translation: "I am impressed with awe and admiration." Nevertheless, even if the similar wording suggests that the footnote supports the conclusion of the poem, the imprisoned Mme Roland musings on the beauties of nature links the note to the speaker of the first part. Since what the passage as a whole reveals is that though in some respects the devotee (Sara) is better than the atheist, the one who can feel the "one intellectual breeze" (or, with Mme Roland's words: "l'intelligence qui les ordonne") while contemplating nature is even better than the devotee. Consequently, the footnote seems to add something to our previous claims: the speaker's "heresy" might be nothing else but his conviction of being able to fully comprehend the Incomprehensible, to express the ineffable.

On the other hand, the Incomprehensible shines through the words that "understand themselves better than those who use them."[39] In a similar way that Plato's pre-text engages in a dialogue with the poem, the footnote reinforces its ambiguity, disclosing the endless communication between signs. Both the 'conversation' with the deceased Mme Roland's writing and the dialogue with the lute (translated first into the imagery of tempting *maids*) escape audible communication. Furthermore, the intertextual nature of all writing (betrayed by Plato's text underlying the image of the "twilight Elfins") which turns into a deliberate intertextual play with the insertion of the footnote brings the poem's dependence on written traditions in any assignment of meaning[40] into the

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[39] Schlegel, p. 33, see the epigraph.

[40] Cf. Jonathan Culler. "Presupposition and Intertextuality." *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 103.

foreground. This meaning, however, undermines itself: the note used by the speaker as means to support the faith that "inly *feels*" comes from 'outside' (from Mme Roland's writing and from outside the poem itself), the sound of nature comes from literature, and the imagery expressing the search for origins and originality derives from Plato.

IRONY AND READING

While the semantic ambiguity of lines 12–35 revealing the equivocal character of language, as well as the ambiguity of the footnote (who is better, the *athée* or the *dévot?*) and that of the poem (who is "wrong," Sara or the speaker?) entailed by the juxtaposition of two different points of view bring – in Friedrich Schlegel's words – "everything into confusion,"[41] they also open up a 'conversation' with the *reader*. For the reader, left without a unifying voice, is forced to make and unmake decisions: to give an active, creative but also arbitrary response to the text. Hence, even if the evil silence of signs which challenges the unity of being and meaning endangers the authorial voice, it also ensures the survival of the text through the active reader-response it triggers.

Paul de Man argues that Friedrich Schlegel's authentic language is "the language of madness, the language of error and the language of stupidity [...] It is such because authentic language is a mere semiotic entity, open to the radical arbitrariness of any sign system and as such is profoundly unreliable." And he continues:

> There is a machine there, a text machine, an implacable determination and total arbitrariness [...] which inhabits words on the level of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration.[42]

Effusion might be considered as the intertwining of an allegorical mode of speech engendering the narrative structure, and irony originating in the authentic chaos of language and subverting denotation. For the mirroring eyes of the listener do not only remind the speaker of his "authentic temporal destiny," as it

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[41] Schlegel, p. 33, see the epigraph.
[42] Paul de Man. "The Concept of Irony." *Aesthetic Ideology.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 181.

has already been argued, but also of the fact that during the process of translating ('endowing with a meaning') some inarticulate sounds, he fell prey to the evil spirit of self-differing signs. But the speaker's self-alienation triggered by the listener's gaze is also an ironic gesture: as if self-irony was a means to control and overcome the subversive force of irony inherent in language. However, as we have seen, no gods can ever "rescue us from all these ironies."[43]

In the meantime, the reader might go through the same stages as the speaker does. Coleridge's surrender to Sara may come as a surprise to most of us who read the first part of *Effusion* as the confession of a Poet who has "drunk the milk of Paradise." Only the sudden shift of perspective makes us ask what can be wrong with the lute or the "aye-babbling spring" of the imagination. Subsequently, when we would accept a more traditional faith and the supremacy of conjugal love over the desire for some imaginary maids, the index, disrupting the linearity of reading, refers us to the writing of yet another woman: to *Mme* Roland. This inter-play of enthusiasm and detachment – the alteration between giving and withdrawing a meaning – suggests that the poem both re-enacts and makes the reader re-enact a possible process of reading which stands in clear opposition both to (ideal) listening characterised by enthusiasm without detachment and to mere gazing characterised by detachment without enthusiasm (cf. Sara, and the speaker in "Dejection, an Ode").

Coleridge wrote sixteen versions of the poem, and it seems that the revisions aim at rescuing language from "these ironies" and bringing it closer to speech. The alterations made in the 1817 edition, the change of the title from *Effusion* to *The Eolian Harp*, the insertion of the full passage on the "one life" ("O the one life within us and abroad") and the withdrawal of the footnote might all be considered as an act of faith in a poetic language in which "the figure, and the real thing so figured, exactly coincide."[44] At the same time, however, Sara's presence will always remind the readers of the heretic dangers in attempting to express the translucence of the Meaning.

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[43] Schlegel, in "On Incomprehensibility," poses the question: "What gods will rescue us from all these ironies?" Cf. Wheeler. *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*, p. 37.

[44] Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "On the Principles of Genial Criticism (1814)." *Biographia Literaria,* Vol. II, p. 233.

Ákos Krassóy

The "House of Fiction"

Plurality and Essentialism in Dickens' *Bleak House*

> "Does this mean 'in a world grown alien to it,'
> the novel will disappear? That it will leave
> Europe to founder in 'the forgetting of being'?
> That nothing will be left but the endless babble
> of grafomaniacs, nothing but *novels that come
> after the history of the novel?*"
>
> (Milan Kundera)[1]

"ADA'S PROBLEM"

In Dickens' *Bleak House*, Ada Clare addresses the following words of entreaty to Richard Cardstone:

> I do not quite know how to write what I wish to say next, but I trust
> you will understand it as I mean it. [...] I most earnestly entreat and beg
> you to desist. You can do nothing for my sake that will make me half so
> happy, as for ever turning your back upon the shadow in which we both
> were born... Pray, pray... let it go for ever. We have reason to know, by
> this time, that there is no good in it, and no hope; that there is nothing
> to be got from it but sorrow.[2]

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[1] Milan Kundera. *The Art of the Novel.* New York: Grove Press, 1988, p. 19.
[2] Charles Dickens. *Bleak House.* London: Chapman and Hall & Henry Frowde, 1892, p. 605.

She is trying to drag her lover away from the Chancery suit of Jarndyce & Jarndyce, out of the endless flow of unreconcilable arguments which has determined the lives of the naive parties to the suit as they pursue a breath-taking heritage. A final verdict could certainly change the financial and social standards of those involved. Yet, the words of the quotation speak for themselves: there is no justification for optimism over a quick ending to such an intricate Chancery suit.

This alarming message is addressed not only to Richard, but to the reader, the interpreter as well, who thus is likely to become a victim of the destructive underworld of the novel. The grey setting of the Court of Chancery affects the consciousness of those who pursue meaning as well. It blocks the mind of all those who wish to give a transparent reading to such an opaque sequence of facts. The underlying structure of this micro-world cannot be seen. We follow the confusingly interwoven lines of the plot but do not reach the final stage; we do not get to the *cause,* to the actual fact of crime. We do not get to know the murderer, the unknown promoter of these dark affairs. The unsuccessful investigation produces a metaphorical meaning.[3] All in vain, we run after a vaguely discernible trail: we gradually lose confidence in achieving a decent reading and tend to think "there is nothing to be got from it."

DICKENS' REALISM

However, the investigation must be continued, not "let it go for ever." The mere existence of diametrically opposed critical readings calls for further examination. Dickens has been used as a test case by far too many critical schools and exploited by the proponents of various ideologies. Naturally enough, the political aspects of his oeuvre are the most noticeable, since the socio-political connotations of his vision of the world are obvious. The pages on Jo, for instance, are easy to read as a description of the lowest layer of the urban *lumpen proletariat,*[4] or, in a different

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[3] All in all, *Bleak House* covers the story of an unsuccessful investigation. Neither of the investigators manage to unfold the secret entirely: while Tulkinghorn is killed before revealing his findings, Bucket, who has got to the bottom of the case, fails to prevent the Lady from ending up in a pauper's grave. (Cf. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák. *Kubla kán és Pickwick úr.* Budapest: Magvető, 1982, p. 241.)

[4] Cf. Sándor Rákos. "Előszó." In: Charles Dickens. *Az örökösök.* Géza Ottlik transl. Budapest: Révai Könyvkiadó Nemzeti Vállalat, 1950, p. vii. The foreword of the 1950 Hungarian translation, written by Sándor Rákos, reflects the thoughts of a highly sophisticated, self-appointed representative of

perspective, identify Jo's world with 19th century bourgeois liberalism.[5] Dickens has been appropriated by communists, liberals, and conservatives alike on ideological grounds. He provides a fertile ground for political speculation. But let me quote Orwell's famous essay here at length:

> And so far as social criticism goes, one can never extract much more from Dickens than this, unless one deliberately reads meanings into him. His whole "message" is one of that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent.[6]

And later:

> As I said earlier, Dickens is one of those writers who are felt to be worth stealing. He has been stolen by Marxists, by Catholics and, above all, by Conservatives. The question is, What is there to steal? Why does anyone care about Dickens? Why do I care about Dickens?[7]

It is alarming to think of the possibility of literature eventually falling victim to such exclusively political readings. When compared to the arts, politics is a far more direct and outspoken discipline, which, according to some, can hardly match the implicit strangeness of the artistic. Understandably, the predominance of the political may curb the autonomy of the aesthetic.[8] Inquiries

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what now might be considered the "working class." Today it is to some extent amusing to see someone believe in such a *grand narrative:* "Later, when describing Mr. Rouncewell's factory, the workers of the factory are shown as well. They walk numb, headstrong along the road, with hard steps. The writer does not say more. But one can feel that it is a much greater trial than that of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which is going into action from the walls of works, factories. It is pursued for the heritage of the millennia, for the material and spiritual wealth of humankind by its right heirs..." (Rákos, p. vii, my translation).

[5] According to Rorty, Marxists have excommunicated Dickens for his being a bourgeois reformer. (Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* Cambridge: CUP, 1989, p. 147.)

[6] George Orwell. "Charles Dickens." In: Stephen Wall ed. *Penguin Critical Anthologies: Charles Dickens.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p. 298.

[7] Orwell, p. 306.

[8] Dickens' fame may be questioned for a number of reasons. And Dickens himself might provide a basis for this. The interpretation of a text must be fully different from the life of its creator, yet, Dickens may fall under suspicion of not being a novelist at the first place but, say, an author of political pamphlets, whose main goal was to "sell" rather than "create." From week to week he straightforwardly addressed the subscribers of a magazine; he thus had to satisfy the needs of his readers in a totally direct way and only in his later years could he enjoy the freedom of artistic liberty. After all, he wrote for a sociologically distinct reading public, which was probably one reason why he achieved such an unequivocal fame. And of course, there are comments that describe

which use literary analyses to develop philosophical points, and are not concerned with literature, often prove to be politically motivated.

Therefore, when digging up the foundations of *Bleak House*, "theory" might be excluded from the field of literary analysis. However, in the present essay one of these openly theoretical narratives will be considered: I shall develop a pragmatist reading of the novel. For various reasons, Richard Rorty seems to be an ideal guide to the world of Dickens' novel. Although in his philosophical pragmatism literature is subject to preconceptions, his interpretation of the novel is being carried out in an utterly thought-provoking way. For Rorty not only gives a strictly exterior reading to Dickens' work, but he does so by interpreting another theoretical framework, which is to defend the integrity of the literary work. He primarily relies on Milan Kundera, though he admittedly converts the Czech novelist's *Art of the Novel* to his own pragmatic credo. By "unpicking the tapestry woven"[9] by Rorty's "theory" of the novel, there may be an opportunity to disclose the underlying structure of Dickens' art and determine the place of the *political* in the nexus of literature and philosophy.[10] If it is his realism that attracts politically determined criticism to his work, then the realism of the late 19th and early 20th century should be re-examined. In contrast with the usual positivist conception of this notion, I shall attempt to lay bare the hitherto hidden aspects of Dickens' *real*ism. As stated above, "the question is, what is there to steal?"

RORTY'S PRAGMATISM

Rorty's tenets make up a "theory," which gives a place to the written word within its own boundaries whenever it serves its own needs, for achieving its own goals. He *uses* literature for pragmatic purposes, even if he is eager to substitute "theory" for narrative. In other words, Rorty is approaching the novel from a clearly "exterior" position. This, however, should not induce a fierce attack on

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him (while acknowledging some of his skills) as a cheap sensationalist, whose oeuvre shows distinguishable disproportionateness. (See, for example: Szegedy-Maszák, p. 234; or other texts in the *Penguin Critical Anthology* by Kafka [pp. 258ff.], James [pp. 168ff.], Huxley [pp. 281ff.], or Santayana [pp. 259ff.]. Shaw describes him as a "a complete barbarian" [p. 288], not to mention Woolf's infamous "don't cross the street!" speech, of course [pp. 277ff.].)

[9] This is Kundera's image (Kundera, p. 160).

[10] As regards other major Hungarian contributions to this discussion, criticism of Kundera as a writer by Mihály Vajda, Ágnes Heller and Gergely Angyalosi will be left out here, for I will mostly concentrate on arguments against Rorty's theory.

pragmatism, since Rorty has several arguments to defend his enterprise. There is an essential point, an *origo* underlying his work that explains the whole system of his thought (along with the peculiar position he prescribes to the novel): his ambition to overcome *grand narratives* within the limits of his own narrative.

Indeed, a quasi-ethical need[11] to find a response to the weight modernity imposes on history in the post-Auschwitz era characterises his thought. Thus, as Rorty's philosophical pragmatism inherently stems from a political attitude, in a most natural gesture he borrows Judith Shklar's definition of liberalism to declare his own objective: "... liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do."[12] And he takes this principle very seriously; his pragmatism is chiefly built on the omnipotence of this maxim: his whole undertaking could be explained by this single line. Rorty sketches the figure of the "liberal ironist," for he

> use[s] the "ironist" to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease.[13]

So Rorty does everything in the pursuit of a particular goal. In as much as his sole aim and purpose in constructing his "theory" is to reduce pain, he is acting *pragmatically.* The imaginary individual of his story, defying the sophisticated aspiration of the French Revolution, looks back on history, understands the essential relativity of things and, as a result of this, cuts down on the use of essentialist narratives to the utmost satisfaction of his fellows. Reading Nietzsche and Heidegger may primarily teach one how to view the past and develop the ironic state of mind one may need in order to realise what to do in

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[11] Rorty quite often describes himself as a something like a Wittgensteinian pragmatist, which might speak for the ethical implications of his work. Rorty himself, however, has always denied the possibility of having such an inclination of his philosophy, when asked at conferences. (A verbal comment from Prof. János Boros.)

[12] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. xv.

[13] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. xv.

real life – how to live well with one's peers. Rorty's vocabulary contains lesser words; 'contingency' leads to 'irony' and ends up in 'solidarity' in the long run.

However, it might be useful to compare Rorty's hero(ine) to the leading characters of other thinkers' tales[14] as well. For Rorty's tenets make a clear-cut alternative to the current views on the Post-modern; his ideas take shape as a response to the works of proponents of twentieth century social theory. His oeuvre seems to be positioned between the stances taken by the rather culture-pessimistic, ethics-oriented French thought and the more confident German line of thinking. On the one hand, "the American"[15] does not fully share Lyotard's all-embracing distrust in grand narratives, because, in his view, instead of totally dismissing these discourses one may evade them by going around them. This idea latently comprises two premises at least: first, as a liberal pragmatist, Rorty seems to have confidence if not in the progress, but in the successful functioning of human societies; second, he entertains serious doubts about deconstructive narratives: in his view they seem to idolise new entities in the place of the used ones. For epistemological[16] and the political reasons mentioned above he does not put much hope in a pure version of postmodernism. Therefore, the deconstructive resources of human thought might be important, but the liberal ironist treats them as simple reminders of certain fallacies in the history of mankind.[17] He regards the fulfilment of grand narratives, utopias as an endless process – "an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing truth."[18]

So, Rorty does not rage against Modernity. Yet, this is not to say that he would, by learning from the errors of the past for example, reconsider its program. He does not follow Habermas either, as he does not think human societies can profit from history by using educational processes. In the Rorty

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[14]In many of his writings, Rorty tries to destroy the serious nature of his own text by calling his speech a "tale." Apparently, he attempts to remind his readers of the fact that this is not the only way of treating the issue.

[15] Mihály Vajda's disparaging term for Rorty. (Mihály Vajda. *A posztmodern Heidegger*. Budapest: T-Twins–Lukács Archívum–Századvég, 1993, p. 59.)

[16] Rorty's contempt for essentialism is largely related to his critique of language. In his view, everything depends on the dictionary of the given community. Ascetic priests claim the ineffable by inventing a new vocabulary. (Richard Rorty. *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. Cambridge: CUP, 1989, p. 72).

[17] See the introduction of Rorty's *Essays*.

[18] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. xvi.

utopia, knowledge is not obtained from a stable position by reflecting on what has been done before:

> In my utopia, human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved. It is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created.[19]

The pragmatist *history after history* goes along on its own. Indeed, this concept is not "theoretical" in the usual sense of the word. For it focuses on action – it is a "theory" of action.[20] In lieu of useless theorising, the point is that people actively co-operate in reducing the negative effects of the system.

And Rorty's political "theory"[21] is strongly motivated by a pragmatic "theory" of knowledge. In his view, this is best exhibited in the functioning of present-day pluralistic *bourgeois* democracies, in which politics has become a question of *sentimental* calls for the tempering of suffering instead of moral calls to philosophic perfection.[22] Democracy will take a preference over philosophy; it is not at all necessary for one to have a typified idea of the main goals of society to act properly in a political community. What society utterly needs in the place of abstract ideas is easily understandable, direct talk that effectively achieves its goals. Rather than giving a concise background to social action, there should be a focus on the know-how of finding a consensus in down-to earth issues, not ignoring the emotional factor at all.[23]

Generally speaking, Rorty does not favour "theory." Firstly, he thinks that the philosophical treaties is not capable of communicating the liberal calling properly. Though reaching the ironic mood by reading thinkers like Nietzsche

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[19] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* p. xvi.

[20] Even though the pragmatist can as a matter of fact not have a "theory" of anything, whatsoever.

[21] Certainly, Rorty's tenets on politics cannot be treated as a detailed, conceptual theory of politics debating exact, down-to-earth problems of justice, law, and so on. He does not have a scheme, in the closest sense of the word. He may fit the category of the 'public intellectual,' or the 'social thinker' rather than the philosopher specialist.

[22] Richard Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens." *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* p. 81.

[23] In Rorty's view, democracy comes ahead of philosophy. Unlike communitarians, he does not think that liberal social theory should be reformed, because it is needless to be familiar with the philosophical background of a democratic principle to practice it (András Lánczi. *Huszadik Századi Politikai Filozófia.* Miskolc: Fáklya, 1997, p. 173).

and Heidegger can be highly profitable, it is absolutely pointless without implementing their tenets in praxis. Theory has to be made visible, packaged for the inquiring mind. Secondly, philosophers may often make the mistake of locating the *essence* of the object of their curiosity, which does not (unlike in the natural sciences) assist moral and political reflection.[24] They try to go behind the surface of words in a strictly not politically correct way.[25] In the pragmatist's view things are far more complex than that. There are too many stories, which simply cannot be bound together and reduced to a *real* one. Not to mention that it is, after all, fairly anti-democratic to postulate a group of people who should be closer to something genuine than the rest of people, who know more than "us." Rorty does not seem to be happy with the existence of a cultural elite which holds the key to the underlying issues of mankind.[26] As opposed to *essentialism*, Rorty is never searching for something "Wholly Other,"[27] and would even sometimes go as far as dismissing theory as such. One should stay on the lookout for the rise of new genres, as perhaps the traditions of anti-theory preserve the capacity to maintain liberal hopes on their own.[28]

RORTY'S "THEORY" OF THE NOVEL – RORTY'S DICKENS

There are lots of points as to why neo-pragmatism supports the reading of Dickens. Rather than mistaking the genre for being second-rate, the advantages of the novel should be considered over the negative effects of theory on the democratic enterprise. In general, narrative has its own means of realising Rorty's liberal utopia.[29]

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[24] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 67.

[25] Going for the one right answer might lead to apparent inconsistencies in intercultural comparisons, and cause serious difficulties in the globalising world of our present days.

[26] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p 74.

[27] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 71.

[28] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 73.

[29] Rorty tries to dismiss the work of philosophers, though he himself is *philosophising* on the novel. Thus, his project might duly seem ambiguous, and perhaps he is not keen enough on clarifying the confusion. However, the notions used by him can be systematised, which might justify his project. Here is a possible classification of his terminology, from the most "negative" to the most "positive": metaphysics/essentialism (ascetic priests / one, grand narrative) – theory (quasi-essentialist; always trying to find something true) – philosophy (restricts itself and gives way to the novel) – narrative (the pluralism of the novel).

On the one hand, story telling has proved to be quite effective in educating people's minds through the courses of history. Books have been read by people who "either could not follow a philosophical argument if they tried, or by people who have no wish to try."[30] It is perhaps preferable to read novelists to find out what went wrong with the Enlightenment rather than the works of so-called philosophers. On account of Kundera, Rorty attributes a large instructive force to social criticism in fiction: it looks as though Flaubert, for instance, did more to overthrow general "stupidity" than anybody else before.[31] Someone who uses a language they understand, writes about topics of their interests – and yet *teaches* them new things by using latent processes – will be more respected by the common people.

On the other hand, there is a difference in quality, not in terms of effectiveness only. It is relatively easy to line up an opposition between the ascetic priest's inclination for simplicity, structure and abstraction, and the novelist's taste for detail, diversity and accident.[32] The underlying features – the dissimilarity of viewpoints, or the plurality of the description of the same events, for example – may provide a proper substitute for philosophical dualism, since in contrast to the One True Description the novelist "may move back and forth"[33] between the many possibilities. Due to the implicit humour of the novel, theory will look comical: anyone who could know more than the rest of "us," who would reject all descriptions save one, develops ridicule.[34] Owing to its form, fiction is a place of tolerance and ultimate truth seeking.[35] In the *carnivalesque* of the novel people retain their idiosyncrasies and become individuals. "Everybody can do what they want if they don't hurt anybody else while doing it."[36] Everybody has the right to be understood, yet nobody to rule.

Thus, Dickens, the "social theorist" can be revisited. Rorty prescribes an utterly flattering role to the author of *Bleak House:*

> I want to put forward Charles Dickens as a sort of anti-Heidegger. [...]For Dickens could help [...] grasp a complex of attitudes which was important to the West, and perhaps unique to the West, in a way that

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[30] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 73.
[31] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 76.
[32] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 73.
[33] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 79.
[34] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 73.
[35] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 75.
[36] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 75.

neither Heidegger nor any other philosopher could. The example of Dickens could help them think of the novel, and particularly the novel of *moral protest,* rather than the philosophical treatise, as the genre in which the West excelled.[37]

Dickens could well exemplify a counteraction on essentialism.[38] Similarly to Orwell, Rorty underlines the importance of Dickens' scheme of characters. In his view the most substantial feature of these Victorian novels is the unsubsumable idiosyncrasy of their figures. Dickens' characters refuse to be categorised in moral typologies, but they take the place of moral principles, virtues or vices instead.[39] As Rorty says, "they do so by permitting us to describe each other as 'a Skimpole,' 'a Mr. Pickwick,' 'A Gradgrind,' 'a Mrs. Jellby,' 'a Florence Sombey.'"[40] Rorty envisages a fictional society, which gains its vocabulary from novels through names, rather than from *ontotheological* or *ontico-moral* treatises. There the ultimate goal of human social organisation would ironically not be more than comfort, the enjoyment of human association. Thus, one can learn how institutions could be changed so as to best guarantee everybody's rights and duties.[41]

Rorty provides for a few other explicit arguments on the presence of the democratic in Dickens' descriptive art. He relies on Orwell: "The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens' writings is the unnecessary detail [...] he is all fragments, all details, – rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles – and never better then when he is building up some character who will later on be forced to act inconsistently."[42] In Dickens' novels, attention not only falls on the protagonists; the viewer is presented a large variety of different sorts of people

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[37] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 68, my italics.

[38] One might want to recall the special circumstances that describe the publication of *Pickwick Papers,* or other works. People waiting at train stations for the latest editions, or inquiring at American harbours about the outcome of stories already published in series at the other side of the Atlantic were not rare episodes in the birth process of the Dickens cult. Dickens' world had a significant effect on the common consciousness; his character sketches were contributing to reader's sometimes-limited experiences to a large extent. The paperback versions of his books were available to the poorer layers of society thereby taking a large share in people's "education." As stated by Orwell, he has become an institution – "he is there, like the Nelson column" (Orwell, p. 307).

[39] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 78.

[40] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 78.

[41] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 78. See the relevant places in Orwell, too (Orwell, pp. 301–312).

[42] Quoted in Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 81, my italics.

who follow their own lights. As there are no maxims, except that of equality, in the Dickensian "paradise of individuals"[43] everybody has an equal right to exist. Moreover, these minor character sketches are just as elaborate as those for characters of higher importance.[44] Thus, one may most definitely improve in a toleration of diversity if one treats apparent inconsistency not as something to be rejected but as a mark of the inadequacy of our current vocabularies.

It is not surprising to find literal, word-to-word parallels between Dickens' art and Rorty's "theory" of democracy:

> Despite having no higher goal than comfortableness of human association, Dickens did an enormous amount for equality and freedom [...]. But Dickens performed his services to human liberty not with the help of the "savage indignation which Swift rightly ascribed to himself but with something more *bourgeois* – *sentimental* tears and what Orwell called a generous anger.[45]

While the sentimentality of Dickens' romances is reflected in the watchwords of the pragmatist's anti-theory, Rorty finds a proper model of his fantasy-world in Dickens' writings. In his view – in their view perhaps – social change is not a question of re-creation, but of mutual adjustment.[46] All in all, the Dickensian phenomenon proves to be perfectly prosaic and democratic at the same time, since it aims to realise the liberal calling by pointing to the weaknesses of the present status quo.

RORTY'S BLEAK HOUSE

Although the presence of pragmatic principles might be detected in number of layers of *Bleak House*, I shall deliberately focus on one aspect of the given work only: its images.[47] Admittedly, Rorty's project requires a special attitude to art in

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[43] Kundera, p. 159, quoted in Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 74.

[44] "The generosity of Dickens', Stowe's, and King's anger comes out in their assumption that people merely need turn their eyes toward the people who are getting hurt, notice the *details* of their pain being suffered, rather than needing to have their entire cognitive apparatus changed" (Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 80).

[45] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 79, my italics.

[46] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 80.

[47] In my view, there are at least four distinct levels of the work to be examined besides images, which I, lacking space, shall not expand here: (1) the unique self-constitution of the speaker, (2) the

general. Obviously, a scheme that prescribes the leading role to the novel should necessarily root in an aesthetics that respects the most "anti-artistic" of all literary genres.[48] Rorty praises the beholder of the funny, the humorous – not that of the beautiful. The ultimate image of *Bleak House* could be taken as a means of illustration to this statement. When commenting on Nabokov's interpretation of the fog, Rorty turns down Nabokov's aestheticism as a non-pragmatic art "theory." He quotes Nabokov at length:

> As is quite clear, the enchanter interests me more than the yarn spinner or the teacher. In this case of Dickens, this attitude seems to me to be the only way of keeping Dickens alive, above the reformer, above the penny novelette, above the sentimental trash, above the theatrical nonsense. There he shines forever on the heights on of which we know the exact elevation, the outlines and the formation, and the mountain trails to get there through the fog. It is in his imagery that he is great.[49]

This is of course unacceptable to Rorty. He must be interested in a Dickens totally unlike Nabokov. What ticks him off is Nabokov's narrow focus on the artistic – the "tingles between the shoulder blades."[50] It looks as though Nabokov is solely concerned with the aesthetic bliss of literature[51] and thinks that the sociological or political content has to be devised for those who are naturally immune to the vibrancy of literature.[52] In the pragmatist's view, it is much easier to admit that *Bleak House* aroused participative emotions which assisted in changing the laws of England, and as a result made Dickens immortal. Rorty cannot accept talk in a quasi-metaphysical style about the essential goals of the writer.[53] Rorty cannot tolerate Nabokov's reading of the fog. The well-known description of the image at the beginning reads as follows:

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characteristically strong voice of the narrator, (3) Dickens' liking of *showing* things instead of telling about them, and (4) the characters themselves could all be used to illustrate the pragmatic inclination of the book.

[48] Fiction has been depreciated as a genre by many authors. (See, for example, Mihail Bakhtin. "Eposz és regény." *Az irodalom elméletei III*. Pécs: Jelenkor, 1997, pp. 27–68.)

[49] Quoted in Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 148.

[50] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 147.

[51] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 147.

[52] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 147.

[53] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 148.

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish Heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards... Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

And a few lines below, accented by the personal voice of the narrator:

> Never can there come fog too thick, never can there mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this *High Court of Chancery,* most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.[54]

Rorty would be entirely satisfied with Nabokov's interpretation of this trope as a means of revivifying the legal miasma that emerges from the dealings of The Chancery. Yet, when it turns out that Nabokov expects one to treat Dickens' attacks on evil as a simple "lesson in style"[55] (!) and praises Dickens' political skills for their artistic mastery, Rorty cannot go along with Nabokov. In defence of writers who, as described by Nabokov, only create "topical trash,"[56] Rorty does not want to believe in abstract entities. In his view, literary pieces should, rather than enrich the self-centred, autonomous field of art, directly serve the needs of the public.

Thus, the exact artistic mechanism of the work could be considered. Even though the pragmatist can *de facto* not engage in any kind of "interpretation," Rorty's account of figures could be reconstructed. Ironically, the fog proves to be a *par excellence* Rorty entity. The fog applies to readers, too. Metaphorically speaking, this figure crosses the boundaries of the work and spreads over things

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[54] Dickens, pp. 17–18, my italics.

[55] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* p. 146. At one point, Nabokov cites a famous paragraph on Jo, which begins with "Dead, your Majesty! Dead, my lords and gentleman!" and ends with "And dying around us every day." In Rorty's view, of course, this "is to call public action if anything in Dickens is." But Nabokov tells us that the chapter is "a lesson in style, not in participative emotion." (Nabokov quoted in Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* p. 148.)

[56] Quoted in Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* p. 148.

outside as well. Supplying the medium that conceals things from our questioning eyes, the fog makes it impossible for us to know everything. Just as the unnecessarily detailed presentation and the introduction of a diversity of characters secondary to the main line of the plot halt the narration, the emblematic fog blocks hasty conclusions as to the ultimate mystery of the story. The fog paralyses our readiness for judgement. In a certain sense, it blocks the awareness of the interpreter craving for *the* reading. The case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* reveals a self-ruling organism, which may seem to be a menacing entity, with all its dusty files, shady conspiratorial bloodshed, and unquestionable implication for all corners of life. However, as a figure of reading prose it does not threaten with any danger. For the reader, the interpreter, it must exemplify the perfect attitude to the text. The artistic repertoire of *Bleak House* evokes the Rorty concept of the novel: the image reminds us of our mission of democracy. Instead of achieving "the ultimate," the reader has to keep looking around.

Obviously, the language of the novel might provide a suitable base for this, since it renders the debate under the circumstances of a game, the chase after meaning. As the reader is constantly looking for the roots of the overlapping branches of the suit, he/she hopelessly strives to find a solution. Its origin is undetectable. On the one hand, the novel contains the story of an unsuccessful investigation.[57] Even though Tulkinghorn, Guppy and Bucket become fully aware of the Lady's secret, the general public does not get to know anything about the mystery. Not even Sir Leicester's negative belief in the riddle of his wife, based on the information he received from the investigator, is confirmed. Bucket wisely keeps it to himself, and apart from the rumours spreading around in society nothing comes to light. The long-established practices of the Dedlocks persist. The narrative of a traditional family of England is preserved. Dickens drops a few comments on the upcoming death of the Lord, yet the reader may well finish the book with the confidence that nothing will really change. What has been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years may endure for centuries in the future. The line of the story was not broken; it is continuing towards nothing, so "there is" indeed "nothing to be got from it." The same applies, on the other hand, to the conclusion of the case. The whole book is a report on the proceedings of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*. Both the heirs and the reader are

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[57] See Szegedy-Maszák, p. 24.

continuously following a trail[58] in hope of a settlement. But, in the concluding chapters of the work, another discovery is made: on account of a ragged piece of paper found in Krook's "archives" every inheritor gets his/her own share from Jarndyce's wealth. However, all of that is consumed by the legal expenses. All the money drawn from the heritage should be spent on the costs of indifferent clerks, officers. Thus, "the suit lapses and melts away,"[59] also leaving the true heirs wmpty-handed. The reader does not gain much, at least not in the usual sense of the word. One can, as a matter of fact, understand the main moral of the story. The juridical process was all in vain, and those who financially relied on the case should decay.

In the spirit of pragmatism the identity of assassins, the content of verdicts are neither important. Unlike in a desire-governed, essentialist attitude, no "genuine" ending can be expected here. One cannot satisfy one's hunger for information in the text as in theory – the traditional methods of understanding prove to be too old-fashioned in Rorty's criminology.

BLEAK HOUSE – A BLEAK THEORY OF THE NOVEL?

In general, Rorty is right in what he says about the democratic nature of the novel. There really is something only the novel can say in its own way. Even when applied to the particular work, his "theory" looks completely plausible. Yet, one should face the consequences such a pragmatist definition has on the concept of (the structure, and, as a result, the philosophy of) narration.

First of all, his principles redefine the work of art. As shown above, the ultimate goal of Rorty is to put the principles of democratic thinking into practice. Therefore, he has to use a special technique. Rorty's work exclusively focuses on the activity of our senses. As opposed to the general roles of telling, the function of seeing is emphasised here. And the visual, the perceptible turns out to be a proper means of demonstration. The reader cannot discern the outcome of the happenings straight away, but is made to watch the whole system patiently.

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[58] Derrida's concept of the *trail* in interpretation might have pragmatist connotations, but in fact it has nothing to do with Rorty's project. As mentioned above, Rorty is not fond of deconstruction. To learn more on the issue, see especially Jacques Derrida. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." In: Critchley, Derrida, Laclau & Rorty. *Deconstruction and Pragmatism.* London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 13–19. (The book contains Derrida's answer as well.)

[59] Dickens, p. 797.

Rorty's Dickens slows down the flow of events. He aims at depicting things as they are. This way, Rorty embarks on a special conception of the story. In an implicit way, Rorty attempts to eliminate the power of telling. Here emphasis is laid, not on showing, but on peering as such. Otherwise, one may suspect that the contours of things could be overshadowed by the dynamism of story, which, being a holder of desire, should obviously not meet the requirements of pragmatic thinking. Rorty reinterprets the basic notions of telling. Apparently, such a view on fiction has its own aesthetic premises, and the blame seems to be laid on the primary Aristotelian concepts. Rorty's account of fiction seems to be absolutely in line with the heritage of prose, but it does not fulfil the initial obligations of story telling. While neo-pragmatism attends mostly to the prevalent exhibition of things, it disregards the cardinal quality of reporting events. Probably, there lies a more fundamental mark of Cervantes's project: unaffected, impulsive tale telling. In a superb way, the viewer gets moved by the issues of democracy yet, the main reason of one's attraction to reading is not established: the reader's curiosity as to the events is left out from Rorty's premises. Listening to substantial information makes people interested in the outcome of the case. Nevertheless, the reader feels a compulsive need for the progress and the ending of the plot. In anti-essentialist thinking 'necessity' as such becomes outdated. The motor of the 'plot' should be exterminated.

There may be a doubt as to whether Rorty's thesis can be verified at all. There must be other writings that would not fit this definition. As a result, Rorty's "theory" of the novel might turn out far less universal than his pragmatist arguments may claim it to be. And he admits that. Consider the following:

> So the lesson I draw from Proust's example is that novels are a safer medium than theory for expressing one's recognition of the relativity and contingency of authority figures. For novels are usually about people – things which are, unlike general ideas and final vocabularies, quite evidently time-bound, embedded in a web of *contingencies*. Since the characters in novels age and die – since they obviously share the finitude of the books in which they occur – we are not tempted to think that by adopting an attitude toward them we have adopted an attitude toward every possible sort of person. By contrast, books which are about ideas, even when written by historicists like Hegel and Nietzsche, look like descriptions of eternal relations between eternal objects, rather than genealogical accounts of the filiation of final vocabularies...

This seems to be completely in line with the above. But the main point follows later, in the footnote below:

> There are, of course, novels like Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* in which the characters are simply dressed-up generalities. The novel form cannot by itself *insure* a perception of contingency. It only makes it a bit harder to avoid this perception.[60]

So, a few novels contain some elements that do not meet the requirements of the pluralistic narrative. Namely, the description of characters might retain something from the failed legacy of essentialism in some stories, and these works are excluded from Rorty's canon. Presumably, their author does not give his/her cast the freedom the form of the novel would provide them. Instead of allowing them to follow their own lights, the writer directly uses this cast to put already existing plan into action. He/she is using them as the spokesmen of his/her own ideas. Now, this point must be the residue of something significantly larger. Generalist character traits cloak other features of fiction that go against the liberal interpretation of the genre. In this light, it seems obvious that the problem goes well beyond ill-fated types. When Rorty turns *Doktor Faustus* down for the incontingent features of its figures, he is dismissing the frame of the Mannian universe as a whole for being not sufficiently incidental and ironic. The description of characters takes up a huge share in constituting the general form and the content of the work. The inhabitants of a fictional society, they constitute the world of the novel by revealing their *persona* in their thoughts and deeds. A character – the "form" of a person – gives form to what is happening in the novel. It essentially implies the changes of the given individual's inner field and his/her actual action. Generalist features cover similarly determined attitudes. Therefore, these "dressed up generalities" will induce a pre-schematised, ascertained line of events, and Rorty's contempt for a few character traits must be covering his critique of these characters' *story*, too. Broad properties will probably require generalised action schemes. Objection to the contents of a character leads to a censure on the formal apparatus of the story. Rorty's "theory" would find faults with a number of suspicious plot schemes that, similarly to the characters, keep something back from essentialist thinking.

There seems to be a connection between essentialism incorporated in certain character traits and Rorty's indirect rejection of some important notions

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[60] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 108.

in Aristotelian poetics. It must be plots not following the liberal call for showing rather than telling that develop essentialist types and are to be ignored. A few kinds of novels can keep something of suspicious *theoretism*. The "web of contingencies" offered by the framework of the genre does not necessarily neutralise heavy theoretical content. If necessity culminates on a very high level in the story, (on account of its intellectual theme the plot of the novel should necessarily and dynamically develop into a single direction) then there is no time for the liberal ironist to realise his/her goals in genre.[61] The impetus of the story has a striking resemblance to the dynamism of desire-governed discourses. Therefore, Rorty does not dignify all sorts of fiction.

There are, indeed, such novels. Quite a few books have a clear, essentially directed frame, which requires characters to act in accordance with the line of narration. Just take another novel from another culture, Dostoevski, for instance. Compare the value-governed, richly ornamented, moralising world of his characters to the analytic, "well-balanced" and democratic aura of Dickens. Compare their "speed," their dynamism, see how the actual story affects their style, and the difference may become explicit. Furthermore, compare them on the basis of the notion of necessity, that is to say, see if there is any difference between them as far as the "weight" of their theme is concerned. As opposed to the Dickens of a famously sober, analytic English mind, one can find totally different phenomena in this story influenced by a different spirit; one may also get a view on say, the grandiose ideas of the Slavophiles at the time. Even though Dostoevski, in Bakhtin's view, seems to be highly devoted to the pluralism of the genre and the polyphony of his works could be hardly contested, the rhythm, the dynamics of his narrative definitely differ from that of Dickens. Necessity culminates on a very high level in his works – it demands a strict and tense sequence of action. Beyond doubt, things cannot happen in them randomly; there could be serious reasons – hidden causes, essences, values, and theoretical beliefs – of the various turns in the line of narration. The writer, while designing the story, gives priority to certain things: he does not consider the principles of democracy when it comes to deciding on, say, killing or keeping alive a certain character.

Therefore, fiction in its mere form cannot meet the requirements of pluralism. False idealism may leak into it in a way or another, and the pragmatist is inclined to reduce the risks that the narrative implies. When interpreting a work, he tries to pacify the line of telling. Since he has to regulate the plot of the

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[61] In the concrete *reception* of the work, the novels may of course retain their pluralistic facet.

story as well, he creates a politically correct theory of the novel by cleansing it of all suspicious scratches. He chooses a special set of novels and novelists to defend his point. Less and less remains of the pluralistic structure of the novel. Theoretical oddities do not directly dissolve in the carnival of the genre. Rorty does not favour the novel as he seems to do; he rather curbs the supremacy of the genre to which he attributed a distinguished position before. The seeds of metaphysics are likely to be implanted in the novel.

Yet, Rorty's tenets should be appreciated, not dismissed.[62] As indicated in the beginning, empathy as such might be a useful means of treating his thinking. Certainly, it would be easy to denounce pragmatic liberalism for being an absolute stranger in the realm of literature, still, its challenge will remain valid. However hard one tries to defend fiction, Rorty's claim to eliminate the grand narrative of art and reduce pain sounds compelling, what is more, alarming. One had better stand up to the challenge of Rorty's program. The question is how Dickens the social thinker could be identified with the artistic visionary. It might be necessary to balance the quasi-essentialist structure of the dismissed novels with Rorty's call for contingency, irony, and solidarity.

Where is the dividing line between a "visceral" conception of art that creates grand narratives and a deliberately vague, pragmatic, politically correct idea? Can there be balance in the novel between *plurality* and *essentiality*?

A RORTYANISED KUNDERA

In order to answer the questions above, one might not want to go too far. All the more so, as, interestingly, Rorty's system depends on the modification of another substantial argument – he relies heavily on someone else's work. His pragmatic conception of the novel largely feeds on the thoughts of a distinctly European novelist: Milan Kundera. Concerning the philosophical *consequences* of the genre they practically hold the same views; a quasi-political and anti-essentialist interpretation of the novel is totally acceptable to both men.

> The novel's wisdom is different from that of the philosophy. The novel
> is born not of the theoretical spirit, but the spirit of humour. One of

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[62] I purposely do not want to blame Rorty for the negative aesthetic effects his theory might, in fact, have on fiction. Apparently, there is no point in attacking the American philosopher, as one would only reaffirm his devastating view on grand narratives, and make him/herself ridiculous.

Europe's major failures is that it never understood the most European of the arts - the novel; neither its spirit, nor its great knowledge and discoveries, nor the autonomy of its history. The art inspired by Gods's laughter does not by nature serve ideological certitudes: it contradicts them. Like Penelope, it undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers and learned men had woven the day before. [...] The eighteenth century is not only the century of Rousseau, of Voltaire, of Holbach; it is also (perhaps above all!) the age of Fielding, Sterne, Goethe, Laclos.[63]

In these lines, one might reconsider how – instead of drawing some obscure, fuzzy analogies with sophisticated metaphysical concepts – great novelists have helped one to achieve the goals of the liberal ironist. Kundera's claim on the basic mission of the genre fits entirely the facet of the "democratic narrative."

Nevertheless, there are a few points here that can hardly be attributed to Rorty. Admittedly, the author of *Philosophy as a Mirror of Nature* constructs his theory on Kundera's teaching by "correcting" it a bit at the same time. Rorty reads *The Art of the Novel* in his own manner. Even though a clear-cut correspondence could be lined up between their standpoints, as regards the background of their thinking it would be much harder to point out any similarities. Actually, the sequence of argumentation is of high importance in their works: each author follows different traits on their way to fiction.

Before Kundera touches upon the anti-essentialism issue, he embarks on a cardinal philosophical enterprise of the turn of the century: the work of Edmund Husserl and his pupil, Heidegger. Kundera deals with an overall crisis at the first place, in which "the one-sided nature of European sciences, which reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation"[64] marks the epoch. The Czech-French writer shows how great Husserl had held the disaster of objectification: the human being having conquered the world has eventually lost himself in something similar to the forgetfulness of being debated by Heidegger. As sciences excluded *die Lebenswelt*, the Cartesian mind gradually eliminated the heritage of humankind thereby expressing the extreme need for a progressive theory to account for this dilemma at the time.[65]

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[63] Kundera, p. 60.

[64] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 76.

[65] Kundera, p. 4.

And there is Kundera's far-reaching proposal, which as regards one of its goals at least would surely be appreciated by Rorty:

> Perhaps it is Cervantes whom the two phenomenologists [Husserl and Heidegger] neglected to take into consideration in their judgement of the Modern Era. By that I mean: If it is true that philosophy and science have forgotten about men's being, it emerges all the more plainly that with Cervantes a great European art took shape that is nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being.[66]

This certainly reminds us of Rorty's preference for the novel over philosophy in a different packaging. Rorty must be highly content with the glorious role Kundera attributes to the artistic. Nonetheless, one may as well recognise the tone so characteristic of Kundera; some words would undoubtedly give pain to Rorty. On account of the last statement of our quotation it is not clear why the author talks about "analysing this forgotten existence" in such a context. Truly, should one continue reading *Chapter 2*, doubt might arise concerning Kundera's "liberal" understanding of Cervantes' heritage.

> Indeed, all the great existential themes Heidegger analyzes in *Being and Time* – considering them to have been neglected by earlier European philosophy – had been unveiled, displayed, illuminated by four centuries of the novel [...]. In its own way, through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one...[67]

Apparently, Kundera also discredits philosophy because it has not been capable of carrying out its undertaking. However, his neglect of the theoretic has its roots in something significantly different. As opposed to Rorty, who applauds the novel's absolute independence, the author of *The Art of the Novel* connects fiction to Husserl's legacy. It is only from this point that he goes on to debating the plurality of the novel. Kundera does not state it explicitly, yet the logic of this text tells us: there lies an essential connection between the eradication of objectivity and the liberal perspectives of the novel. According to Kundera, from the beginning of Modern times the novel has understood its mission as protecting man in its scientific and spiritual adventures from the "termites of reduction"[68] – to throw light on the "concrete world of life" defined by Husserl. The novel

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[66] Kundera, p. 4.
[67] Kundera, p. 5.
[68] Kundera, p. 17.

attempted to get back to what has been lost in experience – it tried to bypass alienation. For the wisdom of the novel shows: by saving "being" from falling into complete oblivion, one might cut out the clichés and oversimplifications of this estranged world. By escaping from the "whirlpool of reduction,"[69] one could get away from the conventionalism of a science and technology-conducted culture. This all looks to be indispensable so as to see clearly and not accept the rule of one's surroundings. Therefore, according to Kundera, plurality requires an antecedent: the recaptured wholeness of the phenomena in the novel may cut out the dominance of essentialism.

For Kundera the spirit of the novel involves the spirit of freedom. He builds the core of his poetics on the moral of the novel, though this conception of ethics in literature should be significantly different from that of Rorty. As Herman Broch, summarising the thesis of Kundera's book, states:

> The sole *raison d'être* of the novel is to discover what only the novel can discover. A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral. Knowledge [getting to know something unknown] is the novel's only morality.[70]

All in all, Kundera's view seems to go beyond the tenets of liberal pragmatism. Rorty does not hesitate to tackle this quasi-phenomenological reading of the genre. The grave speech of phenomenologists cannot stand the test; it should straightforwardly go in the category of grand narratives. According to Rorty, a pluralistic interpretation of the novel here is supposed to be compatible with "essentialism," because the Czech thinker "politely interprets his [Heidegger's] term "forgetfulness of being" as meaning "forgetfulness of this essential relativity."[71] Yet, this cannot work. He turns the idea down by solely reasserting his earlier thesis on how the novelist and the "philosopher of poetry" cannot have anything in common.

> Here at the beginning of his book, Kundera thinks of Husserl's *Lebenswelt* and Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-Sein* as standing over against "the one-sided nature of the European sciences, which reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation," and casually assimilates both to his own notion of the "essential relativity of human

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[69] Kundera, p. 17.
[70] Kundera, p. 16.
[71] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 76.

affairs." But this assimilation is misleading. Husserl and early Heidegger were insistent on getting down to the basic, permanent structure of the *Lebenswelt,* or of the *In-der-Welt-Sein.* For Kundera, we make up this structure as we go along.[72]

So, the pragmatist cleans the othewise serviceable theory from the slips of his companion in order to utilise it again. By contrasting the plurality of the novel with the basic, permanent structure of the *Lebenswelt,* or of the *In-der-Welt-Sein,* Rorty assumes that a democratic interpretation of the genre has nothing to do with Husserl, or, obviously, Heidegger. Apparently, in the noisy, uproarious world of the novel it would be pretty painstaking to rely on such ascetic priests.

THE PLOT AND THEME: KUNDERA'S HISTORY OF INVITATIONS

This being granted, there is a growing need to view Kundera's *ars poetica* in greater depth. It is to be deliberated whether Kundera's cunning theory of the novel can successfully account for the simultaneous assignments of political correctness and a reasoning aiming at the essential structure of things. Kundera's idea that the novel could co-ordinate the pluralism argument with the permanent structure of consciousness requires an explication.

Kundera does his best to reconcile plurality with the principle of viewing/showing the essential structures of the concrete world of life. Nothing models this hypothesis more effectively than his speculation on the art of structuring the novel. According to Kundera, the genre ought to have a sort of tendency towards a substantial spiritual content, its form compels the author to aim at the heart of the matter. In Kundera's words, it has to be made dense.[73] Kundera develops a certain aesthetic strategy; he hopes to implement his technique in story-telling as follows:

> I have always constructed them on two levels: on the first, I compose the novel's story; over that I develop the themes. The themes are worked out steadily *within* and *by* the story. Whenever a novel abandons its themes and settles for just telling the story, it goes flat.[74]

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[72] Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera and Dickens," p. 76.

[73] Kundera, p. 73.

[74] Kundera, p. 83.

In other words, Kundera conceives of a topic which he combines, with the line of the narrative. Now, it is utterly important to see that he lays the emphasis on the presence of a clear-cut thematic; he thinks that only by strengthening the intellectual apparatus of the work – by developing an abstract thesis – can one create a successful novel. This idea may seem suspicious for a moment, as it may suggest that the ascetic priest hiding behind the storyteller again. But he does not simply add this "existential thematic" to the already existing frame of the story as one puts a cloak on a dead corpse or plasters a *houses* with mortar. He makes it part of the novel. As Kundera says, "Once it is part of a novel, reflection changes its essence: a dogmatic thought turns hypothetical. This is something philosophers miss when they try to write a novel."[75] In other words, one cannot regard this move of Kundera as a revolt against fiction. On the contrary, it is the story that gives full significance to the theoretical; only narration supplies the *ideal* with a semantic entirety. Only the narrated, that which provides a context to the sequence of happenings, seems to be the proper manifestation of cognitive functions. In its intentional structure, the story as such implies an element that can stop the laughter of deities.

It is not all by accident that Kundera talks about an inherent connection between theme and story. As defined in his small dictionary of key words, the novel meditates over the great themes of existence, which are voiced through experimental selves,[76] and this explanation necessarily reveals the Heideggerian affiliations of the theory. If the most important Heideggerian terms are considered, the category of *In-der-Welt-sein* provides a proper analogy. Accordingly, Kundera underlines the importance of the fact that one cannot get an exterior perspective over things in the great story of being, for one does not view the world as the subject refers to the object. The world is part of men, just as men is part of world, its primary dimension, and as the world changes so does existence (in-der-Welt-sein).[77] So, most importantly, one has to interpret the underlying thematic of life from life itself.[78]

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[75] Kundera, p. 79.

