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# Miracle-working Poetry, Poetry Worth a Miracle?

## The Cædmon Story Yet Again

All who are interested in Anglo-Saxon poetry would certainly find it extremely exciting to travel back in time and meet one of the poets who composed some of the lines we are studying, over a thousand years later, see how he worked, how he got his training, how he lived, what role he had in society. Was he rich, respected, somebody with great prestige, or the direct opposite? Since, however, this is impossible, scholars have made several attempts at reconstructing the historical figure of the Anglo-Saxon scop. All of us, who read and love Anglo-Saxon poetry, commit the venial sin of the scholar of using our fantasy to do this, and have a mental image of this very attractive person. If, however, we try to work as a scholar should, we feel very much at a loss, because there are almost no historical data we can rely on in constructing this figure. Even the historical generalisation of "the Anglo-Saxon scop" seems of very questionable value.[1]

One strong temptation all students of Anglo-Saxon are exposed to is reading Bede's story of Cædmon, which seems to be the only description of a historical poet in action, but after the first happy encounter with this attractive person a more careful reading and analysis reveals of how little use he is for us in pursuing

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[1] A common denominator of all scops is a rather indistinct image, but I cannot agree to the separation of different kinds of roles like those in Jeff Opland's *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), Chapter 8, where he describes the harper-entertainer, the vatic scop, and the teller of prose stories as distinct well-defined kinds of poets in Anglo-Saxon England. He draws his parallels from rather too far away in space and time. The temptation is understandably great for such analogies because of the shortage of data.

our aim of reconstructing the historical figure of a scop, because Bede's story is anything but a historical document, simply put: its purpose is not what we wish to use it for.

Cædmon is certainly the first Anglo-Saxon poet in at least two senses. The first datable person with a name, that we know of, who composed poetry, and the first one, that we know by name, who welded together pagan and Christian tradition in his poetry.[2] But in literary history we cannot make much of him. He is just one among many Anglo-Saxon poets who composed religious verse, he stands out only inasmuch as we know his name, but not much of his poetry. His story, however, is a case study in how at least one member of his audience, although not in his immediate proximity, Bede, a near contemporary, appreciated his person and his compositions and how he passed his story on to his readers. This paper is one more attempt at reading Bede's story of Cædmon, and at confronting a possible reading in the context of Bede with what 21st-century minds might extract from it. My conclusion is that Cædmon is the most attractive character in the story only for the reader. Bede's central character is not him, neither is Bede's purpose to present documentary evidence about how Anglo-Saxon poetry was composed. Bede's aim was different with this story.

Another way of approaching our topic would be to retrieve the image of the early scop from the extant poems. In doing so we must never lose sight of the fact that whatever we read now, was filtered through at least one clerical mind, so we shall never have immediate access to any pagan heroic poet. He is irretrievably lost. When Christianity took root, it slowly but radically altered the social and cultural setting. Pagan poetry still remained popular in Christian Anglo-Saxon England and the ideals it showed to the listeners were not washed away by the holy water of baptism, but this poetry underwent a change. The integration of the two cultures is one of the most fascinating aspects of this early world. Bede's story of Cædmon is witness to how a contemporary mind appreciated this change, what role he ascribes to poetry in it, how he justifies the old style with the new topic.

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2 The earlier view, held by many, that a number of biblical poems can be ascribed to Cædmon, beside the nine-line hymn is less and less accepted now, since it is almost impossible to prove. It rests only on impressionistic stylistic evidence. There are extant poems, like Genesis, which fit in with Bede's description of what sort of poetry Cædmon composed, but no hard proof, "beyond reasonable doubt" exists that Cædmon had anything to do with it. The concept of Cædmon initiating a school of poets cannot be confirmed from Bede. He clearly states that nobody could do what Cædmon did as well as he, and the rest of religious poetry is definitely not less good in quality than Cædmon's hymn.

The piece concerned is Book IV, Chapter 24 in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.[3] It tells the story which took place in the double monastery of Whitby around AD 680, when a simple shepherd, Cædmon, who could not sing any songs earlier to entertain his lay companions at a feast obtained the gift of composing religious poetry with the help of an angel during his sleep.[4]

From Bede's and Cædmon's point of view this is a miracle God performed on Cædmon, and thus it is described much in the vein of saints' lives. "In Bede's account, Cædmon's gift of singing in 'verses which he had never heard before in praise of God the Creator' is a miracle because God wonderfully articulated what he already had imbued in Cædmon's nature and prepared for in his Anglo-Saxon monastic surrounding."[5] The story should not be read as if it was history, in the modern factual sense of that word.[6] It was history for Bede, "who would have found the distinction between secular and sacred otiose,"[7] and whose purpose was to write the success of Christianity (i.e. of God) in England. The story clearly furthers that aim, "it describes how God subordinates physical nature to a higher

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3 All references to the Latin and English texts are to this edition: B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Book IV, Ch. 24, pp. 414–421.

4 Roberta Frank draws attention to a story in Isidore of Seville of passing a harp around the table, commenting that "perhaps the Whitby diners were just doing as the Romans did," in: R. Frank, "The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Poet," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993) 11–36, p. 30. Bede's story of Cædmon is certainly loaded with familiar literary and mythic elements but that should not prevent us from discarding its meaning on face value all together.

5 G. H. Brown, "Old English Verse as a Medium for Christian Theology," in: *Modes of Interpretation of Old English Poetry, Essays in Honor of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. Ph. R. Brown *et al.* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1986) 15–28, p. 16.

6 "Sacred history [...] in the Middle Ages assumes as part of its responsibility the recording of those instances when God manifests the divine in the world. Medieval man believed that the theophany was most appropriately manifested through an incarnation in God's elect, his saints. I would argue that one of the principal activities of sacred biography is to chronicle the appearance of the inbreaking of the divine in the world, or what Augustine referred to as the *seminales rationes* interrupting the continual flux of the world. Secular history, on the other hand, has as its responsibility to chronicle and interpret activities, points of view, and institutions all of which have little metaphysical orientation" (Th. J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography, Saints and Their Biographies in the Middle Ages* [New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], p. 97).

7 Heffernan, p. 97, note 43.

purpose,"[8] in this case the uneducated mind of a shepherd is made suitable for the purpose of teaching, converting pagan Anglo-Saxons.[9]

If, on the other hand, the story is scrutinised from the point of view of poetry, interesting aspects emerge. The miracle sheds light on how mighty the persuasive power of poetry was considered by Bede and his readers, if it was worthwhile to "mobilise" God to confer this power upon somebody in order that Christian truth was more efficiently spread among people who were still pagan.

We can go further and say that it was God who inspired and, in a sense, also "composed" his poetry; Cædmon is treated merely as a vehicle. "The angel brings to a chosen vessel, characteristically humble, the obligation to receive and to be the first to communicate God's word in English poetry."[10] What was admirable in the event for Bede and the audience was not so much Cædmon, but God at work. Cædmon could only be presented by Bede like a saint, not as a poet.

In Bede's story the gift to Cædmon was limited to making poems on religious topics, but none could be his equal in this as it was only he who obtained the skill from God. The old verse applied to the new topics was delightful and moving so "[b]y his songs the minds of many were often inspired to despise the world and to long for the heavenly life."[11] The passage shows how Bede thought that through this new medium, through yet another channel God could turn people to the new ways more easily than by only sending his missionaries to them who could probably tell the same things no less enthusiastically, but only in prose sermons. This is why Cædmon's teachers soon turned into his listeners, his admirers. Bede only gives a prose summary of Cædmon's first poem, and scholars have been wondering why he did not quote the original Old English poem, which can be found on the margins of the earlier manuscripts. "This is the sense, but not

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8 Ch. G. Herbermann et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York: Appleton, 1908), Vol. 3, p. 342.

9 Whether the essence of the miracle consisted in a gift of traditional language for making aristocratic verse, or whether it was a gift of an insight into scripture coupled with adequate language for the description of it, or a gift of memory, or whether God's intention was to save pagan poetry by giving it to Cædmon to tell his truths in – as it is listed by St. Greenfield in *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986), p. 230, is irrelevant. In the miracle God harnessed popular pagan poetry in order to achieve his own end.

10 B. F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence in Old English Poetry* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1959), pp. 102–103.

11 "Cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contentum saeculi et appetitum sunt uitae caelestis accensi" (Bede, pp. 414–415).

the order of the words which he sang as he slept. For it is not possible to translate verse, however well composed literally from one language to the other without some loss of beauty and dignity."[12] There is a simple explanation, which is logical from Bede's point: since he did not mix languages in his work, there are no old English citations anywhere else; what he refers to as inadequate here, would be a Latin verse translation. Probably it never occurred to him that we, late readers of his would appreciate the Old English original of Cædmon's poem. He is not writing about Anglo-Saxon poetry and poets, but God first of all, and his church in England.

Seemingly a similar quality of poetry of persuading, teaching through entertainment was utilised by Aldhelm at the occasion described by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificium*:[13]

> The people at that time semi-barbarous and too little interested in divine sermons, were accustomed to return to their homes immediately after the singing of Mass; therefore the holy man (i.e. Aldhelm) took up his stand before them on a bridge which connected the town and country like one professing the art of minstrelsy; and by doing this more than once he won the favor and presence of the people.

After which, when the crowd was large enough, he could continue with a sermon.

In this case, however, poetry is only a means of *captatio benevolentiae*, only a trick in comparison with what Cædmon did, as Aldhelm did not posses the divine inspiration, he did not tell the new teaching in verse, only attracted the attention of the people with the help of traditional poetry.

Aldhelm composed Latin poetry, but if we can believe William of Malmesbury, writing about him five centuries later, he could also compose in English, and did so, although he was a cleric at the time of the story. This is also an instance which shows that poetry was well liked and important among the

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12 "Hic est sensus non autem ordo ipse uerborum, quae dormiens ille canebat; neque enim possunt carmina, quamuis optime composita, ex alia in aliam linguam ad uerbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri" (Bede, pp. 416–417).

13 A. C. Partridge, *A Companion to Old and Middle English Studies* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1982), p. 195: "Populum eo tempore semibarbarum, parum divinis sermonibus intentum, statim cantatis missis domos cursitare solitum. Ideo sanctum virum super pontem qui rura et urbem continuat abeuntibus se opposuisse obicem quasi artem cantandi professum. Eo plus quam semel favorem et concursum emeritum. Hoc commento sensim inter ludicra verbis Scripturarum insertis, cives ad sanitatem reduxisse," quoted from William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificium Anglorum*, Rolls Ser. No. 52 (London: 1870), Book V, Part 1.

Anglo-Saxons, and instead of giving up pagan poetry at the coming of the new culture, ways were found how to cultivate it still, and justify the use of it. For a proof that a situation like the one in William's history about Aldhelm would not have been totally incredible, we can return to Cædmon and trace what contemporary practices of composing and consuming poetry may have been like.

Cædmon's lack of skill in verse making is shown untypical among his fellows. "Hence sometimes at a feast, when for the sake of providing entertainment, it had been decided that they should all sing in turn, when he saw the harp approaching him, he would rise up in the middle of the feasting, go out, and return home."[14] This scene confirms what we have in Beowulf, that many of those present at feasts were skilled enough to recite a song, even if in Cædmon's company we imagine a group of far less sophisticated people to be spending the night together entertaining themselves than in the hall of Hrothgar. We might take the scene as an exaggerated one, like Peter R. Orton does, i.e. one, in which Bede presents Cædmon as "the right kind of innocent" for God to work his miracle on,[15] contrasting him with all the others. Cædmon's lack of poetic talent is even more dramatic in comparison with everybody else's at least minimal skill in verse-making – although no-one of us could tell now what the poems, they composed, were really like. What Bede's text certainly proves, however, is that the scene must have seemed probable for Bede's readership, not totally impossible to have happened – i.e. it is not wide off the practices of the age. In addition, in *The Ecclesiastical History* we are not reading a kind of historical reconstruction of an age several centuries later, as we are in Beowulf. There are not more than two generations between Cædmon and Bede. The change in everyday customs is probably negligible during such a short time. If the description of the entertainment at the feast had not been credible for Bede's audience, another miracle would have been needed, i.e. to gather together a rather knowledgeable group of poets in the out-buildings of a monastery so that Bede could present Cædmon as "the odd one out."

We can also find the reason here of why the aesthetic power of poetry was so influential, too. The audience of Cædmon's songs after the miracle was a group of

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14 "Vnde nonnumquam in conuiuio, cum esset laetitiae causa decretum ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille, ubi adpropinquare sibi citharam cernebat, surgebat a media caena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat" (Bede, pp. 414–417).

15 P. R. Orton, "Caedmon and Christian Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983) 163–170, p. 170.

connoisseurs – whether laymen or ecclesiastics –, knowledgeable critics, as many or all of them could sing themselves. The way Cædmon sang was even more amazing for his audience because he must have been notorious for not being able to sing, some sort of a freak, or at least unusual, thus his audience could well estimate the extent of the change that took place overnight.

Bede describes that later Cædmon was instructed in sacred history, biblical stories. "He learned all he could by listening to them and then, memorizing it and ruminating over it, like some clean animal chewing the cud, he turned it into the most melodious verse: and it sounded so sweet as he recited it that his teachers became in turn his audience."[16] This description reminds one of the expression in *Beowulf* which calls the poet the person whose head is full of storied verse (guma gylphlæden, *Beowulf* 868a). The poet in Beowulf, however, is not said to be composing the poems, just storing them in his memory. The big issue, discussed in different theories of composition is, what sort of units were stored there in the poet's head. Cædmon, on the other hand, – as pictured by Bede –, or rather God within him, is composing new poems from the memorised stories. In Bede's frame of mind it is rightly so, creation belongs to God.

Cædmon's image is that of the Christian poet, somewhat like the evangelists, he is very different from his pagan counterpart. He is a tool in God's hand to achieve a certain aim, a channel through which the new truth can reach the people. He has become a pale shadow of his pagan brother if we think about him in romantic terms. He is not the preserver of wisdom or history, he is not an oracle or a vates, he does not prophecy about the future or dispense knowledge. Neither is his poetry the means to create and immortalise warrior heroes. He is deprived by Bede of the merit of poetic creation, too. He has to withdraw "to consult his source of poetry" before he can render a new biblical story in persuasive verse form.

Would he not deserve a more favourable judgement from us? But Bede did not misunderstand him at all. In medieval terms, there is only one Text, and Cædmon is communicating this sacred Text of the Bible, so he is one in the line of a number of worthy interpreters of the words of the divine composer. The authority is not his, he is only a vehicle. His reputation comes from joining the line of transmitters each of whom reflects the divine authority absorbing also a

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16 "At ipse cuncta, quae audiendo discere poterat, rememorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando, in carmen dulcissimum conuertebat, suauiusque resonando doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat" (Bede, p. 418–419).

fraction of the light and emanating it as his own. This provides recognition for him. The best vehicle of the message is the most transparent one as far as the authenticity and truth of the text is concerned. The recognition of Cædmon by Bede is the recognition of this transparency: he humbly let God work though him and achieve his divine aim. Cædmon acted like a saint. He also died like a saint in Bede's description, he predicted the time of his death, made sure he was at peace with everyone around him, took the heavenly Viaticum and passed away with God's name on his lips.

Interestingly enough the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, published in 1908, still confirms him in that position. "According to William of Malmesbury, writing 1125, he was probably buried at Whitby, and his sanctity was attested by many miracles. His canonisation was probably popular rather than formal."[17] Further study would be necessary – whether it is worthwhile or possible at all, is another matter –, to find out if any cult really grew up around him. All that Bede described happened well before any formal canonisation process was needed to acclaim a person a saint, and he is one of the many, who have never been included in the liturgical calendar. This quotation is only an interesting detail rather about the connection of history and religion at the turn of the 20th century.

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From the above it is clear that poetry was evidently worth a miracle. If this fusion of the old and new had not taken place, Anglo-Saxon poetry would have stood a good chance of being lost all together, like early Hungarian poetry was. Did poetry also work miracles? To what extent it was instrumental in spreading Christian doctrine and culture we can hardly tell, but Ælfric's homilies and saints' lives and the surviving large corpus of religious verse prove the popularity of old-style poetry applied to the new topics.

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17 Herbermann, Vol. 10, p. 132.

*Elemér Boreczky*

# Actor or Author

## John Wyclif's Teaching and Fame as Authorship of History[1]

Although John Wyclif's documented public appearances are remarkably few, his teaching on justice, law and dominion and transubstantiation reverberated in the schools of the university of Oxford. Summoned to appear before ecclesiastical courts, and snarled at by friars and monks, his fame was promulgated in the discourses of other audiences, among the knights and their ladies in royal courts and the common people of England, before it spread to the continent and inspired

1 This essay is a reflection on a more substantial study of Wyclif's theology and theory of dominion, which I have conducted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Glamorgan. The title of my dissertation, *More Delightful Love and the Sweet Sense of Dominion: The Disruption of High Medieval Order and the Rational Reconstruction of the Integrity of Man and Nature in John Wyclif's Theology and Theory of Dominion*, shows the main thrust of my work. I engaged myself in the study of John Wyclif's natural philosophy and political theology neither as a philosopher nor as a theologian, but as a student of cultural studies. By this work of *cultural discourse analysis* I have tried to substantiate a proposition that Wyclif's *understanding* of the Scriptures as "script of humanity," his understanding of the essential unity of man and nature in his philosophy and the *communication of his understanding to various audiences* placed the themes of property and rule [i.e. "by what right one can claim to dispose of wealth, natural resources and the services of other people; commonly remembered as his theory of dominion by righteousness and his 'communism'"] at the core of the complexity discourses that were to lie behind several themes of formative public discourses in English-speaking cultures.

In this essay, however, I only want to comment on two rather controversial issues in respect of John Wyclif's reputation: i.e. how an Oxford don could become the instigator of popular revolt and a heretical movement. In other words, how could the Doctor Evangelicus be the *author* of acts performed by political *actors*. This reflection, of course, also contributes to the issue of authorship in cultural discourses as highlighted in Bakhtin's, Barthes's and Foucault's works.

Jan Hus and the rise of the Czech nation against the German nation. He contributed substantially to scholastic, political and lay talk on justice, and in the process he crossed the path of political actors in an unusually calamitous period of English and European history, which Trevelyan called "the meeting point of the medieval and the modern." Yet the picture we get from his public manifestations does not fit into the role of the political activist (actor), "the Reformer," invented by Bale, canonised by Foxe, and even accepted by Robson.[2] In fact, it is hard to fit Wyclif into any other contemporary or modern "role constructs."

In the following essay I want to show how Wyclif's person, his fame and his teaching operated as separate factors that influenced historical actors, and how creative potential, wisdom and love, i.e. the divine essence found in every being singularly and in the human community universally[3], became the author of history by integrating man and nature in the human person and by the gratification of the ethnic community.

Wyclif's person has posed a problem for almost everyone who tried to reconstruct his role as "the morning star of reformation." His fame as the Father of English Prose was originated in the mythical belief that he had translated the Bible into English. His teaching as reflected in his work could not be studied for five hundred years as his works were demolished and the extant copies were stacked away at libraries and archives mostly in Vienna and Prague. When they were finally dug out and they started to appear in print, the editors expressed the hope that

> the zealous patriot, preacher, missioner, and Englisher of the Bible [...] being dead, yet speaketh, and once more his voice would go forth, his hand point the way, as over the long tract of his time his skin-books turned into paper and print, would tell them the steps he trod, the spirit in which he prest onward, as he sought the Right and fought the Wrong, during his time of struggle here on earth.[4]

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2 J.A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools, the Relation of "Summa de Ente" to Scholastic Debates at Oxford in the Later 14th Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1961). (To this day, Robson's is the most comprehensive reconstruction of Wyclif's metaphysics and philosophy, which reclaimed him as a great scholastic thinker and gave impetus to a revival of interest in his logic, metaphysics and philosophy.)
3 Of course this is meant to paraphrase the debate between Fitzralph and Wyclif, or between nominalists and realists. Whereas nominalists followed Ockham's concept of the singularity of the real, Wyclif's professed aim was to restore the order of love of universals.
4 The Second Report of the Executive Committee of the Wyclif Society, attached as an appendix to John Wyclif, *De civili dominio* (London, 1885). Vol. 1, p. 1. [All parenthesised references are to this edition.]

They were apparently disappointed; Wyclif's scholasticism, communism, and the clumsiness of his style could not fit into any great trends of late nineteenth century thought. With the publication of his Latin works, which took nearly forty years of efforts on the part of the Wyclif Society, and which is still unfinished, his fame curiously dwindled, and he almost vanished in near oblivion.

## 1 WHO WAS WYCLIF?

### 1.1 The controversial person

Whereas Wyclif apparently influenced his contemporaries, as well as future generations for five hundred years, mostly by his fame and the "narration" of his story, and much less by the actual reading of his works, his person has remained controversial.[5] It was controversial in the few documented public roles as well, which he did not seek for himself. Even as John of Gaunt's "athlete" he gave a sermon on law and justice in London, and a testimony on whether the King had a right to withhold the duties from the Pope, in the preamble of which he first defined the English nation as a natural body before the King's Great Council, i.e. in parliament, yet he preferred to stay in Oxford, and teach the ordered love of universals in order to restore the integrity of the created universe in the mind of his audience, which was what "re-ligio," i.e. "re-alignment," meant for him and his disciples.

To some, he was "a great clerk and a perfect liver."[6] To others, his irreproachable life was a disguise for his collegiality with Satan, by which he confused the soul and the mind of people.[7] He, himself, thought he did not deserve the gifts he received from God, but it seems that he was able to keep the "fire of charity and the light of the intellect" focused within himself in an unusually intensive manner. Apparently uninterested in material "realities," he ventured into the logical, metaphysical and natural dimensions of truth, with abandonment, and used his understanding in his works and sermons to "create" the "realness" of the community of things in the soul of his audience. He believed

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5 Berryl Smalley, *Introduction to Wyclif and His Followers* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984), p. 5.
6 Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978). Thorpe's evidence about Wyclif's university followers, 1407, p.33.
7 *Chronica Monasteri S. Albani, Thomae Walsingham, quadam monachi S. Albai, Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London, 1857). Walsingham discusses Wyclif's role at length in Vol. II, pp. 50–61.

that preaching and teaching were creation, and that by the logical reconstruction of will to rule desire, the creative potential, the divine constant present in every individual, could be ordered by the will for the greater good so that the integrity of man and nature be restored, and the welfare and growth of the republic be sustained. Yet, in the end, he seems to have been ex-*communicated* not only by the church, or by "his inordinate pride in the power of his logic and intellect,"[8] but also by the inability, or reluctance, of his chosen community to unite in the reciprocal service of one another and the common good. Private interests and fear proved stronger than faith, hope and charity.[9] He complained in his *Protestatio* about "the lack of perseverance in our race [...] to train our nation in unanimity and constancy."[10]

### 1.2 Wyclif's influence through his fame

Wyclif's contemporaries and near contemporaries called him John, Son of Augustine, *Doctor Evangelicus*, the Fifth Evangelist, King of Philosophers, or "*mala bestia*," "*collega Sathanae*," and others[11]. Characteristically, none of these names had anything to do with politics. He never seemed to fit easily into any assigned role. The tellers of his story have had a lot of difficulties, when they had to find a line to join the various elements into a coherent tale (narrative), and to create (construct) an "individual" from the scarce evidence about the person, as we have been taught by our modern cultural tradition to expect.

Wyclif's fame was canonised by Foxe,[12] who was the first one to turn an oral tradition into a written story. He established almost all the themes and tropes of later Wyclif biographies, when he presented him as the first martyr of Protestantism. He was probably responsible for setting the date of his birth, too, which was put at 1324 (and took exactly 600 years from his death to correct). Foxe keeps a straight line in his argument, placing Wyclif in the clear-cut role of Reformer, and putting all the blame on the bishops for the failure of his

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8 Quoted from a sentence of the Council of Constance, condemning Wyclif as a heretic.

9 Cf. the first and general proposition of the Lollard Manifesto of 1395 (Hudson, p. 24).

10 *Responsio Magistri Johannis Wyccliff ad dubium infra scriptum questuum ab eo per dominum regem Angliae Ricardum secundum, et magnum suum consilium: anno regni sui primo*, in: *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico*, ascribed to Thomas Netter of Walden, provincial of the Carmelite Order in England, and confessor to King Henry V, ed. Walter Waddington Shirley (London, 1858), pp. 258–271.

11 Walsingham.

12 Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was first published in 1570.

reformation. This charge was reiterated in the fierce debates of the English Revolution and is echoed in Milton's Areopagitica, too. Foxe even tries to clear the Commons of their implication in the passing of "the first act against religion" in 1382, by his reference to a move next year by the Commons to annul the bill passed against their will, but the proceedings of the parliament of 1383 were never printed.

In Foxe's biography, based on Netter, Walsingham, and records of Parliament, Wyclif's few documented public appearances are turned into a coherent story, a narrative, for the first time. In his description, Wyclif's prosecutors find themselves in the general image of "Romish champions," who "never ceased, by writing, admonishing and counselling, yea, and by quarrelling, to move and stir up princes to mind war and battle, even as though the faith and belief of the gospel were of no power or little effect without that wooden cross."

Before Wyclif's story was retold in English by Foxe, who canonised the context, the themes, the interpretation, the protagonists and even the judgements, it could have been known in three, or perhaps four, versions. One, or, perhaps, two of these versions could have constituted an oral tradition both within the establishments of church, university, court, and among the secret sect of Lollards. The two oral traditions must have been diametrically opposed to each other in their judgements as regards Wyclif's role in the calamities that characterised the years between 1376 and 1401, and set the scene for the acts of a historical drama which was performed in the following years. No royal prince could have been educated by his clerical tutor without gaining knowledge of the events which featured prominently in the family story of Lancastrian kings, and marked the beginning of a conflict which raged through England and in Central Europe throughout the whole of the 15th century. Thomas Netter of Walden's *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico* and his *Doctrinale* served as the basis of any other work or discussion on Wyclif.

Netter, who sat at the Council of Constance, which had condemned Wyclif's tenets and their author as heretical before it could find a reason to send Hus to the stake, however, never told the story, and, apparently, neither did members of the persecuted sect of Lollards, who, in their dire situation, were hardly able to keep the few notes which helped them to use the Bible in their secret meetings. Netter hoped to discredit the Lollards by refuting their teacher's tenets. The Lollards, in fact, very seldom made direct references to Wyclif. Either because they did not want to give away themselves, or because Wyclif himself left them with a legacy

that would put the word and work before the person. However, as their living relationship with the university was severed, the free flow of ideas of natural philosophy that was an integral part of Wyclif's design was also cut, and they became increasingly dogmatic and sectarian. Even though they took pride in their education and impeccable life, they gradually corrected Wyclif and shaped him to their own spiritual needs. Then they reverted to the literal reading of the Bible, which even Pecock, the Bishop of Chichester, writing about the general agitation among the people of England even about seventy years after Wyclif's death, thought to be scarce of logic.[13] This oral tradition has proved to be the most pervasive of all Wyclif-narratives: the Evangelical Doctor is still active as the authority behind the unebbing tide of evangelisation. Though historical criticism has expressed serious doubts about the possibility of Wyclif's translating the Bible into English, his popular fame still cherishes him as the Father of the English Prose for this deed. (Wyclif's Bohemian followers started his cult as a saint. Some of them even took a piece of his tomb to Prague, where it was worshipped as a relic.)

Apart from *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, which does not contain much information about Wyclif's life, there are two contemporary sources: Thomas Walsingham's and Henry Knighton's chronicles.[14] Walsingham's *Historia* was believed to be the most authentic one. Its author, however, regarded Wyclif "an evil beast"; he did not only incriminate him as being the main instigator of the Peasants' Revolt, "*collega Sathanae*," but he was also overjoyed when this "instrument of the devil, enemy of the Church, who confused the minds of the people, this idol of heretics, deceptive mirror, who created schism, this breeder of hatred, maker of lies" died, his tongue "paralyzed as Cain's by God."[15]

The mystical entity of Wyclif stalked rulers, knights, clerics and commons. Walsingham, a monk of St Albans, was apparently prejudiced against Wyclif, while Knighton, who was a monk at the same Augustinian Monastery in Leicester as Repington, one of Wyclif's most well known followers, who later recanted, and, presumably, betrayed his master, held more favourable, or at least, more neutral views of him.

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13 Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor over much blaming of the Clergy* (1457), ed. C. Babington (London: Rolls Series, 1860).
14 Henry Knighton, *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitton, Monachi Leycestreusis*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Rolls Series, 1889–95).
15 Walsingham.

Wyclif's name was never forgotten. When in 1521 Pope Leo X asked the University of Oxford to falsify Luther, Edward Powell, a Welsh Fellow of Oriel, answered: "Luther less than Wyclif in terms of knowledge, but greater in evil."[16] How did he know? Less than ten years later Henry VIII sent to Oxford for a copy of the condemnation of Wyclif at the Council of Constance, but the university sent its own condemnation from 1410. In a perverted manner, the king received the script for his reforms. As if a late realisation of Wyclif's his ideas, the Act of Uniformity aimed at "training the nation in unanimity and constancy."

John Bale, who compiled the first catalogue of Wyclif's works in 1548, wrote that "he shone like the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and remained for many years as the faithful witness in the church."[17] He started his fame as "The Morning Star of Reformation." In the Church of England, he became a kind of a pseudo martyr. Thomas James, the first keeper of the Bodleian Library, hung his picture in the main reading room, which remained there for almost four hundred years. In fact, it was only removed a few years ago. For most of these years he was frozen in this rather dusty image. Incidentally, Thomas James also found it essential to point out even in the title of his apology for John Wyclif, that "[he] did not hold all the goods of Christians to be common" – betraying the living tradition of Wyclif's communism. [18]

### 1.3 Wyclif's waning fame

The debate about Wyclif's person and work was revived again in the 1830s, in another period of frenzied change which affected every segment of English society. Shirley in his edition of *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* effectively revived interest in Wyclif, and he was the first to present him as a scholar, too. Shirley edited his sources to the effect to emphasise the "commencement of Wyclif's career as a reformer [...] contemporary [...] with the climax and first decline of feudal chivalry in England."

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16 G. Fitch Little, "John Wyclif, Edward Powell, and the Lutheran Revolution," *SCH*, Subsidia 5 (1986).

17 John Bale, *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytannie [...] Catalogus. Centuria Sexta* (Basel, 1557), pp.450–455.

18 Thomas James, *An apologie for Ion Wycliffe: shewing his conformitie with the now Church of England; with answere to such slaunderous obiections, as have been lately urged against him by Father Parsons, the apologists, and others, etc.* (Oxford, 1608). The title of James' apology may serve as a study by itself, underlying at least two aspects of Wyclif's living legacy: a bookish knight and a public library.

The common belief about Wyclif's communism revived interest in his works in the 1880s. An equally important impetus for the study of Wyclif's works came from German scholars who attempted to revise the assessment of Hussitism in their quest for the origins of German nationalism and spirituality. With the publication of more and more of Wyclif's Latin works by the Wyclif Society, the introductions by Pool, Lechler, Dzewiczky tried to summarise their content and even give appraisals of it. But in popular history, it was Trevelyan's *England at the Age of Wyclif* which reformulated his myth. Trevelyan's book, which was published in more than twenty-five editions, is very much biased, but it is revealing in respect to the overt and covert discourses of historians and the educated audience at the end of the 19th century. He brushed aside Wyclif's *De civili dominio*, the work that made him notorious and most controversial, that was taken to Prague, translated into Czech, and burnt there, too, as heretical, so much that it has been looked upon with suspicion ever since. Trevelyan's story is told with such vehemence, heat and pathos, that his retelling of events on the basis of *Chronicon Angliae* and *Historia Anglicana*, and a select reading of Rolls of Parliament, leaves little doubt about his inner motive: to clear Wyclif of any incrimination with the "peculations" of his patron, John of Gaunt, and the Peasants' Revolt, even at the cost of belittling his intellectual capacities and moral judgement. Shakespeare had given a better role to the Duke of Lancaster.[19]

Workman's *Wyclif*,[20] by constructing the most detailed biography possible from the scant evidence, gives a much more balanced picture than Trevelyan, but its positivistic attitude was hardly influential in 1926; at an age when one of Wyclif's main concern, the integrity of the soul, seems to have been lost for good, and what was left of it was taken care of by analysts and psychologists. His other major concern, social justice became a political issue for liberals, conservatives and socialists to implement through various legitimations for the distribution of goods and resources.[21] As there has been little hope of discovering more data about his life, interest slowly turned to his political role in lollardy, and his logical-philosophical and theological-pastoral work. As a result, in a hundred years' time, by the end of the 20th century, Trevelyan's judgements have been cautiously

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19 G. M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wyclif*, first published in 1899 (25 editions).
20 H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: a Study of the English Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), 2 vols.
21 Wyclif confessed that the theologian was Christ's lawyer in cases of injustice, and that he should always support the oppressed in such "cases of God."

revised, while never returning to the high-toned and fairly superficial appraisal of Wyclif in traditional Anglicanism. Wyclif began to wane into oblivion, without his epoch-making work on justice, law and dominion ever having been seriously considered or even read.

### 1.4 Modern images: Wyclif as ideologist of dissent, and an analytical philosopher

K. B. McFarlane's *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Noncomformity* (London, 1952) and his lectures on Lollard Knights have shown how Wyclif influenced Lollardy, and how Lollardy led to the Henrician Reformation, but he presented Wyclif as an inferior thinker and a failure as a political activist. Mary Aston apparently followed this appraisal in her impressive studies of lollardy. Gordon Leff summarised his theology and placed it in the broader context of medieval heresies, yet he apparently undervalued Wyclif's originality as a theologian, and was unimpressed by his political role. Michael Wilks attempted to restore Wyclif's reputation as an ideologist of dissent, and Anne Hudson has done invaluable and abundant work on various aspects of Wycliffism. Her Introduction to her *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, seems to be one of the most balanced and reliable summaries of Wyclif's life and works to this day – even though she fails to mention Wyclif's work *De civili dominio*, which made him what he was to be in the memory of several generations, in the list of important events. Robson's *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* initiated serious interest in his logic and philosophy. The work in this field was followed by Kenny, and Kretzmann, and by the publication of *De universalibus* and *Summa insolubilium*. Anthony Kenny's *Wyclif* (Oxford, 1984), is the latest handbook on Wyclif, and it also tries to reconstruct his intellectual profile on the basis of recent work. An edition of Michael Wilks's studies by Anne Hudson is the latest attempt to keep interest in Wyclif's political ideas alive. Perhaps the most important change in Wyclif's acclaim came with Beryll Smalley's discovery of Wyclif as a Biblical scholar. In this respect, Anne Hudson's work on *Floretum* is an equally fundamental link between his actual teaching and its impact on his audience.

These works reflect the intellectual interests of twentieth century academics and reveal new aspects of Wyclif's person and influence, yet they leave the fundamental problem of the appraisal of Doctor Evangelicus in the dark. At one end, there stands the Oxford scholar with his impressive amount of Latin works on logic, metaphysics, philosophy and theology, and the secular priest, who would do honour to God, and edify; at the other, the instigator of a popular

movement, the arch-heretic, condemned by the English Church, the University of Oxford, and the Council of Constance. Between the two ends, there are about seven years, when Wyclif's path crossed the path of people who were the heroes of chronicled history, and became entangled with them. It is believed that the intensity of intellectual illumination of private and public paths came to being through *De civili dominio*, in which he applied his intellectual vision at political "actualities." His involvement with politics gave a pretext for posteriority to overemphasise his political role, and to leave his evangelising, preaching, and teaching in obscurity.

## 2 ACTOR OR AUTHOR?

### 2.1 Wyclif's union with the "universe" of Oxford scholarship

This may be at the bottom of many difficulties as concerns his historical role. One of Wyclif's main scholastic problems was whether nominalism, or rather terminalism, or the science and art of "sign-doctors," was compatible with realism, whether logical truth was compatible with truth as justice; or, in post-modern usage, whether "constructed" reality, with its formalistic rules and the conventional meaning of its symbols was compatible with a more fundamental "narrative," whose *author*, though incessantly and charitably giving his creative potential, intelligence, and charity (all homonyms for the divine essence) to his audience, the "*genus*" called "humanity," by "*ens communissimum*," does not know them as individuals or their individual actions. The implication of this proposition is that the free choices made by individuals either to "liberate themselves from justice, or from sin, or from humanity"[22] cannot but receive the creative potential which makes them inevitably real, while the material substance they are made of, informed by the reason of their "creation" at their *conception* by a name which is identical with the concept, will obey the dumb forces in the physical world of cause and effect. Yet, as the promise of salvation is given to "humanity," and was even made real by Christ's life and resurrection in the body, by following the only authoritative "narrative" of his story, we can obtain a mirror by which to see ourselves, and free ourselves from sin. "Narration" is creation; through "narration" words assume their higher meaning in the audience, and create a community. It is through this narrated (or, in fact, created) universe

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22 Cf. *De civili dominio*, Vol. I, p. 240.

that the first cause moves men to wisdom. However, the other two aspects of the divine presence, creative potential and charity are constants that are effective even if the will and its interpretation in rational terms are inflected from straight line.

In Wyclif's quest for the good, free and beautiful life, "ordered love of universals" and contemplation of God's law was the supreme good for "*viators*"; "every Christian who flees from meditating on God's eternal love to temporalia by which he satisfies his inordinate appetite fornicates spiritually [...], and becomes a fool."[23] No more a sinner than any human being except in the state of innocence, nor a fool, but "a passing reuli man,"[24] Wyclif channelled his creative potential into his work, rejecting his carnal desires, and converting them into the driving force of prayer and work of another kind than Benedictine or Cistercian *regula* would demand. Instead of turning away from the world, and keeping the canonical hours, or embracing mysticism, he turned to the natural world and created a memorable presence by the example of his life and the power of his words in the soul of his audience. He believed that the only rule(*regula*) to live by was natural order. He chose the medium of the university for his good works. Whether or not this was a viable example for young men who went to Oxford to prepare for a life in the service of the church is debatable. He became one with Oxford, and his presence has lurked there ever since he was condemned and forced to leave in 1382.

## 2.2 Wyclif's appearance on the stage of history

In view of this, what is known, or can be known, about the life of Wyclif's "spare, frail, emaciated"[25] body is ultimately not very interesting. In fact, not much is known for certain. He made his first appearance on the stage of history on February 19, 1377, in an imposing pageant, as he marched down the aisle of St. Paul's in the company of four friars, escorted by the two most powerful men of England, the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Percy, the Marshall of England, to face an equally magnificent ecclesiastical court sitting in full pomp in the Lady Chapel. A show of force ensued, which did not last long. John of Gaunt threatened to pull the bishops out of their churches by the hair, should they dare to touch "this saintly man," leaving no doubt that Pilate, this time, was not going to wash his

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23 John Wyclif, *Tractatus de mandatis divinis accedit Tractatus de statu innocencie*, eds. Johann Loserth and F. D. Matthew (London, 1922), p. 102.
24 In Thorpe's testimony, see fn. 6.
25 In Thorpe's testimony, see fn. 6.

hands. But then a crowd of Londoners, unimpressed by the pageantry of the historical moment, broke the door down, and instead of coming to the rescue of their preacher, their doctor (teacher, and – thus – their creator), whom they apparently did not recognise, they threatened to kill the Duke of Lancaster, and put an end to the whole show. Quickly saved by his rival, Courteney, the Duke fled to the palace of the Princess of Wales, who hid him in her wardrobe. The "small emaciated figure" of the "saintly man" mysteriously vanished. Knight, priests, and the common people were all participating in this rude interlude "at the break of dawn of Reformation."[26] Yet, four years later, on Corpus Christi Day in 1381, the London crowd had Wyclif's name on their lips, when they rioted.

The timing of the riot could hardly be accidental. Apparently, the event had been related to the attack of Doctor Evangelicus on transubstantiation. The Corpus Christi mass written by Thomas Aquinas and commissioned by Urban IV as a means of gaining popular attention for the Host of the Altar, and the secret of the Catholic faith, especially against *Albigensis*, had been perhaps the most important liturgical change introduced by the Lateran Councils. Liturgically, i.e. culturally and ritually, its celebration overshadowed Ascension Day and Pentecost. When in 1379, Wyclif attacked the dogma of transubstantiation in his famous *De eucharistia*, based on his understanding of Christ's humanity, and the mystical body of the church that he believed was "one integral rational body [...] always a convocation, never a congregation," he signalled a change of cultural discourse from the ancient sacrificial worship of divinity administered by a privileged class of clergy to its "real presence" in the community of the faithful communicated by the Spirit, the power of the Word. If the spirit, that was the reflection of humanity in the individual soul, the word, which was verity, and natural body were integrated, free life and dominion were achieved. This could only happen in community through goodwill, mutual exchange and reciprocal service. This was how Wyclif considered Christ nature instituted and free life. This was compatible with the symbolical celebration of the Gift of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of nature at spring. If Wyclif's philosophical ideas were intended to liberate the soul of men from the "constraints of false logic," his

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26 What followed is not relevant for Wyclif's life, but it may reveal a further dimension of the symbolism of the age. John of Gaunt identified the action of the mob with London and threatened to withdraw its charter. This must have been motivated by certain controversies over financial issues.

theological views did the same in respect of subservience to a costly regime of rule over the public and individual mind.

The riots came only a few weeks before the more memorable Peasants' Revolt, and signified the beginning of a popular form of heresy in England, which was to characterise Lollardy as its distinguishing feature. At the Lords' Supper, Lollards refused to accept that the bread after consecration by the priest became Christ's body. After Wyclif, they would consider this the most horrible form of heresy. At communion they ate the bread and became one with Christ in the community of his humanity and divinity in their souls. Though Hus did not embrace Wyclif's idea of transubstantiation, the liturgical change was further developed by Hussites. The political consequences of Wyclif's ideas were also acted out by his followers.

### 2.3 Wyclif's integrity

Whether it was the apparition of a man, or whether it was Wyclif's written and spoken word which was more like himself , whether word and its power over passions of the soul were bigger than natural bodies who would attempt to elevate themselves by brutal force, wealth, rank, ornaments, and loud and rude words, has remained a question to the present day. If it was into his words that the reality of person, his intellect and his soul, was translated, it remained hidden, as his written words were demolished by fire, or scattered around the world, and the spoken ones were distorted by the interpretations of his diverse audiences. All other facts of his life remain obscure and can only be reconstructed from imagined contexts.

It seems that Wyclif was not tempted to assert (construct) himself as an individual, but, true to his own teaching, he integrated in himself the "created universe of knowledge" with the natural man. Many Wyclif scholars have wondered why he has left scarcely any trace of himself in his works. Life in its vegetative sense, controlled by blind forces, "the animal" part, may have interested him only in as much as it was the matter which was given form by the creative potential of God through "ens communissimum." True, in others, he saw the essence of God as part of their created being, and thus nature was the most fitting object of contemplating on the divine essence.[27] In a certain sense, this must have been one of his attractions. His did not triumph over the body by destroying

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27 Cf. *De mandatis divinis*, p. 175.

it, or doing sacrilege to it – on the contrary. Together with the beauty of nature, he would find great joy in beautifying it.[28] Yet, the body, being of matter, was corruptible, and only the soul made it real. It was made sensible by its creation in time, as part of a universe governed by reason, which was made up of entities with names: genus and species. The soul was the mediator between uncreated nature and the omnipotence and omniscience of God, and a priest was to be its cultivator – in himself as in others.

Whether the intellectual qualities of the soul by which it recognised its own indestructible essence and justified its being, inhered in the individual, or whether they had a reality outside the individuals, i.e. whether they were common, in community, and the individual soul had only the capacity to recognise them, was a decisive issue in scholastic thought. The former assertion found its intellectual being in nominalism; the latter in realism – Aristotle instead of Plato. The former amplified the forces leading to Renaissance individuals, and united the body and the soul by *autonomous actors*, the latter helped to shape the forces which led to periodic outbursts of rebellion under various *common* (collective) names they found for themselves; good men, peasants, nation.[29] Renaissance individuals found a reflection of this individual spirituality, in fact the "locomotion" of the soul, in enjoyment and use, manageable rituals and objects of worship, and dynastic families, by which they could hope to be in control of their own justification and fate after life on earth, and civil law in their temporal being. Less self-assertive people found their self-identity in a feeling of being in community with others achieved by the enlightened and communal practice of study and talk of God, i.e. supreme justice, and contemplation of created nature in the refracted light from over the horizon of eternity.[30]

Whether the cure of the soul consisted of administering the sacraments and keeping the unity of past, present and future by the elaborate liturgy of the Catholic church, and doing the work of God in external ways, or by cultivating

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28 Cf. *De mandatis divinis*, pp. 140–150. Here, quoting St. Anselm, Wyclif describes the 14 signs of blessedness (*beatitudines*); seven of the body, and seven of the soul, namely: beauty, swiftness or agility, fortitude, liberty, health, pleasure, duration, and wisdom, friendship, concord, honour, power, security, joy.

29 The connection between Marsiglio of Padua and Wyclif, or FitzRalph and Wyclif, is misleading. They were 'modern,' i.e. nominalist, voluntarist and individualist, whereas Wyclif was 'antique' and stood for community.

30 Paraphrased from *De mandatis divinis*, p. 175: "Si ergo voluerimus videre naturam divinam in patria, consideremus creaturas suas secundum rationes quibus ab ipso cognoscuntur et ordinantur; et sic convertamur ad *orizonem eternitatis* sub quo latet adhuc lux illa abscondita..."

the soul so that it could receive the seed of truth and nourish it, was a further reflection of the dichotomy, which would point to different directions for the "*cathena* of concord and love."[31] For one, it was unbearable to be without a name; he had to find one for himself, by distinction, if they did not have one by inheritance, that was attached to a piece of land, an estate that would make their name fertile for "eternity," or by other means. Not to be known to God by name, i.e. as an individual, meant fear of damnation. Whether one's name was written in the Book of Life was to become a painful issue. But for Wyclif, the Book of Life was the Scripture with its veritable sense which even went before its literal sense, and the veritable sense was its "natural" truth.

The question of nominalism *vis* realism was crucial in this respect, too. It also affected Wyclif's view of predestination, and various desperate efforts by certain people to manipulate the memory of their name by mass, prayer, donation, funds, etc.- or, at the other end, to manipulate the generation of offspring's. No wonder such practices were most abhorable for Lollards and Hussites, as well. For them, it was all vanity; God promised eternal life for humanity and not for individuals, and Christ redeemed men in body by delivering them from the rule of man-made custom and law. He showed them the way back to the state of innocence, i.e. natural life, and thus to a chance for perpetual justification.

In Wyclif, too, there was a paradox; perhaps, the paradox of every "realism." For nominalists, there are several truths and a mystical sense of, or faith in, what is beyond their terms. For realists, truth is universal. The first proposition seems to give more freedom of choice to individuals, and an acceptance of conventional forms of the cure of the soul and the rule of law. The second one, on the other hand, has a tint of authoritarianism, self-righteousness, and community control. Yet, it looks like there have been "realists" with community action behind every change of "paradigm." A nominalist would construct the details in between.

## 3 *NATURAL INTEGRITY*

For Wyclif, the world was what the righteous ones made it to be by their "merituous copulation, rational integration, and enjoyment." He also based his whole mission of restoring justice by the restoration of the rational order of the

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31 "[C]athena concordie vel amoris," *De mandatis divinis*, p. 325.

universe on his assumption that the human person was the natural integrity of the spirit and the soul. While the soul was the instrument of the survival of the body in the natural and physical environment of cause and effect through the principle of *bonitas*, the spirit became part of this same soul at copulation, similarly to the gift of language, and both the spirit and the language were the reflection and the real presence of the community in the singular, i.e. individual being. The community was an entity that existed in communication: in reciprocal service. This linguistic and emotional exchange, which corresponded with the wisdom and love of the divine trinity was superimposed on the natural constant of creative potential. Creative potential moved man to want things in the material world, but the goods of nature and man made goods could only be truly enjoyed if they were in concord with wisdom and love which were the reality of common humanity. The creative potential was a constant, and will was absolutely free; consequently it was possible for powerful persons to force their will on others, but abuse of one's own potential and of the goods of the community could ever lead to true dominion which was God's ordination and legacy for man in the world.

When he responded to the question of the King's Council as regards the lawfulness of withholding dues from *dominus papa*, his answer was based on his understanding of the "natural body" and its integrity, which was separated from its divine essence by "lust": dominion, possession, fornication, and murder, i.e. Cain's and Lucifer's party. There were two ways for reintegrating body and soul for the "free and good life," i.e. for religion as "realignment." To cut across roles which had created such powerful "composite" characters as William of Wykeham or John of Gaunt, who, in their many "habits," were guided by different principles, reasons, and customs. One was to control one's desire by assuming an individual identity, name, and power, i.e. dominion, to channel all of one's potential into the service of private goals in multiple roles, each governed and regulated by "charter, custom and law," and creating a segment of a complex pattern of culture. The other way was to become part of a greater natural entity, and give oneself over to "natural" desires and work. They were, as they had been in popular heresy, "good" or "true" men and women: the

"righteous" ones, Wyclif's "*fideli*," who believed that the "person of the Word" was "*esse deitatem*."[32]

Wyclif agreed that uncreated nature had the potential to procreate, but there was no blessing and grace, no creation and thus no meaning in such procreation. Through this procreation and lust, Satan divides body and soul.[33] This would mean that we cannot create(construct) habits(culture) as second nature, unless in alignment with the first of nature, which is the dominion of God, where the principle of our being is demonstrated; otherwise we become perverted by "Satan's deceits." By equivocation, this would mean that since truth is God, and truth is predication (i.e. saying something of a thing which is identical with the thing in essence) all else is falsity – a lie. Wyclif was not a liar, he tried to be identical with his word, which he derived from the Scriptures, and found its incarnation in Christ, as a natural man.[34]

Apparently it has generally been difficult to conceive of individuals simply as natural indivisible beings. At the threshold of modernity, faced with the disruption of the archaic patterns of lordship and servitude, Wyclif seems to have had a clear choice between *individuality*, with its extrapolation of spiritual needs into constructed artefacts of beauty, thrill, enchantment, rapture, in brief, surrendering the soul to the forces of lust, greed, pride, and conquest, as if deliberately bringing about a division in the soul between Aristotle's law abiding animal in a world of objects prone to manipulation, by which the qualities of the soul could be projected into, and cultivated by, "private religions," and an unconscious psyche, burying the burden of sin, i.e. falsity, in private confessions; and *community* of "natural" men and women who open their soul to the creative power of the Word, and go about their business in the spirit of mutual and reciprocal exchange. Wyclif's philosophy, theology and life seem to have represented the second path, as did Piers Plowman. This was recognised by the rebels in the Peasants' Revolt.

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32 That is, "the mode of being of God" – "Assumptum patet de persona Verbi, quam fidelis credit esse deitatem [...] patet quod predicatum sit communius quam subiectum" (*De dominio divino, Liber secundus, cap. ix*, p. 190).
33 *De mandatis divinis*, p. 236.
34 Cf. *De dominio divino*, p. 178.

But it seems that it was the impact of the spirit and the intellect, his fame and his teaching, and not his corporeal body and individual self which assumed this historical role. He was not an actor, yet he was seen by his contemporaries as an author. As Archbishop Arudnel said at the Lollard William Thorpe's trial in 1407: "Wyclif your master and *author* was a great clerk."[35] Wyclif, though, believed that authorship was the divine will, which worked through creative potential, wisdom and love in the human person: the integrity of nature and spirit in the individual soul.

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35 "Wiclef ʒoure mistir and auctour was a greet clerk" ("Thorpe's evidence about Wyclif's university followers, 1407," in: Hudson, p. 33).

*Rita Dózsai*

# Novelties or "Common Maxims"

## Problems of Originality and Genius in Young's *Conjectures*

The purpose of this paper is to consider Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) with special emphasis on the author's understanding of genius. It is well known that this particular essay had had a significant influence on the Romantic Movement in England, Germany and France stretching well beyond the confines of his time. Offering his conjectures on exceptional ability within the broad context of imitation and originality, the author made a peculiar contribution to the vogue of genius on the Continent. When one recalls the date at which this "manifesto of romanticism was written," one may recognise "how the publication of the *Conjectures* was a milestone in literary history."[1] Precisely for this reason, that is, because of the way the *Conjectures* challenged prevailing classicism does Young's enterprise still interest the reader. In what follows, therefore, I propose a consideration of Young's arguments, and attempt to examine whether his claim for originality is justified. To achieve this, in the following pages, I shall revise, at first, the most important eighteenth-century treatises on genius in order to provide a possible contextual framework for Young's composition. I shall also be concerned with the eighteenth-century development of the notion of genius by focusing on Young's original or unoriginal efforts to posit a definition on this term. Meanwhile I also try to explore to what extent the Youngean model paves the way for a Romanticised genius.

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1 Harold Forster, *Poet of the Night Thoughts: Edward Young, 1683–1765* (Alburgh: Erskine Press, 1986), p. 3.

Before turning to Young's practical contribution to the history of genius, however, it seems to be necessary to consider at some length the profound changes which came into prominence in the critical thinking of eighteenth century classicism. Atkins exploring "the widening outlook" points out that in the mid-eighteenth century a great bulk of critical material is published – he mentions the works of Gray, Hurd, Lowth, the Wartons and Young – which develops a "fresh approach to the whole critical business."[2] Challenging the authority of the neo-classical doctrines, undermining the established tradition of imitation and advocating originality are the most important tendencies in these new critical attitudes. Equally important is, therefore, the debate between the ancients and the moderns– "principally a French affair, carried on with less heat in England"[3] – upon which Temple, Wotton and Bentley reflect well ahead of Young, taking different positions. Practically speaking, the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* concerns the question whether the moderns should copy the ancient authors or exploit their own creative originality.[4] That the modern opposition to antiquity and the views on Homer's original genius become prominent to literary and scientific matters is evident in a great body of eighteenth century discourses. The ancients, according to Simonsuuri, encourage the imitation of classics because classical antiquity is considered to be equivalent with nature. The moderns, quite to the contrary, reject modelling themselves on the examples and rules of ancient authors, while naturally they do recognise their merits. As a consequence, the interest of moderns is directed to contemporary works that display human nature in a more complex way than the classics.[5] As it seems, the antithetical position promoted by the polemic and the shift in emphasis from imitation to originality prepare the ground for the remarkable eighteenth century documents on the concept of genius.

Tracing the development of this very concept, it is apparent that the notion of genius is foremost in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, but it is

2 J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism, 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 187.
3 Kálmán Ruttkay, "Young's Conjectures Reconsidered," in: *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok IV* [Hungarian studies in English IV] (Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1969), p.70.
4 Kirsti Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-century notions of the early Greek epic (1688–1798)* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), p. 19. The name of the debate originates from Charles Perrault's work, the *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1688–97). During the controversy, the moderns or the followers of Perrault are set in opposition to the ancients, the supporters of Boileau.
5 Simonsuuri, p.23.

also clear that the idea had formed well before that time. Wickman points out that the period from the mid-eighteenth through the early nineteenth century is traditionally considered "an age in which the concept of genius evolves from its prior significations of attendant or ancestral spirit or natural inclination to its more Romantic and modern associations of an ecstatic and creative individuality."[6] For our purposes, however, it is of far greater importance to reconsider the fifth definition of genius given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This enquiry may bring us closer to the origins of genius delineated in the *Conjectures* revealing an earlier contribution to the history of original genius. The *OED* defines the term as "native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery," providing an illustrative mid-eighteenth century example.[7] Exploring the earliest modern usage of the concept Jonathan Bate suggests a "principal modification" of the date when the word first acquired its widely accepted modern meaning.[8] One should not forget that as early as 1711 Addison in *The Spectator* 160 attempts to posit a definition of original genius supplying all the essential elements which, according to the *OED*, "is not properly formulated" until the mid-eighteenth century.[9] Such an early exploration of the concept, as it will be demonstrated in later parts of this paper, foreshadows Young's "original" model.

It is interesting to notice here that the very notion of genius is involved in a prolonged critical dialogue. Let us mention, therefore, further important works developing a detailed account of great ability during the period concerned: Sharpe, *A Dissertation Upon Genius* (1755); Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756–82); Duff, *Essay on Original genius* (1767), Gerard, *Essay on Genius* (1774); Reynolds, *Discourses* II (1782).[10] While the main concern of these

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6 Matthew Wickman, "Imitating Eve Imitating Echo Imitating Originality: The Critical Reverberations of Sentimental Genius in the Conjectures," *ELH* 65 (1998), p. 900.

7 The first attested usage of this particular sense of genius is from Fielding's *Tom Jones*, XIV.i (1749): "By the wonderful force of genius only, without the least assistance of learning."

8 Jonathan Bate, "Shakespeare and Original Genius" in Penelope Murray, ed., *Genius: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 77.

9 Bate, p. 78.

10 Anette Wheeler Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets. Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 214. Nineteenth-century discourses on genius include Hazlitt, "On Genius and Originality" (1814), "On Genius and

treatises is mainly philological, the Scots primitivists (Sharpe, Duff, Gerard), however, are interested in philosophical matters focusing on the faculties that constitute genius and the creativity of primitive man.[11] These discussions contributing to the eighteenth-century development of the term may serve to remind us that by the time Young's essay came on the scene the conjectures on the problems of imitation were far from new. Indeed, Young's argumentation reflects standard contemporary features of genius.

Besides the major eighteenth century works considering the originality and genius of Homer, a large body of minor critical pieces appear, such as "the numerous letters, essays and poems written for didactic or literary critical purposes," – works "which do not directly attempt to evaluate Homer but use him indirectly as an example."[12] Ultimately, Young's essay, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* belongs to these. The essay in the epistolary form is dedicated to Samuel Richardson who plays the key role in shaping Young's draft versions. "One hundred and Fifty Original Letters between Dr. Edward Young, Author of Night Thoughts, and Mr. Samuel Richardson, Author of Clarissa, Grandison, &c."[13] contain such pieces that demonstrate this joint effort. It is therefore of great value and concern that the letters show insight into the different stages of the essay.[14] Thus, the correspondence between 1757 and 1759 is especially relevant as far as the emendations and comments of the novelist are concerned. Richardson's suggestions (concerning both the style and content) bring us to what is perhaps the most difficult problem, the question of his responsibility for any alterations to Young's original composition. Notwithstanding, as Phillips convincingly argues,

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*Common Sense*" (1821); Lamb, "*Sanity of True Genius*" (1826); D'Israeli, *Essay on the Manners and Genius of The Literary Character* (1795); Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter II (1817).

11 Simonsuuri, pp. 122–123. The Scottish primitivists are a minority group centred around Aberdeen and Edinburgh during the second half of the eighteenth century. Other renowned members are Blackwell, Reid, Campbell, Beattie, Kames, Lord Monboddo, Blair, Fergusson.

12 Simonsuuri, p. 143.

13 Henry Pettit, ed., *The Correspondence of Edward Young 1683–1765* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), p. xxxiv. From 1813 to 1819 a series of letters was published in the *Monthly Magazine* "as memoirs and remains of eminent persons."

14 Importantly enough, McKillop's article is the first to use and examine the materials provided by the correspondence (Alan D. McKillop, "Richardson, Young, and the Conjectures," *Modern Philology* 22 [1925], pp. 391–404). Patricia Philips also drawing on the letters reconsiders Mckillop's findings (Patricia Phillips, "Richardson, Young, and the Conjectures: Another Interpretation," *Studia Neophilologia* 53 [1981], pp. 107–112).

we can only notice that Richardson makes suggestion whether they are "entirely or partly his own cannot be known."[15] In this respect, the choice of "conjectures" in the title proves to be fairly suggestive reflecting on its development. Since in terms of textual criticism *conjecture* denotes a proposed emendation of a text.[16] By all means, during the crucial period of emendation (14 January 1757–31 May 1759) Young's understanding of original composition and genius is fostered under the authority of Richardson.

Perhaps it might be of interest to remark that as early as 1756 Young is at work on his critical essay sending the first draft to his correspondent.[17] And in the same year Joseph Warton dedicates his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* to Young himself. This piece of criticism regards imitation as an inferior poetic technique proposing the demotion of Pope from his established rank.[18] Apparently, Warton's confidence in Young's patronage is based on their shared *modern* position and the poet's earlier points of attack on the works of Pope.[19] The information in Young's letter of 24 February 1757 seems to provide further details about the essay in progress and contemporary literary life. Somewhat excited, Young planning a flying visit to London writes: "I must borrow one hour of you to hear me read the letter, as now, by your assistance, amended; for it is so transcribed, that, without some hints to you, it will be unintelligible."[20] Interestingly enough, it is concerning this occasion that Dr. Johnson also comes into the picture. The famous incident is narrated by Boswell:

> the first time he saw Dr. Young was at the house of Mr. Richardson, the author of *Clarissa*. He was sent for, that the doctor might read to him his *Conjectures on original Composition*, which he did, and Dr. Johnson made his remarks, and he was surprised to find *Young receive as novelties, what he thought very common maxims.*[21]

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15 Phillips, p. 109. According to McKillop, Richardson was very often rewriting Young rather than making additions of his own.

16 Cf. the definition of 'conjecture' given in the *OED* (head 5).

17 Young's letter of 21 December 1756: "I know not the merit or demerit of what I send; if it has merit, I beg you give it more. How much does the Centaur owe to you! If it has no merit, keep the secret and all is well" (Pettit, p. 440).

18 Forster, p. 303.

19 Neither regards imitation and translation as original composition.

20 Pettit, p. 452.

21 R. W. Chapman, ed., *James Boswell: Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (Oxford: OUP, 1944), p. 341 (my italics).

Now let us quote the concluding notes to the 1854 edition of the *Conjectures* which question Boswell's authentic recordings of Johnson's talk and account for the literary friendship between the listeners:

> But does the biographer mean, that Johnson's opinions on Young's production, delivered after dinner ore rotundo, in his oracular style, were mere commonplace sentiments, and received as 'novelties' by his delighted auditory? If this be the sense of the passage, it is one instance, among many, of Boswell's loose diction; and is by no means complimentary to Johnson's character, when Young and Richardson, with a select party, were his willing listeners. But if he intended to convey the impression, that Young had introduced into his *'Conjectures'* 'very common maxims' which he regarded as 'novelties,' it is manifestly erroneous. At the time of this interview, Johnson was in the prime of life, being about thirty years the junior of Young; and his intellectual powers had reached their maturity. He had not then become notorious for overbearing dogmatism; and the presence of the kind-hearted Richardson and of his polite friends might restrain much of his exuberant criticism.[22]

Even though the nineteenth century editor argues against Young's "commonplace sentiments," there is scant doubt that in its day the essay turns out to be hardly original. However it seems to be far more doubtful, as it shall be detailed, whether Johnson commits his strictures to paper. Indeed, the ever-recurring element of the correspondence is the uncertainty about Johnson's making his remarks at all. In this respect, Richardson's letter of 24 May 1759 might be of interest. Here the novelist informs his friend about the reception of the *Conjectures'* first edition: "Mr. Johnson is much pleased with it: he made a few observations on some passages, which I encouraged him to commit to paper, and which he promised to do, and send to you."[23] What makes Young disappointed or at least impatient with – the same that makes the student of Johnson suspicious of – is the critic's (unusual) reluctance.[24] Such a peculiar attitude towards the

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22 *The Complete Works, Poetry and Prose of the Rev. Edward Young, LL.D.*, revised and collated with the earliest editions (London: William Tegg, 1854), Vol. II, n.p.

23 Pettit, p. 498.

24 Young's hesitation whether to send Richardson the revised version of the essay originates from Johnson's silence: "I shall not send a copy till I have the pleasure of Mr. Johnson's letter on the points he spoke of to you, and please let him know that I impatiently wait for it" (Pettit, p. 500). In the final letter on 31 may 1759 Young writes: "It was very kind in you to send to Mr. Johnson's; and unfortunate to me that you sent in vain" (Pettit, p. 503).

*Conjectures*, as it shall be discussed, remains to be the same in Johnson's later approaches to Young.

Perhaps, needless to say, the essay receives very different critical response from those of the similar tracts of Young's contemporaries. The influence and the reception of the *Conjectures* divide the reading public for a long time. As Rúttkay points out:

> [t]he reason why it evoked enthusiasm abroad and met with indifference at home is that, while it could strike even post-Bodmer Germany as something like a revelation of a new artistic creed, it could have no such message of novelty for English readers, who had been gradually accustomed to similar ideas discussed in a great number of works.[25]

It must not be forgotten that before the Conjectures Young's fame is already established by his *Night Thoughts* (1742–1746) becoming a "poet of European standing" and an "inspiration to artists from Blake to humble and anonymous engravers."[26] The great influence of the essay on *Sturm und Drang* movement is evident in the 1761 Leipzig translation of the text as well as in the Young-Klopstock correspondence.[27] This way the German romanticism may owe "a double debt" to Young: a poem and an essay.[28]

However indifferent the immediate reception of the essay is at home, within six months of its publication there appears a second edition. Importantly enough, the revised text incorporates some changes, now minor, now major, which may as well shed new light on Young's understanding of originality. While it is true that Young's reflections are far from being innovative, there remain at least three particular aspects that may break new ground in the field of originality and genius. By and large, it is the pose of the originator, the metaphoric language and.

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25 Rúttkay, p. 67.

26 Quoted from the exhibition: *Edward Young. Poet of the Night-Thoughts (1683–1765)* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1983). The exhibition provides a wealth of information about the European vogue of the Night Thoughts, displaying different editions and translations of the text. The enquirer, for instance, can find out that "the first book printed at Elsinore was not Hamlet but the Danish translation of the Night Thoughts" or in Venice Yohannes Eremeau translated the work into Turkish printed in Armenian characters.

27 Cf. Gedanken über die Original-Werke ["Conjectures on Original Composition"] In einem Schreiben [...] an den Verfasser des Grandison [Samuel Richardson] Aus dem Englischen [translated by von T., i.e. H. E. von Tenbern]. For Young's influences, see Martin Steinke, *Edward Young's "Conjectures" in England and Germany* (New York: Stechert, 1917).

28 Forster, p. 388.

the model of Addison that the novelty of his work consists in. Let us consider how these innovative, albeit fairly ambiguous, qualities manifest themselves in the text.

The essay, cast within the framework of "monumental marbles" to which Young conducts the reader, embarks upon "composition in general."[29] Then come Young's attempts to define originality and genius in the author's elaborate metaphoric diction which I shall consider later. As a next measure, he inquires into the applicability of definitions to ancient and modern authors. And finally, he turns to his main theme, "the long digression" on the marbles of Addison "the chief inducement for writing at all" (108). Thus, as far as the argumentation is concerned, the author examining the minds of the ancients and moderns, imitative and original geniuses, gradually moves towards the original destination he promised to reach from the start.

Near the beginning of the essay one encounters the following note: "You [i.e. Richardson] remember that your *worthy Patron*, and *our common Friend* [...] desired our Sentiments on Original, and on Moral Composition" (4). Chibka asserts the somewhat obvious when he says that Young here "helps his readers to identify with Richardson by means of devices that gives the *Conjectures* a quasi-fictional air."[30] Indeed, the patron in question appears to be invented since Richardson's letter of 14 January 1759 indicates that the subject of the *Conjectures* is "desired" (meaning suggested) by the novelist himself.[31] Thus, it seems that what Richardson requests in their private correspondence is now concealed in a public letter, i. e. in the essay, by the introduction of the fictitious figure of the anonymous and mysterious patron. In this way, Young's originality might be preserved and Richardson's role in the origin and development of the *Conjectures*

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29 Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison. 1759*, facsimile (Leeds: The Scholar Press, 1966), pp. 3–4. All parenthesised references are to this edition.

30 Robert L. Chibka, "The Stranger Within Young's Conjectures" *ELH* 53 (1986), p. 562.

31 "As you do the writer of the history of Sir Charles Grandison the honour of directing to him your two letters, and give him other hours, which modesty will not allow him to claim, will it not look to some that his request to you to write on the two subjects, *Original* and *Moral*, was made to you in hopes of receiving some kind compliments from your friendly partiality could not, therefore, some powerful and deserving friend be substituted, as knowing I have the honour of corresponding with his valued Dr. Young, to put me upon requesting you to touch upon these two subjects? I conceive that the alteration may be easily made; suppose like this – "Your worthy patron, our common friend, by putting you on the request you make me, both flatters and distresses me" (Pettit, p. 446).

remains unknown. But this is only one of the several examples when Young – pretending that Richardson's suggestions seem new even to the novelist himself – creates a "quasi-fictional air" in his text.

Nor can it escape the attention of the reader that the second edition of the essay incorporates a daring assertion that requires reconsideration. Young plunges into the "desired" theme of original composition "the more willingly, as it seems an original subject to me, who have seen nothing hitherto written on it."[32] In her introduction to the 1918 edition of the text, the editor assessing Young's originality contends: "the author does not add anything striking new to the various statements made by his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. It is his merit, rather, to sum up and emphasise their scattered remarks in an essay, brief, brilliantly pointed, enthusiastic and readable." Strangely enough, it is precisely this insertion, "his somewhat self-congratulatory statement"[33] that makes him original. Hence the whole argument for originality and the way it is articulated appear to be of fundamental importance to Young's claim for priority. Of course, the added phrase can be read as signs of his self-canonisation and self-fashioning. Such a characteristic tendency in almost the same manner appears in his somewhat earlier work *On Lyric Poetry*.[34] In part this attitude is due to the fact that the discourse on original composition evidently requires some instances of originality from the author. Or, more importantly, it is due to the fact that the author should display his own genius from the start on.

Adopting the pose of the "originator," the author lets himself neglect the long established tradition of imitation and originality. The claim of having seen nothing written hitherto on the subject prepares the ground for his contribution to the controversy of ancients and moderns. In this respect the dilemma whether or not Young "forgets" about the renowned parties in the debate is pointless

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32 Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Edith Morley (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1918), p. 8. This text of the Conjectures is based on the second edition with readings of the first one suppressed into the footnotes. Cf. also the anthologised edition of the essay in Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussel, Jr., and Marshall Waingrow, eds., *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969).

33 Ruttkay, p. 66.

34 *On Lyric Poetry* (1728) written on the same subject, anticipates many statements of his *Conjectures*. "And we should rather imitate their example in their general motives and fundamental methods of their working than in their works themselves. *This is a distinction, I think, not hitherto made*, and a distinction of consequence" (Scott Elledge, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961], Vol. I, p. 414).

because he deliberately overlooks them to gain priority.[35] This is how the self-appointed originator indulges in suppositions, i. e. conjectures, the topic of which is "unprecedented," at least Young comes to pretend so. Furthermore, Young's attitude towards the second letter on moral composition turns out to be directly antithetical to the first one. The doubt about what counts to be an original as contrasted to an unoriginal subject is again evident from the correspondence. "I have written a second letter," Young replies to the novelist, "but it by no means pleases me – the subject is too common and cannot keep out of the footsteps of my predecessors."[36] Such a claim for originality, in the sense of being the first instance of its kind, is, of course, an overstatement, which requires a more detailed examination.

The *Conjectures* delivers a passionate defence of originality and freedom from poetic rules, traits that, as the author contends, are supposed to guarantee genius. It is along these concepts that Young attempts to undermine the neo-classical doctrines of imitation, thereby supporting the cause of the moderns. Oddly enough, when the author comes to explain the essence of originality, he leaves the operative term of the essay undefined as the following excerpt shows:

> The mind of a man of Genius is a fertile and pleasant field, pleasant as *Elysium*, and fertile as *Tempe*; it enjoys a perpetual Spring. Of that Spring, *Originals* are the fairest Flowers: *Imitations* are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom. *Imitations* are of two kinds: One of Nature, one of Authors: The first we call *Originals*, and confine the term *Imitation* to the second. I shall not enter into the curious enquiry of what is, or is not strictly speaking, *Original*, content with what all must allow, that some Compositions are more so then others; and the more they are so, I say, the better (9–10).

Young here turns to describe the mind of genius in terms of organic metaphors such as gardens, plants and soil. It is apparent that the author's efforts to posit a definition of originality set in opposition to imitation are problematic. Instead of definition he provides his reader with spoiling the unity between the imitation of ancients and the imitation of nature. Young, as Jonathan Bate puts it, "divides the two practices, confines the term imitation to the imitation of authors, and extols writers who have direct access to nature as originals."[37] Furthermore, it appears

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35 Cf. Wickman's argument concerning the likelihood of Young's forgetting about the works on originality (Wickman, p. 920).
36 Pettit, p. 455. The second essay, however, was never published.
37 Bate, p. 88.

(from yet another correspondence) that for Young originality consists in matter rather than manner. And it is concerning this point that Warburton in his letter to Hurd raises his voice against the *Conjectures*: "He [Young] is the finest writer of nonsense of any of this age. And had he known that original composition consisted in the manner, and not in the matter, he had wrote with commonsense, and perhaps very dully under so insufferable a burthen."[38]

Perhaps, the crucial problem of leaving the key concept of the *Conjectures* undefined merits a further look. Considering the reason for this conspicuous omission, Weisheimer argues that originality may not be distinguished from imitation; therefore, they belong to a "continuum." As a solution, he offers a reasonable combination speaking of "imitative originals" as well as "original imitation."[39] So conceived, the notion of originality as well as genius escapes from clear-cut definition but it allows for metaphoric elaboration. Thus content with a comparative explanation, the author continues his defence in the same rhetorical vein: he relies on organic metaphors to describe original genius. Certainly for Young the image of growing plants seems more appropriate and expressive than his earlier definitive approaches to the key concept. Indeed, it is in its contribution to the developing organic aesthetics that the importance of the *Conjectures* consists, since the vegetable concept of genius was part of an established critical discourse. With the striking comparison of the "natural products of mind to the products of the vegetable world"[40] the natural growth of genius is again set in opposition to mechanical imitation:

> An *Original* may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not made: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up by those *Mechanics*, *Art*, and *Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own (11–12).

The antithetical position between active organic growth and mechanical making, as it has been often noted, embodies such ideas that fall precisely in the field of Romantic aesthetics. This notable passage also shows insight into what makes Young feel compelled to claim originality. His innovation is most significant less for the traditional view of works of art as having organic form

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38 Warburton, Letters to Hurd quoted in Edith Morley, p. 51. Cf. also Richardson's letter of 29 May 1759 (Pettit, p. 502).

39 Joel Weisheimer, "Conjectures on Unoriginal Composition." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 22 (1981), p. 60.

40 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), p. 187.

than for combining the two ideas, i. e. the organic growth of a plant with mechanical art.[41] Anticipating Coleridge's and Schlegel's similar distinction, there remains one further example (foreshadowing Wordsworthian ideas) that may as well test the author's ambitious claim. Tracing the origin of "spontaneity," Bate contends that the Youngean comparison quoted above is "the earliest passage to use the word spontaneity in the context of poetic production."[42]

It is, of course, obvious that Young's system reaches backwards to the contemporary tradition as it is clearly indicated by allusions to prior treatises on original genius. With respect to the correspondence, the implicit references, and the author's "chief inducement for writing at all" (108), all these elements point to the safe conclusion that Addison provides the most important model on which Young builds his own argument. Interestingly enough, it is through the example of Addison, as we shall see later, that Young eventually comes up with an incongruous combination of the governing concepts.

That Addison's particular reflections on genius in *The Spectator* are of fundamental importance to Young as well as Dr. Johnson is evident in their attempts at definition in the essay and the dictionary respectively. In Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), for instance, the second sense of genius ("a man endowed with superior faculties"[43]) is illustrated by the following quotation from Addison: "[t]here is no little writer of Pindaric who is not mentioned as a prodigious genius." Bate in relation to Johnsonian sense of the word carefully points out that the *OED* turns out to be inaccurate when it claims that the fifth sense of the term "is not recognised in Johnson's *Dictionary*.[44] We should, therefore, pause for a moment on how Young develops the notion of original genius already present in *The Spectator* paper.

Addison's essay distinguishes between "the first class" and "the second class of geniuses" in a way that these classes show "equal greatness" but "different manner."[45] The first class of great geniuses are "the prodigies of mankind who by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning,

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41 Bate, p. 89.

42 Bate, p. 89. Bate also mentions that the growth of organisms described as spontaneous appears in scientific writings. Cf. also the *OED*'s definition

43 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), Vol. 1: "genius."

44 Bate, p. 77. The author thinks that Johnson presumably requires from his readers to recall Addison's famous *Spectator* paper on Genius.

45 Joseph Addison, "Genius" in Scott Elledge, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961), Vol. 1, p. 29. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *A*.

have produced works that were the delight of their own times and the wonder of posterity" (A, 27–28). Natural geniuses (Homer, The Old Testament poets, Pindar, Shakespeare) are set in sharp opposition rather to the French 'bel esprit' than to the second kind of geniuses which implies, of course, some nationalistic fervour.[46] On the other hand, the second class of geniuses (Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Tully, Milton, Bacon) are "those that have formed themselves by rules and submitted the greatness of their natural talents to the correction and restraints of art" (29). Keeping a balance between the two aspects of genius, the author exploits the metaphor of wilderness and shaped garden, the recurring imagery of *The Spectator*. Anticipating by half a century Young's organic metaphors of natural genius, Addison asserts that:

> [i]n the first [original genius] it is like a rich soil in a happy climate that produces a whole wilderness of noble plants rising in a thousand beautiful landscapes without any certain order or regularity. In the other [imitative genius] it is the same rich soil under the same happy climate that has been laid out in walks and parterres and cut into shape and beauty by the skill of the gardener (A, 29).

Importantly enough, Young radically turns natural or "Adult Genius" into a superior kind of originality putting "Infantine Genius" of "Learning, Lover of Rules" exactly in second place (27). Here we have Young's challenge to the united power of learning and genius, or as Beddow puts it, "by abandoning the balancing act," Young subverts the "neo-classical ideal of artful genius."[47] This is how in Young's version natural genius held in high esteem becomes and remains throughout antithetical to the artful genius.[48] As for his method here, Young builds up his thesis through comparatively brief multiple parallels: "Learning we thank, Genius we revere, That gives us pleasure, This gives us rapture, That informs, This inspires, and is itself inspired, for genius is from heaven, learning from man [...] Learning is borrowed knowledge, Genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own" (36).

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46 For Génie, "L'étendue de l'esprit, la force de l'imagination, & l'activité de l'âme, voilà le génie" see the *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*.

47 Michael Beddow, "Goethe on Genius" in Penelope Murray, ed., *Genius: The History of an Idea*, p. 98.

48 In *The Rambler*, 154 (1751) for instance, Johnson gives voice to "[t]he inefficacy of genius without learning": "The mental disease of the present generation, is impatience of study, contempt of the great masters of ancient wisdom, and a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity" (W. J. Bate and A. B. Strauss, eds., *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1969], Vol. V, p. 55).

The author concludes the paragraph in which the qualities of genius and learning are enumerated with a caution against setting genius above divine truth. The context of this remark also shows that the Youngean understanding of genius extends backwards to Addison and forwards to the Romantic aesthetics. Recalling yet another popular short *Spectator* essay on "the fairy way of writing," Young extols imagination as one of the distinguishing traits of original genius.[49] Genius (depicted as "wandering wild [...] in the Fairyland of Fancy" having a "creative power" (37), is associated with creativity, inspiration and grace. It is, therefore, of some significance that Young does not display suspicion of the imagination, but rather he assigns to it an essential role in the shaping of the mind of genius. The period extending from Addison's essays on *The Pleasures of the Imagination* to Young's *Conjectures*, as Babbitt also points out, is of particular importance because these critical pieces contribute to "the rehabilitation of the imagination" and the popularisation of the expression, "creative imagination," or "creative fancy."[50]

As Young proceeds to bring his concepts into the field of contemporary criticism, he presents the original author with "two golden rules from Ethics, which are no less golden in Composition, than in life" (52). Despite his earlier attacks on the neo-classical ideal of artful genius, now he prescribes the rules of "Know thyself" and "Reverence Thyself" for observation. It is along these lines that original genius touches upon moral issues (the intended topic of the second letter) "co-ordinating ethics and aesthetics," sentiments on moral and original composition.[51] Here we encounter again the prevailing metaphor of a growing organism encouraging the innate powers of the mind of genius: "let thy genius rise and prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad" (53). Following the Addisonian example, Young confines the concept of genius to Englishmen. In his picture of genius, Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Shakespeare and Milton occupy the same privileged position as the ancients. From these great names it is clear that for Young genius is a wider concept employed not to evaluate exclusively poetic genius. Classing the giant Shakespeare together with Milton and Homer, comparing Ben Jonson to Shakespeare, or in other words, "learning" to "untutored genius," Young by no means voices original, unprecedented ideas: in fact he echoes the general trends or commonplaces of his

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49 Donald F. Bond, ed., *Critical Essays from the Spectator by Joseph Addison* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 199.
50 Irving Babbitt, *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (London: Constable, 1983), p. 82.
51 Wickman, p. 913.

time. When the author inquires into the field of contemporary literature, however, he changes his tone.

In the attempt to assess the moderns (with regard to the ancients), he passes his strictures on the renowned authors of the Augustan age – including his friends as well. Thus, extolling Richardson's "moral" and "original" genius over many of his contemporaries, the critic turns to compare "the original attempts" of Swift, Pope and Addison. Needless to say, in many respects, Young's canon of literature and critical attitude towards the moderns are to be found wanting. In a notable passage, for instance, he vigorously attacks Pope, "an avowed professor of imitation" (65), thereby undermining the complex issue of imitation, translation and the use of rhyme as a means of original compositions. It is his conspicuously low estimate of Pope as an original author that Dr. Johnson deeply reconsiders in his *Lives*. As I have already mentioned, the "promised papers" conveying Johnson's "more detailed opinions about the *Conjectures*, never reached Young."[52] However, it seems apparent that Johnson does not refrain from addressing himself to the problematic parts of the *Conjectures* in his different works. Regarding the same date of publication and the message of *The Idler* 60 (June 9, 1759) we can consider it as Johnson's direct answer to the notions explicit in the *Conjectures*. The following pivotal excerpt would seem to indicate such a criticism of Young's understanding of genius: "the chief business of art is to copy nature; that a perfect writer is not to be expected, because genius decays as judgement increases, that the great art is the art of blotting."[53] Perhaps, what is more interesting is to discover Johnson's borrowings from the Conjectures when he attempts to describe poetic genius in the *Life of Cowley*: "[t]he true Genius is a mind of a large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction."[54] Therefore, we should also argue that in the passage concerned he is not only "thinking of Sir Joshua Reynolds as well as Cowley" – as Grundy argues– but also of Young.[55] Furthermore, Johnson in the concluding *Life of Pope*, challenges the authority of Warton's and Young's demotion of the Augustan poet. As far as the technique of the biographer is concerned, Johnson renders Pope "all the qualities that

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52 Isabel St. John Bliss, *Edward Young* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 147.

53 W. J. Bate, ed., *The Idler and the Adventurer* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), p. 186. Johnson here defends Pope recalling clichés from *An Essay on Criticism*.

54 Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (London: Dent, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 2. Cf. also Young's lines: "as for a general Genius, there is no such thing in nature: A Genius implies the rays of the mind concenter'd, and determined to some particular point" (85–86).

55 Isobel Grundy, *Samuel Johnson: New Critical Essays* (London: Vision Press, 1984), p. 32.

constitute genius": "Invention," "Imagination," and "Judgement."[56] For one thing, that the Youngean discourse on genius seems not to be irrelevant to Johnson becomes evident in this scattered statements of his biographies. Strange as it is, in the *Life of Young* the inquirer would search in vain for the Johnson's "promised observations on some passages" of the essay since this particular life is "the only one of the fifty-two Lives of the English Poets *not* written by Johnson himself."[57] The account of Young adopted in Johnson's work is written by Sir Herbert Croft who underestimates Young both as a poet and as a man. No wonder that this joint enterprise is ridiculed and severely criticised by James Thomas Callender as the following excerpt from his *Deformities of Dr. Samuel Johnson* indicates: "[h]e is the bad imitator of a bad original; and an honest man will not peruse his libel without indignation [...] And yet this critical assassin, this literary jackal, is celebrated by the Doctor."[58] Here again we encounter the contemporary problem of imitation coupled with originality which leads us to the final but the most puzzling scene of the *Conjectures*, namely the digression on "monumental marbles," Addison's death.

Young's judgement on "the triumvirate" concludes with extolling Addison, the "great author" over Pope, the "correct poet" and Swift, the "singular wit." (96). The anecdotes about Swift's evening walk (65–66), Pope's plan of an Epic (69) building on the common element of dying prepare the ground for Young's elaborate reflections on Addison's "triumphant" death (102), his "chief inducement for writing at all."[59] Wickman points out that Addison is placed "within the tradition of the ars bene moriendi," thereby locating his genius in his person rather than in his works:[60] "his compositions are but a noble preface; the grand work is his death" (104). As for Young's originality here, the author does

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56 Johnson, *Lives*, p. 214.

57 Pettit, p. xxxiii. It is of great relevance, however, that the critical section of this biography is reconsidered by Johnson himself and attached to the end of Croft's rather problematic account.

58 J. T. Callender, *Deformities of Dr. Samuel Johnson: Selected from his Works*, facsimile (Los Angeles: University of California, 1971), p. 18.

59 "Pointing at it [a noble elm], he [Swift] said, 'I shall be like that tree, I shall die at top.'" Then: "We might have had two Homers instead of one, if longer had been his life; for I heard the dying swan [Pope] talk over an Epic plan few weeks before his decease." Young reports on Addison's triumphant death: "Dear Sir! You sent for me: I believe, and hope, that you have some commands; I shall hold them most sacred: 'My distant ages not only hear, but feel the reply!' Forcibly grasping the youth's hand, he softly said, 'See in what peace a Christian can die.'"

60 Wickman, pp. 914–915.

not accept Richardson's "humble suggestions" that he should "separate the heterogeneous parts," referring to the strange inclusion of moral genius. The *Conjectures* arguing against imitation, at the end, puts forward the imitation of Addison, whose "compositions are built with the finest materials in the taste of the ancients and on truly Classic ground" (98).

In this light the account of the deathbed scene reporting Addison's exemplary death at the most empathic point of the essay seems to give an incongruous combination of the problematic concepts considered throughout the *Conjectures*. A puzzling solution to the central problems the topic of original genius poses involves: the blending of moral and original genius, imitation and originality, Richardson's emendations and Young's original version. Thus it seems that Young's claim as well as arguments for originality rest rather on a bold than false assumption.

*Veronika Ruttkay*

# Interpreting *Hamlet*, 1812–13

## Coleridge's Romantic Hermeneutic Experiment

In 1819 Coleridge wrote: "*Hamlet* was the play, or rather Hamlet himself was the character in the intuition and exposition of which I first made my turn for philosophical criticism, and especially for insight into the genius of Shakespeare, *noticed*." The much-quoted passage reveals Coleridge's interpretation of *Hamlet* as divinatory in a double sense: firstly, because it foreshadowed his Shakespeare criticism and indeed his philosophical criticism as a whole and proved to be something like its germ, and secondly – in the sense defined by Schleiermacher – because it began with the reader's "intuition," an imaginative transformation which lead to immediate comprehension of Hamlet and insight into the author's genius. The two meanings encapsulate why it is important to study the *Hamlet* interpretation and what I want to say about it. However, a few words in explanation of these questions will not be out of place.

Even if we do not want to believe that a reading of *Hamlet* awakened the slumbering critical talent in Coleridge as he claims, it is still significant that he chooses this play for his story. By doing so he joins the tradition – represented most influentially by Goethe and Schlegel – according to which in *Hamlet* "the spirit of its Author is at its most visible."[1] His interpretation of the play is, accordingly, in many ways central to his Shakespeare criticism. He treats it as a point of reference to which other plays can be related, moreover, in his analyses

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1 In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, after Wilhelm's analysis of Hamlet, the company "applauded this method of penetrating into the spirit of the author." See Jonathan Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 305.

of *Hamlet* he usually rephrases the general principles of his "philosophical criticism" – for (as we shall see) he regards *Hamlet* a drama that not only justifies but somehow evokes these principles of interpretation. Since he never committed to paper a coherent analysis of the play, I am going to study the 1812 and 1813 *Hamlet* lectures of which more or less detailed reports survived together with Coleridge's notes for the second lecture. I am aware that it is highly problematic to analyse texts (that of the two lectures) which hover unreachable between an outline written before and two accounts written after them. Still, I think that a careful reading of the existing sources is the only way – if there is any – to approximate the non-existent ones, even if that means that I have to construct an "ideal" *Hamlet* interpretation of 1812–13, blurring the differences between the two separate occasions as well as between the texts and hands recording them.

The two lectures were among the most successful in Coleridge's career: letters and diaries preserved enthusiastic responses and Coleridge himself was pleased.[2] Together with his marginalia to the play written around 1818, they have been recognised as cardinal interpretative events in the history of his Shakespeare criticism. The critical attention they received, however, was strangely determined by T. S. Eliot's charges expressed first in his 1919 article on *Hamlet* and later in his 1923 "The Function of Criticism." In the latter text he raises the rhetorical question: "for what is Coleridge's *Hamlet*: is it an honest inquiry as far as the data permit, or is it an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume?"[3] His suggested answer is, of course, the second one – in his earlier study he already wrote of Goethe and Coleridge: "These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realisation."[4] Eliot seems to say that Coleridge's interpretation is a self-serving projection instead of being "honest": he is too "apt to take leave of the data of criticism," "his centre of interest changes, his feelings

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2 Robinson called the 1812 *Hamlet* lecture "[p]erhaps his very best." (Cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor [London, New York: Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960], Vol. II, p. 173; henceforward referred to as *SC*). Of the 1813 lecture Coleridge wrote to Mrs Morgan: "My Lecture of yester evening seemed to give more than ordinary satisfaction – I began at 7 o'clock, and ended at half past 9. – Mercy on the audience YOU will say; but the audience did not seem to be tired, and cheered me to the last" (*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs [Oxford and New York, 1956–71], Vol. III, p. 450).

3 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 76.

4 Eliot, *Selected Prose*, p. 45.

are impure."[5] What Eliot finds wanting in Coleridge's approach is the close correspondence between literary fact and interpretation – this is the other side of the „objectivity" for the lack of which he criticises romantic poetry. But interestingly enough he attributes the same fault to Shakespeare's main character and to the play as well: "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his creator is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem."[6] Eliot presents his theory of the "objective correlative" as opposed to the series of artistic and critical misconceptions represented by Hamlet, Shakespeare, and Coleridge ("No! I am not Prince Hamlet" in "Prufrock" gathers a different significance from this perspective). By doing so, however, he implies that there is a certain correspondence between the drama and its criticism: Coleridge in fact imitates the mistake of Hamlet and Shakespeare. This insight is a very valuable one in spite of its negativity. What Eliot does not take into consideration is that Coleridge's subjectivist „misreading" may arise not from his overflowing personality (as his earliest critics also thought) but from the romantic critical framework in which his interpretation is moving – and which is still very much present for Eliot, although in a negative way.

Several critics attempted to counter the effects of Eliot's verdict but they were only partly successful. This is because they consented to the rejection of romantic subjectivism as a critical mistake and tried to rescue Coleridge by pointing out that it is characteristic of only a part of his criticism. Barbara Hardy, for instance, observes: "In the 1811–12 lecture on *Hamlet*, psychological analysis of character is certainly prominent, but when we turn to the notes we find a much fuller formal analysis."[7] A very similar claim was made by David Ellis and Howard Mills in 1979, who find that the author of the notes for the 1813 lecture is critical of Hamlet's bias towards the imaginary whereas the report of the same lecture is characterised by "romantic self-indulgence" and, as a consequence,

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5 Eliot, *Selected Prose*, p. 56.

6 Eliot, *Selected Prose*, p. 49.

7 Barbara Hardy, "'I Have a Smack of Hamlet': Coleridge and Shakespeare's Characters," *Essays in Criticism* VIII (1958), Vol. 3, 238–255, p. 245.

"Hamlet has been enrolled amongst the Lake Poets."[8] But the attempt to "defend" Coleridge by downplaying or even rejecting one part of his criticism for the sake of another must necessarily disregard the similarities of the notes and the lectures and blur the connections between the two „sides" of his criticism.

My assumption is that the critical framework in which the two approaches (a formalist and a subjectivist one) presuppose each other is to be looked for in romantic hermeneutics, a movement developing in Germany around the time of Coleridge's lectures. The theorist of "general hermeneutics" Schleiermacher thought that interpretation requires the simultaneous using of two radically different approaches: a grammatical and a psychological (technical) one. As he put it: "We must not only explain the words and the subject matter but the spirit of the author as well."[9] The latter task is the less self-evident one; it could be completed, according to Schleiermacher, by reading the contingent signs with imagination and thus by intuitively understanding the spiritual truth conveyed by them. As Tim Fulford detects, Coleridge's theory of symbolism expounded in his religious writings is a version of the same approach.[10] The Shakespeare lectures also seem to share the assumption that meaning should be detected in the subjectivity of the author, which can be reached through what Schleiermacher calls the "divinatory method": an imaginative transformation into the Other's subjectivity.[11]

By claiming that Coleridge was familiar with some of the problems of this new school of interpretation, I rely on the findings of E. S. Shaffer who already in 1975 traced Coleridge's connections with it.[12] Of course, he could have first-hand knowledge only of Biblical hermeneutics (in Göttingen he met its main

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8 David Ellis and Howard Mills, "Coleridge's Hamlet: The Notes versus the Lectures," *Essays in Criticism* 29 (1979) No. 3, 244–253, p. 250.

9 Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, transl. James Duke and John Forstman (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 212.

10 Tim Fulford, "Apocalyptic or Reactionary? Coleridge as Hermeneutist," *The Modern Language Review* 87 (1992) 26–28.

11 "[P]articularly in his Shakespeare criticism, Coleridge partakes of Schleiermacher's subjective orientation to interpretation – the 'Romantic' notion that one should 'reconstruct' the subjectivity of the author" (David P. Haney, *The Challenge of Coleridge: Ethics and Interpretation in Romanticism and Modern Philosophy* [University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001], p. 87).

12 Elinor S. Shaffer, *"Kubla Khan" and The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770–1880* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1975). See also Shaffer, "The Hermeneutic Community: Coleridge and Schleiermacher," *The Coleridge Connection*, ed. Richard Grevil and Molly Lefebure (Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1992).

proponent Eichhorn and later he read his works together with some of Schleiermacher's Biblical writings).[13] But this field of study quickly radiated towards literary criticism, also because it entailed – as in Coleridge's case – reading the Bible itself as literature. In *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* Coleridge clearly uses literary criteria in his interpretations of the Bible and sets up several parallels of biblical texts and Shakespeare (Sara Coleridge in her preface to the posthumously published *Confessions* still had to defend this unorthodox practice).[14] An altered reading of the Bible therefore must have had an effect on Coleridge's reading of Shakespeare as well. Tilottama Rajan analyses the conversational poems as "Coleridge's Conversation with Hermeneutics," implying that this system of thought had a thorough influence on his poetry.[15] In spite of this, there has been no detailed study of Coleridge's "practical criticism" with respect to romantic hermeneutics. I think that his *Hamlet* interpretation can be a good starting point – due to its self-claimed central position in his Shakespeare criticism but also due to the critical debate that issued forth from Eliot's radical questioning of Coleridge's critical trustworthiness.

The presence of romantic hermeneutic strategies in the *Hamlet* interpretation does not mean that it should be regarded a simple illustration of them. Coleridge's habit was to combine different systems of thought in order to construct his own ideal method. His individual readings are thus to be regarded as experiments with, not clear-cut manifestations of, certain critical principles. Thus his 1812–13 interpretations of *Hamlet* start out from a version of the principles of romantic hermeneutics, but the implications of these, as played out in the context of the play itself, seem to modify or even call into question the original assumptions. This can be regarded a case of what Tilottama Rajan – following Kierkegaard – calls "dialectical reduplication" of a theory: "a repetition that simultaneously enacts it and throws it into relief, translates the theoretical into the real and the proper into the figurative."[16] In other words, the *Hamlet* lectures "replay theory as fiction"; they present a framework of interpretation and make it relative at the same time, revealing its potential paradoxes.

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13 On Coleridge's Biblical hermeneutics see Fulford, p. 18–31.

14 Cf. E. S. Shaffer, "Ideologies in Readings of the Late Coleridge: *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*," *Romanticism on the Net* 17 (February 2000) [http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/17confessions.html] (ISSN 1467-1255).

15 Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theories and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990).

16 Rajan, p. 68.

## CLEARING THE GROUND

The very first interpretative move of both the 1812 and the 1813 lectures was a gesture at the prevailing notions concerning *Hamlet*. Coleridge, as elsewhere, showed that he considered himself "not as a man who carries moveables into an empty house," but one who "entering a generally well-furnished dwelling exhibits a light which enables the owner to see what is still wanting" (*SC* II, 81). What he found wanting was, of course, an appropriate interpretative attitude, and what he found in the way was a heap of prejudices about Hamlet and Shakespeare. Collier reported on his 1812 lecture: "The Lecturer then passed to Hamlet, in order, as he said, to obviate some of the general prejudices against Shakespeare in reference to the character of the hero. Much had been objected to, which ought to have been praised, and many beauties [of the highest kind] had been neglected, because they were [somewhat] hidden" (*LL* I, 385-6). The exact nature of the prejudices against Hamlet that Coleridge is referring to according to Collier is difficult to tell. Foakes in the footnote of the critical edition mentions that "there was much hostile comment on him in eighteenth-century criticism" and names Francis Gentleman, George Steevens, and Akenside as promoters of such views. He also says that Coleridge "may be thinking primarily of Dr Johnson" whose severe notes on Hamlet triggered some of his most passionate counter-arguments (*LL* I, 385).

It is true that in the lectures Coleridge answered most of Johnson's charges of Hamlet's immorality. However, it was probably not just such moral considerations that Coleridge referred to as "prejudices." He seems to have meant the general way of looking at *Hamlet* which characterised Johnson's reading and most eighteenth century interpretations. This becomes obvious if we consider the report of the opening sentences of his 1813 lecture, in which the need for a complete change of perspective is expressed. "The seeming inconsistencies in the conduct and character of Hamlet have long exercised the conjectural ingenuity of critics; and as we are always loth to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves, the mystery has been too commonly explained by the very easy process of supposing that it is, in fact, inexplicable; and by resolving

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17 References are to this edition: S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

the difficulty into the capricious and irregular genius of Shakespeare" (CCS 75).[18] Coleridge here speaks about more than a single prejudice, rather a system of misconceptions that evolves from the wrong assumptions about Shakespeare. The eighteenth-century commonplace of Shakespeare's irregular and unconscious genius, the notion of the inexplicability of his writings, and the readers' inability of finding "method" in Hamlet's seemingly inconsistent behaviour (and therefore the claim that he is a great character but unexplainable, or that he is an ill-written character) all arise from an erroneous attitude towards Shakespeare.

As the passage makes clear, Coleridge's solution is "to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves." This means that we have, self-critically, to change our perspective in order to see the hidden coherence of the whole. The argumentation is recognisably apologetic: Coleridge seems to claim that if we cannot understand Shakespeare, the fault is in ourselves. Of course, to suppose that, he needs the complementary assumption that Shakespeare is infallible. In order to assume that an ideal whole can be reconstructed from the seemingly inconsistent parts of the play, he has to take for granted that it represents a perfect design in which every detail is equally justifiable. Therefore, "the smallest fragment of his mind not unfrequently gives a clue to a most perfect, regular and consistent whole" (SC II, 109). In other words, Coleridge rejects the myth of Shakespeare's incomprehensibility by proposing another "mystery," that of Shakespeare's perfect design. As Péter Dávidházi states: "To maintain that it is not hopeless for us to understand Shakespeare [...] Coleridge exhorts us to have confidence in the constancy of the superb order created by an intellect that knew even the 'most minute and intimate workings' of the human mind."[19]

As Dávidházi points it out, Coleridge's argumentation strangely resembles one of Christian apologetics – the "argument from design" – that Coleridge himself found dated.[20] However, the traditional argumentation is subtly reverted by him. The theologian William Paley "sought to prove the existence of a benevolent God by pointing to omnipresent 'evidences' of a transcendent design in nature," and therefore he was guilty of circular reasoning, as Coleridge himself

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18 References are to R. A. Foakes, ed., Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989).

19 Péter Dávidházi, The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective (Houndmills, Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1998), 60.

20 "Coleridge (perhaps unwittingly) fuses the apologetic strategies we might call literary theodicy with the very technique of Christian apologetics he was otherwise more and more reluctant to accept: the argument from design" (Dávidházi, p. 61).

shrewdly noticed.[21] Logically, Coleridge must have assumed the divine power of Shakespeare's mind *before* setting out to prove the perfect design of the plays. The question is, of course, how could he ground such a presupposition, if not in evidence offered by the texts? Coleridge's implied answer seems to be that even if it cannot be grounded in logic, it can be *experienced* through the intuition of that transcendental Mind of which both Shakespeare's and the reader's mind partake. According to his famous definition, "Shakespeare shaped his characters out of the nature within; but we cannot safely say, out of *his own* nature, as an *individual* person. No! this latter is itself but a *natura naturata*, an effect, a product, not a *power* [... ] Shakespeare in composing had no *I* but the *I* representative" (*TT*, 15th March 1834).

While rationalist critics employed their critical tools in order to judge the quality of a text, Coleridge, as we have seen, had to assumed its exquisiteness in advance, in order to be able to start his interpretation. Interpretation to him meant something quite different from what it meant to Johnson: not a fixing of meanings (finding long-forgotten usages, clearing corrupted forms, etc.) but an approximation of an infinite one. The paradox is, of course, that such a meaning can never be fully verified. Schleiermacher, whose hermeneutic theory included similar considerations about the transcendence of meaning, reflected on this problem when he asserted that "the art of interpretation is not equally interested in every act of speaking" – in other words, the critic has to decide on the significance of a text before in-depth interpretation can start. Using his terminology, Coleridge's *Hamlet* must be placed among texts of "absolute" significance "that achieve a maximum of both linguistic creativity and individuality: works of genius."[22]

## PRINCIPLES IN A HERMENEUTIC READING OF HAMLET

Coleridge's critical method of defining his principles *a priori* (usually in the first few lectures of a course) and then finding them in individual texts or passages is modelled after Kant's critical method: it aims at the essential, the *sine qua non* of a subject and eliminates what is supposed to be accidental to it. As Coleridge explained in a letter in 1811, the distinguishing feature of Kantian philosophy is

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21 Dávidházi, p. 61.

22 Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 77.

"to treat every subject in reference to the operation of the mental faculties to which it specially appertains, and to commence by the cautious discrimination of what is essential, i. e. explicable by mere consideration of the faculties in themselves, from what is empirical, i. e. the modifying or disturbing forces of time, place, and circumstances" (*SC* II, 184). Coleridge followed this method whenever he distinguished between what is essential to Shakespeare's genius and what is common to his age (one of his regular critical moves) and he followed it with surprising consistency in his interpretation of *Hamlet*. Each of his lectures, then, is meant as a laying bare of the essence of the play.

The central meaning in this case is undoubtedly subjective. Coleridge's notes for the 1813 lecture start with the question how Shakespeare "conceived" his main character. His exposition of *Hamlet* in the lectures themselves is closely related to this topic: in 1812, his first question was "What did Shakespeare mean when he drew the character of Hamlet?" (*LL* I, 386); in Collier's shorthand version "what meant Sh by the character of Hamlet."[23] In 1813, the first thing he showed the audience was that "the intricacies of Hamlet's character may be traced to Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy" (*LL* I, 538). All these openings, different as they are, revolve around the question of origin and origination, the scene of which is invariably the mind of Shakespeare. The seeking of a subjective *Anfangspunkt*, a point of origination that could explain the totality of the work is a classic move of romantic hermeneutics.[24] As we have seen, for Schleiermacher too, technical (psychological) interpretation involves a reconstruction of "the original psychic process of producing and combining images and ideas."[25] Coleridge indeed pursues a psychological method when he regards each individual play or poem a "fragment in the history of the mind of Shakespeare" (*SC* II, 64). In this framework it is quite natural that his interpretation of *Hamlet* should begin with a discussion of Shakespeare's mind and how it conceived the drama, instead of considering its historical background or literary context.

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23 Cf. R. A. Foakes, "What Did Coleridge Say?" *Reading Coleridge*, ed. Walter B. Crawford (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979), p. 202.

24 According to Rajan, divinatory understanding is possible "by finding a point of inception (*Anfangspunkt*), which is also the work's center in that it unlocks its *arche* and *telos*, and thus allows the reader to grasp it as a totality" (Rajan, p. 91).

25 Quoted in Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992), p. 150.

However, the hermeneutic task of "reconstructing another life" was in this case even more difficult than otherwise. Following the opinion of Schiller expressed in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), critics traditionally regarded Shakespeare a definitely 'objective' author, one whose subjectivity is totally absent from his works. Coleridge partly accepted this view and used a number of different strategies to counter its hermeneutic consequences. For one thing, he reconstructed the history of Shakespeare's mind starting from his poems in which a speaker (who is, however, in no obvious connection with the biographical author) is present. He, then, could regard the development of Shakespeare's genius as a gradual movement away from his own lyricism towards pure drama. But this did not solve the problem of the 'mature' plays like *Hamlet*. If Shakespeare is absent from them, how could his consciousness be reconstructed from the text? Coleridge's answer was paradoxical: Shakespeare was both present and absent at the same time. He repeated this in several versions; he claimed, for instance, that the plays are "a divine Dream / all Shakespeare, and nothing Shakespeare."[26] As Abrams observes, Schlegel also arrived at this conclusion, which is again a literary version of a theological concept: "It is possible, Schlegel thought, that the literary qualities of 'objectivity' and 'interestedness' are not incompatible, so that a modern writer may at the same time be in, and aloof from, his own dramas. This is a seeming contradiction, but one which had sanction in an ancient and persistent concept about the relation of God to the universe."[27]

If the transcendent author is immanent in his creations, then Shakespeare's spirit is present and can be felt intuitively in all his writings. Moreover, Coleridge thought that a kind of secondary source of subjectivity is represented by the fictional characters of the plays. In a *Table Talk* remark he distinguished between different kinds of subjectivity in literature: "There is no subjectivity whatsoever in the Homeric poetry. There is subjectivity of the poet, as of Milton, who is himself in everything he writes; and there is a subjectivity of the *persona* or dramatic character, as in all Shakespeare's great creations, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, etc." (*TT*, 93-4). A consequence of this distinction is that even if it would be difficult to use the psychological method with regard to Shakespeare himself, it could be still applied with regard to one of his characters. In the case of *Hamlet*, Coleridge

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26 *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 3 vols. (New York, 1957-73), II, p. 2086.
27 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953), p. 239.

turns quite naturally to the main character to investigate his psyche, moreover, he makes it clear that in this way he intends to gain insight into that of Shakespeare. The continuity between the two minds is the first thing he establishes in his notes for the 1813 *Hamlet* lecture: "Shakespeare's mode of conceiving characters out of his own intellectual and moral faculties, by conceiving any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then placing himself, thus mutilated and diseased, under given circumstances: of this we shall have repeated occasion to restate and enforce" (*LL* I, 539).

The "circumstances" that objectify the inner Shakespearean essence of Hamlet's character, as it can be inferred from Coleridge's interpretation, constitute the dramatic situation itself. Even though they determine the course of the tragedy, they are basically inessential to the deepest meaning of Hamlet. Coleridge, of course, knew that the story (that he usually did not distinguish from the plot) had an existence prior to the drama in mythology and literature, so it was only *received* by Shakespeare. For him, its most important characteristic was its very invisibility: the fact that people were familiar with it and so accepted it easily. As the 1812 report says, "Coleridge's belief was that the poet regarded his story, before he began to write, much in the same light that a painter looked at the canvas before he began to paint" (*LL* I, 386). This means that the story is used only as the medium through which meaning – the "portray" of Hamlet – can materialise.[28] However, Coleridge's stance towards the story is not as clear-cut as that. He asserted in the same lecture that "Shakespeare never followed a novel but where he saw the story contributed to tell or explain some great and general truth inherent in human nature" (*LL* I 390). This would suggest that Shakespeare in fact altered the canvas in order to make it fit the portrait. In other words, the story *does* contribute to the meaning of the whole after all. Coleridge's paradoxical treatment resembles romantic ideas about language: on the one hand, it is regarded as a received property determining what can be expressed, but on the other, it can be modified imaginatively in order to convey a subjective meaning.[29]

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28 Cf. also: "The plot interests us on account of the characters, not vice versa; it is the canvas only" (R. A. Foakes, ed., *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811–12* [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1971], p. 115).

29 Cf. Schleiermacher on technical interpretation: "To recognize an author in this way is to recognize him as he has worked with language. To some extent he initiates something new in the language by combining subjects and predicates in new ways. Yet to some extent he merely repeats and transmits the language he has received. Likewise, when I know his language, I recognize how the

The tendency to rely self-consciously on linguistic models in criticism is even more recognisable in the way Coleridge approaches the main character. He treats Hamlet not only as a manifestation of Shakespeare's mind, but also one that is created for a purpose. He regards him the "character" or signifier by which Shakespeare communicates his subjectivity – as we have seen, his question is "What meant Sh *by* the character of Hamlet" (my emphasis). This reveals that he interprets the drama in the framework of intersubjective communication in which the task of the receiver (hearer) is to grasp the intention of the sender (speaker) through the interpretation of signs. In other words, he engages in a psychological interpretation which "attempts to identify what has moved the author to communicate."[30] For Coleridge, as for Schleiermacher, this is possible because signs and especially spoken words – even though they have an outward existence – can partake of the subjectivity of the sender. According to Schleiermacher, speaking is "only the outer side of thinking," this is why understanding a speech involves not only to "understand what is said in the context of language" but also "to understand it as a fact in the thinking of the speaker."[31] Coleridge gave expression to this crucial presupposition several times.[32] Interestingly enough, he explained it in most detail in his 1813 notes on *Hamlet* where he writes about Hamlet's attraction towards words: "the half-embodyings of thought, that make them more than thought, give them and outness [i.e. a sense of being external to the mind], a reality *sui generis*, and yet retain their correspondence and shadowy approach to the images and movements within" (*CCS* 73–74).

Hamlet, the central signifier of the play, is similarly characterised by both an "outness" (in so far as he is "materialised" in the story) and a correspondence to the workings of the mind of Shakespeare. He can be called, in Coleridge's terminology, a version of those symbols that are the products of imagination and are, as expressed in *The Statesman's Manual*, "consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors."[33] Hamlet, like the symbol, is characterised by a synecdochic relationship: he is consubstantial with Shakespeare's mind, but can

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author is a product of the language and stands in its potency. These two views, then, are only two ways of looking at the same thing" (Mueller-Vollmer, p. 94).

30 Mueller-Vollmer, p. 94.

31 Mueller-Vollmer, p. 74.

32 In his fifth lecture on Shakespeare and Milton, for instance, he asserted that "words are the living products of the living mind and could not be an accurate medium between the thing and the mind unless they partook of both" (*SC* II, 74).

33 S. T. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972), p. 30.

represent only a fragment of it. Moreover, his essence – like that of the symbol – can be grasped imaginatively by the receiver. This is because both the symbol and the "character" are supposed to correspond to the deepest structure of the mind common to all humanity – and thus to convey truth. As H. C. Robinson's diary proves, Coleridge established this claim about Hamlet already in his 1808 lecture: "The essence of poetry *universality*. The character of Hamlet, &c., affects all men" (*SC* II, 8). In his 1813 lecture, he made a similar claim: "That this character must have some common connection with the laws of our nature was assumed by the lecturer from the fact that Hamlet was the darling of every country where literature was fostered" (*CCS* 75). Since Hamlet reveals something universally true about human nature, everyone can recognise himself in his ideal figure. This accords very well with what Coleridge thought of Shakespearean characters in general: "In the plays of Shakespeare every man sees himself, without knowing that he does so: as in some of the phenomena of nature, in the mist of the mountain, the traveller beholds his own figure, but the glory round the head distinguishes it from a mere vulgar copy" (*SC* II, 125). In his interpretation of *Hamlet* Coleridge makes us aware of that mainly unconscious phenomenon: he proposes that the adequate perspective of understanding the main character is that of introspection. As the 1813 report says, "He thought it essential to the understanding of Hamlet's character that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds" (*CCS* 75).

With the proposition that in order to understand *Hamlet* we have to look into ourselves, the circle of Coleridge's hermeneutic principles is completed. It started out from the assumption that understanding *Hamlet* involves understanding the mind that produced it, which is now revealed as self-understanding. Vital to this critical system is the establishment of a correspondence between the mind of the 'speaker' (Shakespeare), the symbol through which it communicates truth (Hamlet), and the mind of the receiver (Coleridge as reader). It is also vital that something transcendental (truth) is conveyed through this process, and not the individual meanings of the author – otherwise it could not be something common and communicable to all readers. Coleridge's 1812–13 lectures on *Hamlet* can be regarded as the scene of reading where the consequences of these presupposition are played out; the main character of this drama being undoubtedly the Coleridgean Hamlet.

## THE MEANING OF HAMLET 1: THE SUPERIOR MIND

The critical principles of Coleridge's lectures offer a kind of preliminary interpretation of the play: the meaning of the whole is determined by the central signifier, Hamlet, the vehicle by which Shakespeare's *meaning* can find its way to the reader. Coleridge therefore starts his actual interpretation with a general characterisation of Hamlet, quite in accordance with Schleiermacher's view that interpretation must start with a general overview of the whole and then move to a detailed reading.[34] However, the overall meaning of the central signifier proves to be utterly problematic, which undermines the logic and symmetry of the original hermeneutic propositions. Schlegel in an enigmatic statement claimed that *Hamlet* as a whole "resembles those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude always remains, that will in no way admit of solution."[35] Coleridge's lectures would be a perfect example to clarify what Schlegel could have meant. In his reading the indeterminable figure, the mysterious X is Hamlet himself, whose contradictions make the two halves of the equation always contradict each other.

For Coleridge the identity of Hamlet is determined by the way he came into being. As we have seen, he believed that Shakespeare conceived him "out of his own intellectual and moral faculties" – in other words, through meditation on his own mind. This is in sharp contradiction with the eighteenth century image of Shakespeare as the greatest observer of human nature. For Coleridge's Shakespeare, the outside world with all its people and phenomena is in itself unimportant: "Meditation looks at every character with interest, only as it contains something generally true, and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem" (*SC* II, 85). Since one of the greatest philosophical problems (especially after Kant) concerns the thinking faculty itself, it is no wonder that Shakespeare's meditative mind has, according to Coleridge, a tendency to create images of itself. The deepest of these self-representations is thought to be Hamlet himself, but (since Shakespeare's oeuvre developed organically) he is prefigured by other characters like Jacques, Richard II and Mercutio. In his analysis of the latter figure, Coleridge recapitulates his claim that mere observation of externals is "entirely different from the observation of a mind, which, having formed a theory and a system upon its own nature, remarks all things that are examples of its truth, confirming it in that truth, and above all,

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34 Mueller-Vollmer, p. 86.
35 Bate, p. 307.

enabling it to convey the truths of philosophy" (*SC* II, 98). He regards Mercutio not only the product of "observation, the child of meditation" but one characterised by the same intellectual faculty that Shakespeare used when he drew him: "Hence it is that Shakespeare's favourite characters are full of such lively intellect. Mercutio is a man possessing all the elements of a poet: the whole world was, as it were, subject to his law of association. Whenever he wishes to impress anything, all things become his servants for the purpose: all things tell the same tale, and sound in unison" (*SC* II, 98).

The Coleridgean Hamlet, like his Mercutio, is a mirror-image of Shakespeare's self-reflexive intellect. His stance to the external world is identical with that of his creator: the attitude of meditation. The 1812 report says, "He [Shakespeare] meant to portray a person in whose view the external world and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind" (*LL* I, 386). This Hamlet is very similar to that Shakespearean mind which forms "a theory and a system upon its own nature" and "looks at every character with interest, only as it contains something generally true, and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem." Hamlet disregards everything that does not fit his "abstractions" and, like the Kantian philosopher, aims to grasp only the essential. As Coleridge says, his mind "keeps itself in a state of abstraction, and beholds external objects as hieroglyphics" (*CCS* 76). This implies that Hamlet's mind is continuously interpreting the outside world (most probably other people as well) in order to discover in them a system of signification. In this respect he is the image not only of the author but also of the critic who approaches the world of the play with the same curiosity for hidden connections and – in the case of Coleridge's philosophical criticism – with the same method of looking for the essentials behind accidentals.

As we have seen, Coleridge attempted to treat his object according to the task of critical philosophy, "in reference to the operation of the mental faculties to which it specially appertains." Which mental faculties can be relevant to his description of Hamlet? In so far as he is preoccupied with abstractions and what is essential to his own intellect – his mind is "for ever occupied with the world within him, and abstracted from external things" (*CCS* 76) – he can be related to the faculty of reason. Coleridge, following Kant, distinguished this from

understanding, a "merely reflective faculty [which] partook of death."[36] Clearly, Hamlet's constant generalisations and his preference for "mental forms" that are "indefinite and ideal" to realities that "must needs become cold" show that he is primarily interested in the workings of reason (*CCS* 72). However, there is another mental faculty playing a role even more central to his character: imagination. It is crucial to his meditations for it allows him to represent objects when they are not available to the senses. Coleridge has emphasised the role of imagination in Hamlet's character from the beginning of his 1812 lecture: "Hamlet beheld external objects in the same way that a man of vivid imagination who shuts his eyes sees what has previously made an impression upon his organs" (*CCS* 67). According to this, his vivid imagination makes Hamlet akin to poets like Wordsworth who can picture the dancing daffodils or the Tintern landscape in their absence, and picture them not only as outward appearances but as ideal forms "Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart, / And passing even into my purer mind."[37]

Hamlet's imagination, similarly to that of the poet, transforms external objects into something ideal and thus provides him with "a world within himself" (*CCS* 68; 70). This internal world – in many respects the key to Coleridge's interpretation – is far from being a copy of the world outside; as Coleridge wrote in his notes for the 1813 lecture, "his thoughts, images and fancy [are] far more vivid than his perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplation, and acquiring as they pass a form and colour not naturally their own" (*CCS* 73). This description accords with Kant's definition of the imagination as a faculty that creates an inner world by organising sense perceptions according to the ideal laws of reason. By reflecting to that capacity, according to Kant, we gain a sense of our freedom from the empirical world (nature) and the law of association, which is attached to sense perceptions, "for although it is according to that law that we borrow material from nature, we have the power to work that material into something quite other – namely, that which surpasses nature."[38] The

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36 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. J. Bate (London and Princeton, 1982), I, 144

37 From "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, eds., *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*, Second Edition (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 114.

38 *The Critique of Judgement*, paragraph 49 (quoted in G. F. Parker, *Johnson's Shakespeare* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1989], p. 125). The whole passage reads: "The imagination [...] is very powerful in creating what might be called a second nature out of the material given to it by actual nature. We

Coleridgean Hamlet gains a sense of the freedom of his mind whenever his imagination allows him to distance himself from the external world and reflect on its own images. This means that his meditations, and especially the soliloquies, are to be regarded as the most adequate manifestation of his mental disposition: they can prove the superiority of his mind over the "matter" of the play.

In Schleiermacher's terms, the monologues are the "grammatical" (formal) correlatives of the psychological content (the meaning) of Hamlet. Another "grammatical" proof of his overpowering imagination is his habit of punning, to which Coleridge pays considerable attention. In his notes for the 1813 lecture, quoting Hamlet's first line ("A little more than kin, and less than kind" [1.ii.65]) he emphasises that "He begins with that play of words" (CCS 73). His comments are again opposed to Johnson's opinion; he attempts to prove that the seemingly unnatural figure of punning is in fact a sign of the naturalness of Shakespeare's language: "No-one can have heard quarrels among the vulgar, but must have noticed the close connection of punning with angry contempt – add, too, what is highly characteristic of superfluous activity of mind, a sort of playing with a thread or watch chain, or snuff-box" (CCS 73). Hamlet's puns, then, signify both his anger with Claudius and his restless mental activity and therefore contribute to the "naturalness" of Shakespeare's textual world. However, Hamlet is also in a closer and more self-conscious relationship with words: according to his critic he is obsessed with "the prodigality of beautiful words, which are, as it were, the half-embodyings of thought" (CCS 73). He seems to be concerned with the material side of words, their "thingifying" capacity ("his words give a substance to shadows"– CCS 76), which is what puns are based on. In this respect again he is similar to the poet whose task is to treat words as things and build a kind of second nature out of them.[39] Puns and conceits are generally important for Coleridge exactly for this reason: they are not only figures of speech that are "natural" when uttered in a passionate state, but also figures in which the arbitrariness of language (the conventional connection between signifier and

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entertain ourselves with it where experience proves too commonplace, and we even use it to re-model experience, always following laws of analogy, no doubt, but also in accordance with higher principles given by reason. [...] By that means we gain a sense of our freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical employment of that power [namely, imagination]), for although it is according to that law that we borrow material from nature, we have the power to work that material into something quite other – namely, that which surpasses nature."

39 Cf. Kathleen M. Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan' and the Art of Thingifying," Duncan Wu, ed., *Romanticism: A Critical Reader* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell 1995), p. 133.

signified) is covered for a moment by a secondary motivation. As McKusick claims, "Coleridge regards puns and conundrums as exemplary of the coalescence of a word with the thing signified. Puns, of course, rely on both the phonetic and semantic properties of the words that constitute them."[40] Hamlet's punning, according to this, is an attempt to create a meaningful system of words through secondary motivation – a secular version of Berkeley's "Divine Visual Language" in which there is a necessary connection between invisible and visible entities.[41]

This activity can be seen as the inverse of Hamlet's habit of seeing "hieroglyphics" in the external world: on the one hand, his imagination turns objects into signs and meanings, while on the other hand, it turns thoughts to words and thus into objects. These two processes together constitute the circular motion of the imagination that Coleridge famously describes in *The Statesman's Manual*: "that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors."[42] As we have seen, on the basis of this theory of symbolism the figure of Hamlet can be recognised as a symbol of Shakespeare's infinite mind. On closer investigation, this symbol is now revealed as itself a producer of symbols which are – presumably – similarly bearers of truth. But Coleridge's interpretation of Hamlet seems to call into question this last proposition.

## *THE MEANING OF HAMLET 2: THE INSUFFICIENT SYMBOL*

Coleridge's Hamlet shares many qualities with the superior intellect of Shakespeare out of which he is thought to have been created. His habit of meditation, his interest in pure reason (as opposed to external phenomena), his powerful imagination, which attempts to read the language of nature and is even

40 James C. McKusick, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*, Yale Studies in English 195 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986), p. 32.

41 In the Divine Visual Language "God communicates his will to man through the various phenomena of nature, which functions as a series of signs for God's thoughts." G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of Philosophy* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1969), p. 32.

42 S. T. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, p. 30–31.

capable of creating a secondary nature out of language – these are all proofs of his "consubstantiality" with Shakespeare's mind. No wonder that Coleridge exclaimed at the end of his 1812 lecture: "Anything finer than this conception and working out of a character is merely impossible" (*CCS* 72). However, his interpretation of Hamlet has a darker side too, which is constantly present in his notes and lectures, making his overall assessment rather contradictory. His Hamlet, representative of the superior intellect, is also characterised by a "morbid sensibility" and "self-delusion" (*CCS* 76), which make all his unique features dubious or even reprehensible. This paradox appears in everything Coleridge says about Hamlet – my separate treatment of the two sides is highly artificial – but it can be grasped most effectively at the point where the superiority of Hamlet's mind is at its most visible: in his experience of the sublime.

Coleridge regards the Kantian sublime the definitive world-experience of Hamlet; most probably this is why he practically repeats Kant's formula in his 1813 lecture: "The sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the reflection upon it; not from the impression but from the idea" (*CCS* 76).[43] This experience is of utmost importance to both Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and – as Nigel Leask points out – also "to A. W. Schlegel's theory of · Tragedy, teaching us respect for the 'divine origin' of the mind and leading us 'to estimate the earthly existence as vain and insignificant.'"[44] It is also crucial for Coleridge's interpretation because the fact that Hamlet feels sublimity proves most forcefully the superiority of his reason over empirical reality. Imagination again plays a key role in this process, but in a negative way: the sublime is experienced exactly when the mind is so overwhelmed by the infinity or might of something (for instance, nature) that imagination cannot represent it, but realising this inability, the mind also realises that it still possesses a concept of these properties, which proves the superiority of reason over sense perceptions. As Kant explains, the sublime "cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather

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43 Cf. with Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" in *The Critique of Judgement*: "From this it may be seen that we express ourselves on the whole inaccurately if we term any *object of nature* sublime, although we may with perfect propriety call many such objects beautiful. For how can that which is apprehended as inherently contra-final be noted with an expression of approval? All that we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of a *sublimity discoverable in the mind*" (David Simpson ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel* [Cambridge: CUP, 1984], p. 48).

44 Nigel J. Leask, *Coleridge and the Politics of Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 110. (Quoting from Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, 1808–9.*)

concerns ideas of reason, which although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit sensuous presentation."[45]

The sublime experience is not homogenous like the experience of the beautiful but consists of a constant oscillation between a feeling of frustration (because the imagination cannot represent the infinite) and a feeling of joy over the superior ideas of human reason. In his 1813 lecture on *Hamlet*, Coleridge gave an example of this double movement: "Few have seen a celebrated waterfall without feeling something of a disappointment; it is only subsequently, by reflection, that the idea of the waterfall comes full into the mind, and brings with it a train of sublime associations" (*CCS* 76). As he added in the next sentence, "Hamlet felt this," which seems to imply that he was either in a state of disappointment with the outside world, or in the world of sublime reflections over his own superior reason. However, ideas of reason like infinity can be grasped only indirectly, as unimaginable, which requires the endless frustration of the imagination. In his lecture on *Romeo* Coleridge described this movement "where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being [...] the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image" (*SC* II, 103–4). The oscillation is without end: Hamlet is constantly "craving after the indefinite" (*CCS* 76) but his desire must needs remain unfulfilled.

As it is already evident, there is a certain amount of negativity in Kant's concept of the sublime even though it offers insight into the ideas of pure reason. Firstly, it can bring about the devaluation of all phenomenal objects that are representable – a consequence which could not be wholly accepted by Coleridge. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the sublime threatens the ability of the mind to know the world. Since the sublime feeling is based on "objects that defy conceptualization," the ensuing train of sublime associations is in a sense the admittance of failure.[46] This is well consistent with Kant's objectives who never claimed to offer a positive knowledge of the world. Coleridge, however, was

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45 Simpson, p. 48.
46 Cf. Linda Marie Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime to the Individual Self: Kant, Schiller, Coleridge and the Disintegration of Romantic Identity* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), p. 26.

reluctant to accept this and – together with Schelling – denied the inconceivability of the 'thing in itself.'[47]

He seems to have faced the negative implications of the Kantian sublime in his interpretation of Hamlet – and following the diagnosis, rejected him as "unnatural." As a consequence of his sublime perception of the world, Hamlet becomes "dissatisfied with commonplace realities" because they "must needs become cold" for him (*CCS* 76; 72). Even though Coleridge speaks of him with much admiration, his preoccupation with ideal things is after all described as a "morbid craving for that which is not" (*CCS* 76). Indeed, he seems to be solipsistically in need of distancing himself from the world in order to be able to represent it *for himself*. As Coleridge said in 1812, he "yields to [the same] retiring from all reality which is the result of having what we express by the terms a world within himself" (*CCS* 70). Moreover, he not only dismisses external reality (for the sake of his ideals), but may even be incapable of getting to know it. In this case his internal world would be no more than a false interpretation of a vast and incomprehensible external reality. Coleridge could not accept such a condition as the natural human condition, therefore he had to describe it as illness.

He expresses the suspicion that Hamlet may be mad most openly in his notes for the 1813 lecture: "Add, too, Hamlet's wildness in but *half-false* – O that subtle trick to pretend to be *acting* only when we are very near *being* what we act," and connects Hamlet's behaviour to the "vivid images" of Ophelia, "nigh akin to and productive of temporary mania" (*CCS* 73–4). In his 1812 lecture he also observes that "Such a mind as this is near akin to madness" (*CCS* 70). In the light of this suspicion, the "inward brooding" of Hamlet is a sign of his inability to face reality: "Hamlet's running into long reasonings – carrying off the impatience and uneasy feelings of expectation by running away from the *particular* into the *general*; this aversion to personal, individual concerns, and escape to generalisations and general reasonings a most important characteristic" (*CCS* 74). Similarly, his wordplay and irony is an effect of his "disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and the supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous – a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium"

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47 "In spite therefore of his [Kant's] own declarations, I could never believe, it was possible for him to have meant no more by his *Noumenon*, or Thing in Itself, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *plastic* power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the *materiale* of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable" (*Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask [London: Everyman, J. M. Dent, 1997], p. 90).

(*CCS* 77). This Hamlet is no longer the figure who demonstrates man's freedom from the external world but one who tries to escape from it because he *cannot* face it, and therefore all signs of the superiority of his mind are revealed as symptoms of a disease.

The main cause of Hamlet's unhealthiness as Coleridge sees it is his "overbalance of imagination" (*CCS* 76): this faculty creates "a world within himself" which has more or less lost its connections with the world outside. Although Kant thought the inner "second nature" superior to the empirical world, he also described such malignant working of the imagination in his *Anthropology*, remarking that "If it is not already a form of mental illness (hypochondria), it leads to this and to the lunatic asylum."[48] Coleridge diagnosed the disease already in 1810, when H. C. Robinson wrote of him: "He made an elaborate distinction between fancy and imagination. The excess of fancy is delirium, of imagination mania."[49] That he did not dismiss this theory is proved by Chapter 4 of the *Biographia* where he presents fancy and imagination simultaneously with delirium and mania, although he does not include the analogy in the much more optimistic Schellingian definition of the imagination offered in Chapter 13. Hamlet's "half-false" madness undermines the belief that the creations of imagination (its system of symbols) partake of truth. Hamlet's diseased imagination can produce only false symbols that are not "conductors of truth," but his means of self-delusion. Such an insight into the threat of the imagination could even lead Coleridge to question its truthfulness in general. As critics like McGann claim, a crucial suspicion about the imagination can indeed be witnessed in his later works, most openly in the poem "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (1826).[50]

What is so strange about Coleridge's Hamlet is that he partly retains his admirable characteristics: he is both a prime representative of the superior human

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48 The beginning of the quotation reads: "To observe in ourselves the various acts of the representative power when we call them forth merits our reflection; it is necessary and useful for logic and metaphysics. – But to try to eavesdrop on ourselves when they occur in our mind *unbidden* and spontaneously (as happens through the play of the imagination when it inverts images unintentionally) is to overturn the natural order of the cognitive powers, because then the principles of thinking do not come first (as they should), but instead follow after." (Simpson, p. 10)

49 Seamus Perry, *S. T. Coleridge: Interviews and Recollections* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 132.

50 Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 99.

intellect and a bad example, in whom certain faculties can be found in morbid excess. How can the mentally unbalanced, unhealthy Hamlet be identical with the representative of Shakespeare's divine intellect? Or does Coleridge mix up two distinct interpretations? As we have seen, these ambiguities are to some extent due to his own ambivalent response to Kant's philosophy, on which his interpretation is based. However, Hamlet's ambiguity is already present in his "conception" as Coleridge understood it: Shakespeare created his characters by conceiving "any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then placing himself, thus mutilated and diseased, under given circumstances" (CCS 72). This means that although Hamlet was created out of Shakespeare's own mental faculties (his reason and imagination), these are present in him in morbid excess and therefore he is "diseased." Moreover, he can represent merely a "mutilated" Shakespeare because only part of the authorial subjectivity was infused into him – this is why Coleridge claims that "he has a sense of imperfectness" and "something is wanted to make it complete" (CCS 70).

In other words, Hamlet shares the fate of the symbol that can represent only a *fragment* of the truth of which it partakes. His negative characteristics are only the other side of his divine conception. Coleridge's survey through the tragedy following his general characterisation of Hamlet reveals what he finds missing in him: he lacks the capacity that is needed for participation in the external world, or, in his words, he lacks the ability to act. Coleridge's interpretation explores how such a subject must become the main character in a tragic plot

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE TRAGIC

In his notes and in both lectures, Coleridge complemented what he called his "Character of Hamlet" with a "cursory survey through the play" (CCS 73). Unfortunately, the lecture notes cannot be regarded a thorough rendering of what he really talked about; Badawi even supposes that his criticism of structure may be missing to a large extent because "it cannot be abridged" and is more difficult to note down and remember.[51] However, the material we have of the lectures seems to reveal a certain tendency in Coleridge's selection of scenes and passages which contradicts the intention of giving a full structural analysis. His grounds for choosing certain passages can be inferred from how he interprets them: most of

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51 M. M. Badawi, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973), p. 83.

the time he brings up a text as evidence of his general interpretation of Hamlet's character, the central signifier of the play. This means that, in Schleiermacher's terms, he is still pursuing a psychological interpretation and his goal is "nothing other than a development of the beginning, that is, to consider the whole of the author's work in terms of its parts and in every part to consider the content as what moved the author and the form as his nature moved by the content."[52] Coleridge reads each selected part as a development of "the beginning": a manifestation of the meaning of the whole, which is, in this case, the conception of Hamlet. This is why he detects a similar meaning in most passages he selects for commentary.

Naturally, he has a preference for Hamlet's speeches and soliloquies since these, as we have seen, offer him an almost direct insight into his consciousness and thus, into the meaning of the play. In his own notes written for the 1813 lecture, after analysing the first scene he deals with Hamlet's first wordplay (I.ii.65), his reply to the queen (I.ii.75ff), his first soliloquy (I.ii.129ff), his meditation before the Ghost appears (I.iv.13ff), his "instant and over-violent resolve" when the Ghost's story is told (I.v.29ff), his following soliloquy and "ludicrous" sayings (I.v.92ff), and his soliloquy over the player king (II.ii.544ff). In all these passages he studies "how the character develops itself" (*CCS* 73) and connects each observation to his general understanding of him. Of the last passage, for instance, he claims that it is "Hamlet's character, as I have conceived, described by himself" (*CCS* 75). The 1813 report shows that Coleridge followed his notes quite closely in his lecture, and Collier's notes prove that he chose similar passages also in 1812: in addition to scenes mentioned already, he spoke of the soliloquy about the young Fortinbras (IV.iv.32ff), Hamlet's "moralizing on the skull in the churchyard" (V.i.74ff), his replies to Ophelia (III.i.90ff), his monologue in the prayer scene (III.iii.73ff), his voyage to England, and his meditation "after the scene with Osric" (V.ii.215ff). All in all, this is indeed a "cursory survey" rather than a careful analysis of the structure of the play. Moreover, with the exception of two passages (on the first scene and on the voyage to England) Coleridge deals exclusively with Hamlet's own words, and usually on himself. By doing so he repeats what Goethe's Wilhelm Meister did and even called attention to: he judges a whole play from one character.[53] Both

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52 Mueller-Vollmer, p. 94.

53 "Ich habe den Fehler, ein Stück aus eine Rolle zu beurteilen, eine Rolle nur an sich und nicht im Zuasammenhange mit dem Stück zu betrachten, an mir selbst in diesen Tagen so lebhaft bemerkt,

Wilhelm and Coleridge attempt to understand the drama through imaginative identification or *Einfühlung* – a method that Coleridge himself regarded inappropriate for the analysis of the play as a whole. At least in his interpretation of the character of Polonius (relegated to a lecture on a different topic) he claims that "Hamlet's words should not be taken as Shakespeare's conception of him" (*SC* II, 217). In the lectures on *Hamlet*, however, he sticks so much to Hamlet's words that he cannot present his concept of the 'real' Polonius – or the 'real' Ophelia, Gertrude, or Claudius. This contradiction still follows from his method of dealing with what is thought to be essential and ignoring all the accidentals. Since he believes that the essence of the play is to be found in Hamlet's psyche, he deals only with passages that can be regarded as manifesting this essence.

With such principles, the critic cannot be expected to say much about the tragic plot of the play. In spite of this, Coleridge seems to have a distinct sense of Hamlet's tragedy. Describing the first scene (the only one he chooses to mention in which Hamlet is not present), he speaks of "the armour, the cold, the dead silence, all placing the mind in the state congruous with tragedy" (*CCS* 73). Since he usually treated the first scenes as the germ from which the whole play develops, this remark is of special interest. It claims that *Hamlet* can be understood only by a receptive mind that has some affinity for tragedy – which also implies that tragedy in this case is something like a state of mind. (*Gedankentrauerspiel*, Schlegel's word for *Hamlet*, allows similar conjecture.) Coleridge repeats this view in his notes for the 1819 lecture where he investigates how in the first scene "all excellently accord with and prepare for the after gradual rise into Tragedy – but above all Tragedy the interest of which is eminently *ad et apud intra*" (*LL* II, 295). Such a subjectivist concept of tragedy accords with the general nature of Coleridge's interpretation dealing primarily with spiritual or psychological entities, picturing the tragic character himself little more than a state of mind "congruous with tragedy." The external events of the drama are important from this point of view only as the background which brings out the tragic quality inherent in Hamlet – as we have seen, Coleridge regards the story as the canvas only on which the portrait is painted. Since Hamlet is defined by the faculties he has on the one hand, and he lacks on the other, the "background" is to bring out both, and this is its sole *raison d'être*.

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dass ich euch das Beispiel erzählen will, wenn ihr mir ein geneigtes Gehör gönnen wollt." (J. W. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, ed. Erich Trunz [München: C. H. Beck, 1977], p. 216 [IV, 3]).

Hamlet's inability to act, of course, can be best shown in circumstances in which he must act (just as his overpowering faculty of thought can be best shown in a situation where he should not think). This need determines for Coleridge the dramatic situation. In 1812 he said about Hamlet: "Shakespeare places him in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in: he is the heir apparent of the throne; his father dies suspiciously; his mother excludes him from the throne by marrying his uncle. This was not enough but the Ghost of the murdered father is introduced to assure the son that he was put to death by his own brother. What is the result? Endless reasoning and urging – perpetual solicitation of the mind to act, but as constant an escape from action – ceaseless reproaches of himself for his sloth, while the whole energy of his resolution passes away in those reproaches" (*CCS* 67–8). As this passage makes clear, Coleridge, like virtually all 19th century interpreters of the play, was convinced that the Ghost's call for revenge must be obeyed – mainly because he accepted Hamlet's insistence that it must. The whole play, then, becomes for him a story of delayed action; the motive, the resolution and the means are given (Coleridge quotes Hamlet's "I have the cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do't" – *CCS* 70) but "nothing happens."

As we have seen, according to Coleridge's diagnosis the overbalance of Hamlet's imagination creates an inner world for him which prevents all forms of action. Hamlet is unable to act "not from cowardice, for he is made one of the bravest of his time – not from want of forethought or quickness of apprehension, for he sees through the very souls of all who surround him; but merely from that aversion to action which prevails among such as have a world within themselves" (*CCS* 68). Later in the same lecture Coleridge rephrased the statement: "This admirable and consistent character, deeply acquainted with his own feelings, painting them with such wonderful power and accuracy, and just as strongly convinced of the fitness of executing his solemn charge committed to him, still yields to the same retiring from all reality which is the result of having what we express by the terms a world within himself" (*CCS* 70). These explanations imply that Hamlet is after all a victim of not what he lacks but what he has in excess: his imagination is so strong that it usurps the place of the outside world for him. The fact that Coleridge attributes to him a high degree of self-consciousness could even mean that he is himself aware of this "overbalance," which could lead him to question the status of reality as such. The possibility of interpreting Hamlet as a sceptic is given in Coleridge's interpretation although it is not fully realised.

Schlegel, however, was definitely on this opinion and Hazlitt, probably following his views, also called Hamlet sceptical.[54]

Since the Coleridgean Hamlet has practically lost touch with the everyday world and therefore cannot act, he may not be accused of anything he does – only of what he does not do. Consequently, Coleridge clears him of all charges of intentional wrongdoing that his former critics, most importantly Johnson, brought up against him. One of the charges concerns his heartless treatment of Ophelia; as Johnson wrote, "He plays the madman most when he treats Ophelia with so much rudeness, which seems to be useless and wanton cruelty."[55] Coleridge, probably because he considered the love-interest generally of secondary importance, deals only with the crucial dialogue in 3.1, and claims that "His madness is assumed when he discovers that witnesses have been placed behind the arras to listen to what passes, and when the heroine has been thrown in his way as a decoy" (CCS 70). With this explanation Coleridge claims that Hamlet's rudeness is in fact a defence, and consequently it is not his fault. Johnson's second and even more severe objection is against Hamlet's monologue when he sees his uncle praying (III.iii): "This speech, in which Hamlet, represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered."[56] Coleridge, not surprisingly, sees in this scene another proof of his theory of Hamlet, even though for this he has to assume that Hamlet deludes himself: "The fact is that the determination to allow the King to escape at such a moment was only part of the same irresoluteness of character. Hamlet seizes hold of a pretext for not acting, when he might have acted so effectually" (CCS 71).

Coleridge's theory seems to make him blind to any guilty deed Hamlet may commit. G. F. Parker is right to observe that "Coleridge's subordination of what

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54 Schlegel: "Hamlet has no firm belief either in himself or in anything else: from expressions of religious confidence he passes over to sceptical doubts: he believes in the Ghost of his father as long as he sees it, but as soon as it disappears, it appears to him almost in the light of deception. He has even gone so far as to say, 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so;' with him the poet loses himself here in labyrinths of thought, in which neither end nor beginning is discoverable" (Bate, p. 309–310). Hazlitt: "when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical" (Bate, p. 325).
55 Johnson on Shakespeare 1–2, ed. Arthur Sherbo, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. VII–VIII (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1968), Vol. II, p. 1011. Henceforward: JoS.
56 JoS II, 990.