[76] Kundera, p. 142.

[77] Kundera, p. 35.

[78] This Heideggerian idea could be applied to Aristotle in an interesting way. Just as one cannot step out of being, the novelist obviously *cannot* go for the position of the historian, the student of historical facts. As one is fundamentally bound to one's existence – like "the snail to its shell" –, one can get knowledge of being from *being in* this story. Consequently, the *story* reveals an essential *thematic*, because the tale does not analyse the reality of *history*, but focuses on the fictitious. It does

As a consequence, in Kundera's interpretation the aesthetic as such plays a decisive role; it is *form* that is supposed to integrate the essential into the pluralism of story telling. "But in art, the form is always more than a form. Every novel, like it or not, offers an answer to the question: what is human existence, and wherein does its poetry lie?"[79] For Kundera ventures to balance the immense weight of his questions with the extreme contingency of the arrangement of those ideas.[80] On the one hand, the contrast of an easy technique and a serious topic may reveal the "unbearable lightness" and insignificance of some phenomena of our ordinary life. "The union of a frivolous form and a serious subject lays bare our dramas [...] in all their terrible insignificance."[81] This must be the implicit humour of the novel. At the same time, one should not forget that all of this is done in hope of approaching the essential, in the "positive" sense of the word. Narration, by redressing theory can carry out such an operation.[82] Besides the humorous, the laughable, the story may also reveal some hidden, unexpected aspects of the theoretical. It may bring the abstract to a state in which it gets an unspoken yet extensive form of meaning.

On the whole, Kundera's strategy to thematise ultimate, permanent structures of consciousness in story telling incorporates a need to mediate between the stable scheme of the *Lebenswelt* and the plurality of the novel, and he finds the means of resolving this necessity in the intentional basis of the narrative. As, if one wants to, in the *story* one can give a phenomenological interpretation of plurality. The essential relativity of our underlying perspectives can be intelligible in the tradition set up by Husserl. How does the narrative approach the concrete world of life – what is the phenomenal structure of narrativity like exactly? Apparently, the story does not reveal anything explicitly; even if some particulars seem to turn to us, they disclose themselves at once. As a whole we cannot get to know the objects of our *intentionality*. Kundera states, talking about Dostoevski's *Devils:* "In each of the narrative lines, this theme is considered from a different

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not engage in what happened, but considers what could be happening. This way, it throws a glance at the possible constitutions of the act. That is to say, in Kundera's words, it uncovers the possibilities of a human being. It reveals our existence. "Novelists draw the *map of being* by discovering this or that human possibility" (Kundera, p. 42).

[79] Kundera, p. 161.
[80] Kundera, p. 95.
[81] Kundera, p. 96.
[82] Kundera, p. 122.

angle, like a thing reflected in three mirrors."[83] That is, one cannot own the phenomenon, as it has many forms of apparition but not an ultimate one.[84] Similarly to a search for the fundamental identity of the ego, Kundera discourages one from pursuing exaggerated optimism. In his view, "in a paradox: The more powerful the lens of the microscope observing the self, the more the self and its uniqueness elude to us..."[85] And the feeling that remains will resemble a "paradoxical dissatisfaction,"[86] in as much as one will not be able to do anything except admit that the object has been examined from all possible angles.

In fact, here one may comprehend the unfixable movement of sensory data. In the essential relativity of perceiving phenomena, the diversity of *aesthetic* impressions comes to the fore.[87] As quoted by Béla Bacsó from Wolfgang Welsch's analysis of Aristotle, "the sensory impressions are created exactly by the transferring of this manifold-complex into the simple (sensory, absolute, irreversible) – and that is where from it gains significance."[88] One may engage in the constant displacement of our sensual world. Thus, one may understand where the phenomenological roots of the *story* lie. Apparently, in narration the very same processes are to be found working.[89] The story simply gives way to the unreconcileable movements of our impressions. As Paul Ricoeur maintains, on the level of the genre an interaction is postulated between our pragmatic wisdom of life from the past and our realisation of a surprising element in the present. The paradox of the novel exploits this split between *phronesis and synesis* when something unusual turns up, to which one was not looking forward. However, this cannot be any disappointing to the devotees of theory, for if one understands the premises and consequences of such thesis, one would cope with a *philosophical* explication of the novel:[90]

> Philosophy will happily return its responsibility to other people – we will no more think ourselves the *"functionaries of mankind"* (Husserl), that is, we shall less likely want to think in the place of them – so that

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[83] Kundera, p. 82.

[84] One should think of such Husserlian categories as "die Abschattung" and "passive synthesis."

[85] Kundera, p. 25.

[86] Kundera, p. 25.

[87] In the original, Greek meaning of *aisthesis.*

[88] Béla Bacsó. "A regényes élet." *Határpontok.* Budapest: T-Twins–Lukács Archívum–Századvég, 1994, p. 165.

[89] Bacsó, p. 166.

[90] Bacsó, p. 166.

one could, based on one's phronetical wisdom, weave the unexpected event into the already existing, well-known texture of life.[91]

Subsequently, such a theory drives our attention towards the history of the genre.[92] In the life of the novel every single narrative has had a special underlying structure, the uniqueness of which makes itself identical to others. Every simple work has been a trial for the mind to get closer to the empirical matter of the world. Thus, each of them must be equal in the history of the novel; they take part in boundless attempts of consciousness. For the novelist executes his assignment in the context of the specific age – up to the needs of the specific age. The novel thematises the *Lebenswelt* in an always regenerating form. The chronicle of the novel consists of an immense flow of "invitations." Kundera distinguishes four of these: an "invitation for the game" in the work of Diderot and Sterne; an "invitation for the dream" in Kafka's "enormous discoveries"; an "invitation for thinking" as regards the ambition of Musil and Broch to make the novel the highest spiritual synthesis; and "invitation to time," the commitment of Proust and Fuentes, Aragon, just to mention the most recent ones.

A GRAND DIALOGUE

Bleak House can be interpreted on the basis of Kundera's theory of the novel. When put in the above-mentioned line of "invitations" the work attains a new

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[91] Bacsó, p. 166.

[92] Nonetheless, there is a point to be made here. Since, as a rejoinder to an earlier question, it follows from this theory that one may conceive of very many types of stories. In the history of the novel, there must be an infinite number of configurations that would meet the "standards" of Kunderaian poetics. As debated above, the genre has only one commitment. As long as a work in a way or another cultivates the moral of the novel, it should fit in the canon. If the basic Aristotelian principles of narration can be accepted, a relatively free system will be created. Kundera's essay does not attempt to legitimise a rigid scheme at all. The fact that he derives his ars poetica from an ontological reading of phenomenology does not give priority to the stories of *being*. (The most important distinction between Kundera's and Heidegger's philosophy could be described by the antinomies of *ontic* versus *ontologic*. In other words, Kundera's scheme is a pragmatic, popularised version of the phenomenologis.) Having read *The Art of the Novel*, one might falsely expect Kundera to compose a new order, the members of which even in their *sujet* incorporate existentialist narratives. In fact Kundera does not fall in that mistake. He does not levy new restrictions on the novel. By forming a relatively pluralistic model he accepts any work that *as a whole* serves his main goal, the analysis of being. This principle is as *liberal* as it can be on the level of the work: it acknowledges of any piece that serves artistic purposes with the means of the artistic.

meaning. All in all, one may easily read the novel in the light of Rorty's principles; he is right in saying that a significant undertaking of Dickens' work lies in its critical functions. As mentioned before, the Aristotelian power, the impulse of the novel is eliminated. Instead of it, *investigation*, the slowness of analysis is accentuated. The reader should stay still, as it is the sight that becomes emphasised, not the story. He/she is supposed to meet, to see a lot of people he/she cannot pass by: he/she has to honour them with his/her *gaze*, with sincere curiosity. That is how in the realm of the democratic one should respond to one's fellows. On the metaphorical level of the work, there is the emblematic fog to remind the reader of the unusual *status quo* of the work: it will cool down any hazy involvement that would, instead of engaging in the narratives of our counterparts, be drawn in by the story.

At the same time, Rorty's principles ought to be reconsidered to make a successful reading strategy of them. On a slightly different basis one can interpret it as a writing uncovering the misdeeds of human foolishness. For the work properly shows what *realism* entails in fact, and without understanding it, one may hardly appreciate Dickens' art. Realism, the realistic presentation of social relations, the criticism of human conditions on the level of the work should not be sufficient; a critical function of the work remains totally blunt and misunderstood, if one does not realise what lies behind this as well. In *Bleak House*, the realism of social phenomena requires the realism – the looking behind, the exploring – of physical phenomena, too. In the thickly woven texture of the book democratic ideology carries a phenomenological background. Since one should not take anything as one can see it; things are not simply projected to us as one would wish. The underlying structure of phenomena moves us out of the stable relation of the subject to the object. One has to look behind, and scratch the background of things. In order to conceive of the affairs of human partnership, the evanescent element that is constantly deceiving our senses should not be ignored. In forming our judgements one needs the ungraspable, the differing implied in the phenomenalty of things. By emphasising seeing, a spotlight is thrown on the imagery. The pervading silkiness, the horrifying affects of the fog are definitely needed to interpret the world of the cold Victorian era; the reader has to get into the visual so as to grasp the *reality* of sensual data.[93] This

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[93] Husserl, and his disciples, to some extent, focus on the 'familiar' phenomena of our life-world If my analysis is not mistaken, Dickens' emphasis on the "romantic side of familiar things" in the preface in the 1892 edition (Dickens, p. 9.) may gain a new interpretation. In a quasi-hermeneutic

is why the viewer of *Bleak House* becomes aware of the democratic values of the novel and apprehends the intolerable situation of bureaucracy and the social conditions of the age.

Therefore, Rorty seems to confuse the result with the cause. The *comme il faut* of the novel may explain a lot, but it is another issue to argue for a personal commitment to the principles of democracy in the work. One may opt for a politically correct explication of the genre; however, in praxis, within the boundaries of the lively microcosm of the novel, one should primarily reveal the particular motivation of the individuals behaving democratically and only then interpret it in the spirit of political decorum. Instead of following the directives of a specific theorem, the devotees of democracy would rather read individual stories that uncover the hidden, but all the more essential networks among people. The novel cannot be a mere model of politics, but a source of human relations that gives rise to the political.

Only this can help us to appreciate the diversities and the idiosyncrasies of the characters of the novel. Thus, by engaging in the milieu of the work, the reader may as well take pleasure in looking around here; he/she will not even become conscious of the actual time spent when reading it. And Kundera provides for an analogy here again. He says:

> The answer can be found in a letter [...] to Milena: "The office is not a stupid institution; it belongs more to the realm of the fantastic than of the stupid." This sentence contains one of Kafka's greatest secrets. He saw what no one else could see: not only the enormous importance of the bureaucratic phenomenon for man, for his condition and his future, but also (even more surprisingly) the poetic potential contained in the phantasmic nature of offices.

And a little later:

> The quality of the fantastic that he perceived in the bureaucratic world allowed Kafka to do what has seemed unimaginable before: he transformed the profoundly antipoetic material of a highly bureaucratized society into the great poetry of the novel [...] into myth, into epic, into a kind of beauty never before seen.[94]

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phenomenology of romanticism, *Bleak House* implies a few vague similarities between the two lines of thought.

[94] Kundera, pp. 113–114.

Here another hint is given at the radical autonomy of the novel,[95] as the viewer might witness how a social, political analysis can be completed in the text of the work. It seems understandable that the genre has a special advantage over other means of reporting of facts. In its form it helps to convey the theme – that which can only be told by the novel.

To sum up, it could be stated that the main metaphors of the book arouse the dispute between phenomenology and pragmatism. Apart from the apparent parallels, I tried to find the differences between these two theories, and locate the more appropriate conception to form a theory of the novel. Choosing between the two stances, I argued for a phenomenological interpretation of the theory of the novel. I attempted to disclose a few interesting critical aspects of the genre. As argued by Kundera, it is not at all unlikely that a grand dialogue took shape between the novel and philosophy.[96] "The novel is built on [these] categories as a house is built on pillars."[97]

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[95] Kundera, p. 117.
[96] Kundera, p. 161.
[97] Kundera, p. 95.

Ildikó Limpár

Reading Emily Dickinson's
"Now I lay thee down to sleep" as a Variant[1]

Due to thorough manuscript analysis and inquiries into Dickinson's personal relationships and private circulation of poems, now there is a general openness in today's critical thinking to the open-endedness and inherent ambiguity of her poetry, though the possibility for various interpretations have given scholars ground for much debate and disagreement.[2] Sharon Cameron's recent *Choosing not Choosing*[3] seems to have started a new chapter in the dispute. Having thoroughly researched fascicles fifteen, sixteen and twenty, Cameron proposed the possibility of reading variants as non-exclusive variants,[4] saying that "words that are variants are part of the poem outside of which they ostensibly lie, as poems in the same fascicle may sometimes be seen as variants of each other."[5] These variants, moreover, argues Cameron, are not about the same thing, but are the same thing. This can be applied, I think, to all of Dickinson's poems where there is a multitude of meanings, by considering the various possibilities of interpretation as variants of the poems. Accordingly, "Now I lay thee down to

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[1] I am very grateful to Prof. Jane Donahue Ebewein, who called my attention to the parodic aspect of the poem, and helped my work with her comments, criticism and suggestions.

[2] Dickinson's contradictions are usually "reconciled" by declaring no need for reconciliation. Among the recent publications, see, for example: Gary Lee Stonum. *The Dickinson Sublime.* Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; and Beth Maclay Doriani. *Emily Dickinson: Daughter of Prophecy.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

[3] Cameron. *Choosing not Choosing.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

[4] Before Cameron, Miller also recognises the importance of variations, considering them as clarifying means that "bring us closer to the poet's own thoughts about her poem" (Cristanne Miller. *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1987, p. 47).

[5] Cameron, p. 5.

sleep," written in approximately 1882 and first published in 1924, is on the textual level a variant of a well-known bedtime prayer, while on the level of interpretation it carries the possibility of being several variants at the same time:

The prayer:	The poem:
Now I lay me down to sleep,	Now I lay thee down to Sleep –
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.	I pray the Lord thy Dust to keep –
And if I die before I wake,	And if thou live before thou wake –
I pray the Lord my soul to take.	I pray the Lord thy Soul to make –[6]

The prayer presumes a benevolent, provident God who would take care of a person's eternal part (i.e., the soul) after death has separated it from the body. Following Cameron's theory, Dickinson's task when rewriting the prayer was to produce a variant that is the same as the original text, yet "extends the text's identity in ways that make it seem potentially limitless."[7]

Wheatcroft calls this poem a "mock elegy in the form of a parody,"[8] arguing that "[n]ot only does the poem pervert the most widely used bedtime prayer of Protestant New England children; it also casts doubt on the eternal existence of the soul."[9] Yet, this parody is not funny in the first place, carrying a serious sense of humour and wit. While rejecting the metaphysic of orthodoxy in theory, Dickinson could not repudiate the condition coming from it, therefore "her humour undermines the foundations of New England orthodoxy"[10] and at the same time offers a redefinition for unacceptable doctrines. In fact, her act of rewriting a prayer reflects this attitude.

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[6] All references to the poems by Dickinson are to this edition: Thomas H. Johnson, ed. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960.

[7] Cameron, p. 5.

[8] John Wheatcroft. "A Serious View of Humour in Emily Dickinson's Poetry." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 22.3 (Spring 1974) 95–104, p. 99. Lindberg-Seyersted also refers to this poem as a parody: "A set of full rhymes coloring all the line ends of a stanza cooperates with metrical regularity to bring about a humorously exaggerated formality of tone in the following parody..." (Brita Lindberg-Seyersted. *The Voice of the Poet: Aspects of Style in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson*. Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1968, p. 159). However, all the components of this "humorously exaggerated formality" can be found in the original piece, too. Therefore it is the content, in the first place, that strikes the reader – the form is borrowed. And though the poem may provoke laughter as a first reaction, it surely urges us to think over the "perverted" message.

[9] Wheatcroft, p. 99.

[10] Wheatcroft, p. 97.

If we regard the two texts as variants to each other, the exchanged words should stand for the same things. In this case the poem is a self-addressing one, it is clear; how soul can be equivalent with Dust, die with live, and take with make, needs further investigation, which I attempt later on. But even changing the person induces difficulties in the interpretation. The complication lies in the fact that, although Dickinson changes the first person singular to second person when referring to the one about whom she speaks, she keeps the first person for the one who says the prayer. This double nature of the speaking character together with the additional changes in the vocabulary and the spelling reshape the meaning of the text.

Capitalising sleep strengthens the traditional Christian identification of sleep with eternal sleep, that is death, while capitalising dust and soul emphasises the two concepts as constituents of the individual. Exchanging the verb die for the verb live shifts the stress from hypothesis in the original prayer to reality in the poem: "And if I die before I wake" reflects the Christian attitude that life should be lived knowing that it might end at any moment. Thus every night carries the possibility of a sudden death. Dickinson goes one step further: "And if thou live before thou wake" assumes that every night carries the possibility – and only the possibility – of life;[11] as a consequence, every night is a death. But due to the split identity it is difficult to define who exactly dies repeatedly.

The individual consisting of two parts, Dust (body) and Soul corresponds to Christian teaching and becomes a recurring theme in Dickinson's poetry.[12] What is extraordinary is her assigning separate lives to these components (even while the person is alive), which turns the natural state of the person into

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[11] See a variant of the same idea in "On that specific pillow" (#1533), written in approximately 1881 (almost concurrently with "Now I lay thee down to sleep"): "On that specific Pillow / Our projects flit away – / The Night's tremendous Morrow / And whether sleep will stay / Or usher us – a stranger – / To situation new / The effort to comprise it / Is all the soul can do." Antecedents of these poems could be "Let me not mar that perfect dream" (#1335; from c. 1875): "Let me not mar that perfect Dream / By an Auroral stain / But so adjust my *daily Night* / That it will come again" (ll. 1–4; my emphasis); and "Heart, not so heavy as mine" (#83): "Tomorrow, night will come again – / Perhaps, weary and sore" (ll. 17–18).

[12] One of the most illustrious examples is in poem "I am afraid to own a body" (#1090): "I am afraid to own a Body – / I am afraid to own a Soul – / Profound – precarious Property – / Possession, not optional –" (ll. 1–4). In Dickinson's poetry, this "double estate" suggests a unity, in the first place, and the separation of the two components is mostly described as the consequence of death: for instance, see "Departed to the judgement" (#524), "Death is a dialogue between" (#976) and "The overtakelessness of those" (#1691).

schizophrenia, resulting in a peculiar trinity: there is the persona as Dust, the persona as Soul, and a complex persona as the unity of Dust and Soul – the latter persona identified as I, addressing her two other selves.[13] Soul and body, furthermore, obviously experience different realities in a person's life. But while Christian teachings try to settle this duality by proposing a conscious choice of the soul, that is true experience, Dickinson adapts this spiritual reality to the body's experience, too.

At the same time, the bodily reality is applied to the soul, since the endurance of the body and the soul is reversed, if compared with the traditional Christian concept: whereas in the prayer the soul survives death, in the poem the soul must each day be made anew. The soul is not immortal and there is a permanent need for its re-creation, as a pre-condition for the existence of the complete identity, just as the living body is a pre-condition for the existence of the soul. This multi-layered inter-dependence gives special emphasis to the body, being more enduring than the soul, and offering an opportunity for the soul to exist. However, this relation also implies that it is the soul that is able to revive, while the body is only a dwelling place for the spiritual self. Reducing the soul and the body to a common denominator, it is the corporal that is more determining on the textual level. As Robert M. Smith contends: "Dickinson's art is never ethereal, but aggressively physical."[14] This is how the word Dust can function as soul.

The changes Dickinson made turned the bedtime prayer into a funeral prayer, or rather combined the two types, assuming that each night is a death to come. In consequence, each day is an agonising experience, resulting in the extinction of the soul. Life is dreadful, continuously labouring with death. This fear is expressed in the gothic image of being buried alive,[15] which may be found

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[13] This attitude was not alien to Dickinson, as can be observed in "I felt my life with both my hands" (#351): "I felt my life with both my hands / To see if it was there – / I held my spirit to the Glass, / To prove it possibler – // I turned my Being round and round / And paused at every pound / To ask the Owner's name – / For doubt, that I should know the Sound –" (ll. 1–8). The poem clearly has a speaking character (identified as "I"), and has both a soul (identified as "my spirit") and a living body (identified as "my Being"), so it is a mistake to identify the "I" simply with the spirit, as Robert McClure Smith suggests (*The Seductions of Emily Dickinson.* Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1996, p. 118).

[14] Smith, p. 110.

[15] The feeling of being buried alive is also a recurring theme in Dickinson's poetry, meaning an entombed existence in-between Life and Resurrection. Due to the manifold meaning of her terminology, especially of death and life, this existence can be understood as both of this world and

in the line "And if thou live before thou wake" which may be paraphrased as: and if you (body) resurrect while you do not have your spirit, therefore being still in the state of being dead. For the living body without the soul the world – its dwelling place – is just a tomb. But continuing with the parallel, we might see the body functioning as a tomb for the soul, too – especially since it is called Dust. This further strengthens the claustrophobia of the selves as the multi-layered inter-relation is transformed into the image of a nest of coffins. Again, while life is lived symbolically in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23) in the Christian belief, life practically is a death-experience here.

From this analysis we can see how the text becomes transformed. Dickinson touches upon all the possibilities of ambiguity, which the original function (the prayer) clears up. The possible separation of body and soul in life – an unusual idea – may generate from the second line of the prayer: "I pray the Lord my soul to keep." Religion makes it clear that 'keep' here is to be understood as protect, guard – that is, keep safe. Yet, separating the text from Christian doctrine, keep takes up the meaning of keep somewhere, as if the soul were kept separately from the body at night for safety.[16] Dickinson takes advantage of this reading and supports it by her special use of the dash, signifying a suppressed word or idea.[17] The physical separation inherent in the meanings of the words keep as well as take (prayer, l. 4.) and make (poem, l.4.), respectively, confirms that every night does become a death – death according to Christian

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of the other. See, for example, "So give me back to death" (#1632). "And now, by Life deprived, / In my own Grave I breathe" (ll. 4–5); "Advance is Life's condition / The Grave but a Relay / Supposed to be a terminus / That makes it hated so – / / The Tunnel is not lighted / Existence with a wall / Is better we consider / Than not exist at all –" (#1652, ll. 1–8). See also the poems where a grave appears as somebody's home as in "A dimple in the tomb" (#1489), "Sweet, safe houses" (#457); or an inn: "What inn is this" (#115); or simply something protective: "Some, too fragile for winter winds" (#141) and "The clouds their backs together laid" (#1172). Lindberg-Seyersted contends that "[h]ere domestic imagery is most certainly used to make the mystery of death appear less terrifying" (p. 87). Since Dickinson draws the two worlds near each other, making death look less terrifying means, at the same time, making life look more terrifying.

[16] A similar gothic reading of "It was a grave, yet bore no stone" (#876) might begin with a person's soul entombed as a punishment. "It was a Grave, yet bore no Stone / Enclosed 'twas not of Rail / A consciousness its Acre, and / It held a Human Soul. // Entombed by whom, for what offence" (ll. 1–5). The poem is also an example of how the word *soul* may substitute *body*.

[17] The clearest example to demonstrate this technique of Dickinson's may be found in the last line of "We dream – it s good we are dreaming –" (#531): "It's prudenter – to dream –" the poem ends, without phrasing the hardly omissible government of the grammatical structure. Also in the last line of "Follow wise Orion" (#1538): "He is just as high –".

theology as the separation of dust and soul. The consuming everyday struggle for the spiritual survival manifested in this disintegrating procedure results in the person's collapse. Consequently, even if we accept the possibility of self-address, we might as well state that the speaker addresses someone (or something) that is not identified as the speaker's person.[18]

The speaker takes care of the addressed one. The first line ("Now I lay thee down to Sleep") if read literally, clearly expresses motherly care . But if we also accept the symbolic meaning of the poem, this concern then turns into an utterly gothic, gruesome providence: care that is revealed in terms of providing a proper death both physically and spiritually. Considering the conjectured date for this poem, 1882, when Dickinson was hit or threatened by deaths of loved ones (Josiah Holland, Charles Wadsworth, her own mother and Judge Lord),[19] the poem's reading as a funeral oration seems to be appropriate.

Death as the manifestation of Providence in the poem becomes qualified as a purifying, sustaining force. This aspect of death, which is absolutely contrary to the Christian concept and to what we have observed so far in the poem, can further be justified if we assume a parallelly existing symbolic reading of Sleep, in which the idea of separation becomes dominant, resulting in a farewell poem. In this case the speaker decides on excluding the addressee – or her relationship with the addressee – from her life. Yet, the caring attitude of the speaking person remains, so the need for separation must be generated by an outside force.

One of the several feasible readings, supported by Dickinson's biography, suggests a love affair that should not, cannot be fulfilled. Bidding farewell, therefore, makes a memory out of the flesh and blood experience, turning it into Dust, lacking the contact that would make the relationship live. The exclusion, composed in the image of Sleep, resembles rather a life imprisonment then a death penalty. The resurrection of the relation is independent of the speaker. The exemption from the punishment (which is a mutual punishment) is shifted to an undefined dimension, beyond the physical world. This dimension can be the other world, the Kingdom of God. The same idea can also be found in her last

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[18] The unspecified address is a general characteristic of Dickinson's late poetry, helping to create the universality of reference. Dickinson's poetry of 1880's demonstrate "a shifting of emphasis from the very emotional and personal to a more 'philosophical' and more universal tone" (Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 55–7).

[19] Facts about Dickinson's life are taken from: Richard B Sewall. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1994.

letter[20] to John Graves: "Ah John – Gone? Then I lift the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay another in, unto the Resurrection – Then will I gather in Paradise, the blossoms fallen here, and on the shores of the sea of Light, seek my missing sands"[21] (Letter #186).[22] Accordingly, the last three lines of the poem refer to a possible Judgement Day, interpretable as follows: I pray that there be a Judgement Day when your body is also to resurrect in the Kingdom of God ("I pray the Lord thy Dust to keep"); and if God raises your body from the dead ("And if thou live before thou wake"), I pray that it should be a complete resurrection; not the resurrection of the memory I made out of you, which is only Dust, but I ask God to recreate your soul which I took away on Earth ("I pray the Lord thy Soul to make"). At this point the verbs take and make meet, since make here accounts for what has previously been taken.

The above interpretation considers the expression of a dead relationship in the image of a body without a soul. Similarly, these four lines could refer to somebody "dead" in the same sense, just like the subject of "That this should feel the need of death." Knowing that the poem in question was sent to Susan Dickinson, with whom Emily usually shared her witty opinion on everything, the poem as a humorous judgement on a person who struck the two women as

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[20] Lindberg-Seyersted calls our attention to the fact that Dickinson often phrases parallelly the same idea in prose (letters) and in poetry; moreover, "she seems often to have stored her preliminary literary efforts the way writers frequently do, and reworked them later; sometimes she may not have remembered that she had used a phrase or a line before" (Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 19).

[21] All letters by Dickinson are to this edition: Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, eds. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP & Belknap Press, 1958.

[22] The date of the letter is uncertain (1850s). Resting until a re-encounter at the Resurrection appears in Dickinson's poetry in various forms, for example, that of the dead in "Safe in their alabaster chamber" (#216; versions: #1859, 1861). "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers – / Untouched by Mourning – / And untouched by Noon – / Lie the meek members of the Resurrection –" (ll. 1-3), and in "Of nearness to her sundered things" (#607): "As we – it were –that perished – / Themself – had just remained till we rejoin them –" (ll. 17-18); that of the Soul and the Flesh in "Departed to the Judgment" (#524); that of love in "The bustle in a house" (#1078): "The Sweeping up the Heart / And putting Love away / We shall not want to use again / Until Eternity" (ll. 5-8) and in "The grave my little cottage is" (#1743): "The grave my little cottage is, / Where "Keeping house" for the / I make my parlor orderly / And lay the marble tea. // For two divided, briefly, / A cycle, it may be, / Till everlasting life unite / In strong society"; unspecified in "Ample make this bed" (#829): "Ample make this Bed – / Make this Bed with Awe – / In it wait till Judgement break / Excellent and Fair" (ll. 1-4). In all of these poems, death gains a symbolic meaning, so the subjects and consequently the poems themselves become open to various interpretations.

never having really lived is not only acceptable, but also consonant with Wheatcroft's reading of the poem as containing parodic elements.

As the last line may also emphasise the replacement of the physical nature of the relationship with the spiritual one, another possible identification for the new dimension is the dimension of Art. For Dickinson, poetry, like religion, is both private and impersonal, she uses the personal experience, yet distances it from herself. In this case, the whole poem can be interpreted as if it were addressed to Dickinson's own making, a piece of art. The poem thus becomes part of the creative act, as a ritual, a magic spell, following the birth of each piece of poetry. However, what follows from the text is that every labour results in a still-birth. Producing dead poetry was one of Dickinson's major apprehensions. In her first letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson on April 15, 1862, she openly asked the essayist: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" and added: "Should you think it breathed – and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude –" (letter #260). The poem "Now I lay thee down to sleep" testifies that she experienced writing as a perpetual failure. For Dickinson, labouring and birth are both unfinished activities, they do not have a completed state: the author lays down her creation as if it were only its ashes (Dust), a dead body.[23] What appears curious here is that we are not given any kind of explanation about how the poems come to life.[24]

It is not the creation of soul by divine providence that enables the words to live, because coming to life is a prerequisite for asking the Lord to do so. Living, in this context, is rather an ability to live in a new dimension, being fit for life, having a quality that justifies the existence of the work of art: that is, being a good poem. Poems, accordingly, exist even before they are written. The poet calls them to life – wakes them – in this world by putting them down. Nevertheless, vitality is not a physical but an artistic attribute, thus corporal survival (which is the precondition of the intellectual one) must be assured spiritually, as it derives from Dickinson's body-soul dualism. Immortality demands a Soul, without which

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[23] This idea is also present in "I felt my life with both my hands" (#351), where the speaker has a spirit and a body, which body is her creation; that is, her poem. The creator is not sure whether her poetry is alive or not. "I pushed my dimples by, and waited – / If they – twinkled back –" (ll. 10–11). In both poems, the conditional structure holds out the bright prospects of life.

[24] For Dickinson on the act of creation see "This is a Blossom of the Brain – / A small – italic Seed / Lodged by Design or Happening / The Spirit fructified – // Shy as the Wind of his Chambers / Swift as a Freshet's Tongue / So of the Flower of the Soul / Its process is unknown" ("This is a blossom of the brain," #945, ll. 1–8).

the poems would remain dead, forgotten bodies, however strong they would otherwise be. And though the poet exposes her own makings to death[25] without exception ("Now I lay thee down to Sleep –"), the poems have their own lives, independently of the one who helps them to be born, and the perfect ones may survive death – and this is the moment where real Life begins.

Art as Life is often discussed in relation to the Dickinsonian oeuvre.[26] Now we can add Art as Death, since death-like experience is the characteristic of live art, as Dickinson sees it: "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry" she explained once to Higginson (letter #342a). Both poem and poet are touched by Death in the mystery of Art. Perfection results in death – a concept borrowed from nature:[27] "Midsummer, was it, when They died – / A full, and perfect time –[...] / When These – leaned into Perfectness – /Through Haze of Burial –[.]"[28] "Artistic death" is thus not a demolishing force, but a fruitful one, bringing perfection, perfect art – that is, pure magic. In this light, Dickinson's "[...]dying I may earn the look / For which I cease to live –"[29] becomes paraphrasable as: if I give up (the enjoyment of) life for artistic pleasures, I may reach Art. This is dying without dying, the greatest miracle possible, as the poet testifies in her poem "To die – without the dying" (#1017).[30] But whether one is capable of this wonder depends on one's poems. It is the work of art that can call the artist to this death without dying – that is,

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[25] The ironical assumption that levels Dickinson's creative work with death functions as a source of humour in the first place; its role of masking Dickinson's fears, however, is also detectable. This attitude is in harmony with her often assumed role as "the persona of the body of her poetry; the child. [...] [S]he transforms her perceptions into the child's experience [...] . Whimsy, innocence, humor, irony are modes that she commands, enabling her to establish her distinctive poetic control" (Wheatcroft, p. 97.).

[26] See, for instance, Judith Farr. *The Passion of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1992, Chapter 6.

[27] The capitalisation adds another dimension to the image of harvest (for instance, that of art).

[28] "Midsummer, was it, when they died" (#962, ll. 1–2; 7–8).

[29] "Tried always and condemned by thee" (#1559, ll. 3–4).

[30] "To die – without the Dying / And live – without the Life / This is the hardest Miracle / Propounded to Belief." See also "The going from a world we know" (#1603), where the hill of Art is described as to be climbed alone (that is, renouncing everything and everybody in life): "The going from a world we know / To one a wonder still / Is like the child's adversity / Whose vista is a hill, // Behind the hill is sorcery / And everything unknown, / But will the secret compensate / For climbing it alone?"

immortality.[31] Conquering death in this way has a double consequence for Dickinson: firstly, death offers the manifestation of reality – real life – as opposed to the life she must live;[32] secondly, death, as a concept, becomes absolutely relative, being demise and animation at one and the same time.[33]

The idea of being born in death generates modifications in the speaker-addressee relation in "Now I lay thee down to sleep." The motherly creator is regarded as a midwife of the creation, and if the poem is viable and starts breathing, it is God's task to complete it with a soul – to provide it with immortality. The personal experience is thus distanced and gains impersonality. The birth takes place in the reality of the known world, while the (re-)vitalisation occurs in another dimension, in-between the earthly and the heavenly spheres: in the realm of Art, where everything comes into being through craft. Even God becomes the supreme craftsman, who makes souls – makes, which implicates manual art (a Blake-like concept) unlike in Genesis 2:7, where He breathes the soul into the body. Thus the soul of a piece of art must be created in the same way as its body, or its form. But the last word of the poem (make) gives it yet another turn instead of closing it. As the verb keep can be assigned different meanings, so with the verb make. Besides the already discussed meaning, this transitive verb make can take an object complement, also. Since there is a dash at the end of the last line – instead of any other punctuation that might indicate closure – this dash could stand for the unuttered complement, which can either indicate nothing itself, or anything a reader may think of. Nothing and everything merge in the mystery of the act of creation. Nothing is everything, death is the life of art. If you can make everything out of the nothing, this is art. If you can make the contrary, this is art, too. Dickinson claims live art makes you feel as if you died and were resurrected. Consequently, to be an Artist or to be a

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[31] Thus I suggest that in "I had no cause to be awake" (#542) the visiting dead who call her to the other world can be identified as her poems. The process of becoming a real poet (through death) is procreated by her Best [poem]: "I had no Cause to be awake – / My Best – was gone to sleep – / And Mourn a new politeness took – / And failed to wake them up – // But called the others – clear – / And passed their Curtains by – / Sweet Morning – When I oversleep – / Knock – Recollect – to Me –" (ll. 1–8)

[32] See "I like a look of agony" (#241): "I like a look of Agony / Because I know it's true –" (ll. 1–2).

[33] See "A death blow is a life blow to some" (#816): "A Death blow is a Life blow to Some / Who till they died, did not alive become – / Who had they lived, had died but when / They died, Vitality begun." The philosophy on the relativity of death also appears in "Unfulfilled to observation" (#972; probably of the same year, c. 1864): "Unto Us – the Suns extinguish – / To our Opposite – / New Horizons – they embellish – / Fronting Us – with Night" (ll. 5–8).

work of Art demands a continuous state of being buried alive – of which both Dickinson and her poetry were the manifestations.

This analysis of "Now I lay thee down to sleep" has demonstrated how various interpretations, justified by numerous other poems in the oeuvre, offer an understanding of the poem by reading them as non-exclusive variants of the same idea, even though such readings might seem contradictory at first sight. Dickinson's contradictory constructions manifest in her poetry result from a deep philosophy. I consciously use the term philosophy instead of religion, since "Dickinson's version of spirituality is not creedal," as Doriani contends.[34] Moreover, her ideas concerning the Transcendental are of the same nature as her ideas concerning anything in the world: "If White – a Red – Must be!"[35] – that is, each thing carries in itself its own opposite that ultimately derives from God's double nature.[36] The two things are, in fact, identical, and one must seek the dimension where one can recognise their sameness.[37] This dimension appears often in Dickinson's poetry. Accordingly, the best reading of these poems is the one that offers the various levels of interpretation with an awareness of their being different aspects of the same thing, and not really different possible solutions to the poems' riddle.[38]

Dickinson's carefully composed poetry leads us into Temptation, which is at the same time Salvation: we are tempted to renounce the daily experienced truth and tempted to find a different one, through Art. But since artistic and divine are synonyms in her vocabulary, what Dickinson suggests is a truth whose dimension is infinite and can, therefore, only be approached.

> Truth – is as old as God –
> His Twin Identity
> And will endure as long as He
> A co-Eternity –[39]

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[34] Doriani, p. 26.

[35] "The zeroes – taught us – phosphorus –" (#689, l. 6).

[36] See "'Heavenly Father' take to thee" (#1461): "'Heavenly Father' – take to thee / The supreme iniquity / Fashioned by thy candid Hand / In a moment contraband – / Though to trust us – seem to us / More respectful – 'We are Dust' – / We apologize to thee / For thine own Duplicity –" (ll. 1–8).

[37] One must also make an attempt to see the other aspect of the same: "What Duplicate – exist – / What Parallel can be –" ("No crowd that has occurred," #515, ll. 13–14).

[38] See also Lindberg-Seyersted on Dickinson's use of paradox, calling it "an attempt at completeness" (Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 104).

[39] #836, ll. 1–4.

Éva Péteri

Tennyson and His Pre-Raphaelite Critics

Pre-Raphaelite Interpretations of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"[1]

Literary paintings are like essays on literature. Intending or not, the painter inevitably interprets the words of a writer as he makes them visible. The analysis of a group of paintings illustrating the same literary work is like perusing a collection of critical studies on the same subject, produced, however, not by literary scholars or theorists, but by sensitive readers, fellow artists. Nevertheless, their approaches often show close affinities with well-known trends in literary criticism. Tennyson's mysterious "The Lady of Shalott," where several things remain unsaid and unexplained, allows a range of vindicable interpretations. No wonder, therefore, that it has always excited critics and painters alike, each of them being affected by their personal, literary, and historical experiences in forming and presenting their views.

At the same time a literary painting is the re-creation of what is given in the text. In addition, regarding the written work itself as the re-creation of reality, its visual rendition becomes re-recreation. In the case of simple visual images re-reflection means the recovery of the original, of reality itself. But artistic re-creation, either in words or in images, is not merely a mirrored presentation of reality. As a result of artistic selection and intensification[2] it is also transformation, which means that the reflected image becomes distorted. Nevertheless, regarding re-reflection as the key to the understanding of

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[2] Cf. Péter Egri. *Value and Form: Comparative Literature, Painting and Music.* Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1993, pp. 30–36.

Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," there is still some important parallel between the notion of double visual reflection in the poem and the duality of a literary painting. As reality intrudes upon the lady by her looking either at reality itself or, equally, at Lancelot's doubly reflected image in her mirror, her tapestry, her work of art disintegrates, her visionary world and source of inspiration is flawed by cracks. Based on analogy, the re-reflective quality of a literary painting may bring about the destruction of the magic visionary world of the poem. And, to a certain extent, it really happens to Tennyson's poem in its Pre-Raphaelite renditions. These painterly interpretations necessarily reduce the manifold meaning and mysterious nature of the poem to a final, thus much limited version of it.

Examining the Pre-Raphaelite painters' pictures inspired by the poem the present paper tries to disclose how these artists understood the story of Tennyson's cursed lady and how their approaches and treatments defined the poem and, in certain cases, altered its original character.

1 TENNYSON

"It is what I have always felt even from a boy," said Tennyson about one of his poems,[3] "and what as a boy I called 'the passion of the past.' And so it is with me now; it is the distance that charms me in the landscape, the picture and the past, and not the immediate to-day in which I move."[4]

As part of his deep-rooted passion for the past Tennyson is reported to have announced his intention to rewrite the legend of King Arthur in the early 1830s, willing to build on the renewed early 19th-century interest in the saga, and supplement a modern reinterpretation of the ancient stories.[5] The work engaged him for over sixty years, the first pieces being written in the early 1830s, and, as late as in 1891, a year before his death, Tennyson is said to have still been concerned with some work on the final version known as *Idylls of the King*.[6]

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[3] "Tears, Idle Tears" (1847).

[4] Quoted in Carr. "Tennyson as a Modern Poet." In: John Killham ed. *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 45.

[5] Debra N. Mancoff. *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes*. New York: Abrams, 1995, p. 50.

[6] Mancoff, p. 51.

Tennyson's long-lasting interest in the Arthurian legends reflects the general Victorian enthusiasm for them, and corresponds well with the great popularity of themes taken from them in contemporary art. In 1847 the legendary cycle of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table was decided on as the most appropriate subject for the decoration of the newly built Palace of Westminster, and scenes from it, inspired either by the ancient accounts or by Tennyson's reinterpretations, featured in many celebrated paintings of the time produced by artists like Joseph Noel Paton, George Frederick Watts, Arthur Hacker, James Archer, and many of the Pre-Raphaelites.

At the time of the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848 and in the early years of their joint work their choice of subject was decisively influenced by their strong affection for literature; Shakespeare, Dante, Keats and Tennyson being their first favourites. Of the early members and associates William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and Elizabeth Siddal are all known to have had an especially great admiration for Tennyson's works,[7] and, as Andrea Rose observes, the "lapidary, pictorial quality [of Tennyson's poetry] and its lush evocation of the medieval past"[8] meant that it lent itself well to pictorial presentation. In addition, the Pre-Raphaelites became personally acquainted with Tennyson in 1849, when the sculptor member of the brotherhood, Thomas Woolner was commissioned to make a medallion of the poet, and Tennyson began sitting for him.

Many of Tennyson's poems gave inspiration to early Pre-Raphaelite pictures. *Mariana* and *St Agnes' Eve*, for example, were the sources of Millais' works with the same titles made in 1851 and 1854, Siddal's *Saint Cecily and the Angel* (n.d.) was inspired by *The Palace of Art* and her *Lady Clare* (1854-7) by the poem *Lady Clare*, while Arthur Hughes' *April Love* (1855-56) was exhibited with a quotation from *The Miller's Daughter*. However, it was *The Lady of Shalott* which proved to provide the most lasting inspiration exerting its influence on the early Pre-Raphaelites in the middle of the 19th century as well as on their late followers at the beginning of the 20th.

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[7] Cf. William Holman Hunt. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. London: Macmillan, 1905, Vol. I, pp. 316–7; Vol. II, p. 177; Oswald Doughty & John Robert Wahl eds. *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–67, p. 1857; John Guille Millais. *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*. London: Methuen and Co., 1905, pp. 67, 283; William Allingham. *A Diary, 1824–1889*. London: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 163; Alicia Craig Faxon. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1989, p. 78.

[8] Andrea Rose. *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*. Yeovil: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1981, p. 95.

Though not exactly originating from the Arthurian legends, the story of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* bears close resemblances to that of Elaine the White of Astolat, which is an essential part of the cycle. Nevertheless, Tennyson's immediate source is claimed to have been the Italian romance *La Damigella di Scalot.*[9] The story, as related by Tennyson, tells how the lady, held by a miraculous spell, was working day and night on a tapestry depicting scenes of the outside world. Being inhibited from looking at the world directly, she viewed it through a mirror, until a day, when Sir Lancelot appeared in it, and the lady, defying the curse, turned around to have a look at him. In the same moment the mirror cracked and the tapestry disintegrated, signalling that the curse had been fulfilled. Leaving her lonely tower and the island of Shalott the lady sat into a boat, and, singing her last song, drifted down the river to her death. As the boat reached land at Camelot people gathered to have a look at the mysterious vessel and its lady. Lancelot was one of them, and his musing words on the lady's beautiful features close the poem.

In a contemporary article the poem was described as "a strange ballad, without a perceptible object"[10] probably for its incompleteness, since, as Lionel Stevenson observes,[11] it gives no explanation as to why a curse has been put on the lady, what the exact reason for her defiance is, or how her death is actually caused. Others, like R.H. Hutton regarded the poem as an allegory, claiming that "it has for its real subject the emptiness of the life of fancy ... which compels any true imaginative nature to break through the spell which entrances it in an unreal world of visionary joys."[12] Taking his explanation further, Hutton adds, "[t]he curse is that she shall be involved in mortal passions, and suffer the fate of mortals, if she looks away from the shadow of reality."[13] Stevenson also sees the poem as an allegory, according to him the lady of Shalott represents the artist, who, being completely isolated from the outside world, is "weaving beautiful pictures which are supposed to reproduce real life but which are derived entirely at second hand through the mirror."[14] He finds his interpretation just relevant to Tennyson's own retreat to an ivory tower, and to the fact that Tennyson's poetry

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[9] Cf. Lionel Stevenson. "The 'High-Born Maiden' Symbol in Tennyson." In Killham, p. 129, note 1.

[10] Quoted in Christopher Ricks. *Tennyson.* London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 73.

[11] See Killham, p. 129.

[12] Quoted in Ricks, p. 74.

[13] Quoted in Ricks, p. 74.

[14] Quoted in Killham, p. 130.

of the time was often, and not without justifiable reasons, accused of being "artificial and derivative."[15]

2 TENNYSON'S CRITICS

Interestingly, the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings were received with similar reserves. Overtly admitting their admiration, and, in a way, returning to the pictorial tradition of medieval and early Renaissance art, they incurred accusations of displaying "an unintelligent imitation of the mere technicalities of old art."[16] However, as one of their main principles, the Pre-Raphaelites wished to avoid imitation of all kinds, willing to study nature directly and to take it as the basis of their presentations. Tennyson's concern with art and artistic creation naturally excited the novice painters; their similar concerns are reflected in Rossetti's search for an artistic creed in his short story *Hand and Soul*, and in Hunt's enthusiasm discovering the first volumes of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* finding its moral approach to art a principle he could whole-heartedly take on.

2.1 Allegorical approach: the lady as the failing artist

The earliest Pre-Raphaelite picture inspired by Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* was made by William Holman Hunt in 1850, at the same time when Millais started working on *Mariana*. Hunt's fascination with the poem was so strong that he concerned himself with it till the end of his life, producing altogether four different versions, on the course of which he developed his early drawing into the magnificent oil painted between 1886–1905. The four versions; the drawing of 1850 [Fig. 1], an illustration made for Edward Moxon's edition of Tennyson's *Poems* in 1857 [Fig. 2], a water-colour painted between 1889–92 [Fig. 3], and the oil completed only a few years before the painter's death [Fig. 4], are all based on the same design, which reflects that Hunt's view of the poem and the reason for his attraction to it had remained unaltered throughout the long years he was concerned with it. In all the versions he shows the decisive moment of the lady's defiance of her fate to live in a world of reflections; her fatal turn to the window and to the forbidden outside world.

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[15] Quoted in Killham, p. 130.
[16] Cf. Francis Bickley. *The Pre-Raphaelite Comedy.* London: Constable and Co., 1932, p. 176.

In accordance with the poetic narrative Hunt presented the lady's incomplete tapestry disintegrating, and showed the figure of Lancelot being reflected in the cracked, circular mirror in the background. However, quite atypically of his usual accuracy, he depicted the lady as being entangled in the flying threads of her decomposing work, which is obviously contrary to what Tennyson had described in his poem ("She left the web, she left the loom/She made three paces thro' the room..."). When the poet saw Hunt's illustration made for the Moxon edition, he complained about the freedom Hunt had allowed himself in his rendition of the scene, but the painter answered, defending his concept, that he "had only a half page on which to convey the impression of weird fate, whereas [Tennyson] use[d] about fifteen pages to give expression to the complete idea."[17] As Hunt's comment suggests, he wanted to seize the moral essence of the poem, and not just to present one of its incidents. Thus, in order to convey the "complete idea" he tried, at first, to retain something of the narrative sequence of the poem by enhancing the natural boundaries of pictorial presentation and presenting pictures within the picture. In the drawing made in 1850 eight small roundels, depicting the most important preceding and future moments of the lady's story, are placed around the huge circular mirror in the background, which, if read clockwise, starting from the top, relate the complete story. The first roundel shows the view of Camelot, the second the lady working on her loom, the third her catching sight of the "young lovers lately wed" in the mirror, and the fourth the image of Sir Lancelot riding by. The fifth roundel is obscured by the figure of the lady, but it can be considered as identical with the drawing itself, presenting the climatic moment of the story, the fulfilment of the curse. The last three roundels are all shown as cracked, as they foretell events to come; the lady's writing her name on the prow of the boat, then the boat drifting down the river, and finally the boat reaching land at Camelot.

Hunt's wish to recapitulate the narrative of Tennyson's poem in this early drawing reflects the Pre-Raphaelites' early strong reliance on narrativity. Actually, narrativity was peculiar not just to early Pre-Raphaelite art but to mid-Victorian painting in general. The Victorians were eager to find a narrative aspect in a painting, they expected it to tell a story and were ready to invent their own if there was no direct reference in the title or in the exhibition catalogue. They were so accustomed to having a narrative interpretation that in the 1860s, when the first works of purely aesthetic nature were beginning to appear on the walls of

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[17] Hunt, Vol. II, p. 125.

exhibition halls they had difficulty interpreting them.[18] Literary themes were in general popular, since then the narrative content, the 'explanation' was already at hand in the written work. There were two common ways to give narrative dimension to a painting, which is bound by its nature in time and space. The most obvious solution was to paint a series, the tradition of which goes back in England to the famous sequences of Hogarth and finds its 19th-century exponents in such famous works as William Powell Frith's *The Road to Ruin* (1878) and Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* (1858). This type was mostly relied on in the case of what Hogarth called "modern moral subjects"[19] where, unlike in the case of literary paintings, there was no pre-formulated story to support the visual rendition, and thus everything had to be 'told' by visual means. The other way was the application of symbolic references, which, though made the spectators' task of 'reading' the painting more demanding, allowed the painter to concentrate more on the main scene, thus the picture could become more powerful, emotionally more effective.

The purpose of Victorian narrative painting was definitely didactic: it wanted to teach, to present a moral lesson. It was John Ruskin, whose theories on art influenced perhaps the most the mid-19th-century concepts of painting and architecture. He was an ardent advocate of the moral responsibility of the artist, identifying the artist's role with that of a priest. It was also Ruskin, who tried to re-establish the former rank and common knowledge of typological symbolism in art. Analysing Tintoret's *The Annunciation* in the second volume of *Modern Painters* he shows how the meaning, the message of a painting can be extended by giving it a "typical [typological] character."[20] As it has already been mentioned Hunt's artistic creed was much influenced by Ruskin and the Ruskinian moral concerns. His wish to convey a moral message and his general reliance on some sort of narrative make Hunt's works typically mid-Victorian. But whereas for his early drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* he chose the more conventional sequential type, in his later renditions of the poem he concentrates on just one incident and gives extension to it by using symbolic references.