Hamlet does to what he feels constitutes a softening of the play."[57] However, this does not mean that he clears him of all charges. Of his "original sin" inherent in his conception as an insufficient symbol he is never relieved. From the moment he is alienated from the originating mind of Shakespeare and put into the circumstances of the drama, he is practically doomed. Coleridge regards his tragic end as a consequence of his "morbid sensibility" – the plot is on the whole against him, and the particular events only show evidence of this. His downfall is both accident and necessity; as Coleridge said to H. C. Robinson "S[hakespeare] wished to shew how even such a character is at last obliged to be the sport of chance" (*SC* II, 165–6). This is why he cannot commit suicide, which for Robinson would have been the most logical ending of the play. Coleridge's Hamlet is unable to determine what he does or what happens to himself so his death must come from the outside. In his 1812 lecture he repeated that it was consistent with the character of Hamlet "that after still resolving, and still refusing, still determining to execute, and still postponing the execution, he should finally give himself up to his destiny; and in the infirmity of his nature at last hopelessly place himself in the power and at the mercy of his enemies" (*CCS* 71). This Hamlet probably comes as close to Aristotle's tragic hero as a modern character can. He is superior to others but is also imperfect – commits the *hamartia* of insufficiency – and therefore he must die. His sin is nothing within his power but, like Oedipus, he must bear its consequences.

What kind of moral can such a tragic character convey? Does it say that the human spirit is wasted on earth, moreover, that it is blind to its own state until the very end? Schlegel, whose interpretation of the play runs close to Coleridge's, admits the possibility of a totally negative message: "A voice from another world, commissioned it would appear, by heaven, demands vengeance for a monstrous enormity, and the demand remains without effect; the criminals are at last punished, but, as it were, by an accidental blow, and not in the solemn way requisite to convey to the world a warning example of justice; irresolute foresight, cunning treachery, and impetuous rage, hurry on to a common destruction; the less guilty and the innocent are equally involved in the general ruin. The destiny of humanity is there exhibited as a gigantic Sphinx, which threatens to precipitate into the abyss of scepticism all who are unable to solve the dreadful enigmas."[58] This utterly pessimistic account is all the more remarkable because – as Parker

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57 Parker, *Johnson's Shakespeare*, p. 185.
58 Bate, pp. 309–310.

observes – for Schlegel normally "what is desperate and terrible in the situation of the tragic protagonist serves to intimate that *there is a world elsewhere* (to recall Coriolanus's cry as he 'banishes' the populace of Rome), a world in which the spirit rises indomitable over all that can befall it in its phenomenal aspect."[59] It seems that *Hamlet* did not offer the same consolation – its scepticism proved to be powerful enough to ruin some of Schlegel's main presuppositions. Coleridge, however, draws an altogether different moral. He does not accept the total negativity of Shakespeare's message but does not see in the tragedy a promise of another world either. He identifies the much more down-to-earth message "that action is the great end of existence – that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or otherwise than as misfortunes; if they withdraw us from, or render us repugnant to action" (*CCS* 72).

Such a moral follows somewhat unexpectedly from Coleridge's interpretation, indicating that in the background he has modified his interpretative principles. He started out by regarding Hamlet the central sign which conveys the subjective meaning of Shakespeare but now it seems that the final meaning is not conveyed through the sign but through what it is not: Shakespeare's intention is to show something *contrary* to Hamlet. The notion that meaning (intention) is not to be sought in or through the sign but in what is absent from it is the characteristic strategy of what Rajan calls negative hermeneutics, a phenomenon of romantic criticism.[60] While positive hermeneutics (in the case of Schleiermacher, for instance) "synthesizes the text by arranging and expanding elements actually given in it," in the negative method "reading supplies something absent from and in contradiction to the textual surface."[61] Coleridge's interpretation starts out from a positive, and reverts to a negative hermeneutics – strangely enough in order to assure a positive Shakespearean meaning in spite of the tragic signifier Hamlet. This also means that for him Shakespeare's spirit after all proves to be transcendent rather than immanent: although it is present in Hamlet to some extent, its essence is missing from him.

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59 Parker, p. 83.
60 Shelley in his *Hamlet* interpretation follows a similar strategy claiming that "there is but one demonstration of the excellence of health, and that is disease" (Bate, p. 342).
61 Rajan, p. 5.

## *THE PLOT AGAINST THE CRITIC*

With his final interpretative move (finding the moral of the play) Coleridge attempts to reach out to Shakespeare's meaning in a way *disregarding* Hamlet, the ambivalent signifier. But the Hamlet-symbol is constructed too powerfully to be ignored, and even though it cannot be seen through (due to its ambivalence) and thus it cannot lead to a final meaning, it still produces meanings by reflecting – and refracting – the image of the critic. That Hamlet and the critic are figures of each other follows from Coleridge's hermeneutic principles. As we have seen, he identifies the meaning of Hamlet by looking into his own mind; he constructs the figure out of his own subjectivity and makes him the bearer of its "truths." He is lead by the assumption that Hamlet is a universal symbol, representing what is common to all humanity. The symbol, however, proves to be tragically ambivalent (an image of the superior human mind *and* of the diseased mind), and acts out this ambivalence – in fact the ambiguous positions of the critic – within the context of the play. The critic has by that time indeed "Interwove Himself into the Texture of his Lecture": by defining Hamlet he has also defined his own positions and from that moment he must follow his self-constructed symbol wherever it leads him.[62]

Several instances can be witnessed in the lectures where the critic imitates Hamlet's behaviour. Coleridge approaches the play consciously with certain preconceptions – abstractions about the human mind – and regards every element in the text as possibly a hieroglyphic conveying its truth. Therefore, for him too "the external world and all its incidents and objects" in the play are "comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves" and "began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind" (CCS 67). By finding the most important hieroglyphic in Hamlet as the image of the mind, he dismisses every element that has no relevance to this strand of interpretation. His Hamlet ignores external circumstances, and consequently the critic has to ignore the dramatic plot as such and concentrate on the soliloquies in which Hamlet speaks of himself. He dismisses, for instance, Ophelia, as Hamlet dismisses her, because she is not part of the main interest that he discovers in the whole play. G.F. Parker also observes the way "Hamlet's ceaseless conversion of things into

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62 Edward Jerningham wrote in a 1808 letter of Coleridge: "He often Interwove Himself into the Texture of his Lecture." (Perry, p. 121)

thoughts" is "reflected in the manner of much of Coleridge's critical writing."[63] However, as we have seen, Hamlet's turning away from reality may be revealed as an attempt to escape from it. Does the critic also have to flee the text in order to avoid facing an unsettling insight about himself?

Nowhere is Coleridge's habit of imitating Hamlet so obvious as in the examination of the Ghost-scenes. These passages are naturally very important for his interpretation: the appearances of the Ghost are the absolutely sublime moments of the play in which Shakespeare's genius – and Coleridge's meaning – should be witnessed. Hamlet's seeing the Ghost is the episode in which the "overbalance" of his imagination could be best shown and Coleridge in his notes indeed remarks somewhat enigmatically that "The familiarity, comparative at least, of a brooding mind with shadows, is something" (*CCS* 74). In other writings he deals with this psychological phenomenon much more extensively; in *The Friend* he reconstructs how Luther's vision of the Devil evolved and even claims to wish "to devote an entire work to the subject of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, Witchcraft, &c."[64] His proposed outline bears some relevance to Shakespeare: "I might then explain in a more satisfactory way the mode in which our thoughts in states of morbid slumber, become at times perfectly dramatic (for in certain sort of dreams the dullest Wight becomes a Shakespeare) and by what law the *Form* of the vision appears to talk to us in its own thoughts in a voice as audible as the shape is visible; and this oftentimes in connected trains... "[65] Hamlet could be a perfect example of this psychological case, which would make the whole play doubly a drama of the imagination. However, for some reason Coleridge chooses a different interpretation.

In fact he raises the possibility "that the vision is a figure in the highly wrought imagination" only to dismiss it (*CCS* 68). As he asserts in his 1812 lecture, "Hamlet's own fancy has not conjured up the Ghost of his father" – the evidence being that "it has been seen by others" (*CCS* 68). However, this seemingly unquestionable proof is a little shaken by the mode Coleridge insists on establishing it. For one thing, he ignores the passage that could provide a counter-

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63 Parker, p. 89.

64 *The Friend*, no 8, 5 Oct 1809 (*The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke [Princeton: PUP, 1969], Vol. II, p. 120).

65 *Friend* I, 145. A casual anecdote about Coleridge's psychological approach to ghosts told by Sir James Mackintosh: "the best thing ever said of ghosts was by Coleridge, who, when asked by a lady if he believed in them, replied, 'No, Madam, I have seen too many to believe in them'" (Perry, p. 179–180).

argument: the bedroom-scene in which Hamlet sees the Ghost but his mother does not. Furthermore, he compares Hamlet's reflections before the Ghost enters to *Macbeth*: "The same thing occurs in *Macbeth*: in the dagger scene, the moment before he sees it, he has his mind drawn to some indifferent matters" (*CCS* 68). The comparison is somewhat odd, since in *Macbeth* all circumstances suggest that the dagger is indeed a delusion of a guilty mind – it cannot be grasped, and if it was sent by the witches, they themselves correspond to desires inherent in the hero, as Coleridge makes clear.[66] The analogy accordingly would suggest that Hamlet's moralising before the Ghost enters is a sign of his "desire to escape from the inward thoughts" but these thoughts suddenly take shape in the vision, just like in *Macbeth*. Since Coleridge wants to prove the opposite, in other passages he points out the contrast between the supernatural in the two plays: "The Ghost, a superstition connected with the [...] truths of revealed religion, and therefore, O! how contrasted from the withering and wild language of the *Macbeth*" (*CCS* 74). But does the fact that the Ghost is a *Christian* superstition give more credit to it? Coleridge's strange (and politically charged) insistence suggests that he wants to impress this thought upon the audience. In his notes he jots down: "Shakespeare's tenderness with regard to all innocent superstitions – no Tom Paine declarations and pompous philosophy" (*CCS* 73).[67] But he was evidently not settled in this explanation; his notes for his 1818 lecture on *Hamlet* deal exclusively with the first scene, comparing it with "all the best-attested stories of ghosts and visions" and analysing every little detail that creates dramatic faith. A report of his lecture in 1819 shows that the problem of the Ghost has become almost an obsession for him: "Many of his ideas were as just as they were beautiful; but we wish that he had given some portion of the time consumed by the almost unintelligibly ambiguous apologies for belief in ghosts and goblins, to the elucidation of the yet obscure traits of the character of Hamlet" (*SC* II, 259). Of course, Coleridge is not likely to have propagated belief in ghosts in general – his argumentation is meant to prove that readers should have *dramatic* faith in the vision. However, the Ghost's reliability is questioned by Hamlet himself and its ontological status is

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66 "They were mysterious natures: fatherless, motherless, sexless: they come and disappear: they lead evil minds from evil to evil: and have the power of tempting those, who have been tempters of themselves" (*LL* I, 531).

67 Cf. also his notes for the *1818–19 Lectures on Shakespeare*: "Hume himself could not but have faith in *this* Ghost dramatically, let his anti-ghostism be as strong as Samson against Ghosts less powerfully raised" (*LL* II, 296).

ambiguous throughout the play. Due to this ambiguity Coleridge's insistence that the Ghost is "real" and "true" could not be anything but "ambiguous."

Why is it so important for him to prove the Ghost's trustworthiness? Obviously, if he wants to maintain that the play conveys the moral that "action is the great end of existence" and its plot is about Hamlet's inability to act, he has to make sure that the call for action is based on truth. It could be said, that in this modified, negative hermeneutic interpretation not Hamlet, but the Ghost conveys the Shakespearean meaning (the call for action), and his *logos* assures the coherence of the whole. In this way he is not only the figure of the dead father, but also that of the author and a voice from heaven, as Schlegel thinks. If it proved to be a delusion and thus unreliable, the whole dramaturgy and the positive moral would be undermined. This would also mean that Hamlet is irretrievably deluded, but Coleridge wants to maintain that his madness is not complete but "half-false." His drawing of that precarious distinction is as important as his diagnosis of the Hamletian "overbalance" of imagination.[68] For if Hamlet would be really mad, and the manifestation of the Shakespearean meaning (the Ghost) would be revealed as no more than a projection of his deluded psyche, where could any meaning be located? And if Hamlet, who shares the intellectual faculties of the critic, would *invent* figures of meaning instead of interpreting them, what could be said of the critic?

The unreliability of the Ghost and the possibility that Hamlet may read his own meaning into it would have unsettling consequences for the critic that Coleridge has to avoid. Namely, it would suggest that the way Hamlet projects himself into the Ghost, the critic would possibly project himself into Hamlet and thus, instead of finding the true meaning inherent in both of them, he would invent his own meaning. In this case – using Rajan's formula – the hermeneutic reading would be unmasked as an heuristic one, which "can no longer be conceived as the reconstruction of an original meaning but must be seen as the production of a new meaning."[69] Of course, this is in contradiction with Coleridge's belief that through introspection he can find the truth of the drama.

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68 Coleridge draws attention to the distinction in a note in the *Biographia* (Ch. 2). Here he quotes the same line from Dryden as in his lecture on *Hamlet*, "Great wit to madness sure is near allied" in order to illustrate the deception that works "by the telling the half of a fact, and omitting the other half, when it is from their mutual counteraction and neutralisation, that the whole truth arises, as a tertium aliquid different from either." (Coleridge, *Biographia*, p. 28) With this intertextual reference he indirectly emphasises that Hamlet is not *really* mad.

69 Rajan, p. 33.

Therefore he sets out to seek absolute evidence for the reliability of the Ghost – and his insistence on completing the impossible task makes him imitate Hamlet who does the same at least through three acts. He is entrapped in the plot of his own hermeneutic reading in which he either has to acknowledge that his Hamlet is his own mirror-image or has to repeat the movements of Hamlet and become *his* mirror-image. A metaphor of the situation is provided by Coleridge himself. In his poem "Constancy to an Ideal Object" he rewrites the image he used earlier to express the universality of Shakespeare's genius. The mountain traveller who – like the reader of Shakespeare – in the mist "beholds his own figure, but the glory round the head distinguishes it from a mere vulgar copy" becomes a deluded "rustic": "Sees full before him, gliding without tread, / An image with a glory round its head; / The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues, / Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!"

In the intricate pattern of Coleridge's *Hamlet* interpretation we can witness the employment of a fundamental problem of romantic hermeneutics. A possible formulation of it would be that romantic hermeneutics assumes the meaning of a text to be found intuitively through looking into one's own self (subjective identification) but it also wants to make sure that the meaning grasped in this way is absolute, i.e. identical with the authorial and transcendental one. Thus it grants the reader freedom of interpretation and takes it away at the same time. Rajan offers another formulation: "The history of romantic hermeneutics is of a movement complicated by its emergence within a chain of substitutions. When writing fails to represent adequately the thought or speech that precedes it, it is replaced by reading, which is thus open to a similar failure."[70] Coleridge's reading of Hamlet goes through the same stages: it attempts to move beyond writing to reach the Shakespearean meaning but he finds a set of different meanings instead, relevant mostly to himself.

Whenever "a man is attempting to describe another's character, he may be right or he may be wrong, but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself" –Coleridge wrote in his Notebook.[71] His lectures on *Hamlet* are a perfect illustration of that, as his first audience was already aware. The most well-known evidence of this can be found in the letter H. C. Robinson wrote in January 1812 about Coleridge's lecture: "Last night he concluded his fine development of the Prince of Denmark by an eloquent statement of the moral of the play: 'Action,'

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70 Rajan, p. 69.
71 *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York, 1957–73) Vol. I, p. 74.

he said, 'is the great end of all. No intellect, however grand, is valuable if it draw us from action and lead us to think and think till the time of action is passed by and we can do nothing.' Somebody said to me, 'This is a satire on himself.' – 'No,' said I, 'it is an elegy.' A great many of his remarks on Hamlet were capable of like application" (*SC* II, 181–2).

What is interesting about this anecdote is not only that Coleridge's first audience immediately recognised the self-reflexive subjectivism of his interpretation but that they attempted to find its proper "genre" as well – the mode in which it is to be understood. In this respect they went further that T. S. Eliot who believed that Coleridge simply wanted to present himself "in an attractive costume." The first remark quoted by Robinson ("satire") expresses something important about the lectures: their self-critical edge, expanded by critics like Ellis and Mills.[72] However, Robinson's reply ("elegy") goes deeper. It implies that Coleridge is in a sense mourning for himself along with the tragic hero. Indeed, he could be said to have buried some of his romantic hermeneutic ideals in the course of this interpretation. Perhaps this is why the main products of the next important phase of his *Hamlet* criticism (1818–19) are not reports or lecture notes but marginalia to the play, representing a kind of transitional stage between reading in the strict sense and interpretation. With his sharp observations never straying too far away from the text, he reverts to something like Johnson's method who famously claimed to "have confined [his] imagination to the margin."[73]

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72 Speaking of the first paragraph of his 1813 notes they assert: "So that while Coleridge may well have identified with Hamlet, this paragraph brings home the obvious truth that self-identification need not inevitably lead to self-glorification. It can also operate, as it may be doing here, as self-criticism." (Ellis and Mills, p. 246)

73 *JoS* I, 108.

*Andrea Timár*

# Imagination Disconnected

## On Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*

### *WITHDRAWALS*

While partly writing, partly dictating from his notebooks, *Biographia Literaria* to John Morgan in the summer of 1815, Coleridge reduced his dosage of laudanum and suffered from heavy withdrawal symptoms.[1] His compulsion to talk and write, as well as his frustration, was increased by the deadline: he had to finish the work by September. The book therefore became a symptom of withdrawal.

The *Biographia*, intended as a preface (or prelude) to the two-volume book of poetry, *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), has long been interpreted as Coleridge's version of the "Growth of a Poet's Mind." The collection of poems opened with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* already supplemented with the metafictional glossary, and included, for the first time in print, the later canonised version of *Effusion XXXV: The Eolian Harp.*[2] It also contained several other conversation poems, such as *To William Wordsworth*. Though the collection of poems "has been entitled SIBYLLINE LEAVES, in allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state in

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1 Cf. J. Engell and W. J. Bate's preface to *Biographia Literaria*, in: *The Collected Works Of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. J. Engell & W. J. Bate (London: Princeton UP, 1983), Vol. 7, p. lii. All further references to *Biographia Literaria* (henceforward *BL*) concern this edition, unless otherwise noted.
2 For the analysis of *Effusion* and the changes turning it into *The Eolian Harp*, see my "Conversing Signs: Coleridge: Effusion XXXV," in *The AnaChronisT* (2001) 19–38.

which they have long suffered to remain,"[3] it tellingly *excluded* the three most famous of Coleridge's 'fragment poems,' *Kubla Khan, Christabel* and the *Pains of Sleep*, despite the fact that they had already been published in a 1816 volume.

In my article in the 2001 issue of *The AnaChronisT*, I followed the general critical trend in explaining the subsequent modifications of the 1798 version of *Effusion XXXXV* into its 1817 version, *The Eolian Harp*, by arguing that without the most relevant excisions (that of the footnote) and insertions (that of the "one Life" theme), the poem would have even more ostensibly subverted the aesthetic and/or moral principles it was supposed to declare. As a general assumption, we even ventured the claim that in poetic practice the withdrawals were commonly carried out surreptitiously, with the complete effacement of their mark of excision, the trace of their past existence.

In this paper, I will follow an opposite path: investigating a *false* mark of withdrawal, I will endeavour to examine a passage that deliberately subverts the theory it is supposed to ground: the letter, written by a fictitious friend, which precedes the definition of Imagination at the end of chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*.

Since in the most celebrated chapter, "On the imagination, or esemplastic power," the "author" interrupts himself in the middle of his philosophical disquisition and introduces a letter recommending him to *suppress* the whole chapter from the book:

> Thus far had the work been transcribed for the press, when I received the following letter from a friend, whose practical judgement I have had ample reason to estimate and revere...
>
> [the letter follows]
>
> In consequence of this very judicious letter [...] I shall content myself for the present with stating the main result of the chapter, which I have reserved for that future publication, a detailed prospectus of which the reader will find at the close of the second volume.
>
> The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary...[4]

We know from Coleridge's personal correspondence that the letter was written by himself and that the part of the chapter which "*cannot, when it is printed, amount to so little as an hundred pages*" had never existed. As he remarks

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3 *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols., ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1912).
4 *BL.*, p. 304.

to Thomas Curtis, "that letter addressed to myself as from a friend, at the close of the first volume of the Literary Life [...] was written without taking my pen off the paper except to dip it in the inkstand."[5] Thus, the definition of *Imagination* has remained groundless, or else, *abstracted* from its alleged but actually missing ground.

The reason why this chapter is so idiosyncratic in the Coleridge canon is twofold: on the one hand, though we are accustomed to a self-editorial work erasing the changes, the withdrawal of the pages refers to a self-editorial process presenting a non-existent change; and on the other hand, though Coleridge has the most often been charged with plagiarism,[6] or the unacknowledged appropriation of someone else's voice, the introduction of the fictitious friend can be interpreted as the disappropriation of one's own. Consequently, although the letter, as well as Coleridge's plagiarisms, has "often been glossed over in the interpretation of the *Biographia* as a device of deferment or *dissimulation* [of lack],"[7] we may endeavour to interpret the intrusion of the letter as a *simulation* or counterfeit creating the effect of some hundred pages that are and have always been absent.

Critical writings making any comment on the intrusion of the fictitious friend tend to deal either with the function and the structural necessity of the letter in the *Biographia*, as a whole, or attempt to "identify" the persona created in and by the letter.

One of the most thought-provoking analyses of Chapter XIII was offered in 1977 by Gayatri Spivak who, in her Lacanian reading of Chapters XII–XIII, shows the gaps and logical slippages in Coleridge's argumentation in order to demonstrate that "the letter as a whole is the paradigm of the 'symbolic' [...] a mark of castration [...] that allows the Law [the final definition of Imagination] to spring forth full-fledged."[8] With this analysis, she opened the space for subsequent critics who interpreted the friend as the intrusion of some "male Will balancing the spontaneous effusions in the *Biographia*."[9] Though Nigel Leask himself does not specifically allude either to the letter or to the friend, his overall comment on

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5 *BL*, p. 300, editor's note 3.
6 The implications of Coleridge's plagiarisms in the paradigm of Romantic Irony, as well as Coleridge's relation to the Romantic Ironists or the similarities between his writing practice and that of Friedrich Schlegel do not constitute the central issue of this paper.
7 David S. Ferris, "Coleridge's Ventriloquy," *Studies in Romanticism* [*SiR*] 24 (Spring 1985), p. 71.
8 Gayatri Spivak, "The Letter as a Cutting Edge," *Yale French Studies* (1977), p. 220.
9 Nigel Leask, "Shelley's Magnetic Ladies," p. 61.

the *Biographia* could typify the prevailing critical opinion concerning the letter. Leslie Brisman, for instance, identifies the friend with the "person from Porlock" of the Preface to *Kubla Khan*, arguing that he is "the natural man who keeps getting in the way of the poet."[10] Following Moore's remark that "Coleridge perceived his inadequacies, his procrastinations, and what he called his 'diseased volition,' as particularly feminine traits which made him a lesser man, and not so manly a poet, as say, John Donne or Wordsworth,"[11] we might even claim that Kenneth R. Johnston, in endeavouring to demonstrate that the fictitious friend is Wordsworth himself; "albeit a Wordsworth who speaks in playful Coleridgean ironies"[12] (?!), is completely in line with his predecessors. Johnston's argumentation itself, however, is worthy of consideration, since it does not only allude to the manifold relationships between Wordsworth's *Recluse* and the *Biographia* itself as whole, but also makes a thorough inter-textual analysis to demonstrate that "several parts of the letter can be regarded as a Coleridgean complement to the 'gothic church' in the preface to *The Excursion*."

Richard Holmes, the biographer, also follows the beaten path, since he identifies the friend with Sara[13] (Coleridge's wife), who, as our previous analysis has shown,[14] can also be considered as the personification of masculinity, of some castrating power, contrasting not only Asra (Coleridge's love) but the imaginary maids or Mme Roland from *Effusion* as well.

There are two readings which seem to stand out from the critical trend. The first is Jerome Christensen's[15] who, contradicting Gayatri Spivak, interprets the letter as the return of the repressed from the unconscious "structured like language," while through the close reading of the *Biographia* and its marginal method he demonstrates Coleridge's anxieties to become "merely a man of letters."[16] Meanwhile, "not by argument or revelation is Coleridge delivered to the imagination, returned to himself, and rescued from the fate of becoming merely a man of letters," Christensen writes, "he is saved by a blank counter [i.e. by the

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10 Leslie Brisman, *Romantic Origins* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978).

11 J. Moore, "Land of the Giants," in *Beyond Romanticism*, p. 158.

12 Kenneth R. Johnston, *Wordsworth and The Recluse* (London, New Haven: Yale UP), pp 341–359.

13 Richard Holmes, *Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 400.

14 Cf. Timár, "Conversing Signs."

15 Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), pp. 161–175.

16 Cf. *BL*, Ch. I, p. 229.

letter of the 'man of letters'] which the fancy alights on and letters into a man."[17] The second analysis that can hardly be put in line with the others is Kathleen M. Wheeler's,[18] who places the Biographia in the paradigm of Romantic Irony. In a hermeneutic reading, she argues that the reader's imaginative activity is required to create unity from the fragmentary text.

Thus, though it may well sound obvious to claim with the biographer that by the insertion of the letter, and by the allusion to the withdrawal of a hundred pages, Coleridge only "acknowledged his inability to ground his theory of imagination" and betrayed his frustration at the approaching deadline,[19] we may still remark that the letter remains unnecessarily long for this function. Furthermore, the fact that this elaborate literary composition possesses, as its reception suggests, much more of the traditional (though undoubtedly undefinable) characteristics of a piece of art than the *Biographia* itself might make us ask further questions.

What is the role of the false mark of withdrawal? Why does a potential writing which, considering its "effects," cannot be simply bad has to be withdrawn? What is the power that would make a posited reader "standing on his head"? What is the "orphic tale," the "tale obscure" to be suppressed? And eventually, what role do the two parts of the letter play?

The critical reception of the letter will be as important to our analysis as the letter itself: both the letter and its reception speak around the gap we are interested in. The emphasis put on the "effect" of a missing original is not only in line with post-structuralist literary theories but also with 19th century hermeneutics. As Tilottama Rajan claims one can

> trace through the eighteenth century the decline of the idea that literature should approximate to painting in order to summon up its subject before our eyes, and its replacement by a Burkean aesthetics of the sublime that makes us feel the experience instead of painting it for us. Presence comes to be located not in depiction but in an effect, something that happens in the consciousness of the reader...[20]

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17 Christensen, pp. 172–173.
18 Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1980).
19 Holmes, *Darker Reflections*, p. 385.
20 Tilottama Rajan. *The Supplement of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), p. 17.

### APPROACHES

How to approach a text that does not exist and has never existed? Firstly, we may assume that the missing passage covered by the letter is similar to the preceding ones (cf. "Thus far had the work been transcribed for the press, when I received the following letter from a friend."). Interestingly, however, the intensity of the response it provokes ("*the effect on my understanding*" and "*feelings*") outdoes by far anything that we might have expected after having read the previous twelve and a half chapters: as if the first part of the letter, at least, was an answer given to something completely different.

It has already been remarked that critics who have analysed in detail chapter XIII of the *Biographia* generally interpret the letter either as a hermeneutic model recommended by Coleridge or as the intrusion of the conscious will ("the male Will") in an unmasterable stream of associations. But in acknowledging that with the fictitious friend Coleridge introduces a second self, they fail to remark that this second self actually enacts two kinds of reading: while in the first part of the letter describing the effect of the chapter on his *own* "feelings," the friend compares the missing chapter to one of "*our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn*," in the second part, describing its possible effects on the "public" for whom the chapter would be "utterly incomprehensible," he presents it as the "*fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower*." These two "illustrations" are far from being the same, despite the friend's insistence: "*and what remains look (if I may recur to my former illustration) like the fragments of the winding steps...*"

Kathleen M. Wheeler argues that Coleridge asks for the reader's imaginary activity to reconstruct the "unity of the *Biographia*" from the "fragments of an old ruined tower." Conspicuously however, though the common reader can indeed see nothing else but fragments, "the very judicious" friend himself does not *reconstruct* the cathedral *from* the fragments, but "feels" ("*the effect on my* feelings") as if he *was placed* in a gothic cathedral. His being somewhat possessed by the pages is further emphasised in the example given to illustrate its "effect" on his "understanding": as the reference to a previous footnote suggests, in this state of mind "man feels as if he were standing on his head, though he cannot but see that he is truly standing on his feet. This [is] a *painful* sensation," men feel "an *involuntary* dislike towards their physician" who "*restored*" them "from derangement."

The identification of the two interpretative models which could permit the imaginary reconstruction of at least some characteristics of the passage allegedly withdrawn obviously poses some insoluble problems: not knowing the "original text," we cannot decide what kinds of hermeneutics (the study of the relations between textuality and reading) are practised, that is, to what extent we should count with the necessary imaginary activity involved in (self-)reception. As a result, even if we accept that it is the first part of the letter which can be considered as the creative hermeneutic model offered by Coleridge,[21] we can still draw a scale moving away from text to reading according to the *degree* to which the friend creates his meaning out of the missing text. Although Coleridge's hermeneutics as a whole is beyond the scope of this paper, three brief examples, taken from Coleridge himself, may serve to illustrate the many degrees of the necessary creative involvement of a critic who, unlike the "public" apparently despised, engages in a dialogue with the text.

"Higher Criticism," the endeavour "to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror [from] a higher point of view,"[22] is intended as a model for the hermeneutics of history, the ability to correct the false assumptions of the past eras from a supposedly detached vantage point. The definition, however, deliberately taken out of its context, can also be regarded as the ideal of a reconstructive hermeneutics which requires the reader to synthesise and "elevate" into a higher unity the scattered parts of the absent whole. It is practised by Wheeler, for instance, who tries to reconstruct the "Unity of the *Biographia*,"[23] while considering it as the metaphor of its own reading.

At the other end of the scale, that is, the further away from the "letter" of the text is the production of a completely new meaning out of a text considered as a mere source of inspiration. This kind of experience is described, for instance, by the speaker of the Preface to *Kubla Khan* who falls half-asleep upon Purchas's Pilgrimage under the "effects" of an anodyne. The friend's words, however ("*Only I will not promise* [...] *to* make *the sparks and figured flashes which I am required to see*") apparently contradict the assumption of his being the inspired reader par excellence.

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21 Wheeler, in *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry*, argues that Coleridge's works exhibit their own reading and explicitly offer a hermeneutic model requiring the imaginary activity of the reader.
22 T. Ashe, ed., *The Table Talk and Omniana of S. T. Coleridge*, (London, 1923), pp. 138–139; quoted by McGann in *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 6.
23 Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods*.

The principle of "Genial Criticism" (1814), the ability "to judge in the same spirit in which the Artist produced or ought to have produced"[24] might be regarded as an example of the "sympathetic" reading that recognises "the difference between the letter and the spirit of [...] writing."[25] It interestingly *anticipates* Schleiermacher's *Compendium* (1819)[26] which, distinguishing between a "grammatical" and a "psychological" reading, claims to understand the author better than he himself does. Though the distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit" of the text was part of the English theological disputes of the time and represented, first and foremost, an approach to the Bible, Coleridge considered it as a fundamental approach to all texts. In Chapter IX of *Biographia Literaria*, for instance, he says the following on Kant:

> in spite therefore of his own declarations, I could never believe, it was possible for him to have meant no more by his *Noumenon*, or THING IN ITSELF, than his mere words express [...]. I entertained doubts likewise, whether in his own mind, he even laid *all* the stress, which he appears to do on the moral postulates. / An IDEA, in the *highest* sense of the world, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction, and for those who could not pierce through this symbolic husk, his writings were not intended.

This separation of form from meaning has obviously two important practical implications. On the one hand, it tends to project on the work the reader's expectations coming either from a familiarity with other works (by the author or from the era) or from his own "ideology"[27] of reading. These expectations are obviously unavoidable in any kind of interpretation but Coleridge, despite his insistence on the necessity of trying to understand the author's "own mind," seems to be well aware of it:

> I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudices, not to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present. [...] Till I

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24 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), Vol. II, p. 223.

25 Cf. the title of Chapter IX: "The difference between the letter and the spirit of Kant's writings."

26 Though Tilottama Rajan, in *The Supplement of Reading*, claims that "the separation of form from meaning seems to begin with Schleiermacher's sense of the need for a 'psychological' as well as a 'grammatical' or literal reading of texts" and that "this need is first articulated in the 1819 Compendium" (p. 37), Coleridge's sense of "Genial Criticism" clearly anticipates Schleiermacher's ideas.

27 I call ideology, now in line with Gayatri Spivak, the imposition of a theory on a text.

have discovered the art of destroying the memory *a parte post* [a parte prius], without injury to its future operations, and without detriment to the judgement, I should suppress the request as premature.[28]

On the other hand, by putting the emphasis on the "spirit" of the work instead of its "letter," "Genial Criticism" also recognises that writing (the "letter") might threaten ("dissolve, diffuse and dissipate") the identity of meaning to such an extent that it has to be "recreated" in a sympathetic reading... [29]

Nevertheless, we may bear in mind that given the absence of the "primary" text, the attempt to analyse the hermeneutics practised by and in the letter has to remain practically groundless.

## FRAGMENTARITY

"In Coleridge, fragmentation is not so much a phenomenon of *lack* but rather something brought about by *addition* confirming and, as it were, replacing the notion of loss,"[32] Fritz Gutbrodt claims in his analysis of the Preface attached to *Kubla Khan*. His remark may also apply to Chapter XIII: through the addition of the letter, Coleridge both pretends to hint at and to cover a "lost original." Though *Biographia*, as opposed to the Preface of Kubla Khan, fails to perform the self-effacement so characteristic of prefaces, the "Literary *Sketches*" also prove to be fragmentary despite their avowed autobiographical "narration [used] for the purpose of giving a continuity to the work."[31] Hence, as Christensen observes, the *Biographia* "takes as its subject the possibility of the unified book: the fundamental stability of the grand chiasmus that the text is unified because it is the product of an integral consciousness and that consciousness is unified because it produces integral texts."[32] It therefore exhibits the narcissistic, specular relationship between the speaking subject, the "I" and the text – completely in line with the autobiographical tradition. The *Biographia*, however, still remains fragmentary and, in Christensen's words, "flirts recklessly with the idea of the book, as though unity was not an anchoring reality but a floating object of

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28 *BL*, Chapter XII, p. 234.
29 "The Secondary Imagination [...] dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate" (*BL*, p. 304). In what follows here, this idea will be expanded further.
30 Gutbrodt, *Fragmentation by Decree*, p. 86.
31 *BL*, Ch. I, p. 1.
32 Christensen, p. 120.

desire"[33] – as if the achievement of a narrative identity was a task impossible to perform.

Literature on the fragmentary nature of Romantic writing is endless, such as literature on the fragmentariness of Coleridge's poems, prose works, and especially the *Biographia Literaria*.[34]

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33 Christensen, p. 120.

34 Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthes in *L'absolu littéraire* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1978) give the most comprehensive account on Romantic Fragment, though they focus on the fragments of the German Romantic Ironists, especially Friedrich Schlegel, which, unlike the Coleridgean ones, are "intended" to be fragments and are presented as the only effective mode of art. It is undeniable, however, that both the Coleridgean and the German Ironists' fragments are incomplete works representing the eternal progress, the unfulfilled project always to be fulfilled, the process (the becoming) as opposed to being. They are endless potentialities never to achieve actual fulfilment: "the awareness of the always-already-lost naiveté make absolute art an always-yet-to-appear". (see also: Mellor: *English Romantic Irony* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980], pp. 1–25). According to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthes, fragments have an essentially dialogical nature: on the one hand, there is an active dialogue between the text the reader which later has the task to complete the fragment, while on the other hand, there is a tension, a dialogue between the part and the series of parts which do or do not amount to the Whole. As far as English Romanticism is concerned, MacFarland (in *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), together with the majority of other critics of Romanticism, such as Jerome McGann (in *The Romantic Ideology*), tend to emphasise the inherently fragmentary nature of Romantic Writing. According to McGann "What distinguishes romantic forms from the systematic representations of those forms [i.e. Hegel's] is that the former's aspirations (and dissatisfactions) are preserved at the most radical level. Dissatisfaction cannot produce satisfactory accounts of itself, only – as with Coleridge – a perfect account. Coleridge's theory of Romanticism is the archetypal Romantic theory – brilliant, argumentative, ceaseless, incomplete, and not always very clear (47). MacFarland, who claims that "the reflexive pressure of the magnum opus made the whole of Coleridge's actual prose achievement provisional" (p. 343), draws on Coleridge's symbol–allegory distinction, in order to point to the always hypothetical nature of the whole that of which the realised fragment is the representative or the symbol (27). Kathleen Wheeler (cf. *Sources, Processes and Methods*) seems to share MacFarland's views, while completing it with the requirement of the "supplement of reading"(see also Tilottama Rajan) or the activity of the imaginative reader being able to see symbol in the fragment. Others, mainly post-structuralist theorists, however, following Walter Benjamin's ideas on the ruin and its relationship with the fragment according to which "[a]llegories are in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things".(*The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne [London: New Left Books, 1977], p. 178), argue that the fragment is the allegory par excellence, since it reveals man's temporal predicament, the essential disjunction between the idea and its representation, the world and the word, the inscribed sign and its material embodiment, etc. In spite of these, it seems to be obvious that whether a part is a symbol or an allegory is mainly a question of reading.

As already mentioned, the friend's letter, by a curious mise-en-abyme effect, mirrors the missing pages back not only as "*the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower*," thus laying bare the insufficiency of the pages to reflect back an integrated self, but also as a "*Gothic cathedral*" – triggering a response similar to the intuition of the sublime.

The effect of mathematical sublime illustrated by Kant as "the bewilderment or sort of perplexity which, as is said seizes the visitor on first entering St. Peter's in Rome"[35] also implies fragmentarity. As Neil Hertz argues, it arises out of "sheer cognitive exhaustion [...] the mind blocked by the fear of losing count – with no hope of bringing a long series or vast scattering under some sort of conceptual unity."[36] And the friend's account on the possible public reception of the missing pages is clearly reminiscent of the description of the mathematical sublime: "*you have done too much, yet not enough... , you have been obliged to omit so many links... , cannot amount to so little as a hundred pages...* " However, as Kant argues, "true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject," that is, not in the outward object that occasions it. The friend himself, unlike the common readers, is also able to surmount the difficulty: the state of mind in which he has "*the distinct connection between two conceptions, without that sensation of such connection which is supplied by habit.*"[37] and which provokes a "*chilly sensation of terror*" (!) is followed by a sudden positive movement, "*then suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights.*" The process is clearly analogous to the experience of the sublime "brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful."[38] Or, as Hertz explains, by the mind's "blockage" at a "vast scattering"(its awe

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35 Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 100. (Henceforward referred to as *CJ*.)

36 Neil Hertz, "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," in: *The End of the Line* (New York: Columbia, 1985), p. 40; cf. Kant: "To take in a quantum intuitively in the imagination so as to be able to use it as a measure, or unit for estimating magnitude by numbers, involves two operations of this faculty: *apprehension* (*apprehensio*) and *comprehension* (*comprehensio*) [...] if the apprehension has reached a point beyond which the representations of sensuous intuition in the case of the parts first apprehended begin to disappear from the imagination as this advances to the apprehension of yet others, as much, then, is lost at one end as is gained at the other, and for comprehension we get a maximum which the imagination cannot exceed." (*CJ*, p. 99)

37 The footnote the friend refers to will be quoted under the heading: "The Missing Part: Standing on One's Head."

38 Kant, *CJ*, p. 91.

mingled with terror)[39] is followed by a positive mental movement, "the mind's exultation in its own rational faculties, in its ability to think a totality that cannot be taken in through the senses."[40] Thus, the introduction of the fictitious reader, this *scriptor* (or rather: editor) *interruptus* effect which imposes an artificial image of synthesis, or else, totality, on the supposed heterogeneity of the text rescues the writer from the dangers of being lost in the "eternal mobility," the "chaos" of signifiers. (Later, we will also consider how this excess, this abyss, as well as the totality become thematised in the letter.)

However, as the primary text itself is nothing but an *as if*, the sheer lack of self-representation, the sublime trickery with the letter – though consolidating indeed the idea of the self as a whole – also serves as the most effective means to simulate, to create the *effect of* a non-representable, always-already-lost "original" which, on its turn, would suggest an always-yet-to-appear "wholeness." Since what the letter shows up the most conspicuously is the inherent incompleteness, the endless deferral of the "Work": "*as for the public, I do not hesitate a moment in advising and urging you to withdraw the Chapter from the present work, and to reserve it for your announced treatise on the Logos or communicative intellect of Man and Deity,*" writes the fictitious friend to "Coleridge."

Interestingly, apart from pointing to the gap between the Eternal Idea (the whole) and its temporal textual manifestation (the part), the letter, covering a fragment from the part, suggests the unrealisability of a *textual* whole (the "treatise on the Logos")[41] which would be in a synecdochic relationship with the Idea. Thus, the reason why this false mark of withdrawal is so idiosyncratic is the fact that *neither* the part, *nor* the whole exist – as if the trace of absence was in

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39 François Lyotard, explaining the Kantian sublime (in *Lessons in the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. E. Rottenberg [Stanford University Press, 1994], p. 110), explicitly connects the "momentary check of the vital forces" to the Burkean horror "beyond this absolute of presentation thinking encounters the unrepresentable [...] and what Burke calls horror, takes hold of it."

40 Hertz, p. 40.

41 Claire Miller Colombo, in her analysis of this much debated passage of *The Statesman's Manual* ("the symbol [is] the translucence of the Eternal through and in the temporal"), already points to the fact that Paul de Man, in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," has left out of consideration the fact that the symbol–allegory distinction was part of Coleridge's *exegetical* theory. "The paragraph following the famed Statesman's Manual passage [...] explains how the finite and the infinite are consummated in scripture" (Claire Miller Colombo, "Coleridge's Animation of the 'Dead Letter,'" in: *SiR* 35 [1996], p. 30).

itself the "part" referring both *back* to an always already lost "original" and *forward* to a never to be attained textual "wholeness."

It seems therefore that we may also regard the letter, the allusion at the missing part of the missing whole (the hole in the whole) as a hint at some "deep Romantic chasm."

## THE SECRET BEHIND THE LETTER

Thus, the readers' desire and curiosity are aroused not only by a fragment seducing them into an imaginary completion, not only by the charm of the "symbolon" requiring the other half, the receiver's imaginary response to be able to signify, but also by the simulation of some hidden, yet unavailable knowledge.

Meanwhile, Coleridge's "friend," or persona (mask), by seemingly covering a hundred pages does not only point at an existent but hidden knowledge, but by commemorating (murdering) the "voice," he also creates the effect of a "voice" that he, by the same token, saves from the self-murderous power of writing. Thus, though the omniscient Author becomes indeed nothing else but an effect of signifiers (the letter), this "nothing else" is in fact the most effective means to suggest "presence" and "knowledge" where there is but a gap, a lack and, ultimately, absence.

In what follows, I will try to show through close reading of the letter that the withdrawal of the passage is not merely a necessary means to create the effect of a "lost original." We will examine what "knowledge" the missing pages imply and whether the "conversion" they entail can be connected to the concluding definition of Imagination, generally considered as an act of faith taken in the Symbol.

### The missing part: standing on one's head

The friend compares the effect of the chapter on his understanding to a state of mind which is the antithesis of that in which man is, when "he makes a bull." The "bull" is defined by Coleridge, in a footnote attached to Chapter IV, as "the bringing together of two incompatible thoughts, with the *sensation* but without the *sense* of their connection." As an example, he gives the sentence, "*I was a fine child, but they changed me*"; and explains:

the first conception expressed in the word "*I*," is that of personal identity – *Ego contemplans*: the second expressed in the word "*me*" is the visual image or object by which the mind represents to itself its past condition. Now the change of one visual image to the other contains in itself no absurdity, and becomes absurd only by its immediate juxtaposition with the first thought, which is rendered possible by the whole attention being successively absorbed in each singly, so as not to notice the interjacent notion, "changed" which by its congruity with the first thought, *I*, constitutes the bull. Add only that this process is facilitated by the circumstance of the words "*I*" and "*me*," being sometimes equivalent, and sometimes having a distinct meaning; sometimes, namely, signifying the act of self-consciousness, sometimes the external image in and by which the mind represents that act to itself, the result and symbol of its individuality. Now suppose the direct contrary state, and you will have the distinct connection between two conceptions, without that *sensation* of such connection which is supplied by habit. The man *feels*, as if he were standing of his head, though he cannot but *see*, that he is truly standing on his feet. This, as a painful sensation, will of course have a tendency to associate itself with the person who occasions it; even as persons, who have by painful means restored from derangement, are known to feel an involuntary dislike for their physician.[42]

As Wheeler remarks, the footnote, being a bull in itself, "plays out the drama which it describes." On the one hand, it can indeed be regarded as the metaphor of itself and, we may add, that of the *Biographia* as well: the sample sentence exemplifying the problem of self-knowledge, the relationship between the subject and the positing of the subject thus objectified, is both one of the central issues of Romantic thinking and the problem of autobiography itself.

On the other hand, the footnote also makes a comment upon the poetics of genius. Firstly, attached to Chapter IV ("The Lyrical Ballads with the preface... "), it explains reviewers' opposition to Wordsworth's theories, who, unlike the friend, refuse the remedy of their "physician." In their "opinion of long continuance," they do not let themselves persuaded either by the Preface, nor by the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves that

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair;
in other words that they had been all their lives admiring without judgement, and were now about to censure without reason.[43]

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42 *BL*, Ch. IV, pp. 72–73.
43 *BL*, Ch. IV, p. 72. Note the allusion to *Macbeth*.

These critics stand therefore in contrast with the friend, who writes: "*Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super human... , I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs, while the grotesques, in my hitherto belief, stood guarding the high Altar with all the characters of Apotheosis.*" Thus, apart from the fact that the analogy between Wordsworth's poetry and the withdrawn pages is anticipated well before the quotation, "*with a few of the words altered*," from *To William Wordsworth*, the direct contrast between critics responding to Wordsworth and the friend responding to the missing pages makes it clear that the fictitious friend cannot be Wordsworth himself – not even a Wordsworth "who speaks in playful Coleridgean ironies"[44] – and that Kenneth Johnston's analysis contains a logical slippage.

Secondly, we may contrast the state of mind of the one who "makes a bull" – his "attention being successively absorbed in each [image] singly," to the "middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the *imagination* than any other when it is hovering between two images." Coleridge spoke of Milton's poetry in his 7th Lecture (1811) with these words, quoting the same passage from *Paradise Lost* as the fictitious friend does in his letter: "If substance may be called what shadow seem'd, for each seemed either!" In the 7th lecture, after quoting Milton, Coleridge goes on to say:

> the grandest efforts of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely the substitution of a *sublime* feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image.[45]

Thus, in the greatest kind of poetry, imagination provokes a sublime effect and its "hovering" or "wavering" between images contributing to the sublime contrasts both "understanding" where the mind is "fixed on one image"[46] and the

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44 Cf. Johnston, "The Recluse and the Biographia Literaria," pp. 333–363.

45 Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (London: Everyman's Library, 1960), Vol. 2, pp. 103–104.

46 Cf. Kant, p. 90: "The sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form so far as it immediately involves, or by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a superadded thought of totality," and p. 107: "The mind feels itself *set in motion*... This movement can be compared with a vibration, i.e. with rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction produced by one and the same Object."

surprise provoked when, "making a bull," the "attention [is] being successively absorbed in each [image] singly."

This "hovering," this state of *betweenness* emerges many times in the *Biographia* in connection with the poetic genius. The Absolute Genius, for instance, characterised by a "sanity of mind *between* superstition with fanaticism on the one hand, and enthusiasm with indifference and a diseased slowness to action on the other," "rest content *between* thought and reality as it were an intermundium"[47] It seems therefore that the "sanity of the mind" of the genius (such as Milton's or Shakespeare's) contrasts both Coleridge's youthful "bewilderment with metaphy*sicks*"[48] (sic!), this "mental disease" proper to some "abstruse research"[49] (see also: *Dejection, an Ode*, line 89), and the "derangement" or blindness of those (such as the friend's) who have later become, "by painful means restored" by "their physician."[50]

Unsurprisingly, though the friend refers indeed to the missing pages as a remedy against some illness, his "practical judgement," "taste and sensibility preclude all excuses." For "*negative* faith,"[51] or "the willing suspension of disbelief"[52] must be triggered both by the work of art (hovering between images, "without either denial or affirmation of their real existence"[53]) and the attitude of the reader himself: the sublime does not result from the object of perception (the text) but from the mind, the reason's response to it. That is, the kind of reading which renders the sudden "illumination" (cf. "*suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights*") and the mind's conversion ("*Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super human...* ") possible requires first an attitude of openness, a readiness similar to the one which permits the reception of some divine grace.

However, despite the fact that the image of the "*cathedral*" where the friend has been "*placed*" could constitute a claim for the presence of the divine in the withdrawn pages, a closer analysis reveals that the "pharmacon" does not possess a soothing effect. Although the friend is standing on his head knowing that he is truly standing on his feet, the mirror keeps bringing about bewilderment.

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47 *BL.*, Ch. II, p. 32.
48 *BL*, Ch. II, p. 15
49 *BL*, Ch. II, p. 17.
50 Note Coleridge's recurring metaphors of physical and mental sickness.
51 *BL*, Ch. XXII, p. 134.
52 *BL*, Ch. XIV, p. 6.
53 *BL*, Ch. 22. p. 134.

### The Fall

Conspicuously enough, the inter-textual references made by the friend all contain the motif of the *fall*. Firstly, though the *Biographia* has long been interpreted as Coleridge's version of the "Growth of the Poet's Mind," Coleridge refers to the *Prelude* in *To William Wordsworth* as

> An orphic *song* indeed,
> a song *divine* of high and passionate *truths*
> to their *own* music chaunted!
>
> (ll. 45–47, my italics)

whereas the "friend" refers to the missing pages as

> An orphic *tale* indeed,
> a tale *obscure* of high and passionate *thoughts*
> to a *strange* music chaunted! (my italics)

Though we might claim with other critics that these lines reflect, as many others, Coleridge's "inferiority complexes" towards Wordsworth, an awareness of the fact that he is "less" than his friend, the changes from "divine" to "obscure," from "truths" to "thoughts" and from "song" to "tale" also imply the moment of fall from the unarticulated, organic and harmonious world of unity into the articulated and self-differing world of language.

Meanwhile, the adjectives "obscure" and "strange," just like the noun "tale," allude to the presence of the supernatural (ideally procuring "the willing suspension of disbelief") that, in Coleridge's poetry, generally accompanies the theme of the fall (cf. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*), the trespassing of the "line" between life and death. Chapter XIII itself, moreover, actually ends with the promise of a "critical essay of the uses of the Supernatural [...] which the reader will find prefixed to the poem of *The Ancient Mariner*." This promise, just like the treatise on the Logos of which the missing pages would be a part, remains unfulfilled.

The absence of Joy (traditionally, the inter-communion of mind and nature) is further emphasised by the fact that instead of Coleridge's characteristically "organic" or natural metaphors expressing the power of both "poetic" and "philosophic" imagination, we find the contrary extreme here, the image of a cathedral. "Architecture exhibits the greatest extent of the difference from nature

which may exist in works of art"[54] – as Coleridge claims in *On Poesy or Art* (1818). To the Gothic church, we may compare, for instance, Coleridge's intentions concerning the *Biographia* expressed in Chapter IV ("My friend [i.e. Wordsworth] has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their *poetic* fruitage. I wish to add the trunk and even the roots"[55]) as well as his famous description of the philosophic imagination.[56]

On the other hand, we may also recall Johnston's claim that "several parts of the letter can be regarded as a Coleridgean complement to the 'gothic church' in the preface to *The Excursion*." Though critics generally consider the *Biographia* as Coleridge's version of *The Prelude*, the withdrawn pages themselves are *not* part of the *Biographia*: they are announced to appear in the "*great book on the* CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY." As if the *Biographia* itself was merely a *preface* to that future work never written. Coleridge himself, in reflecting upon the *Biographia* alludes to Wordsworth's *Excursion*, intended as a part of *The Recluse* – never completed: "I earnestly solicit the good wishes and friendly patience of my readers, while I thus go sounding on my dim and perilous way."[57] In the Preface to the *Excursion*, Wordsworth says: "The preparatory poem [i.e. *The Prelude*] is biographical [...]; and the two Works [*The Prelude* and *The Recluse*] have the same kind of relation to each other [...] as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church."[58] It seems therefore, that the future great book containing the missing pages compared to a Gothic cathedral, actually parallel the future *Recluse*, "a philosophical [!] poem," or Gothic church. All the more so, since while friend hints at a future *prospectus* to the "*treatise on the Logos*," Wordsworth presents a *Prospectus* to the *Recluse*. Consequently, if *The Recluse* parallels the future great work on the Logos, the missing pages parallel the missing part of the *Recluse*.

Yet, the image of the Gothic church does not seem to suggest "Beauty, Love, and Hope," as Wordsworth's *Prospectus* does. First of all, it is underpinned by a quotation from *Christabel*: "*Now in glimmer, and now in gloom.*" Tellingly,

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54 Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art" (1818) in Shawcross's edition of *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), Vol. 2, p. 261.

55 *BL*, Ch. IV, p. 88.

56 Cf. *BL*, Ch. XII, p. 242: "They and only they can acquire the philosophic imagination, the *sacred* power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar..."

57 *BL*, Ch. 5, p. 104 (allusion to Wordsworth's *Excursion*, iii.710).

58 *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), p. 754.

*Christabel* was not only excluded from *Sibylline Leaves* but was also cast out by Wordsworth from *Lyrical Ballads*. It is an *obscure* tale indeed: the story of Christabel's fall. It is also a *gothic* story, the metaphor of the cathedral. The line, "Now in glimmer, and now in gloom" itself succeeds the well-known "threshold scene" of *Christabel* ("And Christabel with might and main / Lifted her up, a weary weight, / Over the threshold of the gate: / Then the lady rose again"), when Christabel and Geraldine

> Steal their way from stair to stair,
> Now in glimmer and now in gloom,
> And now they pass the Baron's room
> As still as death, with stifled breath!
> (ll. 168–171)

This passage through her father's room anticipates Christabel's fall, as a rite of passage from innocence to experience.

The friend's reading experience ("*to have known only our light airy modern chapels of ease, and then for the first time to have been placed, and left alone, in one of our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn 'now in glimmer, and now in gloom'*") might therefore be analogous to Christabel's, lured and possessed by Geraldine:

> So deeply had she drunken in
> That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
> [...]
> And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,
> Still picturing that look askance
> With forced unconscious *sympathy*...
> (ll. 601–609, my italics)

Meanwhile, both the friend's reading of the pages and Christabel's reading in Geraldine's eyes lead to the breaking of an illusion, the conclusion of which will turn out to be the same: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair."

As far as *Christabel* is concerned, Susan Eilenberg remarks, "Geraldine's evil is her phenomenological duplicity, her failure to appear as she is [...]. She makes clear what representation implies: not self-evidence, as Wordsworth wanted to believe, the natural expression of one's own being, but the subversion

of identity."[59] And this subversive force is unbearable. Christabel tries to send
Geraldine away:

> By my mother' soul do I entreat
> That thou this woman send away!
> She said: and no more she could not say:
> For what she knew she could not tell,
> O'er-mastered by the mighty spell.
>
> (ll. 604–620)

Thus, although it is Geraldine who casts a spell on Christabel, the way the
friend casts the pages out of the book rather parallels Christabel's attempt to send
Geraldine away. As if the missing pages could be personified by Geraldine, the
evil, female power to be cut off, by all means. But similarly to Geraldine who in
fact has never left the castle (*Christabel* is unfinished), the potential evil of writing
seems to be undestroyable: though some pages can be cut out from the text, texts,
as the very existence of the allusions shows, cannot be annihilated.

On the other hand, the fact that the friend cannot tell *what* the missing pages
actually are, and that only the "*effect*" of the pages can be told, from which readers
of the *Biographia*, similarly to the readers of the poem, have to *conjure up* what
happened, equally points to the possible analogy between Christabel and the
friend.

Interestingly enough, the "phenomenological duplicity" of the pages,
undermining any faith in the symbol ("the translucence of the Eternal through
and in the temporal") emerges once again from an inter-textual reference, as if
from the chaos of signifiers: while the apparent "illumination scene" of the
Gothic church is undermined by the allusion made to *Christabel*, the "conversion
scene" itself is rendered ambiguous by an other intertextual reference, by a
quotation from *Paradise Lost*:

> Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
> For each seem'd either![60]

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59 Elineberg, *The Strange Power of Speech*, p. 80.
60 Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the
Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), pp. 55–56, quotes the same passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*
to underline his claim that "[to] make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be
necessary."

Unsurprisingly, these lines are taken from the description of the gates of *Hell*:

> Before the Gates there sat
> On either side a formidable shape;
> The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and *fair*,
> But ended *foul* in many a scaly fould [...]
> [...]
> The other shape,
> If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
> Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
> For each seem'd either; black it stood as Night,
> Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
> And shook a dreadful Dart...
>
> (Book II, my italics)

First of all, we may notice that there is an unexpected similarity between the wording of the witches in *Macbeth* "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" – with which Coleridge characterised, in chapter IV, the effect of Wordsworth's poetry – and Milton's description of the first "shape" at the gates of Hell. But while the witches' words, at least according to the interpretation Coleridge gives in chapter IV (see above: "Fair is foul and foul is fair, / in other words that they had been all their lives admiring without judgement, and were now about to censure without reason"[61]), refer to the sudden revelation of Truth leading to the subversion of habit or received opinions, in Milton's Hell, the Woman is indecipherable: she seems fair to the waste, but ends foul. Her evil consists in the dissimulation of her true nature, in the contradiction between signifier and signified.

Furthermore, despite the interpretation given in the *Biographia*, the notes taken at Coleridge's lecture on *Macbeth* make the remark that, according to Coleridge, the evil character of the Weird Sisters consists in their duplicity:

> the exquisite judgement of Shakespeare is shown in nothing more than in the different language of the Witches with each other, and with those whom they address: the former displays a certain fierce familiarity, grotesqueness mingled with terror; the latter is always solemn, dark and mysterious."[62]

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61 *BL.*, Ch. IV, p. 72.
62 *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 2, p. 220.

Interestingly, though these words are only the interpretation of Coleridge's own words (which, on their turn, might have been taken from A. W. Schlegel), they may remind us, on the one hand, of the possible difference between the missing hundred pages and the letter covering it, and on the other, of the friend's response to the letter ("*Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super-human in magnitude of intellect, I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs...*"), as if the missing pages could have suddenly unveiled the "true" nature behind some false appearance, or else, to make an important precision, as if the friend's reading of the pages amounted to a sudden revelation of truth.

Meanwhile, the references to *Christabel*, to *Paradise Lost* and to *Macbeth* all show up the world of allegories: a fallen, temporal world with a fragmented, discontinuous relationship between the signifier (the word), the signified (the concept, the idea or God) and the reference (the perceivable world or the universe). Conspicuously, the friend's discourse, from a thematic point of view, seems to deny any reference to a meaning previously established, as it would be proper to allegory. The *shapes "all decked with* [...] *mystic symbols"* point to truths not yet revealed. From a rhetorical point of view, however, these "*holy insignia*" changing the significance of certain "*names*" are in fact not brought about by a sudden divine revelation but firstly, by a new interpretation (i.e.: the missing pages) correcting previous ones, and secondly, by the reading of this new interpretation (i.e.: the letter). The relationship between the temporal ("the names") and the eternal ("with all the characters of Apotheosis") is therefore established through two acts of reading, irrevocably (re)covering the original text. Hence, the friend's letter reveals, among others, the temporal nature of meaning artificially attributed to the sign, while suggesting a possible discontinuity between the signifiers ("fair") and the signified ("foul").

Meanwhile, the shadows are indistinguishable from the substances: *each* seems *either*. In a curious way, therefore, the quotation given by the friend ("If substance may be call'd what shadow seem'd, / For each seem'd either") to support the revelational nature of the missing pages ("*In short, what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while every where shadows were deepened into substances*") has a contrary effect: though allegory itself is, in principle, unambiguous (one signifier for one well determined signified), the allusion itself points to the ambiguity or undecidability (cf. "obscurity") of the text: we cannot decide whether the signifiers refer to shadows or to substances, or whether they are themselves shadows or substances: each seems either.

Turning back to our previous reference: Geraldine and Christabel mirror each other at a certain point: "Fair is foul and foul is fair" *and* each seems either. Christabel

> [...] passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate!
> And thus he stood, in dizzy trance,
> Still picturing that look askance...
>
> (ll. 605–608)

On the other hand, the friend's allusion to Milton is conspicuously reminiscent of Macbeth's "reading" of the witches, quoted by Coleridge in his notes to the lecture on *Macbeth*:

> BANQUO Whither are they vanished?
> MACBETH Into the air, and what seem'd corporeal melted
> As breath into the wind.[63]

Apart from the evil character of the witches, Coleridge's notes emphasise as well that Macbeth generally *mis*interprets the signs. The sentence "Before he [Macbeth] can cool, the confirmation of the tempting *half of* the prophecy arrives..." (my italics) suggests that Macbeth captures only a fragment from the whole message so as to construct a (false) meaning, while the words "Macbeth mistranslates the recoilings and ominous whispers of conscience"[64] clearly point to the fact that the play can also be regarded as the re-enactment of the consequences of a process of misreading.

As a result, though the friend, unlike Macbeth, proves to be a "good" reader and can endow the chaotic, equivocal signifiers with the "right" meaning, *both* the gap between the signifiers and the signified *and* the equivocal, double nature of the signifiers break the Neo-Platonic illusion of the one Life or the One Meaning.

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63 *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 1, p. 61.
64 *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 1, pp. 62, 72.

## IMAGINATION DISCONNECTED

Though Henry Nelson Coleridge's editorial notes to Coleridge's notes are also only a reading of Coleridge's own, his summary is worthy of consideration:

> Their [the witches'] character consists in the imaginative *dis*connected from the good; they are the shadowy *obscure* and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the *lawless* of human nature, – elemental avengers without sex or kin: / Fair is foul and foul is fair; / Hover thro' the fog and filthy air (my italics).[65]

But if there are two kinds of "imaginative," one connected to and one disconnected from the "good," then the missing pages themselves, in spite of the friend's "good" reading, do *not* appear (!) to be in any way *connected* to the "Infinite I AM." The reader's role therefore becomes of utmost importance. In order to surmount the "gulph" of signifiers, he has to make an *arbitrary* cut:

> THESIS X: even when the Objective is assumed as the first, we yet can never pass beyond the principle of self-consciousness. Should we attempt it, we must be driven back from ground to ground, each of which would cease to be the Ground the moment we pressed on it. We must be whirl'd down to the gulph of infinite series. But this would make our reason baffle the end and purpose of all reasons, namely, unity and system. *Or we must break off the series arbitrarily*, and affirm an absolute something that is in and of itself at once cause and effect (causa sui), subject and object, or rather absolute identity of both (my italics).[66]

This paragraph underlines our claim that the "conversion" may not imply the giving up of one belief for another, but the recognition that the search for meaning may lead into an abyss with no ground. Hence, in order for the reader to "recreate" the Meaning, he "must break off the series *arbitrarily*." Thus, while the letter is a reading or interpretation brought about by an arbitrary cut from a (missing) text, it constitutes, by the same token, the very cut by which the definition of Imagination, this act of faith taken in the Symbol, becomes abstracted from its evil and ultimately fallen ground. Meanwhile, the dialogue between the (missing) text and its reader reflects upon the workings of the Secondary Imagination, the definition of which equally implies a cut: it "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates *in order to* recreate." Writing or the signifiers themselves might therefore be inherently diffusive, and only a "recreative" reading ("co-

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65 *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 1, p. 60., n. 2.
66 Ch. XII, p. 285.

existing with the conscious will") brought about by an arbitrary cut may endow them, artificially, with a signification.

On the other hand, Thesis X also alludes to a process similar to the reader's experiencing the *sublime*: the mind baffles at being overwhelmed in the chaos of signifiers ("the gulph of infinite series") but, due to its rational faculties, it is able to *detach* itself from this effusion and create an *artificial* form of synthesis or unity: a Meaning. Unsurprisingly, the antecedents of the sublime are found by Neil Hertz in the literature of religious *conversion*: "the mind [is] thoroughly 'turned round'"[67] – similarly to the friend's, who is "standing on his head." Furthermore, while in religious literature the difficulty (or blockage) of the mind to be surmounted is provoked by the obscurity of the figurative language of the Scripture, we have seen that the friend's conversion is brought about by some "obscure tale." The letter therefore seems to create the effect that the missing pages exemplify the Book or the divine Logos turned, after the fall, into an obscure text to be deciphered.

But if only a *leap* into the order of faith through the artificial suppression and recreation of the ground (the missing pages) can save the Idea (the Symbol) from the "gulph of infinite series," then we can not only emphasise the reader's role in the creation of the Symbol, but, completely in line with this, we may also accept Elinor Shaffer's remark that "Coleridge eradicated the distinction [between the beautiful and the sublime] by making the sublime the single aesthetic category."[68]

*THE PROSPECTIVE WHOLE: THE DARK CAVE OF TROPHONIUS*

David S. Ferris,[69] the only critic, as far as I know, to investigate the possible implications of the cave of Trophonius claims:

> To totalize the self-reflexivity of the text [...] would require this great unfinished work of construction [i.e. the great book on constructive philosophy] which the friend compares, not without reason, to a consultation at the oracle of Trophonius. [...] From this cave, both the imagination and the supplicant would emerge speaking the authoritative truth of the author who may never reveal himself as such.

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67 Hertz, p. 47.

68 Shaffer, "Coleridge's Revolution in the Standard of Taste," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1969), p. 213.

69 David S. Ferris, "Coleridge's Ventriloquy," *SiR* 24 (Spring 1985), p. 81.

Ferris also remarks that Trophonius, with his brother Agamedes "built the temple at Delphi outside of which stands a pillar on which the heaven-descended postulate of Coleridge's philosophy is engraved: Gnothi seauton [Know thyself]." Ferris alludes here to Chapter XII, in which Coleridge asserts: "The postulate of philosophy and at the same time the test of philosophic capacity is the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF!"[70]

Investigating the connotations of the metaphor, Ferris only refers to the legend according to which "the one descending in the cave to consult the oracle must first drink the water of Lethe, that he may forget all that he has been thinking of hitherto, and afterwards [...] drink another water, the water of Mnemosyne, which causes him to remember what he sees after his descent."[71] Interestingly, the experience of the cave, apart from illustrating the scene of conversion described by the friend, may also exemplify ideal work triggering ideal reading. Since, as it has been noted above, Coleridge, deeming his desire for an ideal reader premature, used the following phrasing:

> I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudices, not to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present. [...] Till I have discovered the art of destroying the memory *a parte post* [a parte prius], without injury to its future operations, and without detriment to the judgement, I should suppress the request as premature.[72]

On the other hand, however, this "test of philosophic capacity" seems to gain a very doubtful connotation in the context of the cave – clearly contradicting any "authoritative truth," most of all that of the "author." As already mentioned, the pages making the friend feel as if he was standing on his head have the effect of a magic mirror comparable to the serpent eyes of Geraldine: the friend passes from innocence to experience, and the fall obviously implies an awareness of death. In connection with the allusion to the gates of Hell, we have also seen how this awareness is reflected on a rhetorical level. Destroying the binary oppositions of reason (fair *vs* foul, shadows *vs* substances, self *vs* non-self), and serving thus indeed as an ultimate remedy against "metaphy*sicks*," the oscillation between signifiers renders Meaning depending on the arbitrary choice of the reader.

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70 Cf. *BL*, Ch. XII, p. 252.
71 Ferris, p. 82.
72 *BL*, Ch. XII, p. 234.

Nevertheless, the actual encounter with death has been avoided so far: temporality has been repressed under the friend's apparently "recreative" discourse and has only kept returning from the deep chasm of intertextual references, from the abyss of signifiers. The entrance of the cave, therefore, constitutes the "line" that the friend refuses to (tres)pass. Since with the water of Lethe, the cave of Trophonius openly refers to the world of Hades. The descent would therefore parallel that of Orpheus, but we know that Coleridge's "*orphic*" tale, as opposed to Wordsworth's, is not "divine," but "obscure."

Furthermore, Ferris fails to mention the fact that the oracle of the cave, in contrast with the "*heaven*-descended know thyself," is generally associated with despair. De Quincey, for instance, uses it in a context clearly suggesting melancholy:

> I, whose disease it was to meditate too much, and to observe too little, and who, upon my first entrance at college, was nearly falling into a deep melancholy, from brooding too much on the sufferings which I had witnessed in London, was sufficiently aware of the tendencies of my own thoughts to do all I could to counteract them. – I was, indeed, like a person who, according to the old legend, had entered the cave of Trophonius: and the *remedies* I sought were to force myself into society... (my italics).[73]

The many references found on the Internet give further proofs of the dangers inherent in descending into the cave:

> Trophonius (Greek): With his brother Agamedes, legendary architect said to have built the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Agamedes was killed by Trophonius [...] and later an oracle and cult were dedicated to Trophonius, which included descending into a cave to receive revelations. *The descent was so awe-inspiring that it was said that no one who visited the cave ever smiled again.*[74]

> Tropho'nius (Latin): He has visited the cave of Trophonius (Greek). Said of a melancholy man.[75]

> PROSTRATION, prostration of soul; broken heart; despair; cave of despair, cave of Trophonius.[76]

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73 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 194.

74 See www.sackclothandashes.org.

75 See www.bartleby.com.

76 See www.bartleby.com.

Thus, the profound melancholy of the one that will never be able to laugh again is not provoked by the longing for an Ideal once glimpsed (or else, by the awareness of the unbridgeable gap between the actual and the ideal), but by the sudden revelation of a Truth which undermines any hope for a better world.

As far as the reading process is concerned, however, we could hardly assume that the friend, the sympathetic, creative reader who practised, even if it proved to be "painful" (above: "by painful means restored from derangement") the metaphorical reading "required" from him, suddenly turned into an "indifferent," "detached" and ironic reader refusing any further imaginary activity.

On the one hand, this sudden awakening, this refusal may simply serve as link to the next part of the letter, anticipating the attitude of the public. Or else, as an exemplification of parabasis, of the "breaking of illusion" characterising any ideal reader hovering between "enthusiasm and indifference." In this case, the sudden detachment would parallel the act of reflection proper to Romantic Irony, which destroys the representation of the "eternal act of creation" in order to keep it alive in a potentiality evermore about to be.

On the other hand, we can also surmise that these are the possible dangers of the dark cave that the friend escapes. For the supplicant does not have to *make* sparks and figured fleshes in the cave, but certain images befall on him, suddenly possess him, as if against himself. Thus, it is the state of being *overwhelmed* by images which might threaten the reader: it would make it impossible for him to recreate signification. As Coleridge claims in Chapter VI criticising Hartley's theory of association: "If therefore we suppose the absence of all interference of the will, reason, and judgement [...] the ideas (or relicts of such impression) will exactly imitate the order of the impression itself, which must be absolute *delirium*."[77] In other words, instead of the celebrated middle state of the "sanity of mind," the experience of the cave might lead to madness, to the contrary opposite of "metaphysicks."

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77 *BL*, Ch. 6, p. 111. Interestingly, Coleridge gives the following illustration: "a young woman [...] who could neither read, nor write, was seized with a nervous fever; during which [...] she became *possessed* [...] by a very learned devil. She continued incessantly talking Latin, Greek and Hébrew. with most distinct enunciation" The solution of the phenomenon was later discovered by the physician of the girl: she was the maid of a very learned man, a great Hebraist, who used to read aloud to himself from his favourite books. The maid, unable to understand the words, could still reproduce them in a state of delirium. This example is all the more telling that the *Biographia* itself can be considered as the sum of Coleridge's miscellaneous readings, though "blended with, and modified by" the will.

We may take *Kubla Khan* as a possible analogy: if its speaker *could have* revived the vision in which "images rose up before him as *things*,"[78] due to some water of Mnemosyne, he would have built "that dome in air" indeed, but he would also have fallen into the abyss of madness: "And all should cry, Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!"[79] (cf. "When a man mistakes his thoughts for persons and things, he is mad. A madman is properly so defined," Table Talk, July 25, 1832[80]) That is, if the images of memory or dream become again real as things, they are considered as pathological illusion, contra-distinguished from vision:

> Hard to express that sense of the analogy or likeness of a thing which enables a symbol to represent it so that we think of the thing itself, yet knowing that the thing is not present to us [...] that likeness is not identity... [81]

Consequently, the actual writing of the poem (as well as the ideal reader-response triggered by the imaginary activity of the reader) requires a "sanity of mind": the midway *between* "madness" and "metaphysicks." From the moment one cannot distinguish between the real and the imaginary, he loses self-possession, and this kind of enchantment is incompatible with the workings of the imagination "co-existing with the conscious will."

Obviously, however, one does not "drink the milk of Paradise" in the dark cave of Trophonius. These are not the "gardens of the Muses" where the inspired poet is brought to ecstasy, which ecstasy, on its turn, is recreated by the first reader, the rhapsode. Since it seems that the experience of death introduces a gap in the magnetic chain of iron rings: it allows to remember the experience but makes it impossible to recreate it. For despite the fact that absolute self-knowledge (*Gnothi seauton*) only occurs when the subject faces its own death, death itself cannot be turned into profit, the awareness of the dissolution of the self does not contribute to the recreation of its unity. Just like the state of being in ecstasy, it implies the complete annihilation of the self.

As a result, the descent into the dark cave of Trophonius could not engender the positive mental movement which would be proper to the achievement of a sublime effect: after the "check of the vital forces" provoked by the mind's being

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78 Preface to *Kubla Khan*.

79 *Kubla Khan*.

80 Quoted by Steven Knapp. *Personification and the Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1985), p. 41.

81 Coleridge, "Anima Poetae," quoted by Tilottama Rajan, in *The Dark Interpreter*, p. 207.

overwhelmed by the images of dissolution, the rational faculties fail, and are unable to think the totality that cannot be taken in through the senses. "The point of excess for the imagination [...] is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself,"[82] argues Kant while describing the effect of the sublime. The images of the cave of Trophonius, however, would not only remain excessive for the sensible but might even impede the emergence of the "rational idea of the supersensible."[83] They have to be forgotten for ever.

### READING AGAINST SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The main axis of friend's first reading is vertical: he discovers paradigmatic, metaphorical relationships (between the gothic church and the gothic story), changes between depths and surfaces (*"what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while every where shadows were deepened into substances"*), and alludes to intertexts *under*mining surface meanings. Thus, the friend's illustrations spatialise (gothic church) an essentially temporal experience (gothic story), that is, the passage from innocence to experience, from a false assumption to a true revelation and, ultimately, from text to meaning is presented as if it was a visionary experience.

The public, on the other hand, would read through a horizontal or syntagmatic axis: *"you have been obliged to omit so many links,"* it *"holds the same relation in abstruseness to Plotinus, as Plotinus does to Plato,"* *"you will be reminded of Bishop Berkley's* Siris, *which, beginning with Tar, ends with the Trinity."* The latter example is all the more characteristic because, as the editor's note informs us, Berkley's *Siris* is subtitled: "A *Chain* of Philosophical Reflections..." Meanwhile, the analogy between the pages and *Siris* is based on nothing else but contiguity: since the "links" constituting any act of reading are missing, the indifferent "public" can only see that both works are about something else than what they promise to be. Furthermore, whereas the public could indeed consider the "author" of the pages as being *essentially* similar to Plotinus or Plato (and conclude themselves "ignorant of his understanding"[84]) they would not notice but

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82 Kant, *CJ*, p. 107.

83 Cf. Kant, *CJ*, p. 107: "[...] is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself: yet again for the rational idea of the supersensible it is not excessive, but conformable to law."

84 Cf. *BL*, Ch. XII, p. 233: "I have been re-perusing with the best energies of my mind the Timaeus of PLATO. Whatever I comprehended, impresses me with a reverential sense of the author's genius;

a superficial analogy, the same "abstruseness" in the works. Thus, the metonymic reading (which obviously imply the lack of any suspension of disbelief) fails to engender a conversion similar to the friend's. Instead of *feeling* the reversal of every ground, they would not *see*[85] but fragments. We cannot forget, however, that the unconnected, syntagmatic reading of the incomprehensive (i.e. "indifferent") public may be *safer* than the paradigmatic reading of the comprehensive friend.

If we compare the introduction of the friend in chapter XIII of the *Biographia* to the friends evoked by the conversation poems,[86] we may notice that the physical absence of the imaginary other, who, in each conversation poem except *Effusion* turns out to be Coleridge's "better self," is more problematic in the *Biographia*: here, the other, or second self is represented by a letter. This implies, on the one hand, that he is "responsive," or else, reflective: as if the appearance of an "esemplastic" and friendly eye could endow with an identity the fragmented, effusive writing self. On the other hand, however, the letter also introduces an "absence": there is both a temporal and a spatial gap between the writing and the reading selves who never act simultaneously.

## LETTEROPHOBIA

> "On 17 September, 1815, urged on by a frantic Morgan, he wrote directly to John Gutch [his publisher] about the cause of the slipped deadline. He apologised for his 'accursed Letterophobia'"[87]

The *Biographia* as an autobiographical narration can be regarded, following de Man,[88] as an extended prosopopeia (a trope ascribing a voice to the *absent*, the inanimate or the dead), a discourse of self-restoration by which one's name is made intelligible and memorable as a face. The face is therefore not given, but is given *by* an act of language, by the figure of the prosopopeia. However,

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but there is a considerable portion of the work, to which I can attach no consistent meaning. [...] Therefore, utterly baffled in all my attempts to understand the ignorance of Plato, I CONCLUDE MYSELF IGNORANT OF HIS UNDERSTANDING."

85 Cf. *Dejection, an Ode*: "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!"

86 For the discussion of Coleridge's conversation poems see Timár, "Conversing Signs."

87 Richard Holmes, *Darker Reflections*, p. 404.

88 Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," *The Rhetorics of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 67–83.

> Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. [...] Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve.[89]

Though de Man quotes only the first part of this paragraph by Wordsworth in order to point to the dangers inherent in writing,[90] Wordsworth's last sentence ("to derange, to subvert... to dissolve") interestingly parallels the definition the Secondary Imagination. And if language, as it has been remarked above, "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates" in order to be "recreated" or brought to an (artificial) unity through reading, the *Biographia*, similarly to the conversation poems, also seems to point to Coleridge's insatiable desire for an ideal receiver who can rescue the Book, the autobiography or the would-be representative of an integral consciousness from the dangers of an endlessly proliferating text – even at the expense of the fact that the (re)creation of a meaning from the chaos of signifiers ("each seem'd either") cannot be but artificial ("every where shadows were deepened into substances") and clearly entails repression. We may nevertheless bear in mind that not only the "author" of the *Biographia* can be considered as a prosopopeia, but the posited reader as well: the friend himself is nothing else but a figure. And if the friend does not exist but in and by the "letter," he *is* the very language that "deranges, subverts" and, ultimately, "dissolves." Hence, though the figure of the reader violates the text in order to endow it with a meaning and though this violation amounts indeed to mutilation and, eventually, to the effacement of the chaos of signifiers, reading itself still remains a text which "diffuses, dissolves and dissipates," waiting for other readers to recreate (violate and mutilate) it – as we did.

As a result, though the asking for the "friend's" opinion, as well as his fictitious response addressing "*Dear C,*" dramatises the image of the self – the responsive "I" (cf. eye) necessarily implies the existence of a "you" ("*You ask my opinion concerning your Chapter*") – textuality, or the succession of effusive (or "diffusive") writing and "recreative" reading fails to amount to the potentially

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89 Wordsworth, "Essays Upon Epitaphs III," in: *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen & Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), Vol. 2, pp 84–85.

90 Cf. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," p. 81: "as soon as we understand prosopopeia as the positing of a voice or face by means of language [we conclude that] it deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores."

synthetic power of the Secondary Imagination: *correspondence*, in its literal sense, fails to yield (self-)identity. Since although the fact that the relationship between the two selves cannot be but *dia*logical could well imply (self-)knowledge ("the heaven-descended know thyself"), the predicament that the succession of the two selves, instead of turning into an endless alteration, oscillation or else, into the celebrated state of the "hovering between," actually leads to the effacement of one party seems to render the attempt at (self-)understanding impossible. Furthermore, the fact that the dangerous passage to be repressed in the *Biographia* is nothing else but the potential "other" or "stranger" *in oneself*, an "other" clearly challenging the belief in the "Infinite I AM," reveals, similarly to the conversation poems, that the Coleridgean texts do not propose to resolve the interrelated problems of textual hermeneutics, of self-knowledge and the possibility of understanding an other human being by simply declaring "there is One life within us and abroad."[91]

## EPILOGUE

Coleridge himself has never written the pages to be withdrawn "in consequence of this very judicious letter." Neither did he mean the insertion of the letter 'seriously,' nor did he take the figure of the friend literally. Is not it nonsensical to analyse a passage that does not even exist?

By way of conclusion, we shall re-evoke Socrates's mask:

> Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation. [...] It is a very good sign when the harmonious bores are at loss about how they should react to this continuous self-parody, when they fluctuate endlessly between belief and disbelief until they get dizzy and take what is meant as a joke seriously and what is meant seriously as a joke.
>
> (Friedrich Schlegel, Critical Fragments, 108)[92]

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91 Cf. *Effusion*.
92 K. M. Wheeler, ed., *German Aesthetics and Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), p. 43.

*Katalin Pálinkás*

# Negative Capability

## Keats's and Coleridge's metaphors for poetic creativity

### INTRODUCTION

Keats's negative capability letter is often cited in reference to his idea of poetic creativity. The interpretations centre upon two aspects, either on one of them or on both: the idea of self-negation, and/or the ability of retaining an imaginatively open state of mind. According to the first, negative capability is "the ability of the mind to detach itself from its own identity."[1] This is a concern of voice, the poetic self in Keats's poems is seen as refined of any biographical reference, operating rather as a "representative figure," and the poems are viewed as rendering the mind's process of discovery.[2] In this respect, Keats's choice of Shakespeare as his presidor shows an affinity of poetic temperament, since Shakespeare also erased concerns of his own identity in his works. Among the contemporaries Wordsworth's poetry meant a strong but troubled influence for Keats: he saw his own poetic practice as sharply different from the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime," from a preoccupation with self-representation. In light of the other aspect, negative capability demands openness, a breadth of imagination in face of a

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1 Paul de Man, "Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats (1966)," *Critical Writings, 1953–1978* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), p. 190.
2 Cf. the introductory chapter of Susan J. Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), especially p. 35.

world of uncertainties.[3] This interpretation draws on the contrast of intuitive and rationalising tendencies of thinking, and focuses on the source of inspiration and the creative process in the poems. Negative capability calls for a reliance on intuition, and approximates passive receptivity, or Wordsworth's "wise passiveness." But negative capability can also be understood as the very activity of thought, and can stress "the energies of contradiction and irresolution, as the shaping power of imagination."[4]

These arguments, of course, can be seen as two sides of the same coin. How Keats ideas branched from each other is nicely shown when placing the negative capability letter, written in December 1817, alongside with another famous letter written a few weeks earlier, in November 1817, as Ágnes Péter does in her study.[5] In the earlier letter Keats ponders on what forms the "Men of Genius":

> I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth – Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect – by they have not any individuality, any determined Character.[6]

Keats claims in this letter that men of great intellect have no individuality but have "chameleon" or protean selves, to jump to later wordings of the idea. The negative capability passage starts out from the same question:

> what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessd so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason –[7]

A creative state of receptivity is demanded here, a preference for intuitive to rational knowledge. Both letters try to grasp a capacity felt necessary for "Men of Genius," thus it ensues that the phrase negative capability is used to embrace both ideas justifiably. Keats used the word "capability" in the first letter cited to write about the need for "Humility and capability of submission" in a world of

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3 Bate interprets the negative capability letter along this line in his famous biography. Cf. Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 242–259.

4 Cf. Susan Wolfson's interpretation of negative capability (Wolfson, p. 187).

5 Cf. Péter Ágnes, *Keats költészetelm életének fejlődése* (Budapest, 1970), pp. 90–95.

6 *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), vol. I, p. 184 (referred to as *Letters* hereafter).

7 *Letters* I, p. 193.

uncertainties. "'Negative' was to be the next word he would apply to the 'capability' he had in mind [...] though even 'negative' would still be far from adequate," Bate comments.[8]

This paper focuses on interpretations of negative capability as imaginative openness. I would like to explore possible implications of the metaphorical language of the passage in the context of the poems, and discuss Keats's idea of poetic creativity. A second concern of the essay is to interpret the role of Keats's critical remark on Coleridge. I will include a comparison of Keats's and Coleridge's view of the creative process, concentrating on their recognition of its inherent indeterminacy. In my interpretation I argue for what Tilottama Rajan writes in her book on figures of understanding in Romanticism: there are signs of a "shift in romantic aesthetics, from a concern with the text as a finished product that contains its own meaning to a concern with the creative and receptive processes as loci of meaning."[9]

*INTERPRETATION EXPANDED*

Arguing for a hermeneutics of indeterminacy, Geoffrey H. Hartman evokes Keats's negative capability as a quality, or rather labour, needed for doing criticism as well:

> indeterminacy does not merely *delay* the determination of meaning, that is, suspend premature judgements and allow greater thoughtfulness. [...] The delay is intrinsic: from a certain point of view, it is thoughtfulness itself, Keats's 'negative capability,' a labor that aims not to overcome the negative or indeterminate but to stay within it as is necessary.[10]

In *Criticism in the Wilderness* Hartman calls for a critical commentary which originates in the bewilderment the text causes in understanding and does not try to master the text, but discloses contradictions and equivocations. In Hartman's use of the phrase, Keats's negative capability stands for the sphere of indeterminacy in which interpretations move in face of the text.

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8 Bate, p. 237.
9 Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 17.
10 Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Criticism, Indeterminacy, Irony," *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 269–270.

The principle of indeterminacy also implies, Hartman writes, that the text is not resolved into available readings, but a "willing suspension of disbelief," that is, a suspension of accommodating meanings is at work. When he terms the discourse of criticism "suspensive or negative," he interprets Keats's negative capability and Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" as instances of a similar concern.[11] While the phrases described imagination in respect either of creative work or of reception in their original sense, for Hartman the evoked ideas stand for a mode of negative, that is, dialectic or counter-affirmative thinking in the process of critical commentary.

Yet, this does have some result if we try to turn Hartman's approach to our account, to the explication of Keats's idea. It stresses, at the least, the element of indeterminacy and dialectic thought possibly present in Keats's negative capability. The relation can be established for consideration also as Hartman's claim for plurality, that the critical approach should free all ideas and theories "for contemplation, analysis and play" cannot be far-fetched from Keats's idea that the mind should be a "thoroughfare for all thoughts."

Similarly, negative capability is interpreted as strength of thought in Susan Wolfson's book on Wordsworth's and Keats's poetry. For Wolfson the phrase becomes metaphorical of a poetic language rich in interrogative practices, which express the questioning presence of the imagination.[12] She interprets negative capability as a state of indeterminacy, of experiential speculations, also endorsing the implications of self-negation.

The early poems of Keats, for instance, are read by Wolfson as inquiries into his poetic powers and self-definition, where displacement of these questions into idioms such as myths instigates creative exploration and leaves the problems provocatively indeterminate.[13] In her interpretation of the odes, Wolfson states that the poems "test the limits of Negative Capability against the mind's positive tendencies. Keats's term itself shelters these tensions in describing a strength of intelligence against a field of absences – absent certainties, absent knowledge, absent answers."[14]

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11 More importantly, of course, Hartman places his argument in the tradition of philosophical and literary thinking, his use of Keats's and Coleridge's phrases being metaphorical, rather than instrumental.

12 Wolfson, p. 17.

13 Cf. Wolfson, pp. 206–226.

14 Wolfson, pp. 331.

Wolfson also stretches negative capability over the boundaries of the poems, to employ the perspective of reader-response. Interpreting "Ode on a Grecian Urn," she states that the speaker's questions facing the urn is analogous to the reader's perplexity before the poem. Wolfson claims that Keats's odes strengthen the negative capability of their readers, as they are required to interpret a poetic language that fixes and unfixes, forms and transforms meanings. By the interrogative practices Keats's poetry retains a mystery of signs, and demands the questioning presence of the reader. Thus, in Wolfson's interpretation Keats's poems demand the ability of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" also on the part of the reader.

The circumference of possible interpretations of negative capability is as wide at least as shown briefly above. Keats's phrase appears to embrace implications also on reader-response and on the practice of criticism, the common denominator being creativity and indeterminacy implied by negative capability.

### INTERPRETATION FOCUSED

For Keats the autumn and winter months of 1817 were productive of insights into poetic creativity. In a letter written to a close friend, Benjamin Bailey at Christmas, he worded the famous passage:

> Brown & Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or other obliterates all consideration.[15]

These lines, particularly their metaphorical language, pose several difficulties. In his biography Bate gives a comprehensive interpretation of Keats's letter.[16] He

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15 *Letters* I, pp. 193–194.
16 I briefly recapitulate Bate's chapter on negative capability here. Cf. Bate, pp. 237–263.

traces the inspirations that probably matured Keats's aesthetic views, and interprets the most important aesthetic speculations worded in these months: the need of intensity in style, the ideal of non-egoistic personality, and the sympathetic potentialities of the imagination. In this very broad context negative capability is glossed as the quality needed for an imaginatively open, receptive state of mind, in which reality can be captured in its concreteness and diversity.

In Bate's interpretation the prerequisite for the creative work of imagination is openness, the ability to abandon the hunger for settlement, for closure, for inscribing an identity and a rationalised system on reality. Analytic and systematic thinking dissects and confines the concreteness of experience into a rational frame, whereas negative capability requires strength of intellect to let the mind be a "thoroughfare for all thoughts." Besides, any systematic structure is a product of the "assertion of one's own identity," Bate writes. Imaginative openness offers insights, when, through a sympathetic identification with the object, the unity of the mind and the object is attained: "Truth" is felt as "Beauty." For a poet in possession of negative capability "the sense of Beauty" that realises this experience again and again "overcomes every other consideration, or other <rather> obliterates all consideration."

I would like to supplement Bate's interpretation with a focus on Keats's demarcation of his poetry from Coleridge's, and on the possible sources and implications of the metaphorical language of the passage.

### 1 Penetralia of mystery

In his definition of negative capability as "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" Keats probably evoked his reading the *Tintern Abbey* poem, and Wordsworth's phrase, which gained special significance for him. As we know from Benjamin Bailey's account of their passionate readings in autumn 1817, Keats particularly liked the following lines of Wordsworth's poem:

> That blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy & weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lightened.[17]

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17 As quoted by Benjamin Bailey (Bate, p. 214).

The phrase "burthen of the mystery" echoes in several letters, when Keats tries to define an adequate stance in a world where so little can be known for certain. It was quoted, for instance, in May 1818, in a long journal letter: extensive knowledge, emphatically including all departments of thought, Keats wrote, "takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery."[18] Wordsworth's "heavy and weary weight" was replaced by "the heat and fever" of existence in this passage. Keats's use of words probably reflects his idea of poetic creativity, "fever" being a word often associated with the intensity of creative imagination in his vocabulary.[19] Hence the "burthen of the mystery" also connotes the burden of creative attitude to life. Also, "widening speculation" can be a call for continuous creative exploration of reality. Wolfson writes, "the poetry of no self enjoys a greater flexibility of 'speculation,' Keats thinks, and in his vocabulary *speculation* is virtually synonymous with dynamic expansions of thought."[20] Negative capability, or the state of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" allows for experiential speculations.

The phrase "Penetralium of mystery" is most often sidestepped in the interpretations of the negative capability passage. According to the *OED*, penetralia are "the innermost parts or recesses of a building, esp. of a temple, the sanctuary or the innermost shrine" (Vol. XI, p. 472). Keats's use of the word visualises these confined spaces, and, referring back to the state of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts," lends a spatial metaphor to a state of mind.

Strangely, the central symbolic scenes in Keats's poems where human limitations are transcended by means of the imagination, or where the essence of existence is lived through are often organised around a shrine or an altar, a sacred place. They are hidden and innermost recesses, where the poetic self, confronted with a godlike figure, goes through an initiation, penetrates into the truth. The temple of Delight in the "Ode on Melancholy," or the altar of Saturn in *The Fall of Hyperion* are all penetralia in this respect. Hidden and hiding a female figure, they are shrines to the imagination.

These scenes of understanding and initiation are markedly allegorical passages, and can be read as self-representations, dramatising the faith vested in

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18 *Letters* I, p. 277.
19 Cf. Miriam Allott's note to the painfully self-ironic lines of *The Fall of Hyperion*: "Thou art a dreaming thing,/ A fever of thyself." Miriam Allott, *The Poems of John Keats* (London: Longman, 1970), pp. 668–669.
20 Wolfson, p. 37.

imagination. In the ode Melancholy sits in the innermost shrine of the temple of Delight, and only that one is allowed to see her who can "burst Joy's grape against his palate fine," who learns that they can savour joy because they can savour sorrow and vice versa. The knowledge gained fuses sensuous and spiritual experience: the "soul shall taste the sadness of her might." Helen Vendler writes that the most striking discovery for Keats in the ode is that truth can be pursued in sensation, "that his own mind worked in ways which were best described by the vocabulary of Sensation, rather than the vocabulary of Thought."[21] In the last stanza of "Ode on Melancholy," Keats "begins to worship a complex emotional state, the acute nexus of pleasure and pain, from which, he realises, his creativity has always sprung."[22]

A similar central scene in *The Fall of Hyperion* is when the poet confronts Moneta in the shrine. The innermost recess of the sanctuary is her wan face behind the veil, and, even more hidden, the dark chambers of her brain. When Moneta unveils her face, it seems as if all possible narrative interest was vested on her face.[23] It becomes a depository of knowledge, as if it bore and depicted "the burthen of the mystery." She is Memory, witnesses and preserves all change, and the poet entering into her vision gains the knowledge that consciousness itself is irreversible. The self-confrontation thematised in the poem sets the question how the poet can be a "a sage;/ A humanist, physician to all men" with this knowledge.

The allegorical veiled female figures who impart knowledge in these scenes are figures of mentality. Melancholy stands for a mental state attained through experiencing the fullest emotional intensity, and absorbing willingly "the plenum of melancholy as well as the fullness of delight."[24] In *The Fall of Hyperion* Moneta is a figure of memory and represents the temporal aspect of human consciousness and of history. The poetic self must absorb their knowledge by the most bodily means of sensuous discovery, taste, or by a more intellectual one, entering into the vision of Moneta.

I think there is a valuable import of interpreting these penetralia of mystery in the poems for the negative capability passage. The scenes of understanding and

21 Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, London: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 184.

22 Vendler, p. 185.

23 Vendler, p. 213.

24 Vendler, p. 165.

initiation demand an emphatic reliance on the power of imagination on the part of the poetic self, as it is similarly requested in the negative capability passage. What appears, however, as a claim or deliberation in the aesthetic speculations of the letters, unfolds its problematic in the poems.

### 2 Coleridge

Another question that is problematical in the interpretation of Keats's negative capability is the use of the phrase itself, as it stands out from its context, and is thought to be a coinage, which does not appear in the letters again. Strangely, the paradoxical contrast of the two polarities itself, capability being something positive, sounds quite Coleridgean. But there is no agreement in criticism even about what inspired Keats's critical remark on Coleridge.

In his biography on Coleridge, Richard Holmes suggests that Keats seized on an earlier wording of Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" as "negative belief" to define his negative capability.[25] Whether he assumes that Keats heard the very phrase discussed, read Coleridge's lecture published, or encountered the term "negative faith" in *Biographia Literaria* is not uncovered by Holmes. Coleridge used the term to clarify the nature of stage illusion in a lecture in 1808:

> all other Stage Presentations, are to produce a sort of temporary Half-Faith, which the Spectator encourages in himself & supports by voluntary contribution on his own part [...] I have often noticed, that little Children are actually deceived by Stage-Scenery, never by Pictures [...] The Child, if strongly impressed, does not indeed positively think the picture to be the Reality; but yet he does not think the contrary. [...] Now what Pictures are to little Children, Stage-Illusion is to Men, provided they retain any part of the Child's sensibility: except that in the latter instance, this suspension of the Act of Comparison, which permits this sort of negative Belief, is somewhat more assisted by the Will, than in that of the Child respecting a Picture.[26]

Coleridge's wording, the two opposing polarities are justified and expounded in their context, and the phrase appears again in *Biographia Literaria*. Though Coleridge's concern is drama, the idealised state of mind in the process of reception seems to resemble Keats's idea of negative capability, at least in the

25 Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: The Darker Reflections* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 130.
26 *The Collected Works of S.T. Coleridge* 5, *Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature* (Princeton, London: Routledge and Kegan, Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 134–135.

demand for openness and sensibility. Yet, they have not more than the aspect of negativity as counter to affirmative thinking in common: Coleridge counters his conception to what might be called "positive faith," that is belief in something existent, whereas Keats contrasts negative capability with a capacity of finding and stating certainties. Even if, hypothetically, Keats came across Coleridge's "negative faith," he only borrowed the economy of the phrase.

As for the instigation of Keats's criticism, *Biographia Literaria* is most often mentioned, from different respects. Jack Stillinger thinks that Keats's surmises on imagination in autumn, 1817 were stimulated by his reading and discussing Coleridge's work with Benjamin Bailey. Specifically, he reads the famous letter where Keats compares imagination to Adam's dream as an attempt to counter Coleridge's statements about the imagination in chapters 13 and 14. Stillinger claims that "when, a month later (27 [?] December 1817), Keats chooses Coleridge to exemplify the lack of Negative Capability [...] he is surely thinking of *Biographia Literaria*."[27] Robert Gittings in his biography also suggests that Keats had not Coleridge's poems, for instance the *Sibylline Leaves* in mind, but the *Biographia*, and its critique of Wordsworth.[28]

Explanations hover around the influence of *Biographia Literaria* on Keats's aesthetic views. However, no overt reference to Coleridge's book, or to Keats's reading of it can be found in the letters, though *Sibylline Leaves*, which came out together with the two-volume work is mentioned. For this reason Kenneth Muir's explanation for Keats's critical remark as an indirect influence is for me more convincing. Muir argues that Keats most probably picked Coleridge as a counter-example because Hazlitt's harsh critique of *Biographia Literaria* still haunted him.[29] Hazlitt's piece was published in the August issue of *Edinburgh Review* in 1817 and was damning: "Mr. C., with great talents, has, by ambition to be every thing, become nothing. His metaphysics have been a dead weight on the wings of his imagination – while his imagination has run away with his reason and common sense."[30] Keats, who was probably familiar with Hazlitt's critique, caught a deeper and more sensitive insight into Coleridge's poetic development,

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27 Jack Stillinger, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems* (Urbana, Chicago, London: The University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 152.

28 Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (London: Heinemann, 1970), pp. 261–262.

29 Kenneth Muir, ed., *John Keats: A Reassessment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1959), p. 143.

30 Ralph M. Wardle, *Hazlitt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 205.

Muir claims. What Keats captured in his letter is that Coleridge is unable to rely on his creative power, and his preoccupation with metaphysics can be seen as a symptom of it. Also, Keats's attempt to disentangle his poetry from his contemporaries can be sensed: he rejected Wordsworth's egoism and Coleridge's metaphysics to form his own poetry and poetical ideal unfettered.

## 3 A fine isolated verisimilitude

As a reader Keats often singled out lines of poetry for their expressiveness and vivid images. He could physically enter into the image, as the legendary account of his reading Spenser's *Faerie Queene* tells: "He hoisted himself up, and looked burly and dominant, as he said, 'what an image that is – 'sea-shouldering whales!'"[31] Phrases and passages distilled from his intensive readings echo throughout the letters and present strong influence in the poems. Keats even worded some of his insights into poetry through this receptive experience: he admired the spontaneity of expression in Shakespeare's sonnets, where the strikingly vivid images are "fine things said unintentionally – in the intensity of working out conceits."[32] The demand for unintentionality is emphatic in Keats's ideal of poetry.

Reading *Biographia Literaria* Keats must have relished Coleridge's extended metaphors for the imaginative process, as, for instance, the passage on the water insect in chapter 7, Holmes notes.[33] Though we cannot ascertain how much Keats read of *Biographia*, this passage can still be considered as an interesting parallel to Keats's "snail-horn perception of Beauty," a subtle image of creative sensibility in the letters. Interpreting the two passages side by side may suggest what Keats must have meant by "a fine isolated verisimilitude" in his critical remark on Coleridge.

The beautiful image of the water-insect and its motion reflected on the sunny bottom of the stream appears in Coleridge's ongoing discussion of association in *Biographia Literaria* as follows:

> Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing [...] Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed, how the little the animal *wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now

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31 Bate, p. 33.
32 *Letters* I, p. 188.
33 Holmes, p. 456.

resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION. But in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary controul over it.)[34]

Coleridge evokes a natural phenomenon to grasp the process of thinking and understanding in metaphorical language. The movement of the small animal, swimming now by the current, now against it, visualises two opposite powers at work while thinking or writing poetry. The active phase rests on the exertion of will-power, the passive on surrender to the power of the current. The dialectic of the two propels the process. Concerning the creative process, in the active, self-conscious phase the mind is in control, makes, for instance, compositional decisions, whereas in the passive it is controlled, through a reliance on the inspiration from the materials it works upon. The passage emphasises the importance of the balance of the two, and seems to defy the possibility of closure in the process.

It is worth noting here that Katherine Wheeler takes Coleridge's extended metaphor to stand for the reading process, for the kind of reading *Biographia Literaria* itself requests.[35] In the current of narration, Wheeler explains, the passive phase is analogous to reading sequentially, in a linear way. But, in the meanwhile, the mind should also "gain a fulcrum to propel itself upward against the stream. Such specifically metaphorical passages in the *Biographia* are fulcra," they halt the reader and offer reflexive pauses.[36] Wheeler differentiates between the two types of reading accordingly, the one linear, the other reflexive, and claims that the depth and inwardness of reflexive passages actually lend coherence to the surface fragmentariness of *Biographia*. More importantly for my argument here, she claims that the metaphorical passages in *Biographia* most often thematise the act of

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34 *The Collected Works of S.T. Coleridge 7, Biographia Literaria I–II* (Princeton, London: Routledge and Kegan, Princeton UP, 1983), Vol. I, pp. 124–125. (Hereafter referred to as *Biographia*.)
35 Katherine M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge, London et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See especially pp. 82–85.
36 Wheeler, p. 84.

understanding, and should be read self-reflexively. I think the water-insect passage in particular refers the reader to their own self-experience, to observe their own processes of thinking.[37]

Engell and Bate interpret the water-insect metaphor as anticipating the definition of imagination in chapter 13, the phrase "in all its degrees and determinations" possibly differentiating the degrees named there as primary and secondary imagination.[38] The state which is passive in relation to the other can thus be interpreted as the primary imagination of perception, which is instinctive, a reflex of the mind. The water-insect is yielding to the power of the mightier current as the mind yields to a myriad of stimuli, and creates a picture of the world around. The active state, conversely, can be the secondary, poetic imagination, which co-exists "with the conscious will." The act of will instigates and controls the poetic imagination: "This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities."[39]

The two-paragraph definition of imagination in chapter 13 has become the crux of *Biographia Literaria*. Not only the interpretation of the definition, but also its immediate context, the letter written to a friend is polemical. To quote the different standpoints is not my concern here. To counter the passage on the water-insect and its interpretation of imagination to the definition of chapter 13, however, offers an interesting point. There, at the centre of *Biographia* is "the theory of imagination as a synthesising faculty that creates unity out of multeity so as to bring about the self-construction of the subject in a personal version of the Eternal Sum or I Am."[40] Here, imagination as an intermediate faculty refers to a suspension of closure and an engagement in a process of continuous self-construction and self-deconstruction, constitution and deconstitution of mean-

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37 Another metaphoric description of the passive and active phases of imagination at work in the reading process appears in chapter 14: "The reader should be carried forward (...) by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. Precipitandus est *liber* spiritus, says Petronius Arbiter most happily" (*Biographia* II, p. 14).

38 *Biographia* I, p. lxxiii.

39 *Biographia* II, p. 16.

40 Rajan, p. 104.

ings. As an intermediate faculty imagination strives not for a unity, but immerses in the contemplation of the play of multeity.

The intermediate aspect of imagination appears elsewhere in *Biographia*. Coleridge's use of the word is perhaps best understood in light of his discussion of the strength of thinking in

> leaving a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images. As soon as it is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination [...] a strong working of the mind.[41]

Coleridge's metaphorical passage on the water-insect can be taken as a "fine thing," a vivid image Keats would have favoured when reading *Biographia Literaria*. Yet, it is obviously not said unintentionally: Coleridge inserted the image as an illustration, an "emblem of the mind's self-experience" in the discussion, and analysed it to sketch a theory of imagination. Probably, Keats would have seized upon a similar image with a "sense of Beauty," and would have considered it to be an intuitive insight, which cannot be dissected and analysed.

Keats's metaphorical description of the creative process as a "snail-horn perception of Beauty" was worded in a letter written to the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon in April 1818. His friend is addressed as a fellow-artist, with whom Keats shares the experience of creative work:

> I have ever been too sensible of the labyrinthian path to eminence in Art judging from Poetry) ever to think I understood the emphasis of Painting. The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at the trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty – I know not you many havens of intenseness – nor ever can know them – but for this I hope not you atchieve is lost upon me...[42]

The source for the subtle recognition is self-reflection, a "watchfulness in himself," which for Keats is perhaps the strongest motivation through which a poet comes to maturity. Keats believes, the creative process is an intimate experience, its emotional and intellectual intensity cannot be captured fully in

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41 "The Seventh Lecture" (1811–12) in Coleridge's *Shakespearean Criticism* quoted by Wolfson, p. 325.
42 *Letters* I, pp. 264–265.

words. Moments intense in the birth of the work are necessarily lost to the recipient, even if they are familiar with the creative work of other arts. Sceptical as to what can be known and conveyed, Keats seizes the image he finds to suggest what cannot be analysed.

The moment of perceiving and creating beauty is described in the passage, as imagination can only be captured, metaphorically. Keats uses an image of nature, though also evoking a literary experience, an image he found especially vivid in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and copied in the letters:

> Audi – As the snail, whose tenders horns being hit,
> Shrinks back<s> into his shelly cave with pain,
> And there all smothered up in shade doth sit,
> Long after fearing to put forth again... [43]

The phrase "snail-horn perception of Beauty" evokes sense perception, strangely combining the tactile and visual in the image of the sense organ of the snail, to describe an aesthetic experience. The attributes, as if by sympathetic imagination identifying with the snail, beautifully evoke the sensitivity of the creative mind. The "perception of Beauty" refers to that moment when a unity of the mind and its object is found, which comes half through perception, half through creation.

Keats's metaphorical description places the emphasis on the indeterminacy of the creative process, and on the impersonality of the creative state. The compositional decisions, he writes, "take place between the intellect and its thousand materials," thus the creative mind and its materials appear to work upon each other, the former being much like an agent. A similarly impersonal view is worded elsewhere in the letters: "But as I was saying – the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repeti[ti]on of its own silent Working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness."[44] This passage might be interpreted as recalling moments when recognitions, memories, which were absorbed and dissolved to be part of the self, suddenly leap into the mind, and become formative of experiencing reality. Perhaps the nicest implication of the

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43 *Letters* I, p. 189. Jonathan Bate traces the inspirations of the passage and claims that the image of the snail is combined with a line which Keats probably borrowed from Hazlitt's account of Shakespeare's mind at work: "In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass" (Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], p. 170).
44 *Letters* I, p. 185.

passage is that these moments may come continuously also on "the simple imaginative Mind," not merely on "Man of Achievement."

Woodhouse explains in his commentary on Keats's mode of writing: "He has said that he has often not been aware of the beauty of some thought or expression he has composed and written it down. It has then struck him with astonishment – and seemed rather the production of another person than his own. [...] It seemed to come by chance or magic – to be as it were something given to him."[45] Strangely enough, there are no signs of the indeterminacy described in the passage in Keats's corrections in the drafts of the poems. Most of them, even the odes, were written rather as "extempore effusions," Stillinger claims, and where the drafts show processes of revising, their concern is primarily stylistic. In his exciting study Stillinger tries to resolve the puzzle: "The revisions within the drafts, then, are of interest mainly negatively: they have so *little* to do with the creative process. Either some trial-and-error activity of initial composition took place in Keats's mind before he ever put pen to paper, or else we must believe what Woodhouse reported from conversations with Keats: there was never any significant amount of trial-and-error activity at all in the process – a large share of Keats's lines came "by chance or magic."[46] Textual criticism remains just as sceptical about what can be known from the extant drafts as Keats is about what can be grasped and conveyed from the intensity of the creative process.

Keats's comparison of the creative process to a "labyrinthian path" warns of its "negative" aspect, that composition is full of digressions, dead-ends. The "innumerable compositions and decompositions" lay bare a state of indeterminacy, an inner frissure of the creative mind. It is here that Coleridge's and Keats's views of the creative process come closest. The very process of thinking, of writing constantly regenerates meanings, keeps them unsettled, in an undecidable play, both of them seems to say. Yet, Keats fixes the moment of creation when the synthesising desire of the mind perceives and creates a unity, "Beauty." For Coleridge, secondary or poetic imagination is co-existent with the conscious will, depends on it, as it dissolves and dissipates so as to re-create. An act of will is emphatically entailed in the creative process, and imagination is often described as work, struggle, it being a mental effort, as opposed to Keats's insistence on a reliance on the intuitive powers.

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45 Quoted by Jack Stillinger, "Keats's extempore effusions and the question of intentionality," in: *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 312.
46 Stillinger, "Keats's extempore effusions," p. 312.

Keats tried to demarcate his "province of poetry" as sharply different from the contemporaries, while also bearing their strong impact on the poems. His numerous reflections on Wordsworth's poetry, and its troubling influence can be traced in Keats's letters. In contrast, there is practically no reference to Coleridge in the letters, though even his impact can be felt for instance in Keats's "Isabella," or "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." Keats did not write critical comments upon Coleridge's poetry, as evidently he did not feel it a need to extricate his poetry from Coleridge's influence. The only criticism in the negative capability passage comes as repudiation. In spite of all this, however different the poetry it produced, a common concern of theirs can be detected for that "pleasurable activity of the mind," which takes place in the creative process.

*Gabriella Reuss*

# The Nineteenth-century Theatres of Gábor Egressy and William Charles Macready

> "Shakspeare is a good raft whereon to float securely down the stream of time; fasten yourself to that and your immortality is safe."[1]

## BEFORE THE CURTAIN

The thought of the present comparison between Macready's and Egressy's work onstage and off was inspired by two curious remarks. Firstly, that Macready's first fully restored *King Lear* was produced in 1838 the year when Egressy's was too. Secondly, in 1845 Gábor Erdélyi reported the way Macready acted Othello with the deliberate aim to present imitable foreign example to Hungarian actors. These two bits of information would be enough to spring a Hungarian Macready-researcher at immediate work, but there was a third impulse as well. Following the Hungarian war of independence in 1848–49 Jácint Rónay, once secretary to Kossuth and then emigrant in England, sent accounts of London theatre life back to Hungary for Egressy's theatrical journal.

Hence this paper will focus on the roughly contemporary intellectual milieux and theatres of William Charles Macready (1793–1873) in London and Gábor Egressy (1808–1866) in Pest-Buda and on the possible connections between them. It is not only their temporal parallel that prompts the present essay. Their equally perfectionist (indeed, difficult) personality, deep and expert fondness of

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1 G. H. Lewes, "Macready," *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (1875), also in *Victorian Dramatic Criticism*, ed. George Rowell (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 86.

literature and Shakespeare, and radiant personal power to shape public taste are what relate them. Their inexhaustibly energetic and also pioneering efforts in Shakespeare's cause, or Shakespeare's verse within what Dávidházi calls the "mystification"[2] phase of the Cult gained both for them and their profession a long-awaited social respect. Both actors used their newly earned middle-class appreciation nobly, indeed, effectively, which furthered not only the art of the stage but the art of letters as well.

## THE BACKDROP

By the nineteenth century the cult of Shakespeare, thanks to Garrick, had reached its full bloom in England, and the seeds were ready to be spread elsewhere. Indeed, bringing it home from England became a basic need for other countries.

Dobson, who views the matter from an English political angle, points out that not only America needed to take "steps towards appropriating the Bard in the interests of its own national and imperial project."[3] Countries on the Continent realised that Bardolatry must become a part of the national literature at some point. It is no accident, says Dobson, that the adoration of Shakespeare was adopted with ardent enthusiasm after the Jubilee "by the next European country to experience a literate middle-class movement, Germany, (and thereafter by so many other emergent nations – Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia)."[4] Dobson is quite right about the role of the "literate middle-class." The social groups that were to constitute the future Hungarian bourgeoisie nurtured the cult themselves, educated the public to become readers and audiences, set modern and quite high demands for the cultivators of the worship, even if the first morsels of the cult, the first experiences, were imported by aristocrats.

In Hungary it was mainly the members of the nobility, like Baron Wesselényi, Count Széchenyi, who read in foreign languages and had the means to travel abroad. But the editors and journalists who published or commented upon these travelogues in their magazines equally contributed to the appropriation of the Bard, and they all came from the middle-class(-to-be), Dávidházi's cultural anthropology points out. In this phase which Dávidházi calls

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2 Péter Dávidházi, *Isten másodszülöttje* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989).

3 Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 228–229.

4 Dobson, p. 226–227 (my italics). (It would perhaps be less AnaChronistic of Dobson to refer to the Czech or Bohemian, etc. parts of the Habsburg Empire rather than to Czechoslovakia.)

"initiation" to the cult, the Hungarian journals of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries noted and highly praised the respect which the English expressed towards their scholars, poets and language, methods of maintaining and promoting the national literature, paralleled with an often urging, reprimanding overtone towards Hungarian upper classes who could have done more to import Shakespeare.

The news about the Jubilee and cult of Shakespeare[5] was received with almost unanimous appreciation. Garrick's recipe, the national and institutionalised admiration of a poet offered ready means and methods for the cultural mission enthusiastic Hungarian men of letters and educators of men had sought. In the next phase, preceding true "institutionalisation" which Dávidházi describes as "mystification," a religious tone appears in Shakespearean discourse. On paying a visit to Shakespeare's birthplace the expressions of Hungarian pilgrims would rise to the heights of sacred adoration identifying Stratford with Bethlehem or even Mecca as our source Rónay did.[6]

The new intellectual fashion in Hungary created a market for Shakespeare which was most easily met by quick, careless translations from German versions of the plays. However, to the fortune of later generations, the rise of the literate middle class put an end to these pedestrian translations by firmly requiring higher standards and producing light winged texts. When in his *Indítvány a szellemhonosítás ügyében* (1848)[7] Egressy openly demands the poets of the highest rank Arany, Petőfi and Vörösmarty be honoured and financed by the nation to provide translations worthy of Shakespeare. Thus the lowborn actor, a prominent new member of the literate middle-class was in fact making the first steps towards institutionalising the Hungarian Shakespeare cult.

Macready's task, in the context of an apparently solidly established admiration of the Bard seems at first sight to have been rather different. The state of the cult in England can easily be characterised by a perfectly serious proposal

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5 "Shakespearnak Jubileuma" [Shakespeare's Jubilee], *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* (1790), in Dávidházi, p. 96.

6 In 1864, Károly Szász, poet and Shakespeare translator, in his tri-centennial ode referred to Stratford as Bethlehem (Dávidházi, p. 143); while Jácint Rónay in the first edition of his *Diary* wrote with great simplicity "Stratford, Britannia Mekkája" [Stratford, Mecca of Britannia] (Dávidházi, p. 210).

7 [A Proposal for the Spiritual Nationalisation of Geniuses] Gábor Egressy, *Életképek*, Vol. V, 20th February 1848.

Macready recorded in his *Reminiscences* for erecting a monument to Shakespeare's mother. Macready's attitude was: "query, why not his grandmother?"[8]

Often fluffed by brutality or explicit sexual references, the Restoration versions of Shakespearean pieces still popularly held the English stage. The programme of the Jubilee in fact featured none of the original Shakespearean plays. It appears that after Garrick no one ever read the original dramas apart from theatre-avoiding Romantics. Lamb's categorical refusal of having to see "an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick"[9] instead of his noble, visionary Lear is an obvious testimony against current stage versions. Thus it was left to a figure both devoted and famed, like Macready, to stop the adapters, Tate, Davenant, Colman, Dryden and the actor-managers clinging to Shakespeare's name rather than words and float on peacefully towards immortality or at least financial success. Our commercially mystified but generally unknown Author, degraded into the state of raw material or mere ingredient had to be saved from the tide. A Hamletian statement (though philologically untrue) would perfectly summarise the situation of the adapted plays, especially of *King Lear*: "it was never acted, or if it was, not above once – for the play, I remember, pleased not the million, 'twas caviare to the general."[10] Thus Macready's task appears to have been in a way similarly educational: redirect public attention and taste to their original object. His theoretical insistence on Shakespeare's words required completely new acting versions in practice.

Remarkably, both our restless heroes Egressy and Macready chose to dig out Shakespeare from underneath equally corrupt translations and adaptations, and create their own relatively pure Shakespearean text.

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8 William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from his Diaries and Letters*, 2 vols., ed. Sir Frederick Pollock, one of his executors. (London: Macmillan, 1875), Vol. I, p. 462.

9 Charles Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation" (1811), also in Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: New Penguin Shakespeare Library, 1992), p. 123.

10 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden edition third series (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 262, II.ii.431–3.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

*Relatively* pure only, since Egressy did not manage to have a complete and professional Shakespearean translation and Macready did tailor Shakespearean lines.

Macready's first restoration, *Richard III* in 1823 proved unpopular with audiences who much preferred Cibber's version. Stubbornly enough, Macready did not give up. Despite the failure he soon started contemplation on restoring the text of other plays,[11] *King Lear* among them. With this play, however, he took much care not to chase audiences away. In an experiment in 1834 he restored most of the text, yet following Tate's order in the storm scenes, and omitting the Fool. In later accounts he did not pride himself in this partial restoration though the greatness of the achievement and the significance of strategic progress is clearly indubitable.[12]

The restoration of *King Lear* in 1838 was probably Macready's greatest achievement. The extent of the changes in this play has been reported in many ways. Most sources, either contemporary or retrospective, applaud and appreciate the actor's efforts, and differ only in temper in doing so. One of them is the twentieth century theatre historian Odell, calm, omniscient and reliable, who after thorough examination found that the arrangement on the whole "follows Shakespeare's with great accuracy."[13] Hostile voices have been rare: it is always the mediocre contemporary actor, George Vandenhoff who is cited; whose nearly (in)famous sentence is the sole one which has represented the anti-Macreadian attitude ever since the late-nineteenth century. Of the 1838 restoration of *King Lear* Vandenhoff said in 1860 that Macready "restored as much of the text as suited him."[14] Yet the production was and has ever since been widely celebrated as admittedly the first to include the Fool in one and a half centuries.

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11 Macready's 1st restoration: *Richard III* (1821), the 2nd one: *Antony and Cleopatra* (1833), the 3rd one: *King Lear* (without the Fool) (1834).

12 More on the 1834 production in Gabriella Reuss, "Veritas Filia Temporis or Shakespeare Unveiled? William Charles Macready's restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 1834 according to his unpublished promptbook," *The AnaChronisT* (2000), 88–101.

13 George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1963, reprint of 1920), Vol. II, p. 195.

14 George Vandenhoff, *Leaves from an Actor's Note-book, with reminiscences and chit-chat of the green-room and the stage, in England and America* (New York, 1860), also in Robert Spraight, *Shakespeare on Stage. An Illustrated History of Shakespearian performance* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 74.

As it is clear from his promptbooks,[15] Macready's changes concerned mainly the length of the parts spoken, which, as the usual practice of theatres, is quite forgivable; or, as in the case of *King Lear*, the order of certain scenes, *not the words* of Shakespeare.

In fact, Macready followed the living tradition established by Garrick and continued (and carried to excess) by Kemble and Kean to cut Act One short after the Curse which had been the greatest "peak" in the play for all Lears. Lear thus gains an impressive exit after the ariatic monologue at Goneril's expense. The other point of more serious change was the storm in which Macready did not dare to straighten out the Tatean scene order. The core of it is that Macready followed Tate in joining the Shakespearean Act III Scenes 5 and 7 in one, supposedly for practical reasons, namely, to avoid another quick scene change. However, at least he exchanged *all* of Tate's bombastic or explanatory expressions for Shakespeare's own and included parts for the Fool. Hence the result, despite Vandenhoff's accusations, is obviously more Shakespearean than not, while familiar enough to prove capable of catching the audience's favour.

As Macready, Egressy was also curious about the original text, or about the closest access to it. In a way, Egressy too returned to Shakespeare's words when his production demanded a new translation from English. The way to it, however, was not paved; thus he had detours of a different kind.

Having Shakespeare in Hungarian, and later, having Shakespeare played in a manner worthy to the Bard, as organic parts of mystification, soon equalled a higher degree of civilisation and refinement of taste. Out of the twenty-two plays by Shakespeare appointed for translation in 1831 by the Academy, then the Magyar Tudós Társaság, ten (!) were produced in the following one and a half decades. According to Kerényi, "ebben nagy szerep jutott a színészi kezdeményezőkészségnek. Egressy és Megyeri az átlényegülés nagy lehetőségeit találták meg szerepeikben."[16]

The first Shakespearean translation from English, was *Macbeth*, in prose, was made as early as 1812, however, this venture by Gábor Döbrentei had not

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15 For the restoration of *King Lear* in 1834, see the promptbook held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford. For the 1838 production see the promptbook preserved in the Forster Collection, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

16 [This was due to a large extent to the initiative taken by the actors themselves. Egressy and Megyeri found great possibilities for identification in their Shakespearean parts.] Imre Kerényi, "A nemzeti romantika színháza," *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve*, ed. Ferenc Kerényi (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), p. 23. The great comic actor of the time, Károly Megyeri was the first Hungarian Falstaff.

invoked much response. It took nearly three decades for his pioneering view to work from the original rather than a German translation, came into fashion. In 1830 Döbrentei updated his *Macbeth*: re-translated it, this time in iambic verse and published it in an independent volume accompanied by, as Dávidházi appreciates, "az angol szakirodalom elmélyült ismeretéről tanúskodó kísérőtanulmányokkal körítve."[17]

Significantly, Egressy selected Döbrentei's work as an example to follow, and eventually managed to bring Shakespeare's rather than Schröder's Sturm und Drang style *Lear* onto the Hungarian stage. Egressy knew Shakespeare's play only from German translations and there had been only one model, again a German speaking one before him. In the winter of 1836–37, ignorant of the fact that he was to be contracted by the opening Hungarian Theatre of Pest and driven purely by his professional curiosity, he managed to reach Vienna in quite an adventurous fashion (thanks to his overt poverty) where he saw the famous actor Anschütz in the Burgtheater production of *King Lear*. So much different from that of the itinerant actors, the refined style of the Austrian artists, especially that of Anschütz impressed him deeply. He started preparing in mind for the title role, but the basis for such study was still missing. The lack of a playable text was recognised by Vörösmarty in 1837 in an overtly bitter tone:

> Azon darabok közől, melyek más nemzeteknél a színház örökös díszei, melyekben magokat jeles színészek vetekedve gyakorolják s a közönség csüggedetlen részvétele mellett kitüntetik, alig bírunk egyet-kettőt jó fordításban. Nincs Learünk, nincs Romeónk; nem láthatjuk a Velencei Kalmárt, Hamletnek csak árnyékát bírjuk; [...] pedig csak ilyen darabokban mutatja ki magát a színész erejének teljes nagyságában, ily elmeműveken gyakorolhatja magát haszonnal, s érhetik valódi művésszé.[18]

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17 [Accompanied by studies betraying thorough knowledge of English secondary material.] Dávidházi, p. 107.

18 [Of those plays which are the everlasting ornaments of theatre for other nations, in which actors of greatest renown practise and excel themselves competing before the untiring attendance of the audience, scarcely do we possess one or two in good translation. We have no *Lear*, no *Romeo*; cannot see *The Merchant of Venice* and possess only a shadow of *Hamlet* [...] although only in this kind of plays can an actor show his full power, only in this kind of works of the mind can he practise himself with use and ripen himself a mature artist.] Mihály Vörösmarty, criticism on the performance of Schiller's *Die Räuber* at the Hungarian Theatre of Pest, dated September 18, 1837, in Mihály Vörösmarty, *Drámák, elbeszélések, bírálatok*, Magyar remekírók series, ed. András Martinkó (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1974), p. 676.

The picture of the learned and learning artist apparently coincided with the aims and nature of both stars. As Macready, Egressy was not contented either with the texts currently available. From this time two unpublished but played acting versions are known due to Bayer's and Kiss's researches; but Egressy threw away both. One of them was, "Hérószi Szomorú Játék 5 Felvonásban Shakespeare és Schiller után, készült 1811 februáriusában" as Zsuzsánna Kiss found,[19] while the other was probably translated by a touring company director.[20]

Egressy rather chose to adopt the comparative practice Döbrentei followed, when beside the original, he used Voss's, Burger's and Schiller's German versions as well. The censored promptbook frontispiece reads "Az eredeti, Schlegel és Petz után fordították Vajda, Jakab, Egressy."[21] Of the translator team István Jakab spoke German, Péter Vajda mastered English and Egressy supervised and co-ordinated the work paying special attention to his role which, in turn, was translated in iambs by Vajda for him.

> Érdekes véletlen, hogy az első eredetiből fordított magyar *Lear*-bemutatóra és az 1606-os előadás utáni legelső teljes, csonkítatlan *Lear*-előadásra Angliában egyazon évben, 1838-ban kerül sor.[22]

Like Macready's production four months earlier,[23] it received a warm welcome. The title role remained one of the most popular and best "impersonated" roles of both actors (on this even the most hostile critics agree), who, true to their nature, never stopped refining themselves in it. Forster wrote in *The Examiner*: "Mr Macready has now, to his lasting honour, restored the text of Shakespeare [...] Mr Macready's success has banished that disgrace from the

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19 [A Heroic Tragedie in 5 Acts after [not *by*] Shakespeare and Schiller, written in Februarius, 1811] Zsuzsánna Kiss, *A Lear király magyar fordításainak szöveg- és színpadtörténeti vizsgálata*, unpublished PhD thesis (Budapest: ELTE, 1997), p. 51.

20 According to Bayer, Ferenc Komlóssy's text is dated 1819. In József Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Kisfaludy Társaság Könyvtára, 1909), Vol. II, p. 275.

21 [Translated from the original, Schlegel and Petz by Vajda, Jakab, Egressy] Kiss, p. 79. The Hungarian Lipót Petz translated the play from English to German(!) and the raw material was the Warburton edition of King Lear. Petz's translation is "formahű, pontos, valódi irodalmi érték" [true to the original form, punctual, indeed a valuable piece of literature]. Kiss, p. 73.

22 [Interestingly enough, the debut of *King Lear* translated from the original took place in the very same year as the first full, untruncated production of *Lear* after 1606 in England.] Kiss, p. 76.

23 Macready's production took place 25th January 1838.

stage for ever."[24] Egressy's effort was quite similarly appreciated. In the following passage by Imre Vahot the nearly religious tone of mystification will also betray itself: "Shakespeare Learjét a nagy költő egyik legbuzgóbb tisztelője, sőt, művészi dicsőítője, Egressy Gábor hozá legelőször színpadunkra. E tettéért legyen áldott az ő neve!"[25] Toldy's opinion is also positive: "A fordítás helyenként darabos, de általában véve mégis az eredetinek erejét megközelítő, s ügyes kéz műve. A király szerepe jambusokban."[26]

On the formation of the role Archer, an eyewitness-biographer says of Macready that

> in Lear he found ample scope for [...] subtlety of psychological suggestion which was one of his great qualities. He marked the gradual encroachments of insanity by the most delicate touches; and the irresistible tenderness of the last act contrasted beautifully with the overwhelming vehemence of the first and second.[27]

Even if we coolly replace all the superlatives with their basic forms in this obviously partial account we will see the main direction of Macready's impersonation of the character. His display of domestic gentility is widely appreciated even by the most hostile critics of the age. Archer's description refers to two other important points as well. First, that Macready's Lear was much less ariatic than any of his predecessors as he carefully designed graduality and credibility of all psychological changes. Second, that in his interpretation, as both the critics and his Diary refer to it, he is reluctant to display the Lambian image of the physically weak old man tottering with a stick. Rather, he depicted an energetic, vigorous old fellow with red cheeks and dominating, loud voice.

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24 John Forster, "Macready's production of King Lear," The Examiner, February 4, 1838. Also in Dramatic Essays by John Forster and George Henry Lewes, eds. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (London: Walter Scott Ltd 1896), p. 50.
25 [Shakespeare's Lear was first brought to our stage by a most enthusiastic admirer, indeed, the artistic worshipper of the poet, Gábor Egressy. For this deed, bless'd be his name!] Imre Vahot, "Lear király," Regélő, April 14th, 1842. Also in Magyar Shakespeare Tükör. Esszék, tanulmányok, kritikák, eds. Sándor Maller and Kálmán Ruttkay (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), p. 130.
26 [The translation is not round occasionally but in general it comes close to the power of the original and is the work of a skilled hand. The king's role in iambs.] Ferenc Toldy, Athenaeum, May 5th 1838, The idea of looking at this particular piece of criticism came from Zsuzsánna Kiss.
27 William Archer, William Charles Macready, Eminent Actors series. (London: 1890), p. 203.

The only thirty-year-old Egressy, fifteen years Macready's junior in the title role was also highly praised, even by critics like Toldy and Vahot who had had the opportunity to see Anschütz's Lear in Vienna. Vahot wrote:

> Egressy mint Lear, kivéve az erősebb indulatok és szenvedélyek kifejezését, Anschützcel sok tekintetben kiállja a versenyt, sőt azt vettem észre, hogy ő az öregséget testhordozásában hívebben tünteti vissza, s azon jelenetben is, midőn Lear Cordeliát megismerve, ez előtt térdre esik, s bűnbánólag beszél, hajlandó vagyok Egressynek nyújtani az elsőség babérját.[28]

Interestingly, it is Egressy's domesticity and tenderness that moves the critic's heart the most, which fact undoubtedly strengthens the invisible string that relates the two actors. The passages quoted suggest that even if neither of the actors was too kingly or heroic, these momenta being absent from all the descriptions; with their empathy, analytic mind and psychological studies they mastered the personal or natural touches which caught their contemporaries' attention. Apparently, their life-size Lears brought the character closer to the audiences.

### THE WORLD AND THE STAGE

A deeper look into the Hungarian and English intellectual context in the 1830s will explain more of the curious and seemingly occasional similarities between the two actors. Indeed, further ones will pop up, I found. Not only their personalities, interests and maximalism but their consciously chosen and developed style, way of interpretation, views on their profession and even their social position and impact have resemblances.

Unlike Kean, Macready never went on stage illuminated by alcohol, never led a Bohemian life, never left his partners' parts unread... and of course was never adored so ardently in unison. In short, he was eminent; that is, a sober and staid member of respectable society.

In rather an un-actor-like way he owned a house with flowery garden in the calm village of Elstree near London from where he took the trouble of

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28 [Egressy as Lear, except in the expression of stronger emotions and passions, stands in many respects the competition with Anschütz, indeed, I noticed that he [Egressy] reflects old age by stature more faithfully, and in the scene in which recognising Cordelia he falls onto his kneels and speaks full of regret, I am willing to give the laurels of priority to Egressy.] Imre Vahot, "Lear király," *Regélő*, April 14th, 1842. Also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 130.

commuting to work and lived there in peace with his lawful wedded wife and over half a dozen children, reading and preparing indefatigably. According to Macready's *Diary*,[29] the actor's reading varied on quite a wide scale: from Austen, Byron, Thackeray, Fielding, Rousseau, Voltaire and Racine etc to the classical authors (Livy, Homer, Virgil are often mentioned) whom he certainly read in their original tongues as his partbooks are usually full of Latin and Greek marginalia. He thought and talked his parts over with his wife, an actress herself, and more importantly, with his friends. The dinner parties the Macreadys threw as the *Diary* and Archer's biography tell us, saw many a reputed man of letters and artists of the age: the Wordsworths, Charles Lamb, William Wallace (his literary adviser) to mention some of the earlier friends. The young generation was represented by J. H. Reynolds, Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Talfourd and Browning. Dickens and Forster were always regulars. Westland Marston complements the list with the names of Tennyson, Thackeray, Stanfield, Maclise, Etty, David Roberts, remarking that the guests' "very presence was a testimony to the intellect and cultivation of their host. It may be said" continues Marston, who himself gave Macready his first play to read, "that few had obtained any marked reputation in literature or art without making his [Macready's] acquaintance."[30]

The phenomenon, the highly cultured actor as an active and reputed member of the learned circles, who attempted to contradict the great Romantics and played the unactable play of the mind, was at the time unique enough to attract attention. It is then not surprising that Macready sought and received sufficient encouragement from his learned friends when he initiated his Shakespearean restorations. When he was planning his first restoration of *King Lear* in 1834 in the last minute, although having Forster's strong support throughout, before making the promptbook he "Called on Reynolds [...] who approved of *Lear* with Shakespeare's text."[31] The pledge of mutual respect and co-operation between theatre and contemporary literature seems to have been the actor's person, especially, when the common goal was the reintroduction of expunged texts to the audience.

Finding descriptions of Egressy roughly corresponding with those quoted above of Macready was not a difficult job at all. Staud's remark is practically an

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29 William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready*, 2 vols., ed. William Toynbee (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912).
30 Westland Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, 2 vols. (London, 1888), Vol. I, p. 61.
31 Macready, *The Diaries*, Vol. I, p. 129, dated May 3rd.

equivalent of Marston's. Egressy's "Barátai korának legtehetségesebb emberi közül kerülnek ki."[32] However, we must not expect fancy dinner parties at the Egressys: the actor who in fact made his way to the Burgtheater from Pest-Buda on foot to see Anschütz, lived with his fragile young wife, an actress herself, and their three children on rather moderate means, renting a small flat near the theatre over a chemist's.

In Hungary, perhaps due to the poverty of individuals, the circles of the intelligentsia met in inns rather than in private homes. Attempting to list Egressy's friends we find that critics like Bajza and Henszlmann who were most fierce opponents in the columns of magazines, frequented the very same circle at the inn Csiga. A prominent regular of the Csiga and later translator of the first full, and ever since most nobly and poetically phrased *King Lear*, Vörösmarty essayed on Shakespearean dramaturgical matters with just as great care as he taught correct English and Hungarian pronunciation on a linguistic basis in his criticisms. As chief editor of the *Athenaeum*, he gave space in his magazine for the ardent talks that stormed around Egressy's acting.

As Macready's "natural" style caused debates among viewers and reviewers throughout his career, Egressy's style stirred critical aesthetic discourse as well. The discussions of his style were paralleled by arguments on the reception of Shakespeare.

"An idealist Hegelian,"[33] sharp-penned Bajza[34] was convinced that nature or reality should never be presented as they are, rather, in a beautified way. "Fordítani klasszikai műveket híven kell ugyan, de színpadon előadni nem mindig lehet, és Shakespeare-t nevezetesen hűség rovására kockáztatni, műveitől elidegeníteni a magyar közönséget, nem okosság."[35] Hence Bajza expected Egressy

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32 [His friends came from among the most talented people of his age.] Géza Staud, "Egressy Gábor," *Nagy magyar színészek*, eds. Miklós Gyárfás and Ferenc Hont (Budapest: Gondolat, 1957), p. 95.

33 Béla Várdai, "Egressy Gábor mint Shakespeare-színész," *Magyar Shakespeare Tár*, Vol. II, No. 3 (Budapest: 1909) 1–120, p. 7.

34 He was the first director of the Hungarian Theatre of Pest, founder of several critical journals (e.g. *Külföldi játékszín* which was meant to publish foreign plays or *Kritikai lapok* which was first to publish regular criticisms). He also fathered the custom of publishing both regular literary and theatrical reviews. See also the Introduction by László Négyesy to *Bajza József munkái*, ed. L. Négyesy, Remekírók series (Budapest: Wodianer és Fiai, 1908).

35 [The translation of classical works must be done faithfully to the text but the performance on stage is not always possible; and risking Shakespeare by preferring faithfulness, and thus alienating the audience from his works is not a clever thing to do.] József Bajza, "Othello," *Athenaeum*, November 22nd, 1842. Also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 112.

to sweeten his harsh style with a pinch of idealisation. Egressy answered in a dialogical pamphlet in which he refused being "nice" and stood for the characteristic and the real. Art historian Henszlmann joined the debate on the actor's side[36] arguing that in understanding Shakespeare

> közönségünk egy év óta nagyot haladt [...] Építsünk bár [...] nagyobb színházat, [...] lássuk el azt csupa MacReadyk, Rachelek, Seydelmanok és Garrickekkel, [...] képezzük bár drámairóinkat merő Shakespeare-ekké, [...] s mégsem lesz nemzeti színházunk mindaddig, míg a közönség öneszmélkedésre nem szokik, míg a kritika egyesült erővel azt ezen öneszméletre nem ösztönzi.[37]

Being a much more private person, Macready never wrote pamphlets explaining his style. However, we may trace a similar approach confessed to his *Diary*. In one of the rare moments when he was content with his performance he wrote "I felt myself the man."[38] One of his main goals was not to "represent," as then was said, implying a distance between the actor and his piece declamation followed by bows and applause within a play. Rather, he meant to *identify* with the character all the time while on stage. He wasted no word and no effort whatsoever on beautification or idealisation.

Whether sympathetic or not, sources quite agree on the main features of Macready's acting. Downer mentions a contemporary critic in *The Theatrical Times* who found that "If Kean were the Byron of actors, Macready may in many respects afford a parallel to Wordsworth... [in particular, his] insight into the laws of nature under its varied modifications."[39] Being less sweepingly passionate and

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36 Imre Henszlmann, "Othello," *Regélő*, November 20th, 1842, Also in Maller & Ruttkay, pp. 122–126. "Könnyebb észrevenni, vajon midőn Egressy valamely szerepben hegedűjátszót képez, lehúzza-e kesztyűjét vagy nem, s mozgásai itt vagy amott elég kerekdedek valának-e – mint a művészet legbelsőbb műhelyébe behatni" [It is easier to note, when Egressy represents a violinist's solo in a part, whether he takes off his glove or not, whether his movements here or there are round enough or not – than to get to the innermost workshop of art.] Henszlmann, "Othello," also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 125.

37 [Our audiences have progressed a lot. [...] Let [...] an even larger theatre be built, [...] supply it with all MacReadys (sic!), Rachels, Seydelmans and Garricks, [...] train our playwrights all Shakespeares [...]: yet we will not have a national theatre till the audience gets used to awareness, till they are encouraged and helped by critical discourse.] Imre Henszlmann, "Othello," *Regélő*, November 20th, 1842. Also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 123.

38 Macready, *The Diaries*, Vol. I, p. 192, dated October 25th, 1834.

39 *The Theatrical Times*, II. 1847, p. 164. Also in Alan S. Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian W. C. Macready*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 354.

much more intellectual than Kean, also less "stately" than Kemble and even more industrious and analytical, Macready was constantly balancing and synthesising spontaneous and conscious acting. It is not surprising then, that many an experienced theatregoer missed the usual pathos, or, as Horne did, accused him of reading poetry "very badly" for he broke up poetry according to sense (sic!) and mood rather than to music. Certainly Horne admits that Macready was still very impressive, "because he is thoroughly in earnest."[40] Another respected eyewitness reaches a very similar conclusion: "in all the touching *domesticities* of tragedy he is unrivalled," says Lewes. "But he fails in the characters which demand impassioned grandeur, and a certain *largo* of execution. His Macbeth and Othello have fine touches, but they are essentially unheroic."[41] Thus Macready redefined what was expected from tragedians and opened the way before a more realistic or "natural" style of acting.

Macready's unusual way of identification, his unheroic Macbeth and human-sized Othello impressed János Erdélyi when he saw him act in Paris in 1844. He wrote to *Pesti Divatlap* openly setting Macready's example before Hungarian actors and spectators:

> Ha Egressy Gábor most volna Párizsban, sok hasznát vehetné azon stúdiumoknak, melyeket Macready játékából meríthetni. [...] a közönség is csak elmegy színházba, de mint az iskolás gyerek, könyvvel a kezében, Robertson úr fordítása szerint olvasván a színészek után Shakespeare-t, s ez csak fele haszon, mert a színészet elvesz, s pedig minő élv a színészettel![42]

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40 R. H. Horne, *A New Spirit of the Age*, 2 vols. (London: 1844), Vol. II, p. 115.

41 G. H. Lewes, "Was Macready a Great Actor?" in *Dramatic Essays by John Forster and George Henry Lewes*, ed. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (London: Walter Scott Ltd, 1896), (London: Walter Scott Ltd, 1896), p. 130.

42 [If Gábor Egressy were in Paris now he could make much use of those lessons which Macready's acting provides. [...] and the audience attend the theatre, like schoolchildren, with books in hands, reading Shakespeare following the actors in Mr Robertson's translation. And it is yet not really beneficial since they lose the acting thus, though with that what joy it would be!] János Erdélyi, "Úti levelek Párizsból," *Pesti Divatlap*, January 19th, 1845, philosopher and critic, later director of the National Theatre in 1848–49. Also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 134–135.

*WEEDING AND PLANTING*

According to Trewin, one of his biographers, Macready "had no regard for the profession he helped to raise."[43] However, Macready himself says in his *Diary*: "Miserable as my profession is, its wretchedness is aggravated by the persons allowed to degrade it."[44] Fortunately, a well-known oracle, the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* sticks to facts more than Trewin does here and concludes: "He [...] made many enemies, particularly by his constant disparagement of the profession which he adorned."[45]

Most of the defects in the colleagues that were the targets of Macready's merciless weeding, in fact, well deserved their fate: in either Covent Garden or Drury Lane, Macready accepted neither carelessly collected riffraff costumes without study, nor indolent and improvised quotations from the author instead of the playtext. When not in a managerial position, he restricted himself to open disdain towards colleagues, letting off steam in his *Diary* in the shape of frequent sighs, complaints and even more frequent curses.[46] He blamed these buffoons of colleagues for the lack of social respect and financial safety which was a painful experience for actors[47] in the mid-nineteenth century. Constantly worried about the future of his seven children, Macready made desperate efforts to maintain a steady middle-class living on an actor's income that was rather unpredictable both in sum and regularity.