By the time Hunt was working on the illustration for Moxon's Tennyson he tried to lay the emphasis only on the dramatic power of the depicted moment

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[18] Cf. Russell Ash. *Sir Edward Burne-Jones.* New York: Abrams, 1993, Plate 19.

[19] In Simon Wilson. *British Art: from Holbein to the Present Day.* London: The Tate Gallery & The Bodley Head, 1979, p. 30.

[20] John Ruskin. *Modern Painters.* London: André Deutsch Lim., 1989, pp. 259–60.

itself, on the sudden action and the immediate reaction; the lady's rebellion and the instantaneous fulfilment of the curse. Thus he made the clasp of the threads on the lady's body stronger, and presented the lady with a twisting body and windblown hair. Tennyson, again, protested, claiming that he had never said that the lady's hair was "wildly tossed about as if by a tornado" and that "the web [wound] round and round her like the threads of a cocoon."[21]

Tennyson was of the opinion that the illustrations should have been subordinated to the text and should remain faithful to it overall. Typical of his insistence on such pictorial accuracy, he criticised Millais for painting daffodils along with wild-roses in *Ophelia* back in 1852. Millais simply "wanted a bit of a yellow" in the painting, but Tennyson told him that "it was quite wrong,"[22] since daffodils could not possibly bloom in the summer, when wild-roses do, and Millais, feeling quite embarrassed, quickly painted them out. However, neither Hunt nor, as it will be seen later on, Rossetti was as compliant as Millais. Thus, despite Tennyson's disapproval, their illustrations made for Moxon were published unaltered, constituting far more independent renditions of the poems than any of the rest of the volume.

When Hunt returned to the theme of the lady of Shalott in the 1880s his concept was even more alienated from the Tennysonian text. The swirling movement became more emphatic, and the lady's attempt to free herself from the entwining threads more desperate. In addition, both the watercolour and the oil versions were extensively amplified with elaborately painted details, none of which has anything to do with the narrative of the poem itself. By this time such detailed elaboration and heavy reliance on prefigurative symbolism had become distinctive features of Hunt's paintings in general. The symbols were basically due to extend the scope of the depicted incident by bearing references to past and future events as well as extending the moral or spiritual aspects of the story. Their application in *The Lady of Shalott* was Hunt's new, and probably more successful attempt "to give expression to the complete idea" of the poem.

As Landow observes, compared to most of Hunt's other paintings like *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, *The Scapegoat*, or *The Awakening Conscience*, the symbols he employed in the late versions of his *The Lady of Shalott* "do not serve as the generating force," they only "comment upon the main

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[21] Hunt, Vol. II, p. 124.
[22] Quoted in Allingham, p. 379.

theme."[23] The relatively loose connection between the symbols and the main theme is also indicated by the fact that most of them are distinct in the different versions. The decoration on the background wall, for example, is unique to each version. In the Moxon illustration it shows the Crucifixion, which may refer to artistic self-sacrifice. In the water-colour it presents the enthroned Lord holding a sphere and being surrounded by winged angel-heads, which is a traditional way of presenting the Creation, and which is probably due to refer to the lady's artistic, creative type of work. In accordance with it the upper section of the wall depicts cherubs, each of whom, strangely enough, seems to be engaged in some sort of creative activity, either physical or artistic. One of them is shown carrying containers, another digging, a third spinning, while one is playing the flute and another the cello. Hunt's presentation of such duality of creative work may have originated in Carlyle's description of honourable workers in *Sartor Resartus* as the toiling craftsman and the inspired thinker or the artist, which also inspired the concept of Ford Madox Brown's painting *Work* (1852-65).

The background of the oil version of Hunt's *The Lady of Shalott* presents Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides on the right, and the Nativity on the left, while celestial bodies are shown in the upper part. Hercules – who is a common prefiguration of Christ – performing his twelve labours fought heroically against evil, and, as a reward, gained remission of his sins and was granted immortality. Christopher Wood claims that Hunt "intended [his painting] as an elaborate fable representing the conflict between the forces of good and evil,"[24] which corresponds well with the same concerns in the story of Hercules, and the same in that of Christ. At the same time, the figures representing the celestial bodies may stand for the unknown forces of fate, the turns of which is incomprehensible and immutable.

The tapestry the lady had been working on is partly visible in both paintings, and in both of them it seems to depict Sir Galahad's attainment of the Holy Grail. Here again Hunt deviated from the text of the poem, since according to the text the tapestry was due to reflect the outside world as it had been revealed to the lady in the mirror. The mystic appearance of the Holy Grail in Hunt's paintings suggests that the tapestry is endowed with a symbolic significance by the painter, standing not just for the object of the honest work of the artist, but also

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[23] George P. Landow. *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism.* New Haven: YUP, 1979, p. 139.
[24] Christopher Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites.* London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1983, p. 109.

for an achievement which reaches beyond human capacity. The symbolic decorations on the stands of the loom and the candlestick placed inside it, presenting water, earth, air and fire, may also refer to an ideal entirety and perfection, the ultimate end of all honest work of art. Had it been completed, the tapestry would have filled the space on the wall now occupied by the mirror, the legend of the attainment of the Holy Grail, in which Celtic and Christian elements are combined, giving a matching counterpart to the Christian Nativity scene, and the story of Hercules of Greek mythology, in the sense that they all represent the manifestation of divine grace.

At the same time the moment represented in the painting is that of the disintegration of the tapestry, thus it implies that the lady has failed to accomplish what she was entrusted with by rebelling against her appointed duty. The picture shows, as Landow describes, a "powerful moment of illumination,"[25] the moment when the devastating consequences of one's failure become suddenly manifest. The loss of divine grace is also indicated by the presentation of the doves, since, unlike their heavy presence in the Nativity panel in the background, as soon as they appear on the right in the painting, they immediately depart through the opening at the top. In Peter Betthausen's opinion the universal message Hunt wished to deliver in this painting was that the essence of things can never be known to any human being, which may imply that the lady's failure and the consequent loss of divine grace were inevitable.[26]

Betthausen also suggests[27] that Hunt may have intended to reflect on the restricted social role of the women of his time, and on the enclosed domestic world they were confined to live in. Landow, however, makes a definite distinction between those works of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites on the one hand, which, as he describes, present "the woman inside," and *The Lady of Shalott*, Tennyson's poem and Hunt's paintings on the other. As he explains, though Tennyson as well as the Pre-Raphaelites "frequently portrayed single figures of women within an enclosed space or room which embodies their psychological and moral condition [...] Hunt's The Lady of Shalott and its Tennysonian original employ this device to represent allegorical or mythic figures who are not literal women but aspects of humanity as a whole."[28]

[25] Landow. *Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, p. 20.
[26] Peter Betthausen. *Die Präraffaeliten*. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst Gesellschaft, 1989, nr. 60.
[27] Betthausen, nr. 60.
[28] Landow. *Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, p. 46.

Hunt's unwavering adherence to his youthful artistic creed to the end of his life shows how much convinced he was of the propriety of his chosen way. His typically mid-Victorian moralism extended into the 20th century, by which time it was regarded by most as long and clearly outdated. By that time Hunt's morally charged 'symbolic realism', as Landow terms Hunt's approach,[29] got new dimensions and found its successors in the imaginative symbolism of George Frederick Watts and the highly decorative symbolic Art Nouveau style of Edward Reginald Frampton.

2.2 Feminist approach: the lady as a woman

Given the poem's own reliance on the division between the enclosed, isolated world of the lady and the open, public world of Lancelot, the pictures inspired by the poem are often seen as being concerned with a similar dichotomy so typical of the Victorian era. As it has already been referred to, even Hunt's work is considered to reflect upon this theme. In the case of Elizabeth Siddal's drawing, however, it is almost indispensable, since the fact that it was made by a woman artist makes such an approach too enticing. Elizabeth Siddal, the model of many famous Pre-Raphaelite paintings and later the wife of Rossetti, is a favourite choice for feminist studies where the authors are attempting to view her artistic role and place within the Pre-Raphaelite circle independent of male oriented approaches and categories. But even without setting such a far-reaching feminist aim, it is interesting in itself to examine whether a woman artist treated the subject of *The Lady of Shalott* differently than her male companions or not.

What is most striking in Siddal's drawing [Fig. 5] is the relative plainness of the setting and the figure alike. Despite the tapestry hanging on the background wall and the carved decorations on the Lady's chair and the chest in front of the window, the place looks bare and does not at all recall the medieval atmosphere of the poem. Furthermore, Siddal's Lady is quite ordinary and far the least feminine of all her Pre-Raphaelite presentations. It may be the result of the artist's feminine approach, which implies the refusal of the masculine one according to which, as Griselda Pollock puts it, "the feminine [the woman] is

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[29] George P. Landow. *Victorian Types Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 123.

positioned as the object of the look."[30] In Siddal's drawing, as Deborah Cherry observes, "The Lady is represented at the moment of *her* look. She is not offered as a victim or a spectacle for the masculine gaze."[31] It must be remembered, however, that the poem itself is about *her* look and *her* view of reality in general. Thus the basic question is, in this context, whether it has a significance at all that the story is concentrated on a woman figure. As it has already been referred to, in Landow's opinion Hunt's Lady stands for all humanity and in this sense her femininity plays no part in the meaning of her story. Nevertheless, Hunt's presentation of the Lady shows an unusual sensuality – unusual in Hunt's case –, thus, in this sense, even Hunt's approach can be regarded as typically masculine. At the same time, Siddal's Lady, her plainness, her complete lack of sensuality, maybe even unattractiveness, suggest a more feminine treatment.

Describing Siddal's drawing Deborah Cherry claims that it reflects upon the mid-19th-century concern with gender difference in the sense that it "produces and reproduces the ideology of the separate spheres of men and women, and in its representation of an historical past it works over contemporary distinctions between the private indoor world of women and the public, outdoor world of men."[32] The Victorians are, indeed, noted for their observance of clear-cut roles for women and men. It is actually Tennyson whose lines in *The Princess* are often quoted to illustrate this polarity:

> Man for the Field and Woman for the Hearth:
> Man for the Sword and for the Needle She:
> Man with the Head and Woman with the Heart:
> Men to command and Woman to obey;
> All else confusion.

Using capital letters in the key nouns of the text Tennyson gives emphasis to those things and qualities which are most strongly associated with the feminine and the masculine roles endowing attributes on the types as it is done in allegorical painting. Thus the 'Woman' is identified with the Hearth, the Heart and the Needle, which imply her restrictive domesticity, the notion that she belongs to the home and to the family, and that she should occupy herself in

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[30] Griselda Pollock. *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the History of Art.* London: Routledge, 1988, p. 114.

[31] Deborah Cherry. *The Pre-Raphaelites.* London: Tate Gallery, 1984, p. 266.

[32] Cherry, p. 266.

conformity with her role and space. In accordance with Tennyson's lines women are most often depicted as mothers, as wives doing needlework in Victorian painting. Ford Madox Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside* (1855) or Charles West Hope's *A Life Well Spent* (1862) are just a few of the many examples. Weaving a tapestry the Lady of Shalott can, then, be seen as belonging to this tradition, though weaving may demand more power and creativity, thus can be regarded as more masculine according to Victorian standards. At the same time, the Lady as a lonely woman is completely out of her role, she has no husband to guide and defend her, and no children to be looked after which would make her mind and hands 'properly' engaged. In Victorian terms remaining single and solitary was, for a woman a curse in itself. Furthermore, the Victorian consciousness knew only two basic types of women: the virtuous, even saintly but asexual wife, and the sensuous, impure mistress or whore; the Virgin Mary and the Magdalene types. Not belonging to one almost meant belonging to the other. Thus the Lady of Shalott, living isolated, without proper male guidance and control, is, at least suspicious of being rather a Magdalene, and the overt sensuality of most of the visual presentations, where instead of being a helpless victim the Lady is depicted as a *femme fatale* type, seem to build upon this idea. Siddal's drawing, however, definitely denies this aspect. Presenting the Lady as calm, serene, and unsensuous she makes her pure and self-controlled.

All these 'feminine' characteristics in Siddal's work notwithstanding, the details of the drawing do not seem to indicate a distinction between the "private indoor world of women and the public outdoor world of men."[33] On the contrary, many features, which are unique to Siddal's concept, seem to make the contrast between the lady's lonely and home-ridden world and the free, public life of the knights of Camelot even less prominent than it is in the poem. One of them is the type of the presented chamber itself, which is spacious, light, and airy, its huge window allowing a wide view of the outside world. The ivy, climbing up on the window frame connects the chamber directly with the outside world, just like the singing bird on the top of the frame of the loom, none of which is actually mentioned in the poem. Describing the poem Cherry writes that the bird is shown just having perched on the tapestry; however, as the lines of the drawing may suggest, it is perhaps tied to it, which may be regarded as the only indication of the lady's captive life.[34] On the other hand, Lancelot, who is supposed to

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[33] Cherry, p. 266.
[34] Cherry, p. 266.

represent the "public outdoor world of men," appears solitary in the cracked mirror, emerging as a ghost or a faint vision, as nothing of the outside world that should surround him is reflected in the mirror. Like the bird, the crucifix on the chest is Siddal's own addition, which, according to Faxon, "may signify the sacrifice of the artist in creating a work of art."[35] Cherry also finds that the lady's work is an important aspect of the drawing. She describes the chamber as a "work-room," and refers to the tapestry in the background as the indication of the lady's past labours.[36] Nevertheless, the lady's occupation of weaving is not emphasised, her chest is empty, and there are no balls of wool around to work with.

Though her tapestry disintegrates and the mirror cracks, the lady remains surprisingly calm, not seeming to realise the tragic consequences of her act of defiance, or bother about the fulfilment of the curse. In Cherry's view "Siddal's drawing refuses the narrative drive of the poem" in the sense that it "resists the ending in death."[37] At the same time, it means, that the incident as shown by Siddal lacks the dramatic power of both the relevant section of the poem and Hunt's interpretations of it. It can be argued whether it was Siddal's intention to undramatise this highly tense and climactic scene of the poem or it was just her inability to capture the fatality of the depicted moment which made her work so peculiar. Scholars are much divided in their estimates, some like Jan Marsh or Alicia Craig Faxon emphasise the ingenuity of her work and claim Siddal a prominent and independent role in the history of Victorian art,[38] others, like Christopher Wood believe that her works "show little original talent."[39]

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[35] Faxon, p. 79.

[36] Cherry, p. 266.

[37] Cherry, p. 266.

[38] Cf. Faxon, pp. 81–83; Jan Marsh. *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1987, pp. 72, 110. See also the brief review of Siddal's work in the exhibition guide of "Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist 1829–1862" (26 January to 13 April 1991, Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield), which, strangely enough, finds her drawings and water-colours, *The Lady of Shalott* among them, "emotionally [...] intense and dramatic, often depicting moments of crisis."

[39] Christopher Wood. *Victorian Painting*. London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1999, p. 325.

2.3 Reader-response approach: the lady as the dead lover

Originally Hunt was to make two illustrations to *The Lady of Shalott* for Moxon's Tennyson, but Rossetti begged one of them from him, being strongly attracted to the medieval and mystic aspects of the story. Rossetti's view of the function of an illustration was definitely distinct from that of Tennyson; he was ready to pay attention "not to kill the distinct idea of the poet," but he basically wanted to "allegorise on [his] own hook on the subject."[40] As in reader-response criticism the literary text is regarded as of secondary importance compared to his own feelings and impressions of it.

Accordingly, when making his illustration to the poem [Fig. 6], he put Tennyson's text aside without scruples, and searched for the earliest record of the story he could find. His final detection was *Lancelot du Lac,* the early 14th-century French manuscripts in the British Museum, which contain several miniatures relating the legend of Lancelot. One of them depicts the same incident as the one presented by Rossetti, showing Lancelot musing over the beautiful dead lady, whose boat has been drifted ashore at Camelot. Both the miniature and Rossetti's drawing depict the knight leaning over the boat in order to see the lady it carries, and each presents a group of curious onlookers gathering behind him. As in all of Rossetti's drawings and water-colours inspired by medieval art the image he created is crowded and over-all detailed, which, though much angering the engravers, who found it impossible to render satisfyingly in a wood-cut, corresponds well with the teeming and excitement suggested in the poem.

Besides the opportunity of being immersed in a medieval subject, Rossetti was most probably also attracted by the theme of the depicted scene itself. Emotionally charged, dramatic encounters of men and women as well as the conflict of the dead and living have always fascinated him, as is revealed by such works as *The Raven* (1847), *The Blessed Damozel* (poem: 1847, painting: 1875-78), *Arthur's Tomb* (1855), *The Salutation of Beatrice* (1859) or *How They Met Themselves* (1851-60). The way Lancelot is shown gazing at the beautiful, dead lady in this drawing clearly foreshadows his famous presentation of Dante gazing at his dead Beatrice in *Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice* (water-colour: 1856, oil: 1871).

As an interesting thematic counterpart of Siddal's work, which shows the solitary woman looking at the ghostly appearance of an armed man, Rossetti's

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[40] Doughty & Wahl, p. 239.

drawing depicts a man of bustling society looking at the ghostly appearance of a beautiful woman in a death-barge. If Siddal's version presents *her* look, than Rossetti's one definitely depicts *his* look, which is eager, tense, remorseful yet devouring. The burning candles and the fire of the torches intensify the 'heat' of the moment, which is counter-balanced by the cool water, the calm and graceful swans and the busy, unconcerned folks in the background. The presentation of a passive, beautiful female figure being exposed to the adoring gaze of a perplexed man in Rossetti's drawing foreshadows the concept of some of Burne-Jones' compositions, the "Pygmalion" Series (1868-1870), the whole story of which is about the sculptor Pygmalion's devotion to the ideal beauty of his creation Galathea; *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884), in which the sovereign is shown worshipping the simple yet so mysterious maiden; and all the "Sleeping Beauty" pictures, where the unconscious princess lies unaware of being approached. Also, though in a more remote way, it anticipates Frederick Leighton's and Albert Moore's reposing and sleeping female beauties as well as Rossetti's female portraits where the static, apparently unaware women characters remain the same, just the admiring male figure is eliminated his role being taken over by the spectator himself.

In Rossetti's pictorial rendition of *The Lady of Shalott* the role of the Lady is much restricted, her fate, her rebellion become irrelevant, but she gains significance in her inert beauty and obscurity. Thus Rossetti's work points the way to an aesthetic approach, which tends to neglect the narrative background and concentrates on the presentation of aesthetic qualities.

2.4 Aesthetic approach

2.4.1 Millais' elegy

Of the Pre-Raphaelites it was Millais who contributed the most to Moxon's Tennyson, making altogether 18 illustrations, as compared to Hunt's eight, and Rossetti's five drawings. His study on Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* [Fig. 7] is also said to have been made as a design for Moxon's edition, however, it was never worked out as a proper drawing for an engraving. It depicts the lady floating down the river to Camelot, lying in her boat weak and powerless, resignedly awaiting the curse to be fulfilled on her. Her hands are reaching down into the water, while she is singing her last song. The river scenery with the inclining boughs of a willow in the background, the pose of the lady, and the

theme itself are much reminiscent of Millais' celebrated *Ophelia* completed just two years earlier. The swans, not mentioned in the poem, appear first in this drawing, since Rossetti's work was made somewhat later. Millais' own account of his work on the landscape of *Ophelia* reveals that he had a memorable encounter with swans at the time,[41] so the idea to have swans included in a similar scenery might have come from this earlier experience. But the swans may also carry a symbolic reference to death, as they are known to have a presentiment of their impending death and sing their last song, as, according to the poem as well as in the painting, does the Lady of Shalott. Lamenting the death of the Lady, Millais' rendition gives a pictorial elegy.

Analysing Millais's *Ophelia* Péter Egri observes that the Shakespearean tragic death of the literary Ophelia is transformed in the painting into a decorative death of a beautiful woman.[42] He uses the term "pre-Art Nouveau decorativity" to describe the basic quality of the picture finding its elaborate execution of delicate details – such as the colourful flowers and Ophelia's embroidered ancient dress – and its detachment from the dramatic source the most important elements of Millais's visual concept. And though it would be too daring to apply the same term in the case of the unfinished, very sketchy presentation of *The Lady of Shalott* its concentration on the harmony of the landscape and the figure instead of the dramatic or moral element of the story is a definite early mark of a departure from the Ruskinian-Huntian didactic moralism.

The reason for the fact that Millais never executed this study in a more complete form may be found in the design's lack of originality in the sense that it has such a close affinity with *Ophelia,* but the fact that in the middle of the 1850s Millais was already turning away from the strict narrativity of the early Pre-Raphaelite style may have also contributed to it. He started painting melancholic, mostly non-narrative pictures such as *The Blind Girl* (1854-56), *Autumn Leaves* (1855-56), *Waiting* (1854), or *The Vale of Rest* (1858), which remained favoured by him till the end of his life.

2.4.2 Grimshaw's fairy-tale

From the middle of the 1850s the Pre-Raphaelites' early strong reliance on poetic subjects was generally weakening. While Millais turned to sentimental themes,

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[41] Cf. Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 97.

[42] Péter Egri. "A preraffaeliták Shakespeare-képe." *Holmi* 3 (2000) 310–329, p. 324.

Hunt devoted himself mostly to religious subjects, and Rossetti took to painting decorative portraits of beautiful women. At the same time, the legend of King Arthur was a great favourite with the artists of the second generation of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, such as William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, or Frederick Sandys, but they found inspiration rather in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* than in Tennyson's Victorian reinterpretation of it. And, as the story of the Lady of Shalott is not included in Malory, the subject lost its earlier popularity.

However, by the end of the century a new upheaval followed, many of the late Pre-Raphaelite followers rediscovering the poetic sources of their predecessors. As Christopher Wood observes, Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* was "almost a cult subject among the later Pre-Raphaelites."[43] John Atkinson Grimshaw, John William Waterhouse, and Sidney Harold Meteyard are all noted for their admiration for the poetry of Tennyson,[44] and each of them took up *The Lady of Shalott* as his subject at least once.

Grimshaw was a self-taught artist from Leeds who, abandoning his job as a railway-clerk started painting landscapes in the Pre-Raphaelite manner in the 1860s. Gradually gaining fame in his local area he turned to literary themes. Nevertheless, his pictures inspired by literature are quite independent from their narrative sources. As Alexander Robertson observes when "he takes a line from a poem, Grimshaw gives us the *feel* of the words, the sense of time, the atmosphere – not merely an illustration of them."[45] And, apart from a few domestic pictures, all Grimshaw's works – landscapes, townscapes, and literary works alike – suggest his complete immersion in the overwhelming atmospheric power of the mysteries of dusk and the evening lights, which shroud his imaginary lanes and Jacobean mansions in magic and make his rainy, muddy streets sparkle with golden gleam. Familiar reality at first sight, but made mysterious and alluringly beautiful.

The scene chosen but never fully carried out by Millais in his *The Lady of Shalott* was taken up again by Grimshaw some twenty years later [Fig. 8]. Though it depicts the same incident as Millais' drawing, Grimshaw's presentation is very different from that of his predecessor, and quite unlike Millais' early work in general. It evokes a visionary, fairy-tale world, depicting a dark, dragon-headed

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[43] Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 139.

[44] Wood. *Victorian Painting*, pp. 168, 172; Anthony Hobson. *John William Waterhouse*. London: Phaidon Press, 2000, p. 40; Alexander Robertson. *Atkinson Grimshaw*. London: Phaidon Press, 2000, pp. 58–9.

[45] Robertson, p. 86.

funeral barge drifting alone with its lifeless passenger, dressed in gleaming white, towards the distant, misty towers of Camelot. The sky and the water are glowing in red and yellow as the sun is setting, where the ghostly vessel appears as an eerie apparition. As Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and Poynter, constituting the Classical Revival, created their idealistic visions of antiquity imbued with beauty, ease and harmony, so did Grimshaw invent his own world of enchantment, a world of mysterious stillness and quietude. All these realms can be regarded as the manifestations of the artists' resistance of the materialistic concerns of their busy age and accelerating rhythm of life.

Though starting as a landscapist in the Pre-Raphaelite manner Grimshaw, like Rossetti, gradually abandoned these early principles and became more and more attached to aestheticism, reading and appreciating Whistler rather than the 'old master', Ruskin. Family accounts suggest that Grimshaw knew Whistler personally, and it seems that Whistler much appreciated what Grimshaw was doing.[46] "I thought I had invented the Nocturne," Whistler is reported to have said, "until I saw Grimmy's moonlights."[47] Though Grimshaw's night scenes are obviously more detailed, more discernible than those of Whistler, it is Grimshaw who could more successfully recreate the "fairy-land" described in the famous passage of Whistler's *Ten O'Clock Lecture*, the section which is marked in the copy he owned:

> And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairy-land is before us – than the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, and Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and master – her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her.[48]

To Whistler, as well as to Grimshaw, Nature is admirable for its enchanting beauty in itself. This Nature is obviously different from the Ruskinian

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[46] Robertson, p. 118.

[47] Robertson, p. 75.

[48] Robertson, p. 118.

one which is charged with moral significance and is seen as the manifestation of divine perfection.[49]

2.4.3 Waterhouse's romances

In a way similar to Grimshaw Waterhouse also created an imaginary world of his own. But whereas Grimshaw depicts a basically eventless, veiled and misty realm where the people appear like shadows or cut-out puppet-like figures drifting without any perceptible purpose, Waterhouse always tells a tale and always presents flesh and blood figures in highly realistic surroundings. In his work, as Christopher Wood describes, "the aestheticism of Burne-Jones and the classicism of Leighton are fused, producing yet another highly individual and romantic style."[50]

Compared to Grimshaw's apparently superficial fascination with Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott,* Waterhouse seems to have been more profoundly interested in the poem. His enthusiasm was actually so strong that he produced three different versions, each of which depicts a different incident of the poem. His early works being mostly influenced by the classical ideal, Waterhouse was won over to Pre-Raphaelitism probably after his visit to Millais' retrospective exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1886, which he is known to have admired.[51] His first painting produced in the Pre-Raphaelite style is said to have been his first *The Lady of Shalott* painted in 1888,[52] in which, as Hobson observes, he "moves from history to romance; and also, for a brief period, to plein-air painting."[53]

The first picture [Fig. 9] presents the lady unchaining her boat and embarking on her final journey on the river to meet her fate on the way to Camelot. As compared to Grimshaw's rendition, the most important difference is that, while Grimshaw presented an imaginary, mythical realm, Waterhouse depicted a very real, willow-girded riverbank, reproducing the lady's mysterious story in a highly realistic manner. As Hobson describes, looking at the picture "one feels the cool of the day,"[54] which is suggested by the darkened sky, and by

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[49] Cf. Ruskin, p. 200.

[50] Wood. *Victorian Painting,* p. 236.

[51] Cf. Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites,* p. 141.

[52] Cf. Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites,* p. 141.

[53] Hobson, p. 40.

[54] Hobson, p. 41.

the indication of the breeze which lightly blows the lady's hair and the faint light of the candle. But, as Hobson continues, "the centre scene is held by the haunting beauty of the figure,"[55] whose expression recalls that of the dying *Ophelia* in Millais' early work.

To a certain extent the symbolism of the early Pre-Raphaelite works is also evoked by Waterhouse in this painting, though he rarely relied on such didactic means. The crucifix, the rosary and the candles, which are placed on the prow of the boat, are not mentioned in the poem, and their presence there can hardly be explained in view of the depicted scene itself. It is still light enough to have no need for candles, so the fact that the lady put them, as well as the crucifix, into the boat must imply that – in Waterhouse's understanding of the poem – the Lady is much aware of her fate and her nearing death. Thus with the application of these objects she has transformed her boat into a funeral barge something similar to Rossetti's coffin-like boat with its burning candles. Accordingly, the Lady's facial expression and slightly knit brows reflect painful resignation. The Lady's coming death is also referred to by the fact that only one of the candles is burning, and even that is mercilessly exposed to the blowing wind, as the Lady is exposed to forces beyond her power. Though in theme, in mood, and to some extent in symbolism the painting owes a lot to the early Pre-Raphaelite works, in style it does not follow them but shows affinities rather with the style of Bastien-Lapage and the French 'plein-air' painters and their English followers, the painters of the Newlyn School.

The second painting Waterhouse made on the poem [Fig. 10], which depicts the climactic moment of the story, bears some resemblances to Hunt's works on the theme, despite the fact that, as Hobson suggests, Waterhouse made "an unusual number of preliminary sketches" probably for wishing "to avoid duplicating the composition" of Hunt's works.[56] Comparing the two presentations Hobson argues for the originality of Waterhouse's composition, and in the final analysis finds it more impressive than that of Hunt. He claims that "Holman Hunt is seduced by a concentration on detail which fatally weakens his narrative power. The carefully contrived tonal balance completely misses the point; it thrusts the mirror forward at the very moment when its importance has been eliminated, and at the climax of the Lady's existence she is thrown into the shadows. Hunt delivers the final blows to the text by confining her within the

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[55] Hobson, p. 41.
[56] Hobson, p. 53.

low embroidery frame where it must have been agony to work day after day a few inches from the floor and where she cannot possibly make the prescribed three paces through the room, and by turning her gaze neither to the mirror nor to the window, either of which would have been acceptable in the context of the poem."[57]

Nevertheless, Waterhouse's lady is just as trapped by the entangling threads of the disintegrating tapestry as Hunt's, so she would be likewise incapable of making the described advance to the window. In addition, this way of presentation, as it has already been pointed out, was a feature particular to Hunt's concept and wholly independent from the poem, so Hunt's influence in the case of this particular painting is hardly deniable. It is, however, indeed original that the lady is shown looking up exactly into the spectator's eyes, getting him involved in the action. In this sense, the painting expands on the thought concerned in the poem by extending its discussion of artistic creation with the idea that a painting itself, however realistic, is a necessarily derivative image as compared to the spectator's real world.

This youthful Lady of Shalott is one of Waterhouse's many beautiful female figures combining childish innocence and alluring, irresistible menace like the water nymphs in *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896) or his "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." These beautiful *femme fatales*, or, as Hobson calls them *jeune fille fatales*,[58] with their deceptive apparent artlessness are perhaps even more dangerous than the fierce-looking witches of Frederick Sandys, for example, since they catch their victims off their guard. Though a victim herself the Lady becomes a captor, who, looking up into the spectator's eyes in this painting, puts the viewer into a similar captive position as that of the mythological Hylas or Keats's "knight-at-arms" depicted in the other paintings. By presenting Tennyson's Lady as a victim and an enchantress at the same time Waterhouse gives a new dimension to the Lady of Shalott theme.

In 1916, just a year before his death, Waterhouse returned to the legend of the Lady of Shalott once more. This time he went even further back in the story illustrating the lines he also took as his title: *"I am Half-Sick of Shadows," said the Lady of Shalott* [Fig. 11]. As if the brightly coloured and strongly narrative early Pre-Raphaelite style had been re-discovered this late work has the closest affinities perhaps with Millais' *Mariana,* since even the depicted mood, the weariness of the

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[57] Hobson, p. 53.
[58] Hobson, p. 52.

character is alike. The loom, the tapestry, and the beautiful features of the lady are familiar from Waterhouse's previous paintings on the poem, but the image reflected in the mirror: the scenic landscape and the many-towered castle of Camelot appear for the first time. Providing the background of the painting it recalls the similar background views of such late medieval illuminated manuscripts as the famous Book of Hours of the Duke of Berry; however, unlike the castles depicted in these early miniatures, Waterhouse's Camelot is wholly imaginary. In its theme, arrangement, accessories and even colours this late version of *The Lady of Shalott* is much reminiscent of Waterhouse's *Penelope and her Suitors* (1912) painted just a few years earlier. But whereas Penelope is shown being immersed in her work at the loom the Lady of Shalott is depicted in her idleness and the loom at standstill. In her inactivity the Lady is an obvious descendant of the daydreaming, reposing ladies familiar from the canvases of Moore and Leighton. But while his neo-classical colleagues dreamt about the marble palaces and villas of the sunny shores and rich meadows of Greece and Italy and set their maidens into an idealised ancient world, Waterhouse conceived a less exotic land and put his figure into a medieval context.

Christopher Wood describes the work of Waterhouse as "an enchanted garden,"[59] where the beautiful, imaginary world of his depicted subjects appears as if it were reality itself. And Waterhouse's "enchanted garden" is just as wished for today as it was a hundred years ago. His first *The Lady of Shalott* is said to be one of the most popular pictures of the Tate Gallery selling more postcards a year than any other.[60] But Waterhouse's contemporaries were likewise captivated by his visionary world. As an article published in *The Studio* in September 1908 wrote:

> [Waterhouse] lives in a world of his own imaging, a world which knows nothing of the stress and turmoil of modern life, and in which the dominant note is a kind of gentle melancholy without bitterness and without sentimentality. [...] In his art there is a restfulness which is peculiarly satisfying, a delicate reticence which comes as a real relief from the strenuousness of the times in which we live; and there is, too, a romantic grace which is not artificial or obviously invented, but really the outcome of the artist's own aestheticism.[61]

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[59] Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 148.
[60] Wood. *Victorian Painting*, p. 238.
[61] "Some Drawings by J. W. Waterhouse, RA." *The Studio* 186 (1908) 246–252, p. 250.

2.4.4 Meteyard's dream vision

Another unreal world, but a less enchanting one, appears in Meteyard's painting on Tennyson's poem, which bears the same title and depicts the same scene as Waterhouse's last picture on the theme [Fig. 12]. Meteyard was one of the late followers of Pre-Raphaelitism and belonged to what is called the "Birmingham Group." The group had close associations with the Arts and Crafts movement, Meteyard himself is noted for his craftsmanship in enamelling, stained glass and leatherwork. The most important inspiration to the group came from the Birmingham-born Burne-Jones, who, as the President of the Birmingham Society of Artists, where Meteyard was secretary, had a personal connection with the members and had a direct influence on their art. Meteyard's work in general is often viewed in its relation to Burne-Jones, the latter's biographers, Harrison and Waters finding it "much reminiscent of Burne-Jones in colour, imagery, and atmosphere, yet [...] more corporeal and less languorous, and [in the] interpretations of the themes [...] quite different."[62]

In the spellbound world of Meteyard's *"I am Half-Sick of Shadows" said the Lady of Shalott* (1913) the lady's chamber seems to be literally the realm of shadows, as no natural light is shown to enter it. The mirror reflects only the darkness of the night with the dim, moonlit figures of the lovers mentioned in the poem, and the whole painting is dominated by the colour-harmony of the dark, leaden hues of blue, grey and purple. Like these, the lady's closed eyes as well may also suggest an unrealistic, shadowy life. The sweet smell of the host of peonies in the foreground seems to overpower the lady, who is shown leaning back in her chair faintly, almost lifeless. According to the language of flowers the peony stands for bashfulness,[63] and here it may refer to the enclosed world the lady is confined to live in.

What makes Meteyard's presentation of *The Lady of Shalott* unique is that it unites the Tennysonian theme with the late 19th-century concern with sleep. The Lady's closed eyes, the darkness of the night, and the overpowering smell of the flowers all refer to it. The concept of the painting may have been inspired by such works of Burne-Jones as the "Briar Rose Series," and his monumental last piece *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-98), which display the master's strong fascination with sleep. To Burne-Jones sleep meant a world of dream

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[62] Martin Harrison & Bill Waters. *Burne-Jones*. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1989, p. 183.

[63] Cf. Sheila Pickles. *The Language of Flowers*. New York: Harmony Books, 1989, p. 77.

vision, it meant isolation and independence from the worldly matters of everyday reality. In connection with the story of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* all this bears relevance, since the Lady's shadowy world of reflection is as detached from reality as a dream. In addition, sleep is often regarded as a suspended state between life and death, thus Meteyard's pictorial reference to sleep can also be seen as an indication of the curse and the Lady's impending death.

Besides Burne-Jones, however, Leighton was also known of his sleeping figures, and in her corporeality and sensuality Meteyard's Lady is definitely closer to the sleeping girls of Leighton's *Summer Moon, Flaming June* or *The Garden of the Hesperides* than to the ethereal, graceful figures of Burne-Jones. Richard Ormond's description of *Summer Moon* is surprisingly appropriate to Meteyard's work:

> Leighton's monumental women are latent with power and significance. [...] The subject is suffused with poetry and mystery, and the figures appear suspended between life and death. [...] Through their beauty and sensuousness the women stand for the powers of nature under whose spell they lie enchanted.[64]

It is interesting to see that whereas the early Pre-Raphaelite painters were mostly fascinated by the dramatic moments of the story of the Lady of Shalott, their late successors showed such a decisive preference for subjects of a dreamy, melancholic, and inactive character. The Aesthetic Movement, and, as a part of it, the Classical Revival of the 1860s, which brought the popularity of works presenting "a harmonious, luxurious ideal of beauty in repose,"[65] had an influence even on such quasi-medieval subjects as Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*. In addition, Meteyard's reliance on colour-harmony is also akin to the same pursuit of the aesthetic painters. Whistler, for example, was famous for his 'musical' compositions in which he based his work on the use of the varying shades of just one dominant colour. Some of Rossetti's work like *A Woman in Yellow* (1863) or *Veronica Veronese* (1872) show similar concerns, and the ashy, funeral colours of Meteyard's painting have an obvious predecessor in the "Tartarean grey"[66] of Rossetti's 1877 version of *Proserpine*. Aesthetic considerations being dominant, there is nothing in Meteyard's painting to suggest the medieval origin of the subject; the story of the lady of Shalott seems to live on completely independent from it.

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[64] Richard Ormond. "Leighton and his Contemporaries." *Frederick, Lord Leighton: Eminent Victorian Artist.* London: Royal Academy of Arts & Abrams, 1996, 21–40, pp. 34–35.

[65] Julian Treuherz. *Victorian Painting.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, p. 136.

[66] The expression is used by Rossetti himself in his poem "Proserpine."

By the end of the 19th century in most of the paintings the historical aspect of Tennyson's "passion for the past" reflected in the poem had been overshadowed by its mysterious and poetic qualities. What Henry James wrote about Burne-Jones' art in 1877 seems to apply to most of the late Pre-Raphaelite works, according to which their art was "the art of culture, of reflection, of intellectual luxury, of aesthetic refinement, of people who look at the world and at life not directly, as it were, and in all its accidental reality, but in the reflection and ornamental portrait of it furnished by literature, by poetry, by history, by erudition."[67] In the early 20th century the legendary world Tennyson reproduced in his poems provided for artists a welcome retreat from the harsh and brutal reality of their contemporary world.

3 CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind that Hunt's minutely detailed oil painting on Tennyson' *The Lady of Shalott,* which is loaded with symbols of moral significance, is almost contemporary with Meteyard's aesthetic conception one may say that in general the theme – the choice of the depicted incident – and the style – the way of execution – can depend as much on the artist's personal conviction as on the time of production. Nevertheless, the analysis of the Pre-Raphaelite renditions of Tennyson's poem show that a line of development, a movement from mid-Victorian narrativity to late-Victorian aestheticism can clearly be established. Accordingly, re-interpreting their literary source the early works were aiming at re-creating the story and the message of the written text. At the same time the dominance of such a definite and didactic purpose led to the destruction of the poem's mysterious, balladistic character. Later, however, with the spread of a new artistic ideology inspired by the writings of Whistler and Walter Pater, that challenged the moralistic theories of Ruskin, the emphasis gradually shifted to a wish to capture rather the melancholic beauty and the emotional atmosphere of the poem. And though it meant a break with its historical and literal context, it brought the successful rendition of the poem's magic spell and sentiment.

As literary essays these paintings show different approaches, and find different answers. And as the striking dissimilarity of Hunt's early drawing and Meteyard's painting show depending on the chosen point of view one may come to surprisingly diverse conclusions.

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[67] In Wood. *The Pre-Raphaelites,* p. 95.
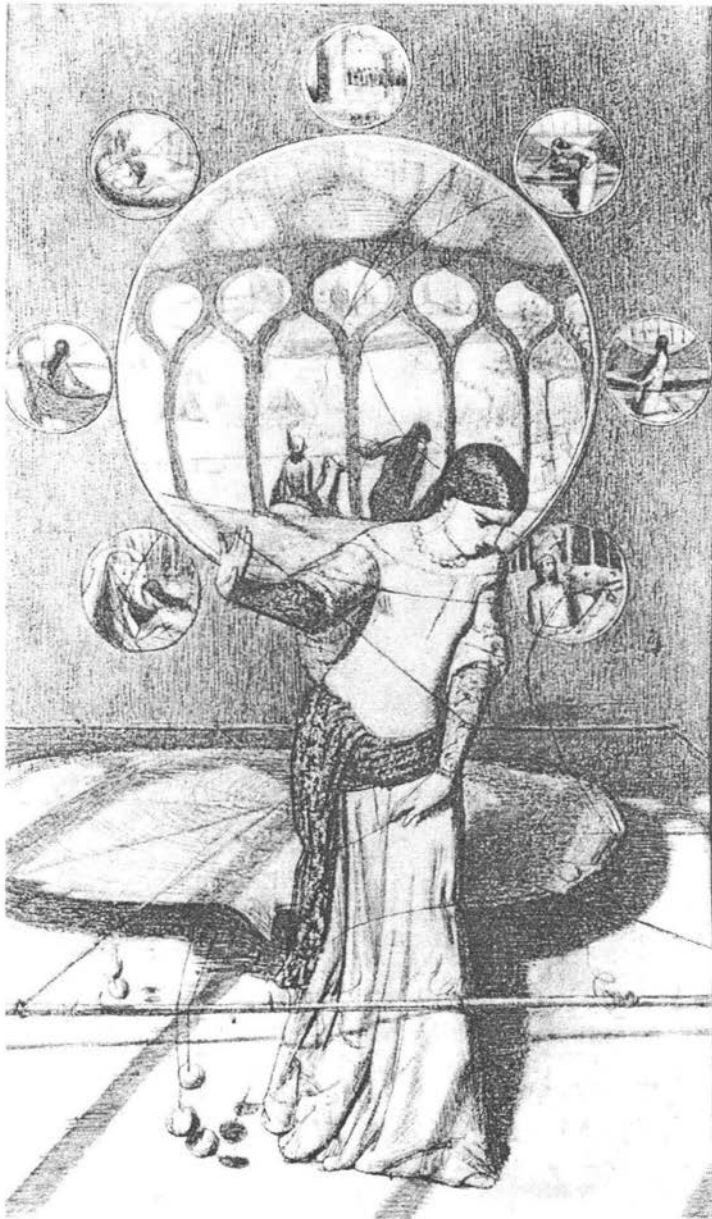
FIGURE 1. William Holman Hunt: *The Lady of Shalott* (1850)

FIGURE 2. William Holman Hunt: *The Lady of Shalott* (1857)

FIGURE 3. William Holman Hunt: *The Lady of Shalott* (1889–92)

FIGURE 4. William Holman Hunt: *The Lady of Shalott* (1886–1905)
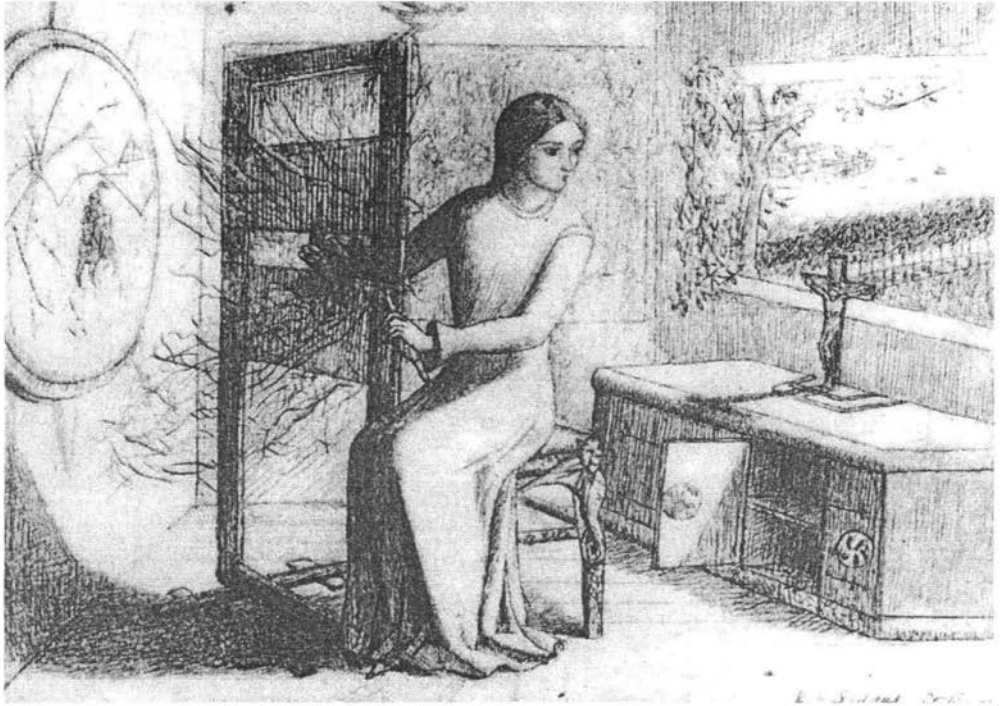
FIGURE 5. Elizabeth Siddal: *The Lady of Shalott*

FIGURE 6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Lady of Shalott*

FIGURE 7. John Everett Millais: *The Lady of Shalott*

FIGURE 8. John Atkinson Grimshaw: *The Lady of Shalott*

FIGURE 9. John William Waterhouse: *The Lady of Shalott* (1888)

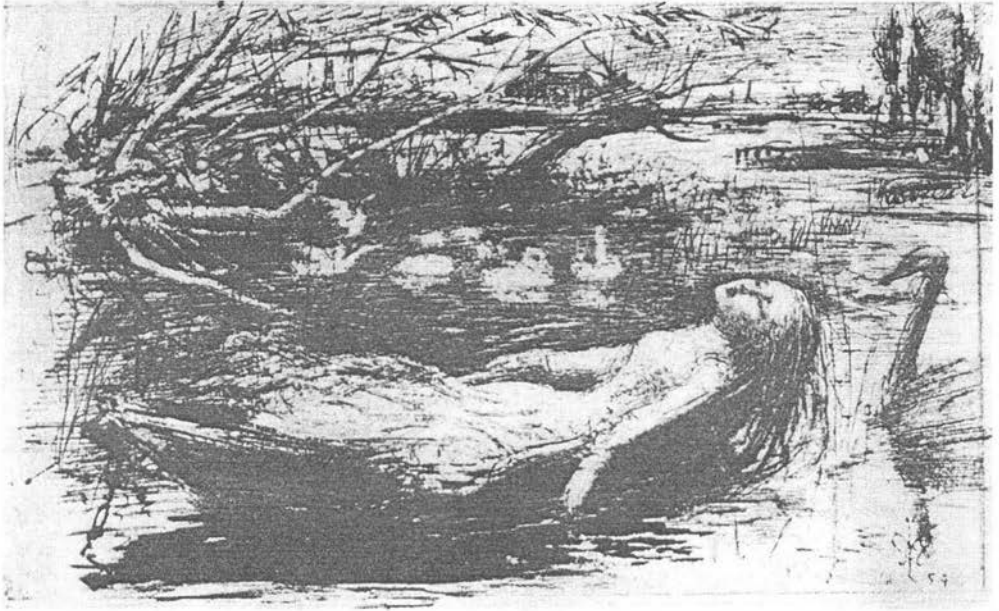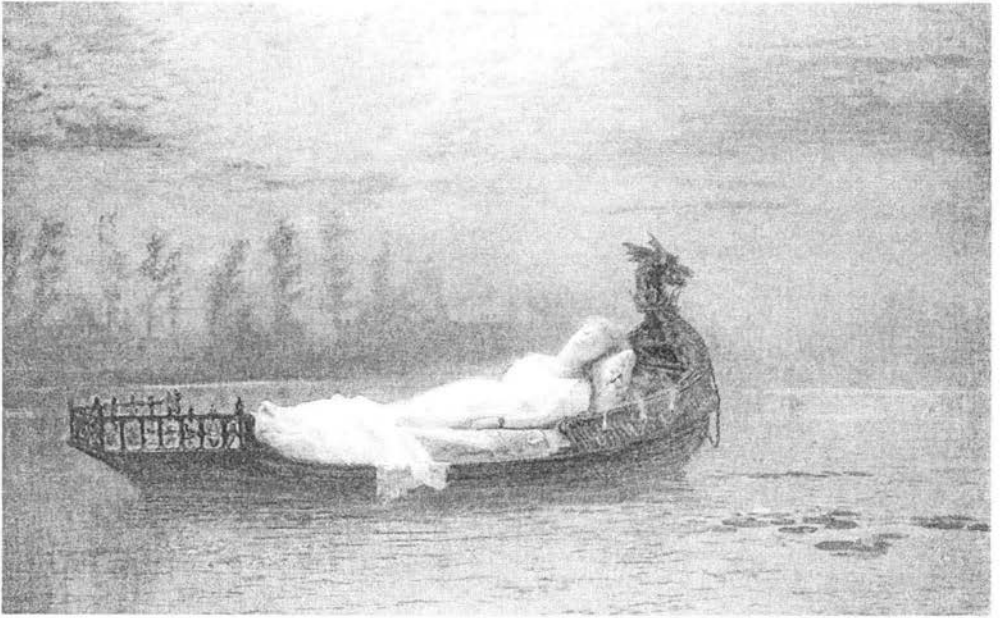FIGURE 10. John William Waterhouse: *The Lady of Shalott* (1894)

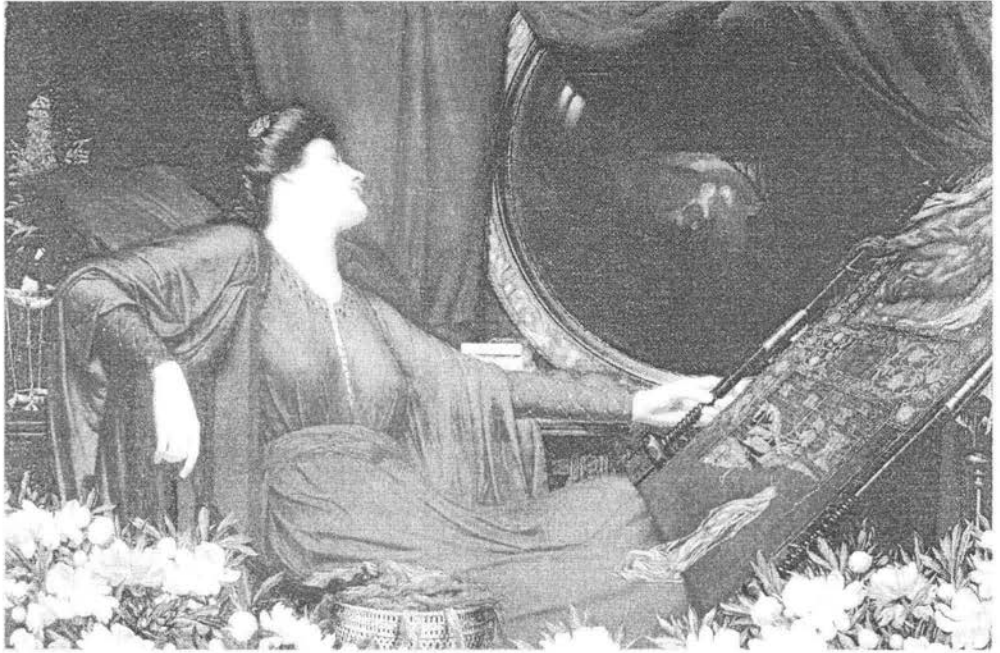FIGURE 11. J. W. Waterhouse: *'I am half-sick of shadows,' said the Lady of Shalott*

FIGURE 12. H. S. Meteyard: *'I am half-sick of shadows,' said the Lady of Shalott*

Ágnes Zsófia Kovács

The Sacred Fount of Social Art

James Revisited

The Sacred Fount (1901) is James's last novel before the novels of his so-called major phase and bears traces of the novels to follow.[1] James's late novels have been labelled evasive in style, stylistically elaborate, reflecting a technical interest, providing a hermeneutic model of understanding, lately shown to be embedded in the social practices of the turn of the century.[2] It seems that *The Sacred Fount* can be taken as a minimal model, not to say prototype, of the problems occurring in the late novels: the issues of detection, theories, artistic creation all appear in it. The reason why I selected *The Sacred Fount* to write about here is its apparent focus on one element of the issues above, the failure of comprehension, i.e. the narrator's apparent failure to actually find out anything. Following the focus reveals a complementary relation between detection and artistic creation in *The Sacred Fount*, which I think in turn paves the way for an approach to the late novels.