Apparently, he did all he could: "He was the first English manager to insist on full rehearsals, particularly for supers and crowd-scenes,"[48] as even the laconic *Oxford Companion* registers. As Horne vividly describes it, "he made the supernumeraries act – a mortal labour. He not only multiplied the brood of these 'turkeys,' but he crammed them, and made men and women of them."[49] Under the heading of "ensemble acting" however, we certainly should not understand

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43 J. C. Trewin, *Mr Macready. A Nineteenth Century Tragedian and His Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1955), p. 7.

44 Macready, *The Diaries*, Vol. I, p. 129, dated May 14th, 1834.

45 *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 598.

46 One of his recurrent remarks in the *Diary*: He was "disturbed [...] by the carelessness of the performers" (Vol. I, p. 178). He regularly complains about "ill-disciplined actors" (Vol. I, p. 192).

47 They needed extra income, e.g. American and country tours, to stretch the family purse.

48 *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, p. 598.

49 Horne, Vol. II, p. 116.

the same as today. Stars like Macready did have their "peaks," but at least *not only* peaks. With Macready the intention to present a whole character throughout the play finally appeared. To those who expected the leading actor change back into a private person after giving an elevated recital of a "piece" (the word itself is indeed telling) to bow and seek immediate applause, or even to repeat a monologue (e.g. the Curse) as Garrick often did, Macready caused serious disappointment.

Just as Macready, Egressy also headed a change in both quality and style. He started his career as an itinerant actor acting in their "singing-crying"[50] declamatory style. The most tender hearted and civilised of critics, even Vörösmarty sends the once respected representatives of the old school off the national stage.[51] Young Egressy adapted and was soon to set the standards of modern Hungarian acting. He did so by example and also by sharing his views in print. He authored handbooks, *A színészet könyve* (1866), *A színészet iskolája* (1879),[52] valid ever since, and a good deal of articles. He claimed: "az eddigieknél nagyobb praecisiót 's correctséget nyernének előadásaink, mi genialitás nélkül is eszközölhető, ha komolyabban vesszük a színészetet, 's kissé több fáradságot veszünk hozzá magunknak."[53] He also insisted on ensemble acting implying ensemble rehearsals, a matter initiated by Macready on the early Victorian stage as well: Egressy says, "ne játsszék a' színész mindig magának, hanem az egésznek, a' tárgynak, azaz: segítse motiválni társa' játékát."[54] An inherently private Englishman, Macready does not go further to educate future actors than the following remark in his *Diary*: "I never acted Macbeth better, and *learned much in this night's performance.* Hear this and understand it, if you can, you 'great' young actors!"[55]

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50 The critic József Bajza described it thus, expressively enough for the phrase to become a technical term.

51 "There was a time when with stately stature and loud voice, that shook if not the viewers then at least the theatre (which not rarely was made from unworthy material), was held as appreciated and as main thing in art. Now the demand of the age has become stricter: people would like to understand for what they applaud." (Vörösmarty 1974: 692)

52 *A színészet iskolája* was published posthumous in 1879, 1889.

53 [Our performances would gain greater praecisio and correctness which are achievable without geniality if we take acting more seriously] Gábor Egressy, "Párbeszéd Szebeklébi és Egressy között színészi dolgokról" (1842), *Egressy Gábor válogatott cikkei 1839–48*, a facsimile edition, ed. Ferenc Kerényi (Budapest: OSZK Színháztörténeti Tár, 1980), p. 5.

54 [The actor should not play for himself but for the whole, for the subject, that is, help motivate his colleague's acting] *Egressy Gábor válogatott cikkei 1837–48*, p. 6.

55 Macready, *The Diaries*, Vol. I, p. 236, dated February 1st, 1847. Italics are mine.

Egressy's suggestions rhyme well with Macready's standards; of which many remained confined in the *Diary* to the utter delight of future readers, while others were voiced at rehearsals to the utter resentment of colleagues. Egressy's fiery temperament could not stop at the public articulation of his opinion: he responded to the lack of school for actors by founding one.[56]

As it is doubtful that the English star ever heard of Egressy or Hungary, it is time to see how Egressy managed to possess morsels of foreign news and experience. After Anschütz's Lear he was left alone professionally, let alone Vörösmarty's instructive criticisms, thus it must have meant a great deal what he learnt from travellers' accounts.

Having seen Macready and his company in Paris in the winter of 1844–45, János Erdélyi talked, addressing his account directly to Egressy, of the celebrations with which the initiated and illuminated Paris audience greeted Macready. An aesthete, critic and philosopher, Erdélyi immediately reports on the state of the French Shakespeare cult as if it were a special thermometer to measure the development of civilisation and taste.

Then he gives a sensitive account of Macready's and Miss Faucit's electrifying performance and original reading of *Othello* and *Hamlet*. Erdélyi found Macready's Othello full of warm colours, his Hamlet loving and highly sophisticated, offering extra material to Egressy. Whether or not Erdélyi is a reliable reporter, nonetheless, he appears to be a credible one. We must believe him when he is touched by and hence stresses Macready's extraordinary talent for depicting gentility and tenderness, suppressed pain, mingled with love and desire, as this ability of Macready had always been mentioned and praised by the English press. Also, Erdélyi's writing about it refers to the fact that these refined touches must have been a novelty for the Hungarians:

> Mikor [Macready mint Othello] elmondja, miképp szeretett belé Desdemona, ez nem puszta elbeszélés, hanem a leglángolóbb emlékezet megújulása, boldog szeretői diadal [...] Harmadik felvonásban, hol Jágó fölkeltvén lelkében a vihart, a féltékenységet; így szól: Látom, hogy észrevételeim nagyon felizgatták kedélyedet. – Egy jotát sem (Not a jot, not a jot!) – felel Othello kimondhatatlan fájdalommal, melyben mind látszik a gyöngéd szerelem Desdemona iránt.[57]

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56 The institution opened in 1865, nearly thirty years after its anticipation.
57 [When [Macready as Othello] tells about how Desdemona fell in love with him, this is not a mere narration, but the renewal of the most blazing/ardent memory, of the lover's happy victory. [...] In

The future director of the National Theatre (1848–49), Erdélyi continuously keeps track of both the actor's performance and of the audience's reactions, apparently holding them equally important throughout his report.

Erdélyi's previous experiences, "egyszer a színpad közepéről hurcolta nyakán fogva, fojtogatva Desdemonát Othello az ágyba [...] máskor azt is láttam, mint szoríták ki a lelket párnával szegényből,"[58] seem to have stood on the verge of the ridiculous and the primitive, which, we can see, "dashed his spirits" a little. József Bajza, by recalling a very similar scene in 1842, verifies Erdélyi's memories. He must have referred to the very same performance (Lendvay as Othello), not without utter disgust: "Istenért! ne hurcolja többé Othello Desdemonát, és ne fojtsa párnákkal agyon szemünk előtt, mert ez hajborzasztó."[59] Interestingly, Bajza comes up with the same idea Macready's company was to present in Paris, surely ignorant of the English actors' practice: "A megfojtás az ágykárpitok között mehet végbe, de ne szemünk előtt."[60]

This quite Mediterranean practice of dragging and public suffocating which alienated many a Pest-Buda spectator from *Othello* in 1842 appears to have been a widely spread and widely known scene as Gvadányi wrote an amusing story titled *Egy falusi nótárius budai utazása*, and later József Gaál was inspired to make a comedy, *A peleskei nótárius*, out of it.[61] A highly sympathetic spectator, the notary of Peleske on his visit to the theatre rushes onstage only to save poor Desdemona from brutal Othello's enormous black hands. Erdélyi even provokes the spectator by asking, "Csuda-e, ha ilyek láttára irtózik a peleskei nótárius?"[62] Erdélyi clearly prefers the use of a curtained four-poster bed which offers comfortable privacy to execute the task and Desdemona undisturbed.

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the third Act when Iago says, stirring the storm, jealousy in Othello's heart: I see this hath a little dashed your spirits. – Not a jot, not a jot! – Othello replies, full of unutterable pain in which his tender love for Desdemona is apparent.] János Erdélyi, *Pesti Divatlap*, Maller & Ruttkay, p. 134.

58 [Once Othello dragged Desdemona by the neck, stifling, from centre stage across to bed, on another occasion I saw when with pillows her soul was pressed out of her.] János Erdélyi, *Pesti Divatlap*, Maller & Ruttkay, p. 135.

59 [For God's sake! let us not allow Othello to drag Desdemona and stifle her with pillows to death before our eyes because this is horrid.] József Bajza, *Athenaeum*, November 22, 1842, also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 113.

60 [The choking must take place behind the curtains of the bed, not before our eyes.] József Bajza, *Athenaeum*, November 22, 1842, also in Maller & Ruttkay, p. 113.

61 The play was among the first to be staged at the National Theatre (1838).

62 [Should we marvel that the notary of Peleske shudders at such a sight?] János Erdélyi, *Pesti Divatlap*, Maller & Ruttkay, p. 135.

In fact, Macready was merely following the English theatrical tradition which comprises stock props as well as stock stage business. In Macready's study book in which various Shakespeare plays are bound together with *Lear*, I found a plate on the frontispiece of *Othello* displaying a large canopy bed with an abundance of curtains, size and shape of a Turkish tent, to provide for the double deaths.

Hence Egressy must have found it vital to widen his own and his contemporaries' horizon: he initiated and then edited a new critical magazine to serve as the compass of theatrical art, taste, and to guide audiences. The magazine called *Magyar Színházi Lap* managed to survive in 1860 only for a year.

Nonetheless, even this unfortunately short-lived journal furthered the actors' cause. Egressy asked for and received material from contemporary literary celebrities. Beside poems, reviews and theoretical writings he published a brief view on the actors of the English stage sent by Jácint Rónay, Hungarian immigrant from London.

Egressy's London correspondent was in fact an emigrant Catholic priest, former secretary to Kossuth and the first Hungarian Darwinist who spent sixteen years in exile in England between 1850 and 66.[63] A member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science,[64] Rónay regularly read about and attended the London theatres collecting material for his reports. His articles being well-informed, attentive and remarkably impartial, Egressy wanted Rónay to provide a series on English actors for his magazine. "Kean Edmund életrajzát alig várom. Bármily hosszúra terjedne az, jogos helyet fog lapomban foglalni. [...] És ha Kean-nel készen leszünk, nem lehetne-e aztán Shakespeare életére is gondolnunk?"[65] Not only did Rónay write Edmund Kean's and Shakespeare's biographies, but he sent Egressy the lives of Charles Kean and Macready as well.

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63 Rónay's exile in England: 1850–66. A selection of his *Diary* incorporating these years was first published in 10 copies according to Dávidházi, but was re-selected and re-published in 1996.

64 Dávidházi, p. 209. In England Rónay taught Kossuth's sons, while back in Hungary he taught Rudolf, heir to the Habsburg throne (1871–72) and Princess Mary Valery (1875–83).

65 Jácint Rónay, *Napló* (Válogatás), ed. György Hölvényi, METEM könyvek series 13 (Budapest & Pannonhalma, 1996), p. 258. Rónay kept some of Egressy's letters to him, the one quoted above is from among them. [I can hardly wait for the biography of Edmund Kean. No matter how long it will extend, it will receive its rightful place in my magazine.[...] And if we are done with Kean, could we think of Shakespeare's life then?] Rónay's study on Shakespeare appeared in the Appendix in Vol. VIII of his *Diary* published in only ten copies.

Even if the book,[66] compiled from the earlier papers came out in 1865, the year preceding Egressy's death, on the basis Egressy's thoroughness, interest and zeal we might well assume that these were read by the Hungarian star.

The friendly tone Rónay uses in Macready's biography is characteristic throughout the whole book, however, it does not indicate his partiality. His background as a scholar, natural scientist and cleric served Rónay well: his statements are moderate, factual and argumentative. All his information coincide with the other sources, e.g. Macready's own writings, Erdélyi's letters, or even a French journal which collected the contemporary French response to Macready's 1844–45 tour in Paris. Hence the citations below (unfortunately none about his *King Lear*) will not only stand there to embody what Egressy in fact knew of Macready at the time, but necessarily they will summarise the features that relate Egressy to the English star.

"Tanulni nem szűnt meg soha," wrote Rónay, "de játékát szigoru, ingatlan elvek intézték; ezért haladása következetes volt. [...] Játékban a következetesség, szorgalom nélkül nem is képzelhető, s Macready feltűnőleg szorgalmatos volt." The description might fit Egressy, without any changes: all his books, articles and personal example, strict demands of praecisio and industriousness echo Rónay's words. He continues, "szerepe minden szaván, játéka minden mozdulatán, kezdettől végig keresztül haladott akkor is, midőn kedveltebb hőseit százszor ismétlé."[67] However, not only does the latter statement betray the actor's honest self-discipline. It also reveals the fact that he would not have been contented with giving a number of "good pieces of acting" a night: just like Egressy, he insisted on acting a complete character, a round human being, each time building up the psychological background for the figure. It seems, no one questions the work Macready invests in characterisation, now from a French source: "Le talent de Macready réside dans l'étude et la méditation, dans le lent perfectionnement de

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66 *Jellemrajzok az angol színvilágból: Kean Edmund, Macready Vilmos, Kean Károly.* [Portraits from the World of the English Stage. Edmund Kean, William Macready, Charles Kean]. Pest, 1865.
67 [He never gave up studying, but his acting was directed by strict, unchanging principles thus his progress was consequent [...] Consequent thinking cannot exist without industriousness in acting, and Macready was outstandingly industrious. He went through each and every word and gesture of his roles, from the beginning to the end, even when he repeated one of the favourite parts for the hundredth time.], Rónay, p. 119.

l'exécution"[68] the *La revue* sums up. On the occasion of the 1844–45 Paris tour, the *Le Constitutionnel* stated that "l'acteur se montre sur la scène tout pénétré de l'esprit de son rôle, tout imprégné du puissant génie de Shakespeare."[69] The latter remarks further assert the fact that Macready was not keen on delivering the traditional "points" but re-presented the imagined character on stage.

"Macready nem puszta szenvedélyből, hanem meggyőződésből volt színész;" argues Rónay, "azért a színészetet nem csak saját diadalaiban, hanem általános vívmányaiban is szereté, s ha küzdött, hogy nevét a feledésből kivívja, küzdött azért is, hogy pályatársainak tisztességes állást biztosítson, hogy a színészetet magasra emelje."[70] Although Rónay's empathy might be felt here, one cannot really deny the truth in his sentences. Macready took pains to find a new and respected place for the histrionic profession in the middle class, an effort Egressy shared with Macready.

## THE GREEN CLOTH[71]

Thus not lacking encouragement from and being surrounded by the most learned men of the time, hence guaranteeing his theoretical background and promoting his popularity, Egressy was able to raise considerably the renown of his profession and to produce, in his most timely art, something that would be memorable in the future. Around Macready's person a quite similar circle developed and the mutual co-operation and respect between the artist of the stage and the artists of letters bore fruit: the actor's profession was not the same as when Macready started his career. In his Shakespearean restorations what once, in the age of Charles Lamb seemed impossible to reconcile, theory and practice, reading and acting met. Shakespeare could only have benefited from all this: the popularity of

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68 [Macready's art lies in study and thought, in the slow perfection of the execution], "William Charles Macready et les comédiens anglais à Paris (1844–45)," *La revue des lettres modernes*, Nos. 74–75 (1963), p. 16.

69 *Le National*: [throughout the scene the actor seemed to be entirely penetrated by the spirit of his role, entirely impregnated by the great genius of Shakespeare]; *La revue*, p. 19.

70 [Macready became an actor not because of sheer passion but out of conviction; hence he not only liked the acting profession for his own successes but in general too, and if he struggled to lift his name from oblivion he struggled for his fellow-actors as well, to provide them with proper jobs and for the elevation of the profession.], Rónay, p. 113.

71 A quote taken from the end of the promptbook prepared by Macready for his partial restoration in 1834, surprisingly preserved in the Bodleian Archives.

the actors conveyed the merits to the wider public. If nothing else, the cult, learned respect that had preserved Shakespeare's plays grew. Egressy managed to play Lear fifty-six times while Macready in his longer career gave it eight more times.[72]

Both acting versions of *King Lear* were milestones in their own tradition, which of course, even the enthusiastic recorder of their histories admits, were only there to be surpassed. However, doing so was not very easy. Charles Kean and Irving built their spectacular *Lear*s on Macready's only after his retirement; and only Egressy's death could put an end to the career of a text in which, incidentally, only his part was in iambic meter. Vörösmarty's powerful and tragically instrumented translation of 1855 had to wait for fifteen years until the actor's memory in that well-trained audience of Egressy and his literary friends would fade. Even after Vörösmarty's translation was finally billed at the National Theatre in 1870, four years after Egressy's death, the new text often got overwritten by Egressy's in the promptbook, in individual parts and personal memories.

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72 Egressy's data from Staud, p. 115, Macready's data from Archer, p. 203.

*Katalin G. Kállay*

# Mailing Versus Blackmailing

## Senses of Delivery in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter"

What happens when one has to realise that something has been stolen from him or her in such a cunning manner that (s)he is incapable of doing anything against the act of purloining? The victim first becomes embarrassed, then irritated, maybe enraged, and (s)he, of course, will desperately want to get it back. In case the victim is equipped with the necessary courage and cunning (s)he might want to steal it back, exactly in the astonishing manner of the thief.

A reader, a man or woman of letters might become the victim of such a process when reading "The Purloined Letter,"[1] the literary example of a case described above. The thing so stolen is no less than the reader's *trust* in a "story proper," in a "manifold message," and thus in the possibility of the nondescript and vulnerable notion of *catharsis*. If one is not content with any of the various replacements, after becoming embarrassed and irritated (s)he will try to do whatever is intellectually possible in order to get it back. For this purpose, an extraordinary amount of courage and cunning is needed, since the thief is the author himself, who seems to take delight in confronting his reader with an emptiness in the heart of his story. And the act of purloining is so perfect that the emptiness might demonstrate to the victim that the thing stolen has never been in his or her possession, which is still not a proof of the fact that it does not exist.

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1 All quotations from and references to the text are based on the following edition: Thomas Olive Mabbot, ed., *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Tales and Sketches, 1843–1849* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press and Harvard University Press, 1978) 972–997.

How to steal it back, then? This short story is the third and last, in Poe's words "perhaps the best,"[2] of a series of tales of *ratiocination*, celebrating the congenial and ingenious "analytical mind" of the master-detective, C. Auguste Dupin. How to compete with *him* in *acumen*?

The text begins with a serious warning in Latin: "*Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*" ("Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than too much cunning").

Knowing that this line is ascribed to Seneca but it has not been located by the philologists, and also knowing that itself was purloined by the author from an early version of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (the first tale of the series),[3] can we, shall we take this warning to heart? In the name of wisdom, we must, even if we allow the possibility that the sentence is already part of the trick of purloining.

In the "Rue Morgue" version, the utterance is directed against G., the Prefect of the Parisian Police, who is "somewhat too cunning to be profound" – but is it certain that the target is the same here? In "The Purloined Letter," there are some people much better equipped with cunning than the half "entertaining" and half "contemptible" Prefect. The Minister D., both a practitioner and a victim of purloining, as well as of "analytical" exercises, who is a poet and a mathematician in one person, cannot possibly be devoid of *acumen*, not to mention Dupin himself. Considering that the motto did not appear in *The Gift* edition (the first publication of the story)[4] but was a later insertion, one might even say that Poe managed to "seal" his tales of ratiocination with such a warning directed against his own method. And where is the *terminus*? Who can take the last step in this game of "set a thief to catch a thief?" Of course, it is the reader. But which reader?

In this case, there seems to be an almost endless chain of readers and readings. This particular text (and this particular game) has proved to be so powerful that – although the plot is very far from being sensational (especially as opposed to some of Poe's other stories) – it has managed to stir up such a sensation in recent critical and theoretical thinking that even a volume entitled

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2 Poe wrote J. R. Lowell on 2nd July 1844 that "'The Purloined Letter,' forthcoming in 'the Gift' is perhaps the best of my tales of ratiocination" (Mabbot, p. 972).

3 Cf. the Motto in Mabbot, p. 993.

4 Cf. Mabbot, p. 973.

The Purloined Poe[5] had to be issued as a kind of testimony to its importance. Starting with Jacques Lacan's famous Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"[6] (which, according to Jacques Derrida, already partly refigures Marie Bonaparte's Freudian interpretation), many outstanding critics have answered the challenge: Derrida's "La Facteur de la Vérité"[7] and Barbara Johnson's "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida"[8] have proved to be exceptionally influential in the chain of interpretation.

Inspired by these texts, I now have to take into account the motto's warning indeed: too much cunning is hateful to wisdom. In other words: the overcomplication of explanations might destroy the art of disentangling, which, according to Poe, is "that moral activity" in which the true "analyst" "glories."[9] The only problem is: how much is too much? Where is the limit one must not transgress when trying to enter into a conversation with Poe's text, in order not to violate the "honour among thieves?" Poe, the master of proportion might offer us a helpful device in his review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales: we might say that the interpretation, like a good story, must be "perusable" (i.e. readable and understandable) "at one sitting."[10]

Yet also according to Poe, "These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key."[11] Perhaps it is not the amount but the mode of cunning that has to be dealt with cautiously, perhaps in this case "too much" is a qualitative and not a quantitative distinction. How to find the "new key" of cunning that is not incompatible with wisdom? We must try at least to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."[12]

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5 John P. Muller and William Richardson, eds., The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

6 Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 191-205.

7 Jacques Derrida, The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 411-497.

8 Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," Literature and Psychoanalysis, Yale French Studies 55/6 (1977) 457-505.

9 Poe says this in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Mabbot, p. 528).

10 E. A. Poe, "Twice-Told Tales, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Review," Anthology of American Literature, Vol. I, ed. George McMichael (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), p. 995.

11 Poe wrote this in a letter to his friend, Philip Pendleton Cooke, 9th August 1846 (quoted in Mabbot, p. 521).

12 Cf. Matthew, 10:16

The structure of the text is very much like that of a good detective story. There is a frame, a comfortable setting in which three people discuss a crime. Although there is a confidential Narrator, the events of the "crime story" are told first by the Prefect and then by the Detective (Dupin), so the first person Narrator loses his primary function and thus becomes a dubious and passive *character*. (The arabesque pattern of narrators might remind one of the structure of Scheherazade's tales in *The Thousand and One Nights* as well.)

The crime is very simple. In the royal "boudoir," a letter of great importance has been stolen from the Queen by the Minister who immediately replaced it by a letter of no value, and although she witnessed to the act of purloining, she was paralysed by the *presence* of the King, from whom the whole matter should be concealed. The matter requires extreme delicacy. (In fact, the words "Queen" and "King" do not appear in the text, they are referred to as "royal personages" and it is only the personal pronoun that differentiates them.)

This is a promising start, and the reader (whose trust is not yet stolen) immediately starts to make guesses of various importance. For example:

1. It is perfectly normal that a "Royal He" visits the boudoir of a "Royal She"
– but what has a Minister got to do there?
2. Even if it is the royal custom that state-affairs are discussed at this particular place of intimacy, how can the Minister have the courage to meddle with pieces of paper on the Queen's desk?
3. For what possible purpose does the Minister purloin the Queen's letter?
4. Who sent the letter and what is it about?

The reader might expect a "good detective story" to unfold along the lines of these (and similar) questions, but in Poe's text it is exactly this kind of information that is withheld. It is only the third of these miscellaneous naïve questions that can vaguely be answered: by stealing the letter, the Minister gains power over the Queen and has the possibility of blackmailing her into whatever he wants. But this possibility is never realised. As Lacan observes: "He [the Minister] suspends the power conferred on him by the letter in indeterminacy, he gives it no symbolic meaning, all he plays on is the fact that this mirage, this reciprocal fascination is established between himself and the Queen... "[13]

The letter gives the possibility of power to the person who holds it – somewhat like Aladdin's lamp in the Arabian tale – but its 'jinni' is never let

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13 Lacan, p. 200.

loose, as if no one wanted to or knew how to do that. (This is not the only "lamp" Dupin decides not to use: when the Prefect enters, he literally stands up to light one in his room, but upon hearing the purpose of the visit, he sits down without doing so, preferring to think in the dark.)

There is no scandal, no juicy story to satisfy the reader's thirst (not necessarily for blood but for at least something to feel for, to identify with). Unless, of course, readers make it up for themselves. What Poe truly presents is a dry, although no doubt acrobatic display of "analytical" exercises, in which the main question is how to steal the letter back.

Meanwhile, he manages to sterilise the text of everything that would disturb the pure intellectual delight in the breathtaking flight of thought (of perfectly precise logic, blended with poetic intuition). But does the principle of *l'art pour l'art* (in this case, ratiocination for the sake of ratiocination) work without anything at stake, is it possible to enjoy the "supernal beauty" of the performance without the gravitation that attracts us to matters of life and death? If there is nothing at stake, there is nothing to lose when the delicate "luxury of meditation" (like the blue smoke of the meerschaum which is so enjoyable to Dupin, the Narrator and the Prefect) vanishes into thin air.

The text is extremely inviting because it is so seductive. It lures the reader into endless and comfortable philosophising, or else it succeeds in exciting one to the pleasures of bringing one's own analytic talent into play, and the passion for "disentangling" thus aroused can easily become an addiction. The absence of "heavy weight," that is, the absence of a proper story with flesh and blood characters, seems to allow us to free ourselves of human responsibility in the course of a literary analysis.

It is in this sense that instead of "*mailing*" a "manifold message," Poe manages to *blackmail* the reader: if we want to steal our *trust* in the power and weight of literature back, if we cannot remain content with the comfortable talk without human responsibility, we ourselves have to point out what is to be put at stake. This can be done either by entering an endless theoretical debate on what "literature" is, or by writing the missing story.

In both cases, we are confronted with the problem of *delivery*. If the purloined "letter" (now in the sense of the "heavy weight" described above) cannot be delivered by the "ordinary mail" of literature, how can it still, in Lacan's words, "reach its destination?" Is it possible that someone, equipped with exceptional rhetorical abilities, can conjure it up through the brilliant delivery of

a speech? Or can someone's imagination conceive the seminal problem, and, after a pregnant silence, perform the successful delivery of a new-born story? Can we take Poe's text itself as a serve in an intellectual game of tennis, to be returned by a single, well-directed stroke? Or can we deliver ourselves from the problem, saying that the "heavy weight" we are so desperately looking for is simply nowhere to be found in Poe's text, and, like the helpless Prefect (who, by the way, is the single person in the story that might resemble a flesh-and-blood character) can we turn to an almighty master-detective who might show us that it has always already ("*tojour déjà*") been there, under our very nose? (And what price are we willing to pay for that – either by filling a cheque or by way of "cash on delivery?")

How could we find a "new key" of understanding? If the attempt at solving a poetic problem (the search for cathartic experience) with the help of logic proves to be a failure, could we not experiment with making the problem a logical one and trying to solve it with the help of a touch of poetry? Since the Minister owes his unusual abilities to being both a mathematician and a poet, it might be useful to invite mathematics into the process of analysis, keeping in mind, of course, Dupin's outburst against "mere" mathematicians: "Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation* – of form and quantity – is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example."

Since the *morals* of the characters in this story, to say the least, can be questioned, it might be better to turn to their "*relations*." Let us take the plot to be that of a mathematical problem, in which the *personae* are geometrical points, definable only through their relations to the others. Poe's usage of initials instead of names (the Prefect G., the Minister D., the Sender S.) especially encourages me to do that – some of the characters have already been referred to by a single *letter*. I will take six characters into account. Three from the narrated scenes: the King = K, the Queen = Q and the Minister = M; and three from the scenes of narration: the Prefect = P, Dupin = D and the Narrator = N. When a "relationship," by which I strictly mean 'personal acquaintance,' exists between two points, they will be connected with a line. Step by step, out of these lines, some kind of a figure will have to develop. I will also take into account the measure of *trust* between characters; trust will only be geometrically interesting when the purloined letter (which I, unlike Lacan, do not consider to be a character) is set into motion.

* * *

(1) Let me begin with the King (**K**) – not only out of due respect but also because he seems to have the least to do with the all the others. This point is to be taken arbitrarily on the geometrical plane of the story. He is acquainted with the two other points: the Queen (**Q**), who, in quite a conventional manner is subordinated to him (mostly by her fear of him), and the Minister (**M**) who, in turn, quite unconventionally seems to be in a co-ordinate relationship with him (since he can take liberties to such an extent in the royal boudoir). We do not learn whom the King trusts but, presumably, he trusts his Minister – and maybe he trusts the Queen as well, or at least this is what she hopes. The first figure is thus:

$$K \text{———} M$$
$$|$$
$$Q$$
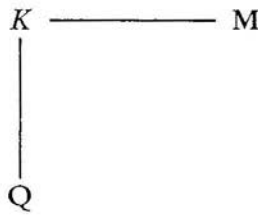
(2) The second point to be observed is the Queen's (**Q**), the single female character's. She is the only one for whom this game is a "matter of life and death" – but since the text does not reveal anything about her person, it is quite impossible to be moved by her intolerable predicament. She can be connected·to three other points: the King (**K**), the Minister (**M**) and the Prefect (**P**). Her marriage with the King is unstable: whatever went wrong between them gets manifested in the loss of the letter, which, unlike Desdemona's handkerchief, might truly become an "ocular proof" of her secret affairs. (The secret is not necessarily a love-affair – it might be a political issue or anything else, but it is certainly something that disconnects her from the King.) Consequently, she is afraid of her husband. Her connection with the Minister is even more problematic. By taking her letter, the Minister took her liberty. She is of course terribly frightened but – as Lacan observes – there might be a little exaggeration in her behaviour, unless she is emotionally more involved in her relationship with the Minister than the text allows us to know. The way she turns to the Prefect of the Police for help indicates that she is capable of complete trust, either in his personal discretion or in the efficiency of the institution. This trust creates a co-ordinate relationship between her and the Prefect:
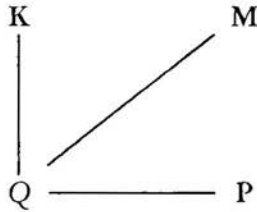
(3) The Minister (**M**) is the next point to be examined, the one completing the triangle in the royal boudoir. He is connected with four persons: the King (**K**), the Queen (**Q**), the Prefect (**P**) and Dupin (**D**). Not only is he in a co-ordinate relationship with the King but, in the possession of the letter, he must feel even superior (at least in *acumen*). The way he is connected with the Queen, as we have seen, is quite problematic, mostly because his motives are unknown. Does this "*monstrum horrendum*," this "unprincipled man of genius" (as Dupin calls him) play this game out of sheer boredom? Or can we suspect something more between him and the Queen? If I were to write the missing story, maybe he would be the Sender of the letter himself, and the Queen's agony would be due to the fact that she could not finish reading the letter – perhaps breaking their relationship off – when it was purloined.[14]

But this takes us far too far from geometry. The Minister's relation to the Prefect is quite clear: he can see through the Prefect's intentions and feels absolutely safe, in full awareness of his intellectual superiority. He is completely incapable of trust. But how does he feel about Dupin? Most probably, he takes the detective to be a worthy adversary, remembering the Vienna-incident between them in the past. But how is it possible that he does not suspect the return of the "evil turn" when Dupin enters his premises wearing "green spectacles?" Or is he so unprincipled that Dupin's machinations fit well into his plans because he got tired of his own game and wants to get rid of the wretched letter anyway? Be it so or not, it is beyond doubt that they are in a co-ordinate relationship. The third figure is thus:



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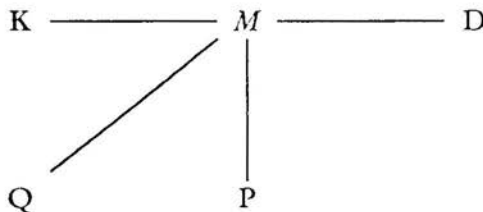
14 This idea was suggested by Géza Kállay.

(4) Let me continue with the Prefect (**P**), whose point constructs the connection between the narrated and the narrating personae. He, like the Minister is related to four other points, the Queen (**Q**) the Minister (**M**), Dupin (**D**), and the Narrator (**N**). He is perfectly loyal to the Queen, and rescuing her is his "knightly quest" (motivated, of course, just as much by his sympathy as by the prospect of the large financial reward). A down-to-earth, disciplined policeman, who does his best to fulfil his task. Although he is the typical "butt of jokes" in the intricately woven texture of this story, he is the only one capable of naive and hearty laughter: "Ha! ha! ha! – ha! ha! ha! – ho! ho! ho! [...] oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!" And he is right in a way: the natural and ordinary attitude to the world represented by him might be killed by the hyper-reflective way of thinking in the detective's analytical exercises. He is trustful, *oddly* enough, even of his opponent, the Minister, searching his house inch by inch, believing that by the perfection of his own method, he might find the letter. The "absolute legion of oddities" he lives among might as well be called miracles of various nature, simply because he is incapable of logically accepting anything outside his private, well-ordered universe. He is subordinated to the Minister and Dupin, due to his intellectual inferiority, and he is in a co-ordinate relationship with the Queen who trusts him, as well as with the Narrator, whom he tacitly trusts.
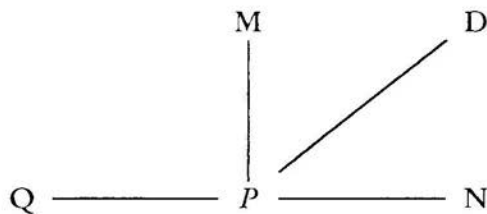


(5) Dupin's point (**D**) might be called the Archimedean "fulcrum" of this story (if such a term is compatible with the present experiment in Euclidean geometry), since Poe himself calls attention to the fact that "The reader is made to confound the ingenuity of the supposititious Dupin with that of the writer of the story."[15] Many critics observe that he is not only the Minister's "double" (having the same "lynx eye" and repeating the same trick) but the author's as well – on top of all that, as the Narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" says, he himself is a "Bi-Part Soul" with a double self: "the creative and the resolvent." If the word

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15 Cf. Mabbot, p. 521.

"resolvent" is meant in the sense of 'being able to separate, or divide,' then Dupin's two selves seem to repeat precisely the two inimitable divine activities expressed in the Book of Genesis (in King James' version) through the words "make/create" and "divide." How to place such a "point" on our two-dimensional geometrical plane? Following the Biblical line of thought: the human attempt at becoming God is the essence of sin. In what sense can Dupin's analytical exercises be considered to be sinful? Is there a sign of anything like that in the text? His diction, especially at the end of the story when his detached, impassive tone changes into a passionate and proud voice of self-complacency reminds us of the diction of some of Poe's criminal-narrators ("The Imp of the Perverse," "The Black Cat," or "The Tell-Tale Heart") all of whom give themselves away by the irrepressible pride over their ingenuity and security. As Stanley Cavell points out: "'I am safe' is true as long as it is not said: saying refutes it."[16] And what he says about "skepticism" is of essential importance, since it may refer to the "perverse" game of analytical purloining as well:

> What I am calling Poe's perverse account of skepticism does, I think, capture an essential perverseness in skepticism, at once granting an insight into skepticism and enacting a parody of it. The insight is that skepticism, the thing I mean by skepticism, is, or becomes necessarily paradoxical, the apparent denial of what is for all the world undeniable. I take skepticism not as the moral of a cautious science labouring to bring light into a superstitious, fanatical world, but as the recoil of a demonic reason, irrationally thinking to dominate the earth. I take it to begin as a wish not to reject the world but rather to establish it. The parody is to deny this, to conceal the longing for assurance under an allegedly more original wish for self-vexation. This concealment is revealed at the end of the confessional stories... [17]

It is in this sense that to some extent we can take "The Purloined Letter" to be "confessional." Dupin's "signature" to the Minister in the form of a quotation from Crebillon's *Atrée et Thyeste* (meaning something like "eat your own children," i.e. "you have fallen into your own trap" – or, as Lacan puts it in his interpretation: "Eat your Dasein!") is a sign of extraordinary sensitivity to the dangers of the analytical process. This final conceit, together with the later

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16 Stanley Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even," *In: Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 141.
17 Cavell, p. 138.

inserted motto about "too much cunning" might testify to Poe's awareness and acknowledgement of the whole problem of skepticism.

Not forgetting about Dupin's "doubles," let us now turn back to geometry and single out a point for him on the chart – since, strictly speaking, he is a singular character with the primary function of the Detective in the story. He, like the Queen, can be connected with three persons (all of whom are his shadows in a way): the Minister (**M**), the Prefect (**P**) and the Narrator (**N**). Simply on the basis of intellectual superiority, the fifth figure looks like this:
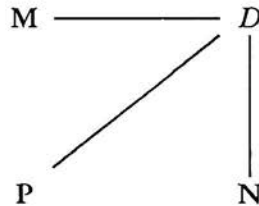


(6) The sixth and last character and point to be taken into account is the Narrator. He, like the King, is an "outsider" – never touching the letter. (But there is a considerable difference between the two of them: whereas the King is involved in the matter without knowing about it, the Narrator knows about everything without being involved.) He, again like the King, has only two "connections": Dupin (**D**) and the Prefect (**P**). With them, he completes the triangle of the narrating personae. In the text, the most personal pronoun, "I," seems to be the least personal. He is so much of a shadow of Dupin that he seems to lack individual characteristics – and this is what makes him dubious. His relations are to be constructed thus:



\* \* \*
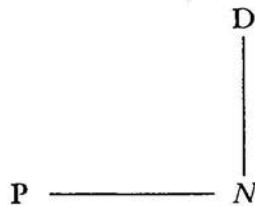
In the next two steps of the geometrical construction, I would first like to combine all the lines drawn so far, and then to suggest possible connections which are not strictly on the basis of personal acquaintance.

(7) What do we get if we put all the lines together in a figure?
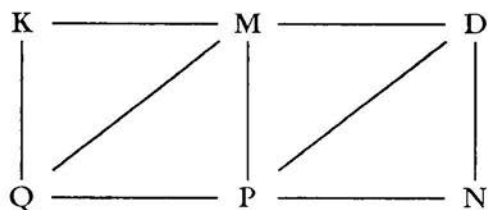


Although the lines are "doubled" because of the reciprocal relationships, the shape of a rectangle comes out, divided into four triangles, each of which represents one phase of the story. The first game of purloining involves **KQM**, the second (unsuccessful) attempt takes part between **QMP**, the third and crucial one happens between **PMD**, and the narrating scene – itself a game of purloining – is reflected in **PDN**. When the letter is set into motion, it takes its route clockwise along the lines of the **QMDP** parallelogram, and its direction is exactly in contrast with the directions of trust (up to the point we can follow it in the text, i.e. P – since the fact that the Prefect takes it back to the Queen is presumable but never narrated). Points that share one line must share some features as well (e.g. **QPN** are intellectually or psychologically subordinated to **KMD**; **QP** are capable of complete trust as opposed to **MD**; **KQ**'s non-ideal marriage stands opposed to **DN**'s ideal friendship, etc.)

(8) And what about other possible connections? The **KP** line could be drawn on the basis of their suspected or real naïveté, **MN** can be brought together by the fact that they both are doubles of Dupin. But the diagonals of this rectangle are important as well: **KN** are both outsiders (as described above); whereas **DQ** can be connected on the basis of their desire to take revenge on **M**.
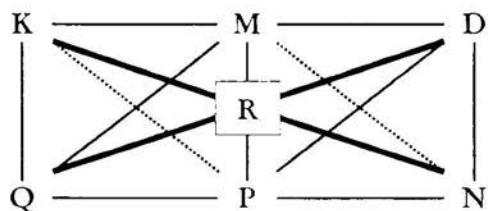
The figure we have thus received strangely reflects the shape of a folded and re-folded envelope (maybe somewhat "more *chafed* than [...] necessary"). It could be sealed in the intersection of the diagonals and the **MP**-line: let me name this point **R** for Reader. What do we expect to find in this final envelope? A cheque of fifty thousand francs? A message letting us know that by such experiments we are, in a sense, "eating up our own children?" Or a letter of great importance, which indeed has reached its destination and hopefully will never be purloined? But what if the envelope is empty? Even in that case, we might see it as an envelope exposed to our mercy, and the responsibility of filling it or throwing it away (facing it or avoiding it in the Cavellian sense) is *ours*.

*Márta Kőrösi*

# "Disembodied Spirits" Revisiting Manderley

## The Construction of Female Subjectivity in du Maurier's *Rebecca*

### *I INTRODUCTION*

Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* (1938) presents an intricate network of interpretative discourses that centre around the figure of Rebecca. Although Rebecca does not play an active role in the novel's plot, her function as a multi-layered textual construction is immense. There are several layers of interpretation to construe Rebecca as a system of reference: Rebecca as a referential construction tδ interpret gender; Rebecca as a semiotic construction created by means of objects; Rebecca as the narrator's double; Rebecca as body; and Rebecca as writing and narrative. These layers do not appear separately in the text, as they all depend on one another in their methods and purpose of constructing Rebecca.

Du Maurier[1] uses the genre of the Gothic romance to arrange these layers into a unified text, in which she poses questions about the institution of marriage, the development of female subjectivity, sexuality, and homoerotic desire. As Janet Harbord points it out, both psychoanalysis and romance narratives draw upon

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1 Daphne du Maurier (1907–1989) was born in London into an artistic family. Her novels and short stories, which are mostly set in Cornwall, were widely read in her time, especially *Rebecca*, which was made into a film with the same title by Alfred Hitchcock in 1940. One of Hitchcock's other great movies, *The Birds* (1963) was also adapted from a du Maurier text. Du Maurier is becoming more and more popular within the field of feminist literary scholarship, as a result of *Rebecca's* various parallels with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

the concept of development in which "to move in time is to progress from a state of flux to a state of stability,"[2] where the "present is established as 'real' only in relation to a past that has been othered, reworked and reconfigured to give eminence to the present of identity."[3] Thus, in romance narratives, similarly to psychoanalysis, the past always serves as something to discard, to forget in order to live happily in the present, preferably in some institutionalised form, most importantly, marriage.

The process of forgetting and discarding, however, is never fully complete. As Harbord writes, "[t]he past returns to haunt, to ghost the present and disturb the familiarity of 'home.'"[4] This parallel makes it possible to interpret the textual construction of Rebecca in psychoanalytical terms, since du Maurier chooses repetition as the main narrative tool to create Rebecca. The novel can be read as a text of continuous repetition and repression, returning and discarding, which provides a method to express female subjectivity and desire.

The most important repetition in the novel is the "wife-doubling," since after Rebecca dies, the narrator comes to fill her position as Mrs. de Winter, when she becomes the second wife of Maxim de Winter, the owner of the Manderley estate. Besides Rebecca, the narrator, and Maxim, the fourth major character of the novel is Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper of Manderley.

Maxim de Winter and Mrs. Danvers represent opposing forces fighting for the right to construct and interpret Rebecca. In a metaphor, this process could be described as a game of tennis in which Rebecca functions as the ball. As Rebecca is bouncing from one racket to another, her meaning and significance changes, as if on a spectrum between two binaries. The game played by Max and Mrs. Danvers can be seen as the process of constructing Rebecca in the narrative, since it is these two characters who, in the larger part of the narrative, let the reader know what Rebecca was like, or rather, what their concept of Rebecca is like. Since the two "players" stand on the two halves of the tennis court, separated by the net, their images of Rebecca appear strikingly different. However, Rebecca finally refuses to take the trajectory allocated for her by either Max or Mrs. Danvers and decides to bounce off court, denouncing all interpretation along binary structures.

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2 Janet Harbord, "Between Identification and Desire: Rereading *Rebecca*," *Feminist Review* 53 (1996) 95–107, p. 95.

3 Harbord, p. 95.

4 Harbord, p. 95.

The significance of this tennis game lies not so much in Max's or Mrs. Danvers's "enjoyment" but in the construction of the narrator as subject. As she always defines herself in relation to the various concepts of "Rebecca," her identification with, or opposition to, "Rebecca" is also shifting, at times moving in the same direction with the tennis ball and other times getting away from it. The tennis game of the narrative suggests that there is no stable subject position either for the narrator or for Rebecca; it keeps moving, and if it seems to get stabilised, it is always only on the surface. The instability of subject positions creates tension between the surface layer and the subtext of the novel, that is, between the story of the narrator's development into a heterosexual woman (where her status is seemingly stabilised by the sanctity of marriage) and her (unconscious) desire to denounce such an ultimate definition. The tension between the surface text and the subtext characterises the genre of romance, as it is "open to transgressive readings outside/against the strictly normative heterosexual matrix, even if the narrative works ultimately (and at times unconvincingly) to contain and close these possibilities."[5] In *Rebecca*, in spite of the fact that it is traditionally regarded as belonging to the group of romance narratives, we can find nothing that would convincingly re-establish the "normative heterosexual matrix" in the end. The text, as Harbord points it out, is informed by homoerotic desire and the neglect, or even subversion, of the Oedipal taboo, which says that "you cannot be what you desire; you cannot desire what you wish to be."[6] The novel, on the one hand, presents the norm (either in terms of heterosexuality or sanity), on the other hand, works for the disruption of the binary of "subject/object," "feminine/masculine," and "angel/witch" and questions the validity of patrilineage and the heterosexual power structure.

## II REBECCA AS THE UNCANNY OTHER TO INTERPRET GENDER

In his seminal study of "The 'Uncanny,'" Sigmund Freud describes this psychic phenomenon as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."[7] From the point of view of Gothic romance fiction, the uncanny gains enormous significance, as it relates to what Freud calls

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5 Harbord, p. 97.
6 Harbord, p. 104.
7 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 123–124.

"repetition-compulsion" in another essay entitled "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." The uncanny frightens us mainly because it is familiar but returns in an unexpected way, thus, it becomes striking.[8] When meeting with the uncanny, "the person seems to be experiencing something passively, without exerting any influence of his own, and yet always meets with the same fate over and over again."[9] In du Maurier's novel, Rebecca becomes the always-returning presence, whose meaning and significance shift according to the level on which she is interpreted.

The endless returns of the late Mrs. de Winter becomes textually interesting because her haunting course is not "initiated" by her (thus, there is no supernatural element in the novel) but by Max, Mrs. Danvers, and, after a while, the narrator herself. All the three characters conjure up Rebecca for some peculiar reason by means of traces she has left behind. Initially, what makes Rebecca's return possible is her going away, that is, her death. The dreadful secret Max hides is that he killed Rebecca and, having hidden her body in her boat, he sank her. The murder is a conscious effort on Max's part to silence, discard, and dissolve Rebecca, since she has become too "disobedient" as a living woman, with all her eccentricity, "inadequate" behaviour, and sexual drives. Max hopes that by killing Rebecca he can gain absolute control over her, as he is able to circumscribe Rebecca as a woman as well as a textual construction. If Rebecca is dead, Max can formulate her image in the popular imagination in the way he wishes, that is, he can keep Rebecca's character within the confines of the Manderley estate, where she is known to have fulfilled the role of the competent and faithful wife and social hostess.

Maxim's ambivalent love-hate attitude towards his wife becomes manifest not only in their shopwindow-marriage and his murdering her, but, most importantly, in his unconscious and unwilling desire to bring Rebecca back. He kills Rebecca, thus he relegates her into the realm of the past; however, he hides her body in a way that she can always return, that is, he sinks the boat not far away from the shore so that he himself may expect someone will sooner or later find it with the body lying at its bottom, as its name, *Je Reviens*, suggests. He identifies the body twice, almost deliberately duplicating his traumatic experience. Al-

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8 Freud, "The Uncanny,'" p. 149.
9 Freud, "The Uncanny,'" p. 150.

though he hates to admit that Manderley is "all Rebecca,"[10] he makes no changes whatsoever to restore the original, "pre-Rebeccan" state of things, so every time he returns to Manderley he has to face the traces Rebecca has left behind. Thus, Max himself seems to act out the repetition-compulsion almost literally: he feels obliged, as Freud describes the process, "to *repeat* as a current experience what is repressed, instead of [ ... ] *recollecting* it as a fragment of the past."[11] By acting out the repetition-compulsion, Max unconsciously undermines his own effort to hermetically and hermeneutically close the past by murdering and burying Rebecca. Even the burial itself is a hoax: the corpse that lies in the family crypt is not Rebecca's, as the real body is floating in the boat sunk by Max, ready to surface at any time.

Max's unconscious urge to bring Rebecca back endangers not only his control over her, but his masculine identity as well. As Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik suggest, Maxim needs woman in order to construct his masculinity in opposition to the Other.[12] Maxim's efforts to create the Other, however, continuously fail, as for him woman has only "two faces: that of demon and that of angel."[13] It entails that in the course of constructing the Other, Max has to rely on binaries like angel/devil, subject/object, and masculine/feminine, and when Rebecca puts the whole meaning of these binaries in danger by refusing to conform to them, Max kills her, hoping that as soon as Rebecca is dead, the traditional binary structures can be restored, and his masculine identity secured with another marriage.

Rebecca's impact as a construction, however, proves to be stronger than her significance as a living wife and hostess, exactly because of Max's repetition-compulsion. His return to Manderley with his new wife amplifies Rebecca's un-canny presence: the second Mrs. de Winter starts to assimilate certain characteristics of Rebecca's into her own subjectivity, even in spite of her own conscious effort to remain distinguishable from Rebecca. It is as if the very aspects of Rebecca that Max tries to suppress by murdering her were resurrecting in the new Mrs. de Winter, who has been chosen by Max directly because she is so much the opposite of what

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10 All parenthesised references are to this edition: Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Pan Books, 1976), p. 287.

11 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), p. 149.

12 Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), p. 105.

13 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 105.

Rebecca represents. This blending of the narrator's and Rebecca's character, the mixing of the supposedly submissive "blondie" with the unruly "wicked woman" not only subverts the binaries of angel/witch and feminine/masculine, but, by Rebecca's continuous return as an uncanny presence for Max through his compulsive repetition, the boundary between life and death is also blurred. Moreover, as the narrator ceases to be distinct from Rebecca, she can no more fulfil her role as the necessary Other for Maxim to construct his own masculine identity.

### III REBECCA AS MRS. DANVERS'S SEMIOTIC CONSTRUCTION

Mrs. Danvers's fetishistic preoccupation with Rebecca largely contributes to Rebecca's powerful presence at Manderley. The first Mrs. de Winter's death becomes not only Maxim's but Mrs. Danvers's trauma, too. However, while Maxim brings about his own trauma, Mrs. Danvers believes that it was the sea that took Rebecca away, since no man would have been strong enough to conquer her. She also thinks that Max loved Rebecca, and his troubled state of mind derives from love: "He was jealous while she lived, and now he's jealous when she's dead" (256). Although a constructor herself, Mrs. Danvers is unable to see that the couple's marriage is a show, a construction itself. She creates the image of Rebecca as a natural goddess, whom she serves as priestess in the temple of Manderley, keeping Rebecca's fire alive (and, significantly, setting the temple on fire as if taking revenge on Rebecca for her turning out to be a woman, and mortal at that). Mrs. Danvers discards the fact that Manderley is not Rebecca's temple but serves as a place of confinement, securing the patrilineage of the de Winter family, thus representing the patriarchal system in which both Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are trapped.

Mrs. Danvers successfully constructs the ghost of Rebecca by means of keeping her physical sphere of existence untouched, and by always recalling her from her memory. Rebecca's body is deprived of its clothes in her death (each time the body is "found," it is naked), while the clothes and other personal objects start to function as semiotic substitutes for Rebecca, as well as fetishistic articles to blur the line between life and death and make the absent lover present:

> Here is the nightdress inside the case. You've been touching it, haven't you? This was the nightdress she was wearing for the last time, before she died. Would you like to touch it again? [...] Feel it, hold it [...], how soft and light it is, isn't it? I haven't washed it since she wore it for the last time. (176)

The first Mrs. de Winter's body, a terrifyingly "floating" signifier of another Rebecca, by no means fits Mrs. Danvers's neatly constructed semiotic pattern. While she can keep the clothes and articles in order forever within the ancient walls of Manderley, thus, she can exercise control over the signifiers she uses to preserve Rebecca's image, the decomposing body refuses all identification and confinement. Most significantly, there are two bodies instead of one, suggesting that the body as a signifier is interchangeable, and Rebecca as a construction is constantly moving and changing. The body is a disturbing element both in Mrs. Danvers's and Maxim's construction: it disrupts their carefully built-up image of Rebecca, and its reappearance disturbs the surface, telling too much about "what lies beneath." While Maxim consciously tries to keep his construction of Rebecca as the wife and hostess at one end of the spectrum, fixing her meaning as woman, Mrs. Danvers wants to remake Rebecca by turning the past into present. Thus, both of them neglect Rebecca's allegorical instability, that her meaning cannot be tied down, preserved in her tomb or clothes but keeps reformulating and is always in flux.

Freud's definition of the instinct as a "*tendency innate in living organic matter impelling it towards the reinstatement of an earlier condition,* one which it had to abandon under the influence of external disturbing forces"[14] can be applied to construe the motivation behind either Max's or Mrs. Danvers's struggle to keep the image and meaning of Rebecca intact. Both of them want to preserve "an earlier condition," in which Rebecca plays either the socially acceptable and acknowledged role of the housewife, or the powerful role of an unconquerable witch-goddess. From both Maxim's and Mrs. Danvers's point of view, the *other* aspect of Rebecca functions as a "disturbing force" that intrudes and disrupts their construction. Maxim kills Rebecca because she endangers the image of the respectable hostess by her eccentric, "devilish" behaviour, while Mrs. Danvers's construction is shattered when she learns that Max killed Rebecca; moreover, she was severely ill, thus, in a way, conquered by her own female body – the very body to which Mrs. Danvers assigns an almost supernatural power. Both Max and Mrs. Danvers construct Rebecca in order to control her by keeping her familiar. However, when Rebecca as a construction reveals aspects of the uncanny, when she becomes *unheimlich,* "unhomely," and starts to function in a way that has not been intended by either Max or Mrs. Danvers, both husband and housekeeper lose the tennis players' power over their "ball," and Rebecca, choosing her own

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14 Sigmund Freud, "Pleasure Principle," p. 158.

trajectory of interpretation, bounces off court. This is the point where the narrator starts to understand the implications of Rebecca as her double and incorporate Rebecca's subversive aspects in the course of the development of her own female subjectivity.

### IV DUPLICATING IMAGES, FLOATING BODIES AND IDENTITIES: REBECCA AS THE NARRATOR'S DOUBLE

In connection with instincts, Freud also remarks that if "all organic instincts are conservative, historically acquired, and are directed towards regression, towards reinstatement of something earlier, we are obliged to place all the results of organic development to the credit of external, disturbing and distracting influences."[15] Adapting this idea of development to female subjectivity, Rebecca can be seen as an "external, disturbing, and distracting" influence that triggers off the development of the narrator's subjectivity.

Horner and Zlosnik identify Rebecca as the narrator's "transgressive double," who is "a manifestation of an anxiety which drew [du Maurier] continually back to the Gothic mode of writing."[16] They argue that du Maurier uses "the grotesque and the sinister to explore shifting anxieties concerning the nature of identity."[17] In *Rebecca* the author creates the sinister and grotesque by means of repetition, return, and doubling or multiplication, which arouses anxiety in the narrator, concerning her identity as the second Mrs. de Winter, and implies, as well, that it is not only Rebecca who is the narrator's double, but the second Mrs. de Winter also functions as the double of the first one.

From the very beginning of her married life, the emphatically anonymous narrator, who lacks any name of her own, has to suffer others' constantly comparing her with Rebecca, thus, her identification as Mrs. de Winter is motivated by different images of Rebecca right from the start. Mrs. Danvers plays the key role in this process, as for her the new wife is also a disturbing element that intrudes into her stable construction of Rebecca as Mrs. de Winter. In this respect, Mrs. Danvers works against her own interest, since by continuously referring to Rebecca and even making the narrator pose like Rebecca at the fancy

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15 Freud, "Pleasure Principle," p. 159.
16 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 6.
17 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 21.

dress ball, she motivates the narrator to always feel Rebecca's presence: "sometimes I felt Rebecca was as real to me as she was to Mrs. Danvers" (144). Eventually, the narrator starts to identify herself with Rebecca: "in that brief moment, sixty seconds in time perhaps, I had so identified myself with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist" (209).

Therefore, by keeping the narrator in constant awareness of Rebecca's presence, Mrs. Danvers achieves an effect different from what she originally intends: while she would like the narrator to disappear from Manderley by all means, even by committing suicide, she makes her start to assimilate certain aspects of Rebecca. This identification process signifies the development of female subjectivity in the narrator: "I had entered into a new phase of my life and nothing would be quite the same again. The girl who had dressed for the fancy dress ball the night before had been left behind [...] This self who sat on the window-seat was new, was different" (272).

The narrator's development, however, is as ambivalent as Rebecca's image. Through the course of the novel, she constantly struggles against Rebecca's influence but at the same time cannot escape it. The narrator finds it extremely hard to completely identify herself as Mrs. de Winter. For example, when the ship runs ashore at Manderley, and she meets some tourists, she fails to acknowledge she is Mrs. de Winter: "I wished I could lose my own identity and join them" (268). Not much later, returning to the house, she realises, "perhaps for the first time, with a funny feeling of bewilderment and pride," that Manderley is her home, she belongs there, and the estate belongs to her (271). Thus, she is constantly moving in and out of being defined by her marriage and by belonging to the Manderley establishment.

The formation of the narrator's subjectivity is thus a process of constant denouncing and returning to what is repressed and denied. The new wife wants to suppress Rebecca's image; meanwhile, she keeps visiting her room and dreaming about her. She craves for the knowledge Rebecca represents: the knowledge of female sexuality and desire. As Horner and Zlosnik write, the narrator's sexual curiosity is monitored by Maxim, who "invokes the father/daughter romance as a cultural endorsement of his over-protectiveness."[18] Maxim wants to prevent the narrator from entering Rebecca's sphere: he identifies Rebecca with a text contained in forbidden books that are "better kept under lock and key" (211), lest they should expose "a certain type of knowledge" (211) the narrator had better

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18 Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, p. 103.

not have. Maxim and Mrs. Danvers believe themselves to be keepers of the key to Rebecca's knowledge, and they both want to use their power to hold the narrator under surveillance and in threat. Paradoxically, both Mrs. Danvers and Maxim contribute to the narrator's gaining knowledge, however dreadful it may be. While Mrs. Danvers gradually lets the narrator know about Rebecca's sexuality, Maxim tells the secret about Rebecca's character and death when her body is found in the boat.

The moment of finding Rebecca's body becomes crucial in the narrator's development, as if the body was supposed to expose the possible truth about femininity. Rebecca's body serves as a metaphor for female subjectivity in that it is similarly floating, unstable, and constantly changing meaning. When the body is found, the narrator gains power and is not afraid of Mrs. Danvers or Maxim any more. Her husband becomes dependent on her, and this is what makes her "bold at last" (13).

The surfacing of Rebecca's body is foreshadowed by certain events in the novel that point to the same direction: towards the narrator's gaining knowledge and power. Maxim notices the first sign of the uncanny in the expression on his new wife's face right before the fancy dress ball: "I don't want you to look like you did just now. You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge" (210). At the fancy dress ball the narrator unwillingly brings Rebecca back by dressing up as Caroline de Winter, one of Maxim's great-grandmothers, whose portrait in the Manderley estate once inspired Rebecca to dress up as Caroline de Winter at an earlier fancy dress ball. The narrator's posing as Rebecca posing as Caroline de Winter visually connects the three women, or rather, identifies them as one, which suggests a kind of alternative ancestral line within the confines of Manderley: that of women. It strengthens Rebecca's allegorical significance, which replays the fate of long-forgotten female ancestors, who were probably silenced and subdued just in the same way as Max tries to silence and subdue Rebecca and the narrator.

Multiplying the image of Caroline de Winter makes the meaning of the portrait unstable:[19] the great-grandmother's feminine position, together with that of Rebecca and the narrator, opens up to retrospective interpretation. The emphatic "dressing-up," which connects the three characters, suggests that women have been performing a masquerade of gender for centuries, which performance, as Horner and Zlosnik write, has long been functioning, within the limits of

19 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 119.

patriarchy, as a "disembodied sign without a referent [...] and as the sight of uncanny ambivalence."[20] Thus, Mrs. Danvers's endeavour to take revenge on both Maxim and the new wife eventually leads to the narrator's experiencing, possibly for the first time with such intensity, "the masquerade of femininity, the flaunting of the theatricality of gender identity."[21] This experience largely contributes to the narrator's knowledge of Rebecca, and by means of this knowledge she finds herself exposed to the fact that gender is constructed of signifiers without a stable referent, which makes the binary of masculine/feminine an artificial construction.

## V FEMALE WRITING, DESIRE, AND THE PROCESS OF SUBJECTIVITY-FORMATION

Similarly to the clothes Mrs. Danvers uses to construct Rebecca's image, the texts Rebecca leaves behind also play a significant role in keeping her alive. Rebecca's written traces interweave the whole novel from the beginning: the narrator encounters the sign of the "curious slanting hand" (37) as early as in Monte Carlo, where she first meets Maxim. Rebecca's name stands out "black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters" (37). Thus, as Horner and Zlosnik say, "Rebecca's uncanny presence in the novel is due not just to other characters' memories of her but to an indelibility which continually surfaces through her signature [...] and her handwriting."[22] Rebecca's writing exercises power over the narrator, so much so that she even burns the page on which she first sees Rebecca's name written down, foreshadowing Mrs. Danvers's setting the Manderley estate on fire towards the end of the novel. This is the narrator's first attempt to suppress Rebecca in herself, quite unsuccessfully, since Rebecca's writing keeps coming back at Manderley. The writing serves as another means of comparison (and, eventually, identification) between the old and the new Mrs. de Winter. After the narrator sees how powerful Rebecca's handwriting looks, she comments on her writing as a sign of her inferiority and immaturity: "I noticed for the first time how cramped and unformed was my own hand-writing; without individuality, without style, uneducated even, the writing of an indifferent pupil taught in a second-rate school" (93).

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20 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 119.
21 Harbord, p. 101.
22 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 109.

Rebecca, however, also teaches the narrator how to write, both literally and figuratively. Besides serving as a powerful visual trace to conjure up Rebecca, her writing also signifies the power over text and narration. Writing is traditionally associated with masculinity, and the power of the written word has been encoded in western culture for centuries. As Horner and Zlosnik point it out, Rebecca's writing symbolises the power the narrator has to absorb in order to become powerful,[23] as well as to develop a level of subjectivity that enables her to write the text of *Rebecca*, which, as Horner and Zlosnik suggest, is another act of repetition, now in a complete narrative framework.[24] Thus, Rebecca keeps coming back in several forms: as a patriarchal construction made by Maxim, as a semiotic construction created by Mrs. Danvers, as a body, as writing, and as *Rebecca* the narrative.

Horner and Zlosnik, without going into details, associate the curious letter R in Rebecca's name with "a runic power which derives from its powerful visual impact and its refusal to be destroyed."[25] Taking a closer look at what a rune means may lead to transgressive territories, as a rune traditionally denotes a "character or mark having mysterious or magical powers attributed to it,"[26] as well as "an incantation or charm denoted by magical signs."[27] Although the mysterious or magical power attributed to Rebecca's writing perfectly fits the Gothic framework of the novel, the significance of this aspect exceeds the stylistic or generic shadings of the text, and extends the interpretation of Rebecca's character. It is not only her powerful writing, however, that associates Rebecca with mystery. Horner and Zlosnik point out that "Rebecca" in Hebrew means "knotted cord," which "indicates that – just as a knotted cord should hold firm – so should a woman with the name 'Rebecca' be a firm and faithful wife."[28] The image of the knotted cord also refers to the rope that may bring Maxim's death foreshadowed in the narrator's final dream.[29]

Although these interpretations sound logical and valid, they neglect the significance of the knotted cord and the runic character of Rebecca's writing as

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23 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 110.
24 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 110.
25 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 110.
26 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971), Vol. II, p. 2606.
27 *OED*, Vol. II, p. 2606.
28 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 115.
29 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 115.

obvious references to Rebecca as a *riddle* Maxim wants to solve. In this respect, the reading of the "knotted cord" as a metaphor for the faithfulness expected from Rebecca becomes highly ironic. Maxim's continuous attempts at making sense of Rebecca's character and femininity prove to be abortive to an extent that his own masculine integrity falls in danger. Thus, he has to kill Rebecca, with which he hopes to provide one possible solution to the riddle. Rebecca's mystery, however, seems to multiply with her death. Maxim's next attempt to control Rebecca is when he gets married to the narrator, in order to counterbalance the mystery of the dark female with a blond, middle-class, and seemingly comprehensible girl. But as soon as the narrator finds herself under the roof of Manderley and under the spell of Rebecca, she also becomes engaged in the riddle.

The implications of the mystery reach much further than Maxim or even the second Mrs. de Winter would expect, because Rebecca's riddle poses disturbing questions about class- and gender-based identification, and female subjectivity, sexuality, and desire. According to Harbord, Rebecca is characterised by "fluidity, the ability to shift between subject positions and across social and cultural spaces."[30] For the narrator knowing Rebecca and having her as a double is fascinating and dreadful at the same time, since "the textual 'other,' as well as being an object of desire, can become a terrifying force who may well invade and destroy the 'self.'"[31] The ambivalence of du Maurier's Gothic romance lies in the fact that on the surface the binaries are acknowledged and fulfilled, and the horrifying aspects of subversion and transgression are suppressed, but the subtext gives away the artificiality of these binary structures, which are always motivated by power-relations.

In *Rebecca*, the narrator also tries to repress her desire to know Rebecca and everything that she entails. However, she expresses her doubt about the successful repression of Rebecca's "threat" as early as on the fifth page of the novel: "We all of us have our particular devil who rides us and torments us, and we must give battle in the end. We have conquered ours, or so we believe" (9). As a contrast to this "hopeful" statement, the whole novel exposes the constant repetition of surfacing and repression. This psychic process is also signified by the dream-frame of the novel: it begins with a dream about returning to Manderley, and ends with a dream about Rebecca.

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30 Harbord, p. 102.
31 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 26.

The final dream has a crucial function in the narrative, as it plays out the blurring of boundaries between self and other: the narrator sees herself in the mirror as Rebecca *writing*, while Maxim tries to strangle himself with the Rebecca-narrator's Rapunzel-rope. This dream makes the narrator's sentence "I too had killed Rebecca" (297) highly ambivalent: according to the surface layer of the romance, whatever Rebecca represents is killed, closed off; however, in the light of the last dream, the narrator's murdering Rebecca can be interpreted as her internalising whatever subversive and transgressive aspects she associates with Rebecca's character. The reader can follow the development of the narrator's subjectivity from ignorance to knowledge, from naiveté to female desire, and from submissiveness to power and confidence. Therefore, the narrator's belief to have conquered her "devil" sounds unconvincing, since "in assimilating aspects of Rebecca, the narrator implicitly rejects the social categorizations which separate the 'bad' from the 'good' woman,"[32] as well as embraces "the multiple possibilities inherent in female sexual identity."[33] In this light, the sentence "I too had killed Rebecca" could be rewritten as "We two had killed Maxim," together with the binaries he uses to establish and maintain a stable subject-position for himself.

The "multiple possibilities" of female sexual identity are strongly connected to female desire, which is motivated in the narrative by repetition and return. As Harbord writes, "despite the narrator's profession to the contrary, 'we' are continually going back, returning, because the appeal of what is prohibited is often stronger than the appeal of the 'present' limits of conformity."[34] Harbord also summarises Freud's setup of the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phases: whereas in the former there is "no distinction between being and having, identification and desire,"[35] the Oedipal taboo "forces a recognition of identity through separation."[36] While Maxim tries to construct female sexuality according to the Oedipal complex, on the basis of its separation from its male counterpart, the way Rebecca relates to men and sex (and the way the narrator relates to Rebecca) interrogates the validity of the Oedipal taboo in the definition of female sexuality and desire. The narrator's relationship with Rebecca is formulated by two forces: her identification with, and desire for, her. Both are motivated by "a semiotic

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32 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 126.
33 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 125.
34 Harbord, pp. 95–96.
35 Harbord, p. 104.
36 Harbord, p. 104.

network of signifiers detached from 'needs,' which are endlessly displaced and substituted."[37] Thus, what constructs Rebecca, and consequently, the narrator's identification with her, is what constructs her as an object of the narrator's desire, a beautiful imaginary signifier without a referent. While Maxim's idea of sexuality and desire is based on binaries, thus, separation plays a key role in its formulation, the narrator's identification with Rebecca, the suppressed object of her desire, denounces division and oppositional identification.

This pre-Oedipalisation seriously jeopardises Maxim's masculine identity, since he has to depend in his self-identification on the feminine "other," which, however, he himself creates. If Maxim's "other" cannot be constructed, moreover, the images of the angel (the new wife) and the witch (the old wife) start to overlap and finally collapse into one subjectivity, Max's masculinity as opposed to femininity makes no sense any more.

## VI CONCLUSION

As Judith Butler writes,

> [i]f prohibition creates the 'fundamental divide' of sexuality, and if this 'divide' is shown to be duplicitous precisely because of the artificiality of its division, then there must be a division that *resists* division, a psychic doubleness or inherent bisexuality that comes to undermine every effort of severing.[38]

Constructed as the textual double for the narrator and for du Maurier herself, Rebecca functions as the object of desire, and thus the novel becomes the story of the ego constantly departing from but always collapsing back into its love-object. If female subjectivity and identification are formulated in relation to a constantly shifting, floating, deconstructed and reconstructed love-object, the story of *Rebecca* "in effect explores subjectivity as a spectrum, rather than a position, thus presenting female identity as complex and multifaceted."[39]

Rebecca, a trope for female subjectivity, is the "absent center of desire, the imaginary lack."[40] She is absent in more than one sense: she is dead and is

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37 Harbord, p. 104.
38 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 55.
39 Horner and Zlosnik, p. 100.
40 Harbord, p. 100.

constructed only from other characters' memories and from traces (clothes, articles, scents, notes) she has left behind. Her body is missing almost throughout the whole novel, and when it is eventually found, it is already decomposed. She functions as a referential structure without a referent, a representative of contrasting discourses but herself the product of the same discourses. Hence her ambivalence: she is a ghost, "intangible yet desirable, present yet invisible,"[41] something to be repressed yet coming back, something to loathe and worship at the same time. Because of her ambivalence and multiple discursive functions, Rebecca eventually becomes what her name refers to: a knotted cord that holds untied, in the same way as the riddle of female subjectivity remains unsolved. The woman, once so familiar and domestic, starts to behave in the same way as the word *heimlich* itself: she "develops towards an ambivalence, until [she] finally coincides with [her] opposite, *unheimlich*,"[42] and keeps coming "home" to disturb the boring but "dear tranquillity" (8), even though her haunting place has long perished in fire.

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41 Harbord, p. 100.
42 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" p. 135.

*Andrea F. Szabó*

# Appropriating Left-Speech

## Women Writing during the American Depression

The 1930s have long lived in the literary and political imagination as an all-male affair. After all the decade was about work, labor, economic depression and, of course, politics; it was about mainstream conservative inertia and political dissent; it was about the future, and the roads leading into that future. What could women have contributed to that affair?

American literary scholarship in this part of the world has long neglected the study of this period for its highly politicized image – and the neglect becomes, historically and psychologically, all the more understandable when we turn our attention to the kind of literature that has become a kind of trademark for the period: Leftist literature. John Steinbeck readily comes to mind, and studies on his works abounded in this country at a time, but we seem to have forgotten about the fact that in the 1930s a large number of women writers from the middle-class joined the Left, and, most importantly, the Communist Party of the United States of America. After all the CPUSA welcomed all who worried about "the people" – that the "people" were first and foremost male seemed to be a surmountable problem since the CP did seem to care about women in its all-inclusive rhetoric.

Middle-class women joined the CPUSA as a conscious choice. After women were at long last granted the right to vote, the feminist movement, and women's movement in general, lost momentum – partly because of the early feminist strategies of argumentation, which emphasized women's innate ability to act as moral reformers in all spheres of life, and, largely, because the goal around which the movement organized had been reached. The vote, in this sense, proved to be a

fiasco – it erased the feminist movement without living up to its progenitors' expectations. Women, however, continued their daily struggle in the harsh climate of the decade and some of their self-appointed spokespersons found the CPUSA the only political party that could adequately represent their interests.

Meridel Le Sueur was one of them, alongside many other women writers who are still left in obscurity despite their commanding presence in the 1930s. The clearly masculine self-image of the CP itself helped erase the memory of these women working in its ranks. This image was best reflected in the fantasy of the proletarian writer, who was "a wild youth of about twenty-two, the son of working class parents, who himself works in the lumber camps, coal mines, steel mills, harvest fields and mountain camps of America,"[1] as advanced by Michael Gold, the image dictator of the Party. This was hardly an image that Le Sueur, Josephine Herbst, and Grace Lumpkin, among many others, could assume for they were neither male, nor masculine, and they came from the middle class. Nevertheless, they found the CP empowering. One reason was the fact that the CP could hardly be perceived as monolithic – it changed its policies, its emphases as the world changed. Although party politicians cast their eyes toward the Soviet Union and often slavishly adopted its policies, change, any change, could be seen as a sign for the possibility of future improvement for women within the CP first and then outside it.

The Communist Party's attitude to women in the 1930s falls into two periods, as Paula Rabinowitz notes. The first is characterized by Gold's view, where women provide support in the background, whereas in the late '30s, the so-called populist era, "the Party sought to fit itself into mainstream American culture, it adopted images of wholesome family life that conformed to stereotypes of Mom and apple pie."[2] Although in both periods women's place was circumscribed by traditional views, the image changed from non-entity to the provider of comfort. As the shift took place, the debate on women's sexual freedom and birth-control was silenced, just as the image of the working and fighting woman was suppressed, but their presence could not be erased causing an inherent tension in Party ideology and in its various manifestations. Le Sueur's

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1 Paula Rabinowitz, "Women and U.S. Literary Radicalism," in: *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930–1940*, eds. Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz (New York: Feminist, 1987), p. 3.
2 Rabinowitz, p. 11.

only novel, *The Girl*,[3] written in 1939 but published in 1978 because the Party condemned it as not serviceable enough, well exemplifies this tension.

The roots of the tension are manifold, but the Communist Party's ambivalent attitude to women and especially to the traditional tropes of their existence features most prominently. The ambivalence was the result of both historical and ideological battles fought within the ranks of the Leftist movement around the world. One impulse was to include everyone regardless of the color of their skin and of their sex as a counterexample to the exclusionary politics of the upper and middle classes. Nonetheless, the privileging of the patriarchal family structure was never an issue of debate within the CPUSA since working class males and females could by definition not be at cross-purposes: the working class male fought an ideological and political battle to establish the utopia of a classless society where the earnings of the head of the family were enough to provide for his whole family; married women were not seen as possible providers in an ideal society.

The first impulse resulted in soliciting more and more women to participate in the class struggle and promoting them; and the second in viewing them with suspicion if they intended to continue work for the CP once they were married or pregnant. This was exacerbated by the events in the Soviet Union, where in 1936 abortion was banned as a legislative method to raise the birth rate, which was, cleverly, disguised as an appeal to the merits of family life.[4] A year later the CPUSA followed the Soviet lead and appealed to motherhood by idealizing it – in sharp contrast to what Le Sueur had written in her journals about a pregnant woman in the CP three years before: "Here she was having a baby. She was not organizing anything to them. I suppose she is kind of out of it. I felt they had kind of dropped her until she was through with this."[5] Some stated that the party even ordered women to have abortion if it interfered with their political interest.[6]

The ranks of the CP were further torn by an ideological and practical contradiction. The Left insisted on giving voice to the people, to let their stories be heard, but only those could hope to be let speak whose stories provided proof for the validity of the arguments about economic exploitation. In addition, it was

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3 Meridel Le Sueur, *The Girl* (Albuquerque: West End, 1990).
4 Constance Coiner, *Better Read: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur* (New York: OUP, 1995), p. 58.
5 Vol. 9, 1934–35; quoted in Coiner, p. 95.
6 Coiner, p. 78.

painful to see that the CP's efforts, thanks to the Works Progress Administration's Federal Arts Project, coincided with those of the bourgeois government in recording the present. The Nazi threat in Europe, however, proved to be ample reason not to oppose the government in every respect but rather join forces and create a Popular Front, where representation and the "people" were not divorced from each other. As Alessandro Portelli points out such a conflation of representation and the feeling of "the immediacy of the body" happened only twice in American history: in the Civil War, where the government came to be seen as the people and the second time in the Depression.[7]

Le Sueur's *The Girl* operates along the axis of these contradictions, widening the rifts between the ideological arguments and their realization. Also, Le Sueur felt the contradictions skin-close because she was pregnant with her second daughter at the time of writing the novel and she never intended to cease work for what she believed in. In addition, she gave voice to characters in the novel whose stories the CP did not find suitable for representation. Thus, in effect, as a result of her insistence on following the tenets of the CPUSA, she ultimately subverted the very ideology she wanted to promote.

The tension was further intensified by another debate among the radical women writers themselves. Although all argued against the appropriation of the female body for politics as well as against the conviction that women exist for the purpose of providing vehicles for the reproduction of the new, socially conscious man, the routes chosen by them were strikingly different. Le Sueur represented one group among them, while Lumpkin another. Both came from a middle class background and both turned ultimately to popular genres in their literary careers: Lumpkin to the romance and the comedy of manners while Le Sueur to the gangster story and children's literature. The works of both writers, though, contained the threat of dissenting voices by providing opportunity not just to talk but to appropriate speech for the voiceless, and thus both subverted the assumed priority and hierarchy of certain kinds of voices. However, while Lumpkin embodied the middle class woman aspiring to be a female intellectual, who had a rather ambivalent relationship to traditional tropes of female existence, such as maternity, Le Sueur wished to lose herself in the working class and maintained a rather suspicious attitude towards intellectuals. She believed in the principles that

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7 Alessandro Portelli, *The Text and the Voice: Writing, Speaking and Democracy in American Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), p. 160.

Gold advocated: there is nothing that school could teach you, you have to live it.[8] This belief resulted not just in the romanticization of the worker and the dismissal of the middle class intellectual as a possible betrayer but also in the glorification of the female body and maternity as symbols of rejuvenation. Maternity meant for Le Sueur a dehistoricized continuity that, nevertheless, could not be confused with intellectual abstraction.

Maternity was also important for Le Sueur since it embodied the CP's vision of future but denied its insistence on fight, battle, and victory; instead, it expressed her vision of future in terms of continuity and organic community. Another dimension is her view that giving birth is an anti-bourgeois act in itself,[9] the direct antithesis of middle-class synthetic infertility. Pregnancy for her is not the curse of economically underprivileged women, as many working class women perceived it, but a special privilege of the people, who were still in touch with the life-sustaining soil. By putting maternity in the foreground, the future is not the linear teleological progression of the CP any longer, but the circular eternal return of the fertility myths, overtly manifest in Le Sueur's fascination with the Persephone-Demeter myths.[10]

*The Girl* is then a story written amidst conflict, which manifests itself in its plot as well. It tells of an innocent country girl who finds a job as a waitress in a bar where alcohol is illegally served. She falls in love with a handsome young man, who is then killed in a bank robbery together with the bar owner's husband, and the gentleman who actually ran the bootleg business. Only the women remain alive: the nameless Girl; Clara, her roommate, who occasionally works as a prostitute; Belle, the owner, who has to leave the bar for lack of police protection; Butch's, the young lover's, insane mother, and Amelia, the Communist mother-worker. Clara dies of tuberculosis, but at the moment of her death, the Girl gives birth to a girl, while the street is full with demonstrators, male and female alike.

The novel is made up of several plot lines. One is the conversion plot, which depicts in a linear progression how the girl finds a community that cares and

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8 Coiner, p. 92.

9 Nora Ruth Roberts, *Three Radical Women Writers: Class and Gender in Meridel Le Sueur, Tillie Olsen and Josephine Herbst* (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 36.

10 Blanche H. Gelfant, "'Everybody Steals': Language as Theft in Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*," in: *Tradition and the Talents of Women*, ed. Florence Howe (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 190–191.

where she learns to care; the romance plot with Butch depicts her passage to womanhood; whereas the third plot is the circular story of loss and recovery.[11] This third plot is not goal-oriented in any ways: it is the re-affirmation of the pleasure of symbiotic unity, of communal identity, and of women's creative power. A further complication is the inclusion of the bank robbery and the hardly typical setting for a Communist conversion story in the bootleg business. In this respect, Le Sueur followed the trend of many Leftist writers who turned toward popular genres with the avowed aim to entertain and propagate the Cause at the same time. The juggling of so many plot lines requires a high degree of authorial control, and it was exactly this that Le Sueur refused to do, she insisted that she was just the recorder and not by any means the originator of the stories – and not the story – of *The Girl*.

The novel, according to Le Sueur, is the result of a workshop, where women could tell their stories, where they at last could talk and where their stories counted. She was there only "as a woman who wrote (like the old letter writers) and who strangely and wonderfully insisted that their lives were not defeated, trashed... "[12] She was just a recorder, there being no tape recorder yet, what Christine Laennec terms as "antigrafus," whose writing is "a form of writing-without-having-written."[13] She only acknowledged that she decided on the order of the stories but the writing itself was collaborative. In this insistence several things were at stake: collective writing was not just an affirmation of the social embeddedness of every individual, of the necessity to counter alienation and that of the importance of developing a "communal sensibility [...] a more collective self and acquiring autonomy and empowerment in discovering this self's multiple extensions into others,"[14] but it was also the denial of her own position as a writer standing outside and above as the sole arbitrator of the worth of her informants' lives. It was a testing ground for her passing as a radical, so preoccupied with the inclusion of the dispossessed.

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11 Gelfant, p. 184.

12 Meridel Le Sueur, "Afterword" to *The Girl*, p. 133.

13 Christine Moneera Laennec, "Christine Antigrafe: Authorial Ambivalence in the Works of Christine de Pizan," in: *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*, eds. Carol Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 35.

14 James M. Boehnlein, *The Sociocognitive Rhetoric of Meridel Le Sueur: Feminist Discourse and Reportage of the Thirties* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1994), p. 109.

Disclaiming her authorship also meant the disclaiming of writing as saying "I I I [because] writing is the act of saying I, of imposing yourself on other people [...] It's an aggressive, even a hostile act."[15] But Le Sueur wanted to write against the dominance of male Leftist logocentrism and of American individualism. She offered her service to put down what she was told but disclaimed authority above her material, she described herself as a life-long listener, but not more.[16] The emphasis on the oral origin is important for other reasons as well. The Left saw the possibility of challenging the cultural order in recording the experience of the working class and developed the theory of proletarian realism heavily relying on reportage as participant observation and oral history.[17] Orality, as Portelli notes, "undermines national institutions by feeding memories, rituals, aggregating all passions, which escape the controls and certainties of written reason and law."[18] Le Sueur's narrative, however, undermines not only the national institutions but also the CP by including the voice of women threatening the authenticity of the Party's official voice.

The threat is even more explicit because the anonymity of the title character suggests a non-singular experience of transformation from a passive conveyor of polemic to not just the acquirer of language but also to its appropriator. At first, she is a silent listener, who does not even understand the language used around her, especially the references to baseball and sexuality, but after being initiated into the language of beating and victory, she not only asserts her own right to speak, but also appropriates and transforms that language into a communal experience.[19] Her initial entrapment in male language transforms into a demand for presence, for authority, for the right to tell not just her story but her mother's as well.

The girl's anonymity, however, serves other purposes as well. She has no pre-established identity and her *Bildung* is not the result of a Cartesian separation but the accommodation of all competing voices around her. Her identity is the result of interconnectedness and not of a self-contained autonomy. Her story and her self are communal, defying the ideology of individualism.

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15 Joan Didion quoted in: Singley and Sweeney, "Introduction," in: *Anxious Power*, p. 3.
16 Gelfant, p. 74.
17 Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 116.
18 Portelli, p. 31.
19 Gelfant, p. 187.

Le Sueur let go of the autonomous individual and created a self that defines itself through connection with others. The writing of the novel is the very instantiation of this idea, where the person under whose name it is published is not more than a central intelligence, through whom others learn to tell their stories. She is no all-powerful author, no one is subordinate to another, the vocabulary of winning and beating disappears, or rather transforms into a language with different meanings. The author cannot exercise total control since the spoken art is "additive, rather than subordinative; aggregative or clustering, rather than analytic; and copious, redundant, or generous rather than spare."[20] There can be no one story, no one plot but multitudes of them.

The setting of the novel itself indicates an attempt at accommodation, since it takes place in liminal spaces. The center of action in the first half of the novel is located in the bar, a boundary of the private and public domain for women since, although they work, it is a job that is close to their nurturing role: they are engaged in cooking, waiting on males, and, importantly, in the second chapter, the bar is transformed into a maternity ward. Similarly, the last scene connects the private and public domains: it is a room where death, birth, and political propaganda take place at the same time. Furthermore, with the sound of demonstrators in the room even the inside/outside division seems to disappear. Whenever the action retreats into either the public or private domain, catastrophe strikes down: in the closed-off hotel room the girl is raped, whereas the public sphere brings death – all men are killed in the bank and in the hospital the danger of forced sterilization lurks. Only liminal spaces are protective.

Similarly, self-enclosed individualism and total dissolution in the community are equally dangerous, the girl has to give up Butch's American Dream of owning a gas station, however fascinated she is with his capacity for and vocabulary of conquest, and she has to learn to become a member of a community while becoming the author of her own fate. If she had just given up her familial loyalty for the sake of Butch or for the Popular Front, her identity would still be unresolved. Accordingly, Clara has to die because she believes that her own body can save her through either marriage or prostitution.

The construction of the novel is equally located on a boundary: it is just as much oral as it is the imposition of one author; it mirrors the past stories of women and deals with the future; in addition, the fluidity of its generic

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20 Jean M. Humez, "'We Got Our History Lesson': Oral Historical Autobiography and Women's Narrative Arts Traditions," in: Howe, p. 127.

classification has an equally important bearing on our understanding. The girl's Bildungsroman unfolds as she attempts to leave home; however, not even after the death of her father when the whole family subvert the rules of propriety is she able to do so. She looks for help in her mother's story but she finds it only after the romance plot terminates and Butch dies. Men have to die in the story since a romance plot cannot be liberating in spirit if played according to established rules – the girl and Belle are annihilated in love although they gladly participate in it as a form of self-annihilation. Also, men represent the language of competition and after it has already been appropriated and transformed no sign of its previous usage can be left as a reminder; therefore, men need to disappear for good. Women have to learn to speak for themselves, to speak their own language and not just be vehicles of it. This, however, does not only mean the reversal of the old script, the exchange of roles between victim and victimizer. Le Sueur tried to create a new script, which contained the creation of a different self, one endowed with both social consciousness and organicity.

Le Sueur wrote in her journal that John Dos Passos with his objective, outside pose represented "the man speech" but that "we need, too, the woman speech. I would like to say the woman speech."[21] *The Girl* is an attempt at writing that "woman speech" which did not repeat the guilt of silence about working class women's experiences, which was a testimony that women cannot be left invisible and unheard, and that they themselves can break out of their history of silence. The novel in this respect is a pivotal moment in the appropriation of the CP's ideology that emphasized the creative power of the working class. However, conflict was inevitable since the meaning of motherhood was not just different for the CP and for Le Sueur, but antagonistic. For the CP motherhood followed the trajectory of shift in meaning from "nuisance" to an ideologically hardly justifiable Soviet imperative, whereas for Le Sueur it represented wholesomeness.

This is not to imply, though, that Le Sueur was on the mission of creating an all-female universe as a political agenda; she readily acknowledged her dependence on males in the "Afterword" to Margery Latimer's *Guardian Angel*: "We still feel the fright without the old dominance, the prisoner can long for the prison." Therefore, the ending of the novel can hardly be seen as more than a temporary stage necessary for the verbally disempowered women to find a voice in order to be able to break out of their closed-off worlds. On the other hand, the strategic value of a female community is easily confused with retreat and is interpreted as a

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21 Vol. 7, 1933; quoted in Coiner, p. 95.

proof for the inefficacy of women's action and with the re-affirmation of women's powerlessness and marginality. However, the women of *The Girl* do not retreat into a silent rebellion as if their only way of rebellion were its intimation; instead, they move out from their places in the private sphere into liminal spaces and by appropriating CP-sanctioned male language they stage a revolution in their own name.

The threat of the novel for the Left was not negligible, although its source does not lie in the fact that she portrays the *lumpenproletariat* instead of diligent factory workers, but rather in the fact that Le Sueur writes about the futility of the lives of a large proportion of the working class. Furthermore, actually it is they who write their stories, who appropriate the CP's language and threaten its uniformity. Similarly, the re-awakened feminist movement too had serious reservations about the novel, though without them the novel would not enjoy the acclaim it receives today; in fact it would not even have appeared in print in 1978. Nevertheless, feminist criticism praises *The Girl* only for its protofeminism, for its daring to tackle questions that not many had courage to care about. Yet, today the epitaph of biological determinism haunts feminist critical writings on Le Sueur's novel, short stories, reportage, and poetry. We should not, however, fail to acknowledge that her goal was not to set an agenda for invigorating a feminist movement but to attempt to accommodate all her ideals: her ideal of collective authorship, her effort to give voice to the silenced, her political activism, and an emphasis on the importance of organic communities. Her work is thus not translatable into any language that relies on teleological vocabulary.

*Tünde Varga*

# Image and Imagination in the Ekphrastic Tradition

The relationship of pictorial representation and picturesque poetic/linguistic representation and the problem of this relationship have a long tradition. In this work I will consider some aspects and reflections on the relationship between language and sight, or better to say, the visual dimension of language. As a theoretical framework I will strongly rely on the ideas of W. J. T. Mitchell and Murray Krieger, but I will not neglect the German reception on the topic either. I am well aware of the fact that within the framework of a short study it is hardly possible to give account of such an intricate question, neither do I think that any theory would be able to control or understand what images are or how they work. Nevertheless, it does not mean that examining them is completely futile, since the link between word and image is not so obvious as it might seem.

According to Robert Rivlin and Karen Gravelle, "The ability to visualize something internally is closely linked with the ability to describe it verbally. Verbal and written description create highly specific mental images."[1] Clear as it seems, yet it should not be forgotten that the simple and clear-cut terminology "mental images" and to "visualise internally" are cultural products; they are always already stained by a philosophical tradition that should also be examined and not to be conceived as natural givens. As Rivlin and Gravelle also notes "The link between vision, visual memory and verbalization can be quite startling."[2] There is a cultural component in that curious thing we call vision, yet it is not

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1 Robert Rivlin and Karen Gravelle, *Deciphering the Senses: The Expanding World of Human Perception* cited by Martin Jay, *The Downcast Eyes* (Berkley: The University of California Press, 1994), p. 8.
2 Jay, p. 8.

only due to linguistic differences in cultures as Martin Jay claims. He says that "although perception is intimately tied up with language as a generic phenomenon, different peoples of course speak different tongues. As a result, the universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically."[3]

In my view what Jay states in the first sentence is in itself the basic problem of the arts without the further complications of linguistic differences between cultures, and not only because the link between the verbal and the visual cannot be univocally defined. During the history of the arts in Western culture there are several ruling approaches to the media of the work of art, which are still present in one form or another in the approaches of different theories. The claim that "perception is intimately tied up with language" has been problematised in different ways. To note some without the intention to be exhaustive: firstly, there is the claim for the purity of the media (one of the central figures to this idea is Lessing), that is, each medium should represent its object according to its proper mode and avoid to be stained by the use of other media.

Secondly, the tradition of the *paragone* (Leonardo da Vinci) means also a somewhat counter-argument in this respect: here the verbal and the visual vie for greater performative power; the two art modes compete with each other in order to show which can represent its object – which is usually the same object – more truly to life or more vividly. Only at a later phase with Romanticism and the idea of the sublime was visual representation doomed to be a secondary form of art, since it was claimed that only the verbal arts are capable of grasping the unrepresentable with their infinite suggestiveness. And, although on a slightly different ground, Derrida also notes that for Kant "the highest form of expression is the spoken [...] At the summit of the highest of the speaking arts is poetry. It is at the summit because it emanates almost entirely from the genius."[4] Yet, in this view the visual itself is more on the side of transparent representation than a

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3 Jay, p. 9.
4 Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11 (1981) 3–25, p. 17. Here Derrida stresses the aspect of auto-affection of the verbal arts, thus their claimed self-originating nature that is typical for German idealist philosophy. The claim is based on the fact that "it says what it [the spoken] expresses and that it passes through the mouth, a mouth that is self-affecting, since it takes nothing from the outside and takes pleasure in what it puts out" (p. 17). It goes without saying, that Derrida's argument goes far beyond this observation undermining the concept of Kantian taste by identifying the pleasure of "what it puts out" with vomiting, that results in the "quintessence of its [philosophy's] bad taste" (p. 25).

problem in itself. The unproblematic nature of vision – which is preserved in some common phrases like "seeing is believing" or that the eyes are "transparent windows on the world" – is, nevertheless, not so unproblematic after all. As Wittgenstein observed "we find certain things about seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough."[5] One of the cornerstones of transparent visual representation, the linear perspective, has long been demystified: "Perspective is a figure for what we would call ideology – a historical, cultural formation that masquerades as a universal, natural code."[6] Thus, the division between verbal and visual representation cannot be necessarily grounded on the naturalness of the visual versus, for instance, the arbitrariness of the verbal (as was among others claimed by Lessing).[7] Finally, there are views affirmative with the interrelation of language and vision, yet, curiously, these views are themselves quite divergent: consider the role of illustration as explanation to the text or vice versa, when the text is supposed to explain pictures; but their curious relationship in Blake's poetry and in its discordant reception can also be mentioned. The enumeration of examples and counter-examples could go on, but I think so much was enough to demonstrate that the visual, pictorial dimension of linguistic representation cannot be taken as a trivia and the questions it involves are worth examining.

The most self-evident place for examining the intersection of the verbal and the visual, of word and image is the ambivalent notion of *ekphrasis*. For ancient rhetoric ekphrasis is the vivid description in prose or poetry of a work of visual art, real or imaginary or a striking visual scene.[8] The prototype of ancient ekphrastic text is the description of Achilles' shield in the Iliad, in which the

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5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), p. 212.

6 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 31. Although I quote Mitchell here the demystification of the perspective as a figure primarily relates to Panofsky, but painters show awareness earlier of the same ideas in paintings which pun on perspectivic delusions, e.g. Holbein's perspectivic illusions or his paintings with anamorphosis (*The Ambassadors*), that illuminate the gaps in the structure of perspectivic representation, and show its fallacious construct.

7 "But the objection will be raised that the symbols of poetry are not only successive but are also arbitrary" (G. E. Lessing, *Laokoön*, trans. E. A. McCornick [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989], p. 85).

8 Gottfried Boehm's study, "Bildbeschreibung," is also of great interest on the topic, in several respects. Gottfried Boehm – Helmut Pfotenhauer, *Beschreibungkunst-Kunstbeschreibung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995).

description of the shield is manifestly imaginary (a shield made by a god and described by a blind poet, who tells what the muses dictate). Krieger puts its appearance to the third or fourth centuries AD; and its role was to bring about seeing through hearing.[9] However, according to Krieger, it develops renewed from the rhetorical trope of *energeia* ("the capacity of words to describe with a vividness that, in effect, reproduces an object before our very eyes"[10]) in "later classicism" which was "looking for a device that would break into and halt the temporal flow of discourse by forcing us to pause over an extended verbal picture."[11] It is clear that in ekphrasis the problematic nature of the pictorial side of verbal representation is foregrounded, for how can words be pictured, if words are arbitrary?

In the history of verbal representation the notion of image also incorporates the different aspects of mental and real images, that is, pictures seen by the physical and the by mental eyes as well. Concrete poetry or calligrams are undeniably physical pictures, but otherwise the pictures raised by the text can only evoke the physical object, and not present it. In the latter case it is irrelevant whether or not the distinction between figurative and literal use of language is made. The representation which is rendered possible by ekphrasis can most obviously be addressed to the "inner eyes," in other words, to "the mind's eye." Moreover, the concept of image at some phases of the history of arts is connected to a mental faculty, to imagination. The supposed relationship between image and imagination produced such far-fetched statements like Vilém Flusser's claim that the "entire Western culture can be conceived as an experiment which aims at the exploration of the imagination (in order to explain images)."[12] Yet, it is an open question whether the image can be connected to the obscure workings of the imagination in such a univocal way, especially, because the term itself has strong overtones of its romantic establishment.

The fact that Murray Krieger and W. J. T. Mitchell produce a narrative on the history of the image in the verbal arts with a somewhat different "moral" is symptomatic of the problematic nature of this relationship. Krieger applies two

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9 Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign.* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University, 1992), p. 7. Though other sources say that the term occurs first in Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the fifth century AD. Cf. *Icons – Texts – Icontexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, ed. Peter Wagner (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 2.
10 Krieger, p. 68.
11 Krieger, p. 68.
12 Vilém Flusser, "Az új képzelőerő," (*Atheneum*, T-Twins Kiadó, 1993/4), p. 256.

terms for the ruling mode of the aimed representation, by which historical periods can be described: the natural sign and the verbal emblem. The natural sign aesthetic belongs to Greek and Classicist art, whereas the verbal emblem is paradigmatic of the Renaissance, Romanticism and Modernism. The former, that is, the desire for the natural sign, seeks to capture the world in the word: "it is the naive desire that leads us to prefer the immediacy of the picture to the mediation of the code in our search for a tangible, 'real' referent that would render the sign transparent."[13] In the natural-sign aesthetic the verbal art is modelled on the pictorial arts, and its highest ambition can only be to become equal to the plastic arts and reach the immediacy of representation they are capable of. He refers to Plato's *Cratylus* as a work in which "Plato deals at length and painstakingly with the relation of language at large to natural signs" and "tries in every way to avoid giving up the mimetic function of words"(73). Krieger notes that "Plato's entire conception of natural-sign imitation rests upon the unproblematic notion" of the transition "from thing to picture of the thing to our internal image of the picture as if it were the thing"(74). He claims that the same applies to verbal representation, which, of course, brings about the banishment of the arts, verbal and visual equally from Plato's state, since they cannot present the ideas themselves, only nature, therefore they are delusory.[14]

Horace's *ut pictura poesis* belongs to this tradition, since as Krieger puts it, here poetic art "seeks to emulate the spatial and visual arts – the arts of the natural sign – to which the visible world is immediately accessible"(78). Thus, poetry is to be conceived as a speaking picture.[15] For Krieger the natural sign aesthetic does not primarily show the oppression of linguistic art, but to the contrary, the verbal arts gain the stability and physical solidity that of the spatial arts. This is what

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13 Krieger, pp. 11–12: "That aesthetic which is also dedicated to the primacy of the natural sign and of the visual arts that are the signs visual embodiment, develops – though with welcome interruptions by dissenters – over the centuries right up to the eighteenth" (p. 71).

14 Krieger oversees here Plato's *Symposium* 211A–213A, and *Phaedrus* 250A–252D, which might provide a counter-argument for the natural-sign aesthetic (one of the reasons why Plato wants to get rid of the arts) he points out in Plato. In these two works love/Eros can create an ecstatic state (a state of poetic mania/creation), which provides an insight into the realm of the ideas, since it is still in touch with that realm. Gottfried Boehm argues that the priority of language is due to its ontological and spiritual excess ever since Plato (Boehm, "A kép hermeneutikájához" [*Atheneum*, T-Twins Kiadó, 1993/4], p. 91).

15 I should note at this place that Krieger does not pay attention to the problematic nature of visual representation, which cannot be called natural at all, but follows the claims of the eighteenth century aesthetic so as not to overcomplicate the issue.

Krieger calls the ekphrastic principle of poetry; he wants to point out is that poetry can have it both ways: to blend the temporal flow, that is, the dynamism of the verbal arts, and to attain the physical, spatial array of pictorial representation. This means that the materiality of the text dissolves in the reading process, and the text functions as a transparent window onto the fictional world or the reader is left in the presence of the thing.

The primary figure of Neo-classicist poetics is Addison for both authors. Addison following Lockean philosophy (and its distinction between sensation and idea), claims art objects to be mere reminders of the primary object of the actual sensation. Krieger says that in this aesthetics the "fidelity to external, 'real' origins in experience is what makes the natural sign the highest achievement of the work of art. It also dictates that the visual arts, as natural-sign arts, are to be the model arts for the other arts" (87). The end of such aesthetic came about around the same period, and its signs are already apparent in Addison's view. Krieger states that under Longinian influence Addison dwells upon the power of words and claims that "the property of words is such that they can stimulate 'stronger colors' in the imagination than a faithful representation can" (99). Interestingly, Krieger chooses the very same quote from Addison as Mitchell, yet the drawn conclusion is not quite the same. In this moment Krieger sees a turn, in which Addison, despite his main ideas, reverses the order of the privileged arts, "claiming poetry's superiority to natural-sign representation in sculpture or painting" (99), this will be then expanded by Edmund Burke in his ideas on the sublime.

In dealing with the representational practices of those periods that can be summarised with the notion of the verbal emblem, Krieger summing up Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* concludes that "The poet, not subject to nature, is free, in making fictions, to invent unnatural creatures" (130). The artist, Krieger notes, is in a position to be able to penetrate the veil between "heaven and earth," which is so thin that "indeed approaches transparency, at least with the sublimely mimetic artist" (132). In short the poet by analogy can present the "invisible-sacred," despite the apparent arbitrariness of signs; they are "authorised to become, in effect, meta-natural signs after all, full of the presence of the transcendental meaning they carry, though we cannot specify or translate them with confidence" (173). Krieger does not make much differentiation in this respect between the verbal and the visual arts, the signs in both cases function as hieroglyphs pointing beyond themselves, yet the poetic creation possesses the advantage of working

with signs that "does not resemble its object, and therefore free to appeal to the mind's eye rather than to the body's eye" (139).[16]

The analogical nature of referring to a transcendental realm, says Krieger, returns in a reborn version with Romanticism, and is "carried farther along for being less dependent on the extravagant metaphysical demands of Christian Neo-Platonism" (142). Krieger sees it as a counter-movement to pictorialism in favour of the freedom of the word, its liberation from the natural-sign aesthetic, which culminates in the modernist return to a newly dynamic spatiality. The vital point in this aesthetic is not only that the poet's act is an imitation of God's, being capable of creating a self-sufficient and organic world from his own genius, neither it is the suggestive unconcreteness of poetry, but that this organicity evolve the spatial element the verbal had so far to create on the analogy of the spatial arts. This is also what the Modernist concept of poetry attains, that is, "this return to spatiality is now to be made on the terms of the verbal arts rather than those of the visual arts, in that the spatiality is achieved in words is to be a hard-won victory over the inherent transience of verbal sequence" (205). So much so that the order is even reversed, and with "modernism they ascend to the status of model"(206).

In contrast Mitchell tells the story of repression in which the verbal triumphs over the visual with an ever greater force, repressing the visual in favour of the verbal expression. In this story the verbal possesses the ability of speech and activity in contrast to the passive, and silent image, since for Mitchell the speaking picture (that is poetry's ideal) is a problem in itself. Mitchell provides a very brief history of representation in "What is an Image?"[17] It is by no means comparable with Krieger's book-length study on the same subject, but for the sake of the different story lines it is worth comparing their main ideas. Mitchell's starting point in his narrative is Addison (and as I have already mentioned with the very same paragraph Krieger deals with). Mitchell, nonetheless, unlike Krieger, does not see the lurking Burkean idea of the sublime in Addison's text, but the

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16 Its emblem is the *ouroboros*, the mysterious winged snake biting its tail, standing for "the unfolding series of interpretative possibilities whose intertwinings are full of mystery" (141). Krieger however sees the ultimate emblem of the ekphrastic art in it, because of its circularity corresponds to the circular, mythopoetic assumption of temporality, which converted into space shapes like a poem. The poem, thus, in its self-enclosure becomes the verbal emblem of temporality as mystery (cf. p. 228).

17 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 7–47.

reinforcement of the pictorialist tradition: "The poetic consequences of this sort of language theory are of course a thoroughgoing pictorialism, an understanding of the art of language as the art of reviving the original impressions of sense" (23). The verbal image here is the exact description which equals to, or even better than, the "images that flow from the objects themselves";[18] sensible forms become a property of words. This does not necessarily mean the abandonment of the natural-sign aesthetic, but only that words can reach better understanding, yet it is one distinguished form of the verbal. Therefore, the clarity of the verbal expression is contrasted with tropes and rhetorical figures, which count as redundant and alluring ornaments,[19] and are no more than mere relationship between signs.

According to Mitchell Romanticism and Modernism still apply the notion of the verbal image, but the term is confusingly used for both the literal and the figural. At this point the two stories slightly converge, since Mitchell conceives the theory behind romantic representation as the workings of the obscure notion of imagination, due to which the requirement of the ideal representation is not that of the mimesis or description of "external visibilia," but the inner light of the poetic genius and the infinite capacity of his creative mind. The poet creating with the help of imagination is capable of rendering organic, living works (works associated with the symbolic), which belong to a higher artistic order than the mechanical reproduction of allegorical works.[20] The main tendency of Romanticism and Modernism in this respect is alike: to attain the notion of a non-representational art, the realm of the intellect which is to be found in the sublimity and the infinite suggestiveness of verbal expression, and which does not necessarily need to have a concrete referent. Mitchell sees the logical peak of the

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18 *The Spectator*, no. 416, 27th June 1712 ("The Pleasures of Imagination VI," in: Elledge, ed., *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays*, quoted by Mitchell, p. 23, or Krieger, p. 99).

19 It is at hand to allude to the well known Lockean notion of rhetoric, its inferiority and misleading nature in the discourse of philosophy: "Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 10 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), Vol. II, p. 147.

20 It is almost common sense knowledge that the differentiation of symbol and allegory as two distinct tropes are the product of this age as well. Gadamer notes that presumably Winkelmann used the two interchangeably. For further reference see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinschümer and D. G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1993), pp. 63–65, and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp.187–229.

sublimation of image in the modernist concept of the "verbal icon," (though he notes that there are some traits of Addison in this concept) the intellectual dynamism, which subordinates the image to the word.[21]

All in all, Mitchell, unlike Krieger's structured taxonomy, tells a linear story of the gradual repression of the (after all unrepressible) pictorial "other" in the verbal arts which aims at establishing their superiority. In contrast, Krieger's story points toward the gradual liberation of the verbal with an inserted backward step of empiricism, yet the liberated verbal arts do not dismiss the lesson learnt from the spatial arts, thus create their own spatial solidity to counterbalance the temporal flow of poetry, to, at its best, reverse the order of priorities and become a model for the spatial arts.

The importance of reviewing the historical development of representation in focus with the relationship of verbal and visual modes is that from this ground it is easier to examine the claimed status of the pictorial in the verbal arts in both thinkers' theory. My aim with this comparison is to show how divergent the theories are in this respect of the work of art, therefore how impossible it is to have any theory which would get closer to control or understand this relationship. Furthermore, with the consideration of a third theoretical approach, primarily that of Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to the question, I would like to draw attention to Mitchell's idea, namely, that the poem's literal visuality is its (*Zeichenbestand*) written materiality, its letters. Otherwise, it can become visible merely figuratively, that is, at its semantic level: descriptions, addresses etc. all come into existence or can be recognised, when the text is itself decoded, and they do not change the structure of the text. The semiotic processes, however, are determined by the text's material dimension, therefore the picture plays the role of the ever recurring repressed other.

Concerning the three theorists, it is Mitchell who takes the notion of the image most literally. Mitchell claims that the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous."[22] In his view "visual representations are already immanent in the words, in the fabric of description, narrative vision,

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21 Pound's poetic enterprise might give some place for doubts here, since although it is true that the verbal creation plays the leading role in his poetry, in the imagist phase of his career Pound wanted to model his poetry on cubist sculpture and painting. Furthermore, in his *Cantos* he consciously mixed Chinese ideograms as pictures into his poetry.

22 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 22.

represented objects and places, metaphor, formal arrangements and distinctions of textual functions, even in typography, paper, binding, or in the physical immediacy of voice and the speaker"(p. 99). Thus, he juxtaposes three different levels in conceiving what he means by the visual dimension of a text, namely, the semantic level of the verbal text, where the referent or the subject matter of the represented can be formed for the inner eyes; the figurative or tropological dimension of a text, in which the reference is ambiguous and the referential function is more openly suspended; and finally, the material aspect of the medium, the literally visible aspect of it. For Mitchell the verbal is stained by the visual, at every level, therefore the separation of the two in a supposed purification of the medium is impossible. Nevertheless, the relationship of word and picture is highly problematic, thus it is important to "ask what the function of specific forms of heterogeneity might be" (100).

Although image and text are intertwined in the texture of culture, this connection – in Mitchell's phrase the imagetext – is burdened with sutures. These sutures are subversive not only to the verbal representation, but also to the institutional meta-language that renders possible the superiority of the one over the other. In the spirit of the *paragone* the value attributed either to the word or to the image changed through different phases. Mitchell claims that the sutures of the imagetext undermine the possibility of such value judgements. As an example he evokes the prototype of ekphrasis, the shield of Achilles in the Iliad, and connects it to the relationship of narration and description. Narration is the temporal flow of the text as opposed to description, but it is not only that the pictorial element is a spatial extension that might threaten with freezing the temporality of discourse into the spatial, it can arrest the temporal flow as an ornament in such a way that the reader might get lost in the abundance and proliferation of descriptive details. It is fundamental that Mitchell sees the picture as a threat to the discourse, for the description thus, is which blocks the narrative so it can never proceed to its end. As an illustration Mitchell deals with the description of Achilles' shield and its relation to the whole Homerian text. The description of the shield is not only a utopian sight which forms a space in the narrative, but an ornamented frame around the narration, a frame or threshold across which the reader can enter into and withdraw from the text. Mitchell concludes that "ekphrastic ornament is a kind of foreign body within epic that threatens to reverse the natural literary priorities of time over space, narrative over description, and turn the sublimities of epic over to the flattering blandishments of epideictic rhetoric" (179).

In considering the trope of ekphrasis Mitchell differentiates between three "phases or moments": ekphrastic hope, fear and indifference. The first covers more or less the desire for the natural-sign image, the wish for the possibility of the verbal image to come true; the second involves a counter-desire, the fear of its possibility, and the third states the impossibility of the ekphrasis. This threefold differentiation bears importance in two respects: on the one hand, he wants to prove that the ambition of ekphrastic hope, that is, the possibility of the image to come into existence in front of our very eyes, is followed by the fear of the emergence of the image, since then, in the presence of the image, the poetic voice would be doomed to silence. On the other hand, he points to the fact that the realisation of ekphrasis is not possible. Obviously, the image cannot come into view literally, since then ekphrasis were applicable only to concrete poetry, therefore the encounter of image and text can be conceived as figurative. What follows from this is that ekphrasis is notional, the image can only be found within the text as its "resident alien"; the descriptive details come to existence (becoming) in the textual space with the figurative and tropological positing act. In other words the text figures forth any description or image. Therefore, the translation into a picture seen by the mind's eye is just as problematic as the translation of a painting into words.[23] Mitchell of course does not offer any solution how the image to be seen in the poem is created on the semiotic level, he talks only about why the semantically conceived picture/image is repressed, namely, poetry in its crave for superiority represses the image to the place of secondariness. Nevertheless, he rightly states that it is impossible to abandon the representational model, though one can give up insisting on the transparency of this representation or on the privileged or superior mode of representation in favour of the one over the other.

In Mitchell's view the problem of ekphrasis lies exactly in the fact that it aims at the overcoming of the otherness of the pictorial in the verbal representation. This goal is highly ideological in the sense that the qualities of "otherness" are also determined and designated by the leading discourse. This is structured on the familiar dialectic of self and other, which means in ekphrastic poetry that the properties attributed to the verbal will, in the final analysis, turn out to be the valuable, higher rank qualities as opposed to the pictorial; to cite Mitchell's attributes: the active, speaking self and the passive seen other. It is

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23 Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976) He claims that no amount of description can add up to a depiction.

exactly why the image the poem is supposed to present for the mind's eye cannot come into existence, and why it is considered to be a threat to the poetic voice. Since, when the ekphrastic hope is realised, then poetic creation itself proves to be useless, a mere servant, in order to achieve what paintings are capable of anyway, that is, presenting an image; but what is more threatening is that the silent passive picture attains the attributes of speech and activity, and it is no longer the voice of the poet which is heard.

Let me now examine why Mitchell can claim that the repression of the pictorial in favour of the imagination surfaces in Romanticism. The theoretical background for the repression of the pictorial other is most transparent in the theory of Burke (and in the traces of his influence on the Romantic tradition and beyond). Burke claims that a thing first and foremost is affecting to the imagination because of its obscurity and not of its clarity. He dismisses pictorial representation as inferior, since it can raise only a clear idea of the object, therefore produces the same affect as the object could have raised in reality. In contrast, words can convey an "imperfect idea of such objects," but then it is in the power of the poet "to raise a *stronger* emotion by the description than I [the poet] could do by the best painting."[24] It is by means of words the poet can create the required affection or emotion due to their uncertainty, furthermore, such obscure ideas as infinity or eternity can only be raised by words, since they cannot be depicted directly. He concludes that "poetry with all its obscurity, has more general as well as more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art" (57). It is also obscurity and uncertainty which results in experiencing of the sublime. Words thus are conceived to be a better means for representation because they can have access, in an analogical way, to a realm beyond reality ("there are many things in nature, which can seldom occur in reality but the words, which represent them often do" 158.), which cannot be conceived from nature directly, nor can it be formed into a clear idea, so words can "affect the mind more than the sensible image d[oes]"(159). This faculty of the mind, the faculty of imagination, is expressible only through words. Imagination creates in the text / by words an obscure image which, nonetheless, cannot become sensible since then the required obscurity factor would disappear, and the representation would lose its sublimity.[25]

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24 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 55

25 At this point I find it important to note the connection of Burke, Kant and English Romanticism as such with respect to the imagination. Kant states that the imagination cannot turn into conceptual

Imagination is often contrasted with mental imaging, for instance Coleridge's distinction between symbol and allegory – the devaluation of allegory as a "mere picture language" in favour of the symbol – is symptomatic of this tendency.[26] An excellent example for the repudiation of pictorial representation in poetry surfaces in the twenty-second chapter of *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge claims that the "poet should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy,"[27] and although he speaks about "poetic painting," it should not be a picture that "a draughtsmen could present to the eye with incomparably greater satisfaction by half a dozen strokes of his pencil or a painter with as many touches of his brush."[28] He calls it "a creation rather than a painting, or if painting, yet such, and with such co-presence of the whole picture flash'd at once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura."[29] The creation of such a whole depends entirely on the verbal expression, which, thus, proves to be of higher value than the plastic arts, since they do not possess the ability to create for the imagination, neither do they "excite vision by sound." There is a latent distrust in pictures, as there was in the eighteenth century, but the stakes are greater than resisting the alluring power of (feminine) pictures.

To cite another example for the stress on the verbal, Wordsworth in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*[30] often uses phrases which put emphasis on the verbal nature of poetry and its power of expression in a tone reminiscent of

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knowledge, since both the beautiful and the sublime are beyond the conceptual. What the imagination figures forth is the idea for which there are no adequate outer images, it can be shown only by ways of analogy. The ideas are images produced a priori by reason, they are intuitive representations. Kant calls these ideas *archetypons* (ur-images), which in the *Critique of Judgement* are equalled to the aesthetic idea and the unity of thought. This idea the representation of the imagination, which is not accessible to the concepts of reason or understanding, manifests itself in poetry. Poetry can allow us to see nature as a phenomenon by sights (*Ansichten*) which nature does not offer either for the senses or for the intellect, but these sights can be used as the *schemata* of the supersensible (paragraph 59). Cf. Zoltán Papp, "Ästhetisch wohnet der Mensch," *Gond*, 15–16, especially pp. 43–52; and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), pp. 221–225.

26 See footnote 20, and for further reference see Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 114–116.

27 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), Vol. II, p. 102.

28 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. II, p. 102.

29 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 103. It might bear some interest that the reference to sun and light can evoke their transcendental referents as God's *lux* in its medieval sense.

30 *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 592–610.

Burke. (Though for an extent of a sentence Wordsworth affirms the sister art tradition of poetry and painting, p. 600.) First of all poetry should be brought as close as possible to "the language of men"; a poet is a "man speaking to men" (600–601). This language is such that it is the "breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" (604), and its object is "the great and universal passions of men"(606); poetry, as Wordsworth puts it, should produce "excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure"(607), the excitement is due to the power of words, whereas the pleasure derives from the regulating meter, which does not let lose the dangers of words, that is, "that the excitement may be carried beyond its bounds" (607). The stress falls, on the one hand, on a mode of representation, which depicts notions not to be found in the outer world or in nature directly; (nature is used here as an entity from which the poet is at liberty to supply himself "with endless combinations of forms and imagery" (606) in order to evoke the unrepresentable), and on the other hand, on the affections and passion this representation brings forth. Similarly, according to Shelley, the power of poetry and poets is such that they "draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the *invisible world* which is called religion" (748)[31] (my emphasis).

What is at stake in representation is, then, not only the alluring power of ornamental pictures opposed to the truthful knowledge deriving from clear representational modes,[32] but that pictorial representation can unravel the epistemological claims of poetry. The access to a mode of knowledge, which is beyond what can be assessed from sensorial experience, is the function of words. To be precise, it is poetic language, which can attain this power. The inner images the imagination causes can never become real or re-presentable pictures, they

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31 In the *Defence of Poetry* also the ethical and socio-political interest vested in poetry surfaces fairly transparently, he claims that poets are "the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society" (748) which he connects with the invention of life and art, moreover ha states the "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (762), thus claiming the highest place for poetry in society. Also it should be noted that religion here cannot be the institution of Shelley's age, since he was infamous of his hatred for the church.

32 The irony in the attempt to clear modes of representation of course is apparent in the fact that they could not get rid of the use of (ornamental) tropes in philosophical discourse, since language is thoroughly saturated with figures and tropes. For further reference see: Paul de Man "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," *The Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Both thinkers consider tropes to be the very basis of language.

cannot stand forth as pictures, because then the dynamism and the obscurity, which guarantee invisibility and passion, is irrecoverably lost. The aimed translation of the invisible, of the ideas of imagination into phenomenal entities produced by verbal signification, result in the disarticulation of the images of the imagination and their manifestation, since by definition the phenomenal representation can only approach, but never reach its "object"; in the correspondence the object or subject matter would lose its transcendental nature. What Mitchell so well observes is that the poetic voice cannot be winded up by the closure of the text into meaning or univocal referent, that is, to freeze into a picture, because then it threatens with silencing the poetic voice. To put it differently, the poetic voice cannot be brought to a halt, for its dynamism and suggestiveness is the repository of the existence of the unreachable beyond, or the mind's capacity to know about this beyond by ways of analogy. But for Mitchell the repression of the seen other is a social repression; or better to say the relationship of the object represented, the artist and the reader in ekphrastic poetry "provides a schematic metapicture of ekphrasis as a social practice."[33]

Leaving Mitchell's social criticism, the pictorial cannot be repressed if for no other reason then because one cannot forget the visibility of written characters. Texts of the Romantic authors often refer to the fact, that even writing, or rather, the printed book, was seen as a supplementary device, a mere instrument in the service of the poetic voice. The above-mentioned example of Wordsworth shows that the stress was on "the voice" and not on writing; or in "The Tables Turned," he is openly against books: "Up! up! my Fiend, and quit your books / [...] Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife."[34] In this respect even the chapter entitled "Books" in *The Prelude* is not a real exception: the inspired dream of the Arab comes only after he has "closed the book"; furthermore, the *song* – as the song of the shell-book ("a loud prophetic blast of harmony") – bears more importance from the aspect of poetic creativity. No wonder he also calls books "Poor earthly casket of immortal verse."[35]

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33 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 165. It means that the represented object's or subject's relation is conceived by Mitchell as representing the always already repressed, whatever difference of the object of the representation should be (women, children, black people), since ekphrastic poetry takes the other of its objet (it is not a self-representation, not only because then it would re-describe a painting of the writing self, but because the mental image of the representing artist of itself is a construct).
34 William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems* (Reading: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 201–202.
35 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. J. C. Maxwell. (London: Penguin Books), pp. 173–177 (Book 5, lines 64–65, 90–95, 164–65, respectively).

Similarly, Coleridge expresses his dissatisfaction about the increasing number of books and the deterioration of their value: "in times of old, books were as religious oracles [...] and at present moment they seem degraded into culprits to hold up their hands at the bar of every self-elected [...] judge, who chuses to write from humour or interest."[36] He calls books a "sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium."[37] The fixity of the printed, material letters of books threaten to dissolve the power of invisible sounds, the proper mode of the poetic genius' expression and its sublimity.[38] Yet, there is an ambiguous attitude to writing in Romanticism, since all their contempt towards the printed word was distributed in printed books, these writers hoped to be widely read. Moreover, counter-examples also appear: Keats expresses fear about not to be able to transmit his mind's fruit before he dies, but the means of transmission are books, and the type: "Before my pen has gleaned my teaming brain, / before high-piled books, in charactery, / hold... "[39] But there is more to it, the visible material dimension of language does not disappear in the temporality of reading: at its most reading oscillates between looking at and looking through the text,[40] but the text, the types does not disappear to give place to the meaning, to the mental pictures, let them be whatever ideological nature, the clear ideas of eighteenth century or the obscure verbal dynamism of Romanticism.

Krieger finds the romantic move toward the creative, emblematic powers attributed to poetic language tied to the discipline of general aesthetics.[41] He seeks to establish ekphrasis to get beyond the function of a mere trope so that it can be characterised as a subject for theoretical placement, hence the expression of ekphrastic principle. This principle shows the ambition of the poetic work to have it both ways: to establish the spatial solidity of the plastic arts, that is, a certain mode of being within the temporal and shifting world of verbal becoming. The most obvious way to achieve this is of course to find a visual object to

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36 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter III, p. 41.

37 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter III, p. 34.

38 For a somewhat more elaborate treatment of the politics of Romantic writing and Blake's resistance to the underrating or devaluation of the materiality of writing see. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 111–150.

39 John Keats, "When I have Fears," *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, p. 503.

40 Cf. D. J. Bolter, "Ekphrasis, Virtual reality and the Future of Writing," *The Future of the Book*, ed. G. Nunberg (Berkley: The University of California Press, 1996), pp. 264–66.

41 Cf. Krieger, p. 145

describe, and hope that verbal representation, in turn, can attain the spatial fixity and solidity of its object of imitation, and which thus "can be appealed to as a constant, unlike our varying perceptual experiences of objects in the world."[42] This way the poem would establish a balance between the flux and temporal disjunction of the verbal and the spatial simultaneity of the visual.

Interestingly, Lessing was one of the theorist strongly against such a view: with insisting on representational purity, he also claims that the two distinct modes should remain within their proper spheres, since they can never be able to overcome the differences. The verbal would irrecoverably remain temporal and thus unable to create the simultaneous unity a painting is capable of. He says that "which the eye takes in at a single glance he counts out us with perceptible slowness, and it often happens that when we arrive at the end of his description we have already forgotten the first features."[43] The conception of the whole remains questionable, since "the imagination must be able to survey them [the details of a description] all with the same rapidity in order to construct them in one moment that which can be seen in one moment in nature."[44] Lessing is utterly sceptical about the feasibility of such representation (or reading process), he denies the "power of depicting corporeality to language" since its illusion, namely, "the coexistent nature of a body" comes into conflict with the "consecutive nature of language" and the "final reassembling of the parts into a whole is made extremely difficult and often even impossible."[45]

Krieger, in contrast, finds this theoretically possible, but at a higher level than a mere natural-sign, or spatial representation. He differentiates between two doubleness in language as the medium of the work of art. The one is the already mentioned conflict between the attraction to ekphrasis as the semiotic desire for the natural-sign and the aversion of it as the deprivation of the flow of imagination in its arbitrary signs. The other doubleness he observes, is that "language in poems can be viewed as functioning transparently, sacrificing its own being for its referent; and it can be viewed as functioning sensuously, insisting upon its own irreducible there-ness."[46] He claims that these oppositions form the

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42 Krieger, p. 8.

43 Lessing, p. 86.

44 Lessing, p. 87.

45 Lessing, p. 88.

46 Krieger, p. 11. It is important to note that the there-ness of the poem Krieger equates with the verbal emblem, which, in my opinion, is heavily loaded with Poundian imagist concepts. Taken in

ekphrastic principle of poetry, in which the poetic is aware of its own delusion of recovering the "immediacy of sightless vision built into our habit of perceptual desire," that is, it knows about its incapacity, "the incapacity of words to come together at an instant, at a single stroke of sensuous immediacy, as if in an unmediated impact."[47] Nonetheless, he attempts to bring these opposition into a happy synthesis of mutual supply on an abstract, theoretical level. The paradoxical character of ekphrasis will serve then as its advantage, and I believe that it is worth quoting Krieger in full:

> I believe that as the Western imagination has seized upon and used the ekphrastic principle, it has sought – through the two-sidedness of language as a medium of the verbal arts – to comprehend the simultaneity, in the verbal figure, of fixity and flow, of an image at once grasped and yet slipping away through the crevices of language. This sense of simultaneity is sponsored by our capacity to respond to the verbal image as at once limitedly referential and mysteriously self-substantial. (11)

The ekphrastic principle realises itself fully in the modernist development to the concept of the verbal emblem, in which the verbal and the visual interact. Krieger claims that the visual object of representation is lost in the translation, but "gradually the verbal representation, no longer leaning on another, extratextual, tangible representation, takes on the power of free-standing entity"(16). The motivation in poetic representation can be conceived as the dialectic between these two stands, the strife for presenting or overcoming the pictorial. This, in the final analysis, renders a picturable poetic principle, which establishes itself in the dialectic of the temporal, arbitrary and the spatial, natural. It is a poetic "which presses for a verbal play that acknowledges the incompatibility of time and space, while collapsing them *into the illusion of an object* marked by its own sensible absence" (28). The recuperative gesture of poetic creation emerges from the verbal, which "creates itself as its own object," thus, repressing the pictorial forever in favour of the verbal. Krieger saves his principle at the cost of the one side of his dialectic which brings the whole dialectic into motion. In Krieger's theory the picture will not be a potential threat as it is in Mitchell's, it can never gain the fearful ability of activeness, since it remains in the control of the verbal expression.

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the Poundian sense the there-ness of the poem is an ideality, an abstraction which points at the represented and at itself at the same time.

47 Krieger, p. 10.

Gadamer's theory might seem a bit far-fetched to bring into connection of ekphrasis; it obviously does not relate to such a trope directly. But since he produced texts on pictorial representation, moreover he wrote a text entitled "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," in which some of the above mentioned ideas recur, it might be worth paying attention to him.[48] First of all, Gadamer's starting point is, not unlike Krieger's, that art belongs to a privileged mode of representation, which is differentiated from the everyday by its power of being beyond the historicity and by its truth measure. Since it has no use-value it cannot be exhausted by the passing of time, but remains valid by spanning periods. In Gadamer's notion the beauty of the artwork (whether the transitory temporality of literary text or the atemporal picture)[49] lies in its ability to show itself openly (276), yet this moment involves a special mode of time: it involves a special mode of temporality, and not to get stuck in the presence of the work. This moment is the moment of Verweilen [whiling, lingering, tarrying] at the artwork in the process of reading. The reading process articulates the inherence of the artwork, in which the discordant things come into harmony, though their differences are not effaced, they keep their mutability. This mode of harmony is to be found only in art, in which its validity discloses itself.

The preservation of the possibility of change is rendered conceivable by Gadamer's claim that the mode of being of the artwork is a permanent becoming and/or execution [Vollzug]. It is when the object of the representation fulfils itself with penetrating into and overwhelming the reader (dissolving the distance of the work and its reader). The temporality of Vollzug makes itself exact in the time structure of reading.[50] Reading, or rather the correct way of reading, in Gadamer's view is interpretation, which is the constant co-speaking [Mit-rede] with the artwork. The process of interpretation cannot dissolve with the meaning of the work, it is which produces the meaning, yet cannot be terminated or brought to a halt. This is a circular structure (a whiling at the text) which brings about the simultaneity of the artworks' structure in which they "come back into

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48 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," in: *Was ist ein Bild?* ed. Gottfried Boehm (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994) and "Wort und Bild – «so wahr, so seiend»," *Gesammelte Werke 8. Ästhetik und Poetik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), pp. 373–400.
49 See Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100: "Der Zeitunabhängige Bestand des Bildes und der transhistorische Zeitfluss des textes bzw. besitzen eine Gemeinsamkeit, die im Vollzug besteht."
50 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100.

themselves."[51] The artwork, or the literary text, are works "in the highest degree": as Gadamer states about the literary text, it "in its own right prescribes all repetitions and acts of speaking," the poetic text "is something that seems to originate in itself."[52] Therefore the artwork becomes self-presenting, that renders the unity of the *Gebilde* [shaped form or structure] (also due to the harmony of its parts). The Gebilde is the unity of the work of art in which "something has developed *into its own pattern from within* and thus is perhaps to be grasped in further formations" (my emphasis).[53] With respect to interpretation Gadamer does not make any distinction between the verbal and the plastic arts: both are artworks thus both need to be read and interpreted, thus implying the hierarchy of the two media. The interpretation reproduces the original work (which is distinguished from the intention of the speaker) and allows it to appear in its own light. But Gadamer notes that "one draws false conclusion if one thinks one can understand such presence with the language of metaphysics as presence at hand [*des Vorhandenen*], or with the concept of objectifiability."[54]

Nonetheless, the circularity of the process of interpretation and the thus the self-presentation of the work is a curious one: on the one hand, it is like the recitation of a fully skilled artist, which "will render the linguistic gestalt fully present," it is not "a mere series of pieces of discourse; rather it must be a whole, which stands in itself."[55] The meaning of the work thus shines forth,[56] renders itself visible, as its truth.[57] In the "blow-like suddenness of understanding, as the disordered fragments of the sentence, the words, suddenly crystallize into the unity of meaning of the whole [...] in which the unity of the whole formulation is illuminated."[58] The unity of the artwork Gadamer refers to is seemingly

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51 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 41.

52 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 42.

53 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 49.

54 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 47.

55 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 47.

56 Gadamer uses Plato's *Ekphainstaton* at this place, which he translates as Herausscheinenden ("Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100).

57 Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100.

58 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 48.

possesses a curious visibility, a picture-like quality, the place probably that of the beautiful in which the idea (or eidolon) appears.[59]

On the other hand, it possesses dynamism, it cannot be reduced to the state of mere objecthood, its sense is carried in its Vollzug [becoming; execution]. Gadamer connects this process to the Aristotelian term of *energeia* and *dynamis*. The work although becomes a Gebilde, it does not mean the stopping of the interpretative process, the whiling at the text, but have both simultaneously. The meaning of the artwork shines forth from within, in its own light, by its own in the simultaneity of the whiling at it, but due to the dynamism of this whiling, it does not mean that that the process can ever be brought to a halt.[60] Yet, the notion of *energeia* carries the connotations of embodiment, shining and making visible. It comes into being with the reading process, that is, the meaning (or rather the Gebilde) of the text. If it is considered to be an ekphrastic object, as Mörike's antique lamp in "Text and Interpretation" can be, then Gadamer's idea of reading is riveting around the problems of the ekphrastic poem. Namely, that the object of the poem is brought into existence by the text itself and it does not pre-exist before the depiction, moreover that the circularity of the described object might impose its structure on the structure of the artwork. Though Gadamer is strongly against the latter view.

Gadamer's ideas are rather reminiscent of Krieger's less philosophical approach to the ekphrastic principle, which would preserve both the dynamism and the spatiality in its ideality. (Krieger identifies circularity as one of the most basic structure of ekphrasis [the *ouroboros*], and interestingly to prove this refers to the very same interpretation of Mörike's "The Lamp" by Leo Spitzer as Gadamer). The image produced in both cases remains captive in the verbal, which produces it and renders its dynamis, its flow. It is verbality which can thus preserve its superiority over the pictorial other, and which can mediate the image "seen" or rather suggested between the becoming of an image and the verbal temporality. The only thing the understanding of the text leaves behind is its linguistic appearance, but not the text itself.[61] Gadamer considers the *Zeichenbestand* [signs and writing] of the artwork mere *Äusserlichkeit* [externals],

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59 Hegel claims that the beautiful is the appearance of the idea and that the sublime is the absolute beautiful. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. B. Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, 1993).
60 See Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," pp. 102–103.
61 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 49.

which are not sensible elements (like motifs, images) its structure is built up of. The letters, words and sentences, that is, the signs and writing of the artwork, is an unavoidable and necessary burden on imagination. Yet, it is a rather disrupting one: it can produce the uncontrollability of representation, the impossibility of taming its excess, the way they take on a life of their own that escapes and defies the will to determine meaning.

In both Krieger's and Gadamer's approach the free-play of imagination is bound to the flow of verbality. The circularity is constitutive of the reading process and the object thus formed, just like in Krieger's ekphrastic principle. As a result of this circular movement of interpretation, in Gadamer's view, the artwork becomes active: it shines forth its sense, yet the shining is not the appearance of the object represented in an objectified state (the lamp if we consider Mörike's poem), but its appearance is the depository of speech, of the dialogical process between the reader and the object. Due to this dialogue the work begins to speak for itself. The image that would stand forth cannot become a real image, a pictorial one, since the constant co-speaking of the dialogical interpretation cannot dissolve speech. No wonder the shining or appearance of the work turns out to be a kind of speaking in the end,[62] speech cannot be stopped even if it is related to the interpretation of the plastic arts. The instability of the painting is not due to the questions of representational unreliability in the plastic arts (as Mitchell claims), but to the interpretative process. The free-play of imagination cannot allow the picture to stand in front of us, since then, it might result in the silencing of the active speaking voice, let it be the poetical, the object's or the object producing dialogue. Corollary, the fixed object as such would lose its timelessness and eternal validity. The shining of the work, that is, the light of understanding, might turn out, in the final analysis, to be dependent on the late medieval metaphysical sense of light: the divine *lux* (and not the perceived *lumen*). It is God's word, the logos, which first creates light, thus making the depository of shining the word (speech) in the first place. The work of art could, then, with full right claim the metaphysical values of timelessness, lasting validity and the appearance of its truth. Gadamer, seemingly with full right, obliterates the word-play of "es scheint" [ "it shines" and "it seems"], since the "larger context" determines that we are dealing with a work of art, so it can only shine in the realm of the aesthetic, not prosaically seem (in the illusory appearances of reality),

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62 Cf. Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 51: "The interpreter, who gives his reasons, disappears – and the text speaks."

yet he remains within the *circulus vitiosus* of his own claim, his decision in favour of shine is made on the presumption that he deals with a work of art. This curious shining of the art might, then, actually blinds us, and the appearance of the idea can never be made perceivable.

Mitchell seems to be right in arguing that the repression of the image is constitutive of the recuperation of the imagination. With analysing Shelley's "Medusa"[63] he stages the dangers of the graphic other of the word that remains inaccessible and beyond control. At this place although I build upon Mitchell's idea, I will provide a somewhat different analysis of Shelley's poem. The dangers of the other's activeness, if Gadamer's idea of the speaking work is considered and seen from Mitchell's point of view, is that it might get out of control, so much so that its beauty freezes the reader/writer.

The poem enumerates the marks of the Burkean sublime related to the impressions from the observation of Medusa: the "flares and light" it projects on the "midnight sky" is a "dread," not only "obscurity," and its beauty arouse the feeling of "terror" (its "horror" and its "beauty" are "divine"). But the terror is not only due to its "beauty" or "tempestuous loveliness" or "grace" to mention a few epitaphs Shelley uses, but to the active gazing back of the serpents to the viewer, and as Mitchell observes, the active gaze of Medusa: "it lieth gazing." The "gleaming" "glare" of the serpents is paralleled with the "fiery" and "lurid" shine emanating from the Medusa face: both stir anguish and fear, as it should be raised by the sublime. The shining of the beauty is mingled with the feeling of terror, unlike the shining beauty of Gadamer's work of art which shows or speaks for itself. The terror of the Medusa is not only due to the oxymoron of "hideous" "beauty," neither to the activity of its (and the myriads of serpents) looking (or talking as the ambiguity of "lieth" implies) back, but the possibility that this active gazing "transforms" its observer: if the process of reading is fulfilled and the Gebilde of the poem can shine forth then the prophecy of the poem comes also true and in the presence of the active gazing head the observer becomes frozen, since it "turns the gazer's spirit into stone." In the act of naiv identification or the moment when the reader/observer is overwhelmed, the dead Medusa freezes its observer into death, his/her "spirit into stone." This stone-like spirit then becomes like the stone used for the material of the plastic arts: it is not the place from which the understanding of the poem emanates when the whole poem is "learnt by heart and live written in the soul on the way to

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[63] "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery."

scriptuality,"[64] but the place of inscription, into which the lineaments or features of the Medusa's face are inscribed. From the moment on this inscription occurs the observing reader has no control over what is inscribed, since it is something that "thought no more can trace." If the harmonisation of the parts can occur this way then it is very unlikely to produce the melody (or harmony) Gadamer talks about.

The realisation of the picture is dependent on the reading of the poem, on the interpreter, the seemingly dead and mutilated Medusa seems to bear life in the reading act, which endows it with the active gaze. The activity of the Medusa is entirely dependent on the reader's reception. Yet, the feeling of threat does not disappear: it stages the problem that the moment the picture stands forth the observer loses its activity in its presence. The active speaking and glaring of Medusa deadens all other activities. Thus the implied threat that he whole picture might turn into an enormous site of gaze: the "ever shifting mirrors" formed from the "vapours of the air" do not function as the mirror of the observer, neither do they seem to mediate the site as Mitchell claims, but "kindle" the "brazen glare" of the sneaks and of the Medusa head and corollary, its beauty and terror. The picture in the end would be an immense site of gazing eyes, which at the same time emanate light and shine enhanced by the mirroring vapours, thus blinding any observer in the process of realisation.

For the impossibility of realising the "pictorial other" a supposedly descriptive part "A Game of Chess" from Eliot's *Waste Land* can serve as a good example. As Lentricchia argues, "In the *Waste Land*, Eliot, a man of his aesthetic times, created a kind of painting in five panels, which must be grasped by the mind's eye all at once, as a spatial form, taken in as if the poem were a single complex image, not a work to be read through time, from beginning to end but to a work to be 'seen' in a glance."[65] Yet, this construction is curious since the real referents are only previous texts or myths. The juxtaposition of many perspectives at once is supposed to insert a spatial dimension into the temporal flow of narration and therefore to create instantaneity or simultaneity, and to freeze the temporal into the spatial. If successful the "meaning," that is, the picture seen by the 'inner eye' stills the movement and becomes static as opposed to the dynamic and active voice. However, Eliot presumably does not want to freeze his poetry into the state of an icon, his poem is so overtly

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64 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 42

65 F. Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 275.

overloaded with different images the prevalent allusions create that it is hardly possible to stop their whirlpool.

The first part of "A Game of Chess" begins with a close paraphrase from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. If one follows Eliot's notes it is easy to notice that the whole section is framed by Shakespearean texts as it closes with the last words of Ophelia. The opening picture of this section give hints of an affluent setting, but these are misleading about the time period we are supposed to imagine. Also the presence of candle light or the massive gold ceiling suggest earlier periods whereas "closed car" and "Shakespearean Rag" appearing in the last lines of this part might refer to a later period, early 20th century, though it does not suspend the ambiguity. The description of the first 110 lines present the interior but leaves out any description of the woman the room belongs to: she is present in her absence. There is no information about her, only the setting and later her diction suggest indirectly her social class. Some pieces of the furniture ("a chair she sat in"; mirror and reflection, perfumes) and the last lines "under the brush her hair / spread out in fiery points" give hints that probably she is seated in front of a dressing table brushing her hair. But we do not know anything about her appearance or age, the woman directs the passage in her bodily absence, but with the presence of her voice for which there is no "audible" answer (only her lines are in quotation marks).

The description of the room has no unified focal point, the elements of the description follow the intertexts intertwined in the texture of the poem, and this makes extremely difficult for the reader-interpreter to imagine the actual setting. Description, according to Mieke Bal, in reality, is closer to de-scription, that is, to un-writing, with which she claims that any description falsifies its object rather than presents it. But here the question is not only the falsity of description, since in Eliot's poem the impossibility of description is due to the intricate allusive system it applies. (Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra also states the impossibility of depicting, he says that "it beggar'd all description"). The first 110 lines are incorporating different sources: after the Shakespearean intertext, the *Aeneid* takes over, the description of Dido's banquet, and then we find a few lines from Philomel's story, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Even the intertexts overlap: Cleopatra invites Anthony for dinner, Dido gives a banquet, Philomel and her sister Procne make a feast for Tereus and serve his son Itys for him as a revenge.

Following the "description" one even finds that on the thematic level it is rather the disruption and the distraction of the senses: light, gold and the glitter of

jewels are doubled and reflected by the glass and the marble, all the light emanating from the different objects "meet" in the reflection, blinding any observant eye (especially "lidless eyes," or eyes which are pearls now[66]) thus thwarting seeing and traditional description. From the 86th line on, smell takes over resulting not only the confusion of the senses, but the intellect as well: "And drowned the sense in odors." The Ovidian intertext, represented as a depiction of a painting, functions as a window, mocking the claimed transparency of artworks by the actual re-writing of a verbal passage. The picture of Philomel points to another picture, to the tapestry, to a mute textile into which she waved her story. Pictures just like signs in this poem point to ever newer signs: "other withered stumps of time / were told upon the walls." But very interestingly, these signs gaze actively and their gaze silence the "talking image-texts" which form the room's description: "staring forms / leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed." Eliot's idea of the objective correlative,[67] according to which objects or external facts must terminate in sensory experience and evoke the required emotion, does not seem to reach its aim, it does not terminate in sensory experience, but in the blindness of reading and recalling other texts. The eyes that became pearls might be objects and impersonal as opposed to the private and personal eye, but with them the possibility for private seeing is lost, for if the image turns into a pearl (the pearls of literature?) there is little chance to gain its original back. The set of objects are not objects but words which has to do more with their sources (with previous texts) than with the existing objects of a description or the probably evoked referent. Although the whirlpool of thoughts and images might be reached in this case, it is possible only at the price of concreteness.