In *The Sacred Fount* the narrator's exploration of the illicit relations between members of the company remains fruitless. The novel has been read as an ambiguous text, as an experiment with form, a model of understanding, and

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[1] On the duality of the major phase and James's literary output in general see Jonathan Freedman. "Introduction: The Moment of Henry James." *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James.* Cambridge: CUP, 1998, pp. 16–7.

[2] On the connection between James's supreme aesthetic detachment and his social engagement see Nancy Bentley. "The Equivocation of culture." *The Ethnography of Manners.* Cambridge: CUP, 1995, p. 9 (especially note 11).

even as a love story and a piece of ethnography.[3] If the relation between detection and artistic creation is mentioned, it is not considered any further and is not connected to the problem of manners. Thus, as far as I can see, it remains to be noted that pre-set notions of decency determine detection in *The Sacred Fount* and that they are responsible for the endless mystery. There is a clear correspondence between sociability and detection in the text.

The essay maps out how standards of sociability frustrate the work of detection in *The Sacred Fount* and tries to discuss the emergence of the so-called ambiguity[4] in it from the perspective of social expectations. The hypothesis is that the work of detection is creating symmetry and pattern rather than an account of things past in the novel. In this way detection appears to resist the tangled real to forge a pattern according to expectation instead. Considering the apparent similarity between detective work and artistic creation, it seems that when detection is flawed it is artistic imagination that has to be suppressed. I argue that this implies a model of art where representation is impossible and a biased presentation is inevitable. The question still open is that of application, whether this pattern fits other so-called ambiguous texts of James's late phase, too.

I would like to explicate the process of detection and its implied parallel to artistic creation in three stages, the context stage, the text stage, and the re-context stage. In the context stage I am going to present how the problem of detection and the problem of art have been discussed before. The two trends distinguished are based on their preference for either detection or art, respectively. Then, in the text stage, I am going to present the case, the process of detection, and those standards of decency that prevent the solution of the case. After this I am going to point out the similarity between artistic creation and detection in the novel and eventually show what model of art this similarity implies. In sum, in the re-

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[3] The models of Shlomith Rimmon (ambiguity: *The Concept of Ambiguity – the Example of James.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), Sergio Perosa (art: "Rival Creation and the Antinovel." *Henry James and the Experimental Novel.* Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1978) and Paul B. Armstrong (understanding: *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford.* Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1987. Cf. also his "The Hermeneutics of Literary Impressionism: Interpretation and Reality in James, Conrad, and Ford." *Centennial Review* 27 [Fall 1983], 4.244–269) are the subject of the first section. Blackall devotes a book to the love story solution (Jean Frantz Blackall. *Jamesian Ambiguity and* The Sacred Fount. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1965, p. 122) and Bentley uses the example of *The Sacred Fount* to introduce her project, fiction as ethnography (Bentley, pp. 11–12).

[4] The problem of Jamesian ambiguity as a formal concern of the New Critical interest and its rewriting into new critical notions could be the subject of another paper. See Freedman, pp. 18–19.

context stage I am trying to place this reading of *The Sacred Fount* among other ones and describe how a consideration of the role of decency in the plot points out a social model of art in *The Sacred Fount*.

1 "CONTEXT"

My insistence on the social nature of detection in *The Sacred Fount* does not imply any disregard for other accounts of the phenomenon but indicates my interest. My focus is on descriptions of detection and art in different readings of *The Sacred Fount*, as I would like to show their relations to my hypothesis. Indeed, it seems that representative readings on ambiguity, failure of artistic creation, and even a hermeneutics of bewilderment describe the familiar symptoms of the fruitless detection I am interested in but arrive at different diagnoses of it. The explication of the above accounts aims at locating the reasons of such a negligence of social expectations in individual readings of the text, and tries to position my idea of cultural detection as one between accounts of investigation and style. The reason for the medial position, it appears, is a different set of presuppositions about the term "real" in individual readings.

You can find a meticulous catalogue of detection in *The Sacred Fount* in Shlomith Rimmon's book on ambiguity and James. Rimmon reads *The Sacred Fount* as a tale of ambiguity. For her ambiguity is the principle of composition in the novel. For her ambiguity is basically a logical concept constituted by gaps of knowledge in a text that can be filled in by two mutually exclusive sets of clues from the same text. In this model the text is a collection of clues and gaps to be combined, is treated as a self-enclosed puzzle where all clues are to be taken at face value, and where segments can be moved and freely substituted. The ambiguous text presents a subsection where there are two equally valid combinations of gaps and clues.[5] The two valid combinations may either be opposites of each other or they may simply be different, but they exclude each other in both cases. In *The Sacred Fount*, Rimmon claims, ambiguity is open in most cases: the two sets of clues are not opposites of each other but are simply different. Still, there is a tendency for the opposite clues, too, and this makes us think of the novel as a step toward the so-called antinovel that uses this type of ambiguity.[6] In this reading

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[5] Rimmon, p. 167.
[6] Rimmon, p. 167.

social expectations and evasive formulations belong to ambiguity on the thematic level: one cannot know if detection is a pastime or a taboo in the text.[7] It is fascinating that all the examples I selected of the appearance of expectations are listed in the article, but the problem of detection blocked by expectation is taken as the problem of classification: if detection is a pastime or a taboo in the novel. In this way ambiguity is described but is not accounted for. The novel's ambiguity is simply considered to be "amazing ... and frightening," a duality characteristic of artistic discourse, as Rimmon puts it.[8]

The description of detection in the text becomes part of a description of art in general in Sergio Perosa's study of the experimental novels of James. Perosa focuses on the figure of the artist in the novel because he views *The Sacred Fount* as the last writing of James's experimental phase that tests both the capacities of the traditional and those of the experimental novel. He claims that the theme of the artist present in *The Sacred Fount* "allows us to relate it to the fictional method and artistic ideals of the French *nouveau roman*."[9] He goes on to present the narrator as the artist in the text. The narrator has to face the fact that art and life are opposed to each other in that art composes order while life is essentially irregularity. Furthermore, the narrator becomes aware of the fact that the real resists the ordering impulse of art, and all his attempts at imposing order at Newmarch are baffled. Thus he has to meditate on problems of fiction writing, and the novel becomes a "parable on the pathetic failure of ordering and expressive skills."[10] In sum, life wins the battle against art, in other words art fails when no solution of the mystery of the sacred fount is provided by the end.[11] In this reading, interestingly enough, detection does not appear as a focal problem of the novel but as a theme within the theme of artistic creation. Although the similarity of the two procedures, detection and artistic creation/reception is pointed out, no further importance is attributed to the relation, it is listed as one example of the artistic failure depicted in the novel. In Perosa's model the real is the binary opposite of art, and expectations and conspiracies on the part of all the characters belong to the realm of the real: are aspects of its irregularity. So,

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[7] Rimmon, p. 220.

[8] Rimmon, p. 228.

[9] Perosa, p. 78.

[10] Perosa, p. 84.

[11] Perosa, p. 84.

similarly to Rimmon's reasoning, the duality of detection and expectations is present only implicitly in the analysis.

Yet another way to envisage the real/art problem in James is Paul B. Armstrong's theory on the challenge of Jamesian bewilderment based on the example of *The Sacred Fount* and *The Ambassadors*. The value of this approach for cultural detection is that Armstrong aims at describing the *process* of what he calls "understanding" in the novels, and he shows the correlation of detection and art determined by the process of understanding. Another term for understanding is Jamesian bewilderment, that "throws into question the interpretive constructs that we ordinarily take for granted."[12] Armstrong argues that it is the powers of consciousness that have to face uncomposed experience in James. It is not art or artistic reception but interpretation, meaning-creation that faces the real. In general, Jamesian writing is paradoxical for Armstrong because it presents interpretive adventures where one does have facts but their readings are multiple. In this way reality is both one and many: James has a faith in the real and questions its stability at the same time, thus is the last realist and the first modernist writer.[13] More specifically, the ambiguity of *The Sacred Fount* indicates that the force of "reality" may not be strong enough to pull interpretation to a definitive result. The issues at hand are twofold in this account: firstly, the main concern is the paradox presentation of the composing powers of consciousness, secondly the supplementary concern is to find out how the reader can take this. So the challenge of bewilderment indicated in the title is both stylistic and receptional: Modernism challenges conventions of Realism and the reader is challenged to develop a greater self-consciousness about the workings of interpretative consciousness. As for detection, it does not appear in itself but as part of interpretive strategies. Detection, amongst other phenomena of interpretive consciousness, is – again in this reading – against the real. However, in this version, the absence of a definitive result is not a telltale sign of the failure of interpretation but a challenge of the epistemological assumptions of mimesis, questioning the independence of reality.[14]

So far it seems that formal and stylistic matters create the difficulty of comprehension in *The Sacred Fount*: ambiguity, failure of representation, and a paradoxical practice of representation. The similarity of detection and art is

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[12] Armstrong, p. 2.

[13] Armstrong, p. 8.

[14] Armstrong, p. 8.

mentioned but is not deemed significant. In contrast to this, I suggest that a re-evaluation of their relation is possible. If formal matters become connected to social and cultural ones within the economy of the text, we are no longer facing an opposition of real – art or real – interpretation but a correlation of them. Analysing Jamesian tales of representation, Julie Rivkin explicates this economy in a convincing way. She claims that the use of inconsistencies, discrepancies is a compositional method of James, the effect of a specific representational logic. This representational logic is that of supplementarity, whereby new issues are substituted instead of previous ones creating a sense of incompleteness in the reader.[15] The issues connected by substitution are artistic and cultural.

> Initially investigating technical issues of representation in James's fiction, I found myself drawn into the investigation of cultural categories such systems invariably mediated. engages issues of cultural construction: when artists seem to live out the compositional imperatives of their artistic activity, they enact the construction of social form.[16]

It appears that beside the poles of art and real, one should take notice of a third one: that of the social, that connects the two. My focus on the cultural facilitation of detection in *The Sacred Fount* is an attempt to read the text from the point of view of cultural construction in the above sense.

2 "TEXT"

My hypothesis is that *The Sacred Fount* is a piece of fictional cultural criticism, but no evidence for this claim has been provided as yet. The text stage below elaborates on the phenomenon of cultural detection in the novel, and thus presents the evidence needed. This presentation, essentially, is not so much a novel model of *The Sacred Fount,* but rather a rearrangement of existing critical observations from the perspective of detection flawed. The aim of the rearrangement is to explicate the intricate relationship between detection and social expectations in the text. The mystery itself is presented first in order to prepare the report on the process of detection aiming to solve the mystery. It turns out that detection is both fuelled and confronted by standards of decency

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[15] Julie Rivkin. *False Positions: The Representational Logic of Henry James's Fiction.* Stanford, Stanford UP, 1996, pp. 14–15.
[16] Rivkin, *False Positions,* pp. 8–9.

that in this way both require and prevent the solution of the case. As the second step, a comparison of detection and artistic creation reveals the similarity of the two processes. Eventually, the conclusion is a model of art implied by this similarity where the binary opposition of art and real is distorted by social conventions.

2.1 The Case

The mystery of the sacred fount is the mystery of a flow of intelligence and youth the Narrator thinks is happening at Newmarch, the scene of an aristocratic weekend house-party in the country. The Narrator witnesses his old acquaintance, Gilbert Long, whom he has thought dim-witted, growing clever. The only possible explanation he can find for the spectacular alteration is that a clever lady must have influenced Long, so he sets out to identify who the lady in question might be: he is checking all possible variations. At the same time he realises that one Lady of the company, Mrs. Briss, has recently grown really pretty, another significant change of appeal. In this case the Narrator supposes somebody's influence again, his theory is that the lady has been influenced by her husband who, in turn, has grown old. Having struck up his theories and started his investigation, an apparent symmetry between the two couples dawns on him: there is a flow of a quality from one side towards the other in both relationships. Considering the supposed reciprocal relations that both mysterious affairs are symptoms of, the Narrator comes to the conclusion that the unknown lady who is influencing the now clever Gilbert Long must have *lost* the power of her intelligence in the process. The Lady is to be found on the basis of her shattered intellectual power and social art. The Narrator only needs to go around, chat with the ladies and consider their mental capacities. Socialising bursts out, and this is also the point where all hell breaks loose: the supposed symmetry of the supposed exchanges begins to be extended to other members of the company – detection not only speeds up but is protracted and stretched as well.

While the narrator diagnoses the case, values of social behaviour are being expressed by him and by other members of the company. Both Gilbert Long and Mrs. Briss are considered to have changed to their *advantage:* their change shows positive values of the society they belong to. As for Gilbert Long, we have seen

that he has improved first of all because he has more *intellect* (322).[17] However, there are other aspects of his improvement, too. He is less handsome, but his *manners* gained in ease (318), he is actually able to get on with anyone in the company. Also, he can *communicate* much more effectively than before, his accounts are *accurate* (320), and the narrator is fascinated by the way he makes his *points* (321). Added to this, the Narrator can locate a definite change in Long's attitude towards others. Long possesses a reliable *sociability* now: he is friendly and is no longer rude (321, 330). Apart from Long's metamorphosis, the other improvement is that of Mrs. Briss's. This alteration is less complex than that of Long, as she has become *pretty* and seems much younger than she actually is but nothing else happened to her. So perhaps it is no wonder that when the narrator sums up his impression of the improvement in Long he values the alteration as the "high sport of subtle intelligence – between two gentlemen" (407). The other halves of the respective couples change to their *disadvantage:* Briss grows *old,* the Lady loses her *wit.* In this way the identification of the mystery presupposes a clear-cut opposition of socially valuable and non-valuable characteristics.

Detection starts out to investigate the secret plan determining the flow of intelligence and manners (468). To be more precise, detection starts out to investigate the mysterious emergence of the positive characteristics listed above. The narrator studies the mystery with a rather mechanistic model of the transformation in mind: once there is a pattern in one couple, this pattern should be reflected in the other case. Basically all relations among the members of the company begin to be interpreted in terms of the secret flow of information they might be reflections of. Also, it is not only the Narrator who watches the others in order to set up his patterns, but others play the same game as well. For one, Mrs. Briss discusses the latest developments of the Narrator's investigation with him and feeds him her own theory in turn. Then, Obert draws an analogy to the mystery projected by the Narrator, saying "You have your mystery and I'll be hanged if I don't have mine" (351). In this way analogy becomes a powerful tool: the torch of analogy shows the way to follow for the Narrator and Obert, analogy becomes the principle of investigation. The first problem occurs when analogy breaks down.

When analogy fails, the obsession of observation produces scenes of self-reflection in the Narrator. First he takes notice of his sharpened perception and

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[17] All parenthesised references are to the Harper edition (Henry James. *Three Novels: The Europeans, The Spoils of Poyntos, The Sacred Fount.* New York: Perennial Classics, 1968, 317–493).

special sensibility (386). He also expresses his need for a material clue, but restrains himself by saying the detective and his interest in the keyhole are ignoble, it is only psychological signs that are honourable for the investigator (352). Still, he notes that he is "reading into mere human things an interest so much deeper than mere human things were prepared to supply" (402). In other words, he is aware of his abuse of psychological signs. He is disgusted by the investigation itself when it begins to concern Mrs. Server, "curiosity began to strike me as wanting in taste" (342), and realises that success may be more embarrassing than failure.

> I succeeded, by vigilance, in preventing my late companion from carrying Mrs. Server off: I had no wish to see her studied – by anyone but myself at least – in the light of my theory. I felt by this time that I understood my theory, but I was not obliged to believe that Mrs. Brissenden did. I am afraid I must frankly confess that I called deception to my aid; to separate the two ladies I gave the more initiated a look in which I invited her to read volumes. This look, or rather the look she returned, comes back to me as the first note of a tolerably tight, tense little drama, a little drama of which our remaining hours at Newmarch were the all too ample stage. (342-3)

This is the point where he decides to redirect his forces and instead of a detection to reveal the case he becomes involved in detection that hides: detection serves to deceive.

2.2 Correspondence between detection and artistic processes

Detection serves to deceive: this is also the point where I have to stop listing traces of the detective process and ask *why* detection went astray and was left incomplete. My hypothesis consists of two components. The first is that it was *necessary* to give up detection because common standards of decency required appearances instead of facts. The second component is that the principles determining detection are *also* the principles determining *artistic creation* in *The Sacred Fount*, and in this way art too can only have the status of appearance.

At Newmarch the company required not an exposure but a covering of the supposed illicit relations among its members. So it is not only the Narrator's moral scruples that restrain him from pursuing his investigation, but also other members of the company express this need. The narrator contends he has to pretend to be an idiot for a decent appearance (484). At the same time he is aware

that he plays a part in a tight little drama where everyone has a part (409). As a result of the acting out, the weekend becomes a secluded stage of a social performance.

> The night was mild and rich, and though the lights within were, in deference to the temperature, not too numerous, I found the breath of the outer air a sudden corrective of our lustre and the thickness of our medium, our general heavy humanity. I felt its taste sweet, and while I leaned for refreshment, on the sill I thought of many things. One of those that passed before me was that Newmarch and its hospitalities were sacrificed, after all, and much more than smaller circles, to material frustrations. We were all so fine and formal, and the ladies in particular at once so little and so much clothed, so beflounced yet so denuded, that the summer stars called to us in vain. We had ignored them in our crystal cage, among our tinkling lamps... (427)

Here life became a simulated lounge marked by a tolerance of talk (366), where the art of telling is of utmost importance. The Narrator enjoys this situation and describes his final conversation with Mrs. Briss as mutually activating and pleasurable: "we both knew we know more than we told. This made our conversation far more interesting than any colloquy I'd ever enjoyed"(467). However, the narrator overdoes his tolerance of talk and his playmates resist after a while. Mrs. Briss complains to the narrator about his habits: with his art of putting things one simply does not know where one is (461). Lady John tells the Narrator to give up confabulating (411). In face of them all, the Narrator is amused by his being a nuisance: "as inhumanly amused as if one had found one could create something" (374). The Narrator overdoes his role and thinks he in fact creates something while the others would like to put an end to his creativity.

There is a distinct similarity between the process of detection and the process of artistic creation as the Narrator describes them: their practice, their relation to the Real, and even their aims are alike. The Narrator talks of artistic glow when he theorises, and compares one of his new theories to *reading* a passage in a favourite author he had not noticed before.

> My large reading had meanwhile, for the convenience of the rest of my little talk with Lady John, to make itself as small as possible. I had an odd sense, till we fell apart again, as of keeping my finger stiffly fixed on a passage in a favourite author on which I had not previously lighted. I held the book out of sight and behind me; I spoke of things that were

not at all in it – or not at all on that particular page; but my volume, none the less, was only waiting. (417)

Also, *artistic imagination* is characterised in the story and is similar to the obsessed observation of the Narrator. Imagination is dangerous, when too vivid: this is the problem with May Server, her overactive imagination frightens males of the company. So imagination has to be suppressed, much like detection had to be.

As for their relation to the Real, both detection and art are against it. In a spectacular example the *mystery* itself, the relation of the two couples appears as a scene, in which art and the detective interest seek patterns and symmetries that do not characterise the real.

> These opposed couples balanced like bronze groups at the two ends of the chimney-piece, and the most I could say to myself in lucid deprecation of my thought was that I mustn't take them equally for granted merely *because* they balanced. Things in the real had a way of not balancing; it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion. (417)

The Narrator was busy watching two couples of the company and considered their relation as a relation within works of art, still without success.

The aim of the detection and artistic creation is also similar. *The Sacred Fount* is not only the fount of intellect and beauty but something more and more hazy than that: the scent of something ultimate. The others share this thirst for the infinite, for instance after listening to a piano concert the company is under a spell. As the Narrator puts it: "it was the infinite that for the hour, the distinguished foreigner poured out to us causing it to roll in wonderful waves of sound, almost of color, over to our receptive attitudes and faces." (408). Art and detection appear similar as creation and as means to some generalised infinite.

2.3 The parallel breaks down

Although the process of detection and artistic creation and experience seem to match, including their thirst for the infinite, the results of detection and art, namely theories and artworks, do not fit accordingly. Works of art are balanced and ordered, but the solution is apparently not. The problem the Narrator faces is the unreliability of his theories. He has to notice that piecing facts together is like picking up straws (418) and also that his theories come into pieces at a touch

(489). When, eventually, he leaves the house in panic, a tangle of theories is left behind with loose threads, without a clear solution for the mystery. Is it in any way similar to the patterned symmetry of a work of art? It seems that detection only aims at producing perfect results but eventually fails to do so.

However, if you consider in detail how a prototypical work of art actually *functions* in the story, you'll notice that actual patterns of art are not as reliable as the descriptions above may suggest. Let us have a look at how a characteristic work of art within the novel functions. There is a portrait, "The Mask of Death," in the text, where a young man holding a mask in his hand is depicted. Four characters in the novel understand the picture in four different ways, not being able to decide if the expression "The Mask of Death" really refers to the young man or the mask in his hand, as the features of both are somewhat artificial. The problem, on the one hand, is that Death can be either the man or the mask, and in this way the "solution" of the portrait "The Mask of Death" remains unknown. However, this complication still does not account for the four different solutions provided by the spectators of the picture. The observers come up with four solutions instead of the two logically possible because they substitute faces from the company into the picture: they use contextual information to interpret the mystery of the title. In this way, different identities of the young man and the mask are provided, and this initial plurality is doubled because of the duality of the title. If there were more than four spectators present in the gallery conversing over the title of the picture, possibly even more interpretations could emerge. Remember that the mystery of the fount is a mystery of faces, characters putting on masks of intelligence, mental deprivation, youth, or age, while other characters behave as spectators trying to find out what the principle behind putting on masks may be. The scheme of the picture, then, is multiple, but this multiplicity is only doubled by the title, its basis is the plurality of theories concerning the mystery of the fount. The plurality of the picture in this scene, then, is contextual.

Considering the process of detection beside this scheme of art, we can certainly say that detection produces a pattern impossible to fill, too. One has the theory of symmetrical relation between two couples, where the symmetry lies in a flow of intelligence or vitality from one member of the couple to the other. The only problem is to find who the actual members of the two couples are. Detection goes as far as to state the pattern, but does not fill the functions with names. To be more precise, each character fills the pattern in a different way at different

stages of the novel, and this situation results in the semiotic failure. Thus the so-called failure of detection actually resembles the pattern of the picture.

3 AN IMPLIED MODEL OF ART

As a consequence of the plurality of detection based on the context, I argue that detection is not a failure of the artistic creativity in this story but rather a replica of it. A "work of art" here presents a pattern to be filled in but that is impossible to fill in. Similarly, detection presents a pattern where gaps of knowledge cannot be filled in unanimously because of the context.

Let us pursue this similarity between detection and artistic creation and reception further. Remember that detection was blocked by a common need on the part of the company not to reveal the names of the persons involved in illicit relations. Standards of decency made the Narrator put an end to his investigation. He couldn't come up with a solution because it was better for members not to expose what was going on, i.e. the real if you like.

If the analogy between detection and artistic creation and reception can be stretched so far, the question to be answered refers to the extent of the analogy. Should one assign a role to expectations within the realm of art, too? This, in turn, implies a model of art that does not simply rely on a direct opposition between a patterned work of art and the tangled real. It seems that a third pole, that of standards or expectations has to be taken into consideration, too. The third pole, according to the analysis, is the one that keeps the gap open between the other two.

It is this model of art that has been shown in connection with the picture. The plurality of opinion among the spectators was based on the plurality of their ideas about the mystery of the sacred fount of life and energy. Everyone was compelled to come up with a hypothetical solution to the mystery, and nobody's version was verified or falsified, which is why the weekend ended in interpretive plurality. The question at hand is how much the compulsion to guess and the interpretive plurality had been expected to happen. In other words, if it would have been possible for the participants of the company to sit down together and listen to a revelation, as would be the case in any conventional detective story. It seems that because of the social expectation not to reveal illicit relations among members of the company, the spectators of "The Mask of Death" were expected to have diverse opinion as to the identity of the mysterious figure. The characters

practically re-enacted the game of "detection flawed" when they interpreted the picture. This means that when they provided a plural interpretation based on the context, the reason of the plurality was in fact the expectation to remain decent, not to expose anyone. The aspect of social expectations prevents a unitary order of the real here.

It is high time to acknowledge that the term "Real" is used with all its ambiguity here. Throughout the text itself it appears with a capital r and the definition of that Real is the one that serves as the basis of the opposition between Real and art. The term "Real" is used in this sense in all the quotes and descriptions above. However, if we come to think of it, in the analysis the essay itself uses the term "real" with another definition applied. In this essay the real with a small r is a cultural product and in that sense cannot be opposed to Art in the Jamesian sense. Basically, throughout the essay I am trying to prove that the definition of the Real in the text should not be taken at face value, and a Lacanian Real be exchanged for an Iserian real.[18]

4 RE-CONTEXT

Such a reading of *The Sacred Fount* does not propose any new element to be inserted into the story of the story. Rather, it represents a change of focus. Shlomith Rimmon in her study of ambiguity in the novel saw it as an exercise in gap filling where two sets of exclusive clues were present to fill the gaps and these resulted in ambiguity. She listed the social values of the group and the opposition of detection and decency as sets of exclusive clues to back up her theory of ambiguity based on symbolic logic. Consequently, for her the model of art in the story is a function that creates ambiguity. In other words, she only has the two poles Art and Real in her model, she focuses on Art within this and every other aspect of the story is labelled according to the duality of Art as she knows it. Sergio Perosa, in turn, emphasises life and states the story is a parable of the pathetic failure of the ordering and the expressive skills on which the artist's greatness depends, so life overcomes art. The power of expectations is labelled under Life, i.e. the real. Let my version represent the third focus, the one on expectations.

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[18] Wolfgang Iser. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology.* Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1993 (1991), p. 4.

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Standards of decent behaviour prevented the solution of the mystery at Newmarch in *The Sacred Fount*. The apparent similarity of artistic processes to those of detection made me consider a theory of art implied in the text that involves not only the poles Art/Real but also a third, that of social expectations. This model seems to present an adjustment of focus, as other readers of *The Fount* have concentrated on either the Art or the Real poles instead. The question I still have not answered though is the scope of my approach. *The Sacred Fount* anticipates the major phase and the question that is projected for me is if this frame can be applied to the novels of the major phase, too.

Péter Dolmányos

Present Buried in the Past

The Bog Poems of Seamus Heaney

INTRODUCTION

The bog poems of Seamus Heaney have been read and reviewed in different ways: admiration as well as strong negative criticism characterise the ambivalent reaction of critics to these poems. The fact that they have received such attention indicates their significance, yet the satisfactorily exact evaluation of this significance is still far from being complete. The bog poems are often not treated as an organic group of poems. It is true that they were not written as a group, yet they display features characteristic of a sequence of related poems (and there is even a booklet entitled Bog Poems, published in 1975, though it is absent from bibliographies). Taken together the poems read as a narrative, a myth, with a discernible narrative structure which shows the dynamism of the poems, reflecting Heaney's process of myth-making and his recognition of the problems inherent in this process: Heaney intends to provide the contemporary violence in Northern Ireland with a mythic framework for the attempt at explanation but as he proceeds he discovers the inherent limitations of his intention and deconstructs his myth, having found it impossible to explain the violence in any sensible way.

Ireland is a land of bog: the ubiquitous element of the Irish landscape is the peat bog. It is the heritage of the Ice Age – the glaciers of the Pleistocene eroded the whole land area of Ireland, stripping off not only the soil but the layers of younger rocks as well. Geographically the peat bog is a unique phenomenon: it

is a watery place of coal formation. The bog as a form of inland water has an interesting characteristic: it takes in the excess precipitation and releases it when it becomes oversaturated. The bog is also a mysterious world with its seemingly bottomless pools which lend a haunting quality to the landscape itself as well as may serve some other purposes: they can swallow various things from butter to bodies of dead people. The bog preserves everything that falls into it and preserves them in a special condition – it is impossible to identify the age of items coming from the bog without scientific investigation. Time after time the bog "returns" these items though it needs human help – most often it is turfcutters who come across such findings.

The special nature of the bog offers certain metaphoric dimensions. The fact that it is a place of coal formation suggests a metaphoric meeting between fire and water, since the traditional source of energy in Ireland, in households, was peat. The preservative aspect of the bog renders it as a kind of living memory – it is "the memory of the landscape."[1] The layered structure of the bog invites a parallel with history as the layers of the bog correspond to periods in history. Heaney focuses on these two aspects, the parallels with memory and history.

Heaney's interest in discovery, in quests of various kinds, or "digging" as he termed it, naturally brought him to the bog; the early example of his fascination with the peculiar Irish element is the poem "Bogland." Still, the poem is only an excursion into the territory as the landscape is in the focus, the human beings appearing in the poem do not have a central significance yet. Heaney's encounter with P. B. Glob's book entitled *The Bog People* set him on a different course. Through the description of bodies found in Danish bogs the book revives an Iron Age culture in which there was a practice of ritual sacrifice aimed to secure the survival and thus the continuity of the community. The book fascinated Heaney greatly and provided him with an idiom adequate to the current conflict in Ulster. Interestingly enough, the book appeared in 1969, the date of publication coinciding with the beginning of the Troubles.

The common ground to Ireland and Denmark is provided by geography: both places abound in bogs. What really bridges the gap between the primitive ancient cult and the modern Ulster world is violence. The bog becomes an adequate metaphor in Heaney's treatment of the Troubles on this basis of similarity. The bog is also a means of distancing himself from the 20th century

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[1] Seamus Heaney. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–78*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1980, p. 54.

events. There is a different kind of sympathy towards the bog people than towards fellow sufferers in the crisis: as Declan Kiberd explains, it may be an attempt to "come to terms with the strange fact that readers, inured to newspaper photographs of daily atrocity, can feel more for the ancient than for the modern victim."[2] This is based on a psychological motif: being exposed to violence over a longer period of time leads to the state of getting used to it, losing the threshold of the "normal" human level of empathy. Kiberd also mentions the idea of the victim of a sacrificial cult as the objective correlative of contemporary violence.[3] The victims of the ancient cult are anonymous but they acquire the honour of being treated as individuals, whereas the victims of contemporary violence are often people familiar to him, still, they are nameless and come to be treated only later in In Memoriam-type poems published in the volume entitled *Field Work.*

As the bog poems are closely related to each other and form a sequence, a corresponding narrative structure can be identified, with sections of rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. "Bogland" is the introduction, a kind of prologue; "The Tollund Man" offers the exposition proper. "Come to the Bower" and "Bog Queen" represent the rest of the line of rising action. The two poems, "The Grauballe Man" and "Punishment" constitute the climax. The word climax suggests the moment of highest tension and also the change of direction – this is the moment when the realistic drive overcomes the mythmaking attempt of the poet. The last two poems, "Strange Fruit" and "Kinship," are the falling line, with the latter as the resolution. This pattern shows how the basic metaphor of the bog undergoes a change which may look to life for its analogue. The metaphor of the bog is born with the first poem. "The Tollund Man" gives vitality to it through the idea of invocation and this lends a symbolic quality to the motif and brings in the mythic dimension. As the goddess revives, the whole world of the bog starts a new life, the myth reaches "maturity." This is in this period that the bog motif starts to incorporate less elaborate elements: "atrocity" begins to balance "beauty." "Punishment" retains something of the mythic atmosphere but Heaney's stance is given in this poem which establishes the aesthetic consideration as the central element of the myth. In the last two poems the motif loses vitality in terms of the myth and "Kinship" concludes on the level of a contemporary report in the form

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[2] Declan Kiberd. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation.* London: Vintage, 1996, p. 594.
[3] Kiberd, p. 594.

of a poem; Heaney sheds the mythic dimension having recognised the impossibility of lending dignity to the sectarian killings of the 20th century.

POEMS: RISING[4]

The bog story begins with "Bogland." This is the poem to set the scene: it shows an environment which is endless in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The endlessness is a distinct quality and the vertical dimension acquires a special significance as the poem progresses towards its conclusion which implies a metaphoric tradition, based on the idea of the continuous growth observable in the bog.

The poem opens with a comparison of Ireland with the "prairies," and though it expresses an absence, the negative statement is turned into an assertion by the following sentence: "Our unfenced country / Is bog." This country is endless, it is "unfenced" – an island, bordered only by the sea; the inner border dividing the Republic from the United Kingdom seems ignored, or at least it is not referred to as relevant in the context since the elements of physical geography do not conform to political borders. The bog "keeps crusting / Between the sights of the sun," it becomes thicker as the time passes, there is a continuous expansion in the vertical dimension. This vertical dimension is focused upon in the main section of the poem: the motif of digging is brought in as the people are shown engaged in an activity of excavation: "Our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards." The word "pioneers" carries the idea not only of the turf-cutters but that of a different group of "diggers," the poets, of whom Heaney is one representative. The bog is built up of layers, and each layer is a part of history as "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before," and in this way the present is understood as just one of the layers. This layered structure suggests a kind of continuous enrichment, even a tradition, if the bog is understood as the memory of the landscape. The direction of the exploration is towards the centre but "The wet centre is bottomless." The vertical dimension is endless, and the centre is "wet" and not a realm of fire, suggesting preservation rather than consummation, which foreshadows later elements of the bog motif. The phrase "Atlantic seapage" may be interpreted as a reference to something greater, something of a larger

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[4] Quotations from the poems are taken from the following collections: Seamus Heaney. *New Selected Poems 1966–1987*. London: Faber, 1990; Seamus Heaney. *North*. London: Faber, 1975; Seamus Heaney. *The Spirit Level*. London: Faber, 1996.

scope, something which is common to a greater number of participants. In this sense the word "Atlantic" is a reference to Northwest Europe and in such a way it is a potential seed of the myth of the North.

As Heaney himself explained it, the poem was born out of a drive to establish a kind of connection between the forces shaping his consciousness: "I had a tentative unrealised need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness."[5] The idea of the bog was a haunting presence but the immediate influence, the decisive impetus came when Heaney, teaching modern literature in Belfast, read about the notion of the frontier, the American myth of the west. The bog offered itself as the adequate Irish myth, as this is a common basis for North and South alike, without divisions. The landscape is in the focus of the poem; the human figures who appear are simply agents for the sole purpose of revealing the unique preservative feature of the bog; they are contemporaries, alive and have no mythical significance.

The first "real" bog poem is "The Tollund Man," real in the sense that it is based on Glob's findings and deals with one of the ritual sacrifices emerging from the lost world of the Iron Age. The poem takes a personal perspective as Heaney takes the framework of a potential pilgrimage to Aarhus, where the Tollund Man is displayed. The idea of a journey to see the victim of a sacrificial cult is complemented by an invocation and the bringing together of the distant worlds of Iron Age Jutland and contemporary Northern Ireland.

The first section of the poem is the declaration of Heaney's intention for the pilgrimage and a description of the Tollund Man. The idea of pilgrimage is reinforced later by images such as "a saint's kept body," "consecrate," "holy ground" and "pray." The motifs describing the man create the sense of innocence as the attribute of the figure and the indication of his death constructs the picture of a ritual. The basis of the ritual is a fertility cult or religion which meant choosing a bridegroom each year for Nerthus, the Mother Goddess of the Earth, a North European equivalent of fertility goddesses of the Mediterranean region, Ishtar and Aphrodite;[6] this bridegroom was ritually murdered and thrown into the bog, the dwelling place of the goddess. The aim of the ritual was to secure the fertility and renewal of the territory, and by this way to maintain continuity.

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[5] Heaney. *Preoccupations*, pp. 54–55.
[6] Michael Parker. *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993, p. 106.

The second section of the poem elevates the Tollund Man to the level of sainthood, though Heaney feels he "could risk blasphemy" by this. Still, the aim is noble: the ancient man is supposed to germinate "The scattered, ambushed / Flesh of labourers" to renew life in Ireland. This is Heaney's invocation to the "Bridegroom to the goddess." The myth of the waste land also appears as a hint, as a parallel to the fertility cult. The labourers mentioned in these lines turn out to be corpses laid out in a farmyard – it is a reference to a conflict between the English and the Irish in the 1920s when Protestant paramilitaries killed four Catholic brothers. The event was well-known to Heaney, "part of the folk-lore of where I grew up", as he put it.[7] The gap between the distant past of the Iron Age and twentieth-century Ulster is diminished and bridged at once by this reference. Still, there is a suggestion by Parker that the Iron Age ritual is almost "civilised," since these killings "at least could claim the dignity of religious purpose,"[8] whereas the action of the Protestant paramilitaries is a mere act of meaningless violence. This idea is strengthened by the fact that the death of the Tollund Man is described with simple nobility whereas the death of the four young brothers is shown with elements of brutality, which creates a shocking picture of violence in the twentieth century.

The last section of the poem establishes a different kind of connection between the worlds separated by thousands of years yet connected by manifestations of violence: the distance is further reduced by the immediate relationship between the pilgrim Heaney and the land: "Something of his sad freedom / As he rode the tumbril / Should come to me, driving." Even if there is a great difference between the voluntary act of pilgrimage and the involuntary one of being sacrificed, the imaginative parallel could lead to an at least partial sharing of the experience. The picture is constructed in the dynamics of progression and regression: the section opens with a sharing of the experience, then the scene moves back into the perspective of a stranger in a foreign land and returns to near familiar intimacy through the concept of "home":

> Out there in Jutland
> In the old man-killing parishes
> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home.

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[7] Quoted by Parker, p. 107.
[8] Parker, p. 107.

The majority of the bog poems were published in the volume *North*. This collection of poems has been seen as the book that attempts to create a myth, a bridge between past and present. The first among the bog poems of the volume is "Come to the Bower." This poem deals with the finding and uncovering of the body of a woman in the bog. The motif of exploration is present though this time it is not in the form of digging but it is "unpinning" and "unwrapping." The poem begins with the description of the scene which appears as a typical "love nest." The body found there is that of a noble woman, she is a "dark-bowered queen," her social status is indicated by "A mark of a gorget in the flesh / Of her throat." The body is attributed the state of "waiting," which suggests sleep rather than death. At the moment of "unwrapping" something significant happens: "And spring water / Starts to rise around her." "Waiting" acquires its full meaning in this context – the dormant state comes to an end with the moment of her discovery. The word "spring" itself has implications of rebirth. This is enhanced by the image of the water starting to rise, and the picture created is that of a new existence initiated by having been found and excavated.

The phrase "dark-bowered queen" in the second stanza establishes the identity of the woman by a metaphoric reference to Mother Ireland. The suggestion of the theme of rebirth supports this viewpoint, together with the scene of the love-nest and the social status of the woman. Heaney's rather private approach may be interpreted as his wish of personal involvement in the process of the revival through an "imaginative intercourse with his country."[9] On another level "Come to the Bower" is a revival of the bog theme, as it was put aside with "The Tollund Man" and brought back with this poem first, and the "rise" of water suggests a process not fully under Heaney's control, which foreshadows the later development of the motif.

The poem "Bog Queen" looks at the special existence of one of the bog people from the inside. The persona of the poem is the bog queen herself; the account is given in the first person singular, describing all the processes to which the body had been subject until it was found and excavated. The story of decay is paralleled with and partly muted by that of a long existence of a different kind, the "life" after death interpreted with the concepts of the living; this can be justified by the resurrection of the woman at the end which suggests a kind of dormant and waiting state rather than the void state of death. The end of the

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[9] Edna Longley. "'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'? Seamus Heaney's *North*." In: Michael Allen, ed. *Seamus Heaney*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 48.

poem evokes glory as the moment of finding the body and the beginning of the excavation are elevated on the level of rising, offering an metaphoric connection with the theme of invocation in "The Tollund Man."

The very first stanza compresses some of the main elements of the poem – "waiting," "turf-face" and "demesne wall." The past tense opening the poem suggests a change of state and the "I lay waiting" of the first stanza becomes the "I rose" of the last one as the theme unfolds. The scene of waiting, "between turf-face and demesne wall" indicates the meeting point of nature and civilisation. The once noble world suggested by the word "demesne" is gone, it is overgrown with vegetation, and the former "queen" lay "between heathery levels / and glass-toothed stone."

The description of the body begins in the second stanza. The body "was braille / for the creeping influences": this creates the vision of a communion between the body and the elements of nature surrounding it. The elements of nature mentioned are shown being engaged in activities of exploration such as "groping" and "pondering," or of subjugation as "digesting." The opening line is repeated in the fourth stanza to enhance the concept of this strange existence: despite the seemingly subdued state she is not defeated, the process of decay does not destroy her entirely. The brain is likened to "a jar of spawn," which gives hints about a new existence through the word "spawn." Images of physical decay follow but the process seems to be constrained by some mysterious force: the "diadem grew carious," still, it is preserved in the bog. Her "sash was a black glacier / wrinkling," but it is still there at when she is found. Her discovery is a matter of chance as a turfcutter comes across the body; the finding is reburied but she emerges out of her hiding place following an incident diminishing her appearance to a certain extent:

> and I rose from the dark,
> hacked bone, skull-ware,
> frayed stitches, tufts,
> small gleams on the bank.

This is a moment of resurrection after the long state of waiting; the concept of "rising" suggests the attributes of a divine existence.

The poem may be read as a variation on the theme presented by the preceding poem. In that work the finding of the woman is described, in this the woman is hypothetically given the opportunity to speak. The point of view of the buried woman is introduced and she gives a detailed and vivid account of her

existence suspended between the two worlds of life and death. There is an identity for the woman: she is the incarnation of Nerthus, the goddess coming alive again, but she can also be an incarnation of the "dark-bowered queen" of Ireland, the present calling for new sacrifices. The change of perspective allows a different relationship with the reader, a more immediate one; the confession-like quality of the poem reflects Heaney's drive for mythicising at its most intensive moment – the intention of Heaney to find a mythic framework is reflected in the intention of the woman to come alive again and to haunt the living with her constant need of sacrifice.

POEMS: CLIMAX

"The Grauballe Man" is another account of a man who was sacrificed as part of the fertility religion. If "The Tollund Man" is a pilgrimage, "The Grauballe Man" is the arrival, the celebration of being there, in the interpretation of Edna Longley.[10] However, as the ending of the poem suggests, the closer perspective creates a standpoint which is not celebratory at all, and a new direction begins with this poem, a direction which leads towards the revision of Heaney's standpoint in relation to finding a possible mythic framework for the violence.

The images used to describe the body in the opening part of the poem build up a vivid picture of metaphoric union between the man and the bog. The references of "tar," "pillow of turf," "black river," "bog oak," "swans's foot," "wet swamp root," "mussel," "mud" and "elderberry place" evoke a world dominated by dark colours and water. The man is described in terms of the bog itself, the union between them is that of a peaceful harmony as the man is seen lying on a "pillow." The impression of this peaceful scene is capsized in the fifth stanza when the "slashed throat" of the man is mentioned: the peaceful image of sleep is turned into the fearful picture of violent death. Owing to the wound on the throat the head looks like a helmet of which "the chin is a visor," bringing the implications of a warlike culture. Heaney's reaction to the sight is equally ambivalent. The "vivid cast" does not allow the designation "corpse" and it is not even a "body" though the "opaque repose" dims the strength of the fascination of the observer.

The face of the Grauballe Man is mentioned for the first time only in the eighth stanza. The description of the man becomes round with his "twisted face"

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[10] Longley, p. 43.

and the actuality of terror asserts itself. The picture is a more balanced one as the Grauballe Man is finally "hung in the scales / with beauty and atrocity" and "with the actual weight / of each hooded victim, /slashed and dumped." "Beauty and atrocity" construct the complex of the Kantian sublime as they combine to awaken an ethically more balanced response in Heaney; the appearance of "atrocity" is an important new development in the evolution of the motif. The last three lines of the poem connect the present with the past through an implicit reference to the methods of the IRA: the name of the organisation is never mentioned but the "hooded victim, / slashed and dumped" marks the method of execution employed by the Republicans, as well as by the Iron Age community.

The body is described to perfection, though this time there is not the kind of voice present as in the case of "The Tollund Man." There are details which show Heaney's exuberance but the indication that his throat was cut brings the victim closer to a de-mythicised existence. Still, it is not a corpse, not even a body, it is something sublime, rather, even if there are no references to sainthood and a possible salvatory germination of the land in hope of a better future. The conclusion of this poem is also different as the Grauballe Man is viewed from a less prejudiced point of view: the eagerness to maintain the myth-making strain at the sight of this man is balanced by the recognition of the terror and pain reflected on the face. Whereas "The Tollund Man" is a record of an experience giving birth to invocation, "The Grauballe Man" is the moment of clash between "beauty and atrocity," myth and reality, suggesting an important turning point in the use of the bog motif.

"Punishment" is a bog poem of a different kind. The central figure is a woman but she is not the incarnation of Nerthus. The young woman was not a cultic victim: she was executed for having committed adultery, she is the "victim" of capital punishment. The perspective is again somewhat ambivalent as there is sympathy awakening in Heaney but his reaction does not reflect this: however strong the sympathy felt for the girl is, he confesses that he would have stood there dumb and watched her execution. The generalised remark at the end, the similarity in fate with girls going out with British soldiers (shaved, tarred and feathered) gives a current reference to the poem and opens a new direction of correspondence between past and present.

The opening sentence carries enough empathy for Heaney to share in the experience of execution described through tactile images. The third stanza moves away from the immediacy of personal contact and creates the sense of distance

which gives him a perspective to describe the body. The description is done in a similar way as in other bog poems – the points of reference are elements of the world of the bog. The first suggestion of the reason of her death comes in the fifth stanza but the picture unfolds only in the one that follows it; there her status is identified as a "little adulteress." The word "little" serves a dual purpose as it takes something away from the edge of the statement and also maintains a personal overtone which is supported by the pronouns: the girl is referred to as "you" instead of the more distant "she" of the earlier stanzas.

She is seen as a "scapegoat," someone to whom evil was transferred, and Heaney's sympathy is expressed by the word "poor." He intensifies the picture by stating "I almost love you" just to confess that his reaction would have been the same as those who were present at her execution: "but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence." The sympathy is muted as the shadow of reality moves over the scene, and Heaney once again steps into a more objective distance, asserting his role of an "artful voyeur."

Heaney's reaction is that of a man used to the proximity of violence. It is even typical of 20th century city dwellers, his compassion is silent and therefore passive, it is that of a private man not inclined to show it to the external world. The explanation for such behaviour is attempted in the last stanza:

> I [Heaney]
> [...]
>
> who would connive
> in civilized outrage
> yet understand the exact
> and tribal, intimate revenge.

This stanza appears to have posed a problem for interpreters as the somewhat diverse critical reception indicates. Seamus Deane sees this as the dilemma of outrage and revenge, that the answer is imaginatively revenge, morally outrage;[11] this is the dilemma which is echoed by most of the commentators. Heaney's own comment is basically a prose paraphrase of the conclusion of the poem: "At one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek the mean of humane love

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[11] Seamus Deane. "Seamus Heaney: The Timorous and the Bold." In: Michael Allen, ed. *Seamus Heaney*, p. 70.

and reason."[12] The stanza reflects the tragic dialectic of the situation – the divergent forces at work allow for no reconciliation, there is no possible way of bringing them together even by splitting the self into two schizophrenic parts. Heaney chooses the only way out by banishing himself into the position of the "artful voyeur," at once establishing and emphasising the primacy of the aesthetic principle in his use of the bog people in his treatment of the contemporary conflict.

The image of the "betraying sisters" establishes the connection with the present. It also serves as the precedent to his hypothetical silence during the execution of the girl. In the concluding stanza his "civilized outrage" competes with "understanding" and the latter outweighs the former, indicating Heaney's standpoint. This moment is often considered as Heaney's taking sides. The decision of Heaney, however, is an emotional one rather than an intellectual one – he is the member of a community and speaks as such. The conditional form takes something away from the edge of his choice and the contradictory idea of "civilised outrage" has a similar effect. Together with the concept of the "artful voyeur" these all suggest Heaney's wish to stay outside the conflict.

Heaney's ambivalent relationship with the figure is shown in the changes of perspective in the poem. His personal involvement takes the form of tentative identity at first. From this standpoint he moves into a distance to draw the picture of the girl; the climax of this movement is the word "adulteress." With the reawakening of sympathy he moves closer again to address the girl as "you." From here the poem goes on to reach a resolution which is a confession of his position as an outsider, a "voyeur." These changes of perspective create a pulsating movement which, together with the idea of the "artful voyeur," lends a climactic quality to this poem in the sequence.

POEMS: FALLING AND RESOLUTION

"Strange Fruit" is another poem dealing with a woman found in the bog. This time the viewpoint of the persona is more distant, there is not the same kind of deep sympathy felt for the victim as before and the idea of attraction is totally missing. The trove is only the head and this head is repulsive as it is described in a more naturalistic way lacking any kind of consolatory elements. The poem begins

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[12] Quoted in Blake Morrison. *Seamus Heaney*. London: Methuen, 1982, p. 64.

with the description of the head with images related to plants – "gourd," "prune-skinned," "prune-stones for teeth" and the "wet fern of her hair"; these create the almost usual bog atmosphere. The picture becomes less attractive when her nose and eyes are mentioned: "Her broken nose is dark as a turf clod, / Her eyeholes blank as pools in the old workings." The conclusion of the poem is markedly different from those of the earlier poems:

> Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible
> Beheaded girl, outstaring axe
> And beatification, outstaring
> What had begun to feel like reverence.

The sight "outstares" Heaney's attempt to elevate the bog people to a mythic level, and in this way to colour the present violence with a hue of acceptability; the rational part of his mind overcomes the myth-maker. The body found in the bog is now a mere document of ancient violence, no indication of myth is present.

This poem represents a departure from the earlier pattern in another way as well: it is written in a sonnet form but it is a failed sonnet. The form suggests another attempt at aestheticisation but it is an attempt of a different kind; Heaney breaks with the short lines of the other poems. The "failure" of the form also indicates the different direction the bog poems after "The Grauballe Man" and "Punishment" are to take; Heaney deliberately misses rhymes, the line length is inconsistent, the iambic pentameter is distorted – these all point towards and reinforce the recognition in the conclusion of the poem.

"Kinship" is a return to Ireland, it is a symbolic homecoming after the bog poems of distant countries. The bog is revisited and re-examined, and in many ways it is a summing up, a reconsideration, supplemented by the element of confession. In this way this poem may be seen as the concluding piece in the row of the poems dealing with the bog – the theme has been used and exhausted from the point of view of the possible references.