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66 It is another allusion to Shakespeare, namely to Ariel's song from the Tempest: "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (Act I, scene ii).

67 "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," *Selected Essays* [London: Faber and Faber, 1958], p 145).

*János Kenyeres*

# Intention and Interpretation in Literary Theory and Legal Hermeneutics

The following discussion offers an investigation into the concept of intention in the humanities, in the broadest sense of the word. My main interest is literary theory – specifically the approach exemplified and represented by Northrop Frye – and legal hermeneutics. Both are concerned with human culture and have societal, communal and public bearings but as US Supreme Court Justice William Brennan has said, "Unlike literary critics, judges cannot merely savor the tensions or revel in the ambiguities inhering in the text – judges must solve them."[1] This pragmatic requirement in legal hermeneutics was certainly one of the reasons why the idea of intention as a guiding principle has been retained in legal interpretation, whereas, in the absence of this practical demand, the role of intention experienced a rapid decline in literary theory as modern and post-modern theories entered the academic field. But apart from this pragmatic aspect, jurisprudence has always been based upon such principles as righteousness and justice, principles attached to ethics, a concept whose role for literature – as the "asymmetric counterconcept" of aesthetics – has been the subject of much debate in literature and literary theory since the last third of the 19th century.[2] For all the differences, however, legal hermeneutics and literary theory are both concerned with the interpretation of texts, which alone offers the opportunity to compare their respective interpretative strategies. In what follows I will first

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1 Quoted in Annabel Patterson, "Intention," in: *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 136.
2 See Zoltán Kenyeres, "Kérdések az etikumról és esztétikumról," in: *Irodalomismeret* (2000/4), p. 65.

discuss literary theory and will proceed on to legal hermeneutics in the second part of this paper.

The concept of authorial intention was largely deprived of its legitimacy and banned from literary criticism in the second half of 20th century as an old fashioned and simple method which restricts interpretation and which is established on a faulty and deficient theoretical basis. As Jeremy Hawthorn has remarked, "in the 1950s and 1960s use of the word 'intention' alone was sufficient to make many critics reach for their revolvers."[3] Northrop Frye's theory, too, moved along this path and rejected the importance of authorial intention in the interpretation of works of literature.

In *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye rejected the notion that the poet is necessarily, or even could be, the definitive interpreter of himself. This notion was in line with the basic tenets of the New Criticism, but Frye traced it to Blake's following comments on Wordsworth: "I do not know who wrote these Prefaces – Blake said – they are very mischievous & direct contrary to Wordsworth's own Practice."[4] Frye believed that "it is a blunder to limit the meaning of art to what the artist may be presumed to have intended," for the "artist's intentions are often on levels of consciousness quite unknown to himself."[5] Frye maintained and developed this idea in *Anatomy of Criticism*, where he claimed that the artist is not equipped with the tools to unravel his own art or that of other poets and that it is the task of the critic to unveil the poet's world of imagination through his creative work.[6] Thus it is not very surprising that Frye concluded that "Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads is a remarkable document, but as a piece of Wordsworthian criticism nobody would give it more than a B plus."[7]

In his effort to set up the principles of literary criticism, Frye was reluctant to use psychological terms, but accepted that "poetry is the product of not only of a deliberate and voluntary act of consciousness, like discursive writing, but of processes which are subconscious or preconscious or half-conscious or unconscious as well."[8] This was a rejection of Husserlian intentionality, at least as

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3 Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 119.
4 Quoted in Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton U P, 1947), pp. 112–113.
5 Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 112.
6 See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1957), pp. 5–6.
7 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 5.
8 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 88.

far as works of literature were concerned, since – as it is well-known – Husserl believed that it is not possible to consider the world independently of human consciousness and that our consciousness always relates to something, since consciousness is always a consciousness of something and the objects of the world are correlates of the individual's intentional acts. Frye did not oppose this idea, but claimed that poetry is creation, not "an act of consciousness," and "creation, whether of God, man, nature, seems to be an activity whose only intention is to abolish intention, to eliminate final dependence on or relation to something else, to destroy the shadow that falls between itself and its conception."[9] This latter view echoed the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant stated, albeit in another context, that: "Otherwise it would not be the exactly same thing that exists, but something else, but something more than we had thought in the concept; and we could not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists."[10]

Frye traced the "intentional fallacy," the concept that the poet's primary intention is to convey meaning to the reader – and that the main obligation of the critic is to evoke that intention – to the failure to distinguish between "fiction and fact, hypothesis and assertion, imaginative and discursive writing."[11] In his view, intention belongs to "discursive writing," where there must be a valid correspondence between the words and what they describe. In discursive writing a statement is true if it corresponds to the reality which it literally denotes. On the other hand, "a poet's primary concern is to produce a work of art [...] in other words, a poet's intention is centripetally directed. It is directed towards putting words together, not towards aligning words with meanings."[12] In brief, the "poet may have intended one thing and done another,"[13] or "A snowflake is probably quite unconscious of forming a crystal, but what it does may be worth study even if we are willing to leave its inner mental processes alone."[14]

One of the most extreme manifestos of this line of critical thought, detaching the author from the work of art, was made by Roland Barthes, among others (like Foucault), who claimed that it is an error to assume that there is an author behind the text, because such a presumption delimits the text and restricts its

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9 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 88–89.
10 Quoted in John Hick, ed., *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990). p. 449.
11 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 86.
12 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 86.
13 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 87.
14 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 89.

interpretation by assigning a deciphering activity to the critic in place of a disentangling process.[15] Barthes' famous statement, that the "birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,"[16] was a logical conclusion in a line of thought that may be taken back to Nietzsche. Nevertheless, despite the rhetorical power of Barthes' assertion, the argument of a long line of earlier critics following the same path, including Frye, stating, for example, that "the author brings the words and the reader the meaning" and that "it is the exact description of all works of literary art without exception,"[17] it is naive to believe that the research of intention is a simple or easy hermeneutic question. The unabridged version of the above Frye quote is the motto of E.D. Hirsch's "defence of the author" in *Validity in Interpretation*, suggesting as if Frye had been his opponent, but Hirsch's attack was more specifically directed against Gadamer.[18] Hirsch defines "verbal meaning" as "what the author meant," i.e. "the author's meaning" and distinguishes it from "understanding," which is the reader's own construction of verbal meaning, "interpretation," which is the explanation of verbal meaning and "significance" which "names a relationship" between verbal meaning and a person, who is the reader of the text.[19] Hirsch's book-length study gave complex reasons for the necessity of an author-centred approach, countering the predominant currents of twentieth century literary theory from Eliot to Derrida (opposing the latter in his *Aims of Interpretation*). One of his key arguments was

15 Barthes claims that "[o]nce the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic" (Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in: *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath [New York: Noonday Press, 1988], p. 147).

16 Barthes, p. 148.

17 Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, pp. 427–428.

18 E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 1, but the same quotation is also cited by Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978). For investigations into the opposing views of Gadamer and Hirsch, see Péter Dávidházi, "A filológia kihívása az amerikai kritikaelméletben," in: *Filológia Közlöny*, xxx/4 (Budapest, 1984), pp. 402–407, and Tibor Fabiny, *Shakespeare and the Emblem: Studies in Renaissance Iconography and Iconology* (Szeged, 1984), pp. 40–44.

19 Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, pp. 8 and 25. For the four categories in Hirsch, see Wendell V. Harris's explanation in Irena R. Maryk, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* (Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 360.

that to "banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation."[20] In opposition to Derrida and J. Hillis Miller, M.H. Abrams struck a very similar tone in "The Deconstructive Angel," claiming that interpretation should approximate what the author meant. Knowing that Hirsch's compelling logic and Abrams' "traditional humanistic scholarship" (as David Lodge calls it)[21] supports the "traditionalistic" side of the debate, it is perhaps not utterly wrong to assert that retaining the concept of the author and of authorial intention may reveal an underlying system, the very core of that which comes to light, and this, in turn, may help solve questions which are otherwise utterly complicated or cannot be resolved at all. In brief, such methodology may offer assistance in seeing things hidden from the sight of the critic, things that are relevant not because they belong to the author but because they pertain to the reader's understanding of what he can see in the text.

In the light of the foregoing it is interesting to observe that there was a shift in Frye's own view concerning the question of intention in the 1980s. This issue did not assume a central role in his thought, but, given his previous conviction, one cannot overlook some queer statements scattered in his last works. Frye never accepted the importance of authorial intention, but the intentionality of the text was a concept which he started to invoke. For Frye, the point of departure remained to be the text, and not the author, but he accepted the idea of intention which was recreated by and through the text, as if being in the mind of the text. For example, in *The Great Code* he asserts: "What I am saying is that all explanations are an *ersatz* form of evidence, and evidence implies a criterion of truth external to the Bible which the Bible itself does not recognise,"[22] suggesting that the Bible has its own integrity and the capability of deciding on such matters, or as was for long held: "Scriptura Scripturam interpretat" or "Scriptura sui ipsius interpres." This concept is repeated in another statement, which includes reference to the mentality of the Bible's presumed author as well: "the Bible itself could not care less whether anyone finds an ark on Mount Ararat or not: such "proofs" belong to a mentality quite different from any that could conceivably

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20 Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 5.

21 See David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London and New York: Longman, 1988), p. 264. "The Deconstructive Angel" is reprinted in the same volume, pp. 265-276.

22 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: A Harvest/HJB Book, 1983), p. 44.

produced the Book of Genesis."[23] Then again, Frye refers to intention in the following sentence: "Once we have realized that the Bible is not primarily literary in intention, it may seem curious that it should be so full of figures of speech."[24] Answering a question posed by a student, Frye said that it was important to respect the religious intentionality of the Bible,[25] and in the "Hypnotic Gaze of the Bible," he said: "Well, I was confronted with the difficulty that the Bible seemed to have all the characteristics of literature, such as the use of myth and metaphor, and yet at the same time it was clearly not intended to be a work of literature."[26] It is clear from these statements that Frye thought both of the mind of the text and, vaguely, of the author of the text, but these scattered remarks are insufficient to conclude that he turned towards an intention-centred approach. These assertions merely demonstrate that he took into consideration some kind of intention, whether emanating from and created by the text or deriving from the author; however, there is no doubt that the internal, centripetal world of the text continued to be at the focal point of his thought, and he did not make a major revision to his views on intention.

The example of other scholarships where the question of authorial intention has not been excluded from the field of research is also suggestive. Not in the sense that these scholarships managed to solve the question of intention once and for all in their own hermeneutics, but in the sense that they demonstrate that this question is a very complex one, to which no general rules can be applied.

In art history, the claim that Baroque churches were over-decorated in order to attract attention and thus help regain people for Catholicism is surely dismissed by most art historians as a commonplace, but not as a statement founded on a false theoretical basis.[27] Alois Riegl's analysis of the origin of the early Christian basilica investigates why in early Christian churches the communal space was emancipated by the unusual placing of the altar in the centre, and finds that the answer lies in the architect's artistic volition to direct the perceiver's attention towards the ceiling and towards the sky above it, suggesting that the believer's

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23 Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 44.

24 Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 53.

25 See "Introduction: an approach, Episode No. 1," in: *The Bible and Literature* [video series] (Toronto: Media Centre, University of Toronto, 1982).

26 Robert D. Denham, ed., *A World in a Grain of Sand: Twenty-Two Interviews with Northrop Frye* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 222.

27 The statement is not true for countries where Baroque art was not connected to the Counter-Reformation, such as Baroque architecture in England.

awareness should be concentrated on the presence which is above, both inside and outside of the building.[28] In art history, intentionality, *Kunstwollen*, is a valid and applicable concept, which László Beke has recently brought into connection with Foucault's concept of *epistemé*.[29] Indeed, already Wölfflin defined the essence of *Kunstwollen* as "not everything is possible in any age." Although the concrete manifestation of *Kunstwollen*, according to Riegl, defines individual periods of art, his usage of the concept was very broad and he applied it to the individual artist as well: "in the age of modern superindividualism, each artist believes that he must write a book on his own *Kunstwollen*, out of the well-founded fear that the public would not be able to understand his artistic conceptions from his works."[30]

Gadamer, drawing on Aristotle, distinguished between *phronesis*, i.e. moral knowledge, *epistemé*, i.e. theoretical knowledge and *techné*, i.e. the knowledge of a skill. He saw a connection between *phronesis* and modern hermeneutic problems, and referred to legal hermeneutics as an example of *phronesis*.[31] Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, of course, proceeded to other conclusions, but his analogy leads one to the area of jurisprudence, which both in theory and practice accepts that an act (action) should be interpreted and judged, at least partially, in accordance with the will, or intent, that caused it to become realised. In criminal law, intention is a concept which distinguishes one degree of crime from another: murder is different from manslaughter in that murder is the illegal deliberate killing of a human being, whereas manslaughter is the crime of killing a person illegally, but not intentionally. Therefore, murder carried out by premeditated malice is different from manslaughter by negligence, exactly on the basis of the intent underlying it, even if the same axe is used.

But to move from the corpse to the corpus, it is clear that law must deal with other cases, too, where the examination expands from a written text, whether a law, a contract or a testament, to the context outside it. The recreation of the intention of the lawmaker, the contracting parties or the testator is an essential element of judicial systems around the world, which brings the interpreter of legal

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28 See Alois Riegl, "Az ókeresztény bazilika keletkezéséhez," in: *Emlék márványból vagy homokkőből*, ed. Marosi Ernő (Gondolat, 1976), pp. 357–360. [My translation.]

29 See László Beke, "Utószó," in: Alois Riegl, *Művészettörténeti tanulmányok*, ed. László Beke (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1998), p. 316.

30 Quoted in Beke, p. 319. [My translation.]

31 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Igazság és módszer: egy filozófiai hermeneutika vázlata* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1994), pp. 222–240.

texts into an extratextual area, back to the intent of the persons who created them. But here as well, the issue of intention is not free from debates.

Even in criminal law, intention is not necessarily the primary principle deciding the case. The story of the publication of *Histriomastix* in 1632 and of the cruel punishment of its author, the Presbyterian reformer William Prynne, serves as a good example to illustrate this fact. Prynne's book was a severe attack against the stage and all theatricals, including those enjoyed or performed by rulers, such as Nero. The English royal family of the time were fascinated by court plays and when Prynne's book was finally published after seven years of hard work and several futile attempts to obtain a licence, Queen Henrietta Maria and her women were engaged in rehearsing a pastoral play for a performance at Whitehall. Among other implicit attacks against the monarchy, Prynne, whether deliberately referring to the queen or not, placed in the table of contents of his book an expression stigmatising women actors as "notorious whores." He was immediately summoned before the Star Chamber and was found guilty of the crime of seditious libel. He was condemned to stand in the pillory, to have both his ears cut off (on two separate occasions, first the upper parts of his ears and later what remained of them), to be branded as a seditious libeller (S. L.) on both cheeks, to pay a fine of Pounds 5000 and, to top it all, to life imprisonment.[32] This pitiless verdict was based on his judges' conviction that "thoughe not in express tearmes, yet by examples and other implicit means [he argued that] for acteing or beinge spectatours of players or maskes it is just to laye violent hands upon kings and princes. [...] It is said, hee had noe ill intencion, noe ill harte, but that hee maye bee ill interpreted. That must not be allowed him in excuse, for hee should not have written any thinge that would bear [that] construccion, for hee doth not accompanye his booke, to make his intencion knowne to all that reads it."[33] Thus, the reasons for Prynne's sentence in 1634 already contained the principle which became one of the key tenets of modern literary theory: the text cannot be reduced to the author's intentions or as Wimsatt and Beardsley asserted: "The poem belongs to the public."[34]

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32 See, for example, J. Dover Wilson, "The Puritan Attack upon the Stage," in: *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, Part Two], eds. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: UP, 1910), Vol. VI, pp. 404–405.

33 Quoted in Patterson, p. 135.

34 "The Intentional Fallacy," in: David Lodge, ed., *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 335.

However, legal hermeneutics as a general rule does not dismiss the concept of intention, although the extent to which it is taken into consideration and the method by which it is used vary from case to case and from author to author. The US constitutional debate in the 1980s serves as a good example to illustrate the complexity of the question. Whereas Attorney General Edwin Meese attempted to define and fix the meaning of the American Constitution by reference to the intentions of its framers in 1787, Supreme Court Justice William Brennan concluded from the records of the ratification that "all that can be gleaned is that the Framers themselves did not agree about the application or meaning of particular constitutional provisions, and hid their differences in cloaks of generality. [...] [Moreover] It is far from clear whose intention is relevant – that of the drafters, the congressional disputants, or the ratifiers in the states."[35] Yet, Justice Brennan firmly believed that the Constitution as a text reveals certain intentions – to change society for the better – which are not bound to the situation of 1787 but can be extended to later developments, such as the abolition of slavery. In this way, Justice Brennan went as far as to claim that capital punishment is the greatest instance of the "cruel and unusual punishment to which the Eighth Amendment was directed and that opposition to capital punishment is consistent with the amendment's 'essential meaning.'"[36]

Today, three basic approaches may be distinguished regarding intention, at least as far as the Anglo-American legal systems are considered. The first roughly corresponds to the principle laid down in Roman law and does not allow for the use of extrinsic evidence unless it is to clarify or explain the integrated writing; extrinsic evidence is never admissible when it would contradict the writing for the basic principle is that intention inheres in the text. As Charles E. Odgers stated, the parties "are presumed to have intended to say that which they have indeed said, so their words as they stand must be construed."[37] The second approach focuses on the interpreter. The exaggerated form of this school argues against the precedence of written texts and regards the legal interpreter as all-important. This concept was advocated in the so-called Critical Legal Studies movement (in the 1970s in the work of Roberto Unger and Duncan Kennedy), and a more moderate and applicable form of this concept is represented by Professor Ronald Dworkin.

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35 Quoted in Patterson, p. 136.
36 Quoted in Patterson, p. 137.
37 Charles E. Odgers, *The Construction of Deeds and Statutes* (4th ed.; London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1956), p. 21.

The third school of legal hermeneutics comprises the "original intent" camp thinkers who believe (such as Chief Justice John Marshall or Robert Bork) that texts must be understood in their original sense.

The question of intention in civil law can be traced to Roman law, which, after a number of debates taking place before the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* was compiled in the 6th century, firmly holds – to a large extent relying on the earlier work of Servius Sulpicius Rufus, Celsus and Paulus – that the subjective intention of the person making a legal statement cannot be taken into consideration if the objective content of the statement is clear. In the event of any ambiguity in the text, however, the true content of the statement can only be established on the basis of the intent of the person making the statement.[38]

Since the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* became the ultimate model for the legal system of virtually every continental European nation, it is not surprising that the Hungarian Civil Code is in line with the above concept. Section 207 of Act IV of 1959 on the Civil Code explicitly defines how contracts and legal statements should be interpreted. It reads as follows (in its literal translation): "(1) In the event of a dispute, a contractual statement shall be interpreted in such a way as the other party, in view of the presumed intent of the person making the statement and the circumstances of the case, must have construed it in accordance with the generally accepted meaning of the relevant words."[39]

But how should this construction be made? The Commentary on the Civil Code explains that

it is clear that what must be clarified during the interpretation is what the other party must have meant by the given statement and this may be specified by assessing

(a) the generally accepted meaning of the relevant words;
(b) all the circumstances of the case;
(c) the presumed intent of the person making the statement.

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38 See András Bessenyő, *Római magánjog I: A római magánjog az európai jogi gondolkodásban* (Budapest & Pécs: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 2000), p. 171.

39 The original Hungarian text of Section 207 of the Civil Code reads this: "(1) A szerződési nyilatkozatot vita esetén úgy kell értelmezni, ahogyan azt a másik félnek a nyilatkozó feltehető akaratára és az eset körülményeire tekintettel a szavak általánosan elfogadott jelentése szerint értenie kellett" (*CompLEX CD Jogtár*, ed. Dr. László Jablonszky [Budapest: KJK KERSZÖV, 02/1999]).

[...] In judicial practice, however, interpretative questions are often solved by investigating the true transactional intent of the parties – that is of each party – instead of revealing the intent of the person making the statement.[40]

It is obvious, therefore, that in judicial practice the text of the law is simplified since what the Hungarian Civil Code provides for to be considered is not the intent of the party making the statement but his intent as interpreted or presumed by the other party. It should be conceded, though, that the original text of the law is almost impossible to put into day-to-day judicial practice and some simplification seems inevitable. At the same time, it is interesting to note that while in literary theory the question of intention is generally *rejected* as an all-too-easy approach, in judicial practice it is *avoided* and simplified as an all-too-complicated matter.

Ever since Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" urinal was exhibited in 1917, the nature of art has become increasingly vague, elusive and indefinable.[41] Instead of "what is art?" the question has changed into "how do we understand it?" Since there are no tangible criteria to decide what art is – apart from, perhaps, those based on common sense – classifying or distinguishing between different texts has become problematic, and, at the same time, irrelevant as well. This change in the nature of art has had a tremendous impact on literary interpretation, too, and, as a result, literary theory today can cope with – in fact it can devour – any text. Such titles as "The law as literature" (1961) "Law as Literature" (1984) or "Constitutional law as fiction: narrative in the rhetoric of authority" (1995) illustrate that law can be read and interpreted as "literature." But can this situation be reversed and "literary" texts interpreted in the context of legal hermeneutics? Can the spirit of the law be applied to literature to see if the passage between literary and legal theory is two-directional? Given that philosophy, history, sociology and the other "neighbouring sciences" can be used in the interpretation of literary works, the question of law may not be so odd as it first appears. Section 207 of the Hungarian Civil Code seems to be a suitable provision to test this issue, for at least two reasons: it relates to texts which are similar to works of literature in that they involve "authorship" (as they are "unilateral statements") and the texts concerned are ambiguous (as they are subject to a debate).

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40 Source: *CompLEX CD Jogtár.*

41 This date, like any other, is of course arbitrary. Duchamp started producing his ready-mades in 1914 ("bottle rack"), but perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that no work is more singularly identified with the transformation of art in the twentieth century than his "Fountain."

Adapting Section 207 of the Hungarian Civil Code to works of literature, we reach the following statement: "literary works should be interpreted in such a way as the reader, in view of the presumed intent of the author and the circumstances of the creation of the work, must have construed it in accordance with the generally accepted meaning of the relevant words." This statement contains the "original intent" or "sensus originalis," historic aspect, though in a twisted form, viewed from the then contemporary reader's perspective. In that way it bears resemblance to canonical criticism, which asserts that the meaning of the Bible derives from the one-time believers, the canonising community, and the Biblical text can be truly understood only if the interpreter shares the "spirit" of that community.[42] However, if the past tense of the statement is changed to the present tense, the key phrase is "must construe it," which does not express an imperative but a logical necessity, involving interaction between reader and text, and referring to the situation in which the text is interpreted in the ideal manner. Therefore, the description is valid to the reader who renders such ideal or implied interpretation and in that way it relates to a reader who can be brought into connection with the "ideal reader" (Didier Coste) and the "implied reader" (Wolfgang Iser). So our hypothetical definition goes: "a work should be interpreted in such a way as the ideal/implied reader, in view of the presumed intent of the author and the circumstances of the creation of the work, construes it in accordance with the generally accepted meaning of the words."

This hypothetical definition is of course not to serve as a "definition" and is merely an initial attempt to demonstrate that, despite the important differences between the two disciplines and their respective subject-matter, the passage between legal and literary interpretation is open: literary theory and legal hermeneutics may venture into the area of the other. This is the point where the overlap between literary theory and jurisprudence becomes apparent and tangible, but also the point where this discussion must end.

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42 See Tibor Fabiny, "Új irányzatok a Biblia értelmezésében," in: *Szóra bírni az Írást: Irodalomkritikai irányok lehetőségei a Biblia értelmezésében*, ed. Tibor Fabiny, Hermeneutikai Füzetek 3 (Budapest: Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont, 1994), p. 17.

*Tamás Tukacs*

# "Close, But Not Touching"

## Readings and Misreadings In John Fowles's *The Collector*

Ever since its publication, John Fowles's *The Collector* (1963) has been a great commercial success – "an intriguing study in warped sexuality [...] cunningly worked suspense" by "an artist of great imaginative power"[1] – as well as the object of intensive critical activity. It has been interpreted as a psychological thriller,[2] an allegorical treatment of the struggle between "the Few" and "the Many," a modern version of the Bluebeard legend,[3] a Bildungsroman, an existential journey towards self-discovery,[4] and so on. What I want to look at in this study is the issue of interpretation as it is encoded in the novel. In *The Collector* the two protagonists, Frederick Clegg and Miranda Grey enter a reciprocal interpretive game in Clegg's secluded house. It is the nature of this intersubjective reading process that I shall try to explore here. In relation to this, I shall look at the ways the reading process is dramatised within the context of the novel. What kinds of reading are approved or rejected by the novel? The most important question proposed by my interpretation is this: is the dichotomy suggested by the novel between apparently good/authentic reading (Miranda) and bad/fake reading (Clegg) still maintained at the end? Finally, is the two characters' interpretation of each other successful – do we have readings or misreadings?

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1 See the cover pages John Fowles's *The Aristos* (London: Triad Grafton, 1986).
2 Bo H. T. Eriksson, *The "Structuring Forces" of Detection. The Cases of C. P. Snow and John Fowles* (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksel International, 1995), p. 125.
3 Sherill Grace, "Courting Bluebeard with Bartók, Atwood and Fowles: Modern Treatment of the Bluebeard Theme," *Journal of Modern Literature* 11/2 (1984) 245–262.
4 Robert Burden, *John Fowles, John Hawkes, Claude Simon: Problems of Self and Form in the Post-Modernist Novel: A Comparative Study* (Wurzburg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 1980), p. 152.

## 1 INTRODUCTION: SCENES OF READING

A careful reading of the novel reveals that the idea of reading texts, specific acts of reading, of books, of newspapers play a crucial role in the work, and that, as we shall see later, reading is always somehow in connection, on the one hand, with the activity of looking and peeping, and, on the other, with the interpretation of the other person.

Reading is already present in the opening section of the novel, which is narrated by Frederick Clegg, the collector of the title, a lower-middle class clerk whose hobby is collecting butterflies, and also women. After having won a large sum of money on the football pools, he decides to kidnap Miranda Grey, an art student, and to imprison her in his newly purchased country house. Within the space of the first two pages of the text we encounter three scenes that are related to reading. Once he meets Miranda in the library: "I stood right behind her once in the queue at the public library down Crossfield Street. She didn't look once at me, but I *watched* the back of her head and her hair in a long pigtail" (5, emphasis mine).[5] Next he sees her on the train: "She sat three seats down and sideways to me, and read a book, so I could *watch* her for thirty-five minutes" (5, emphasis mine). This short train scene is crucial with regard to the rest of the novel. It suggests that Miranda is exposed to Clegg's watching and becomes vulnerable through reading. (Does Clegg perhaps desire the ability of reading that, as we shall see later, he definitely lacks?) Finally, he reads a newspaper article about her: "Well, then there was the bit in the local paper about the scholarship she'd won and how clever she was, and her name as beautiful as herself, Miranda" (6).

What is common in all three instances is that the idea of reading, watching, and Miranda are interconnected in them. This pattern can be discovered in further scenes of reading as well. Once he follows her into a coffee-bar: "I sat on a stool at the counter where I could watch. [...] Then she was standing right next to me. I was pretending to read a newspaper so I couldn't see her get up" (15). Later he returns to the same coffee-bar, hoping to see her again, and he spends "nearly two hours there pretending to read a book" (24). A basic contrast is suggested in all these instances. Miranda seems to be the real, authentic reader, who goes to the library, reads on the train, and Clegg appears to be a fake reader, who reads only newspapers, or only pretends to read. After incarcerating her, he buys for her,

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5 All parenthesised references to *The Collector* are to this edition: John Fowles, *The Collector* (London and Sydney: Pan, 1965).

among other things, art books, with reproductions of famous paintings, that is, pictures that can be looked at as long as one wants to. Elsewhere he also mentions books: "one reason I got fed up with Aunt Annie was I started to get interested with some of the books you can buy at shops in Soho, books of stark women and all that. I could hide the magazines, but there were the books I wanted to buy and I couldn't in case she tumbled" (12). Clegg reads books, indeed, but these are pornographic ones, not exactly designed for reading, but rather for watching. Miranda is not present here, but Clegg's attempt to conceal these pornographic books from his aunt is not unlike his desire to conceal, hide and "read" Miranda in a secluded place. Thus Miranda becomes transfigured into a pornographic book in Clegg's fantasies. Once Miranda writes into her diary: "He reads it [*The Catcher in the Rye*] only to show me how hard he is trying" (192), not realising that it is *she* who is being read, and that Clegg is really trying hard to interpret *her*.

Books also play a crucial role in the second section, which comprises Miranda's diary that she is writing during her imprisonment. There are a number of activities related to reading in this section, too. Miranda spends her first days in the cellar reading, but then this is a rather uneasy activity: "I couldn't do anything if he was in the room. I pretended to read, but I couldn't concentrate" (149). What we have here is the reversal of the train-scene: Miranda, like Clegg, begins to pretend reading. (Of course the cause of her distraction is not desire but fear.) Later in the novel, several specific books are read. First and foremost, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in which some of the characters' names coincide with those in the novel: Miranda, Ferdinand (Clegg claims that he is called Ferdinand [40]) and Caliban (Miranda's nickname for Clegg), and a part of which is indeed cited in Miranda's diary (255). Miranda recommends to Clegg *The Catcher in the Rye*, whose protagonist she identifies with him: "You're a Holden Caulfield. He doesn't fit anywhere and you don't" (216). Further, Miranda reads Jane Austen's *Emma*, and identifies herself with its protagonist: "I *am* Emma Woodhouse. I feel for her, of her, and in her" (167). Once she makes mention of Shaw's *Major Barbara*, and the act of identification also takes place: "A year ago I would have stuck to the strict moral point. Like Major Barbara" (146). Two emblematic novels of the 1950s are also read by Miranda: *Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The protagonist of the latter she violently rejects and identifies him with Clegg: "He's mean, narrow, selfish, brutal. [...] he has the hate of other things and other people outside his type" (241). Mention is also made of the *Arabian Nights* (223), Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (160) and Dickens's *Great*

*Expectations* (194). What is common in all these texts? It is with the help of these fictional works that Miranda tries to interpret, to make sense of the situation, and, what is perhaps more important, she identifies Clegg with certain fictional characters: Caliban, Holden Caulfield, Mr. Elton in *Emma* (230), Pip and Arthur Seaton. Miranda interprets her situation as fiction and tries to read it as a book with Clegg and herself as fictional characters in it that also need to be deciphered. Thus, Miranda interprets the world through reading, which precedes her experience, that is, she attempts to apply certain patterns to her experience based on her previous readings.

The abundance of specific scenes of reading in the novel serves as a set of metaphors for reading the other person and the situation in which they find themselves, indicating that *The Collector* is also a novel about reading. Clegg treats Miranda as a pornographic book which he tries to watch, hide and interpret; on the other hand, Miranda interprets Clegg, the situation, and later herself on the basis of books, and thereby gets involved in a reading process. Reading becomes the metaphor of interpersonal relationships and vice versa, intersubjective relationships represent certain modes of reading.

## 2 MALE VS FEMALE READING

The novel strongly suggests a fundamental dichotomy between the "good," energetic, or catalytic female reading and the "bad," distorted or warped "male" reading; this dichotomy is supported by Fowles's theoretical writings, most notably *The Aristos*, in which he outlines this binary structure.

In the terms provided by *The Aristos*, the apparent opposition of Clegg and Miranda could be explained along three dichotomies: analysis vs. synthesis; determination vs. hazard; and stasis vs. kinesis. Clegg is a quasi-scientist, he collects butterflies, similarly to the rest of Fowles's male collectors, like Charles Smithson in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, who collects fossils. Thus he is closely linked to external reality, which he analyses, divides up, therefore cannot achieve "whole sight." Being a woman and a creator, Miranda has the chance to reach "whole sight," synthesis, as opposed to Clegg's analytic mind. Contrary to Clegg's artificial activities, such as photography, which can be seen as inauthentic, mere reproduction, she paints pictures, which is by definition an authentic, creative activity. Clegg embodies determination and authority as well. He gives no chance to "chance," to hazard, as he puts it, "just one mistake and you lose

everything" (100). In turn, Miranda often relies on the aleatory, on play and hazard. She is unpredictable, whimsical, playful: "She walked away but suddenly she snatched a cushion off the chair, turned and kicked straight at me [...] almost at once she pulled the jug thing off the mantelpiece and threw it at me [...]" (80). "Another day, it was downstairs, she just screamed. For no reason at all [...] What's up, I said. 'I just felt like a good scream,' she said" (72). Thirdly, Clegg's personality is helplessly passive and static. In the novel there is a hope that Miranda, embodying kinesis will manage to put an end to his passivity and "set him in motion" by filling in the gaps in Clegg, by revitalising him. Miranda, however, does not manage to get a unified image of him, as we shall see later: Clegg resists her reading.

In what follows I want to show how the carefully-built gender-based metaphysical polarity, which gives preference to Miranda's reading can be questioned, how the hierarchies of reading slowly break down and finally how both characters turn out to be inadequate readers of each other. In the following section of the essay I shall briefly present two of Clegg's reading modes, which posit him as a definitely inadequate reader of Miranda. One of these modes is in connection with the isolated setting in which the novel takes place, and, in relation to this, with the psychoanalytic concept of *anality*, which constitutes a crucial aspect both of the notion of isolation and of the reading process itself. The other mode is related to Clegg's *voyeuristic* perversion, which prevents him from reading Miranda properly and which will also serve as a sadistic instrument with which he keeps her in captivity.

*2.1 "Having Her Was Enough": Reading as Collecting; the Anal Aspect of Reading*

Barthes writes:

> [I]t is certain that there is an eroticism of reading [...]. By shutting himself up to read, by making reading into an absolutely separated, clandestine state in which the whole world is abolished, the reader is identified with two other human subjects [...]: the amorous subject and the mystic subject [...]. Yet something more enigmatic is presented for us to read, to interpret in the Proustian episode: reading – the delight of reading – has some relation with anality; one and the same metonymy connects reading, excrement and – as we have seen – money.[6]

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6 Roland Barthes, "On Reading," *The Rustle of Language*, ed. Francois Wahl; transl. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 38–39.

As we can see, he draws a strong parallel between the sense of isolation and the process of reading, in which the linking concept is anality. This is justified by the Freudian theory concerning pregenital sexual organisations. The conjunction of the idea of isolation with the reading process can be traced back to primitive fantasies originating in childhood. *The Collector* suggests that Clegg's ego-development has been arrested at an infantile stage and so he is apt only to read in a "perverse" way. There are at least five factors that give justification for Clegg being an "anal" reader: (1) the place of reading (2) Clegg's hobby of collecting (3) his self-control and sense of precise timing (4) his orderliness, and (5) his money-complex.

In *The Dynamics of Literary Response*,[7] Norman N. Holland suggests that every literary work is informed by core fantasies. Following Freud, he classifies fantasies as oral, anal, urethral, phallic, oedipal and genital ones. He assumes that there exists a characteristic "anal" writing, of which the most common characteristic features are images of dirt, smell and disgust.[8] The place of reading, the house in the country, has obvious connotations of anality. The reader will recall that the cellar Clegg confines Miranda into is wet and dark. "It was cold out of the sun, damp, nasty" (18); "This crypt-room is so stuffy, the walls squeeze in" (126); "Hateful primitive wash-stand and place" (128). It is not difficult to associate these descriptions with Holland's anal images.

Clegg's reading strategy can also be seen as fundamentally anal. Anal fantasies stem from a certain phase of ego-development, at about one year of age, when the child encounters two conflicting pleasures: the elimination and retention of excrement. Moreover, the child tends to regard this material as a sort of treasure and excretion as the giving up of this treasure.[9] Freud and Holland associate the

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7 Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

8 Holland, p. 40.

9 "Children who are making use of the susceptibility to erotogenic stimulation of the anal zone betray themselves by holding back their stool till its accumulation brings about violent muscular contractions and, as it passes through the anus, is able to produce powerful stimulation of the mucous membrane. In so doing it must no doubt cause not only painful but also highly pleasurable sensations. [...] But they have other important meanings for the infant. They are clearly treated as part of the infant's own body and represent his first 'gift': by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience. From the 'gift' they later come to acquire the meaning of 'baby' – for babies, according to one of the sexual theories of children, are acquired and born through the bowels" (Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the

activities of keeping and collecting things with this period. Clegg applies reading strategies that are similar to typical anal activities: collecting and treasuring. By collecting butterflies, and, eventually, Miranda, he exhibits the same stage of ego-development to which Freud and Holland refer. He obviously regards Miranda as his *treasure* whom/which he is not willing to set free, as it were, eliminate, and thus his reading of her can be regarded a collecting activity.

Another anal activity is also crucial with Clegg, namely, self-control. It is at the age of about one year that a child learns to control and master his own impulses. The reader will recall that extreme self-control is a key word with Clegg. In the beginning he mentions that he "was never once punished at school" (10). He also refers to this principle of his when it comes to the prospect of an affair with Miranda: "I always understood [...] that a gentleman always controls himself to the right moment [...]" (108). All this can be linked to Holland's notion of self-discipline, impatience, procrastination and precise timing (41). Naturally, not only self-control, but also control over other things or people, namely, Miranda, plays an important part here.

Finally, Clegg is characterised by excessive orderliness, which is a result of the sublimation of anal erotism.[12] His mind is also obsessed by the idea of cleanliness and hygiene, which he also projects to Miranda: "She was always clean, too. [...] She hated dirt as much as I do, although she used to laugh at me about it" (60). He performs little rituals that can be seen as symptoms of neurosis: when he buys a necklace for Miranda, he washes it: "When I got home I washed the necklace (I didn't like to think of it touching that other woman's [the saleswoman's] skin) and hid it so that I could get it out at the correct time" (86; precise timing is also present here).

As a result of their parsimony, anal erotics often have money-complex. In their minds, "money is brought into the most intimate relationship with dirt," and unconsciously, with faeces; thus, interestingly, the most precious thing is brought into correlation with the most worthless one.[11] They are often unwilling to empty their bowels, as they often refuse to empty their purse. Clegg is also reluctant to let his most valuable object, Miranda, free, as if she was some "refuse"

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Theory of Sexuality," *The Pelican Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards [Reading: Cox & Wyman, 1977], Vol. 7, p. 103).

10 Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism," *The Pelican Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards (Reading: Cox & Wyman, 1977), Vol. 7, p. 211.

11 Freud, "Character," p. 214.

to be kept inside.[12] By confining Miranda in that wet, dark cellar, motivated by his anal fantasies, he wants to provide an ideal place for "reading" his beloved. In this sense Clegg is an anal reader, which means that instead of interpreting and understanding the object read, he is content with possessing, collecting, controlling, arranging and systematising it with extreme precision.

### 2.2 "I could sit there all night watching her": Voyeurism, Photography, Reading

The second mode of Clegg's reading can be described as voyeuristic. A certain element of voyeurism can be discovered in every act of reading, and *The Collector* partly dramatises this aspect, but it also dramatises the perverse mode of (mis)reading that is taken to the extreme by Clegg. He, on the one hand, takes a passive role, wishing to enjoy the text/performance without having to act on the literary work, but at the same time he does violence to Miranda by revealing the hidden brutal aspects of his peculiar hobby, photography. Reading Miranda with this technique, he confines, freezes her, she becomes motionless, inanimate; in other words, Clegg kills his text.

It was noted in the introduction that the idea of reading and watching are interconnected in the novel. The first sentence already refers to the activity of watching: "When she was home from her boarding school I used to see her almost every day sometimes [...]" (5). The excessive visuality of Clegg, of which the most explicit metaphor is the fact that he is an amateur photographer, will prevent him from proper reading and will make him a pornographic – and photographic – reader.

The connection between voyeurism and reading has been pointed out by many critics. One key premise of some psychoanalytic theories is that the writer, presenting his own fantasies, allows us to enjoy our daydreams without self-reproach or shame,[13] to "peer with impunity."[14] This instinct is activated through the reading process or watching a performance. Clegg wants to place himself in the role of the audience, and wants to watch Miranda's "performance," thereby also setting such primal scene fantasies in motion. When Miranda asks him to

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12 We should not forget that the money which enables Clegg to buy the house in which he keeps Miranda was won on the pools, so it is also a kind of treasure.

13 Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," *The Pelican Freud Library*. Vol. 14, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 141. See also: Peter Brooks, "The Idea of Psychoanalytic Criticism," *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 6.

14 Holland, p. 172.

"amuse" her, "do something," he cannot perform anything (79). He plays the role of the audience, and in this instance his expectations concerning the enjoyment of the "literary work" are frustrated. According to Holland, when we take a book in our hands, we expect two things: that the book is going to give us pleasure[15] and that we will not have to take our share actively while reading, that is, we will not have to perform anything, act *on* the literary work: "in the literary situation [...] we know no explosion will occur, for we know we are not going to act."[16] Clegg is frustrated because he realises he will have to *act on* the literary work he reads or the performance he watches. From the first moment, he would be willing only to watch Miranda, without having to do anything, considering her as an inanimate statue, picture or literary work. In other words, he is not willing to enter a dialogical process of reading, is not willing to risk himself. Therefore, Clegg can only fulfil his role as audience when Miranda cannot communicate with him: when he watches her from the window (5), when he watches his photos of her, when she is intoxicated, and finally, when she is dead. It is only then that he can "enjoy his daydreams" "without self-reproach or shame." "They [the photos] didn't talk back at me" (118), he summarises the essence of this pleasure.

Although the notion of voyeurism presupposes passivity, its hidden sadistic quality is revealed by the metaphor of photography. It is useful to quote Susan Sontag here: "[...] having a camera has transformed one person into something active, a voyeur: only he has mastered the situation."[17] Clegg uses photography both to occupy the role of the passive gazer who can watch people unpunished, and to compensate for his sexual ineptitude by being an active participant. That is, he substitutes gazing and peeping for making love. It becomes a perversion, because "instead of being preparatory of normal sexual aim, it supplants it."[18] "[I]n scopophilia and exhibitionism the eye corresponds to an erotogenic zone."[19] The sadistic aspect of voyeurism is obvious in the episode when Clegg ties up the sick Miranda and forces her to pose in front of his camera (121–122). Photographing the other person becomes a punishment, a faint echo of the primal scene when the male "punishes" the escaping female and does violence to her.[20]

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15 Holland, p. 74.

16 Holland, p. 82.

17 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 10.

18 Freud, "Three Essays," p. 70.

19 Freud, "Three Essays," p. 84.

20 This is what Sontag writes about a film: "There is a much stronger sexual fantasy in Michael Powell's extraordinary movie *Peeping Tom* (1960), which is not about a Peeping Tom but about a

A photo kills the person being photographed inasmuch as it freezes him or her, confining him or her within the limits of the picture, just as Clegg incarcerates Miranda in his house. "When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies."[21] Being photographed, Miranda becomes a dead, inanimate butterfly in Clegg's collection. He can only read Miranda when she is tied, silent, and inanimate. The immobility of the other, in other words, the possession of her, that has already been discussed in the previous chapter, becomes the precondition of Clegg's reading.

Clegg's other mode of reading is perhaps best described by the adjective "voyeuristic." He activates both sides of a voyeuristic perversion, that is, on the one hand he is content with a passive position of an onlooker who seeks to gain satisfaction by mere watching and thus setting his fantasies in motion. Curiously, the polar opposite of voyeurism is represented as one of Clegg's reading modes as well, which is using a camera as a weapon and as a means of compensating for one's sexual inaptitude by satisfying one's sadistic drives. The camera and photographing becomes metaphors of Clegg's keeping Miranda in captivity, and consigning a freezing and immobile status to her, and also of Clegg himself (conceived as a camera, a machine) capable only of mechanistic, word-by-word interpretation.

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psychopath who kills women with a weapon concealed in his camera, while photographing them. Not once does he touch his subjects. He doesn't desire their bodies; he wants their presence in the form of filmed images – those showing them experiencing their own death – which he screens at home for his solitary pleasure. The movie assumes connections between impotence and aggression, professionalized looking and cruelty, which point to the central fantasy connected with the camera. The camera as phallus is, at most, a flimsy variant of the inescapable metaphor that everyone unselfconsciously employs. However hazy our awareness of this fantasy, it is named without subtlety whenever we talk about 'loading' and 'aiming' a camera, about 'shooting' a film" (Sontag, pp. 13–14).

21 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, transl. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 57.

### 3 "CLOSE, BUT NOT TOUCHING": MUTUAL MISREADINGS

From the first pages of the novel, a stable dichotomy is suggested between Clegg's and Miranda's reading strategies. Miranda appears to be the authentic reader, who reads "real books" (157), and is able to perform the act of interpretation, whereas Clegg seems to be the fake, anal, voyeuristic, perverse reader who, in general, only pretends to read. Thus, a clear-cut opposition seems to be drawn between men and women as readers, evidently approving female readings. In the rest of this paper I want to show how both characters read the other in an inappropriate way, and thus to suggest that the obvious dichotomy suggested by the novel becomes highly questionable by the end. There are three factors on which I base my argument, namely (1) the sense of *theatricality* in the novel, which slowly transforms the characters into participants of a meta-play in which they are both actors and spectators, and thus renders the reading process highly unstable; (2) the hidden *similarities* that can be discovered between the non-present character of novel, "G.P.," who is supposed to be the "master-reader," and the apparently "worst" reader, Clegg; and finally (3) an *allegorising* reading mode that is practised both by Clegg and Miranda, and which is the ultimate step towards the mutual misinterpretation of the other.

### 3.1 "You are only pretending": Theatricality, Pretence, the Instability of Reading

"I am no good as a mimic, unlike quite a number of well-known writers. Perhaps that's what makes me feel dialogue, the playwright's skill, so important," John Fowles declared in a 1995 interview to Dianne Vipond.[22] Indeed, in *The Collector* dialogues play a significant role, which lends the novel a certain air of theatricality, as if it was performed on a stage. But apart from this superficial resemblance, there are other factors that make this text resemble a play rather than a novel.

One key characteristic of *The Collector* is that pretence and lying pervade the whole of the text. In fact the entire story is built upon one pretence: Clegg acts as if Miranda were staying in the house voluntarily and cherishes this illusion until the very end of the novel. The absurdity of the situation stems from the intermingling of reality and pretence. Finally the misinterpretation of these qualities results in tragedy.

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22 Dianne Vipond, "An Unholy Inquisition," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 42 (1996) 12–28, p. 15.

The theatricality of *The Collector* is rooted in the compulsion that both characters have to pretend, which makes the process of reading extremely difficult for both of them. Miranda is bound to act scenes out, to lie, in order to survive. Clegg first pretends while he spies on Miranda, then lies lest his crime be exposed. He tells Miranda, for instance, that he was hired to kidnap her, then he lies that he posted Miranda's letter. Miranda is motivated only by one aim: she wants to escape, so she subordinates nearly all of her acts to this sole need. She pretends to be ill, she pretends to need a lot of things from the town to make Clegg spend a lot of time away so that she could try to escape. So, ultimately, for both of them acting is of existential significance. The idea of acting becomes attached to Miranda in Clegg's mind to such an extent that on one occasion he dreams that when the police comes, he has to kill her and when he takes the cushion away "she was lying there laughing, she'd only pretended to die" (84). When they go upstairs they pretend to have dinner together as wife and husband. When Clegg presents Miranda with a ring, because he wants to marry her, Miranda answers: "I'll pretend they're mine" (89). Thus, like Nicholas in *The Magus*, they become part of a performance within the walls of Clegg's house, which does not have any spectators in the traditional sense: they are the actors and the audience at the same time. As Conchis explains the essence of his own meta-theatre in *The Magus*: "One in which the conventional separation between actors and audience was abolished."[23] This performance in which both of them are involved somehow becomes the ultimate reality/truth for Clegg and Miranda. Both of them seem to be vaguely aware of this peculiar situation. Miranda often puts down her dialogues with Clegg in her diary, in which he calls Clegg Caliban, as if these conversations were scenes in a play. Once she remarks: "I felt unreal, as if it was a play and I couldn't remember who I was in it" (158).

In turn, Clegg (thinks that he) is well aware of the fact that Miranda pretends. He often claims that he "sees through her tricks," and contemplates what she might be up to. This ignorance of what is apparent and "seeing through the trick" become fatal for both of them. One key episode in this respect is the seduction scene, when Miranda, in order to escape, tries to get Clegg to make love to her.

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23 Alison Lee, *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 90.

'Don't be so stiff,' she said.

I was like stunned. It was the last thing. [...]

'*What's up?*' I said.

'You're so unrelaxed. Just relax. There's nothing to worry about.' Well, I tried, she lay still, but I knew *there was something wrong in the situation*. [...]

'Isn't that nice?'

Of course I had to say, yes it was. I didn't know *what her real game was*, it made me nervous, quite apart from me being very nervous anyhow about kissing and all the other business. [...]

'Come on.' *Very coaxing*, she was.

I said, it's not right. You're only *pretending*. [...]

Then she did something really shocking.

I could hardly believe my eyes, she stood back a step and unfastened her housecoat and she had nothing on beneath. She was stark. I didn't give no more than a quick look, she just stood there smiling and waiting, you could feel it, for me to make a move. [...] It was terrible, it made me feel sick and trembling, I wished I was on the other side of the world. It was worse than with a prostitute; I didn't respect her, but with Miranda I knew I couldn't stand the shame. [...]

She stood up. 'You must realize that I've sacrificed all my principles tonight. Oh, yes, to escape. I was thinking of that. But I *do* want to help you. [...] To try to show you that sex – sex is just an activity, like anything else. It's not dirty, it's just two people playing with each other's bodies. Like dancing. Like a game.' [...] *I saw her game*, of course. She was very artful at wrapping up what she meant in a lot of words. (106–111, my emphases)

Clegg always suspects something behind Miranda's acts, supposes that there is some other intention behind the surface. But there is not, there cannot be, because Miranda does not pretend on her own accord: she can do nothing but act. The surface–depth dichotomy becomes questioned, which renders reading very unstable. Clegg's interpretive technique – always looking for the depth, the hidden, a sort of over-interpretation, always suspecting something – becomes fatally wrong when Miranda falls really ill, but Clegg interprets it as: "You could see it was a big act..." (p. 119); "'It's not a cold.' She really shouted at me. – Of course it's a cold, I said. And stop acting. I know your game" (121).

We can see that the peculiar sense of theatricality and pretence subverts the conventional methods of reading and makes the characters extremely suspicious of each other, thereby depriving them of the very possibility of adequate reading.

### 3.2 "People Like You": Social Allegorisation

The metaphor of theatre and the theatrical aspect of misreading in *The Collector*, as in Fowles's other works, can be treated from a sociological point of view as well. Fowles's characters carry "an obligation to discern a basis for personal authenticity. For each of them, the world is a theatre in which his role must be finally substantiated [... ]."[24] Their roles are determined by the unconscious (homo psychologicus) on the one hand and by society (homo sociologicus) on the other. This is what we can see in *The Collector*: the two characters, motivated partly by their socially, partly by their psychologically imprinted role-playing techniques and interpretive mechanism act out certain scenes on the stage of the house. The image the reader can have of Clegg is that of the lower-middle class average man, hating the "Few," the arts, the "posh" places, tormented by inferiority-complex. Miranda is the embodiment of the artistic, open-minded, vigorous and erudite type, rejecting all forms of conservatism (yet, evidently enjoying the benefits of this status-quo). These two classes of society seem to be completely isolated from each other, and if the story of *The Collector* had given the promise of a reconciliation or at least an understanding between these two classes, by the end of the novel it is obvious that no possibility of normal communication and reading is possible between Clegg and Miranda, i.e., between the "Many" and the "Few."

Both Miranda and Clegg are present in the novel as representatives of their class, and they also read the other primarily as members of their respective social group (Clegg reads Miranda from the point of view of lower classes, always keeping in mind that she belongs to the upper class, and vice versa.) Both Clegg and Miranda, as creations of their own social class, are moulded and formed by the way of thinking and social habits of their environment. However strongly they want to break free from them, they do not let them be autonomous selves. "'The self or subject comes to appear more as a construct: the result of a system of conventions.'"[25]

Clegg is brutally imprisoned in his preconceptions and social prejudices. For instance, when he wants to pay by cheque in a shop, "the woman wouldn't take it at first but I got her to ring my bank and she changed her tune very quick. If I had

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24 Malcolm Bradbury, "The Novelist as Impressario: John Fowles and His Magus," *Possibilities. Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 261.
25 Burden, p. 22.

spoken in a la-di-da voice and said I was Lord Muck or something, I bet [... ]" (86). "[To Miranda] You only got to walk into the room, *people like you*, and you can talk with anyone, you understand things [... ]" (198, emphasis mine). According to him, *The Catcher in the Rye* is "not realistic. Going to posh school and his parents having money. He wouldn't behave like that. In my opinion" (216). Clegg is unable to get rid of his socially imprinted reflex-mechanisms; and in this sense he is also a prisoner,[26] moreover, he also imprisons, suffocates, and, as it were kills, Miranda by his way of thinking. This attitude is also a kind of reading, based on previous "reading" experiences, which are frozen into mere reading conventions, as Clegg is also a construction of a system of conventions. Clegg, however, despite his loathing of the upper classes, wants to conform: before kidnapping Miranda, he begins to read "classy newspapers" and goes to the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery so that he "wouldn't seem ignorant" for Miranda (17). (And probably to seem like an adult person, in spite of the fact that his development has been arrested on an infantile level.) Throughout the novel he tries to express himself properly, but he knows he cannot speak correct English. This intermingling of loathing and desire to conform results in a schizophrenic state in him.[27] He wants to seem "acceptable," but at the same time he wants Miranda to know him as he is.

This schizophrenic state is also characteristic of Miranda. She treats Clegg as someone who desperately needs help, like the sick children she helps in her real life. At the same time she looks down on him, on his "Calibanity," as she also looks down on "the Many." She seems to accept G.P.'s "prescriptions" regarding art, in which he suggests that "you have to be Left politically, because the Socialists are the only people who care, for all their mistakes" and that one has to throw away his/her social class, "because class is primitive and silly" (153–154). That is precisely, however, what she cannot do: "I can't stand stupid people like Caliban [=Clegg], with their great dead weight of pettiness and selfishness and meanness of every kind. And the few have to carry it all. The doctors and the teachers and the artists [... ]. Because I'm one of them," she writes (217). In reading Clegg, she begins to mirror his reading techniques and eventually applies those strategies of which she is going to be a victim.

Within the enclosed space of the house, both of them play roles and wear masks. The technique of both of them is allegorisation as a mode of reading,

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26 Burden, p. 35.
27 Eriksson, p. 133.

interpreting the other as a representative of something else, in this case, of his/her class. In this respect, the seduction scene is of central importance. On the one hand, one way of tearing down the mask would have been a "risk-filled sexual adventure," "an affaire" (as in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*), as Burden suggests,[28] when both of them could have got rid of the pressures of role-playing. On the other, that was a moment when the dichotomy of deep and surface structure could have been abolished, as during that scene nothing covered, nothing veiled the depth, or, more precisely, there was nothing but surface for them to interpret. The possibility of the abolishment of surface–depth distinction was offered, but they could not realise this. Seduction for both of them remained a performance.

### 3.3 Psychological–psychoanalytical allegorisation and the breakdown of hierarchies

Another version of allegorisation as misreading is present in the novel, which is in connection with psychology and psychoanalysis, and is yet another factor that serves to subvert the clear-cut dichotomy set up between the two kinds of reading. Both Clegg and Miranda attempt to interpret each other by stereotyping him or her.

Clegg goes through roughly three major phases in interpreting Miranda. He tries to understand Miranda on the basis of three stereotypes of women: the "virgin," the "whore" and the "mother" – that is, his interpretation is always mechanical. Before the seduction scene, he tends to imagine her as a virgin.[29] Ideas of chastity, purity and innocence are associated in Clegg's mind with Miranda. She has to be respected so much that Clegg, for instance, is not willing to tell dirty jokes in front of her (80). She becomes almost like a deity for him, who must not be touched, as if she was under a sort of taboo. It will be recalled that Clegg, if he can manage, does not like to touch Miranda, preferring only to watch her. "We sat on the bed [...] close, but not touching" (71). The most powerful expression of this distance-keeping is photography. "The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance."[30] He only touches her when he does violence to her, when she wants to escape and he has to intoxicate her. Even in

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28 Burden, p. 31.
29 See also Perry Nodelman. "John Fowles' Variations in *The Collector*," *Contemporary Literature* 28.3 (1987) 332–346, p. 339.
30 Sontag, p. 16.

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the seduction scene, when both of them are naked, and therefore, nothing is hidden, Miranda says: "We *can't* be farther apart" (171).

After the seduction scene, Clegg, deprived of the idea of the innocent virgin, interprets Miranda as a prostitute. He cannot respect her anymore, he thinks that "she was like all women, she had a one-track mind" (113). In other words, Miranda offers a kind of relationship, but Clegg is not willing to enter it, because he would have had to risk himself in the reading process (and probably this kind of relationship was discarded by him in fear of symbolic incest). He misinterprets the only instance when he could have known her as a real, flesh-and-blood person, and falls into the trap of another stereotype. He feels that "she had made herself like any other woman" (114, as for Clegg every woman is a prostitute). His reading strategy remains at the level of stereotypes, clichés, like his use of language, his whole behaviour is devoid of any sign of originality.

As it has been pointed out before, Miranda represents a mother-figure for Clegg, too. The most favourable situation he imagines for themselves is when they "would be sleeping side by side with the wind and rain outside or something" (111), which is not altogether unlike a child sleeping beside his mother. It has to be remembered that Clegg's mother, soon after the death of his husband, went off with a foreigner; Clegg's cousin told him that "she was a woman of the streets" (7). If Clegg wants to rediscover her uncorrupted (idealised) mother in Miranda, it is only possible till the seduction, after which Clegg identifies Miranda with her real mother.

One common feature of all these interpretations is that they ignore Miranda as a real, flesh and blood person and treat her merely as an *idea*.[31] Thus Miranda for Clegg is dead, non-existent (untouchable, for instance), which will culminate in Miranda's actual death, when she becomes biologically non-existent. That is, interestingly, for Clegg, who, as it was shown above, is only capable of literal, word-by-word understanding, Miranda is an exception: he can read her *only* in an abstract way.

So far a clear dichotomy has been suggested by the novel between Clegg as male reader and Miranda as a female reader. The introduction of G.P. as a non-present character seems to serve to both challenge and to reaffirm this opposition. Thus a hierarchy is extended into a tripartite structure between Clegg – (the worst reader) – Miranda (the disciple) and G.P. (the "master-reader"). Compared to G.P., Miranda is still a student, while here it is she who teaches Clegg. In the

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31 See Nodelman, p. 333.

opinion of G.P., Miranda does not articulate her own personality in her pictures, she tends to plagiarise: "You're saying something here about Nicholson or Pasmore. Not about yourself. You're using a camera. Just as *trompe-l'oeil* is mischannelled photography, so is painting in someone else's style. You're photographing here. That's all," G.P. tells her (170). So, while, compared to Clegg, Miranda seems to be definitely authentic, she is merely "photographing" as compared to G.P. It is suggested that she is on the right track to achieve "whole sight," which G.P., being a mature artist, has already achieved. This seems to be proved by the "list of the ways in which he has altered" Miranda (153), among which the first principle is that "if you are a real artist you give your *whole being* to art" (153, emphasis mine).

However, this clear hierarchy slowly breaks down, as certain hidden similarities can be discovered between Clegg and G.P. When Miranda is once at G.P.'s place, he suddenly cuts her short, and takes her round the room to make her "look at his things" (i.e., his paintings), at his *collection* of paintings, just as Clegg showed Miranda his butterflies (p. 163). Interestingly, like Clegg, G.P. is not willing touch Miranda either. "He didn't ever force me in any way. Touch me. I mean, he's respected me in a queer way" (p. 192). He likens her to Uccello's painting, *The Hunt*, whose secret has not been solved, either. "Now, I see you have the great inner secret, too," he says (185). He, on the one hand, does something similar as Clegg in trying to interpret Miranda: he attempts to discover something essential, some hidden, deep meaning in her, considering Miranda as a "mystery," a "secret." He, on the other hand, performs a misreading similar to Miranda's: it is only that instead of books he tries to interpret the world and Miranda through paintings, that is, he always puts something between his experience and his interpretation. Nodelman claims that while Miranda wanted love without sex from G.P., he wanted sex without love from her.[32] This is not entirely true, for it is G.P. who sends Miranda away, because he respects her too much, for he knows that he, as a womaniser, would only corrupt Miranda if they had a sexual relationship. He aspires to the same kind of spiritual love as Clegg does. This can be read in a subversive way: is G.P. not so perfect, after all? With this the notion of "whole sight" is also questioned, and it may become an absolute entity, which can be approximated, but never reached. One thing is certain: both Clegg and G.P. see a virgin in Miranda, but for different reasons. G. P. is not

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32 Nodelman, p. 341.

willing to have an "affaire" with Miranda, and Clegg is not able to. Thus Clegg becomes a grotesque parody of G. P.'s misreading, revealing its hidden aspects.

Like Clegg, G.P. also tends to glimpse the prostitute-side of women: "Just that Botticelli moment of the first time of her taking her clothes off. Soon shrivels. The old Eve takes over. The strumpet" (186). He is similarly unable to break free from the allegorisation and stereotypical categorisation of women. He also thinks in allegories (of women), trying to slot Miranda into one of his stereotypes. Thus, his status as a "master-reader" is questioned, and the hierarchy of readers suggested by the novel – Clegg, the worst reader, Miranda, and G.P., the master-reader – is also subverted, and thus the seemingly clear opposition between Clegg and Miranda is also interrogated.

The readings that Miranda applies to Clegg are not consistent, either, and she often changes her mind concerning him. First she interprets him as a madman: "his eyes are mad," she writes in her first entry (126). But while the concept of madness is firmly placed in the system of ideas in the beginning, signifying the opposite of sanity, by the end of the novel this notion also becomes relativised. It is not easy to decide which of Clegg or Miranda is or has gone mad in the story. This relativisation prevents Miranda from interpreting Clegg "simply" as a madman. She cannot help thinking of him as a queer – of course Clegg denies it (63). She also tries to apply a socio-political interpretation to Clegg, considering him as "uneducated and ignorant," an "ordinary dull little" person, who is not "ashamed of being dull and little" (218). She regards Clegg as one of "the New People." She thinks that principally his money is to blame for the given situation: "Persons like Caliban have no head for money" (221). Clegg in her eyes is just one of the Many, the conforming, uneducated, ignorant mass. At other times, however, she cannot help thinking of Clegg as a thrilling mystery, a secret to be solved, as an enigma: "A strange thing. He fascinates me" (126). "'You're just like a Chinese box,' she said" (104). She has to conclude that "he has some secret" (248) (cf. G.P.'s reading of Miranda!). Thus, both Miranda and Clegg serve as enigmas, secrets to be solved for each other.

However, the most prominent way in which Miranda tries to "read" Clegg is the psychoanalytical. She presupposes that she has an authority to know him, to analyse him (based on her social status), often talking to him imitating the atmosphere and methods of a session: "Go on. Just talk" (99); "What sort of dreams did you have about me?" (111); "I have an irresistible desire sometimes to get to the bottom of him, to drag things he won't talk about out of him" (159).

She supposes that there is something *hidden* in him, which has to be brought out and analysed, or which can break out at any moment. "What I fear in you is something you don't know is in you [...] It's lurking somewhere about in this house, this room, this situation, waiting to spring" (75). This is another version of the surface–depth dichotomy, which, as we have seen, is not valid in the novel, and the interpretive strategy based on it does not work. Miranda supposes a hidden *centre* in Clegg, on the basis of which he can be interpreted.

First she concludes that there is *nothing* in this centre, therefore she has nothing to interpret. The reader will recall that Clegg's most important feature is a pervasive sense of emptiness: he lacks parents, friends, proper education, erudition, imagination, love, and so on. The mask, the persona, the role-playing in fact conceal an emptiness:[33] "He's not human; he's an empty space disguised as a human" (234). Later she revises her reading strategy and finds that there is something in this emptiness: however, she has to realise that it is *herself* that is in the middle of it and therefore she cannot interpret it either: "I could never cure him. Because I'm his disease" (257). That is to say, the object and the subject become one and the same: Miranda should interpret herself. The situation comes full circle, it gets closed upon itself, in the way the prison is closed, and like Clegg's way of thinking cannot break out of his own boundaries. The situation is like the problem of interpreting a photograph: "If the Photograph cannot be penetrated, it is because of its evidential power."[34] This is the result of her misreading, with which she tried to allegorise Clegg and construct something else, something other behind him.

There is another basic incongruity, related to the contrast of synthesis vs. analysis, which prevents the characters form the proper reading of the other. Miranda, thinking that she embodies synthesis and union, as it has been shown, wants to apply the same pattern to Clegg – like a reader applying his or her "identity theme" to a text, but she fails. Clegg personifies fragmentation and analysis. Miranda wants to "get" Clegg, that is, have a full picture, a "whole sight" of him, but she cannot: "You're very difficult to get. You're so featureless. Everything is nondescript" (62). "Oh, you're like mercury. You won't be picked up" (80). In fact she wants to carry out a true psychoanalytic reading: to reconstruct the patient's self from traces and fragments, filling in the gaps. However, Clegg (and his environment, too) is characterised by extreme

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33 Burden, p. 32.
34 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 106.

fragmentation. It is enough to have a glance at his aunt's letter (196–197). Its syntax is so fragmented that the text is almost incomprehensible. His photos also fragment the world into little pieces: "The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque."[35] "Photographic seeing, when one examines its claims, turns out to be mainly the practice of a kind of dissociative seeing [...]."[36] On the one hand, Clegg wants to fragment Miranda, but she resists. In turn, she wants to see synthesis in him, but he also resists, therefore, no valid interpretation results. The above-mentioned two reading strategies (Clegg: allegorisation and analysis; Miranda: allegorisation and synthesis) are not applicable in the context of the novel: what we have finally is a series of misreadings and misinterpretations, which will have tragic consequences.

### 4 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay was to examine the nature of the intersubjective reading process that is encoded in *The Collector*. The narrative seems to set up a clear-cut gender-based dichotomy, which evidently favours the female position. In this light, the two most important reading strategies of Clegg appear as perverse, sick and futile. These are: a characteristic "anal" reading (which dramatises the reading process as mere possession, selfish collection) and "voyeuristic" reading (which posits the reading process on the one hand as passive gazing and unconditional acceptance, on the other as violent peeping and degrading the other person into a mere object, exposing the cruel aspects of photographing). The novel strongly suggests that these "sick" reading modes prevent the male protagonist from the proper understanding of the other person and the failure of the reading process is due to these "bad" readings.

A pivotal question of the analysis is whether we can take the gender-based stark opposition of "bad male" reading vs. "good female" reading seriously. A careful examination of the theatrical nature of the narrative shows that ultimately both characters' reading strategy is rooted in suspicion and allegorising constructions. Due to the peculiar conditions of Clegg's house, the reading of both characters consists in generating allegorical "others" behind the other person. They always interpret the other as a representative of something else, for

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35 Sontag, p. 23.
36 Sontag, p. 97.

instance of his/her social group, or of gender-based stereotypes. What they do not realise is that the alleged surface-depth dichotomy simply does not work within the context of the house. Miranda carries on imagining a hidden centre behind Clegg (in which she either finds nothing or finds herself), and Clegg remains suspicious of her till the end. What contributes to the breakdown of the hierarchy set up by the novel (with G.P. as a "master-reader") is a comparison between him and Clegg: both of them perform an essentialising reading, conceiving the female protagonist as either a mystery to be solved or a prostitute. Thus Clegg's status as the worst reader (and thus Miranda's position) becomes questionable, and finally both principal characters fall victim to their own misreadings. On the basis of all this it can be concluded that the novel approves the reading modes in which the reader enters into a dialogical relationship with the work, and is willing to risk himself/herself in the reading process.

*Iván Nyusztay*

# The Faces of the Other

## Configurations of Alterity in Emmanuel Levinas and Harold Pinter

Reading Levinas has become equal to the reading of the most prominent philosophy of alterity. To assess the reasons of this prominence is not among the modest aims of the present paper. However, it seems to me that much of its 'appeal' has to do with the peculiar mode of its articulation. The implied reader of *Totality and Infinity* cannot but concede to the authoritative tone, the coercive language employed. It is a language of superiority, making the whole venture into an essay on superiority rather than exteriority.[1] It is a consistent presentation of a power structure which assigns the implied author's superiority over the reader, pretty much the same way as the Other is to gain superiority over the Same. The success of Levinasian ethics depends on the success of the Levinasian language. The language of curt, abrupt sentences registers an authoritative voice, a voice of order, regulation and dominance. The prominence of Levinasian ethics, besides the appealing political sedimentation it was likely to leave behind, is to a large extent the result of its 'not-to-be-questioned' mode of performance.

In this essay I will invoke some of the building blocks of Levinasian ethics as expounded in *Totality and Infinity* and later amended in *Otherwise than Being*,[2] and will address its various deficiencies and one-sidedness. Harold Pinter's works provide the context for testing the applicability, not to say tenability of these

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1 All parenthesised references are to Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Kluwer Academic, 1971).
2 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981).

concepts. Drama is always instructive in such investigations, since the validity of theoretical axioms in question is tested in concrete dramatic situations. Harold Pinter's plays are also instructive, because there the careful reader finds alternative configurations of alterity Levinas could not but ignore. As I will try to show, these dramas of alterity implicitly convey a criticism of the Levinasian form of otherness. Pinter's plays disclose a plurality of alterity, the multitude of Others that cannot be made to fit into *Totality and Infinity*, they present the multifaceted Other, the other with many faces, forms of Otherness that cannot be reduced to the singular Face.

## LEVINAS, ETHICS AND ALTERITY

Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* is constructed upon well-defined oppositions. The title *Totality and Infinity* itself delimits two seemingly incompatible regions, the same way as the pairs Sameness and Otherness, exteriority and interiority, isolation and the *Il y a*, egoism and goodness, ontology and ethics. It would be rather unfair to claim that Levinas fails to observe the blatant (ontological) interdependence of these terms. On the contrary, what we get is a critical diagnosis of what is lost owing to their unfortunate interpenetration in the Western tradition. Western philosophy culminating in Heidegger regrettably reinforced the dominance of the one over the other, of the Same over the Other, of ontology over ethics. However, at the same time it needs to be said that Levinas does hardly more than produce the inverse of tradition. This inverse of tradition in Levinas brings about a shift of dominance from the Same to the Other, from ontology to ethics, thereby regrettably reinforcing the definite isolation of these oppositions.

In *Totality and Infinity* the Same appears as comfortably housed in an egoistic self-preservation. The Same exists in isolation, at home (*chez soi*). The Same is a totality which preserves itself in enjoyment, and in complete ignorance of the Other (*Autrui*). This separation is tantamount to the ignorance of transcendence, the elementary, the vortex surrounding the housed existence, on which the latter paradoxically depends. The house, or interiority depends on exteriority, but for survival, for escaping the vortex it necessarily separates from it. This dependence on exteriority is the dependence on air, earth, light, etc., though on a small-scale import, since excessive intrusion of these forms of exteriority would destroy not only the enjoyment of the home but the Same itself.