The poem is divided into six sections, each of which develops a smaller theme within a larger pattern, that of the exploration of the bog, physical and spiritual at the same time. There is an element of confession in the first section in which Heaney sets out on an imaginary journey in his native bogland. The very first stanza establishes the "kinship" between Heaney and what is in the bog:

> Kinned by hieroglyphic
> peat on a spreadfield
> to the strangled victim,
> the love-nest in the bracken...

The bog relates the "strangled victim" to Heaney as a "kin." The peat is "hieroglyphic," which suggests something to be deciphered, a hidden message in connection with that victim; this is also a reference to the basis of the bog motif. The line "I love this turf-face" opens the elaboration of the elements of his fascination with the bog. This mysterious world is at the same time a dangerous one as "each open pool" is "the unstopped mouth / of an urn, a moon-drinker."

The second section opens with the enumeration of the "slime kingdoms." These are worlds of cold, mud and dirt, even the ring of the words denoting them seems to echo their characteristic features. Bog, however, is something different for Heaney as he tastes the word, feeling its Gaelic roots:[13] "But *bog* / meaning soft, / the fall of windless rain." There is another important distinction implied concerning the relation of these lands to life. The "slime kingdoms" are populated by the "cold-blooded," there are only "mud pads" and "dirtied eggs" to encounter; life manifests in forms generally considered as repulsive (the world of reptiles). As a contrast, the world of the bog itself is a living organism whose different organs are referred to as "Ruminant ground" and "deep pollen-bin," the former associated with digestion and the latter implying fertility.

The bog is turned into a multi-faced world in the stanzas of the section. It is first a "store house" and a "necropolis,"[14] as the kenning-like phrases of "Earth-pantry, bone vault, / sun-bank" imply. In the first line of the fifth stanza the bog is personified: it is "Insatiable bride," made identical with Nerthus, the Mother Goddess of the Earth. The final image of the bog is deeply personal and put into the context of Heaney himself: it is "nesting ground, / outback of my mind." This opens a different perspective as the landscape is internalised, seen as both the soil of creative imagination and an "outback," a less comforting part at the same time.

The third section brings images of a different kind. This section has sexual references as the images employed point towards an intimate relationship between Heaney and his native ground. The spade evokes the motif of digging, and as he raises it out of its hiding place the bog opens in a simultaneous process. The

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[13] Parker, p. 139.
[14] Parker, p. 139.

process of uncovering the spade in the first stanza leads to another uncovering with the intercourse between spade and ground. The private discovery of Heaney is complemented by another, carried out by others but influencing his consciousness to a great extent. The finding echoes the first two bog poems of the volume as it is a woman figure and Heaney comments on the historical perspective: "I stand at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess." The fertility cult of the Iron Age is the referent of these lines: the "cloven oak-limb" is a representation of the goddess, lying under the "cairn," a heap of stones indicating a burial site; Heaney alludes here to Glob.[15] The myth of another land is seen as a "twin" to his own "obelisk" of the spade, which allows an interpretation of Heaney's "digging"-type poetry as myth-making, creating the myth of Ireland.

The next section opens on a different tone. The first line is an antithesis of Yeats's "The Second Coming" where "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Heaney's Bogland is different, this is a world where the wet centre of the bog is a solid basis: "This centre holds." The centre also "spreads," and the bog is depicted as a world where life and death are seen as close neighbours as the bog itself is "sump and seedbed, / a bag of waters / and a melting grave." The cycle of seasons in this natural world is introduced by autumn. This is a period of decay but that of renewal follows during which the plants in the bog ensure their continuity. Elements of nature "deepen their ochres" in one season but in the other there is abundant fertility as "Mosses come to a head, / heather unseeds." The picture is peaceful and inviting until the last line of the fifth stanza; there the word "rots" brings back the sense of a more sober reality into the almost idyllic vision.

The last stanza is an explicit statement of Heaney's relationship with that world: his origin is identified as his roots have been found, accepted and understood:

> I grew out of all this
> like a weeping willow
> inclined to
> the appetites of gravity.

Despite the assertion of his being subject to the "appetites of gravity," Heaney turns towards the mythic again in the fifth section. The myth of the fertility ritual is brought back at the level of suggestion through the image of "The hand-carved felloes / of the turf-cart wheels." The "tawny rut" of the third section may also be

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[15] Cited by Parker, p. 140.

seen as made by the vehicle on which the victim travelled to meet his death in the Iron Age, which links the two sections on this thematic level.

The last section is a report on the state of affairs in late twentieth-century Ulster. There is an apostrophe to Tacitus, the ancient historian documenting the customs of the old inhabitants of Britain and Germany. He is called in as a witness to the present-day life in Ulster, to assist Heaney in his account of this "troubled" land. The reference to Cathleen Ní Houlihán opens the description of the violent present: "Our mother ground / is sour with the blood / of her faithful." After the "mothers of autumn" in the fourth section it is now the ground which receives the "mother" designation. Meanwhile "the legions stare / from the ramparts" – this is a sad picture of people killing each other while the army is standing by and watching the events; it could refer as much to the Roman legions of the time of Tacitus as it refers to the British army as a witness of the Troubles in Ulster.

The ancient historian is invited back to the "island of the ocean" to see twentieth-century history in the making. The question Yeats asked in the poem "Easter 1916" ("O when may it suffice?") is answered by a disillusioned Heaney: "nothing will suffice." What seemed tentative for Yeats is a certainty for Heaney sixty years later. The account of the situation has horrific elements:

> Read the inhumed faces
>
> of casualty and victim;
> report us fairly,
> how we slaughter
> for the common good
>
> and shave the heads
> of the notorious,
> how the goddess swallows
> our love and terror.

The closeness of violence compels Heaney to ask the help of a more experienced witness whose detached standpoint is more adequate for the task of reporting. "Report us fairly" is his request and the syntax is somewhat ambiguous – the audience is either not specified or it is the same community whose acts are to be reported. Heaney also gives his short report which is full of parallels between the present and the Iron Age as far as the phenomena are concerned: the

faces of "casualty" and "victim," the "slaughter / for the common good," shaved heads and the "goddess" establish the connection once again between the world of the Ulster Troubles and the civilisation of the Iron Age. This connection, however, is different from the one implied in the early poems as the personal contact present there cannot be retained in this poem and the consolatory elements of the bog in the opening sections are outweighed by the picture of violence at the end.

The idea of the "slaughter / for the common good" could be seen as justification and legitimisation of the violence of the present, however it is rather a rendering of the general understanding of the situation into words without identifying with it, providing even a somewhat ironic overtone by the concept of the "common good." The line "Nothing will suffice" is not only an answer to Yeats's question but an important moment for Heaney himself as it deconstructs the hypothetical element of hope in "The Tollund Man": there is no germination, there is no sainthood involved; there is only pointless and endless violence – totally pointless as the quotation implies. There is no myth here; it is the perspective of the historian that is required to treat the barbaric present.

PRESENT BURIED IN THE PAST: SURFACE AND UNDER THE SURFACE

The idea of the bog as a kind of collective memory is the discovery which facilitates Heaney's use of the bog myth. The layers of the bog correspond to periods in history, which means that the present is just one among these layers. The present is not a unique one, the only distinct feature is its contemporaneity, that it is the "layer" which is immediately accessible for the poet. Immediate accessibility, however, does not necessarily mean the success of interpretation. It is because of the problematic status of the interpretation of the present that Heaney turns towards the special world of the bog and grabs the opportunity of utilising it, as an objective correlative, for his attempt to come to terms with troubled situation of the present.

The findings in the bog offer the basis of similarity between the present and the past. In such a way some of the basic patterns observed in the present can also be seen in the culture of earlier times. The common elements are the violence and the religious element which is in strong connection with the notion of territory. The leading motif is the unintelligibility of the presence of violence, its state of being beyond the rational, connected to faith and beliefs, and in such a

way defying explanation and justification. The past is not seen as an explanation in the rational sense of the word; it is simply a precedent, an example of having happened before, creating the impression as if some aspects of the present had been buried in the past (violence, beliefs, irrationality). In this way the past is something that can be explored and discussed without openly taking sides in the conflict of the present.

On the surface level the bog poems deal with human characters. These figures featuring in the poems can be classified as belonging to two major, and at the same time basic, groups: there are female and male characters. The male ones are the representatives of a horrible though noble status: they are bridegrooms to the goddess, victims of the cult, and as such, Heaney attributes a sublime quality to them. The female characters are different ones as they can be put into two groups. The first group is that of the Bog Queen herself; she is an incarnation of the goddess, Nerthus. The other group consists of two figures: an adulteress and a beheaded girl, though there is no reference to the way how the latter came to be beheaded. The more important representative of this latter group is the girl in "Punishment." She has a different place in the myth, which raised points frequently commented on – the moral dimension of Heaney's reaction has been understood as his taking sides yet he does little more than gives voice to the basic dilemma of the necessity of reaction in situations of conflict.

One of the female types is the goddess whose name is Nerthus in the Northern European cult. She has an equivalent in the cultural context of Ireland: it is a female power referred to as Mother Ireland, Cathleen Ní Houlihán or the Shan Van Vocht.[16] As Nerthus, the goddess of the Danish bog people is a goddess requiring annual sacrifice, Cathleen is also demanding: her "material aspect," the bog is termed "insatiable bride" by Heaney. Whereas Nerthus is pleased by rituals of sacrifice in which people present their offering as a natural and usual constituent of their culture, Cathleen is a different figure, she is more difficult to satisfy: time after time she calls for sacrifice. History proves this, and Yeats's question, "O when may it suffice?," is directed at this phenomenon. This is generally interpreted as the basic idea of Republicanism in the North.

There is a similarity observable in the figures of the bog poems on the level of description, yet at the same time they retain their individuality. The Tollund Man and the Grauballe Man are described in similar terms, though the description of the latter is more detailed. It is the face which sets them apart – it is

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[16] Heaney quoted by Parker, p. 134.

"stained" in the case of the former and "twisted" in the latter. The female figures also show some similarities; this is apparent in the case of the poems "Come to the Bower" and "Bog Queen," where the "heroines" are the incarnations of one and the same person. There is a similarity in terms of description between the "queens" of the bog and the female victims too. Heaney uses the same set of images to create his verbal 'photographs" of the bodies, which means the repetition of patterns. The idea of these repetitions may be seen as an attempt of reinforcement, a deliberate intention to reinforce the concept of kinship, both within the community whose members have been found and also on a larger scale, between the group of human figures and nature. However, to a certain extent, this method results in over-use and tends to weaken the effect of the picture on the reader; Heaney's recognition of this leads to a subversion of the motif in the later poems.

Under the surface level of the people of the bog there are discernible traits of deeper considerations. Though Heaney is interested in the figures themselves, these motifs have a greater significance. As Heaney comments on this, "the gaze which the poems fix upon these Iron Age bodies is haunted by parallels which they evoke with things that were happening in Northern Ireland during the violent days of the 1970s."[17] The bog poems tackle the problems of origin and identity, history, landscape, and the most apparent theme is politics in which all the other elements meet and merge.

It is in the volume *North* that the political strain of Heaney's poetry manifests in an open form. It appears in his poetry earlier than this but there is no such extension of it as in this collection. In the motif of the bog the private and the public dimensions meet: Heaney's private exploration reaches the point where it intersects the sphere of public affairs; his own origin and identity come to be interfused with the history and the landscape of his country. As the bogland was, with Heaney's words, a "genuine obsession" from childhood,[18] it seems almost inevitable that Heaney should have come to the bog as a world to explore.

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[17] Seamus Heaney. *Stepping Stones.* London: Penguin–Faber Audio Books, 1995, side A ("The Tollund Man").
[18] Quoted by Parker, p. 7.

PRESENT BURIED IN THE PAST: IMPLICATIONS AND VALIDITY

The elements that allowed Heaney to use the world of the bog people as a symbol in his interpretation of the contemporary world of Northern Ireland are violence and religion. Heaney gives an account of this common ground in an interview:

> You have a society in the Iron Age where there was ritual blood-letting. You have a society where girls' heads were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centring on the territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises. She appears as Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats's plays; she appears as Mother Ireland. I think that the Republican ethos is a feminine religion, in a way. It seems to me that there are satisfactory imaginative parallels between this religion and time and our own time.[19]

The Troubles in Northern Ireland then may be understood as a kind of "fertility cult" – a forced and rather violent way of bringing about a new existence. The notion of Cathleen Ní Houlihán provides support for this: there is a goddess for Ireland, an artificially preserved pagan trait in the context of Christianity. There is sacrifice involved in the cult of Cathleen too. Questions may arise concerning the necessity of the sacrifice and also about the idea of the sacrifice as a kind of "germinating" the waste state of divided existence, whether it is a kind of resolution of a historical situation which divides and separates two segments of the same people. The question of a separate Northern Irish identity also emerges: whether there is such an identity or it is the case of British versus Irish. This direction leads to the domain of cultural identity and away from the poems themselves, still it is among the implications of the bog motif.

If the bog is accepted as an analogue, then the violence is interpreted as being within the community. This suggests unity, oneness, pointing towards a unified existence. Still, sectarianism brings in elements of difference in the form of different communities – the source of the conflict is externalised by putting it beyond the border. This is rather a political conflict transferred to the domain of religion and culture. Heaney has also come to this point, though only after his move to the Republic: "I always thought of the political problem – maybe because I am not really a political thinker – as being an internal Northern Ireland division.

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[19] Quoted by Morrison, p. 63.

I thought along sectarian lines. Now I think that the genuine political confrontation is between Ireland and Britain."[20]

The world evoked and revived by the bog poems is a world where myth plays an important role, as it is exemplified by the sacrificial ritual itself. Deane points out that "although it is true that the Viking myths do not correspond to Irish experience without some fairly forceful straining, the potency of the analogy between the two was at first thrilling."[21] He is the only one among critics who discovers the development observable in the treatment of the theme, a development which shows a growing uneasiness in providing the mythic dimension to violence of any kind.

Other critics have pointed out the unsatisfactory quality of the myth. Ciaran Carson is one of those who attack Heaney on such a ground. He accuses Heaney of having "become the laureate of violence" through the myth.[22] "[Heaney] seems to be offering his 'understanding' of the situation almost as a consolation ... It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution."[23] This is basically the idea of determinism. Still, Carson's notes do not reflect an awareness of the whole curve of the myth and his interpretation of Heaney's bog motif is based solely on the conclusion of one poem, "Punishment." His reaction to Heaney's poems was probably influenced by a sense of betrayal on learning about Heaney's move to the Republic of Ireland.

Heaney's idea to use the bog motif to address the present situation was based on "satisfactory imaginative parallels" between the two worlds, as he put it.[24] This may be seen as an effort to come to terms with what is at hand, it is simply an act of reporting through ideas of similarity, meanwhile he is trying to remain neutral as much as possible, though according to Carson it is possible only at the price of falsifying reality.[25] Still, the main aspects connecting the two worlds are violence (even barbarity) and the religious element concerning the territory, and these seem to be relevant through the filter of these "imaginative parallels."

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[20] Quoted by Longley, p. 60.

[21] Deane, p. 69.

[22] Quoted by Richard Kirkland, "Paradigms of Possibility: Seamus Heaney." In: Michael Allen, ed. *Seamus Heaney*, p. 260.

[23] Quoted by Longley, p. 45.

[24] Quoted by Morrison, p. 63.

[25] Quoted by Kirkland, p. 260.

Edna Longley refers to Heaney's perception of the Bog People in the volume *North* as being "contracted or 'perfected,'"[26] suggesting the colouring of the imagination at work and acknowledging those imaginative parallels Heaney himself noted. However, in her view he sometimes "asks too much of his myth [...] as if 'archetypes' remain above or below argument."[27] She also points out that there is not much evolution in the myth as suggested by the resemblances between the poems.[28] She appreciates "The Tollund Man" as the real achievement; by going on with the theme "Heaney may have mistaken his initial epiphany for a literal signpost, when it was really a destination, a complete emotional curve that summed up profound feelings and wishes about the situation in Northern Ireland."[29] However, the resemblances between the poems only work on the level of description – the implications show a definite evolution from "The Tollund Man" to "Kinship," and it is this development which creates a complete emotional curve rather than the poem offering the possibility of this.

The bog myth as a representation of the present is a highly personal interpretation, a personal vision, the attempt of Seamus Heaney to address the conflict of the present. The only charge which could be brought up against him is the lack of objectivity in bending the ancient elements of the myth to his liking to make it compatible with the ethos of the Troubles. (Yeats was accused of having done something very similar to this with Celtic mythology.) Still, the myth does not surrender easily. Heaney finds a potent symbol with "The Tollund Man." He gives a chance to the myth after the promise of the poem: he returns to it in *North* to see how it works itself out. However, "poems, like poets, are born and not made," as Frye declared;[30] the direction began in the earlier poem is followed for a time but later, through his own dilemma of responding to the violence, he is compelled to move away from the mythic dimension and to recover the point of view associated with history.

Altogether, the bog myth points out that violence, regardless of whether in the Iron Age or in late twentieth-century Northern Ireland, defies rational explanation and mythicisation. There is a connection with religion, the world of faith, which suggests the dimension of irrationality rather than clear and plausible

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[26] Longley, p. 44.

[27] Longley, p. 47.

[28] Longley, p. 47.

[29] Longley, p. 44.

[30] Northrop Frye. "The Archetypes of Literature." In: David Lodge, ed. *20th Century Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1972, p. 425.

justification. As violence is a concept impossible to interpret in rational terms, the idea may appear that this may have been the ultimate aim of Heaney – to imply that there is no real solution to the problem. The final implication of "Kinship" is this as the objective distance of a writer of history is called for. In such a way Heaney himself can be the very first person to call attention to the limitations of his own myth. This would coincide with what Kiberd declares about Heaney: "the worst that can be said against Heaney always turns out to have been said already of himself by the artist within the poems."[31]

The myth seems to have been closed down with the bog poems of the volume *North* as later poems move in different directions. The only potential connection to the bog myth is the poem entitled "Tollund" in the volume *The Spirit Level*. The poem is the account of a visit to the Danish bog in September 1994. The destination is the bog which yielded one of the ancient victims, the Tollund Man. Just as earlier, there are parallels between the bogland of Denmark and that of Ireland. Still, this poem is markedly different from the early ones. The first striking feature of this poem compared to the others is the use of rhyme. The atmosphere of the poem is peaceful, there is a relaxed contemplation in the elements of the landscape, and at the end the thought of being home emerges with the important notion of being now "free-willed again." The pilgrimage to Aarhus mentioned in "The Tollund Man" has now been made but the unhappiness of the time of nearly a quarter of a century earlier is replaced by the modest celebration of a new beginning.

CONCLUSIONS

Seamus Heaney's discovery of the bog produced a number of poems which aimed to provide a wider Northern European context to the contemporary violence in Northern Ireland. The poems are all parts of a wider framework of a myth while forming a myth themselves, and the construct of a myth embedded in another myth indicates the significance of the motif for Heaney. The concept of the bog offers a number of metaphoric connections; Heaney focuses on the parallels with memory and history.

Heaney's bog myth was not constructed along lines of conscious design from the outset. Rather, the poems reflect the reaction of someone contemplating the scene: the initial impression is that of similarity and this allows him to indulge

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[31] Kiberd, p. 595.

in an imaginative attempt at bringing together the two worlds of Iron Age Jutland and contemporary Northern Ireland. Contemplation, however, involves reflection as well and this compels Heaney to realise the problems of his project. The basis of similarity is violence connected with religion; this is an element irrational enough to defy any attempt at explanation – Heaney's intention to use the bog people as an objective correlative of the contemporary situation has to be reconsidered, and this reconsideration leads to the deconstruction of the myth.

Heaney's bog myth begins its life as an adequate analogue for the situation in twentieth-century Northern Ireland. However, despite his intention the myth begins to incorporate elements which are no longer compatible with his early assumptions of finding the dignity of religious sacrifice in the present conflict, and a dynamic relationship develops between Heaney and his creation. The dynamism of this relationship proves to be strong enough to deter him from his original direction, he is banished from the position of the myth-maker to that of the observer.

Heaney finds a potential analogue in the bog people of Iron Age Denmark for the conflict of the present. His role as a poet puts the responsibility of commenting on the present situation. In order to avoid choosing sides, Heaney examines the bog people of the Iron Age; his intention is to find some kind of explanation. The bog yields bodies, even a culture with a fertility religion but it is reluctant to provide more – just as the bog only releases the excess water, the fundamentals of violence remain buried.

Though the bog yields no explanation for the violence, Heaney recognises the difference between the ritual sacrifice of the Iron Age and the sectarian violence of the twentieth century. The poems brought together under the heading 'climax,' meaning the moments of most extreme tension yielding a new direction, mark an important phase in the development of the myth. However, with a backward look on the whole curve of the motif, the poem preceding the climax, "Bog Queen," carries a significant suggestion: the vegetation having overgrown the scene is an indication of the process in which nature subdues civilisation, and on a metaphoric level, the instinctive and uncontrolled violence replaces the control of civilisation over violence through religious ritual. The opposition between uncontrolled violence and religious ritual is the basic dilemma Heaney discovers and this is already a fundamental issue of humanity. The dilemma remains a dilemma at the end of the sequence, and in this way the bog motif of Seamus Heaney as a means of addressing the conflict of the present is the confession of the poet that there is no rational explanation for the violence.

Ágnes Györke

Imagined Identities

Locating the Subject in the Nation

"Imagined Identities" owes a great deal to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities.*[1] The fact, however, that I substitute identities for communities acts both as a tribute to Anderson's work and as its critique. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community, while I define the identity of the subject "responsible" for imagining the nation as an imagined category. Anderson envisages the nation as a community based on a collective experience, while I concentrate on the subject who imagines this community, questioning the possibility of understanding the nation solely as a shared and collective image.

I argue that the subject is both the agent who imagines the community Anderson is talking about, and a construct imagined by the nation in turn: the nation acts as an image created (imagined) and desired by the subject, and as a power that aims to locate and define him or her. This twofold process of "imagining and being imagined" determines the subject's relationship with the nation and writes his or her identity.

My paper consists of three sections. First I discuss the concept of identity, emphasising the psychological and social processes involved in its construction. In section two I examine the national dimension of identification, which I regard as one particular site of the subject's identity, not as a transcendental determining factor of a community inherited from generation to generation. Finally, I discuss literary works, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, analysing how

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[1] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1991.

these texts contribute to the debate of imagined communities, how they narrate the subject and the nation, and what they tell about the relationship of these two categories.

I IDENTITY AS A BLIND SPOT

The term identity is so frequently used in various disciplines, it seems to mean so many different things that it is almost threatened with becoming empty and ending up as signifying a vague set of notions that range from self-identification to political and cultural identities. In common sense, of course, the term causes no problems: what could be more evident than to identify one thing with another, or to assume that all human beings have identities that differentiate them from each other? Is it not obvious that different nations have different national identities, that we are Hungarians while others are English? Identity is so obvious, it seems to be so "innocent" – as Terry Eagleton would say – that it is surely something else than what it appears to be, it surely means something else than what it "hides."

For defining identity, the starting point might be this discrepancy between what the term seems to mean and what it actually conceals. The fact that the problem of definition is usually overlooked and the meaning of the term is taken for granted implies that identity belongs to the terrain of ideology, as it is defined by Althusser and Eagleton.[2] Following their argument, we cannot consider identity as a self-image, a character trait or as an essentially internal, psychic process. Identity can rather be conceived as a process of defining the subject, as an effort to grasp the boundaries of the subject as it is located in the social context.

Stuart Hall defines identity and approaches the problem of identification on a theoretical basis, enumerating the different uses and applications of the term. In his "Introduction" to *Questions of Cultural Identity*, he combines Lacanian

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[2] "Ideologies are sets of discursive strategies for displacing, recasting or spuriously accounting for the realities which prove embarrassing to a ruling power; and in doing so, they contribute to that power's self-legitimation" (Terry Eagleton. "Ideology." In: Stephan Regan ed. *The Eagleton Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 234) "For Althusser, ideology works primarily at the level of the unconscious; its function is to constitute us as historical subjects equipped for certain tasks in society; and it does this by drawing us into an 'imaginary' relation with the social order which persuades us that we and it are centred on and indispensable to one another" (Eagleton, p. 240).

psychoanalysis with Foucault's theory of the subject to elaborate his long definition of identity. As he writes,

> I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of a particular discourse, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of the discourse, what Stephen Heath, in his path-breaking essay on 'Suture,' called an 'intersection' (1981:106). 'A theory of ideology must begin not from the subject but as an account of suturing effects, the effecting of the join of the subject in structures of meaning.' Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack,' across a division, from the place of the 'Other,' and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them. The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed,' but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than a one-sided process, and that in turn places *identification*, if not identities, firmly on a theoretical agenda.[3]

It is clear that Hall is trying to work out a theory of identity which is both scientific and psychic, offering an answer to the question posed by Avatar Brah: "how is the link between social and psychic reality to be theorized?"[4] Hall combines "the rudimentary levels of psychic identity and the drives" with "the discursive formation and practices that constitute the social field"[5] and emphasises the peculiar combination of the two at the point of what he calls suture, or intersection, or joining together. Obviously, this theory goes back to Foucault's definition of the subject as a discursive practice, the effect (and affect) of particular social and obviously external discourses.

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[3] Stuart Hall. "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" In: Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996, pp. 5–6.

[4] Hall, p. 5.

[5] Hall, p. 7.

According to Foucault, the body of the subject, its gestures, discourses and desires constitute and identify the individual, and the whole process of identification is the result of the mechanisms of power.[6] This mechanism is what Hall calls interpellation or a process of hailing us "into place as the social subjects of a particular discourse."[7] This part of his definition is evident; the problem, as Hall himself acknowledges,[8] starts when he moves to the internal spheres of subjectivity.

To begin with, it is not clear at all what he means by the second component that constitutes identity, that is, "the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken.'"[9] It seems to me that he acknowledges the existence of a kind of internal or psychic dimension of identity throughout his essay,[10] but he still tries to exclude it from his definition, since it might make it impossible to place identification "firmly on the theoretical agenda."[11] It is clear that discursive practices construct subject positions, it is also evident that the subject is chained into a flow of discourse and has to take up positions which are representations, but when Hall returns to the question of subject processes which are invested in these representations, he does not go on to explain what these processes are and how they function.

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[6] As Foucault writes, "[i]l ne faut donc pas, je crois, concevoir l'individu comme une sorte de noyau élémentaire, atome primitif, matière multiple et muette sur laquelle viendrait s'appliquer, contre laquelle viendrait frapper le pouvoir, qui soumettrait les individus ou les briserait. En fait, ce qui fait qu'un corps, des gestes, des discours, des désirs sont identifiés et constitués comme individus, c'est précisément cela l'un des effets premiers du pouvoir; c'est-à-dire que l'individu n'est pas le vis-à-vis du pouvoir, il en est, je crois, l'un des effets premiers. L'individu est un effet du pouvoir et il est en même temps, dans la mesure même où il est un effet, un relais: le pouvoir transite par l'individu qu'il a constitué" (Michel Foucault. "Cours du 14 janvier, 1976." *Dits et écrits*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994, Vol. 3, p. 180).

[7] Hall, p. 5.

[8] "The term identity – which arises precisely at the point of intersection between them [i.e. psychic identity and the discursive formations that constitute the social field] – is thus the site of difficulty. It is worth adding that we are unlikely ever to be able to square up these two constituents as equivalents – the unconscious itself acting as the bar or cut between which makes it 'the site of perpetual postponement deferral of equivalence' (Hall, 1995) but which cannot, for that reason, be given up" (Hall, p. 7).

[9] Hall, p. 6.

[10] Hall, quoting Jacqueline Rose: "the question of identity – how it is constituted and maintained – is therefore the central issue through which psychoanalysis enters the political field" (Hall, p. 6).

[11] Hall, p. 6.

There seems to be a gap where the external and the internal meet and constitute identity, and the result is neither the common sense assumption of the triumph of the internal, nor the reductionist view of an exclusive social dominance over the subject. As Hall claims, the representations of identities "can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them,"[12] and whatever he means by subject processes, it seems that identity is not entirely the result of socially preconditioned subject positions. Or, as Althusser writes, ideology subjects us in a double sense, constructing our subjectivity by persuading us into *internalising* an oppressive Law. Thus, he also regards subjectivity as the effect of an external oppressive Law, but at the same time he uses the phrase "internalising," which suggests the transformation of this law at the exact moment when it exercises its effect. The subject recognises him/herself in external models, and s/he is also constructed by these models, but at the moment of internalising them s/he transforms and changes the external laws instantaneously. The process of internalisation itself creates difference and different identifications, though this difference is not the humanist differentiation of individuals on the basis of their "genuine character traits." Instead, it is rather what Homi K. Bhabha – relying on Derrida's différance – calls difference,[13] which, besides denoting the incommensurable difference of cultures, might also be used to refer to the incommensurable ways of internalising the external.

In order to illustrate the process of internalising the external, we might take Catherine Belsey's theory of perfumes[14] as an example.[15] Belsey shows how the subject is affected by advertisements that "draw on the cultural stereotypes of femininity,"[16] associating a particular smell with a particular type of woman, with the help of codes that are already part of our knowledge. For example, an Estivalia advertisement presents a woman "in a long white dress gazing off to the left. Soft focus photography and the absence of bright lightning connote twilight

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[12] Hall, p. 6.

[13] "The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework. Different cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within different groups, very often set up among and between themselves an *incommensurability*" (Homi K. Bhabha. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha." In: John Rutherford ed. *Identity*. London: Lawrence, 1990, p. 209).

[14] Based on Judith Williamson. *Decoding Advertisements*. London: Marion Boyars, 1978.

[15] Catherine Belsey. *Critical Practice*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 47–52.

[16] Belsey, p. 49.

and romance," and the caption reads: "for daydream believers."[17] The subject becomes a reader and is "invited to construct a miniature narrative, a 'daydream story' which takes account of the mysterious figure, the woman and the setting, to perform the 'daydreaming' endorsed by the advertisement."[18] This is what Belsey calls the construction of the meaning of Estivalia; that is, the impression "that we create an individual daydream out of our own subjectivity," while "in practice the range of probable narratives is constrained by the particular semes juxtaposed in the photograph."[19]

The advertisement constructs the stereotype of the daydreamer in which – seeing the advertisement – the subject recognises itself. However, this recognition is the point when the game of subject and power begins: that particular type of femininity which the advertisement calls daydreamer does not produce a unified or transcendental daydreamer image in every single subject seeing the advertisement, but creates millions of different versions, depending on different internalisations. As Belsey argues, the familiarity of signifiers predetermines the signified that is produced, but it can predetermine only one side, one part of it, and the signified cannot entirely be controlled by it. Every subject creates its own Estivalia until it is not possible to distinguish what the external "semes juxtaposed in the photograph"[20] were, and what was added to them in the process of internalisation. The subject can transform, appropriate, internalise and produce a signified that is a mixture of various processes, and their origins would be difficult to determine. In this way, power cannot totally control its effect; instead, it starts a chain of interrelations between the subject and itself. The result of those interrelations can never be predicted, and it might also turn against power – in this case represented by the advertisement – itself.

How can we grasp identity within this framework? We might try to define it as a blind spot between discourses of power and a desired image or ego ideal "grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization,"[21] or, to put it in another way, as the place where the process of internalising the external takes place. I call it a blind spot because the subject is not aware of the existence of a place like this at all, and because s/he unconsciously corrects, complements this

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[17] Belsey, p. 48.
[18] Belsey, p. 48.
[19] Belsey, pp. 48–9.
[20] Belsey, p. 49.
[21] Hall, p. 3.

spot by external reference models and creates an image of identity, just as the eye is able to overlook the blind spot and create a full picture with the help of the surrounding objects. And just as the eye never supplements the blind spot quite correctly – we cannot see little insects hiding there – the subject is also wrong to assume that this image of identity is an integrated presence, as it appears to be on the surface.

However, this hesitant blind spot, which I am not even able to define adequately, is the place where the process of constructing identity happens. The subject speaks, articulates what s/he thinks identity means or shows, while in the background there is always the blind spot where identification hides, thus concealing its double nature and ambiguous origin. Only what I distinguished as the two component parts that constitute identity might be analysed: either the illusion of what identity means to the subject, or the power discourses that indeed constitute these ego-ideals, with the help of stereotypes, models, and several other means of conditioning the subject. The blind spot, however, where the process of identification effectively happens, is blind because only the result of the conditioning can be seen, never the transformation itself. What the subject conceives as his identity is an illusion, what we analyse as his identity is an external mechanism which is betrayed and challenged by difference. Thus, we might as well restrict our analysis to revealing the game between these different sites, without attempting to uncover entirely what the blind spot hides.

II NATIONAL IDENTITY

If identity is a blind spot, can we consider national identity as a national blind spot? Do we get any closer to the location of the subject by introducing that term? According to Hall, national identity is something like the translation of the traditional concept of identity to the stage of culture, which in itself suggests the essentialising nature of the term and the belief that there is a "collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common."[22] If we accept its common sense meaning, national identity seems to be an even more arbitrary category than the identity of a particular subject; that is, if we imagine members of a nation as a unified presence and categorise them according to what

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[22] Hall, pp. 3-4.

we regard as collective history or collective habits, it is not likely that we shall get beyond common sense generalisations. Thus, national identity might be understood as a strategy of power discourses to define subjects as belonging to the same umbrella category, trying to hold them together by slogans of belonging and sameness. The presence of ideology is so evident in this notion that we might apply Fredric Jameson's definition of ideology – an "imaginary relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history"[23] – to define national identity as well.

However, there is another way to understand national identity, and, in this version, we may regard it as something different from what Hall calls a collective or true self. This is because it would be arbitrary to separate national identity from the identity of the subject, as these notions intersect and overlap with each other: it is difficult to think about national identity as something separate from other types of identifications, or to conceive the identity of a particular subject without being aware of its nationality or location. I would rather regard national identity as a specific terrain, one specific site of the subject's identity – or blind spot – that is constituted through its relation to the nation and other related notions, such as culture and history. Thus, while national identity in its common sense meaning is an ideological construct that exists outside and above subjects, we cannot deny that there is a phenomenon – which I would rather call national identification – that is indeed part of the subject's blind spot.

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In order to understand national identification first we have to discuss the concept of the nation and its relation to the subject. The nation is another category that might be approached from different angles, but which – quite similarly to the subject – always eludes an all-inclusive definition. Ernest Gellner emphasises the two main approaches to the nation, the first a voluntaristic, the second a cultural one. According to the first one, nations can be defined as "the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities";[24] that is, nations can be viewed as constructs created by men's will to nationhood. As for the cultural approach, it takes another extreme, claiming that it is not the will to nationhood that creates nations but a common culture; as Gellner writes, "[t]wo men are of the same

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[23] Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act.* London: Methrum, 1981, p. 30.
[24] Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p. 7.

nation if and only if they *share the same culture,* where culture in turns means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating."[25]

It is Benedict Anderson who gives a definition that eludes both approaches outlined above. As he argues, the nation can only be defined as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[26] His cannot really be called a cultural definition, as no common culture or common myths are mentioned, and the only noun that reminds us that he is talking about a collective phenomenon is community. Neither can his approach be classified as purely voluntaristic, since the will-to nationhood theory seems to be left out; instead of emphasising people's power to create the nation, he uses the passive voice in his definition (imagin*ed* communities), and it does not become clear at all *who* imagines the communities he is talking about. Thus, Anderson is trying to elude the question of the subject, but the passive voice used in his definition implies its existence.[27]

Let us examine Anderson's definition in more detail. He calls the nation a community and argues that it is so because "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[28] He argues that it can only be understood as an imagined community, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[29] He also discusses the implications of the words limited and sovereign,[30] and the only term Anderson does not explain is political, which he leaves out from the title of his book *(Imagined Communities)* as well. Anderson seems to take the meaning of political for granted, as if it were unnecessary to explain an attribute that is so obvious. He

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[25] Gellner, p. 7.

[26] Anderson, p. 6.

[27] Anderson usually uses terms like "the people," "they" or "readers" to refer to the subjects of imagined communities. For instance, discussing the role of print languages, he assumes that these "laid the bases for national consciousness" as "fellow-*readers,* to whom *they* were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined communities" (Anderson, p. 44, emphases added).

[28] Anderson, p. 7.

[29] Anderson, p. 6.

[30] Anderson claims that "the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them [...] has finite, if elastic, boundaries" and that "[i]t is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution was destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical realm" (Anderson, p. 7).

combines terms that are familiar to us from psychology (imagination) and aesthetics (he is talking about the different styles of imagined communities[31]) with political categories, such as sovereign, without giving any suggestions of how a political imagination might be conceived of. He talks about an image that lives in the minds of the members of the nations, thus strongly implying the notion of subjectivity that determines nationhood, but he presents this image elsewhere as a shared national consciousness,[32] which eludes subjectivity again and calls to mind Hall's notion of "subjectless" national identity. The problem with his approach is that he does not differentiate between – what Bhabha calls – the people as "objects of a nationalist pedagogy" and the people as subjects, "the present, living creatures,"[33] who intervene in that pedagogy, and thus he does not separate different imaginings of communities from imagined community, or national consciousness as a myth. In other words, Anderson takes the pedagogical version of the nation for granted and ignores the intrusion of the performative subject into this image. Thus, he ignores the very category of the subject, while he is applying terms from psychology that are based on this phenomenon. His definition is neither voluntaristic, nor cultural, if we follow Gellner's distinction, but it appears to be an unexplained mixture, which touches upon more issues than it is able to deal with.

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Anderson does not exploit fully the implications of the term "imagined," which calls to mind Lacan's Imaginary and Althusser's "imaginary relationship." However, both of these are crucial in outlining the subject's ambivalent relationship with the nation, and for grasping the much-abused concept of national identity.

For Althusser, the imaginary is something that is necessarily false. He combines it with the notion of ideology, and claims that "[w]hat is represented in ideology is [...] not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of these individuals to the real relations in

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[31] "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the *style* in which they are imagined" (Anderson, p. 6).

[32] See Chapter 3, "The Origins of National Consciousness" (Anderson, pp. 37–46).

[33] Homi K. Bhabha. "DissemiNation." In: Homi K. Bhabha ed. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990, p. 297.

which they live."[34] On the other hand, Lacan gives a more subtle definition of the Imaginary, taking an entirely different approach to it. His basic assumption is that between the ages of six and eighteen months – which he calls the mirror stage – "the subject arrives at an apprehension of both its self and the other – indeed, of its self *as* other."[35] In contrast to Althusser, Lacan conceives of this apprehension as something that is imaginary, but *not illusory*.[36] As he argues, the subject sees an image of itself in the mirror, an image that is both ideal (a unified whole) and inaccessible (external). This image, true, remains external to the subject, but this does not mean that it is entirely illusory or non-existent for that reason. Lacan takes a further step and claims that the logic of this identification cannot be restricted to the mirror stage, but it also characterises other types of identifications that the subject afterwards creates. "This form would have to be called the Ideal-I, if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register, in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications [...]."[37] Or, as Coward and Ellis summarise the issue, "the imaginary wholeness which is identified in the mirror, is an identification which is retained as the prototype for all identifications as the child enters cultural and specific social formations as a language using subject."[38] However, the imaginary in this sense is not something that is false and has to be corrected, but something with which the subject lives together in the social sphere.

The reason why I diverged from my argument on national identity was to prove how many different notions Anderson's definition, however unconsciously, implies. His use of imagined indicates that the nation belongs to the terrain of both ideology and psychoanalysis, quite similarly to the notion of identity, as I have discussed it in section one. Anderson's use of imagined implies the bipolarity of this phenomenon, suggesting, on the one hand, that the nation can be understood as an ideological construct that imposes a national identity upon its subjects by creating imaginary relationships, which in reality do not exist. On the other hand, the nation can also be understood as the image in the

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[34] Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy.* London: New Left, 1971, p. 155. Quoted by Rosalind Coward and John Ellis. *Language and Materialism.* London: Routledge, 1977, p. 75.

[35] Kaja Silverman. *The Subject of Semiotics.* New York: Oxford, 1983, p. 157.

[36] "The Imaginary is the order of mirror images identifications. The imaginary is *not* the same as the illusory in that the phantasmatic construction comprising the Imaginary order are highly durable and can have effects in the Real" (Madan Sarup. *Jacques Lacan.* London: Harvester, 1992, p. 187).

[37] Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1977, p. 2.

[38] Coward and Ellis, p. 76.

mirror, total and desired, with which the subject wishes to identify him/herself and create his or her national identification. National identity is not necessarily something entirely external and something that should be regarded as a myth, but is an ambivalent phenomenon that both threatens and includes the subject who belongs to this category. In other words, the subject is aware of the fact that the mirror image of national identity is the projection of him/herself, but s/he knows that this image also threatens him/her as the Other which wants to locate and define him or her. What matters is the angle from which we approach this category.

If the subject conceives of the nation as the image in the mirror, it is no wonder that s/he talks about it in aesthetic terms. Once the nation is seen as something that is ideal and unreachable, the associations this category brings are necessarily taken from an equally high domain. To return to Anderson, we can see that besides distinguishing nations on the basis of the style in which they are imagined, his very definition is an aesthetic category, which suggests that he is not able to talk about the nation "as it is." Indeed, "imagined community" is a metaphor, though quite a blind one; the tenor of the trope is the nation, the ground of comparison is the community of the people, "the many as one," while the vehicle is the hesitant image I discussed, the image of communion that lives in the minds of the members of a nation. Instead of explaining the category of the nation, Anderson displaces it with a metaphor.[39] We can also take an example from Gellner. Similarly to Anderson, he also understands the nation as an invention and considers nationalism as the agent of that invention; as he argues, "nations, as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is reality, for better or worse, and in general an inescapable one."[40] However, what is peculiar here is that when he is talking about the nation, Gellner uses similes like "political destiny" and "God-given way of classifying men," and while talking about nationalism, he uses a metonymy. Nationalism that invents cultures obviously stands for the invention

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[39] Bhabha also refers to the process of distancing and displacing the nation; as he writes, "[i]t is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy – and an apparatus of power – that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation" (Bhabha. "DissemiNation," p. 292).

[40] Gellner, pp. 48–49.

of the people, the invention of the subject, whose very existence is displaced but implied here by this trope; the case is altogether very similar to Anderson's use of passive voice in "imagin*ed* communities."

After discussing the figures that Anderson and Gellner use, I would like to introduce my own. It seems that I am not able to talk about national identity "as it is" either. In my view, national identity can only be understood as a synecdoche. This is because a kind of synecdochic logic works when the subject imagines the whole nation on the basis of a few specimens and a few character traits that s/he knows and experiences. The part stands for – and in the place of – an imagined whole and claims that it represents the whole, which is logically impossible, because it always excludes some other parts and traits. The referent of the subject's utterance wants to be the whole, but in reality it can only be the part, and, for that reason, the imagined whole can never be adequately represented. The imagined whole works according to a logic that is similar to Lacan's imaginary, since the totalised (and distorted) national identity acts as the image with which the subject identifies itself.

The Hungarian national anthem, the *Himnusz*, might be taken as an example to show how the synecdochic logic works in constructing national identity.[41] "*Bal sors* akit régen tép / Hozz rá víg esztendőt, / *Megbűnhődte* már e nép / A multat s jövendőt" (emphases added), runs the text of the anthem, thus creating a totalised image of Hungarian national identity, which is based on the notion of suffering. It is not difficult to realise that this identity is indeed synecdochic, as it is chosen from thousands of possible identities that might have been narrated; besides the Hungarian who is suffering misfortune, the text might have presented many other, different images of Hungarians, like the Hungarian who is flammable, the Hungarian who is Messianic, and so on. It is also interesting to note that only the first stanza of Kölcsey's poem became the popular anthem, which is – except for the last stanza – the darkest stanza in the *Himnusz*. The other stanzas, reflecting on Árpád and Mátyás, do indicate a heroic identity and Messianic belief, which is totally absent from the popular version.

Furthermore, the anthem also underlines the blind-spot nature of national identifications. The identity of the suffering Hungarian is imaginary in the

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[41] Obviously, anthems are texts that create imagined communities, imagining subjects as if they belonged to homogeneous categories like the English or the Hungarians. "Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realisation of the imagined community" (Anderson, p. 145).

Althusserian sense, as it indeed acts as an ideal and official image of the Hungarian that power imposes upon the subject: if I recognise myself as a Hungarian who is suffering misfortune I take a position that is offered by the text, considering Hungarians as a nation that is suffering and locating myself as one of its members. The process is quite similar to Belsey's theory discussed earlier, as accepting this position is not far from accepting that I am a daydreamer for whom Estivalia is the perfect scent.

Nevertheless, as I argued in section one, this official image can never entirely determine the subject. First, we should not forget that the very image of the suffering Hungarian is created by the subject itself: the text involves both the desire of the subject to articulate the community s/he imagines, and the effect of power that shapes this image and its articulation.[42] Second, though a subject – a suffering Hungarian – is imagined by the text, it can never be the same as the subject who internalises this image; I might take the position of the suffering Hungarian, I might even totalise this image as a national characteristic trait, but, to put it in very simple terms, it is very unlikely that I consider the events of 1526 or the atmosphere of the 1820s as the reason for this suffering. What is important here again is the game between the external and internal, and the chains of interrelations between these two. National identity is based on the subject's power to create the imaginary Hungarian and objectify it in the text; it is the result of the text's – and institution's etc. – power to impose it upon the subject who internalises the anthem; and finally, it also depends on the subject's power to transform and displace it, creating its own synecdoche of the suffering Hungarian.

III NARRATING IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Let us turn to literary works and examine how they deal with the issues I have been discussing so far; namely, let us see how Salman Rushdie's novels, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* narrate imagined communities, the subject, and what they tell about the relationship of these categories.

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[42]As Hayden White assumes, the text mixes and mediates our desire for the imaginary with the imperatives of the real, thus narration and narrativity are indeed "the instruments with which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in discourse" (Hayden White. *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation.* Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987, p. 4).

Midnight's Children and *Shame* are both novels of the nation, Timothy Brennan says, distinguishing *Midnight's Children* as the historical novel of British India, and calling *Shame* a modern fairy-tale, the novel of Pakistan.[43] *Midnight's Children* presents two allegories of the nation and attempts to create a kind of collectivism, but this collectivism, on the one hand, is situated in the domain of magic, and, on the other, depends on the subject who is introduced here as the location of this phenomenon. Thus, Saleem's narrative wishes to defend the Andersonian view, but is not able to proclaim this option as a route that could be followed.[44]

At first sight, the basic assumptions of *Midnight's Children* seem to be fairly simple. The narrator of the novel, Saleem Sinai, was born on the 15th of August 1947, right "[o]n the stroke of midnight" (p. 9),[45] simultaneously with the independent Indian nation. The course of his life is set right at the beginning, as it is clear for him that he is destined to become the allegorical figure of the nation; as Saleem says, "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my nation" (p. 9). After his birth, Saleem's photo appears in a newspaper, together with a letter from Nehru, in which the president welcomes Saleem as "the newest bearer of that ancient face of India, which is also eternally young," and, "[w]e shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, *the mirror of our own*" (p. 122, emphasis added). The reflection of Saleem's body in the mirror becomes something like a totalised Lacanian image of India, thus establishing the first allegory of nation in the novel.[46]

Together with the children born at midnight, Saleem founds the Midnight's Children's Conference where he himself takes the position of the

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[43]Timothy Brennan. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. New York: St. Martins, 1989, pp. 119–122.

[44] Some critics mention that Anderson's theory might be compared to the presentation of the nation in *Midnight's Children* (Catherine Cundy. *Salman Rushdie*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996, p. 37; Brennan, p. 4; Stephen Connor. *The English Novel in History 1950–1995*. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 30), though none of them goes on to elaborate on the issue.

[45] Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995. All the parenthesised references to *Midnight's Children* are to this edition.

[46] The allegory is also underlined at the end of the novel when Saleem, after the loss of his magic abilities, perceives himself in a mirror and realises that he is "transformed into a big-headed, top-heavy dwarf" (p. 447); his self-recognition, however, is immediately displaced ("I saw in the mirror of humility a human being to whom history could do no more" [p. 447]) and starts to designate India's dwarfism as its national characteristic trait.

chairman; after discovering that his midnight gift is the ability to summon the children's voices in his head, Saleem starts to act as an all-India radio. What midnight's children create is a peculiar community that models the nation itself, and what we may regard as the second allegory of the nation in the novel. The Midnight's Children's Conference appears as an imagined community par excellence, but if we examine the structure of this community, it reveals the paradoxes that are involved in Anderson's thesis.

In *Midnight's Children,* the stage of the imagined community is the head, Saleem's mind, which indicates both the imaginary nature of the nation, and its ambivalent relationship with the subject. The head itself is quite a complicated metaphor, because, though it is traditionally considered to refer to humanity, logic, knowledge, rationality, and so on, in *Midnight's Children* it seems to be just another hole in the range of different holes.[47] There are several instances in the novel that indicate the head-hole parallel, showing that the voices in Saleem's head occupy a place that has previously been empty. As Saleem once says, when pondering on the role of women in his life, "[w]omen have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central – perhaps the place which they should have filled, *the hole in the centre of me* [...] *was occupied too long by my voices*" (p. 192, emphasis added). The head-as-hole also appears later in the novel, when Saleem compares a Pakistani politician's head to a globe – naturally empty inside – that his sister, the Brass Monkey squashed in the garden: "And out of the last car came a man, with an astonishingly round head, round as a tin globe although unmarked by lines of longitude and latitude, planet headed, he was not labelled like the orb which the Monkey had once squashed" (p. 288). The politician's head is quite similar to the hole in the perforated sheet in chapter one (through which Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz examined his patient and future wife, Naseem) and to the hole in Aadam himself, caused by his loss of religious belief: after hitting his nose on one Kashmiri morning, while attempting to pray, Aadam "resolved never to kiss earth for any god or man. This decision, however, made a *hole* in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history" (p. 10). By becoming the home of imagined communities, the head-as-hole indicates that the nation can be understood as something like a magical act of summoning voices in an empty space. This act, as the novel shows, depends on the subject who is destined to be the location of this phenomenon.

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[47] For the analysis of holes in the novel see Tamás Bényei. *Apokrif iratok: Mágikus realista regényekről.* Debrecen: Kossuth EK, 1997, pp. 243–250.

Let us take a look at Saleem's body as the first allegory of the nation. Besides the head, there are several other parts of the body that appear in *Midnight's Children,* constantly violated, mutilated, similarly to the Indian nation Saleem stands for. The first violation is done to his eyes, which were always open, "too blue to blink" (p. 125), until his mother, together with the ayah, forces them to close. Saleem immediately attributes metaphorical meaning to this action, saying that "I learned the first lesson of my life: nobody can face the world with his eyes open all the time" (p. 125). The mutilation of his body continues with his legs, which remain bowed throughout his life (since he gets on his feet too early), and with his left ear, which becomes defective after his father slaps him on the face (unwilling to believe that Archangels have started to talk to his son). One of his fingers is mutilated, his nose is drained, and the peak of his mutilation is the "stupefying operation" ordered by the Widow, as a result of which "the children of midnight were denied the possibility of reproducing themselves" (p. 439). The mutilations of Saleem's body take place simultaneously with political events, which confirms that Saleem's body is seen as the body of the nation, reflecting India in the mirror.

The two allegories of the nation, however, make the sorting out of to sort out the subject's relationship quite complicated. Saleem is part of the Conference, as *one* of its members, while the *whole Conference* is located in his head, which is only *one* part of his body, whereas the *whole body* stands for the nation, just like the whole Conference. The whole is part of the subject, while the subject is also part of the whole, which suggests that wholeness can never be grasped in its totality, but any attempt of articulating it starts a chain of interrelations that complicates matters as much as Saleem's situation complicates them. Furthermore, we should not forget that what is destined to mirror the whole nation is Saleem's body, while the Conference is located in his head, which is the place of the mind. This suggests that the mind imagines the community, while the body reflects it, as if Saleem's body were something like the Lacanian image of the nation that his mind constructs. In other words, Saleem's narrative suggests that the mind creates the nation of which the body itself is the mirror, as if a reciprocal process of mirroring existed between subject and nation, which is determined by the subject, but which also determines the subject in turn.

The Midnight's Children's Conference shows very well how the subject's image of the nation is determined by external categories. First, it should be observed that though the Conference is located in Saleem's mind, it is not Saleem

who originates it, and it is not him who controls it either. His head is just the terrain where the voices come together, which are not his voices, and his voice is just one among the many; the voices are external, even though they fill up the most internal space of Saleem's head. Even the voice of Shiva (Saleem's greatest rival) is inside Saleem's head, which suggests that at the exact moment of creating the imagined community, Shiva's voice is there, as the minus in the origin, showing that the original has never been complete. It is Saleem who enables the transmission of these voices, and he also has the power to articulate them – i.e., to narrate – but this role casts him only as the medium, not the authentic originator of the imagined community. While it is true that Saleem imagines the community he is talking about, he is also imagined and created by the children's voices, and neither exists on its own. Without the voices Saleem's head is a mere hole, an empty space, but the voices cannot create a community on their own either, as they are summoned together and narrated only by Saleem.

In this way, the subject cannot achieve a real triumph in *Midnight's Children*, as many critics claim.[48] Readers of the novel usually argue that Saleem's narrative itself is a proof of this triumph, since it gives an alternative (individual) approach to the official (external) version of history, thus creating his own story and his own version of events. As Mujeebuddin Syed writes, for instance, "Saleem's attempt at rewriting history and in so doing resisting the state apparatus of ideologies, both in colonial and post-colonial contexts is in fact an attempt at his 'open[ing] the universe a little more' – an assertion at the same time of his own self and self-worth."[49] In my view, while it is true that Saleem's narrative is a threat to the official history, and it might be understood as Bhabha's performative intrusion into the pedagogical version of the nation,[50] this intrusion, far from being a triumph, is itself subject to a critique; besides the external categories that determine the subject's mind, the limits of his actions are also firmly marked out by the novel.

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[48] As Brennan writes, for instance, all of Rushdie's writing is "dedicated to recovering individual expression, and to weakening the power that various politicians as 'salespersons' hold over us" (Brennan, pp. 140–41).

[49] Mujeebuddin Syed. "*Midnight's Children* and Its Indian Con-Texts." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (1994/2) 95–108, p. 103.

[50] Once, when he is talking about midnight's children, Saleem claims that 1001 stands for their miraculous birth, which is "the number of night, of magic, of alternative realities – a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians, for whom all alternative versions of the world are threats" (p. 217).

The situation here is quite similar to the case of the subject created by the Estivalia advertisement and that of the anthem: the subject has the power to imagine and construct, but in turn s/he is also constructed by external means. Saleem is constructing throughout the novel, trying to rearrange history, but the result of his actions is never quite successful. For instance, there is an episode in the novel when Saleem decides to teach his mother – and every unfaithful woman – a lesson by sending a note, compiled of newspaper headlines, to inform Commander Sabarmati of his wife's infidelity: "[f]rom GOAN LIBERATION COMMITTEE LAUNCHES SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN I extracted the letter 'COM'; SPEAKER OF E-PAK ASSEMBLY DECLARED MANIC gave my second syllable, 'MAN'" (p. 259). He continues like this until he glues his note on to a sheet of paper ("Commander Sabarmati, why does your wife go to Colaba Causeway on Sunday morning?" [p. 260]), completing his "first attempt at rearranging history"(p. 260).[51] Saleem, whom newspapers determine and create (he was predicted by newspapers even before his birth[52]), is delighted to see his power turn the newspaper against itself, but his jubilation does not last: the note that he compiled becomes the cause of a scandal that affects the whole country, and it turns against Saleem's own aims. Sabarmati, angered by the letter, wounds his wife and kills her lover, his case reaches the Supreme Court, and the whole affair turns out far from Saleem's original intention to punish infidelity: "Commander Sabarmati was only a puppet; I was the puppet-master, and *the nation performed my play – only I hadn't meant it!*" (p. 262, emphasis added). Saleem rearranges history from the periphery, quite literally, since he compiles his note in the bathroom; he is the agent of the forthcoming events, but he is not able to control those events, just as he is not able to master the voices of the children inside his head. The result of his performative intervention into history does not

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[51] For the analysis of this episode and for rearranging history see David W. Price. "Salman Rushdie's 'Use and Abuse of History' in *Midnight's Children.*" *Ariel* 25.2 (1994) 91–107. Cf.: "By tearing out portions of the newspaper in order to construct his own truth, Saleem wields the Nietzschean knife of critical history" (Price, p. 102).

[52] As for Saleem's birth, we learn about the competition for the status of the midnight's child from newspapers: "When the Bombay edition of the *Times of India*, searching for a catchy human-interest angle to the forthcoming Independence celebrations, announced that it would award a prize to any Bombay mother who could arrange to give birth to a child at the precise instant of the birth of the new nation, Amina Sinai, who had just awoken from a mysterious dream of flypaper, became glued to newsprint" (p. 99). It is also a newspaper that announces Saleem's birth and Nehru's greeting letter (p. 122).

reveal a "truer version of events," as we would expect from a critical historian; it is only an awkward attempt, a disruption, which indicates how interdependent the categories of subjectivity and external power mechanisms are.

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If we look at the other novel I proposed to discuss, *Shame*, the first thing that strikes us is the novel's deliberate attempt to profess the synecdochic nature of the imagined community. Whereas *Midnight's Children* struggles between belief and disbelief, calling the Indian nation an "imaginary" and "mythical land," "a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will" (p. 112), *Shame* condemns Pakistan as a country that is *"insufficiently imagined"* and remains "full of irreconcilable elements," and which might be described as "a failure of the dreaming mind" (p. 87). While Saleem's – however naive – desire in *Midnight's Children* is to create a narrative that is total[53] and to preserve the "multitudes" that are "jostling and shoving inside" (p. 9), *Shame* quite didactically claims that no one is able to give a full picture of reality as "one is obliged to see the world in slices" (p. 116).[54]

What makes the novel interesting is that *Shame* claims this thesis of "seeing the world in slices" on more than one level, and besides the essayistic parts of the book, there are several episodes that comment on imagined communities. Imagined communities, and any kind of collectivism are presented in *Shame* as false, unnatural and arbitrary. For example, the family of the novel's peripheral hero, Omar Khayyam, is a peculiar notion of collectivism, since it consists of three mothers. The three girls, called Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny Shakil, are connected by some secret and magic bond (just like the midnight's children): when one of them gets pregnant, the two others start to display the same symptoms of pregnancy, thus sharing her shame. Nobody ever discovers who the real mother is, not even the child, as this artificial motherhood is sustained throughout Omar's upbringing. As the narrator says, a kind of "communal mind" works behind their behaviour (p. 20), just as behind imagined communities, and it also characterises the microcosm they make out of their house; because of their

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[53] See Bényei, pp. 240–41.
[54] This claim is also the subject of Salman Rushdie. "Imaginary Homelands." *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*. London: Granta, 1991. As he argues, the India presented in *Midnight's Children* is his version and "no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions" (Rushdie. "Imaginary Homelands," p. 10). He claims that what he offers is a "stereoscopic vision [...] in place of 'whole sight'" (Rushdie. "Imaginary Homelands," p. 19).

shame, they resolve to live in isolation, and create something like a glass-house that is based on their sameness. Omar is trapped in this unnatural world for twelve years, until he starts to have nightmares, gives up sleeping, and becomes something like an enchanted prince in an "entropical zone" (p. 30). One night, however, (when he completely loses his way in the labyrinth of their house) he gets to a room through the walls of which he glimpses the outside world for the first time. In this place he catches sight of "the shocking promise of daylight streaming through the *hole* [on the wall]" (p. 32), a hole at the very centre of the artificial microcosm, which upsets the balance of entropy, and questions the authenticity of any imagined community based on the logic of all-exclusive sameness.

Another episode that awakes images of collectivism is the description of Bariamma's empire. A kind of community is created and ruled by the blind Bariamma (great-grandmother of Sufiya, Omar's future wife), which is no less ironically presented than the microcosm of the three sisters. The house is described as a "bloodjungle" (p. 74), in which the paternity of children is no more certain than that of Omar, where two sisters have eleven legitimate sons and three brothers have innumerable illegitimate offspring. The main thing that keeps the family together is the recurrent communal story-telling, the actual basis of imagined communities, since "such stories were the glue that held the clan together, binding generations in webs of whispered secrets" (p. 76). However, the family-tales in Bariamma's empire are not about their heroic past, but they recall "smuggling deals, opium-taking poets, pining virgins, curses, typhoid, bandits, homosexuality, sterility, frigidity, rape" (p. 76), and so on. As the narrator remarks, the stories are not even about the original events, since they are altered in the retellings, but when a final version in created (or imagined) "after that nobody, neither teller nor listener would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text" (p. 76). In Bariamma's imagined community, both the subjects and their stories are confused and altered before they are totalised as sacred texts and sacred members, with the "rite of blood" (p. 77).[55]

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[55] It is interesting to observe that the figures that are connected to collectivism in *Shame* (that is, the three mothers and Bariamma) are all archetypal mother figures. The three mothers are said to be united only by motherhood, while the grandmother Bariamma actually reminds one of Ursula from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The mothers that create imagined communities thus might be seen as creators of the *mother* country. The mother as country parallel is underlined later in the novel as well, when Rani complains that it is her fate "to get mistaken for *people's* mothers" (p. 189, emphasis added).

Unlike *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* sees no real subjects who imagine the nation, and the novel has no central hero either, since Omar can by no means be called a protagonist, and the other characters that appear take an equally peripheral part in the plot. If there is an allegorical figure of the nation in the novel, it is Sufiya Zinobia, the retarded, mentally defective wife of Omar, who is described as "the wrong miracle" (p. 72), similarly to the nation she stands for and whose shame she carries.[56] After her marriage to Omar, Sufiya becomes "his wife and not his wife" (p. 210), as every night Omar replaces her with the willing Shahbanou, the ayah, not wanting to do any damage to Sufiya, who is still a twelve-year-old girl in a woman's body. However, Sufiya is very much aware of what's going on in Omar's room after she is sent to sleep, and knows that "something must be wrong" (p. 215). Finally, the long repressed "things that are locked up in her mind" (p. 213) come to the surface (as Omar's deed was the last straw in the chain of exclusions and repressions that was started with her very birth), and Sufiya starts to take her revenge. First, she rapes and kills four children, and then she becomes the allegorical figure of cruelty that threatens the whole country, killing hundreds of children. What is interesting, however, is the method she uses to commit her crimes: after raping the children, she cuts off their heads, and what later the police finds are just the headless bodies, never the heads themselves. The whole country fears the threat of the "headless murders" (p. 259), and Sufiya, turned into a beast, becomes "the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (p. 263).

In *Midnight's Children*, the head symbolises the location of imagined communities, the empty space where the voices that constitute the nation come together. In *Shame*, however, Sufiya even denies the existence of a hole where the nation might be located. Headlessness dominates, indicating that the very location of imagined communities, the subject is missing here, and what we have instead of it is its absence (head*less*), which is not just an empty but a negative space.

Despite its steady argument against imagined communities, *Shame* is not entirely able to get rid of them. For instance, the notion of shame itself appears as something that is collective: "the shame of any one of us sits on us all and bends our backs" (p. 84), claims the narrator. The novel is full of mirrors that witness and reflect shame, and with "whom" politicians share the shame of their greed for

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[56] The "insufficiently imagined" Pakistan is described as "a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriffbaring immigrants saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then: a miracle that went wrong" (p. 87).

power (p. 62, p. 94). As I argued before, Saleem himself becomes the reflection of the Indian nation, and, in my view, the mirrors in *Shame* also work in a similar logic; Pakistan itself is turned into a "looking-glass" (p. 88), and the "mirrorshiny disgrace" (p. 170) of Sufiya's cruelty might also be seen as the "collective fantasy of a stifled people" (p. 263) turned into their totalised reflection. The novel is true to itself in the sense that many of its mirrors are broken,[57] but it actually forgets that the creation of national identity – that is, identification with the image in the mirror – works in the case of broken mirrors as well, no matter how distorted the image they reflect is. The novel is not able to get rid of the desire to totalise (even though it totalises shame), which is the basis of imagining communities.

As I intended to show in the theoretical sections of my paper, the subject is the central category of imagined communities. However we try to elude his or her existence, s/he intervenes in our discourse, whenever we talk about the nation. Tropes both eliminate and reveal this intervention, underlying the assumption that the subject is subjected to the nation and acts as its creator at one and the same time. The literary texts I discussed emphasise this twofold process of imagining communities yet being imagined by them in turn, making a statement for the subject's performative intervention in the discourse of the nation, yet limiting the scope of his or her actions.

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[57] "I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors, the way Farah Zoroaster saw her face at the bollarded frontier" (p. 69).

Tünde Varga

Text and Interpretation Reconsidered

Intertextuality as the Being of Text:
Contrasting Gadamer and Paul de Man in the Light of Intertextuality

"Text and Interpretation"[1] was a lecture delivered by Gadamer at a Paris confer-
ence in 1981. Derrida was one of the participants, and the following day he posed
three questions to Gadamer in a short paper entitled "Guter Wille zur Macht."
Derrida's contribution called forth a famous (or rather infamous) debate (a so-
called encounter), which provoked many texts and much criticism on both sides.

Seemingly, there is no encounter between the two parties – between
Deconstruction and Hermeneutics. The followers of the Hermeneutical school
often blame Derrida, or the Deconstructive school in general, for not paying
attention to their claims, or for their unwillingness to get involved in an
encounter or dialogue (this seems an anathema in the eyes of hermenutists). Yet,
although Gadamer sticks to the application of "good will" in the dialogical
situation so as to facilitate understanding as the understanding of "the otherness of
the other," Derrida suspects that on the whole "good will" is only an excuse for,

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[1] I will rely on both the original German text and its English translation. "Text and Interpretation"
in English can be found in Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard E. Palmer eds. *Dialogue and
Deconstruction.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 20-51. Citations from the
original German version will rely on the edition: Philippe Forget ed. *Text und Interpretation.*
München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1984, pp. 24–56. All parenthesised references are to these editions.
In the use of terminology I also rely on this English translation of Gadamer's text; due to the
problems of translating terms the English equivalents might seem misleading. I will reflect on a great
many of these problem concepts, yet there might still occur some I have missed, which can cause
disturbance in understanding, and for which I would like to apologise.

or a disguise of the "Will to Power." Therefore, Derrida insists on reading along the "hermeneutics of suspicion" – to use Ricoeur's term – not only in the process of communication, but also in textual exegesis.

The common ground for both schools is their emphasis on the language bound nature of human understanding; Hermeneutics as well as Deconstruction deny the possibility of a transcendental ground that would govern understanding without the encounter of language. Thus, whatever knowledge is gained it is only possible by and through the means of language. Furthermore, due to its human origin language has its limits and boundaries in rendering either our knowledge (that is, epistemology) or our experience of subjectivity possible. The fundamental difference lies beyond the question of humanity's linguistic predicament: it is in how the two schools conceive this predicament in the act of "understanding" (or rather in the impossibility of it).

Gadamer conceives language as the medium of dialogue, as a fundamentally living predicament, which exists only in encounter. For Gadamer optimally every encounter aims at gaining a common plane – in his terms, at "the event of mutual understanding" –, which would be the meaning formed in the flow and exchange of the dialogue.[2] In comparison Derrida sees language as incapable of reaching the "event" of understanding, since it always produces a textual excess that is outside the speakers' intention. Instead of considering language in living dialogue, he proceeds from the written sign predicated by a disruptive absence – the absence of true or authentic meaning that lurks also in any ongoing dialogue. His concept of language culminates in the irreducible undecidability of meaning.

In "Text and Interpretation" Gadamer designates his project on the basis of the Heideggerian critique of subject so as to "conceive the original phenomenon of language in dialogue" (23). It would entail the reorientation of Hermeneutics toward "the art of the living dialogue" (23), and since, according to Gadamer, even Greek dialectics was aware of its "fundamental incompletability," his designated project does not aim at reaching "the ideal of the Absolute," the "ideality" of epistemology, unlike the project of positivist scientology. In opposition with the positivist inheritance, which presupposed the possibility to account exhaustively for experience by detailed scientific analysis, Gadamer wants to enlarge the project of Hermeneutics so as to take the experience of art and

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[2] According to Gadamer "a word exists only in conversation and never exists there as an isolated word, but as the totality of a way of accounting by means of speaking and answering" (H. G. Gadamer. "Destruction and Deconstruction." *Dialogue and Deconstruction,* p. 112).

history into account as well. He does it so because he bases the concept of understanding on Heideggerian grounds, that is fundamentally on the notion of what Heidegger called *Dasein*.

Dasein in Heideggerian philosophy is the cross-section of reality and probability, the way something can exist in the world *in language* through understanding. Therefore in order to apply the notion of *Dasein* Gadamer primarily seeks for the structure of Hermeneutics in art and history, in the world of the probable and not only in the world of scientific certainty. He assumes that the meaning of the work of art can never be fully grasped or accounted for by concepts, thus it leaves a residue of meaning that eludes the totalising project of scientific certainty.

The structure of Hermeneutics for Gadamer is also the structure of understanding; and this structure is that of circularity. The hermeneutical circle shows in Gadamer's words "the structure of Being-in-the-world *[in-der-Welt-Sein]* itself; that is toward overcoming of the subject-object bifurcation, which was the primary thrust of Heidegger's transcendental analysis of Dasein" (23). The notion of understanding and circularity thus jointed leads to the fundamental question of the factic – the question of 'Was ist Sein?' and 'Was meint es?' The answer to these questions can only be formed and reformed in (the circularity of) the dialogical situation, in "living dialogue." In opposition to the self-deceiving certainty of conceptual language, one's engagement in living dialogue can in no way result in absolute objective knowledge or meaning of the world, but in the permanent formation and re-formation of meaning between the participants of the dialogue.

Thus, in this sense, the anthropological aspect of language in conceiving and rendering meaning through words is paramount in Gadamer's Hermeneutics. Anthropological here could be conceived as the human aspect of mutual sense creation through or with the help of words that have no meaning or function outside the dialogue which provides their use, meaning, context, etc., the basic requirement for a sound interaction. The meaning of words formed this way are sound only within the boundaries of the interaction and only in that temporal situation, outside it – which also means their temporal displacement – they lose their agreed-upon sense and call forth renewed interpretation in the dialogical situation. This is how Gadamer aims at grasping the "inexhaustibility of the experience of meaning" (24).

In his views *what is* can never be understood completely, since in Gadamer's own words "Being which can be understood is language," nonetheless, he goes on to claim that: "everything that goes under the name of language always refers beyond that which achieves the status of a proposition" (25). This exemplifies precisely the place of language and epistemology in Hermeneutics: there is nothing but language by which human epistemology is construed, by which knowledge can be achieved, but language can never achieve the complete and final meaning of things. Yet there is this obscure "beyond" that Gadamer eludes whenever he is blamed for being on the side of metaphysics. This "beyond"[3] never ceases to return when he talks about the impossibility of closing the interpretative project, but claims the event of understanding to come about in the living dialogue.

Gadamer with the dialogical conception of language wants to exclude two things in the process of understanding. On the one hand the "the subjectivity of the subject" as his starting point in this process. It is because he claims for the hermeneutical circle or the circularity of understanding a certain "genuine universality," and this does not allow for ultimate subjectivity or the fallacious self-deceit of idealism (e.g. that of the Fichtean self-positing self) neither for the "self-certainty of self-consciousness." Moreover, the dialogical situation of the circularity of understanding requires a kind of "partner," even if it is only the inner voice of the soul as it is in the case of Socrates' *daimon* – no matter how much ideality this notion of the inner dialogue carries, if it is really to be conceived as genuine dialogue, which differs from, e.g., the ideality of the self-positing self.

On the other hand, Gadamer wants to exclude interpretation to be viewed as a method. He claims that: "Interpretation is more than the technique of scientifically interpreting texts" (28). He considers language to be more than what fits into the category of "univocal notation," which was formerly believed achievable in philosophy (for instance the British empiricist tradition endeavoured to purify language from its tropes in order to reach the language of pure scientific

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[3] The expression "beyond" is empathic in the clash of Deconstruction and Hermeneutics. Paul de Man picks it up in order to repudiate any plausibility of the transcendental, since as he states its only capability is to render the recurrence of the same. "Beyond," being the first part of the compound meta-phorein or trans-late – meaning carrying over to another realm (to transcend)– is never capable of carrying anything over or beyond what it posits. See Paul de Man. "Trope and Anthropomorphism in Lyric." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

philosophy that would render objective and true knowledge of the world possible). The universal validity of natural sciences bases itself on a schematisation which is a rational construction, but which at the same time leaves out of sight the "midworld" of language *[Zwischenwelt]* (29). Nevertheless, the query of universality is not something Gadamer can easily do away with. In fact, although having repudiated the universality of scientific knowledge, he himself claims universality for Hermeneutics.

Dallmayr, in his paper, points at the contradiction of Gadamer's such statements as: "the universal claim of hermenutics is undeniable" and that the hermeneutical circle enjoys "true universality" on the one hand, and on the other hand that Gadamer talks about the "limits implicit in the hermeneutical experience of meaning."[4] To put it differently: it is impossible to reconcile hermeneutics' claim to universality and its facing of limits within this universality. Unfortunately Dallmayr makes the mistake of seemingly equating understanding with "hermeneutical consciousness," in his words: "comments of this kind do not prevent Gadamer in the end from reaffirming the ineluctable primacy of understanding" or "hermeneutical consciousness."[5]

In his letter to Dallmayr Gadamer defends himself with stating that there is difference between self-understanding *[Selbstverständnis]*, self-consciousness *[Selbstbewusstsein]* and self-possession *[Selbstbesitz]*. This way, self-understanding – which is not only possible through conversation with the other, but entails the "recognition of oneself in the other"[6] as well – is probably of a higher order, or if not it is at least capable of avoiding the fallacy of logocentric or metaphysical certainty, since, in Gadamer's words: "it is an understanding that always places itself in question."[7]

The chain that the 'being of language' is conceivable only in live conversation is what carries its universality, which, although impossible to prove, is supposed to be accepted within the tradition of Hermeneutics: "The fact that conversation takes place wherever, whenever and with whomever something comes to language – whether it is another person or a thing, a word, or a flame-

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[4] See Fred Dallmayr. "Prelude. Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue." In: *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 84–85.

[5] Dallmayr, p. 85.

[6] H. G. Gadamer. "Letter to Dallmayr." In: *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 95.

[7] Gadamer. "Letter to Dallmayr," p. 95.

signal (Gottfried Benn) – constitutes the universality of the hermeneutical experience."[8]

In fact Gadamer is fairly categorical on the notion of shared or common experience, not only in this case, but – to recall another encounter – in his debate with Derrida.[9] In Gadamer's "Letter to Dallmayr" it appears as the 'experience of understanding,' which is also in close relation to the experience of our limits in the dialogical situation, for not only understanding but also encountering limits is embedded in the dialogical situation. In fact understanding requires a "never-ending dialogue,"[10] primarily because of the limits encountered. Gadamer here denies what Derrida blames him for, that is the possibility of rapport; to put it differently, the possibility of total mutual agreement in the event of understanding. Gadamer cannot accept this, since that would mean the closure of the supposedly never-ending dialogical situation, even if it were only a temporary one. In Gadamer's views the dialogue can never be stopped, for it would jeopardise the fundamental notion of hermeneutical understanding, that is the notion of "understanding-differently" [Andersverstehen]. He states that "where understanding takes place, there is not just an identity. Rather, to *understand* means that one is capable of stepping into the place of the other in order to say what one has there understood and what one has to say in response."[11]

Thus understanding, just like self-understanding, is a never-ending process: it is always in "play" as we are being played, and therefore neither the finality of self-consciousness, nor the closed nature of mutual agreement is acceptable within the framework of the play of the dialogical situation. Moreover, encountering limits, that one might call the disruption of the forgetfulness of language [Sprachvergessenheit], can confront one with the failure of understanding and thus designate the task of re-entering into the text or dialogue and, consequently, of getting involved in the interpretative process.

What manifests itself in the experience of encountering limits is once more the universality of the hermeneutical experience, to quote Gadamer: "The experience of limits that we encounter in our life with others – is it not this alone that conditions our experience and is presupposed in all the common interests bearing us along? Perhaps the experience of a text always includes all that binds us

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[8] Gadamer. "Letter to Dallmayr," p. 95.
[9] H. G. Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida." In: *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 53–58.
[10] Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 57.
[11] Gadamer. "Letter to Dallmayr," p. 96.

together."[12] It is vital to emphasise that universality is not to be equalled with univocal, or final, it is better to be understood as the commonness of the communicative process in language. Gadamer rightly claims that entering into a dialogue – with someone else or with a work of art – does not necessarily lead to self-confirmation, neither to harmonious agreement. Yet he assumes that the work bears such a power that it "deals us a blow *[Stoss]*,"[13] which when accepted *[er nimmt den Stoss an]* then "the poetic text can so touch someone that one ends up 'entering' into it and recognising oneself in it" but at the same time "one must lose oneself in order to find oneself."[14]

Let us suppose that it is not only about the power of the poetic work (which would lead to several problems: for instance in its most to that of essentialism, in its least to that of granting a somewhat privileged place to poetic language, which also draws attention to Gadamer's apparent oscillation about the nature of language in dialogue),[15] but also about dialogue in general, then the "event" of understanding comes about when one finds oneself, that is when one recognises oneself in the "text." For the epistemological gain of bearing the possibility of self-recognition – even if it is not something final that can be taken for granted – the loss of temporally losing oneself is a fair price to pay; thus the event of understanding is a positive experience, moreover for Gadamer it entails even more than sheer self-recognition. At this point however I find Derrida's criticism relevant, though a bit tongue in the cheek: "I am not convinced that we ever really do have this experience that Professor Gadamer describes, of knowing in a dialogue that one has been perfectly understood or experiencing the success of confirmation."[16] And clearly, how does one have the certainty if understanding is always understanding-differently, if it cannot be brought to a halt at any moment in the living dialogue?

There are several concepts that have occurred so far which need to be defined or at least accounted for. This is the task which comprises the project of this paper, as they are all closely related. These concepts are the following: the concept of text, interpretation, language and dialogue, play and the ideality of the art-work.

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[12] Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 57.

[13] Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 57.

[14] Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 57.

[15] It is because the most crucial claims are always about the interpretative dialogue with the work of art which, nevertheless, bears – just to give one example – the 'celestial' power to deliver a "thrust" upon its readers.

[16] Jacques Derrida. "Three questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer." In: *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 54.

ON THE NOTION OF TEXT

Firstly, I will attempt to elucidate the concept of text starting out from "Text and Interpretation." Gadamer notes as a preliminary remark that "only on the basis of the concept of interpretation does the concept of the text come to constitute a central concept in the structure of linguisticality; indeed what characterises the concept of text is that it presents itself only in connection with interpretation and from the point of view of interpretation" (30). Accordingly, the notion of text and the notion of interpretation are so closely intertwined in this view that it is almost impossible to separate them. Nevertheless, Gadamer goes on to claim that "it is often interpretation that first leads to the critical restoration *[Herstellung]* of the text" (31). Thus interpretation is not something that is inseparable from the text, but it is responsible for the existence of the text in the first place. This defines that the text as a hermeneutical notion must be conceived as an intermediate product *[Zwischenprodukt]* and not as an end product as it is viewed from the perspective of grammar and linguistics (this is really the repudiation of Deconstruction as well). Since the intermediate product called text is formed in the midworld *[Zwischenwelt]* of the system of language, it is neither bound to conceptual finiteness.

What is at issue here for Gadamer is "the enigmatic nexus between thinking and speaking" (29), since in opposition with the symbolism of mathematical language – which is supposed to express "reality in propositional statements" (29), and from which the midworld of language is left out – he underscores "the primary mediateness of all access to the world [...] the inavoidability of the linguistic schema of the world" and "the priority of the domain of language" (29) by which "the midworld of language has proven itself to be the true dimension of *that which is given*" (29, emphasis mine). The claim of being enclosed or imprisoned in language is well-known in post-structuralist theory, nevertheless the emphasis on the midworld of language has its importance, inasmuch as the text – as intermediate product – is called forth in this world unseparably from interpretation. On the one hand, interpretation is what "performs the never fully complete mediation between man and world, (and to this extent the fact that we understand something as something *[etwas als etwas]* is the sole actual immediacy and givenness)" (30), on the other hand, according to Gadamer, "the so-called 'given' cannot be separated from interpretation" (30).

Gadamer's remarks on the nature of text, however, are not entirely devoid of contradiction. I hardly find reconcilable statements like: "In this

manner it becomes a 'text'; for that which is said is not simply understood, rather it becomes an object" (32), though elsewhere he states that "we must say that a text is not simply a given object but a phase in the execution of the communicative event *[Verständigungsgeschehen]*" (35). Furthermore, the notion of phase also comes up earlier in connection with understanding: Gadamer claims that text as intermediate product is a "phase in the event of understanding that, as such, certainly includes a definite abstraction, namely, the isolation and reification *[Fixierung]* involved[17] in this very phase" (31).

The reified or fixed form of the event of understanding, as the form of the "object" of the text, definitely contradicts Gadamer's notion of understanding-differently. It is no wonder that he, at the same time, denies that the text is a given object, otherwise it would not be possible to maintain the idea that the text is an intermediate product, which is formed or created in the – dialogical – process of interpretation. If he allowed for the temporal fixation of form when the event of understanding takes place in us, then he would be very close to the deconstructive claim that meaning is only a superimposition on the text, which freezes momentarily the play or *différance* of it into an ideological construct.

Text for Gadamer then, it seems, is the product of interpretation and therefore the two are inseparable, yet it does not provide much information to circumscribe these two terms. All the same, since Gadamer every now and then reaffirms that the text can also be conceived as the "wording *[Wortlaut]* of the text" (33) to which one can return when understanding fails, or elsewhere: it is possible "to refer back to the signs and writing *[Zeichenbestand]*" (33) in case of failure.

It is clear that Gadamer wants to repudiate the structuralist-linguistic method of focusing only on "the punctuation and symbolisation *[Zeichensetzung und Zeichengebung]* that occur" (31) in a text in order to give an account of that text, but it turns out to be impossible to leave out of consideration the "Zeichenbestand" that constitutes the text. He states that "every return to the 'text' [...] refers to that which was originally announced or pronounced and that should be maintained as constituting a meaningful identity" (35). Although the

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[17] The English word "involved" might cause a problem here; it is actually missing from the German original: "eine Phase im Verständigungsgeschehen, die als solche gewiß auch eine bestimme Abstraktion einschließt, nämlich die Isolierung und Fixierung eben dieser Phase" (Forget, p. 341). This means that it is the isolation of the phase that happens and not that this phase involves an isolation.

word "Urkunde" is missing from the English translation it is still clear that the idea of some sort of a 'fixed text' is maintained, which underlies what is announced, that is the "Kunde," which the "Urkunde-Kunde" relationship as probable wordplay conveys. The fact that he wants to keep in play the wording of the text, as well as the notion of its dialogical creation *[Herstellung]*, in the interpretative process, causes difficulties in conceiving what is really meant by *"text."*

ON THE NOTION OF INTERPRETATION

At this point it will probably be more fruitful to turn to the notion of interpretation. First, the word's etymology: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*[18] 'to interpret' means to expound the meaning of something abstruse or mysterious; to render (words, writings, an author, etc.) clear or explicit; to elucidate; to explain. The word, nevertheless, goes back to a Latin origin, *interpretari,* that is, to expound, explain, translate, understand and, in the passive sense, to be explained; in Latin rhetoric the word meant the use of synonyms, the explanation of one word by another. The Latin verb was formed on *interpres:* an agent, an explainer, expounder as well as translator, and also carries in its prefix "inter" the notion of between, the state of being an intermediary, a go-between. In fact Gadamer makes use of the notion of interpretation in the above mentioned senses.

Interpretation is to be viewed as a kind of translation of the text, which is required when some sort of a disturbance is experienced in the process of understanding. Otherwise the forgetfulness of language, in which the text is encased, blocks us from being confronted with our non-understanding, from the tendency to reiterate meaning instead of its re-creation in the interaction with the text. In Gadamer's words: "Only when the process of understanding is disrupted, that is, where understanding will not succeed, are questions asked about the wording of a text, and only then can the reconstruction *[Erstellung]* of the text become a task in its own right" (32). Also, elsewhere he writes: "One can almost say that if one needs to reach back to the wording of the text, that is, to the text as

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[18] J.A. Simpson & E.S.C. Weiner eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989 (2nd edition), Vol. VII, pp. 1131–1132.

such, then this must always be motivated by something *unusual* having arisen in the situation of understanding" (33, emphasis mine).

The situation of writing, nevertheless, differs from the situation of the "immediacy of conversation," this is so, because in conversation, that is, in the specific situation of communication *[Verständigungssituation]*, there is place to avoid misunderstanding by the "obvious correction resident within living conversation" (34). Yet, although it is impossible to provide place for constant correction in writing, there still must be place for the possibility of conversation, and this conversation must also "look forward." So "all that is said is always already directed toward understanding *[Verständigung]* and includes the other in itself" (34), that is, toward the other of the dialogue which supposedly coincides with the reader. The written (or printed) text has to be such that "a 'virtual' horizon of interpretation and understanding must be opened in writing the text itself, one that the reader must fill out" (34).[19]

The task of the interpretation and that of the interpreter lies precisely in this opening up the text, namely, to "achieve such an understanding and to let [and to make] the text speak again *[den fixierten Text wieder sprechen zu lassen]*" (35). Whenever the understanding fails interpretation has to re-start again and fold back on the text, re-enter the text, thus opening up its horizon every now and then and make its sense communicate to us through "Verständnis" (that is

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[19] There are three curiosities in the English translation which entail serious philosophical problems. First, the English translation uses the expression of "printed text," whereas in the German original "schriftliche Fixierung" can be found. Yet, the difference of written and printed text is more intricate a problem. There are several authors who discuss the problem brought about by the appearance of print. See Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy.* London: Methuen, 1982; Eric Havelock. *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present.* New Haven and London, 1986. Guilielmo Cavalio & Roger Chartier. *Historie de la lecture dans le monde occidental.* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1997. Secondly, and this is more decisive here, the word "virtual," which is entirely missing from the German original: "daß sei den anderen erreichen, so muß beim Schreiben, das kein Suchen und Finden die Worte mitteilen kann, gleichsam ein Auslesungs- und Verständnishorizont im Text selbst geöffnet werden, den der Leser auszufüllen hat" (Forger, p. 344). The expression "virtual" already carries a heavy burden of interpretative fixation on the part of the translator in considering the notion of the "horizon of interpretation and understanding." I doubt that Gadamer himself would agree of its being only "virtual," whatever the translator had in mind by using this word. Last, to use "understanding" when originally "Verständigung" is used might be slightly misleading, since it is precisely the surplus involved in "Verständigung" what counts in the concept of understanding in Hermeneutics, namely, the coming to a common plane through agreement and thus forming the meaning of something in the event of understanding. "Verständigung" means not only understanding, but making somebody understood.

understanding in common agreement). This opening up is also the depository of readability: in order to avoid unreadability of the text one must always "look ahead to an understanding of that which is said in the text" (32). As opposed to considering the text as a mere system of signs, one has to count with the meaning of it, with what is *said:* "For in every case, whether of a spoken or written text, the understanding of the text remains dependent upon communicative conditions that, as such, reach beyond the merely codified meaning-content of what is said" (33). Therefore understanding is conditioned by, and dependent on the "good will" of the partners in this communication.

The spoken nature of what is said has crucial importance from the aspect of Gadamer's ultimate aim: He is to prove that the literary art-work bears its "own authenticity" in itself because "in literature we find that *language itself* comes to appearance *[zur Erscheinung]* in a very special way" (42). The notion of communication, and corollary, speech *[Rede]* – put in the foreground – bear importance because Gadamer, in the final analysis, tries to prove plausible that the art-work can speak or communicate itself to us without the mediating function of the interpreter. The art-work "itself has its own value" (51), which shines in its appearance *[scheinen–Erscheinung]* without any necessary translation: "the literary text is not interrupted by the dialogical and intermediary speaking of the interpreter" (46). Due to its own value, the literary text can speak to us if there is the "readiness" (or good will one might say) in us "to be 'all ears' *[ganz Ohr zu sein]*" (49), and since the ambition of the literary work is not to convey a message, but "to become present in its linguistic appearance [...] it must not only be read, it must also be listened to – even if only mostly with our inner ear" (43). This way "the interpreter, who gives his reasons, disappears – and the text speaks" (51). This is what Gadamer calls the "eminent" text and which is qualified as a text capable of "fulfill[ing] its authentic being *[Bestimmung]* as text [...] in textual forms" (37). Furthermore, literature is a text "in the highest degree," so much so that "it seems to originate in itself" (42).[20]

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[20] There are several other statements in Gadamer's paper that reaffirm this metaphysical dignity or height of literary text, e.g. "[a] literary text possesses its own status" (44); "it is in the literary text that the word attains its full self-presence *[Selbstpräsenz]*" (43); "the fullness of meaning first emerge in its total volume" (44). Or in connection with the definition of the eminent text: "Every part of speech, every member, every individual word that submits to the unity of meaning in the sentence, represents in itself also a kind of unity of meaning insofar as through its meaning something meant is evoked" (43). The metaphysic nature of conceiving literature this way resides in two things: on the one hand, these definitions of the literary presuppose some kind of an intellect which would be able

Interpretation has a very special role in connection with this notion of literature, which differs from the interpretation of ordinary text or even from texts that cause "distorted intelligibility," since they "offer resistance and opposition to textualization" (37). Whereas interpretation is normally required in case of non-understanding or disturbed understanding, when it comes to literature interpretation cannot be left aside; it is the ineluctable "part" of the text, in fact it is constitutive part of the text in its ubiquity. Interpretation in literature is not to be conceived as the "mediating discourse of the interpreter" *[Dazwischenrede]*, since its primary function does not lie in its function of translation, but it is to be viewed as "the interpreter's constant co-speaking" (46). Co-speaking is what designates the structure of literary interpretation and understanding as a circular one, and not as the traditional notion of a successive, temporal unfolding. It resembles reading aloud, the process in which "the reader belongs to the text," and which "remains 'dialogical'" (or that of reciting) that is, it is "not merely arranging a series of fragments of meaning one after the other," but "will render a linguistic *gestalt* fully present" (47). In the act of interpretation as co-speaking, understanding occurs as a "sudden reversal that comes like a blow from without" and thus the "disordered fragments of the sentence, the words suddenly crystallise into the unity of a meaning of the whole sentence" (48).

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to recognise these signs that show literature to be literature. Nonetheless, I wonder, just to give one example, who would possibly be so brave as to state whether or not there are superfluous words in a text, not to repeat Derrida's doubt about the event of understanding happening to us. On the other hand, and I recognise this might be a heavier claim, if there is no presupposed intellect involved in the designation of the margins or borders of literature, then to the extent that literature is meant to be "texts that do not disappear in our act of understanding them but stand there confronting our understanding with normative claims and which continually stand before every new way the text can speak" (41) – its borders are self-contained and therefore fall outside of any human control or revision. It means that Gadamer conceives literature to be able to justify itself as literature and the borders between the literary and the non-literary are completely independent of human design or intention. By 'intention' I mean the aspects by which a certain canon is designated. Does Gadamer really think that canons are in force devoid of any policy purely because of their utmost literary value? And if he does so then what explains the re-formation of canons by the change of perspectives? Of course the dialogical situation through which one allows himself to enter the text and through which one receives "a sudden instant of understanding [...] in which the unity of the whole formulation is illuminated" (48) involves human presence to justify that literature is literature; but is it really comprehensible as human, is it still within our control or comprehension?

The notion of sudden reversal with its ineluctable transformative power comes up at several points in Gadamer's oeuvre. In *Truth and Method*[21] it occurs in connection with the concept of play at several places, but this notion can also be traced in the "The Ontological Valence of the Picture." Play, according to Gadamer, is the "mode of being of the art-work," it "fulfils its 'purpose' only if the player loses himself in the play," thus it cannot be considered entirely subjective but carries a certain "ideality" in itself which is revealed by the change the subject experiences in the transformative power of the play. In Gadamer's words:

> the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it, but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant. For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play.[22]

This play, then, in order to achieve its ideality, casts a transformation on the players involved, who lose themselves in the play while they are being played at the same time (*"all playing is being played"*[23]), so that they can experience the effect of the art-work, which in turn attains "genuine completion": "I call this change, in which human play comes to its true consumation in being art. Transformation into structure and total mediation *[Gebilde]*; only through this change does play acquire ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play."[24]

The *"Gebilde"* of the literary work manifests itself in the unity of understanding and meaning, but with the restriction that "something else speaks in the literary text that makes present the changing relationship of sound and meaning" (49). That is, the co-speaking *[Mitrede]*, which constitutes the literary text, and which renders the "whiling" with the text [*Verweilen,* tarrying, lingering] possible, thus manifests its circular structure in time.[25]

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[21] Hans Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method.* Translated by Joel Weinschümer and D.G. Marshall. London: Sheed and Ward, 1993.

[22] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* p. 102.

[23] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* p. 106.

[24] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* p. 106.

[25] I cannot agree with Dallmayr in his view that interpretation is what is superimposed over the play of aesthetics and thus "integrated in, and subordinated to, a quasi-idealist hermeneutics of understanding and self-consciousness" (Dallmayr, p. 80). He claims that as a result of this the text in

TEXTS THAT FALL OUTSIDE THE LITERARY (?)

Interpretation in the realm of literature, as we have seen, is a special case for Gadamer, it is no wonder he wants to differentiate as well as to disclose some types of texts with the interpretative approach applied to them. First, there are texts, called "consumption" or "use text" which disappear in the act of interpretation with the event of understanding. The interpretation of these texts is what Gadamer calls *"Dazwischenrede"* as opposed to the *"Mitrede"* of the literary. Although nothing specific is indicated about the possible recognition of these texts, they presumably gain their property from a lack, that is, these texts which, unlike the literary ones, dissolve in understanding. In Gadamer's words: with "the process of understanding a text tends to captivate and take the reader up into that which the text says, and in this fusion the text drops away" (41), whereas, as it has been already mentioned the literary text does not disappear but "stand[s] there confronting our understanding with normative claims" (41). Literary texts are "only authentically there when they come back into themselves"[26] (41), but it is not true for "ordinary" ones, since to return to the "ordinary" text and to restart the act of interpretation is required only when there is a disturbance in the decoding, when the understanding is disrupted. When this disruption is overcome the text becomes intelligible again and there is no more need for the *"Dazwischenrede"* of interpretation, thus the incomprehensible part of the text dissolves in the explanation, that is, in the event of "fusion of horizons *[Horizontverschmelzung]*." As for "use texts" the function of interpretation is fairly clear-cut, but it makes a stark contrast with the literary: since in the literary the "Mitrede" of interpretation does nor dissolve at any point, as does *"Dazwischenrede"* in the use text.

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its understanding is thrust into the ontological reformulation of aesthetics, since interpretation is always already inscribed in the text, it is the part of the text or the meaning and understanding of it. Yet, he is right in that the sudden reversal, in which the play or art-work attains its ideality as "Gebilde" carries this burden of ontological self-affirmation. Therefore it threatens with the possibility that understanding will bring forth a momentary halt in its supposedly ongoing process at the very moment when its event does happen.

[26] The English translation at this part of the text is an interpretation suggesting more than the German original, which claims that the text is text only in and by itself without the reader or interpreter, that is what we could observe in connection with "play" in which the subjectivity of the player dissolves, he is being played. Here interpretation, interpreter and text are merged into each other without any possibility to separate them.

The question, nevertheless, might arise that if interpretation is a *"Mitrede,"* that is, the constant folding or turning back to the text, then how can the event of understanding happen? How is it possible to be certain at any stage text whose meaning production is interpretation related, that understanding really happens, if the turning back to the text can never be stopped, in other words, when understanding is disrupted at all points? Yet, if the event of understanding cannot be stated with full certainty and corollary the *"Gebilde"* is threatened, then it opens a gap for the possibility of multi-voicedness. In order to avoid the multi-voicedness of the text to the extent which would disfigure or deface its intelligibility, Gadamer tries his best through stating that: "In cases of conflict *[bei Anstößen]* the larger context should decide the issue" (51) as the principle of Hermeneutics. What "larger context" is supposed to be if the text is probably *disrupted* at every point or if the interpretative process is in the act of constant *"Mitrede"* – which forms dialogically any sense whatsoever –, is difficult to see.

I presume Derrida's query about designating the border of context can be related to this point as well. But what casts a heavier weight on the question, is the problem of designating this so called "larger context" in opposition to the other possibilities of understanding or in the "possibility of double under-standing," which Gadamer tellingly derides as "an offence *[Anstoß]*" (50). He also mentions that in the richness of literary texts there is place for other possibilities of meaning but only when – to put it somewhat crudely – kept under control. In Gadamer's words: "In a literary text, the accompanying meanings that go along with a main meaning are certainly what give the language its literary volume, but they are able to do this by virtue of the fact that they are subordinated to the unity of meaning of the discourse and the other meanings are only suggested" (45). He makes this claim in connection with "play on words" *[Wortspiel]*, to which I intend to return later on. Here its interest lies in the fact that although Gadamer clings to the priority of "main meaning" or "larger context" – which, if we keep his theory under the necessary rigours he insists on, is not possible without the formative agreement of the interpretative reading – he admits the existence of other threads for forming understanding, with the restriction that it can occur only in the form of "accompanying meaning."

Yet, this way of viewing the proliferation of meaning does not remove its dangers for, as Gadamer goes on, it bears the power that "shatters the unity of discourse and demands to be understood in a higher relation of reflective meanings" (45). If it is so, then it would be a serious threat to Gadamer's claim on

the unity of understanding, that is, in Gadamer's words that there is "a sudden instant of understanding here in which the unity of the whole formulation is illuminated" (48). This way only understanding as understanding-differently can be kept, however, then in turn, the idea of "main meaning" is thrown into doubt. These ideas nonetheless deal with the realm of the literary only, which, in many respects, is the most intricate field of the notion of textuality. Therefore, it would make some of the issue of interpretation and understanding more controversial, if we went on with the elucidation of Gadamer's notion of texts outside the realm of literature.

All the main exclusions Gadamer makes in order to save his idea of the unique, self-evident literary text are closely related to this issue of the possible multi-voicedness or to the ambiguity of text (except for two other types which are related to the above mentioned "ordinary or use text"). "Ordinary texts," as I have already noticed, disappear with the explanatory "Dazwischenrede" of the interpretation. One typical case of this occurrence is when one is reading back one's notes. But the most typical is when a special disruption of understanding makes the return necessary, which frequently happens in connection with scientific texts, they are special cases, since "scientific communication [ ] presupposes definite conditions of understanding from the outset" (33).[27]

It suggests that there cannot be any problem in the act of deciphering the text as long as the argument follows the plausible route that was previously designated within the boundaries of the given science. Only when the possibility of reiteration dissolves, when the pre-set conditions and boundaries fail to fulfil their task, will the reader return to the text in order to apply the process of interpretation, posing the question "whether or not there is a misunderstanding somewhere"(33). Thus, in connection with scientific communication Gadamer does acknowledge the existence of understanding by ways of formalisation (its likeliness to mathematical computation) that in turn involves the possibility of reiteration.

Now the whole query of the exception of science reverts in Paul de Man's study on Kleist in quite a curious context from our present point of view:

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[27] The German original is: "Das ist etwa die wissenschaftliche Mitteilung, die von vorherein bestimmte Verständigungsbedingungen *voraussetzt*" (Forget, p. 343). It is interesting to note here what he says in connection with the conditions of irony: "Es wird ein tragendes Einverständnis *vorausgezetzt*, wo immer Scherz oder Ironie möglich sein soll" (Forget, p. 348).

At the end of the conversation, K has apparently been convinced and the dialogue seems to end in *harmonious agreement* [my emphasis].[28] The agreement is reached because K, at first confused, has now as C puts it, been "put into possession of all that is needed to a process of *understand* (him)." Persuasion is linked to a process of understanding and what is "understood" is that the increased formalisation of consciousness, as in a machine, far from destroying aesthetic effect, enhances it; consciousness's loss is aesthetic gain.[29]

It can probably be seen that Hermeneutics' so utterly valued agreement in the dialogical process of meaning creation and reaching of understanding also appears here, but from a different aspect. Here, the only possibility of reaching the desired understanding is to enframe consciousness within the boundaries of formalised knowledge, and make its working similar to that of a machine. This machine-like consciousness is supposed to be capable of concluding on an agreement in understanding, without the creative, conscious interpretative dialogue, and render the repeatability of itself possible.

All this is very threatening for Gadamer's concept of understanding, especially for the understanding a literary art-work renders. Yet, he attempts to tame knowledge or understanding, received by formalisation, by thrusting it into the category of scientific communication, thus ridding his higher order of literary works from the burden of formalisation, which thus proves to be only the concern of scientific communication. The question posed by de Man, however, cannot be made redundant: What if the aesthetic effect is or can be due to formalisation? How would it be possible then to differentiate between scientific or literary communication? The systematic rigour by which Gadamer aims to disclose anything that undermines his theory is reminiscent of the struggles of Speech Act Theory to create ever renewed categories in order to keep its system on the conditions of fulfilling a speech act plausible and to designate the group of exception or marginal cases which fall outside its concern. All in all, Gadamer

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[28] The fallacy of the notion of "harmonious agreement" (rapport) is what Derrida criticises Gadamer for and which Gadamer does not accept, nevertheless, Gadamer's reasoning against viewing his notion of understanding this way is not fully satisfactory: "The fact that a poetic text can so touch someone that one ends up 'entering' into and recognising oneself in it, assumes neither harmonious agreement nor self-confirmation," since it is repeating the contradictory double of recognising oneself without self-confirmation. (Gadamer. "Reply to Jacques Derrida," p. 57).

[29] Paul de Man. "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 69.

accepts a mode of understanding which is formalised and bound to reiteration, only this mode is excluded altogether when he turns to literary texts. Yet, the acknowledgement of this mode shakes the borderlines of literary and non-literary understanding. In order to save the uniqueness of literary works within his logic, Gadamer is forced to elaborate on textual forms traditionally considered to fall within the realm of the "literary." These forms, according to Gadamer, are to be taken as exceptions, since with their oscillation they seriously threaten the possible *"Erscheinung"* of the work of art, thus the possibility of arriving at understanding.

Gadamer therefore differentiates a group of text types, which are in "opposition to textuality" in order to "throw into relief what it means for a text to fulfil its authentic being *[Bestimmung]* as text, and to do so in terms of textual forms" (37). These types are the followings: "antitexts" *[Antitexte]*, "pseudotexts" *[Pseudotexte]* and "pretexts" *[Pretexte]*. The other reason for maintaining this group of text types is that Gadamer, in his clinging to the dialogical nature of understanding, seeks for the residue of speech *[Rede]* in every kind of textual form as its underlying basis. Therefore, whenever he faces a textual form or notion which dissolves or dissimulates the original communicative situation or basis up to the point of unmasterability (of the text or of meaning), he tries to disclose it from the order of the literary, that is, from the order of the self-presenting text which, in the final analysis, would be able to speak for itself. His interest lies in the "voice" of the text, so much so that, apart from a succinct comment on the materiality of the written page, he completely ignores the query this materiality involves. To cite Gadamer:

> the dispensability of such punctuation aids, which were not to be found at all in many ancient cultures, confirms how understanding is, nevertheless possible solely through the fixed givenness of the text. The mere sequence of written symbols without punctuation represents communicative abstraction in an extreme form (37).

Therefore, no matter how the text is given (in what form or what mode), it is no more than the minutes of the "original communicative situation," irrespective of any material form whatsoever.[30]

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[30] For further reference see Donald G. Marshall. "Dialogue and Écriture." In: *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

For Gadamer the material aspect of the written text is so dangerous, because it threatens the "underlying nature" of the notion of the voiced text. The unmasterable nature of the written text can be so vast that it can overgrown any "unity of understanding" any "transformation into structure *[Gebilde]*" (49). It entails the threatening possibility that, contrary to what Gadamer wants to see in favour of the sounded, on the one hand, "the unity of understanding and reading is only accomplished in a reading that understands and at that moment leaves behind the linguistic appearance of the text" and on the other hand, that "something else speaks in the literary text that makes present the changing relationship of sound and meaning" (49). Thus, what in fact carries the ever changing relationship of a text is its material nature that resides in the written letter, which very surprisingly chimes with a rather Deconstructive claim. Unfortunately, Gadamer's striving after the sounded repeats the previously observed contradiction related to the *"Zeichenbestand"* of the text – the entity to which one should return when the text fails to speak for itself. Yet, the notion of *"Zeichenbestand"* shifts the attention to the transparently *repressed* material aspect of the text in Gadamer's ultimate claims.

The query of the "disfiguring nature" of the letter – which is one of the most frequent terms of Paul de Man – is closely related to the notion of irony. To be exact, it is impossible to separate the two notions in de Man's terminology. The notion of irony is so crucial for my analysis, because it is what Gadamer discloses from the higher order of the literary under the heading of "antitexts."

In his definition "antitexts" are "forms of discourse that oppose or resist textualization because in them the dominant factor is the situation of interactive speaking in which they take place" (37). Deprived of suggestive tone or gestures the text cannot show univocally that it is not to be taken seriously. In the case of irony there is more in need in order to be decipherable without going astray: it "presupposes a common set of cultural understandings *[gemeinsame Vorverständigung]*" (37).[31] Of course Gadamer operates with a common traditional sense of irony presupposing that in order to be able to conceive irony for what it

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[31] Gadamer notes that "in very early aristocratic society" irony "made a smooth transition into writing" because of the "reigning agreement" (37). I am not certain about what he calls early, but if one considers Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which was written in a culture in which one can assume a "reigning agreement," it is quite surprising that his work was so utterly misunderstood as to be taken as a children's book, instead of a highly ironical criticism of the political era among other topics.

is, a "supporting mutual understanding *[ein tragendes Einverständnis]*" (38) is required.

The idea of "supporting mutual understanding" nonetheless recalls what he claims in connection with scientific communication: "definite conditions of understanding."[32] Though it is more suggestive in the German original: "Verständigungsbedingungen vorausgesetzt – Einverständnis aussetzen," it is suggestive enough in the English translation as well. Both irony and scientific communication are based on the same condition, no matter how far they are from each other. What matters only is the importance of keeping them under control by the avoidance of any probable misunderstanding (not to mention the probability of disseminating their meaning). One might nevertheless pose the question on the nature of this *"vorausgesetzt"* understanding, whether it is

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[32] For a further elaboration of the idea of "definite conditions of understanding" one can take a look at Culler's "Presuppositions and Intertextuality," where he views the notion of intertextuality from a somewhat similar perspective of what Gadamer claims to be the fallacious or "lower level" condition of understanding. According to Culler "in the act of writing or speaking he [the individual] inevitably postulates an intersubjective body of knowledge" (Jonathan Culler. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 101), in other words, he postulates "general expectations, implicit and explicit knowledge which will make his discourse intelligible" (Culler, p. 101). Thus according to Culler the intelligibility of a given discussion relies on a prior body of discourse, and he claims that by observing this he has "posed the problem of intertextuality and asserted the intertextual nature of any construct" (Culler, p. 101). Culler considers intertextuality as an instance which primarily focuses on intelligibility or on meaning. This way, in Culler's notion of it, "'intertextuality' leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to a particular prior text than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture" (Culler, p. 101). These discursive practices are not to be conceived as quotations, but as always already present in a cultural field without traceable origin. Culler's this kind of perception on intertextuality puts into question the status of citations from prior texts in the body of a work similarly to that of Deconstruction and, as I see, to that of Gadamer, (though deconstruction excludes the focusing on meaning or on intelligibility). If intertextuality is an "endless series of anonymous codes and citations" (Culler, p. 111), then an actual citation has no such a crucial role, if it is at all recognisable. He claims that "theories of intertextuality set before us perspectives of unmasterable series, lost origins, endless horizons" so "in order to work with the concept we focus it – but that focusing to some degree, undermine the general concept of intertextuality in whose name we are working" (Culler, p. 111). The intertextuality of a text, in this view, is impossible to master, since there are always only limited approaches to it, either we take intertextuality from the aspect of accounting for how "text create presuppositions and hence pre-texts for themselves" or from the aspect of the "conventions which underlie that discursive activity or space" (Culler, p. 118).

inscribed into the text, constituted in it or falls outside of its realm and thus outside of its communicative force-field.

The problem is that neither aspect is acceptable within Hermeneutics. First, there is no probable outside of the dialogical understanding of textuality, as I have already noted. Second, if irony is inscribed into the text, then it is impossible to get rid of its oscillating code. It is precisely why irony is so dangerous. Faced with nothing but the material text it is impossible to say whether it should be taken seriously or not. Its double code thrusts everything into doubts and its reader to desperation.[33] It is no accident that Gadamer notes that "even the hypothesis that one is dealing with irony may be hard to defend....to interpret something as irony often is nothing but a gesture of despair on the part of the interpreter" (38). In case of non-understanding the communicative-dialogical process of interpretation freezes, thus the return to the text comes to a halt. The interpreter in its desperation fallaciously calls the text ironical with an act of superimposition, but then it is not that he recognises irony as irony, but he mistakenly calls his non-understanding irony. The problem from Gadamer's side probably lies in the presumption that there is in fact a possibility for a situation "when one is able to say the opposite of what one means and still be sure that what one means is understood" (37). For Gadamer this "clearly shows that one is operating in a functioning communicative situation *[Verständigungs-situation]*" (37).

In contrast Paul de Man's staring point is quite the opposite of this. Whereas Hermeneutics is concerned with the meaning of the said or spoken word. Deconstruction considers meaning only as a superimposition over the text,

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[33] The threatening power of irony that lies here is neither fully overcome by Donald G. Marshall's interpretation who claims that "antitextuality" should be conceived as the opposite of "dialogue and writing [...] dialectically intertwined and together set against 'idle talk'" (Marshall, p. 209). According to him "antitexts" are forms of language which are "reduced either to empty talk that simply clings to a momentary social contact or to an unambiguous vehicle of information" (Marshall, p. 209). Thus writing or the written text shows its probably higher rank by not being temporal or momentary, but eternal or at least lasting and at the same time capable of changing its informative function or "meaningful expression" what the ineluctable intertwining of dialogue and writing renders to it. Thus Marshall considers it proven that Derrida is *"ausdekonstriert"* (outdeconstructed) by Gadamer since Gadamer's notion of writing includes both the deconstructive notion of *écriture* and the hermeneutical notion of lived dialogue the always differing "interplay of *aporia* and *euporia*" (Marshall, p. 209) and "the temporality of all insights" (Marshall, p. 209). This way it would be plausible to conceive writing as the vehicle to preserve the spoken word of dialogue without its ultimate fixation or without the separation of its materiality.

that is, a superimposition over the letters of which the text is built up.. Why Gadamer tries to exclude irony from textuality is precisely why de Man builds his theory on it. Both authors are preoccupied with the dangers of irony in the possibility of understanding, therefore the two theories can be juxtaposed by the notion of irony, but as each other's inverse.

IRONY IN THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING

De Man assumes that it is impossible to decide whether the text one is facing is ironical or not (still taking irony in its traditional Aristotelian sense), that is, whether or not it is to be taken seriously. Since there are no definite indicators or signals of what ironical is supposed to be, if "pursued to the end, an ironic temper can dissolve everything, in an infinite chain of solvents. It is not irony but the desire to understand irony that brings such a chain to stop."[34] But de Man does not stop at this point, he puts into question whether anything like understanding can happen at all. His claim is fairly radical in comparison with that of Hermeneutics,' since he uncoils any probable notion of the event of understanding rendered in dialogue, or any possibility of true understanding in dialogue: He assumes that

> if irony is of understanding, no understanding of irony will ever be able to control irony and to stop it [...] and if this is indeed the case that what is at stake in irony is the possibility of understanding, the possibility of reading, the readability of texts, the possibility of deciding on *a* meaning or on a multiple set of meanings or on a controlled polysemy of meanings, then we could see that irony is very dangerous.[35]

De Man in fact is trying to prove this assumption by conceiving irony in a curious way. What makes things even more complicated is, that there are different names he uses in more or less the same sense as he uses irony: they are, for instance, "the disfiguring power of the letter," "zero" or "hypogram." The impossibility of understanding is primarily due to the incompatible double code irony works with. "These two codes" he says "are radically incompatible with each other. They interrupt, they disrupt, each other in such a fundamental way

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[34] Paul de Man. "The Concept of Irony." *Aesthetic Ideologies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 166.
[35] De Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 167.

that this very possibility of disruption represents a threat to all assumption one has about what a text should be."[36] In "The Concept of Irony," de Man actually, provides a definition of irony: "irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes,"[37] and claims that "irony is precisely what makes it impossible ever to achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent" since "it will be interrupted, always be disrupted, always be undone by the ironic dimension which it will necessary contain."[38]

This disruptive parabasis is present at all points of the text and can be at work at any point, and seemingly without the realisation of the reader. The instance of irony seems to be more threatening than Gadamer actually shows it to be, since seen from this perspective, it works as a machine: it is "an implacable determination and a total arbitrariness…which inhabits the words on the level of the play of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines."[39] The disruptive force of irony breaks up the illusion of the fiction which, to my mind, in hermeneutical terms can be seen as the unity of "Gebilde [shaped form, structure]."

Irony should also be conceived as the disruptive power of the letter, which in de Man's terminology culminates in the concept of "materiality." According to de Man the materiality of the letter explodes the seeming stability of the sentence and causes a slippage, which in turn undoes it and thus we lose control over its meaning:

> The disjunction between grammar and meaning, Wort und Satz, is the materiality of the letter, the independence, or the way in which the letter can disrupt the ostensibly stable meaning of a sentence and introduce in it a slippage by means of which that meaning disappears, evanesces, and by means of which all control over that meaning is lost.[40]

In this sense irony is very much like "play on words *[Wortspiel],*" which Gadamer also wants to exclude from the literary, since as he says, the "play on words shatters the unity of discourse and demands to be understood in a higher relation of reflective meanings" (45).

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[36] De Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 169.
[37] De Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 179.
[38] De Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 179.
[39] De Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 181.
[40] Paul de Man. "The Task of the Translator." *Resistance to Theory.* Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 89.

Before this discussion becomes far too theoretical and abstract let us see what this radical conception on materiality means from the aspect of textual exegesis. The materiality of the letter is what one is faced with, which is "a first text in that it is nothing but text, nothing but a textual event, inexplicable in the punctuality as it is there."[41] These lines call attention to de Man's analysis of Baudelaire's two sonnets: "Correspondances" and "Obsession."[42] In de Man's study the textual event is "Correspondances" which is to be conceived similarly to what de Man writes about "authentic language" it is a "mere semiotic entity, open to radical arbitrariness of any sign system and as such capable of circulation, but which as such is profoundly unreliable."[43]

This is what Schlegel calls the origin of all poetry in "Rede über die Mythologie," which, according to him, is nothing but "error, madness and simpleminded stupidity" or "the original chaos of human nature." Baudelaire's "Correspondances" is an instance of this kind of poetic language. Despite having indulged into reading this sonnet, it is still not feasible to reach anything like Gadamer's *"Gebilde"* in the interpretative process. There is no place for anything else, but to create another sonnet as its reading, one like "Obsession." The problem nevertheless is that reading does not takes one closer to the understanding of the sonnet read, but creates another one with an act of superimposing meaning over the textual event of the previous text. In Gasche's view "Correspondances" – that is, the textual event which is to be interpreted – is an "infratext [...] the matricial senseless text, the *hypogram* to which all reading, as understanding, must respond – 'Obsession' being a case in point – reading can add only deception and error. [...] The subject is lured into producing an illuminating interpretation of the infratext that is in truth nothing but a fallacious addition" (emphasis mine).[44] Hypogram condenses both: the *material letter* of the texts, their chaotic, arbitrary senseless nature, which by its circulation capable of disseminating meaning up to its uncontrollability and a *figure* superimposed over that inscription, whose existence, whose here and now is "undeniable as well as totally blank."[45] It is impossible to conceive a moment when the written sign is devoid of its meanings; as Chase notes: "Like the 'moment' in which the position

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[41] Rodolph Gasche. "Adding Oddities." *The Wild Card of Reading.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 227.

[42] See Paul de Man. "Trope and Anthropomorphism in Lyric." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism.*

[43] Paul de Man. "The Concept of Irony," p. 181.

[44] Gasche, p. 228.

[45] Paul de Man. "Hypogram and Inscription." *Diacritics* Vol. 11 (1981), p. 28.

of the sign occur as independent of the position of other signs, the text's materiality cannot be isolated as such or as origin, although it is the condition of possibility of any text."[46]

The idea of the machine-like working of the text results from de Man's notion of the materiality of the letter. The "smallest" constituent of writing is the letter – conceived in a pseudo-formalist or structuralist way – when one is to trace back how words and sentences build up the edifice of writing and that of the text. This idea leads de Man to attribute a curious power to the letter, which would work on its own terms, without the reading mind. Nevertheless, I detect some oscillation in his theory that can be grasped in his notion of prosopopeia. This figure states both: on the one hand, the preliminary attribution of meaning to the text in its materiality, which ultimately brings understanding and signification forth; and, on the other hand, the trope-bound, fallacious nature of any writing or language whatsoever. Without the presumption of the possibility of reading the text into meaning, the workings of prosopopeia cannot start off. But once it has started the fallacy in not to be avoided. The power of letter on its own terms can be maintained only in its relation to a reading mind, which is not in the position to control this power, but which, nonetheless, unconsciously contributes to its workings.

Writing according to de Man thus is what "devour[s] itself as the animal is said to devour sensory things in the knowledge that it is false and misleading. Writing is what makes one forget speech."[47] But speech is not less a negativity than writing, on the contrary: "writing unlike speech and cognition, is what takes us back to this [Hegel's ever forgetting] ever recurring natural consciousness."[48] In contrast the phenomenality of speech as voice is made into meaning, but this meaning can never correspond with either the experience one meant to communicate or with the meaning of the written text, since there is no such thing. It is always the disruptive and dissimulative as well as disseminative power of letters that are transformed into tropes which, in turn, are equally dissimulative. Whenever a meaning is superimposed on a set of words or letters the nominative process is set off. To put it somewhat differently, from the moment of granting names to things (which is entailed by a tropological act:

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[46] Cynthia Chase. "Giving Face to the Name." *Decomposing Figures.* Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 105.
[47] Paul de Man. "Hypogram and Inscription," p. 28.
[48] Paul de Man. "Hypogram and Inscription," p. 28.

catachresis), we grant them properties as well, but these properties are created linguistically and are not *a priori* givens of things thus named.

In de Man's notion of reading or interpreting – and thus understanding – can happen only intertextually, that is, through a hypertext[49] (this concept in Genette's terminology coins the case when the entire field of the text, that is, the hypotext, is covered by the other text, the hypertext, written over it). The hypotext is the text read, which requires a reading in order to be conceived as text. Although Genette notes that the hypertext is not a commentary, it is very difficult to conceive any text covering entirely another not to be a commentary, unless it is an ironical superimposition rendering an endless oscillation between the two texts.

THE INHUMAN ASPECT OF LANGUAGE?
DE MAN AND GADAMER CONTRASTED

At this point de Man's notion of interpretation is not much different from Gadamer's: both conceive the text as an intermediary product, that needs to be read for its realisation. The difference lies in the written status of the text in the two theories. According to Gadamer the literary text

> overcomes not just the abstractness of being written in such a way that the text becomes readable, that is to say, intelligible in its meaning. Rather a literary text possesses its own status. Its linguistic presence as text is such as to demand repetition of the words in the original power of their sound – not in such a way as to reach back to some original speaking of them, however, but rather looking forward a new, ideal speaking (44).

Therefore the text as written form is only an abstraction, but its realisation happens through its reading into intelligibility, into meaning. Gadamer operates along or with the meaning of the text, which, in the final analysis turns out to be the *Gebilde* of the literary text. The *Mit-rede* as the interpretation of the text helps the text to present what it is. Although it presents itself always differently in the actual realisation of the reader, the understanding of the text – even if for an inconceivable moment – still turns into the unity of structure.

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[49] Gerard Genette. "Five Types of Transtextuality, among which Hypertextuality." *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree.* University of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 1–7.

De Man, on the other hand, claims that the only stable thing about a text is its material existence as a bundle of senseless letters. Although reading as interpretation is unavoidable, it does not lead to anything like its "real meaning" or to a *Gebilde*-like understanding. As Gasche says: "One text being given, the other must be present, at least in some fashion. [...] There are always two texts, one needing the other to be read and understood. The reader of a text is thus another text, its specular and inverse other."[50] The compel to read thus cannot result in the understanding of the first text, no mater whether it is taken in Gadamer's sense as the "true" understanding reached by interpretation of the "first text" which covers that text entirely.

Yet, reading is impossible to get rid of, it is present in a double way, and both ways its function is that of interpretation, which results only in a fallacious superimposition. On the one hand, in its epistemological sense, reading can be conceived as the reading of things, (nature, culture or feelings etc.), but in this reading one (Man) cannot get closer to the "true" knowledge of these things as they are; s/he can only supply an interpretation of things according to what they seems to be. Since it happens by the means of language this interpretation cannot even be brought to an end, can never reach a stage when one with full assurance can claim to have been able to reach a final stage of the process. What language is capable of is the catachretic positing of things, which is capable of extreme proliferation. On the other hand, in its exegetic sense reading is to be considered as the event when, having faced an actually written text, it is to be pictured as the superimposition of meaning over a hypogram or hypotext.

The actual understanding of the text, nonetheless, is not categorically denied by de Man. Rather, what he denies is the fact that this understanding can by all means correspond to what the text is. There is understanding, yet what we believe to be our understanding is nothing "like a sudden instant of understanding ...in which the unity of the whole formulation is illuminated" (48), but the superimposition (and as such ideological) of what we thought to be understanding. The impossibility of bringing the interpretative process to a halt lies exactly in this, since at the moment one believes to come to an understanding the system is stopped (it is transformed into a structure), but that structure compels its own reading automatically, thus rendering ever newer texts to be read.

Gadamer, in contrast, sees the interpretative process as the meaning of the text, which, similarly to how it is in de Man's theory, covers the text entirely. In

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[50] Gasche, p. 226.

both cases the first text has an intertextual relation to its interpretation in Genette's sense of the term hypotext. The difference is that in Gadamer's view the two texts – as the text and its interpretation – merges in the *Gebilde* and calls forth the "whiling" *[Verweilen]* at the text, a presence "into which all mediatory discourse must enter" (49), that is, into the "self-presentation of the poetic word itself" (47). In contrast, there is no such a thing as this kind of merging of the two texts, no such thing as the "unity of the structure" in de Man's view, but the ever mistaken ideological superimposition of meaning as understanding.

Whereas Gadamer conceives the possibility of understanding in the possible dialogical situation and, in the final analysis, in the anthropological character of meaning creation, de Man puts the query into a completely different light. He does not deny that different aspects in viewing the world can be achieved or that understanding is altogether impossible. Yet, on the one hand, what he considers "true understanding" as only a possibility of reiterating previously set structures: it is their familiarity rather than their understood meaning which results in conceiving their reference. On the other hand, the possibility of reference is not totally dismissed by de Man: it is only that this reference is univocally determined by the text or immanent in the text what is dismissed. Due to the non-determinable system of figuration, which is at work on the textual inscription of semantic determinants, it is impossible to foresee what meaning the text will generate. The performative act of creating the text, for instance, as inscription, is undeniable but what tropological system language engenders is impossible to foretell. The presumed understanding created in the reading process is only the retrospective superimposition of meaning granted to the text and, as such, it is ideological.

This theory pushes the possibility of understanding to its margins: how can it really be certain that one actually understands. The suspicion arises that if de Man is actually right then either the system is over-formalised in order to be understood or one can only reach ephemeral moments of personal insights, which by definition are fallacious. But Gadamer's query is not much different: it revolves around the same problem, since if Gadamer says understanding is always understanding-differently then how can this understanding be communicated?

In de Man's view the system of signs and language is overdetermined up to a point of despair since "it cannot be determined whether it [significance] is random or determined."[51] At this point his claim is irreconcilable with that of

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[51] Paul de Man. "Hypogram and Inscription," p. 29.

Gadamer's, since it is not the "true understanding" or *"Erscheinung"* of the text which is present in the dialogical situation of understanding as understanding-differently, but exactly the oscillation between those two things that constitute the *Gebilde* Gadamer talks of: the oscillating undecidability in favour of the one over the other.

Their different approaches to the written text is probably due to the inheritance of Platonic idea of writing (which even appears in Gadamer's work). There are two types of writing in this sense: the one which is written into the soul and the other that is written on the paper or papirus or inscribed onto whatever material. Plato refers to the former as: "The sort [of writing] that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner, that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing."[52] The latter in Plato's wording is as follows:

> And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.[53]

Gadamer's theory on writing, in fact, resembles Plato's first concept, since his interest lies in the force of writing which is "written into the soul" (42) has. This might lead us to the Hegelian *Gedächtnis–Erinnerung* problem as it is discussed by de Man in "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetic*," reinforcing the same dichotomy on the notion of texts so far discussed in connection with the two schools. Therefore I take the opportunity to contrast them from another approach.

There is a dichotomy between the inscription of meaningless list of names, which de Man considers writing to be and *Erinnerung*, that is, the writing written into the soul, which is capable of recollection, "the inner gathering and preserving of experience."[54] De Man says that *Erinnerung* functions alongside the metaphorical working of interiorisation: *Erinnerung* is capable of the "understanding of aesthetic beauty as the external manifestation of an ideal content

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[52] Plato. *Phaidros. The Collected Dialogues of Plato.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979, 276a, p. 521.

[53] Plato, 275d–e, p. 520.

[54] Paul de Man. "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*." *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 101.

which is itself an interiorised experience, the recollected emotion of a bygone perception."[55] This allows for the "sensory manifestation *[sinnliches Scheinen]* of art and literature." Nonetheless, the problem is, as de Man points out, that where the "sensory appearance take[s] place" – which is the definition of art "as the material inscription of names"[56] – is precisely the so-called *Gedächtnis:* "Memory for Hegel is the learning by rote of names, or of words considered as the writing down of name, and it can therefore not be separated from the notation, the inscription, or the writing down of these names. In order to remember one is forced to write down what one is likely to forget. The idea, in other words, makes its sensory appearance, in Hegel, as the material inscription of names."[57] Thus when Gadamer talks about the literary text "written into the soul" (42) he renews this tradition that leads from Plato through Hegel to Gadamer and beyond. For him the text or the work of art which is written into the soul can speak for itself, can shine forth *[Erscheinung]* showing its meaning, just like Mörike's lamp, according to his analysis in "Text and Interpretation," can begin to shine by the power of the work of art.

De Man, however, sees this kind of shining as only a fallacious metaphorical recuperation built into or projected onto the material inscription of letters, which Plato derides so much, yet uses as a device for his philosophy to be possible. The same applies to Hegel's *Gedächtnis*, which, in the final analysis, turns out to be the constitutive part of the entire system. "Representation," de Man notes, in the Hegelian theory "is in fact merely an inscription or a system of notations."[58]

The question can be carried forth by examining de Man's (or for that matter also Derrida's and J. H. Miller's) considerations of shining (and its connected notions: light, sun, gold, value). Seen from De Man's perspective the lamp in Mörike's poem can only shine due to the prior figuration of the apostrophe that states it as something capable of action, that is, shining by its own force, as something which has existence derived from and by itself. The initial apostrophe of "you lamp" is what calls forth the final statement of its possible shining which grants the lamp the ability of shining without any outside source of energy on its own terms, by grounding itself in itself. As Gadamer claims it is the

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[55] Paul de Man. "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," p. 101.

[56] Paul de Man. "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," p. 100.

[57] Paul de Man. "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," p. 102.

[58] Paul de Man. "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," p. 103.

ability of the work of art, since it is "something that has developed into its own pattern from within and perhaps to be grasped in further formations [Bildung]" (49).

But what if this shining is not the unconcealedness of the poems being, the *alatheia* or *Vorschein* [appearance or beauty]. It might not be the coming into the light of its essence as the sensory appearance of the idea. For shining is not only a property of value and that of gold, but it is also a property of the sun. But what shines forth with the sun? What is possible to know about the sun apart from its double nature of illuminating and blinding. What content, what value can one be certain of? As the sun in "White Mythology,"[59] "Autobiography as Defacement," "Shelley Disfigured,"[60] or in Miller's "Illustrations"[61] – to mention a few examples – the sun and its light are only the result of the figurality of a figure, a superimposition of a prosopopeia or catachresis over an entity whose properties are completely unknown to us, an attribution, an unknown instance or entity given a set of properties by merely the catachretic naming of it.

De Man's notion of the intertextual relation of two texts seriously question the possibility of ever reaching Gadamer's idea of the *"Gebilde"* of the work of art. Yet, it is not at all certain that he is right. Although both theorists maintain the possibility of closing the interpretative process, their radical difference lies in their concept on the nature of understanding, which, I am afraid will never be reconcilable. Settling the debate between the two schools is an infeasible project, yet their views can open different horizons in approaching a work of art. But it should not be forgotten that, in the final analysis, there might be more similarities than differences in these views.

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[59] Jacques Derrida. "White Mythology." *The Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
[60] Paul de Man. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*.
[61] J. Hillis Miller. *Illustrations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Stephen Prickett

Postmodernism and Irony[1]

What I want to do this afternoon is to explore the difficulty that Postmodernism has got itself into, and to see if we can find some of the reasons for the hole it seems to have sunk itself into. I think it would be too much to suggest a way out but we need at least to ask how this difficulty has arisen. I have a text for us from the well-known Hungarian philosopher, Michael Polányi, who I imagine is not well known to most of you. He was a Hungarian refugee to Britain before World War II, and published all his works in English, but he is, I think, a much-neglected linguistic philosopher. The quotation I have from him is "only undefined terms can have any meaning," and the obvious application of that, of course, is to some of the terms we should be dealing with this afternoon.

Let us start with Romanticism. You will be well aware that this is a hugely problematic term and there has been a vast amount of ink spilt on the subject of how one might start to define Romanticism. I do not intend to join that group now at all, I am going to leave the word loosely defined for the moment, just calling attention to the fact that Lovejoy in his classic essay, which I am sure you all know, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," draws attention to three major forms of Romanticism, which I shall be referring to.

The first is what you call the descendants of the Wartons, that is, a kind of early form of Romanticism from the 1740s in England; the second is English Romanticism proper, the movement often referred to as beginning in 1798; and the third, of course, the German Romantics, the Jena Group, also really dating from 1798 through to the early years of the 19th century. Strictly speaking, it is

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[1] [This paper is the transcript of Prof. Stephen Prickett's lecture delivered at Eötvös Loránd University on 17th May 2001 – the Editor.]

only the third group, the German Romantics, that have any real right to be called Romantics in the normal sense, they after all appropriated the word for themselves.

Postmodernism is an equally difficult and problematic word, it is applied to architecture, it is applied to various forms of art, it is applied to styles of thought in literature, sociology and philosophy. I am going to draw largely on Lyotard's famous essay, "The Postmodern Condition," and that only in a critical rather than in a supportive fashion. There are two other words I want to draw your attention to, which I shall be dealing with in the course of the afternoon, and those are fundamentalism and irony.

By fundamentalism I mean a belief in an all-embracing system of explanation. It was originally coined for Biblical fundamentalists, who believed that the great drama of the Bible provided a total explanation of everything that was happening in the world. In more recent years it has been applied to Marxists and Freudians and, most recently of all, to the strange group of neo-Darwinians, the socio-biologists. You may know Daniel Dennett's extraordinary book called *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, in which he argues that natural selection applies not just to the development of species but to almost everything that has happened on this planet including the development of the solar system. This is Darwinism with a vengeance, a spectacular example of Darwinian fundamentalism, which I do not, of course, accuse Charles Darwin of possessing.

Irony I also want to define because it is a popular term with the Postmodernists in particular. There was never yet a Postmodernist who did not claim to be an ironist in one form or another. And I want to suggest that a great deal of the use of the word 'irony' by Postmodernists is in fact a wrong use. They use it to mean scepticism, a conscious scepticism towards grand narrative and towards a whole range of other possible things. I wish to use the word in the sense used by Socrates and by Kierkegaard; that is, the sense of there being a hidden meaning, or an awareness of a hidden meaning. In some cases, of course, this does not amount to a knowledge of the hidden meaning, only to an awareness of its existence. I was given a wonderful example of hidden meaning the other day. Most of you would be too young to remember the Gulf War, but there may be a few people present who recall it. At the beginning of the Gulf War, Mrs Thatcher phoned George Bush at a time when George Bush was not sure whether he wished to attack Saddam Hussein or not, and the story is: she said "George, this is no time to go wobbly!" Now, this was translated, I gather, in the Hungarian press

as "this is no time for your knees to start shaking with fear." Going wobbly, however, is a more interesting term than that, it also has a sexual connotation, the loss of an erection. This is then an attack directly on George Bush's virility. A female prime minister saying this to a male president, she was, of course, delivering one of the most deadly insults – "where is your virility, man?" or, indeed, worse than that, "you cannot maintain an erection." While the first meaning is absolutely correct, it is incomplete without the second layer of what we might call hidden meaning. This will do as an example of irony in the sense I want to use it.

Let us start with the initial problem of Postmodernism itself because we need to try to explore the difficulty it has got itself into. Lyotard in "The Postmodern Condition" argues that Postmodernism is actually to be defined in terms of its resistance to any kind of grand narrative. I quote from the English translation:

> I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind, making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative such as the dialectics of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. [...] I define Postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it.

This is, I think, a familiar definition to all of you, and what we have to do now is to work through some of the ways in which it works out. What Lyotard has done, of course, is to borrow arguments from other areas of the social sciences; in particular, the ideas of his fellow Frenchman Michel Foucault, whose avowed objective is to expose the way in which modern societies control and discipline their populations through the knowledge claims and practices of the human sciences such as medicine, psychiatry, criminology and sociology. Foucault's self-declared concern is not with the meaning of particular statements but with the often concealed social and intellectual rules that permit them to be made, in the first place. What he is really interested in is the nature and exercise of power, which, incidentally, caused the marvellous repost made by one academic; if Foucault is really interested in the nature and exercise of power, what is he doing in a university – which is a good point not properly answered. But for Foucault truth, so far from having any absolute validity, is simply the effect of a certain kind of language. "Truth," he writes "is a thing of this world, it is produced only

by multiple forms of constraint, and it induces the regular effects of power," or, as Bertrand Russell put it perhaps rather more simply, "truth is what you tell the police."

There is a problem, of course, with Lyotard's ideas of narrative because what he means by narrative is a collection of stories that explain the world, and of course the word we would normally use for this is myth. They reach out from the practical, from the concrete to the here and now and can be extended to cover the unknown as well as the known. In other words, myth is the description not of content but of function. Myths are the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of the disparate and fragmented state of knowledge. It is not their truth but their task which is important. Whether stories of Australian Aboriginal rainbow serpents, Greek gods and heroes, the events of the New Testament, or great national figures like Napoleon, or the conquest of disease by ever advancing medical science, such stories seek to explain the world as it is. A myth is a just so story. For Lyotard this makes them always a delusion. For him, narratives are always plural, they must always be in competition with one another. Not merely the great narratives of the kind provided by Christianity, Darwinism or Freudianism but even the great moral abstractions that have moved mankind in the past, such as justice or truth, are simply the constructs of whatever group exercised social control at the time. They have no validity beyond that.

For us in contemporary, post-industrial, postmodern society, Lyotard insists, the grand narrative has lost its credibility. That word, 'credibility,' is very interesting; what he would like to say, of course, is 'the grand narrative has no truth,' but he cannot say this because truth does not exist. So he has to substitute the word 'credibility' for 'truth' at this stage. But what he has done is simply to replace the idea of a grand narrative by a negative term. To insist that there is no such thing as a grand narrative is simply to insist on yet another grand narrative: there is no such thing as a grand narrative. It is the complete mirror image of the positive grand narrative. To insist that in contemporary, post-industrial, postmodern society all grand narratives have lost credibility is not, of course, an empirical or verifiable statement at all but a metaphysical generalisation. It is yet another myth. To refute it, presumably, all you will have to do is to find somewhere one grand narrative that has survived within a post-industrial, postmodern society, and the thesis would collapse.

One might cite, for example, estimates of the number of fundamentalist Christians in the United States alone, which, we are told, amount to some 48 % of

the population, that is, 110 million people, rather more than twice the entire population of Lyotard's France. But to look for actual examples of this kind is to reveal how logically slippery the generalisation is. I suspect one could point out to Lyotard that 110 million American Biblical fundamentalists, however first-world they might be in their living standards, however much they might be employed in service and communications rather than in manufacturing industry, and however much they might surf on the Internet in their spare time, would not qualify as postmodern, post-industrial people as far as he is concerned. Or, perhaps, to take a rather fairer example, if you were to produce a substantial body of working biologists throughout the world who believe in Darwinism and natural selection as the grand narrative that explains all life on earth as well as the actions and interactions of human societies, I do not think he would be prepared to count them, either. His argument is better seen itself as being the grand narrative rather than any kind of testable hypothesis. We cannot think of an empirical test that would falsify these arguments. It is in fact clearly a myth in that sense. The origins of this are quite interesting, and there are two sets of roots lying behind. It is a kind of a molar rather than a front tooth if you want the image. There are two sets of roots leading to this Postmodern position, and obviously the problem with it is that he is locking himself into a Cretan paradox. You will be familiar with the implications of the following statement: "The statement on this blackboard is false." If it is true, it is false, if it is false, it is true, and there are lots of variations of this. Basically, if there is no such thing as truth, how can you make any statement whatsoever? How do we know that his statement is itself true? Some kind of verification creeps in.

There is a more sophisticated version of this argument, by the way, that has been advanced in the 1990s by the American philosopher Richard Rorty. He says that "language does not refer to the way things are, it only refers to other language." And we might say, well, how do you test this hypothesis? He is quite ruthless about this. He says that Newtonian science succeeded over the previous science not because Newtonian science was shown to describe the world better but because people just stopped thinking in one way and started thinking in another. Yes, but then we might argue there is still a truth proposition behind this. How do we know they actually stopped thinking in one way and started thinking in another? And the answer is that we live in a print culture. We can actually read scientific debates and scientific reports. Somewhere along the line you will root this back into a testable truth claim which is either true or false.

And Rorty is very smart trying to evade this. He says, "my description of the world does not correspond to the way things are because nothing corresponds to the way things are because there is no way things are to which it might correspond." And then he says language is a tool like the pulley block which replaces the rope, though some languages are better than other languages. What is very cunningly done here is to supply two middle level technologies: that rope has to be attached to something at some point, whatever kind of tool you are using. And so you are still caught in this dilemma. At some stage you have to touch earth, at some stage some kind of verifiable statement comes in, otherwise discussion about it is quite impossible. And this is the impasse that Postmodernism and Postmodern linguistic philosophy in particular, which is the area that I am interested in, has got itself into. This is why we have to pursue a historical enquiry: how did intelligent and sane people get themselves into this hole?

To begin with, there is the old debate about whether one can produce models to describe the world. Of course, the whole of the social sciences rests on an analogy with the physical sciences. Just as Newton had apparently explained the motions of the planets and in particular the orbit of Mars by a grand theory, so it was thought there must be some kind of social grand theory that would explain human society in general, and the science of economics in particular. I am referring to Marx's successes or failures in explaining human development, human society and, in particular, economics. In fact it was only about 1959 that the American sociologist C. Wright Mills first declared that grand theory was impossible and the social sciences should abandon grand theory. Lyotard has substituted 'grand narratives' for 'grand theory' but he is following along in a tradition of what one might call revisionist social sciences from the mid-years of the 19th century. The term Postmodernist itself has a rather different origin. It seems first to have been used by the English historian Arnold Toynbee to postulate a moment in Christian history. He was trying to formulate a version of Christian history, an unredeemed future moment which history and humanity came to, and he wrote a very engaging, very interesting essay on what he conceived as Postmodernism; only, unfortunately, he produced this essay in August 1939, which was not perhaps the best moment for suggesting that the Christian millennium was just around the corner. This particular theory was somewhat lost in the events of that autumn, and Lyotard was able to take the term and dust it off and reuse it at that stage.

But the paradox into which Lyotard and Rorty and the other Postmodernists have got themselves is also to be explained by a second root which goes back into German Romanticism. Now I do not propose to trace out this course in detail, it has been brilliantly done in two recent books. One is the well-known work by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe called *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism,* which was an extremely influential book of the 1980s. But I think Andrew Bowie's book of 1997 called *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* also traces this, and I regard both these books as being excellent. So the trail is well marked and I do not intend to follow that trail in any great detail. What I am interested in is the way in which German Romanticism was taken up. Now we have to note a number of interesting factors.

The first is the natural unwillingness of any post-Second World War Frenchmen to admit any kind of intellectual debt to the Germans. This is one reason for covering one's tracks but there are also some very interesting sidelines to this general point. Many of you will know Roland Barthes's famous essay "The Death of the Author." Of course, it will not have avoided your notice that the death of the author is also the death of your sources in academic work. In other words, if you are taking an idea from Friedrich Schlegel or Schleiermacher, for instance, the death of the author means also that the way you adopt Schlegel's or Schleiermacher's ideas can equally blot out the origins of your ideas because it is all how you read it not how the author intended it. This is obviously understood as a complete counterbalance to the intentionalist fallacy. Reading is everything. Roland Barthes goes on to clarify a point here. He describes the reading activity where you destroy the author as an anti-theological and revolutionary activity. Both these words are worth looking at. Notice that I do not know what the exact connotations of the word 'revolutionary' are in Hungarian but I know the Western European position on this, of course.

The word 'revolution' was originally a word from Newtonian physics, and it was used as such throughout a great deal of the 18th century. Things go round and come back again; what goes around, comes around, as they say. Revolution was the movement of the planets and when applied as a very self-conscious metaphor to politics, it was intended to indicate a return to the starting point. Thus the English Civil War and the victory of the Cromwellians in the 1640s was the Great Rebellion, whereas the Restoration of the monarchy and Charles II finally came to its culmination in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

When I first came across this term, I imagined in my innocence that it meant nobody had been killed, but that is not what it means at all. The Glorious Revolution is a return to the monarchy. Politics have come back to their starting point. This is not true, of course, but you know we are not concerned with truth; I will be sufficiently postmodern about that. It is what and how people conceived of politics. In 1789, when what we now call the French Revolution broke out, it was hailed by Richard Price, a leading British dissenter as a revolution in the sense that the French were returning to their ancient Gallic liberties. What exactly these ancient Gallic liberties were we need not to enquire, but Price actually preached a famous sermon on this to the English Revolutionary Society. The English Revolutionary Society was a body of staid middle-class people of academic inclination, the last people to turn out on the streets to riot and cause a revolution. And he hailed the French Revolution as being a restoration of liberty, and as you may know Burke read this report with indignation and wrote his bitterly ironic title "Reflections on the Revolution in France." His message is: what revolution? There has not been a restoration of anything. This is nothing but a tyranny. Within five years, by the mid-years of the 1790s, Burke's irony had been completely lost, a new meaning had been attached to the word 'revolution,' meaning a clean break with the past in politics, the overthrowing of a previous regime, and so on. Of course, the word 'revolution' in France, especially for someone of Lyotard or Foucault's political affiliations, has strongly positive connotations. This is the moment, the overthrow of the *ancien régime,* and thus a revolutionary activity by a post-structuralist or a postmodernist is the overthrowing of the *ancien régime* of thought; that is, of people who believe in some notion of truth and verification and some other preposterous ideas like those.

The second point is that Barthes described the reading activity as being an 'anti-theological' activity. The first application of this is to French anticlericalism and an antifundamentalist move, if you like, that the church would seek to explain the world by some kind of simplistic fundamentalism, but he is overthrowing and destroying that kind of truth embodied in the original text by saying, "I will read this, as the author is dead. I can read this in whatever way I like." One is removing any need to be dominated by the text. But there is a second thing behind this, as well, and that is the fact that one of his targets and his chief sources is Friedrich Schleiermacher, who, of course, was a theologian. And so once again one is covering one's German sources and accusing them of being

atheological and having a theological bias at the same time. This is very largely true, of course. The Jena Romantics, the Schlegels, Fichte, Novalis, Schelling, Hölderlin, Tieck, Schleiermacher, etc., are quite an extended and rather fluid group associated with the University of Jena and the last years of the 18th century. It was a hotbed, at least, of theological debate. Most of them, including Friedrich Schlegel, who later became a Catholic, were strongly anticlerical or antireligious. Indeed, they were a rather wild bunch. I seem to remember that Dorothea Michaelis, pregnant by one lover, escaped across the battle lines of the Napoleonic war to another lover... Then I think she married Schelling; there is a crossover anyway. There is a strong theological debate running through this. In 1798, Schleiermacher is at work in his flat in Berlin when there is a great knocking on the door; it is his birthday, and the rest of the Jena Group have all come to Berlin especially for this and burst in, waving bottles of champagne and shouting surprise party. He is caught up in this party, and during the party he is challenged as a Christian to give some kind of theological account of his own position. And what you get is the *Reden,* the speeches on religion, which is one of the great classic restatements of Christianity for modern times.

But at the same time there is another element here that is equally powerful in Schleiermacher and the Schlegels' thought and that is English literature. It will not have escaped your notice that when Goethe wishes to invoke the novels of the past in a novel like *Wilhelm Meister,* which is often hailed as being the first great German novel, he rapidly goes through Fielding, Richardson, Oliver Goldsmith, etc. All his references in *Wilhelm Meister* are in fact to English literature. Of course, the central character is Hamlet and the whole plot; Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the kind of theme piece with 18th-century English novels built into it. It is a most extraordinary work. Goethe is not unique in this. Friedrich Schlegel is constantly taking ideas from English literature. He denounces the English in passing as being a nation of shopkeepers and very myopic and having no aesthetic taste, etc. But the fact is that they are desperately short of German literature to use at this stage. They have only got *Wilhelm Meister,* and look where that comes from. So it is actually very difficult. A further point: Schleiermacher's first two publications were Fawcett's London sermons and the sermons of Hugh Blair who was the first professor of English at Edinburgh University, and indeed the first professor of English really anywhere in the world. He had a third contract for a third book. It was in German this time. (The other two were translations from the English into the German.) A

Berlin publisher, a man called Steiner, wrote to him in 1798 and invited him to contribute to the *Jahrbuch* of Geographical Discoveries that he had been publishing for eighteen years. Every year he brought out this great compendium of what had been discovered during the year. This is the great age of the exploration of the Pacific. Remember, Captain Cook is sailing around the world, his three voyages, La Peruis, Bourgonville; all these people are bringing back amazing reports. There is a huge amount of discoveries going on. Schleiermacher undertook to write a history of Australia. (Incidentally, this is a piece of my own research – does anybody here happen to know about Schleiermacher's *History of Australia?* I am rather proud of myself on this.) There had been five books written on Australia at this stage, and Schleiermacher had read all five. He also even read the reports of the parliamentary debates about the colonisation of Australia. The five books altogether are about so thick; the book Schleiermacher produced on this is about so thick.[2] It was in two volumes, and when Steiner saw it he said my God... He got it in August and had to produce it by November, it was basically a Christmas *Jahrbuch,* and he just panicked, he said I cannot do this. And here is a research project, only two pages. We have the correspondence about this book, we know how big it was, but the book itself has not apparently survived, only two pages of it survive. But the two pages we have concern the Aborigines, and Collins' account of the state of the Australian Aborigines. Collins says it has been remarked by a well-known divine (i.e. Hugh Blair, once again; remember that Schleiermacher had already translated Blair, as we know very well) that no people anywhere in the world have no sense of God. Everybody has a religion of some kind. Collins says that there is one great exception to this, the Australian Aborigines who have no idea of God at all. Well, it is a little difficult to verify that statement, since the Europeans, i.e. the British, subsequently wiped out that particular tribe altogether, but there is actually no reason to believe this is true at all. (But 'truth,' once again, does not enter into our arguments.) Schleiermacher believed this to be true and so he was sitting down to write his *History of Australia* at the same time as he was writing his *Speeches on Religion* in the autumn of 1798 and at the same time as Friedrich Schlegel has moved in with him to encourage him to write his *Defence of Christianity*. I am personally convinced Schleiermacher was actually addressing the state of Australian Aborigines. He wanted an Ur-humanity that had no religious background whatsoever. He was therefore seeking

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[2] [The author demonstrated the thickness of the actual publications with his fingers, showing how much larger Schleiermacher's work was than all the rest – the Editor.]

to include the Aborigines as being human. There was quite a debate going on as to whether they were human or not, and there was another school of thought that said they were not human and therefore could be exterminated quite easily. Schleiermacher belonged to the group that thought they were human and were children of God just as he was.

But all this is by a way of background to this ferment of ideas coming up in German Romanticism. Now I am just going to read you one very famous statement which is Friedrich Schlegel's idea of Romantic poetry:

> Romantic poetry is progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric; it tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical. [...] It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. [...] It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards, but also from without inwards; capable in that it organises – for everything that seeks a wholeness in its effects – the parts along similar lines, so that it opens up a perspective upon an infinitely increasing classicism. [...] Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analysed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterise its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognises as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic.

> (*Athenaeum Fragment* 116)

Well, I will not give you a full analysis of that extraordinary passage but I want to pick out certain elements of it which are interesting. The first is the extraordinary ambiguity between what is prescriptive and what is descriptive. That is, Schlegel is constantly 'swithering' between what is apparently description and saying what should be. It is very unclear in the end whether he is describing

an actual state of affairs or how he thinks things ought to be and, of course, this is quite deliberate because part of the aims of the German Romantic movement is to create a German national literature, and if you get in before anybody has ever written on this stuff, you can lay down the rules by which it should be formed, whereas the English have the distinctive disadvantage of coming in afterwards and trying to work out what has happened. The second, and it is closely associated with this, is the Aristotelian idea of entelechy, the idea of becoming, that Romanticism is not something that has happened or is on the ground; it is in the process of becoming all the time. The third is the fact that it is vague and unspecific, it is very hard to know what it is actually saying apart from making grandiose claims. And the fourth is a certain degree of self-conscious irony; he is mocking a statement and almost mocking himself while making it. This is a typical form of German Romantic irony in particular. Presumably you do not need me to trace these elements back towards Postmodernism. All of them can be found in Postmodernism – the point that one is never clear whether they are actually prescribing a state of affairs or describing how they think things should be; the idea of some vast intellectual movement that is not actually rooted in facts but is somehow coming about even as we talk about it; and then the wonderful word 'irony,' which means you do not have to hold me down to any particular statement because I was only being ironic when I made it, which enables one to put the statement forward and then retreat from it tactically, which is a very good way of debating. Friedrich Schlegel says "Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos." Well, exactly so. For him it was the inseparable twin of the fragment which, of course, was practised in the Athenaeum.

Like any other word, however, 'irony' comes to us with its own history of meaning. We cannot quite take it as it stands, for much of the history of European literary criticism, of course, was dominated not by Socrates and Plato, which is where irony originally comes from, but by Aristotle. Irony was seen primarily as a characteristic of a particular personality type, the *eiron*, the person who deliberately deprecates himself – and this is not a compliment for Aristotle at all. It is the kind of nasty trick that Socrates would get up to. Though it is better than the impostor who pretends to be more than he is, the *eiron* is more effective than dangerous because he is pretending to be less than he is. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle is quite clear that both of these are devious and rather disreputable tricks of rhetoric. When in the *Poetics* he writes specifically on critical theory, Aristotle

is, of course, much more interested in anagnorisis (recognition), and the relationship between anagnorisis and peripeteia (reversal) than in the actual ironies that lie behind both these techniques. Among the German Romantics, as you all know, irony rapidly became a key critical term. For Fichte, Friedrich Schlegel, Tieck and Solger it constituted latitude, a way of thinking that better than any other represented the intense self-consciousness of the modern world. For them, as for the ancient Greeks, however, irony was an essentially negative attitude, an implicit assertion of the superiority of the ironist over his fellows, often a cult of effective boredom and by implication typified, for instance, by Byron's narrative persona in *Don Juan*. Kierkegaard has a rather neat put-down on this, he says that "both Germany and France at this time have far too many such ironists and no longer need to be initiated in their secrets of boredom by some English lord, a travelling member of a spleen-club" and that "a few of the young breed of young Germany and young France would long ago have been dead of boredom if their respective governments had not been paternal enough to give them something to think about by having them arrested," which is rather a nice comment and, of course, it points to a huge revival in the study of irony. Kierkegaard's own PhD thesis, submitted in 1841, was, as you know, on the concept of irony with special reference to Socrates, and again one of Schleiermacher's earliest books is a study of Plato. So there is a growing interest in Platonic and Socratic irony coming through. But this definition of irony is very different from that practice still by the German Romantics. Tennemann, Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and not least Kierkegaard's own Danish tutor, Paul-Martin Müller all take part in this debate. In a curious twist of the Aristotelian idea that irony was first and foremost a character trait, in German Romanticism irony was the inescapable product of a long historical process of human subjectivity. Socrates was important not least because he was one of the first in human history to assert his subjective individuality. Solger, the aesthetician and chief exponent of Romantic irony believed that by his own time irony had become the inevitable condition of every artistic work. The Romantic artist demonstrates his own superiority to his work by deliberately destroying or interrupting the illusion created by it. Schlegel himself wanted to use his own novel, Lucinda, as an example of this. The problem is that it was virtually unread, and denounced as obscene by the few people who had read it. I have to say I read it with deep disappointment looking for the obscene bits, as I could not find them at all. But Byron's *Don Juan* again would be better known to a Danish, German

or English audience at this stage, and there is a continually running dialogue between the author and the reader in *Don Juan*. It is easy to see how all these elements, as I say, figure in Postmodernism, but one can see that the idea of irony is now emerging in a very different form from the way in which I described it. Kierkegaard reverses German Romanticism by insisting that irony is an awareness of something hidden. But the only thing that is hidden in German Romantic irony is the author who keeps popping up in effect and saying, you know, "Hi, it's me and this is an illusion, this is a work of art."

I need, in turn, to go back yet another stage. Behind German Romanticism and these attitudes is yet another figure in the early stages of English Romanticism that we need to look at now, Robert Lowth, who was a young fellow of an Oxford College in 1741, when it became necessary to elect the new professor of poetry. As you probably know the professor of poetry in Oxford is a curious appointment that goes right back to the 17th century. What you do is normally to elect a practising poet. (Matthew Arnold was a professor of poetry, for example, and James Fenton more recently.) But it seems very clear from the records that in May 1741 they had forgotten to elect a professor of poetry altogether. You can imagine this situation; it was a Friday afternoon, and the fellows of the College responsible had gathered and they realised that the first lecture was due to be given on Monday morning but there was nobody to give it, at which point they turned on the youngest fellow in the room, the 29-year-old Robert Lowth and said more or less "Robert, this is your big chance! How would you like to do it?" Poor Lowth was faced with the job of producing these lectures. Normally, you are given a year to prepare them, and he was given one weekend. If one reads his lectures *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* with this in mind, they become extremely funny. The first lecture is that classic lecture which every single university teacher in this room will recognise, the lecture in which you have to stand up for an hour and you have nothing whatsoever to say and you have to try to get through an hour and there really is very little content. You have to read steadily into the lectures before he catches fire and warms his theme and he begins to produce some quite fascinating ideas about the sacred poetry of the Hebrews and about the way in which Hebrew verse works. I have no time to go into all of them here but three are important, I think.

The first is the fact that there is no difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose, that is, Hebrew verse works by the principle of parallelism and repetition. There is no rhyme, there is no scansion, there is no

assonance, there is no rhythm. I believe many of you have tried to translate European poetry, and as you know it is almost an impossible task. You can never do more than produce a kind of inaccurate prose version of it. Hebrew poetry, argued Hugh Blair, actually drawing explicitly on Lowth, is unique because God wrote it more or less in prose, so that it could be translated into every particular language and thus it has a kind of universal applicability. The second point is that everyday things have a kind of sublime reach because the poets of ancient Israel were the prophets at the same time, but they also used the common language of the people; they did not belong to a courtly circle. The third and most interesting point I want to take up is the idea of parallelism and that it has a kind of built-in irony to it (Lowth actually distinguishes eight different forms of parallelism); that is, by producing comparisons, it automatically suggests hidden meaning. Thus, one of the examples Lowth himself took is David and Saul returning from battle with the Philistines. Both of them are greeted by choruses of women singing "Saul hath slain his thousands," and the antiphonal choir replies "And David his ten thousands." You do not need to be a political genius, if your name is Saul, to see that there is trouble coming in that one, talk about hidden meaning that makes Mrs Thatcher's attack on George Bush seem mild by comparison with what Saul will do. He tries to go out and have David assassinated immediately. At the heart of this idea of parallelism there is an ironic reading of the Bible.

I want to return to the question with which we began; that is, what went wrong, how did Postmodernism land itself in the position of the Cretan paradox, of being involved in the denial of any connection between words and truth and any kind of verification principle. There are a number of caveats one has to make here. The first is that the history of ideas is a history of misunderstanding ideas, this is Lovejoy's famous point. There is no such thing as an accurate transmission of ideas, we are constantly misreading, misapplying, misunderstanding ideas, especially translated ideas, especially ideas from other cultures, and we can see that at work. The second is a shift in the meaning of the word 'irony.' What started off as a sense of hidden meaning is translated through German Romanticism into an idea of the superiority of the ironist; in other words, a kind of almost self-flattering affectation. We can see this very strongly; for instance, Foucault has the answer. It is all about power, "we alone" understand this, the whole idea of discourse is to conceal the real centres of power, and so Postmodern irony depends much less, I think, on an idea of hidden meaning than on a relationship between author and reader in almost the way they deny. The third point I want

to mention is (to return to my idea of fundamentalism) that Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard and, indeed, Richard Rorty and some of the recent developments of this idea in the US, all claim to be ironists. Rorty claims, for instance, using a feminine persona, that at this stage she is a liberal ironist. But what he means by this is a scepticism. He does not mean a hidden meaning. In the line I have been arguing here I want to argue that all of them are fundamentalists. All of them are people with a universal, mythical explanation. It has to be a universal explanation because they are denying the possibility of any kind of gaps, any kind of holes in the system; there is no way you can reach through to reality. And so, finally, we come to the point where I would want to argue that he who claims to explain everything explains nothing. Thank you very much.

American Literature in Hungary

Lehel Vadon: *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig* [A Bibliography of American Literature and Literary Scholarship in Hungarian Periodicals to 1990] (Eger, 1997)

To call this bibliography monumental is a rather modest form of acknowledging its significance. The culmination of a decade and a half of painstaking research, it will be an indispensable tool for Hungarian students of American literature for many years to come, and will assure Professor Vadon a lasting place in the history of the profession in Hungary. But as the short dedicatory passage tells us, it was Professor László Országh who first planted the idea in his young student's mind, thus the book is also a tribute to the memory of that great scholar and teacher.

The vast amount of material that it contains is easily accessible: the pattern in which the various bibliographical items are arranged rests on a few well-considered principles of classification. The authors who in one way or another have been brought to the notice of the Hungarian reader – and one would be hard put to it to find a single one that has escaped the editor's attention – follow each other in alphabetical order.

There are two basic classes for the material: *elsődleges források* (primary sources) and *másodlagos források* (secondary sources), which then are subdivided, according to the nature of the writings listed, into *versek / elbeszélések / drámák / regényrészletek* (poems / stories / plays / excerpts from novels), etc. and *tanulmányok / esszék / cikkek* (studies / essays / articles), etc., respectively. This section takes up by far the greatest part of the book. But what follows it is, in its way, no less impressive: there is, in the final quarter of the book, a bibliography of unidentified authors, of folk poetry, as well as a general bibliography of a large range of fields from prose fiction to miscellaneous writings; thrown in for good measure, there is also a list of bibliographies concerned with aspects of the reception of American literature in Hungary.

The true test of a bibliography is in its use. The random checks I have made suggest that Professor Vadon's work will pass that test with flying colours. But usability, in the conventional sense, is not all there is to a book of this kind. If it is good, a bibliography can also be a most exciting read, and can set the mind in motion as effectively as any essay or study built on a sustained argument. Like so many other products of the intellect, bibliographies, by virtue of their contents, bear the imprint of history – in a way, they are history itself.

What I mean is that the reception of American literature in this country, as reflected by the book under review, may also be read as a running commentary on (1) the history of Hungary, (2) the history of the United States, (3) the history of Hungarian-American relations and (4) the history of Hungarian literature – to name only a few of the subtexts within it. The changing fortunes of Howard Fast (before and after 1956), the relative popularity of Albert Maltz even in the fifties are inseparable from the political climate of the times; by the same token, the explosion in the translation of American literature from the sixties onwards has at least as much to do with the growth of the economic and political might of the United States as with the quality of the writing itself. The many translations of works by unidentified authors in much of the nineteenth century speak more eloquently of the state of Hungarian letters and of the international position of America than volumes of scholarship do. The list of the periodicals and newspapers that Professor Vadon has perused in the course of his research is not without lessons of this kind either. For most of us, *Nagyvilág* is the monthly periodical that for decades has performed a vital service for the reading public in this country by making the literature of other nations available in our language; I knew that there had been periodicals of

that name earlier in the twentieth century, but I had no idea that the first *Nagyvilág* had seen the light of day as early as 1880, to be followed by six more attempts to sell literature under this attractive heading. (Small comfort to the latest bearer of the name struggling heroically to get out of the desperate financial straits it has been in for quite some time now.) On top of all that, we are also given a bibliography – not listed as such in the Contents, but tucked away in the Preface – of books by Hungarians dealing with this or that aspect of American literature.

As far as I can judge, all relevant publications – with the exception of daily papers where numbers had to be kept within manageable limits – have been examined. For all that, there are a few more, unexplored at present, which may be worth delving into. As reviews of the films of novels or plays do not lie beyond the horizons of this book, and as *Film, Színház, Muzsika* is not ignored, the omission of *Mozgó Képek* (prominent in the 1980s) is an inexcusable oversight. (Let me treat myself to a little self-promotion: in view of the fact that it carried two short essays of mine, one on Doctorow and another on Henry James, in 1985 and 1988, that now defunct monthly might have raised the number of items in this book from 9920 to at least 9922.)

Making suggestions like this may, under the circumstances, amount to bad manners. From circumstantial evidence I gather that Professor Vadon has done most of the job single-handed, and no broadening of the scope seems practicable without the creation of a proper research team, which, in the final analysis, is a question of money. In persuading the people who hold the purse strings, this very book is a most powerful argument, and one can only hope that it will be used for the purpose. The material, to the best of my knowledge, is computerised, and a sequel is planned to bring (and, hopefully, also to keep) the bibliography up to date. This, among other things, means that it will be comparatively easy to make changes and corrections in any new edition. It is on these assumptions that I raise the queries that follow.

(1) What exactly are the criteria by which the credentials of an author can be authenticated as American? Professor Vadon is more generous in this respect than the immigration laws of the United States were in the late nineteenth century; tighter controls, it seems, would have been beneficial. Joseph Brodsky's or Vladimir Nabokov's citizenship in American letters is indisputable, but try as I may, I fail to find any grounds on which André Breton or Hans Arp could be granted similar status. Yet they also figure in this bibliography. (I note with

a sigh of relief that W. H. Auden does not, despite the many arguments in favour of including him as well.) I appreciate the editor's principled stand observable in the classification of authors into poets, novelists, etc., but the occasional breach of consistency for the sake of the less well-informed reader would have done no harm. Calling Isadora Duncan only "írónő" (writer), on account of her famous autobiography, without noting that she was first and foremost a dancer, is misleading. By the same token, once we have resigned ourselves to Hans Arp's presence, we expect some indication of the fact that his significance as sculptor and painter exceeds his significance as poet.

(2) Translated works appear only under their Hungarian titles. Most users of the book, I believe, would welcome the original titles in parentheses, as it is not always easy to trace the translator's version back to the original. (Apropos of titles: is it not possible that *A fekete fátyol alatt* [Under the black veil], listed on page 865 as the tale of an unidentified author, is in fact Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil"?)

(3) The book is printed in large, legible type, which is a welcome departure from the time-hallowed bibliographical tradition of small print and near-illegibility. Leafing through this large volume several times has, however, left me with the impression that in its pres-

ent form it is too big and heavy, there-fore not sturdy enough, to stand up to the wear and tear of frequent use. Small print, whatever its disadvantages, would have reduced the bulk and thus would have made the book easier to handle.

But these are matters which do not seriously mar the standing of this fine piece of scholarship. The proof-reader, however, was caught napping far too many times, and Professor Vadon's labour of love is disfigured, as a result, by an unacceptably high number of misprints. Open the book anywhere, misprints will stare you in the face. Names, titles, other verbal items – whether in English or in Hungarian – go through strange and sometimes funny metamorphoses. *Winnesburg, Ohio* (63), *Angie March* (94), *Osol-Creek* (102), Richard Grautigan (119), *Saymour: bemutatás* (668), *Heidegger doktor kísérlete* (311), etc. are blemishes that should have been eradicated. Is the periodical that carried translations of the "American poet" André Breton *Arkánum* or *Akánum* (121)? Closer to home, I keep my fingers crossed that the now excellent chances that two of my eminent colleagues stand to attain immortality will not be irreparably damaged by their occasional assumption of the false names of Dávidházy and Mesterházy. (They may take some comfort from the fact that I have suffered the same fate at the hands of the whimsical printer.) We should not despair, however. Is there anyone in the profession who does not know whom the names "Szobodka" Tibor and "Heman" Melville conceal or who their "irdalmi merterei" were? And lest William Jay Smith should sink into complete oblivion owing to his new persona as William Jaysmith (both on page 370 where he is listed and in the Index [Névmutató]), let me mention that this Southern poet and tireless translator of Hungarian poetry was born in 1918, as one can learn from the biographical note in Gyula Kodolányi's anthology *Szavak a szélbe* (Budapest: Európa, 1980). And as he has only recently paid yet another visit to this country, we may assume that he is still hale and hearty, so the question marks filling the place where the dates of his birth and death should stand, may be ignored. I was, by the way, surprised that neither his *Át a tű fokán* (Budapest: Európa, 1976), nor the autobiographical *Laktanya ivadék* [Army Brat] (Budapest: Európa, 1981) received any critical attention.

This, however, is not the right note on which to end my review. The right note is the note of acknowledgement. And it is also the note of anticipation expressing the hope that the planned sequel to the book will also become available in the not too distant future.

ALADÁR SARBU

Reading Re-readings

Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (ed.):
British Culture of the Postwar: Introduction to Literature and Society 1945–1990
(London, New York: Routledge, 2000)

When actually was 'the postwar'? This is the question the editors put at the very beginning of the book, and, of course, there is no precise answer to it, just as in any other case when you try to define a certain period in time. One thing is sure though, that the postwar period began after World War II, in 1945, when people of many different countries and nations went to the streets to celebrate the end of suffering and fear. What seems to be problematic is to define the end of the period.

What brings the period to an end? The Conservatism of the Thatcher Government or the election of the Government led by Tony Blair? Or, as the editors remark, "maybe such views are (typically) parochial, and international developments are more important: the ending of the Cold War, or the pressures towards globalisation" (p. xi).

The contributors' aim in this book is not to draw borderlines but to offer different standpoints, often ones which show things from a point of view that, for some reason, has re-

mained hidden throughout these years. "In discussing the literature, film and visual arts of the past fifty-five years," the editors claim, these essays "discover radical discontinuities and underlying continuities" (p. xi).

"To write of 1960 in the mid 1990s is to be conscious of trying to define a legacy whose implications and ramifications are far from clear. We are still living the harvest of the sixties and to that extent we cannot entirely bring its meaning of significance to conscious articulation: to declare that it was indubitably bad harvest of an unusually rich one seems premature," writes Patricia Waugh in her excellent book *The Harvest of the Sixties.* "To write an account of a historical period through which one has lived is in some sense to write an autobiography where the past and future are necessarily and often mysteriously shaped by the writer's present situation," she continues.[1] This is also confirmed by Alan Sinfield: "This is inevitably a personal book [...] I am re-writing, in large part, my own intellectual history and configuration."[2]

I think reading an account of a historical period through which the reader has lived is almost as exciting as writing it; it is like re-thinking, re-reading our own history both in the narrower and wider sense of the word. Besides the attempt of trying to work

up what has happened in the last ten years, the desire to re-think things was probably another important factor that has made the two editors, Alan Sinfield and Alistair Davies compile another postwar-book to which they also contributed in the form of three essays. The editors as well as the six other contributors are from the Universities of Sussex and Cambridge. The book, consisting of four parts, presents the most interesting problems of British culture at the end of the 20th century: the meaning and problems of post-imperialism, the effects on culture of a shift from a welfare state to free market, Britain's relationship to the continent and Americanisation, and the connection between consumption and cultural institutions. The essays reflect refreshing, new approaches to the cultural history of postwar Britain in the stimulating spirit of Sussex. Each part is introduced with a short summary of the most important historical events of the period. These introductions are not only data that are piled up but each is a thorough-going essay which helps to understand the interaction between art and society; put together they would serve as a short but very informative textbook in British Studies complemented by an excellent bibliography on related topics at the end of every part.

The first two chapters examine the concept of post-imperialism from two points of view. Siobhán Kilfeather's "Disunited Kingdom" begins with a question which emerges in the reader when (s)he looks at the cover of the book, namely, what exactly is meant by the expression "British culture." The difficulties begin with naming. "It is actually impossible to name and describe something called 'British culture,'" Kilfeather writes (p. 10.); but it is also difficult to define and locate Britain itself. In naming the country there are two different modes in use nowadays: "Britain and Ireland" or "the archipelago." She chooses the name "Celtic" (!) in her essay for the Irish, Scots and Welsh. Writing about national consciousness, she presents the way Celtic peoples have made the way in self-assertion since the '40s to the present day from "parochialism," which meant the self-assurance of the metropolitan culture versus the "provincialism" of the country where no judgement was even made unless first it was heard what the metropolis had said, through Seamus Heaney's immense influence which made the country observations valid and respected, to the present when it is 'chic' to be Celtic. Irish culture, for example, is very popular among young people all over Europe, all over the world today – one can think of

the success of *U2*, Sinead O'Connor, or the popularity of Irish folk music.

If the meaning of being British is problematic for natives, the situation of migrants is even odder: in her essay "Migration and Mutability," Minoli Salgado explores the problems of migration in post-imperialist Britain through discussing the consequences of the so-called Rushdie-affair and tries to define Rushdie's place in Britain and his place among migrants. The term "twice born" in Salgado's essay refers not only to the Hindu ceremony of initiation but also signifies the migrant position. As she explains, the Hindu term does not mean a rebirth but rather a split subjectivity which is characteristic of a migrant's personality; in this way she relates Rushdie's point of view to that of the famous post-structuralist critic, Homi Bhabha. Salgado also reminds us that migration is not a mere metaphor but a condition experienced by millions in the world. At the same time, of course, there are numberless varieties; one should not forget the difference between Rushdie's élite condition and those who have left their homes because of economic necessity. What gives the essay special weight is that her reading of migration "is in fact a migrant's reading, containing many of the concerns and doubts of one whose mixed cultural affiliations both enable

and require the mutability of multiple subject positions [...] but one which prioritises a migration post-colonial concern with the issue of agency" (p. 35).

How is writing influenced by the shift from a welfare state to free market? Both essays in the second part of the collection address the question from a different point of view. Margaretta Jolly examines what the term "feminist writing" means today, while Alan Sinfield highlights the connection between literature and sexual identity through a comparison of two novels by Angus Wilson and Alan Hollinghurst.

Jolly's "After Feminism" begins with the statement that despite the general acceptance of the idea that several starting points may be used in the definition of postwar British fiction, the legacy of the 'old' canon of largely male, Anglo-British writing is still dominant. She mentions some recent critics who have written the alternative history of British fiction with a focus on women authors. (See for example F. Alexander, *Contemporary Women Novelists;* T. Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood;* M. Ezel, *Writing Women's Literary History;* L. Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Postwar Women Novelists.*) However, Jolly's aim is not by any means to

exchange the present canon for a homogeneous women writers' canon. On the contrary, she asserts that hardly any consistent separation between male and female literary interests can be detected. In her essay, she is concentrating on Pat Barker, who, she believes, "bridges feminist and mainstream literary interests in ways that make her difficult to categorise" (p. 59). She compares Barker to Penelope Lively, and draws the conclusion that, though Barker is aesthetically less innovative (she never breaks the frame of time or space, almost constantly uses a third-person narrator), her writing within a social realist tradition is still more suitable to reveal the problems of social identity, the relationship between gender and history than Lively's postmodernism. Baker, she believes, is "an apt prism through which to consider the current interplay between feminism and writing" (p. 78).

Comparing Angus Wilson's *Hemlock and After* to Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library,* in his "Culture, Consensus and Difference" Alan Sinfield – who belongs to the British Marxist tradition and in my view has written one of the most stimulating chapters of the book – illustrates the idea he is basically concerned with: what happened to the consensus (the agreement after the war that pre-war conditions should be changed by a welfare society where "good things" – job, pension, education, healthcare and, what is in focus in the essay, "good culture" – "which had been enjoyed customarily by the leisure classes, were now to be available to everyone" [p. 89]), why should it rather be called an "aspiration" than an achievement, and what are the consequences of this miscarriage. Sinfield draws two important conclusions. First, literature has lost its earlier status: Wilson's belief in the possibility of the state's support of young artists in new forms proved to be an illusion. While Wilson was assured that it was clear for everybody what literature was, Hollinghurst's book offers different kinds of readings. Relying on received ideas concerning what literature is supposed to be, it is impossible to decide if *The Swimming Pool Library* is literature or pornography. Sinfield's aim here is not to analyse the possibilities or impossibilities of making this distinction these days, but to find the reason for this – as he calls it – "shift from the consensual, inclusive cultural authority" (p. 99). In his view the shift is due to the victory of market ideology, which has forced literature out of the state sector into the world of commerce. Secondly, he alerts the reader to a "trap": out-groups are often utii-

ised by market forces. In this case, their exoticism serves only as a bait. One should not think that their being supported by different market-oriented people or groups means that being different is accepted; the success of a gay pop group or a lesbian writer does not mean that the struggle for the right of being different is won.

In the third section of the collection of essays Britain's connection to the countries of the continent and the problem of Americanisation is discussed in two chapters, both by Alistair Davies. "Had matters taken a different course, Brighton and Hove (where some of the earliest British film-makers were based) rather than Hollywood might now be the centre of the world cinema" (p. 110), Davies claims in his essay "A Cinema In-Between." He compares several possible readings of the history of postwar British film. It is clear that the moment of Hollywood's victory over British cinema (after World War I) was significant for the British film industry; with American domination, as Davies asserts, British directors and producers (and maybe not only the British) have had two options: to compete with Hollywood by actually "copying" it, or to contrast the "realism" of the British cinema with the "tinsel" of Hollywood. Davies also examines the relationship between

British and other European cinemas, and assesses the British avant-garde. He seems to suggest that Greenaway, Jarman, Sally Potter and Terence Davies' names are lost among directors trying to come up to the market's expectations with making films that depended heavily upon the use of national stereotypes – like, for example, Crichton's *A Fish Called Wanda*, or Newell's *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Though Hollywood is still dominant on the market, the British cinema in the 1990s, Davies claims, "has been one of the truly international spaces of postwar British culture where music, literature and the visual arts have been able to combine freely and creatively" (p. 122).

Davies' chapter on Auden and postwar British culture, "Faltering at the Line," is a very thought-provoking presentation of the newest reading of Auden that makes a break with the tradition of considering Auden an apostate both in politics and poetics, a tradition originally established by Larkin and the Movement Poets. In 1939 Auden left for America, and remained there throughout the war. He returned to Britain only for occasional visits after 1945, and for his (earlier) friends he remained the propagandist of the American way of life. Though he pursued the question of the differences and similarities be-

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tween America and Europe with a great expertise both in his articles and poetry (which brought him immediate success in America), it was never enough to regain his reputation in England. By throwing a different light on some of the well-known poems (like, for example, *In Memory of W.B. Yeats; Spain, 1937; In Memory of Sigmund Freud*), Davies' essay presents a poet whose "questioning of his own authority" during the postwar time and his constant resistance to his contemporaries' attitudes to the situation of postwar Britain and Europe made him appear peculiar in the eyes of his contemporaries. Auden rejected most radically the idea of restoring Europe by reviving the classical-imperial-patriarchal basis, where one hears "the weeping of a Muse betrayed," as he writes in his "Secondary Epic." In conclusion, the author says that Auden's postwar poetry includes constant self-reflection and self-questioning. Davies shows us a deeply interesting standpoint from which it is possible to read the American Auden and to drop the "national culture of conceit" (p. 137). He seems to suggest that what by Auden's revaluation one can gain is an excellent vantage point for which one can better see the outlines of post-modern poetry.

The 1940s and 1950s are very rich years if one considers how many important institutions were founded at those times: the Opera, the Edinburgh Festival and the BBC are there to mention. The essays in the fourth part examine the development (?) in the connection between "Class, Consumption and Cultural Institution" in the fields of the arts and the theatre.

In "Art in Postwar Britain," Nanette Aldred has chosen a new way of approaching postwar British art in her essay. She concentrates on the history of The Institute of Contemporary Arts and presents its postwar role by giving particular attention to a commission held in 1953 and two exhibitions (*When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969 and *The Thin Black Line* in 1985) which were not necessarily the most well attended and widely spoken of events, but whose roles seem to have been significant in contemporary art. She believes that this approach allows us "to consider art works and events in a theoretical context at some key moments in British visual culture" (p. 147). Through presenting the story of the commission titled *The Unknown Political Prisoner* she explores the most basic difficulties of the art of the 1950s which made it impossible to build Reg Butler's prize-winning monument planned to be set up in West-Berlin, namely the lack of funding, as well as Britain's need to reidentify itself against American art,

and the consequences of the Cold War. With this method, she is leading the reader through the sixties, seventies and eighties just as though she were a guide, highlighting many questions and disclosing information which usually are veiled from the spectator on a usual visit to an exhibition. She also presents the position of London in these decades comparing it to that of other European cities. As she writes, her aim is to show British art in relation to that of Paris and New York, avoiding "to create an underlying notion of 'Britishness'" (p. 164).

The issues raised at the beginning of Drew Milne's article, "Drama in the Culture Industry: British Theatre After 1945," promise an exciting essay not only on the problems of British, but of the whole European theatre. However, the author does not seem to go much beyond raising questions on the most exiting possibilities of redefining theatre in his article. One of the most rewarding issue raised is what one can actually "do" with the theatre in the age of "dramatised society." Milne borrows Raymond Williams' term to describe our life, where "drama through television, radio and film, is now a rhythm of everyday life" (p. 172). The concept of drama should be rethought in this light, Milne assumes, and the theatre must

define itself against the media and find its place in the "culture industry" (a term which was first used by Adorno). He compares Lawrence Olivier's and Kenneth Branagh's careers to illustrate how the "culture industry" can be influential as a force defining theatre. While Olivier's shift from stage to cinema is "emblematic of the social contradictions in theatre's struggle for independence as a significant cultural form," Branagh's attempt, "to finesse the differences of stage acting and film," Milne says, "is symptomatic of an increasing gulf between the residual formations of serious bourgeois theatre and the aesthetics of the cinema box office" (p. 174).

Andrew Crozier's essay, which constitutes the last contribution to the collection, bears a rather telling title: "Resting on Laurels." Crozier offers here an elaboration on his argument published in 1983, namely, that the canon of postwar British poetry developed in the '50s and '60s had Larkin, Hughes and Heaney as its cardinal representatives is still with us. He asserts that the features which make a poem fit the canon are still the same in the 1990s. With reference to two poetry anthologies edited in the 1990s (*The New Poetry* by Hulse, Kennedy and Morley and its complementary volume, *New Relations: The Re-*

fashioning of British Poetry 1980–1994 by Kennedy), Crozier warns us that despite all the lip service being paid to alternative views we still have the same prejudices and exclusions that characterised the authoritative views of the '50s and '60s.

On the whole, *British Culture of the Postwar* is a splendidly constructed book; it is a very useful read not only for students and academics, but also for all those who want to understand their own cultural plight by re-reading the history of postwar Britain which reflects the main characteristics of cultural trends in the continent and the US in this age of globalisation.

ANDREA MAGYARI

NOTES

[1] Patricia Waugh. *The Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and Its Background, 1960–1990.* Oxford: OUP, 1995, p. 2.
[2] Alan Sinfield. *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, p. 4.

Case Closed

Infinite listings generating infinite listings generating infinite...

Bényei Tamás: *Rejtélyes rend –
A krimi, a metafizika és a posztmodern*
[Mysterious Order – Crime fiction,
metaphysics and postmodernism]
(Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000)

Writers are often rather partial to crime fiction. Géza Ottlik for example was a great aficionado of Agatha Christie, collected her works, read and re-read them with immense enthusiasm. This kind of love may be one of the driving forces behind the anti-detective novel's increased presence in twentieth century literature, the phenomenon when the formal and topical elements of the detective novel are incorporated into the works of highbrow or middle-brow literature. In these books the investigative process acquires a metaphysical and epistemological dimension, overburdening the traditional structure of the detective novel in such a way that the elements of the structure are bereft of functionality.

Tamás Bényei's book is an investigation into this relationship between the detective novel and the anti-detective novel, aiming to shed light on the intricate pattern of interaction

between the two. When Bényei begins his books with the ambitious list created by detective Mike Hoolihan, the investigator of Martin Amis's *Night Train*, he unintentionally describes his own method of investigation: Mike Hoolihan lists all the possible motives for the investigated murder and tries to attack the problem from different angles, until he is absorbed into the unsolvable mystery of sin. Something similar happens in Tamás Bényei's book. The vast amount of material, the manifold nature of the problem and the abundance of clues turn the investigation into an anti-detective exploration: the investigative process is transformed into attempts of describing the problem, like a postmodern detective attempting to gather enough material for indictment in an unsolvable case, where the investigation inevitably turns into a vast case-description, and the murder-book into a work of art, thus elevating the murder or murders on to an artistic level.

The first chapter describes the tradition of the anti-detective novel from a historical perspective, defining the problem of the relationship between the detective and the anti-detective novel by examining the tradition of the detective novel in relation with modernism and popular culture, relying heavily on a postmodernist approach to literary tradition. The

highly self conscious and formalised nature of the detective novel made it into an ideal victim for the aspirations of the postmodernist literary tradition – and the crime was committed, the anti-detective novel evolved into being. Bényei's analysis mirrors he first chapter of a detective (or anti-detective) novel: by introducing the problem, he sets the scene for the subsequent investigation, and in the later chapters he will attack the problem from a multitude of angles, being fully aware of the fact that this case cannot be cracked, solved and shelved, yet persisting in his obsession, and in the process creating an impressive list of structures, patterns and similarities, which reads almost like a brief history of literary criticism, applying one critical method after the other to the original problem.

The list of the discussed authors is seemingly endless: the works of Paul Auster, Samuel Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Vladimir Nabokov, Umberto Eco, Michel Butor, Robert Coover, Martin Amis, John Fowles, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, A. S. Byatt, Muriel Spark, Lawrence Norfolk, Peter Ackroyd (and the list is far from complete) are all discussed and scrutinised for elements typical of the anti-detective novel. These typicalities could all be organised into another infinite list: repetition, reading, the

distortion of realism, structure, myth, the transformation of the victim, the transformation of the detective, chiasmus, metamorphosis, parody, irony, finite and infinite games. Like a tireless investigator on a routine assignment, Bényei tracks down each element of the list, and looks for corresponding elements between the two: each category serves as a point of origin for a brief analysis involving some names from the first list, and in the process the original category is elevated onto a metaphoric level. In the process he is aided by a third list, the list of critics and theorists containing such names as Hartmann, Freud, Kristeva, Moretti, Kermode, Foucault, Barthes, de Man, Fry or Gadamer.

The repetitive pattern of crime fiction implies and incorporates the process of reading, and on a meta-level it implies the process of analysis; the investigative process is nothing more than the recreation of the original crime, and accordingly when the anti-detective novel is analysed, the analysis may only result in a text which recreates the anti-detective novel. The listing of the relationship between the three lists is a fourth list, which is actually the investigation itself, an infinite and self-generating pattern which in a Borgesian matter emulates the subject of the investigation. And indeed, for Bényei Jorge Louis Borges

is the arch-villain and the arch creator, and the single handed perpetrator behind the whole process of anti-detective fiction turned into postmodernism, whose works are both iconic and typical of the whole process, constructing the point of origin and the culminating point of the anti-detective novel, manifesting almost all the elements from the first list, thus serving as an unifying thread leading the investigation.

The investigative process is defined by the field of the investigation and the method of the investigator, and when Bényei intentionally restricts his own field of investigation to the analysis of the traditional detective novel by excluding most of the hard-boiled crime fiction and modern crime fiction, where the mystery and the investigative process is no longer crucially important, he narrows down the problem to a more manageable proportion, but he also renounces any taking into account the developments within the realm of the modern crime fiction. This is regrettable, because the hard-boiled novel and the modern serial-killer mystery manifest many of the elements typical of the anti-detective novel, displaying a remarkable meta-

physical and epistemological inclination, and also some degree of self-conscious reflexivity. It seems that the reaction to the genre of traditional detective novel is not restricted to the field of literature: the transformation which has taken place within the realm of the pulp mirrors in many ways the development of the anti-detective novel. The works of Ed McBain, Thomas Harris, James Ellroy and Elmore Leonard are particularly interesting from this respect.

Success is not very typical of the post-modern detective, and when Bényei at the end of his book realises that the text he created is shot through by the influence of the anti-detective novel in such a way that it has become in fact a mirror image of the texts he analysed, admits himself in the ranks of the post-modern detectives: the list he has drawn up is an impressive and welcome attempt at solving a mystery, which cannot succeed, and succeeds in the gesture of failure. The list had to be compiled, and the minute and accurate description of the process passes for a solution. A post-modern case cannot really be closed, or it can only be closed to be re-opened.

GYÖRGY DRAGOMÁN

Back to Shakespeare

Frank Kermode: *Shakespeare's Language*
(London: Allen Lane
The Penguin Press, 2000)

The past couple of years have seen the apparition of several heavyweight books about Shakespeare by heavyweight senior contestants in the literary critical arena. After Harold Bloom, who has elaborated his vision of Shakespeare as the inventor of the human in well over seven hundred pages, and Helen Vendler, who at the beginning of her book made the statement – once commonplace but now apparently in need of reiteration – that she does not "regard as literary criticism any set of remarks about a poem which would be equally true of its paraphrasable content," Frank Kermode has also published what he had to say about Shakespeare at the turn of the century.

Bloom, Vendler, and Kermode, three scholar-critics of radically different persuasions and intellectual styles, have at least one thing in common among them: they all remained untouched by the critical and theoretical fashions of the last quarter of the 20th century. But while Bloom and Vendler chose rather to ignore whatever their more trend-conscious colleagues may have produced over these years, and stubbornly proceeded with their own,

prophetic (Bloom) or aesthetic-analytic (Vendler) modes of reading, Kermode has critically engaged with the emergent and dominant tendencies, actively promoting the assimilation of continental work to the practice of English and American criticism. A stunningly versatile critic, he started his career as a Renaissance scholar, with a book on *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvell*,[1] followed by an edition of *The Tempest*,[2] partly an offshoot of the former. He also wrote about Donne and Milton (striving to reverse Milton's fortunes after the unhappy neglect over the mid-century), but then abstained from Renaissance studies for decades. This period saw the rise, most importantly, of New Historicism, described by Kermode in a recent review as "a way, or a bundle of ways, of writing about literary history which incorporates insights provided by other intellectual disciplines, refuses to isolate literature from other forms of discourse, and assumes that the entire culture, including many aspects of it generally overlooked by conventional history – for instance, anecdotes concerning the lives and behaviour of ordinary people – can be regarded as text, with all of its parts somehow interrelated."[3] What annoys Kermode in this new *koiné* of Renaissance Studies is that it "excludes attempts to differentiate between writing that was once re-

garded as literary, of aesthetic value, and all other contemporary documents"[4] – in short, that it fails to recognise literature for what, at least according to most non-academic readers and to less trendy critics, it is. As he puts it, writing about the *Collected Works* of Queen Elizabeth I, the trend now is to "believe that the 'rapidly changing intellectual developments of the past twenty-five years' in a climate of 'revised assumptions about literary value' have shown there is no need to distinguish between [occasional and political] writing and writing formerly thought to have higher aesthetic value. It seems as pointless to argue about this as it would be to dispute an argument that the sole value of Beethoven's last quartets, like that of all other artistic productions of their time, must be sought solely in the political and social conditions of Vienna in the 1820s."[5]

Some of the formulations in the short Preface to *Shakespeare's Language* are no less straightforward. Kermode "particularly dislikes" two modern attitudes to Shakespeare: one "that maintains that the reputation of Shakespeare is fraudulent, the result of an eighteenth century nationalist or imperialist plot. A related notion," he goes on, "almost equally as presumptuous, is that to make sense of Shakespeare we need first to see the plays as involved in the political discourse of his day to a degree that has only now become intelligible" (viii). With such broad and hostile generalisations, the sometime negotiator between modern theory and more traditional modes of reading now joins the ranks of conservative antitheoretical Shakespeareans – a tendency which found its definitive and bulky, if disappointingly superficial, formulation in Brian Vickers's *Appropriating Shakespeare* half a decade ago. But Kermode's interest lies not in New Historicismbashing. His most important complaint, underlying all the rest, is that such trendy scholarly work on Shakespeare (as well as on any other author) fails to address itself to, and in any case to be accessible to, a non-professional audience. Politically motivated writing on Shakespeare, while still claiming for itself a significance extending well beyond the groves of academe, moved way beyond the ken of the "general reader," or, on the rare occasion when such criticism tries to make its voice heard in wider circles, it really tends to make statements which are adequately parodied by Kermode's summary treatment. The academic study of literature has become increasingly isolated from the world of everyday nonprofessional reading of books – for pleasure, recreation, entertainment, or escape.

Kermode is widely respected as one of the most important critics of our

age, and the present book aims to be, first and foremost, a "critical" one – a term that will be echoing throughout the present sketch.[6] *Shakespeare's Language* is a critical book in that it is evaluative and appreciative (much contemporary "literary criticism" refuses to be critical in this sense, which is why I avoided using the term so far) and also undertaking the traditional task of mediating between the writing and its audience. Implicit in Kermode's call for resistance to the radical historicisation of literary value thus there is a call for renewed critical attention: for comparison, evaluation, and judgement of quality, and (in perfect accord with Vendler's creed and practice) also for inquiry into the linguistic groundwork underpinning them – a responsibility, Kermode emphasises, much modern criticism chooses to evade, and one which *Shakespeare's Language* undertakes.

In the two parts the book is divided into, Kermode offers a very strong critical reading of Shakespeare's career. In the first, much shorter section, he surveys the dramatic output of the early years, and then, in Part II, devotes a chapter to each one of the later plays, from *Julius Caesar* to *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* (A chapter each, that is, except *All is Well,* the treatment of which is included in, or subordinated to, that of *Measure for Measure,* and *Henry VIII*

and *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* which are dealt with together.) The twofold structure is a manifestation of Kermode's perception of the shape of Shakespeare's career as a writer. The turning point more or less coincides with the move of Shakespeare's company to the newly built Globe, but is described by Kermode as more of a poetical than an external transformation. The years around 1600 saw an important shift from earlier acting styles to "personation," a new style based not on set types and formal stage rhetoric, but on verbal representation of individuality, matched by, and made possible by a verbal style which should be seen as Shakespeare's singular achievement (6, 244).

The early plays are full of formal orations (27) – "an old-style affectedness, drawing attention to its own unnaturalness" (36) – a highly wrought style characterised by the neatly deployed ornaments of stichomythia, anaphora, by detailed analogies systematically worked out, etc. But over the last years of the 16th century, Shakespeare's plays betray an increasing sense that the decorative old manner came to be felt as false and unreal (46), a perception followed by the emergence of the new, mature dramatic poetry we now see as characteristically Shakespearean. This new mode has its own particular depths, which at the same time involve

particular difficulties: it is distinguished by a "toughening up of the language, accompanied by a new freedom of metaphor and allusion and a rougher handling of the pentameter" (17), difficult sentences breaking off in mid-line (144), along with sudden "alternations of compression and expansion" adding up to an underlying Shakespearean rhythm (150) – in short, a style that shows "more concern with the kind of art that conceals art" (19), one in which "the mature Shakespeare expresses the wavering complexity of emotionally agitated thought" (150). Such imitation of "the actual movement of thought in a character's mind" (245) results in "stubborn repetition, free association, violent ellipses; in short, a prevailing ruggedness in tone" (246) – features that yield their most satisfactory results in *Coriolanus,* the play Kermode sees as Shakespeare's ultimate masterpiece in terms of his handling of the medium.

The structure of *Shakespeare's Language* reflects the contrast between early pieces and the "unpredictable profundity" of the mature work. Early plays like *Titus* and the chronicles are in a perceptive section compared to the youthful and ephemeral music of Mozart's, seen "as early, undeveloped preparations, in themselves not particularly significant, for some highly original achievements of the composer's maturity" (12) – in the case of Shake-speare, for the period expanding from *Hamlet* to *Coriolanus,* followed by the late plays, characterised by "a kind of reticence that might, in relation to that speech in Titus Andronicus [Marcus's speech in II.iv] , be thought close to silence" (13). Such a sketch may under normal circumstances sound little more than commonplace, but – somewhat oddly – in the case of Shakespeare, the best known and most studied literary author of the West, a clear account of the shape of the oeuvre is felt a welcome addition to libraries of critical work. Shakespeare has become so great and so venerable (and venerated) that clear-sighted evaluation of the relative merits and faults of the various parts of the corpus has become a rarity. This is why one must greet an enterprise which, following in the wake of Johnson and Eliot, reinserts Shakespeare into the field of critical enquiry.

The critical, rather than scholarly or academic tendency of *Shakespeare's Language* is also manifest in the musical groundwork of its language – we read about the tunes and themes of the verse, about certain figures providing a ground bass, about sudden switches into a new key, etc. The phraseology is motivated by Kermode's general attitude, which is appreciative rather than interpretive. Putting it very bluntly, it aims to follow the experience of Shakespearean verse, rather than trying to

tell what it tells us. It points out special beauties, difficulties and intricacies, with the ultimate aim of facilitating appreciation, rather than settling for some reading or using the plays as test-cases or indeed battlefields for the analysis or contestation of some intellectual, political or historical issue. Kermode performs critical readings as opposed interpretations of the plays.

Like the career, so the plays also seem to have a tendency to fall into halves in Kermode's book. The second half of *Measure for Measure*, of *Troilus*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* seem not worth to be discussed in *Shakespeare's Language*. Even with plays that receive a more even-handed treatment, Kermode is always more elaborate on early than later scenes – this might be a function of his interpretive interest in identifying the main themes and tunes of a play rather than following their elaboration all the way through – presumably, once alerted to them, any sensitive reader will be able to do that. Furthermore, according to Kermode, Shakespeare's opening scenes, unlike latter bits of some of the plays, tend always to be "carefully excogitated" (166). But underlying Kermode's emphasis on the initial scenes and the difference in the treatment of the rest might be taken to suggest a distinction between plays like *Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* or, with certain

qualifications, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* on the one hand, and plays where critical interest dwindles after the first two or three acts, like in the case of *Troilus* or *Julius Caesar*. Kermode's preferences seem to identify the group of the most "mature" plays, characterised by the most sustained intensity, the examples of what Kermode considers as the best of Shakespeare's high-pressure syntax and semantics, adequate with dramatic character and situation – an essential criterion for him.

As in *Shakespeare's Language* Kermode is interested not so much in churning out "readings," but in giving an account of, and enticement to, reading, he also readily admits failure and puzzlement. In his analyses, complication is at best not an obstacle in the way of the appreciation of poetic qualities, but something to be appreciated in itself as a poetic quality – one, which, nevertheless, occasionally forces the critic to revert to the heresy of paraphrase by way of explaining the difficulties. As Kermode puts it, "Given this new way of representing turbulent thinking, so different from plainly formulated thought, set out clearly and reinforced by elaborately illustrative and copious comparisons [characteristic of the formal rhetoric of the histories and early comedies], obscurities will inevitably plague commentators as well

as audiences" (16). These obscurities, inherent to such style, at times leave the reader or audience to see the point without properly speaking "understanding" the sentence – which at first appears as a characteristic and powerful poetic device, but then, increasingly, also as a dangerous one.

The traditional aim of literary interpretation is to clear away such difficulties. But a theatre audience couldn't possibly have relied on commentaries, glosses and the desperate measures of conjectural emendation. As Kermode points out, following, catching the drift, rather than fully understanding is sometimes the only option, occasionally even after repeated readings aided by explanatory notes and encyclopaedias. This admittance to a failure to understand is, at first sight perhaps paradoxically, closely related not only to taking into account the opportunities and limitations of the "general reader" but also to a difference between the interpretive habits of Kermode and Empson, Kermode's single most important point of reference, a critic with whom he shares an interest in Shakespeare's semantic or lexical obsessions as well as in the poetic importance of ambiguity. Unlike Empson (whose most interesting work now reads as so-called deconstructive literary criticism, though without the jargon derived from Derrida), however, Kermode

(attentive as he is to linguistic ambiguity and semantic oscillation) insists on the necessity of setting certain limits to interpretation. Plays are there to be experienced by theatre audiences, or perhaps, more recently, by readers in their armchairs, and in that process, difficulties and obscurities will inevitably be glossed over. If something is ultimately obscure, this should be admitted and, after a certain amount of effort spent on its explanation, left as it is, "or explanation gets lost in mere noise" (155).

Kermode's chief interest is in the dramatic functionality and adequacy of the verse style. Obscurity and difficulty are often suggestive ways of representing "the wavering complexity of emotionally agitated thought" – Shakespeare mature style is, among others, inflected by a new use of soliloquy, which no longer just conveys information to the audience, but also serves as the medium of considering larger issues, while at the same time showing a mind at work (115). This new type of monologue is itself a function of the new notion of an inaccessible life within, first emerging in plays like *Richard II, Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet.* For Kermode, Shakespeare is really at his best in these tragic verse monologues, characterised by a certain energy and "flurries of oblique associations." But obliqueness at times seems

disfunctional, the result of verbal habit and unnecessary showing of linguistic muscles – as in *Cymbeline*, for example. On the other hand, the intense experimentation of the transitional period of *Troilus*, *All's Well*, and *Measure for Measure* lead to large-scale transformations as well as local failures – these "problem plays" "seem to present not only distinctively ethical problems but peculiar difficulties of a poetic kind" (126). Now if the development of Shakespeare's career first takes Kermode uphill from *Titus* to *Coriolanus*, from that play on the oeuvre seems to go somewhat downhill with its overly obscure formulations. Although *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, two unquestionable masterpieces, appear as exceptions from this trend, after a discussion of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the book ends on a note of doubt regarding the last pieces, and its general drift is that Shakespeare was really placing too much pressure on the audience by now: "Did he overestimate their endurance, and ours; did he perhaps even exaggerate his own?" (312).

If the book insists on an early-late (or, perhaps less clearly, early-high/mature-late) distinction, it also implies some others. The most obvious one of these is Kermode's preference for the tragedies over the comedies. *The Comedy of Errors* is even left out of a survey otherwise devoting at least a paragraph or two to each play. All the plays he finds problems with in Part II – the section that starts with *Julius Caesar* – are comic, or at least partly comic, like *All's Well*, the *Two Gents*, or the tragi-comedy of *Cymbeline*, while the discussion of *Measure for Measure* does not extend beyond the point it departs from a tragic into a tragicomic direction. Similarly, one might argue that *As You Like It*, though admittedly a Globe play is placed in the first section, where most comedies are anyway, because as a less perfect and comic piece it would have watered down the intensity of the mature period. While Kermode's reservations no doubt also have other reasons, such partiality for one genre over another is conspicuous.

What Kermode pays close attention to as the high Shakespearean manner is (in a fashion perhaps high Bradleyan, but certainly high modernist) characteristically tragic. But it also tends to be poetic, i.e. written in verse – in spite of some illuminating points he has to make about the prose of these middle years. Kermode is excellent on the motivations behind the choice of prose or verse at particular points, showing the question a lot more complicated and significant than we tend to assume – but for comments on the prose itself, we are directed to Brian Vickers's 1968 *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose*. A

striking result of these two delimitations of what counts as quintessentially Shakespearean (i.e. a writing that is tragic and in verse) is that the book has surprisingly little to say about Falstaff, especially for a book called *Shakespeare's Language*. Or has Falstaff's linguistic exuberance lost its appeal for modern audiences? The most powerful Falstaff of the post-war years, that of Orson Welles in *Chimes at Midnight*, for example, is perhaps memorable for other things – for his vulnerability and melancholy, and first and foremost for his grotesque body: his verbality is, oddly, not so much a linguistic, but a physical aspect of his personality, memorable as an eruption of sheer garrulousness.

It is in the tragic verse monologues of the Globe years that Shakespeare, from the late-nineties on, "began to use a word or group of words as a central element, almost a subject of exploration, in his verse" (59). This "habit of serious word-play," as Kermode describes it, results in verbal patterns connected to, but different from, the thematic centres of plays, and their identification in *Shakespeare's Language* often provides the hinges for full-fledged interpretations. Kermode's discussions of such words – "doting" in *A Midsummernight's Dream*, "gent(i)le" in *The Merchant*, "opinion" in *Troilus*, "nothing" and "seeing" in *Lear*,

"honest" in *Othello*, "world" in *Antony & Cleopatra*, may seem his most explicit form of indebtedness to Empson. But his analyses only reach the complexity of Empson's essays on such "complex words" once: and that is in a piece not about a semantic, but a rhetorical structure, in the superb full-length reading of *Hamlet* organised around the use of hendiadys (the kind of trope based on the splitting of an expression into two, as in law and order, house and home) and other doubling devices, from slings and arrows through showing "the body of time his form and pressure" to "the whips and scorns of time," which set the unmistakable tune of the verse of the play, providing "a sort of ground bass that sounds everywhere" (106). The chapter on *Hamlet*, perhaps the best in the book, is a rhetorical *tour de force* connecting (to be faithful to the spirit of the text as well as the chapter discussing it) most aspects and elements of the play through the mustering up and discussion of alternatives and bifurcations, of verbal and other doublings.

Apart from such grand verbal themes, Kermode also shows an interest in the "little language" of some of the plays, the use of a set of words to give undercurrents of sense to the dramatic dialogue. But towards the end of the book, the implicit definition of what counts as a problem of "language"

changes somewhat. In Kermode's discussion of the romances, the structures of the plot come to the foreground of interest, and among these, one in particular: recognition features quite prominently. This is perhaps the point where it most clearly shows how *Shakespeare's Language* goes beyond attention to style, rhetoric and semantic complexity. By the end of the book, the term "Shakespeare's language" seems to become coterminous with "the poetics of Shakespeare's plays" – and recognition, or *anagnorisis*, surely is a poetic structure already dealt with in Aristotle's *Poetics*. But even so, its rather careful consideration feels a sidetrack, a direction taken to complement the relatively little the book has to say about the late plays otherwise – as if to make the coverage and the distribution of material over the whole work more even. A noble effort, and perhaps one of the reasons why *Shakespeare's Language* reads less like a sequence of chapters or papers, more like a series of lectures on Shakespeare's plays – it is, in fact, an addition to the great tradition lectures on Shakespeare, like those of Coleridge, Bradley or Auden. Like lectures meant for oral delivery, it is a text with digressions, repetitions and

explanations of difficult passages. They feature introductory passages on the date, texts and topicality of the given play, and then moves on to reading selected excerpts embedded in a sketch of the development of major elements of themes and of the plot – also providing, as Kermode intends it, a sort of general introduction for the general reader. And the fate of the book, it now seems to me, will be very much bound up with the fate of that elusive creature.

ANDRÁS KISÉRY

NOTES

[1] Frank Kermode. *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvell*. London: Harrap, 1952.

[2] William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Ed. Frank Kermode. London: Methuen, 1954 (The Arden Shakespeare).

[3] Frank Kermode. "Art among the ruins." *NYRB* July 5, 2001.

[4] Frank Kermode. "Writing about Shakespeare." *LRB* December 9, 1999. (A condensed version of the argument of the book, taken from its introduction and the chapter on Coriolanus, itself something like a summary of the whole.)

[5] Frank Kermode. "But could she cook?" *NYRB* April 12, 2001.

[6] Cf. Sándor Radnóti. "In defense of interpretation." *Arcadia*, 2000.