If Sameness is totality, Otherness introduces infinity. When totality reduces the Other to the Same, the Other appears in its transcendence. It appears *kath auton*, as Other, as exteriority irreducible to the Same. The appearance of the Other on my doorstep questions my relation to Otherness, my ignorance of the Other, my egoistic separation from the world. It disturbs my enjoyment to provoke my seclusion, but not to cancel it. In other words, it presents an ethical demand.

The transcendent Other is different from the enjoyed Other that is the object of needs and desire. The transcendent Other defies integration to the Subject-Object relation, the manifest establishment of Husserlian phenomenology. It defies reduction to the Heideggerian Dasein, the 'being in the World.' Through this negative theology Levinas portrays a radical form of alterity that cannot be the target of any objectivation, but that is an ethical challenge to all ontologies of objectivation. The ethical demand addressed to the Same requires the opening of the door of the house. The opening of the door is also the opening up of interiority, and the valorisation of hospitality. It is only then that the Face of Levinas appears on the threshold.

The transcendence of the Other is the transcendence of the Face (*visage*). Infinity appears as Face, a power superior to me, a power that mesmerises me. It addresses me in language, in speech, which invalidates my silent withdrawal. The relation of the Same to the Other becomes a relation between interlocutors, in which the Other questions me and demands response. Providing response becomes my ethical obligation to the Other. This obligation is simultaneous with and consequent upon the dominance of the Other over me, the irresistibility of the infinity of the Face, "il se présente comme me dominant" (83). Nevertheless, this dominance does not restrict my freedom, Levinas says elsewhere, but justifies it, "l'Autre, absolument autre – Autrui – ne limite pas la liberté du Même. En l'appelant a la responsabilité, il l'instaure et la justifie" (214–215). Nevertheless, the word dominance keeps echoing throughout the whole of *Totality and Infinity*, and therefore seems to be irresistible even for Levinas himself, "Autrui qui me domine dans sa transcendance est aussi l'étranger, la veuve et l'orphelin envers qui je suis obligé" (237).

For Levinas the Face is singular, it belongs to the stranger, the widower and the orphan alike, that is, to the Other in need, and not to (the object of) my needs. In other words, it is through the Face that the Other gains superiority over me, and demands my submittance and responsibility. It is through the Face that God, sublimity discloses itself.

This brief account, needless to say, cannot present a full (total) recovery of the Levinasian formulation of alterity with all its details and consequences. However, it may help to isolate some of the underlying problems that keep haunting the alert reader throughout. The language of Levinas is a language that defines without explanation. Such a series of definitions inevitably collides into contradictions we find for instance in the dominance the Other has over me, and the simultaneous non-restriction and instauration of freedom. There is further, an unrelenting superior position both on the part of the Other with its ethical demand, and on the part of the Author with 'its' coercive language. The question 'how can we read Levinas' becomes the task 'how should we read Levinas.' The implied reader of *Totality and Infinity* is subordinated, dominated by its Other, its (implied) Author.

But let us return to the contradictory relation between Same and Other. The relation of the Same to the Other in *Totality and Infinity* is defined as ignorance, as seclusion, as withdrawal. At the same time, the relation of the Other to the Same is virtually the opposite: that of demand, obligation and dominance. Levinas tells us that this dominance derives from the Face, its infinity, its transcendence. It is an infinity that demands infinite responsibility, "wild responsibility," to speak with Tengelyi and Waldenfels, a *responsabilité sauvage*,[3] that cannot be reduced to any institutionalised moral obligation. Here the face-to-face relation with the Other necessitates a responsivity which is a limitless responsibility.[4] However, the appearance of the Third, *le tiers*, restricts this responsibility, due to the inevitable conflict of demands. As Simon Critchley observes, the move to the Third, with which Levinas seems to be more concerned in *Otherwise than Being*, is a move towards limitation, towards question and justice which is to say: to politics.[5] The third introduces others, a community, a system, and questions the anarchy of the Same-Other relation.

It follows that the appearance of the third disturbs the face-to-face relation. The intrusion of community at the same time leads to an impasse in the question of alterity: where is the Other outside community? Can ethics detach itself from politics? Or is politics the necessary accommodating totality of infinity? The symmetry and equality of justice and politics violates the infinitely asymmetric

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3 László Tengelyi, *Élettörténet és sorsesemény* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1998), p. 237.

4 This is for Levinas the uniquely distinctive nature of the face-to-face relation in contrast to Husserl's intersubjectivity.

5 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 230–232, cf. Tengelyi, p. 239.

ethical relation, though, as Critchley argues, it is a "creative antagonism" (233). These questions are addressed by Jacques Derrida in 'Le mot d'accueil,' where the already overwhelming presence of the third party is accentuated. For Derrida the primordial there-ness of the third brings contamination and protection at the same time.[6] It is a contamination, because, to speak with Geoffrey Bennington, it "contaminates the purity of the ethical relation."[7] It is protective, since through the advent of justice it abates the anarchy, the ethical violence of the face-to-face.

Levinas also tells us that the Face of the Other addresses the Same in speech, and establishes the relation between interlocutors. Levinas carefully evades the problem of interpretation by claiming that meaning is given to me through the presence of the Other. The face is presence, self-disclosure. The face manifests itself, expresses itself (s'exprime), "le visage parle. La manifestation du visage est déjà discours" (61). The relation inevitably becomes a dialogical relation. I am to listen to the Other's vocative and fulfil the ethical demand: respond.[8] The question then is the following: how can I, or rather, how should I receive the speech of the Face, the Face itself? Can the Face precede interpretation? Can I interpret transcendence?

For Levinas, it is the speech, discours. that instaurates meaning, signification, according to a later chapter in Totality and Infinity (224–229). As the argument goes, meaning questions the constituting freedom itself. Consequently, it is not through the mediation of the sign that meaning is created, but vice versa, it is the meaning as such that makes the mediatory role of the sign possible (meaningful). The meaning is the infinity, the Other itself (227). It seems then, that the Other's speech and its meaning is given to me already in the Other's presence, it is given both in and by this presence. The Other's dominance here is made to be a dominance of signification, one may say, the Other interprets itself for me. Together with the instauration of freedom, this self-interpretation, this disclosure challenging the closure of the Same is also a limitation of freedom in the unconditional obligation and surrender to the Other. The prototype of the

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6 Jacques Derrida, "Le mot d'accueil," in Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas (Paris: Galilée, 1997), pp. 111–112.

7 Geoffrey Bennington, "Deconstruction and Ethics," As Bennington points out, this "contaminability aims to account both for the possibility of any purity whatsoever and for the a priori impossibility of the (even ideal) achievement of any such purity," in: Deconstructions: A User's Guide, ed. Nicholas Royle (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000) 64–82, p. 70.

8 Not responding is also a form of response according to B. Waldenfels's Antwortregister, cf. Tengelyi, p. 236.

Levinasian notion of the Other is this tyrant, this God whose voice compels, whose will imposes itself upon me.

To conclude I would like to stress three cardinal points in the Levinasian ethics of alterity that in my reading constitute its weaknesses: (1) The difference between ethics and politics is as evasive as the presence of the third. (2) The 'wild responsibility' that characterises my face-to-face relation with the Other is inevitably, necessarily restricted when the third (non-chronologically) appears with an alternative demand. (3) Finally, what if the Other is a menace, what if the infinity of the Face is nothing but a stronger form of totality that seeks to engulf, endanger me? To speak with Critchley, "ethically I cannot demand that the Other be good," but "at the level of politics and justice, at which I am a citizen of a community, I *am* entitled to judge, to call the Other to account" (232). These reservations to the ethics of alterity expounded in *Totality and Infinity* lead us to the questioning of 'radical alterity' as such. The primordial infiltration of community necessarily abates radicality, and seems to reduce it at least to the relation it is made to establish with its other: with egalitarianism. Radical difference can be maintained only outside community, in a no-place, a *non-lieu* (utopia), whereas both members of a community the Other becomes equal to the Same in facing justice. It is in the political sphere that the face-to-face relation between interlocutors falls back into an intersubjective relation the whole Levinasian project sought to side-step.

These, and similar questions are, I believe, in the forefront of Pinter's plays. Almost any work by Pinter could serve to demonstrate the complex relations between Sameness and the Otherness, and the dramatic fluctuations of these relations with the non-chronological appearance of the third or community. The following recourse to drama may also enhance further problematisations of the Levinasian opposition of Sameness and Otherness itself, an opposition that is in the centre of the plays discussed below. Samples from the Pinter corpus here serve to challenge the basic presuppositions of Levinasian ethics.

## SAMENESS AND OTHERNESS IN PINTER

Pinter's rooms at first glance seem to share many characteristics with Levinas's houses. There we witness comfortably housed totalities secluded from the outside world, introvert and committed to the everyday routine of self-preservation. The room is a claustrophobic interiority which condenses the *Lebensraum*, the living-

space of human beings, and thereby looks at human relations as if through the magnifying glass. In each case, however, this psychological laboratory is invaded by others. In Pinter the walls of the room delimit the sphere of interiority, but there are important openings and leaks testifying to the vulnerability of secluded existence. To speak with Levinas, the *Il y a*, the elementary surrounding the house is a constant threat. Pinter shows not only how this threat or danger appears as something ineluctable, but also how the inhabitants of the room face it.

In *The Caretaker*[9] the roof is leaking, and there is a bucket fixed to the ceiling to collect the drops of water. The dripping has a symbolic function besides the disturbing sound effect: it accompanies the entrance of the menacing other. The disturbing sound is the disturbing leaking of the other into the room, the peace and comfort of which thereby is, again, disturbed. There are two contrasting representatives of Sameness in the play: Aston and Mick, who respond differently to the entering other, to Davies. Aston invites Davies with an unconditional attestation of hospitality, and opens up his whole world to him. Here egoistic withdrawal is surrendered in response to the ethical demand. By contrast, Mick's treatment of Davies is a xenophobic questioning, a constant calling to account of an intruder "rummaging" in Aston's papers in the latter's absence. The entrance of Mick, the third party, thus brings judgement into the Same-Other relation between Aston and Davies. Davies ceases to be merely an Other in need and becomes an intruder, a menace threatening the peace and equilibrium of the room existence. As the dynamics of hospitality[10]-abuse-xenophobia evolve the bucket is finally full of rainwater and has to be emptied. It is the point of Davies' necessary departure, who has to leave the premises to restore the harmonious relation between the brothers. The stranger received thus becomes an emotional caretaker, who is expelled when this 'job' is fulfilled. The other as stranger has, it seems, at least two faces.

In *The Birthday Party* the invasion of menacing Otherness receives probably the most powerful representation within the Pinter corpus. There we find two alternative entrances of Otherness. Lulu enters after knocking, Goldberg and

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9 All parenthesised references to Harold Pinter's works are to *Complete Works* (New York: Grove Press, 1977).

10 Hospitality is in the foreground of both *The Caretaker* and *Totality and Infinity*, cf. Derrida's description of the Levinas's work as an essay on hospitality (Derrida, p. 32).

McCann without knocking.[11] The one is a domesticated Other, the other a menacing form of Otherness, which eventually humiliates and destroys the tenant of the room, Stanley Webber. Goldberg also has two faces, one with which he wins Meg for his purpose to organise the birthday party, the other reserved for Stanley, which puts forward the unintelligible demand: the demand to answer for an obscure past behaviour. Both plays in my view present totalities threatened by other totalities *ad infinitum*.

There are recurring forms of activity that qualify the hospitality of the Same and also the Other's superiority and menacing presence within the total household: sitting and drinking. I will now first look at the importance of sitting in the Same-Other relation in *The Caretaker*, and then consider sitting and drinking in *The Birthday Party*.

Offering a seat is the manifestation of unconditional hospitality in *The Caretaker*. The play begins with Aston's offer, "Sit down," and the placing of the chair for Davies who is evidently the Other in need, "I haven't had a good sit down [....] I haven't had a proper sit down." The offer is repeated a few lines later, "Take a seat" (17). We are told that Aston rescued the stranger from a brawl, and seeks to appease and comfort him. The offering of the seat is merely the beginning of a whole series of altruistic human responsivity. After the seat Aston will offer him tobacco, shoes, laces, a bed, money (five shillings), a smoking-jacket, a white caretaking overall. It may be argued that such an extreme form of hospitality verges on madness – it is indeed a "wild responsibility" – and that it is largely due to the electric shock therapy Aston received in the past. Davies abuses this unconditional, unequal treatment as soon as he finds himself comfortably housed in this haven where his past injuries are temporarily redressed. It is only because of this abuse of hospitality that he will eventually be expelled, and thereby the emotional-ethical climate of the room purged.

It is one thing to offer seat and drink, and quite another thing to demand these activities. The demand for sitting and drinking is the manifestation of the Other's abuse of hospitality. The imperatives of 'Sit' and 'Drink' weave the text of *The Birthday Party* through and through. The play begins with the usual breakfast ritual, where the cosy, homely sitting and drinking will soon be interrupted by

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11 Appearances of Others include the discovery of their presence on the threshold. In *The Room* Mr. and Mrs. Sands are disclosed on the landing by Rose. Their presence is menacing not only because they give no signs of their being there (like knocking), but because they give contradictory explanations of how they actually got there.

the intrusion of Goldberg and McCann. It is once again the intervention of an Other that ruins the established peace and tranquillity of secluded existence. For Stanley, the room soon turns from haven to torture chamber. As I mentioned above it is decisive in Pinter how the Other(s) enter(s). Goldberg and McCann enter without knocking, what is more, Goldberg immediately takes an unoffered seat at the table. He displays self-confidence, purposefulness and a headstrong determination, which is menacing in itself, since he is all what the others are not. The organisation of the birthday party will be his orchestration, a scheme to enhance the project of Stanley's ultimate humiliation and annihilation. Goldberg takes over the orchestration of the birthday party as soon as Meg mentions it, "we're going to remind him. We're going to give him a party [...] we'll bring him out of himself" (27). What all this amounts to is the unquestionable dominance of Goldberg established prior to an actual encounter with Stanley himself. Stanley seems hardly to have any word in the development of his fate: he will be given the party willy-nilly. It is the sign of Stanley's vain resistance to this dominance that he exclaims, "it isn't my birthday Meg" (30, and repeated to McCann, 35). Stanley has to be broken to accept this dominance, he will be forced to sit and obey orders. The lengthy debate about who is to sit at whose command is the finalisation of the question of hierarchy and dominance. Goldberg first asks Stanley to sit, then asks McCann to ask him to sit, then Stanley asks McCann to sit, upon which McCann informs Goldberg that Stanley would not sit, Goldberg asks McCann to ask Stanley again, which he does but Stanley refuses once more, then they offer to sit together, then all rise almost at once, then finally both Goldberg and McCann turn against Stanley and make him sit (40–41). It is only after this imposition of authority that the insane cross-questioning of Stanley and the obscure accusation "you betrayed the organization" (42) can take place. At the end of this verbal violence Stanley is to "pour the toast," that is, to drink his health in the company. He pours out the drinks, and though all stand to drink to him, while he "must sit down" as Goldberg commands and McCann echoes (49). What is more, Goldberg has so definitively taken over that Stanley cannot but obey his commands even in treating Lulu with a drink, for instance. Stanley's humiliation reaches its climax when his glasses are snatched away, and later he is beaten and reduced to a babbling child, cross-examined and carried away.

## THE OTHER AS INSIDER: INTERNAL ALTERITY

The menacing Other does not necessarily intrude from outside. Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and *A Slight Ache* present insider forms of otherness, where the categories Sameness and Otherness penetrate each other and cease to be distinct entities.

In *The Dumb Waiter* Ben and Gus find themselves confined in a windowless basement room. Their situation is characterised by a tense expectation which is probably stronger than in any other Pinter play. Like in *The Birthday Party* there is mention of an obscure organisation (131) in the background of a mysterious employment, and this organisation is held responsible for the prolonged tension of the present situation. Communication takes place through two diverse channels. The conversation between Ben and Gus takes up most of the play, there is no third party, at least not in the physical sense. Ben appears to be more authoritative, more aggressive to the point of repeated violence, but at the same time he is the more patient, more passive and resigned to except whatever comes. Amidst Gus's unrelenting inquiry into the mystery of the situation Ben continues sitting or lying in his bed and reading his paper. Gus's agitation slowly but steadily increases in the course of their discussions, and at various points Ben will resort to violence to evade his questions. Ben's authority over Gus is clear from the beginning, he treats Gus as his servant, addressing him with repeated orders.[12]

However, there is another channel of communication in *The Dumb Waiter*, if we can call that communication. The dumb waiter and the speaking-tube discovered attached to the wall of the room provide means to contact the external world. It is a possibility which is hardly ever realised. The five menus that are lowered in the dumb waiter present a one-sided communication. They are absurd

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12 The trivial debates between them, especially the quarrel about which is normally lit the gas or the kettle, all serve to diminish one's authority over the other. By correcting Ben and catching him in error, Gus seeks to abate Ben's authority over him (141), cf. Austin E. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 62. Quigley points to the cardinal function of language use in the play. Mutual certainty about language is also certainty about a shared reality, he argues, consequently, when words are void of clear referentiality, this shared reality is likewise questioned. This linguistic phenomenon is a source of comedy in *The Birthday Party*, in the dialogue between Meg and Petey, while it is rather stressful and subversive for Ben and Gus pursuing an important status-confirming conversation (62).

revelations of an inscrutable force, of an absconding authority.[13] The speaking-tube is apparently more responsive. Ben speaks and listens to the tube, and seems to answer a remote voice only heard by him. We may guess what the voice says through Ben's reactions. Ben's discourse with the tube becomes menacing in the absence of Gus. At this climactic point Ben's words betray an obedient registration of an inaudible order, "straight away," "right," "sure we're ready" (148). Gus re-enters the room only to find himself levelled at with a revolver. This time no words are spoken, but a silent mutual stare confirms that the situation – the mystery of which they strove to penetrate in so many words – has finally been established: the assassin is to be assassinated. Gus becomes the target of Ben and the organisation, to be assassinated for no apparent reason. Ben and Gus are a strange pair. Their strangeness is not in their complementarity, their interdependence, their exposure to inscrutable forces, to hidden powers dealing their destinies. As such they are preceded by Beckett's pairs, Didi and Gogo, Ham and Clov, Winnie and Willie and Stoppard's Ros and Guil. Ben and Gus disrupt the traditional continuity of these pairs. What makes them unique is precisely this turning against each other to the point of violence and (anticipated) murder.

The dynamics of sameness and alterity unfolds in the play in a characteristically Pinterian way: first, it is the obscure organisation that appears to be the menacing other. Second, throughout the conversations it is Ben who, establishing his unquestionable authority, becomes the menace to Gus. Finally, in the end it is Gus who is nonsensically excommunicated, betrayed and eliminated. These dramatic fluctuations of otherness disclose a multifaceted or faceless alterity that defies the Levinasian reduction. They present ways in which these categories cease to be clear-cut and definable. As soon as an external overruling reference point, or *logos* is denied, these divisions fail to be meaningful and become contingent by-products of constantly shifting situations. If in Levinas we observed the subordination of situation to the preconceived *logos* of superior alterity, in Pinter we find the reverse: there all superior *logoi* are subordinated to the concrete quintessential human situation. To an ordinary, that is, a faceless situation.

In another complex play, *A Slight Ache*, internal otherness presents itself in a slightly different way. There the problem arises within the confines of marriage, a

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13 The *deus absconditus* is a mystery, a potential source of menace also to Steven H. Gale, who goes as far as stressing the godlike actions of a machine that initiates action, demands food sacrifices and manifests its power over life, *Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work* (Durham, North California: Duke University Press, 1977), p. 59.

favourite field for Pinter. Edward is evidently bored by his wife Flora, and lives a withdrawn egocentric life in his study. Their breakfast communication betrays indifference, boredom and lack of understanding. Though Flora tries her best to regain Edward and elicit some response and understanding, Edward seems eternally lost in his own world of reading and writing. He is especially concerned with the philosophical analysis of space and time and not with the Belgian Congo as Flora thinks (161). There is no obvious reason given for the 'slight ache' Edward has in his eyes, consequently Flora's caring remarks cannot but miss the mark. The 'slight ache' turns out to be concomitant with the appearance of a matchseller standing outside in the garden. The noname, faceless stranger becomes a menacing riddle for Edward who finds it strange that though no matches are sold for weeks, the matchseller should stick to that deserted place.

Outside it is bright, inside it is dark (162). The slight ache corresponds to the extreme contrast between brightness and darkness. Edward is unwilling to leave his claustrophobic introvert life of darkness to meet the challenge of the matchseller, the challenge of brightness. His complaint of the slight ache is simultaneous with his intention to talk to the man, to invite him into the house. The stranger disturbs his sight, and also the site disclosed by the garden, with his far too visible presence. He embodies a riddle which Edward feels he has to solve in order to be cured of the pain in his eyes. Impaired eyesight or blindness is central to Pinter's plays, as in *The Birthday Party* where Stanley's glasses are snatched and broken when he is blindfolded to play blind-man's-buff, or in *The Room*, where Rose goes blind in the final scene of released aggression.

Edwards's communication with the matchseller is one-sided, he addresses his guest in flat, narcissistic monologues, while the other raps himself up in silence. It is his total unbroken silence that makes critics like Esslin say he does not even exist, but is merely the projection of the couple's fears.[14]

The matchseller behaves like the audience, and in fact is used as such. He stands, sits, laughs, cries while listening to Edward and his self-justifying verbal output. The matchseller's wordless presence heightens the absurdity of the

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14 Martin Esslin stresses that the play was designed to be a radio play, which explains the non-existence of the matchseller: Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of his Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 87. Following this line of thought he goes as far as claiming that the matchseller is nothing but simply Edward's death (88). To reclaim the matchseller's existence Steven H. Gale argues that there are several proofs against Esslin's and for that matter, Hinchcliffe's view, like the stage direction including his character, or the unignorable fact that the other characters behave as if he existed, *Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work*, p. 80.

situation more than any communicative zeal would. Edward's whole life gradually shrinks into meaninglessness, it is reduced to a self-centred, embarrassed monologue. Embarrassment and final breakdown follows when this subversive silence cannot be further endured.

Flora takes over after the impasse of verbal diarrhoea, and with her the woman takes hospitality in her hands. She cares, pities and accepts the stranger, even names him 'Barnabas' (176).[15] She is everything Edward is not. She prepares the house for accommodating him as the new tenant. Moreover, she hands his tray to Edward and exits with the matchseller. Edward becomes superfluous and has to leave the house. Alienation within the total household is so palpable that the inhabitants find themselves easily replaceable by outsiders. The ending of *A Slight Ache* suggests a jocular circularity[16] in the relation between housed existence and questioning otherness. The play also shows how the totality of secluded being can nourish internal forms of otherness that are no sooner revealed than expelled.

According to Steven H. Gale *A Slight Ache* is a new development in Pinter, since the supposed threat is brought inside and it becomes clear that there is nothing to fear: the danger is internal.[17] The source of menace in Gale's words is the "unfulfilled emotional needs of the man and woman," which is to say that need constitutes a source of insecurity.[18] It is to be noted that sex and rape are among Flora's first thoughts as she talks to the stranger. The issue of vacancy and that of emotional exposure and dissatisfaction are nicely combined in James R. Hollis's conclusive statement, that the play explores vacancy, and the matchseller serves as an "objective correlative for the emotions of Edward and Flora."[19] This

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15 An apostle, son of consolation (Acts 4:36). She turns to him for consolation, and at the same time offers to put him in bed: in the Freudian bed of sex and death, "why shouldn't you die happy?" (193). Cf. Gale, p. 78.

16 This circularity in *A Slight Ache* appears to be contested by Austin E. Quigley, who suggests that the notion of circularity is a later development in Pinter's work. In plays like *The Basement, A Night Out, The Dwarfs* or *The Birthday Party* the conclusion comes as if the interim had never taken place (Quigley, p. 111).

17 Gale, p. 74. James R. Hollis also draws attention to the threat's being internal, and accentuates the fate of the wasp Edward kills by scoulding. The wasp, Hollis points out, dies in this nook surrounded by flowers, and Edward fails to realise that he is also dying while surrounded by the smothering attention of is *Flora*. On the other hand, he invites the matchseller in order to do away with him as with the wasp, *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence*, (London and Amsterdam: Feffer and Simons, 1970), p. 54.

18 Gale, p. 75.

19 Hollis, p. 58.

sensitive exploration of an emotional crisis between husband and wife shows Pinter's keen insight into the psychology of marriage, and as such finds its further development later in *The Homecoming* (1964) and in *Old Times* (1970).

These brief and reductive glimpses into Pinter's plays serve one purpose. They illustrate those aspects of alterity that Levinas could not but ignore to promote successfully an ethics grounded on the unconditional superiority of the Other. The Other who appears on my threshold as a stranger, a widow or an orphan, exposes, reveals a face that is unique, obliging and unquestionable. With the Pinterian scenes above I wished to problematise the viability of the Levinasian concept of alterity, and demonstrate the way ordinary human situations resist integration into *Totality and Infinity* and its reductive dualities.

*Anna Kérchy*

# Wild Words

## Jazzing the Text of Desire:
## Subversive Language in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

> "'My mother sang opera, she sang sentimental
> Victorian songs, she sang arias from *Carmen*,
> she sang jazz, and she sang blues, she sang what
> Ella Fitzgerald sang, and she sang 'Ave Maria."
> Music is what Morrison's novels are about
> 'because music was everywhere and all
> around."'[1]

### 1 WRITING SUBVERSION, DESIRE AND JAZZ: AN INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Jazz*[2] (1992) is set in the Roaring Twenties, in Harlem, in the legendary and hypnotically luring City, target of the mass migration of hundred thousands of Afro-Americans, fleeing poverty, segregation and violence, seeking northwards jobs, possibilities, excitements and a better life. It is the Jazz Age, the era of the Harlem Renaissance, a golden age of black culture, race music, blues, jazz, nightclubbing, lovemaking and ecstasy.[3] While jazz music vibrates the City

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1 Betty Fussell, "All That Jazz," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 280–289, p. 284.

2 All parenthesized references are to this edition: Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (London and Basingstoke: Pan Books Limited. Picador, 1993).

3 On the ecstasy of the Jazz Age see Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "Jazz," *The Southern Review* 3 (Summer 1993) 614–629, p. 621.

and leads the black community into a collective ecstasy, individual passion is lived in a tale of desire, jealousy, and murder. *Jazz* is the second volume in Morrison's trilogy on impossibly excessive, "awry,"[4] "horrific"[5] loves. While *Beloved*[6] is about a mother's murderous, "too thick" love for her child, and *Paradise*[7] reflects on a community's unlimited and incomprehensible love for God, *Jazz* tells the story of a conventional love triangle, where middle-aged, married Joe Trace, tormented by his neurotic and silent wife, Violet, falls in love with eighteen-year-old Dorcas, and murders her so as not to lose her. Using an unusual narrative strategy, or in a postmodern gesture, Morrison summarizes the story in the very first sentences of the novel.

> Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you." (3)

There it is clear and simple, the story presented in a seemingly omniscient narrator's words: the reader is not likely to look forward to unexpected turns, to tensions, mysteries or final surprises. The remaining two hundred pages of the novel repeat, reformulate, amplify this basic story, present variations on the same plot again and again from different perspectives. However, it is exactly this repetitive, improvisatory, variable nature of the text, together with an unusually poetic, musical, violent, erotic and overall subversive language that makes *Jazz* surpass the banal love-story of a traditional blues-song and become a masterwork. Other stories, painful pasts, troubled psyches, untold longings are revealed beyond the surface story of Joe and Dorcas's tragic love. Moreover, the psychology of human desiring, the role of the eternally impossible desire and of loss in the constitution of the autonomous (writing) subject can be traced on a

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4 S. Judylyn Ryan and Estella Conwill Majozo, "Jazz... On the Site of Memory," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 2 (Fall 1998) 125–153, p. 143.
5 On horrific love in Toni Morrison see Terry Otten, "Horrific Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 651–667, p. 652.
6 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Pan Books Limited, Picador, 1987).
7 Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Knopf, Bonoi Books, 1998).

more general level. The language of desire and the rhythm of jazz and blues music vibrate and weave the open-ended, multi-layered narrative, where the reader is invited to take part in the reconstruction of love, in the composition of jazz, of *Jazz*.

The aim of my paper is to examine the various subversive aspects of Morrison's writing style, and more specifically, the transgressive characteristics and potentials of the language of *Jazz*. My interpretation will be manifold: I intend to study language, style and structure relying on literary interpretations of Morrison's, interviews with the author, articles by jazz critics, and using poststructuralist and French psychoanalytical feminist theoretical works. I analyze the language from the point of view of the "jazzing of the text," that is the influence of jazz, blues, spirituals and race music on the writing style. I concentrate on the potential inspiration originating from Afro-American tradition in the broader sense of the word: the effect of African folk tradition, orality, sermons on Morrison's text. In a second chapter I will analyze the workings of the language of desire in the text, commenting on the stream of consciousness writing technique and "écriture féminine" in Toni Morrison, as well as on Wild words, that is the language of the lost mother, the language of mourning (both personal and cultural-communal) in the text. I examine the revolutionary poetic language, the language of the City, the language of Madness and the language of corporeality in *Jazz*, concluding that the language of the novel is the language of postmodern as well, allowing the Book itself to speak up, to interact and to make love and jazz with its reader. These various revolutionary aspects of Toni Morrison's writing style in *Jazz* introduce a language that is multiply transgressive and, therefore, is capable of surpassing, subverting and jazzing our everyday, Symbolic, phallogocentric language, turning the text into a melody of love.

## 2 JAZZING THE TEXT, HAVING THE TRUE BLUES

*Jazz* is set in the era of the Harlem Renaissance, in the Jazz Age of the Roaring Twenties, when Harlem became a black capital, a City within the City, providing ground for the first time for black group expression and self definition via the instruments of the newly (re)discovered Afro-American musical forms as blues, jazz, spirituals, ragtime, swing, boogie-woogie and be-bop. *Jazz* is unlike traditional jazz literature in the sense that it is not about jazz musicians, jazz instruments or jazz musicology. As Nicholas F. Pici underlines, the word "jazz"

itself never appears in the novel beside the title.[8] However, jazz penetrates the entire City, fills streets, hearts and souls alike. Dorcas and her friend, Felice go to clubs to become women, to be seduced by jazz music, this sensual "lowdown stuff," by "songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart [dropping] on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts" (56). Alice Manfred is afraid of this "dirty, get-on-down music the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild" (58). Riots and marches are accompanied by drums expressing rage. Dorcas dances to jazz music when she is shot by the jealous Joe, while "the music bends, falls to its knees to embrace them all, encourage them all to live a little, why don't you? since this is the it you've been looking for" (188). The young men on the Harlem rooftops never stop playing their music. On the street or in clubs, jazz music is associated with sensuality, desire, yearning, and rage, violence, "appetite," a "careless hunger" (59), provocation, excitement, risk, excess and fever. Jazz as a violent and erotic disruptive element appears on the structural and linguistic level of the text as well, perhaps even more predominantly than on the thematic level.

In an interview with a telling title, "I come from people who sang all the time," Morrison describes the major characteristics of jazz music as having an improvisational, unanticipated nature, as egalitarian, as a coherent melody constructed with dissolves, returns and repetitions, as music located in a historical framework, and as related to love.[9] These features of jazz music can be revealed in Morrison's textual strategies as well. The text is not linear, chronological or teleological: in a multi-layered narrative, jumping in time, space and from consciousness to consciousness, multiple narrative voices give their improvisatory, open-ended versions of the original melody, which is the summary of the plot. The solos of Violet, Dorcas and Joe repeat, reformulate and complement each other with their songs of love, or rather their versions, their varying perspectives of the same song of love, adding up to the tune of the ethos of the 1920s black City experience, the quest for "stronger, riskier selves" (33) and for love. Both in jazz and in *Jazz* the reader has to take an active part in the construction and interpretation of the experience. Critics of jazz in *Jazz* – as Nicholas F. Pici, Eusebio L. Rodrigues and Roberta Rubenstein – underline the importance of

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8 Nicholas F. Pici, "Trading Meanings, the Breath of Music in Toni Morrison's Jazz," *Connotations* 3 (1997–98) 372–398, p. 375.
9 Toni Morrison, "'I Come from People who Sang All the Time': A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Humanities* 1 (Mar/ Apr 1996) 4–13.

group experience, of the relationship with the audience, of audience participation and interplay as mutual provocation, inspiration and energization in jazz.[10] Toni Morrison, as if following this line of thought, in an interview with Claudia Tate claims that

> My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just about telling the story, it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the solo, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it.[11]

Enigmas, holes, uncertainties are left open in the text so as to leave the recipient her/his imaginative freedom and to encourage creativity, "interpretative agency"[12] as well as the pleasure of a shared music, a communal experience. While jazz music always lacks a final chord, the fragments of the text are left unfinished, as if echoing Morrison's definition of jazz: "it doesn't wholly satisfy, it kind of leaves you a little bit on the edge at the end, a little hungry."[13] As Pici describes, the multi-instrumental, polyrhythmic nature of jazz music may refer to the multivocal, polyphonic characteristic of the narrative. The "head and riffs method" of jazz (main distinctive melody and repetition of brief patterns) is inscribed in the text by repetitions.[14] These are renarrations of the same scene from different perspectives (the death of Dorcas), corrected renarrations of the same scene by the same narrator (Golden Gray's arrival), descriptions of persons from different viewpoints (Dorcas is mother and lover for Joe, never-had child for Violet and fake friend for Felice), contradicting definitions of the same concept (jazz is threatening for Alice, seducing for Dorcas, maddening for Violet) – all related to and reframing the main plot, the base melody. As critics agree, the "call and response strategy" of jazz (question and answer of instruments, of musician and audience) appears on a structural level: a leitmotif, symbolic key word at the

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10 On jazz music in *Jazz* see Pici, pp. 372–398, Eusebio L. Rodrigues, "Experiencing Jazz," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 733–754, Roberta Rubenstein, "Singing the Blues, Reclaiming Jazz: Toni Morrison and Cultural Mourning," *Mosaic* (June 1998) 147–164. I use the jazz-terminology and some ideas on jazz introduced by them as starting points of my analysis.
11 Claudia Tate, "Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work* (Oldcastle Books, 1989), 117–131, p.125.
12 Ryan and Majozo, p. 146.
13 Morrison, "I Come," p. 4.
14 Pici, p. 375.

end of one chapter (love, music, the City) is repeated, taken up in the opening sentence of the succeeding chapter, or an idea dropped, left unended at the end of one chapter is continued, elaborated on in the next part. "The effusive legato-like flow of a liquid syntax" and "the staccato of non-standard comma use,"[15] as the lack of punctuation marks, and the overabundance of repetitions, variations, internal rhymes, alliterations, all contribute to the exceptional musicality and to the "jazzing" of the text, reinforcing and echoing the rhythm of the City, birthplace of jazz and of passion, and in the long run creating a piece of writing that transforms jazz music into written language, or language to jazz music, to tell a crooked love in the Jazz Age in a jazzy style and language, as in the following passage.

> The City is smart at this: smelling and good and looking raunchy, sending secret messages disguised as public signs: this way, open here, danger to let colored only single men on sale woman wanted private room stop dog on premises absolutely no money down fresh chicken free delivery fast. And good at opening locks, dimming stairways. Covering your moans with its own. (64)

As Nicholas F. Pici underlines, jazz is a hybrid, Creole genre, a fusion of heterogeneous dialogues and folk traditions[16] – no wonder there are traces of blues embedded in jazz and in *Jazz*. The blues originated in songs of lament in the days of slavery to keep alive, repeat, perform dynamically and melancholically, brutal experiences and lost loves so as to transcend their pain by lyricism.[17] Morrison's text performs the blues by singing of impossible love (Dorcas–Joe), lost mothers, dead lovers (of almost every character), melancholic moods (Violet drinking). Being blue (or having the blues) at the etymological root of the word signifies being sorrowful, sad. Joe with a symbolically significant, unconscious longing wants a blanket of the color blue on the bed he shares with Violet: hence their reconciliation is not without small sorrows. In Morrison's novel black love is always blue, longing for a heart that you can neither live with nor without, as it is sung both in jazz and in the blues.

> Blues man. Black and bluesman. Blacktherefore blue man.
> Everybody knows your name.
> Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So lonesome-I-could-die man.
> Everybody knows your name. (119)

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15 Pici, p. 380.
16 Pici, p. 398.
17 On blues music and black literature see Michael G. Cooke, *Afro-American Literature in the 20th Century. The Achievement of Intimacy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

Like *Beloved*, *Jazz* has been inspired by a heartbreaking real story. In the Harlem of the 1920s a young black girl was shot by her sweetheart at a party, and bleeding to death she refused to reveal the identity of her murderer, trying to give him a chance to get away. James Van Der Zee's album of photos, *The Harlem Book of the Dead* features a picture of a dead girl lying in a casket, accompanied by an Owen Dodson poem.[18] Morrison wrote *Jazz* incited by this tragic, faithlessly faithful, wild and blue love.[19] The novel can be interpreted as a funeral song in memory of dead Dorcas, the story being a recollection of events leading to Dorcas's murder, with musical fragments remembering and mourning Dorcas. In traditional blues songs, grieving leads to spiritual healing, to settling accounts with the past, however, in *Jazz* yearning never stops. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, *Jazz* also sings the blues mourning the irremediable loss of the primary object of love, that is, of the Mother. According to Roberta Rubenstein, *Jazz*, like the traditional original blues music, performs out both private pain and a "cultural mourning" as well: a grief for lost lives and possibilities, inherent in the cultural memory of Afro-American experience, and at the same time a soothing reappropriation of lost cultural creations by the blue lamentation itself[20] – even if this final soothing remains questionable in Morrison's jazzy blue text.

The characteristic vocal content of blues (versus instrumental jazz), the verbalization of melancholy in a lively, spoken language can be traced back to the oral nature of the Afro-American tradition. As Morrison herself claims, her work is "faithfully to reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture [and] make conscious use of its art forms and translate them into print."[21] Furthermore, she emphasizes orality: "I have to rewrite, discard, and remove the print quality of language to put back the oral quality, where intonation, volume, gesture are all there," "writing is [...] talking deep within myself," or "deep talking."[22] As Ryan

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18 James Van Der Zee, Owen Dodson, and Camille Billops, *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, foreword by Toni Morrison (Dobbs Ferry: Morgan and Morgan, 1978). The poem reads: "They lean over me and say: / Who deathed you, who, / who, who, who, who... / I whisper 'Tell you presently / Shortly... this evening... / Tomorrow...' / Tomorrow is here / And you out there safe. / I'm safe in here, Tootsie."

19 On Morrison's thoughts on this murder and on Van Der Zee's photos see Gloria Naylor, "A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 188–218, p. 207.

20 Rubenstein, p. 147.

21 Ryan and Majozo, p.125.

22 Tate, p. 126, p. 130.

and Conwill highlight, the call and response structure, the active participation expected from the listener-reader both in jazz music and in *Jazz* may be related on a historical level to the "collective authorship" underlying traditional Afro-American folk literature, black sermons and spirituals with the aim of establishing a communal experience, a spiritual community so as to reinforce the unity and solidarity of the black community. Jazz becomes a "site of memory," permitting the reconstruction of an enabling identity, of a home and a community.[23]

The long list of parallels between Morrison's writing style and traditional black art forms of expression may be continued. The rhythm of *Jazz* recalls the tam-tam drums of African tribes and slave work songs, black sermons or contemporary rap music. The other stories behind the base plot, the (inter)play of multiple meanings, and frequent Biblical allusions (apple, Eve, Adam, Paradise) remind us of the coded language of slaves, of gospels and spirituals. The performative, repetitive, interactive and open-ended nature of spirituals is echoed throughout the novel's stylistic and textual composition. The violence in the language of *Jazz* recalls toasts, ritual insults and "the signifying monkey" tradition. As Eusebio L Rodrigues stresses, Morrison in *Jazz* combines black vernacular with standard English, jazz jargon, purified tribe dialect, and the language of women between each other to invent a new language of her own, a dynamic, audible text with an oral quality.[24] Barbara T. Christian calls Morrison's textual strategy combining personal voice with that of the folk "creating layered rhythms."[25] Most importantly, Morrison succeeds in impregnating her text with jazz not only as with a musical form but as with a fundamental black experience as well. *Jazz* reverberates Nina Simone's assertion:

> Jazz is not just music, it's a way of life, it's a way of being, a way of thinking. I think that the Negro in America is jazz. Everything he does–the slang he uses, the way he talks, his jargon, the new inventive phrases we make up to describe things–all that to me is jazz as much as the music we play. Jazz is not just music. It's the definition of the Afro-American black.[26]

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23 Ryan and Majozo, p.132.
24 Rodrigues, pp. 736 737.
25 Barbara T. Christian, "Layered Rhythms: Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 483–500, p. 484.
26 Ryan and Majozo, p. 130.

Jazz is not just music. It is a definition of Morrison's subversive language as well, being open, complicated, experimental, provocative, playful and passionate.[27]

## 3 THE LANGUAGE OF DESIRE IN JAZZ

For Toni Morrison jazz symbolizes unfulfilled longing, hunger, desire, incited by its own impossibility.[28] Her writing "all the time writing about love or its absence"[29] appears as a corpus of jazz masterpieces composed in the language of desire. In *Jazz* too, the crucial question is "Who is the Beloved?"[30] and wondering about this question, longing itself seems to predominate over the potential fulfillment. Characters are yearning for the True Love depicted in the romantic movies and love-songs of the 1920s. Desiring infiltrates the City and becomes a veritable symptom of the spirit of the Jazz Age. People long to find empowerment, their stronger, riskier, wild selves, and also their happiness, freedom, home and rest in the City. This paradoxical search for wildness and peace, the never-ending quest of something lost, the melancholic memory of the missing beloved becomes a leitmotif of the novel, haunted by hunger, and hunting for love in the wild words of a language combining yearning and corporeality, poetry and madness, mourning and jouissance, a language moved by the desire of the (m)other.

### 3.1 Tracing Fugitive Desires: A Hunt for Love...

According to Philip Page, the story's principal metaphor is hunting, thus the novel's archetypal father figure is called both "Hunter's Hunter" and Henry LeStory.[31] The Story is associated with Hunting, Tracking, Desiring. Henry LeStory, the lonely black hunter in the forest (in the historical past) "fathers"

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27 On Morrison's language use see Thomas LeClair, "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 119–129.

28 Morrison, "I Come," p. 4.

29 Jane Bakerman, "The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 30–43, p. 40.

30 Naylor, pp. 208–209.

31 Philip Page, "Traces of Derrida in Jazz," *African American Review* 1 (Spring 1995) 55–67, pp. 57–58.

both Wild, Joe's lost mother, whom Joe looks for in all his loves and Golden Gray, Violet's ultimate emblem of love, sprung from her grandmother's stories of a golden haired boy. (LeStory helps Wild in labor with Joe in his cottage, and he is the biological father of Golden Gray.) Hence LeStory is linked to both Joe's and Violet's missing primary objects of love, the story being about the impossibility of desire, never-ending longing – echoed in jazz music. Characters of *Jazz* are tracking in an infinite hunt the appropriate object of love apt to satisfy their hunger, yet they never seem to find it. The beloved always proves to be a displacement of the original object of love, love turns impossible, ending in murder, disillusion, loss or a bittersweet nostalgic melancholy at best.

Joe is hunting for Dorcas in the same way as he tracked Wild, the uncivilized, naked madwoman sneaking in forests, his never-seen mother who abandoned him, and left without a trace (allowing Joe to name himself in memory of her Joe Trace reinforcing the motif of tracking, tracing and desiring in the novel). Joe loves Dorcas because he associates her with his lost mother. The girl fills the "empty nothing" (37) in Joe's heart left behind by his mother. The hoofmarks on Dorcas's face substitute Wild's tracks, the honey of Dorcas's body and the candies she eats correspond to Wild's honeycomb, Dorcas's bleeding shoulder displaces the birds with red wings accompanying and signifying Wild, moreover Dorcas (as Violet) is referred to as "wild" (153, p.182). Dorcas and Wild fuse in Joe's imagination as the same personal pronoun indicates the two women: "But where is she?" refers to Wild, while in the next sentence "There she is" designates Dorcas (184, 187). The dying Dorcas utters the sentence: "I know his name but Mama won't tell" (193), and hence becomes completely one with Wild, the lost primary object of Joe's desire, by her death repeating his primary loss, and revealing the impossibility of desire: when desire is fulfilled, it must die. In a crooked kind of love Joe can only touch his beloved, his mother-substitute by killing her, his gun is the caressing hand of the Freudian "double bind" when his arm reaches her. In the Bible Dorcas is an early Christian seamstress who dies suddenly and is resurrected by the apostle Peter;[32] hence Dorcas could symbolize the resurrected mother, lost again.

Violet in an inner monologue thinks that Joe searches in Dorcas for somebody else, her (Violet's) younger self or "somebody golden, like my own golden boy" (97), for the target of Violet's longing is Golden Gray, "who I never saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers" (97).

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32 Ryan and Majozo, p. 137.

Violet was "made crazy about" the golden boy by her grandmother's, True Belle's stories of the illegitimate mulatto child with the golden hair, an eternal child, an imaginary lover who is held on to when Violet embraces Joe. Violet recognizes the fugitive, displaced, impossible nature of desire saying "Standing in the cane, he [Joe] was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about [Dorcas, Wild?], and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the golden boy I never saw either. Which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he" (97). However, as the chain of substitutions does not end with Dorcas substituting Violet, but from Dorcas leads to Wild, the primary object of Violet's desire is beyond Golden Gray displaced by Joe.

A central passage of the text, repeated and reformulated twice by the narrative voice is that of Golden Gray arriving at Hunter's Hunter LeStory's house carrying the pregnant unconscious Wild on his horse. Allegorical figures of desire are juxtaposed in this highly symbolic scene, bearing considerable significance on a metatextual level as well, hiding the emblematic coming to text, the birth of the text as ultimate object of desire. Golden Gray is imagined standing next to a well that appears as the enigmatic source and target of the text, the Omphalos, the center of the labyrinth, the bull's eye of all tracking and desiring:

> I want him to stand next to a well dug quite clear from trees so twigs and leaves
> will not fall into the deep water, and while standing there in shapely light, his
> fingertips on the rim of the stone, his gaze at no one thing, his mind soaked
> and sudden with sorrow, or dry and brittle with the hopelessness that comes
> from knowing too little and feeling too much (so brittle, so dry he is in danger
> of the reverse: feeling nothing and knowing everything). (161)

This sorrowful and hopeless well, mirroring Golden Gray and Wild, may be interpreted as the very same one into which Violet's mother, Rose Dear plunged when she committed suicide (102). Thus, the recurring motif of the well can serve as a clue that leads (also) to Violet's primary object of desire, to *her* lost mother. Violet herself feels the mother-hunger when (after several miscarriages and sleeping with dolls) she begins to fall in love with the dead Dorcas, associating her with Golden Gray, a child she has never had. Thus Dorcas's death signifies simultaneously matricide, as Joe kills and touches his beloved mother in Dorcas, and infanticide (coupled with matricide) as well, as Violet cuts the face of dead Dorcas at the funeral as that of her never-had child, associated with the Ur-Child, Golden Gray (who is also a substitute of the mother, Rose Dear, via the shared

enigma of the well). Violet's aggressive cut, earning her the name Violent, is a result of her excessive urge to touch, to relate, to love.

Dorcas's name can be considered as an anagram of the word "sacred," evoking the archaic meaning of "sacer," sacred and profane at the same time, like the maternal body, like the dead. Ryan and Conwill note that according to the Egyptian Book of the Dead, ancient Egyptians cut the corpse ritually for spiritual release and for the beginning of a new life.[33] Unlike most of the critics, I argue that Violet's cutting of Dorcas's face, and then her "rebirth" as a new Violet, and her reunion with Joe after Dorcas's death is not a renewal, a reassuring reunion, a reconciliation and a "release," as Ryan and Conwill think,[34] nor is it the celebration of the power of subjectivity and of a new possibility of grown-up love as Elizabeth M. Cannon claims.[35] Neither do I agree with Terry Otten's argument on horrific love bringing a final, regenerative and soothing release.[36] A close reading of one of the final seemingly idyllic and happy-end-like passages proves that longing does not stop, desire cannot be satisfied or pacified, and that Joe and Violet keep on yearning for the impossible, for the lost object of love or for desiring itself. "Lying next to her, his head turned toward the window, he sees through the glass darkness taking the shape of a shoulder with a thin line of blood. Slowly, slowly it forms itself into a bird with a blade of red on the wing. Meanwhile Violet rests her hand on his chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well..." (224–225). Joe and Violet are lying side by side in their bed under the symbolically blue blanket and instead of thinking of each other in the "adult way" put forward by Deyris Paquet[37] and Cannon,[38] the blues of desire recalls in Joe the bleeding shoulder of Dorcas associated with the red-winged birds signifying Wild, while Violet yearns for the sunshine of a golden boy's hair and for the well, a symbol shared by Rose Dear and Golden Gray. The signified of desire keep fleeing yet seducing, and it is only the substitutive displacement that one can hold in her/his arms. Desire is like Violet's parrot saying "I love you": first it is nurtured, then when released it either freezes to death or flies free, only to be

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33 Ryan and Majozo, p. 137.

34 Ryan and Majozo, p. 138.

35 Elizabeth M. Cannon, "Following the Traces of Female Desire in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 2 (Summer 1997) 235–248, p. 246.

36 Otten, p. 664.

37 Marie Anne Deyris Paquet, "Toni Morrison's Jazz and the City," *African American Review* 2 (Summer 2001) 219–232, p. 227.

38 Cannon, p. 246.

replaced by another parrot taught to say "I love you": it is forever displaced. I reject Linden Peach's interpretation of the conclusion of the novel, namely that a monogamous, faithful, mature love is reached by Joe and Violet as a counterpoint to the new (a)morality of Jazz Age.[39] In my reading the fugitive nature, the constant displacement of the couple's desires and the impossibility of a final fulfillment (that would put an end to desire) echoes the quest for happiness in the artificial, imaginary Paradise of the City, and the vibrating instability of the Era, as well as the infinite longing of jazz music, and the functioning of the literary text itself.

### 3.2 Father's Language, Mother Tongue: Words for Wild

This fugitive characteristic of desire evokes the functioning of language: floating signifiers never succeed in touching the sliding signified. Feelings, thoughts, ideas can never be formulated precisely via the representational system, in the jailhouse of language. Communication, as love, becomes problematic. According to poststructuralist psychoanalytical theory (marked by the names of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva among others) the speaking subject is constituted via a primary loss: during the process of socialization, entering the realm of language, Symbolization and representation (faced with traumas of the Mirror Stage and of Oedipalization) the subject has to renounce the preverbal Semiotic bliss, the primary perfect union with the mother, as (s)he exchanges mother's body for the Language of the Father.[40] Thus the constitution of the speaking and writing subject, of the autonomous individual is accompanied by the loss of the primary object of love, by a symbolic matricide. The entry into language separates from the pre-Oedipal, pre-verbal harmonic symbiosis with the maternal body. Yet, paradoxically, language use, writing is a compensatory activity, an impossible attempt trying to recuperate the lost beloved, the good vibration of the maternal body by the pleasure of the text, the rhythm, repetition, musicality and poeticity of the literary language.[41] Thus the literary text is at the same time a "rape-text" and a "mother-text,"[42] "matricide" and "incest,"[43] intertwining the "Symbolic"

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39 Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* (London: Macmillan Modern Novelists, 1995), p. 127.
40 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Modern Literary Theory: A reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (Edward Arnold, 1992), pp. 122–127.
41 Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, Essays, 1985).
42 Hélène Cixous, *La Jeune Née* (Paris: UGE. 10/18, 1975).

language of the Father with (the longing for) the maternal body's blissful, preverbal, "Semiotic" realm.[44]

This ambiguity of the literary text, the melancholic longing for the lost maternal is voiced in Morrison's text as well: "Violet had the same thought: *Mama. Mama?* Is this where you got to and couldn't do it no more? The place of shade without trees where you know *you are not and never again will be loved by anybody who can choose to do it? Where everything is over but the talking?*" (110) (my emphasis). According to poststructuralist theory, desire vibrates every literary text, the nostalgia of the maternal body and of the missed primary jouissance become engines of the text. By the end of the novel the narrative voice confesses to have believed that desiring flesh "hangs on to wells and a boy's golden hair, would just as soon inhale sweet fire caused by a burning girl as hold a maybe-yes maybe-no hand." The voice continues by saying "I don't believe that anymore," hence playing down the validity of the substitutive objects of desire. According to the voice, "Something is missing there. Something rogue. Something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out" (228). This missing part, desired, never successfully displaced, never reached can be interpreted as the "nowhere-everywhere" mother, the desire of the mother that is experienced ("figure in") preverbally ("before figure it out"), to become in language a rogue absence blasting and blessing the text, vibrating wild words. In my opinion, in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* a poetic, musical, jazzed text is woven and waved by a desire that turns out to be the desire of the lost mother, giving birth to the rhythmically pulsating, dynamically repetitive, erotically open text. Thus the passage of Joe and Violet, lying (in both senses of the word) in each others arms, thinking of lost beloved mothers, ends with the phrase: "... and down there somebody is gathering *gifts* (*lead pencils*, Bull Durham, Jap Rose Soap) to distribute to them all" (225) (my emphasis). The phrase by recalling the expression "to put lead in one's pencil," that is a male slang for a full erection, suggests that mother's body is not only exchanged for the Language of the Father, but that symbolic discourse and corporeal energies fuse in the vibrating text of desire. The melancholy of desiring and missing Mother is compensated for by gifts of pencil, that is by the coming to text, by the birth of the literary text itself. Nevertheless, the noun "das Gift" means

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43 Melanie Klein, "Réflexions sur l'*Orestie*," *Envie et gratitude et autre essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 188–219.

44 Kristeva, pp. 17–100.

"poison" in German, while pencils are made of poisonous lead: they can only lead to a text that is bittersweet substitution, forever painful-pleasurable displacement, never ending desire.[45]

### 3.3 Writing Wild from Desiring Bodies (Mother, Madness, Melancholy: Melody)

French psychoanalytical feminist theory (the prominent thinkers are Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) introduces the term "écriture féminine," denoting a specifically feminine mode of writing, defined as a "volcanic," "heterogeneous" writing from an endless body without end, "writing in [the] white ink" of mother's milk,[46] introducing corporeality, libidinal energies, drives and desires of the preverbal, maternal Semiotic realm into the text so as to disrupt symbolic, phallogocentric language from within. Kristeva uses the expression "revolutionary poetic language" referring to discourse vibrated by the repetition, rhythm, alliteration, the transformation of language, transverbal practices and the breaking loose of passions, and claiming that men can also perform this subversive feminine writing.[47]

All these strategies of écriture féminine can be traced in *Jazz*: the base melody, the main plot of love and murder is retold, repeated several times in the rhythmic, musical and poetic language incited by jazz music, and vibrated by desire and longing for the mother. In *Jazz* "jazzing the text," writing in the language of desire and écriture feminine intertwine. Morrison when writing compares herself to a dancer beyond gravity, for her writing is "energetic, balanced, fluid and in repose." And as she claims, "there is always the possibility of growth, I could never hit the highest note so I'd never have to stop"[48] – this is Cixous's writing from an endless body without end. Morrison wrote her thesis on, and has been certainly influenced by Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner,[49] both characterized by the experimental stream of consciousness technique, uncannily recalling écriture féminine, jazzy text, and Morrison's dramatic inner monologues written from/ on loving bodies, inspired by the unspeakable

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45 I would like to thank Nóra Séllei for calling my attention to the lead-poison, "Gift"-poison parallels, as well as Peter Doherty for highlighting the meaning of the male slang expression.

46 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol, Diane Price Herndl (Rutgers University Press, 1991), 334–350.

47 Kristeva, pp. 70–100.

48 LeClair, p. 120.

49 Christian, pp. 483–500.

maternal entity haunting every text of desire. Longing for and writing in "white mother's milk" can be revealed as a motor vibrating the text in *Jazz*.

The narrative voice thinking of the beloved Golden Gray reflects on the language of the text of desire:

> I want to dream a nice dream for him, and another of him. Lie down next to him, a wrinkle in the sheet, and contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it, diminish it. I want to be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open. I want him to stand next to a well...
> (161)

A "language wishing well," calming and soothing is associated with the "well," the maternal metaphor of the text: the pleasure of the literary text signifies a momentary return to mother. This hypothesis is reinforced by a close reading revealing that the "language wishing him," the narrative voice "want[ing] him" desires the lost mother in Golden Gray. Similarly, lying down next to him, contemplating his pain and diminishing it by doing so is an allegory of "incest and matricide" in the literary text, trying to heal symbolically in vain the primary loss, implanting never-ending desire into the text.

The narrative voice musing over the incompetences of her writerly strategy, realizing the impossibility of her project aiming to name unspeakable desires of Joe, Violet, Dorcas and herself, invites the wild mother in her text: "She has seen me and is not afraid of me. She hugs me. Understands me. Has given me her hand. *I am touched by her*. Released in secret. / Now I know" (221) (my emphasis). Touched by the Wild Mother, the text is infected by Wild Words: the preverbal "language," the song, the laughter, the moan and the cry of Wild invade the text, disseminating meanings and "jazzing," maddening the text, turning it into a rhythmic, repetitive, musical flow, a new, "other" discourse, the language of the (m)other. On its very first page, *Jazz* begins with the preverbal sound "Sth" instead of a word, associated with the word "woman" ("Sth, I know that woman" [3]). In the epigraph the Goddess of Thunder speaks up, identifying herself as the "name of the sound" and "the sound of the name," "the sign of the letter" and the "designation of the division," suggesting that the text is disseminated, shattered, exploded from within via a female voice – perhaps that of a mother, a goddess, a dead girl or a jazz diseuse...

According to Andrea O'Reilly, Wild is the physical embodiment of the unrepresentable repressed maternal Semiotic realm disrupting the Symbolic language with the uncontrollable excess and the polymorphously perverse desires

of the primary feminine space returning to haunt, to destabilize the conventional language use and the traditional narrative.[50] Wild writes from her body, communicating via corporeal traces, touching, laughter and song resembling a "combination of running water and wind in high trees" (176). Illogically, O'Reilly concludes that for *Jazz*'s characters "finding their mothers' gardens" signifies not only a return to their original selves and the discovery of whole, complete selfhoods (a paradox in itself), but also a happy reconciliation with the mother.[51] O'Reilly fails to realize that touching the mother via the substitutive hand (or gun?) of symbolic language is an impossible project, a Sisyphian effort that can only bring momentary soothing, unable to satisfy desire for good. Tracing the mother (Wild) there is only "a river called Treason to rely on" (221), for she is "everywhere and nowhere" (179). "Aching words [of the symbolic language can only] set, then miss the mark" (219). In my reading, the text is not so much a joyous celebration of mothering, but a more blues-like melancholic nostalgia felt for the mother, the revelation of her never-ending desire in the text, and of the momentary bliss when the "fort-und-da"-like repetitive rhythm of the text touches the mother. It is the musicality of *Jazz* that remembers, echoes the never-ending song of Morrison's mother.[52] However, the recuperation of the preverbal good vibration is only momentary, it is longing, desiring and melancholy that predominate the text, turning the tale of cultural mourning of lost possibilities, and of the mourning of the dead beloved Dorcas into a mourning of the mother as well. Passion is sublimated into text, melancholy and loss become engines of creative writerly energy.[53] Morrison herself claims to have recognized herself as a writer after a period of melancholic mourning, when she felt herself as a "vessel" (a maternal entity), and realized she "could hear things."[54] Thus, having the blues may allow the verbalization of melancholy's melodic yearning.

The "desire of the mother" works as a polysemic concept in *Jazz*. The mother is desired by the writing subject, infecting her text with the primary yearning for the Semiotic ("mother text"), and, on the other hand, the mother

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50 Andrea O'Reilly, "In Search of My Mother's Garden, I Found My Own: Mother-Love, Healing, and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 3 (Fall 1996) 367–380, p. 375.

51 O'Reilly, p. 377.

52 On Morrison's memories of her singing mother see Fussell, pp. 280–287, and Morrison, "I Come," pp. 4–13.

53 On the psychological and literary analysis of melancholy see Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

54 Tate, p. 128.

appears as a desiring woman herself, contaminating with her wild passion (the passion of Wild) all the other female figures. As Doreatha Drummond Mbalia remarks, traces of Wild are disseminated everywhere throughout the novel, Wild is present in all women, in the City, in jazz music. Mbalia associates wildness with the rage of Afro-American women resulting from their oppression.[55] Elaborating on Mbalia's argument, it is worth noting another aspect that contributes to Morrison's characteristic style just as her being an Afro-American woman: all women in *Jazz* share the wildness of sexual desire, turning the novel into an eroticized text. Women's desire falls beyond the ideologically prescribed passive feminine sexuality or the monogamous reproductive economy of the heteronormative scenario governed by hierarchical gender oppositions. Female desire in *Jazz* is polymorphously perverse, excessive, wild. "Excessive, generous, wide spirited loves"[56] are beyond the traditional femininity. Violet seeks her beloved in Joe, in a boyfriend, in Dorcas, in Golden Gray, in Dear Rose, and in Felice. Dorcas desires Joe, Acton and the brothers alike. Wild roams the forest touching Hunter's Hunter, Golden Gray, and as a symbol of threatening yet tempting female sexuality haunts all men around her. Female desire is uncentered, unlimited, dispersed, characterized by risk, excess and what Cixous calls a "libidinal economy of gift."[57] Dorcas, faithlessly faithful, bleeding to death without revealing the name of her murderer-lover is a par excellence example of excess in love, of nonproductive expenditure. Violet's love is violent, she can only touch the beloved Dorcas by cutting her face with a knife (thus penetrating her with a phallic symbol). Wild bites Hunter's Hunter face instead of kissing him. Sexual hunger, excess and jouissance lie at the heart of jazz music, and consequently at the heart of Morrison's jazzed and eroticized text.

According to its definition, écriture féminine is fueled by female jouissance, by the volcanic pleasures of the female body, constituting a rhythmic, cyclic, open text of desire written from the body providing the pleasure of the text to its reader. According to Cannon, the function of jazz music is to awaken the listeners' sexual desires.[58] Consequently, I think, Morrison's jazz writing returns

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55 Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, "Women Who Run With Wild: The Need for Sisterhood in *Jazz*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1993) 623–646, p. 625.
56 Naylor, p. 208.
57 Cixous, *La Jeune Née*, pp.155–63.
58 Cannon, p. 237.

to the original sexually charged meaning of jazz, of "jazz me, baby."[59] An erotic text full of sexual metaphors and allusions is produced – as in this sentence: "[...] licking his licorice stick, tickling the ivories, beating his skins, blowing off his horn while a knowing woman sang ain't nobody going to keep me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to get it bring it and put it right here [...]" (60). Yearning, jealousy, sexual excitement and hunger are equally incorporated in a jazzy and erotic text resounding (and becoming itself) the flow of desire:

> Take her to Indigo on Saturday and sit way back so they could hear the music wide and be in the dark at the same time, at one of those round tables with a slick black top and a tablecloth of pure white on it, drinking rough gin with that sweet red stuff in it so it looked like soda pop, which a girl like her ought to have ordered instead of liquor she could sip from the edge of a glass wider at the mouth than at its base, with a tiny stem like a flower in between while her hand, the one that wasn't holding the glass shaped like a flower, was under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, and he bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don't you know, and she wore it for him thin as it was and too cold for a room that couldn't count on a radiator to work through the afternoon while I was where? (95)

The desiring body in its corporeality is a crucial leitmotif of *Jazz* on a thematic level, yet it also directs the structure, organizes the plot and destabilizes, infects language by the subversive potentials of the unspeakable materiality of the body. The body in the text and the text on the body are equally transgressive, excited by desire. Bodies, from the very first "train-dance" to the City, in clubs, in streets, on rooftops alike, are moving sensually to the sexually stimulating rhythm of jazz. In fact, the entire body is marked by the longing of jazz: "knees in full view, lip rouge red as hellfire, burnt matchsticks rubbed on eyebrows, fingernails tipped with blood" (56). Jazz turns (people) hungry for love, the dancer cannot be separated from the dance. Jazz is the voice of the flesh, in the dance the body is everything, "a badly dressed body is nobody at all" (65). In the "society of spectacle" of the Jazz Age, persons are identified with their bodies as targets of desire: "The girls have red lips and their legs whisper to each other through silk stockings. The red lips and the silk flash power. A power they will exchange for the right to be overcome, penetrated" (182). The new, jazzy women, the flappers

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59 On the etymology of "jazz me, baby" see Rodrigues, p. 735.

of the 1920s open their bodies, live the sexual liberation celebrated by jazz, and cannot be described but in an eroticized language: "she is clipping quickly down the big city street in heels, swinging her purse, or sitting on a stoop with a cool beer in her hand, dangling her shoe from the toes of her foot, the man, reacting to her posture, to soft skin on stone, the weight of the building stressing the delicate, dangling shoe, is captured" (34). Dancers seem to become one body, "sharing a partner's pulse like a second jugular" (65). Taking up the rhythm of jazz is like making love, the text is pervaded by the language of corporeality, of the desiring body. The writing on the body intertwines with the écriture féminine-like, jazzy and erotic writing from the body.

Pains and pleasures are written on bodies marked by desire. Neola's "clutch of arm to breast" seems to wish to "hold the pieces of her heart in her hand" (63), paralyzed when left by her treacherous lover. According to Marie Anne Deyris Paquet, the traces on Dorcas's bad skin indirectly testify to the traumas of her childhood, that is the loss of her parents.[60] However, in my opinion, the hoofmarks on Dorcas's cheeks can also be the tracks of Wild, traces of Joe's desire. Violet's violent expression of love, the cut on dead Dorcas's face opens the way to remembering, that is the re-membering of the beloved's body in the reconstruction of the narrative. Joe's two color eyes and Violet's "wayward mouth" and "renegade tongue" (24) signify their heterogeneous, decentered, neurotic identities, destabilized by desire. As Vikki Bell highlights, the performance of the racialized body can be revealed in the light-skinned Golden Gray's quest for his "nigger" father, "the blackest man in the world" (157, 172), as in the nauseatingly black and naked Wild's absence-presence, while Dorcas's light skin and straightened hair signify the stylization of the black body.[61] The search for light bodies (that of Dorcas and of Golden Gray) by black characters may mark the impossibility of desire. Desire is written on the body and the desiring body, the language of corporeality writes the text.

The language of corporeality speaks in the tongue of the mad body as well. Violet is the madwoman in the text. By her violent, abnormal, neurotic acts – as throwing her favorite parrot saying "I love you" out into the street, stealing a baby, sitting down in the middle of the street, imitating her husband's dead lover, cutting Dorcas's corpse at the funeral – she repeats Wild's, the mother trope's wild desires

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60 Paquet, p. 226.
61 Bell, "Passing and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *Social Identities* 2 (June 1996) 221–237, pp. 225–226.

and unlimited, heterogeneous self. Her madness is reflected in her language as well, tainting the text of *Jazz*. She has a "renegade tongue," a "wayward mouth," responsible for her verbal "collapses" (24), letting her unconscious speak up, disturbing language and mind alike. The uncontrollable slips of her tongue, her wild, delirious monologues are varied by her incomprehensible, melancholic silences. The narrative voice is often infected by Violet's linguistic madness. It claims to be omnipresent and objective, knowing everything *and* unreliable, influenced by personal feelings. The narrative is full of gaps, silences and uncertainties *and* it is repetitive, loquacious, full of maniac, endlessly flowing monologues. Trying to remember Joe's and Violet's going to the City "nothing comes to mind," nevertheless the forgetful voice immediately after this statement recalls seven pages of memories of this journey (29–36). In the City language is treated "like the same intricate, malleable toy designed for their play" (33), this language lies, heats your blood, then disappears (37). The language of the City, that is the language of desire, jazz and madness is spoken by Violet and the *other* Violet as well, for Violet's identity is that of a schizophrenic split-personality, a borderline case stumbling through cracks and gaps, splitting Violet's life, self and language alike. "*That* Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no *that* Violet is me" (96). That Violet is Violet's violent self, a neurotic "other," cutting a girl's dead face, embodying unconscious repressed drives and desires, a Woolfian Septimus in Violet speaking with trees (216) in the revolutionary poetic language of the crazy female body, a madwoman in the text jazzing and maddening the narrative. Morrison's aim is to project the self into language with "space between words, as though the self were really a twin or a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you."[62] The other is embraced in the uncanny language of the lunatic, Violet's and Morrison's own.

Toni Morrison in the preface of her *Playing in the Dark*, analyzing Marie Cardinal's novel, unveils the "nerve-wracking," "visceral," "emotional and intellectual" jazz music of Armstrong as a trope of nervous breakdown and mental disorder.[63] Jazz music seems to fulfill the same symbolic function in Violet's mind, reflecting her emotional disturbance and fluid identity, her melancholic silences and hysteric

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62 Naylor, p. 208.

63 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

outbursts, the "innarrable cracks"[64] of her mind, just as the impossible desires of her split self. Cannon and O'Reilly claim that Violet by the end of the novel succeeds in uniting her two selves reaching a full, complete and coherent identity.[65] In my reading Violet's personality is not that unproblematic, for the decisive passage, a conversation between the Dorcas-substitute Felice and Violet on Violet's *other* and her split self may be interpreted in a way different from that of the above-mentioned critics. „'How did you get rid of her?'/ 'Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.'/ 'Who's left?'/ 'Me'" (209). It is not self evident that the *other*, violent Violet becomes suppressed, leaving a coherent me behind, since the question "Who's left?" can be read both as "Who is left?," meaning "Who remains behind?" and as "Who has left?," meaning "Who departed?" In the second reading the killing of the other Violet seems either impossible (finally it is the me leaving and not the *other*) or resulting in the denial of one's own personality (if one denies the stranger, the other, the unconscious in herself she denies her being a heterogeneous subject). The other Violet can stay behind in the form of an unspeakable limitless desire exciting self and text, revealing a "subject and meaning in process/on trial,"[66] vibrated by the rhythm of jazz. Carolyn M. Jones argues that the jazz writing used by Morrison is a form demonstrating a performative, improvisational and fluid identity.[67] In my view, this postmodern concept of identity is shared by the contemporary reader, thus a bond is established, and the delirious, erotic, desiring voice of the jazz-text touches the reader where it hurts and soothes the most.

## 4 IN PLACE OF CONCLUSION. THE VOICE OF THE BOOK

> "You can start anywhere – Jazz as Communication –
> since it's a circle and you yourself are the dot in the
> middle. You, me. [...] with you in the middle – jazz is
> only what you yourself get out of it."
>
> (Langston Hughes)[68]

Toni Morrison's *Jazz* challenges its reader to participate actively in the composition of the jazz story and text, filling in gaps, musing over mysteries,

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64 Carolyn M. Jones, "Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 3 (Fall 1997) 481–496, p. 486.
65 Cannon, p. 246, O'Reilly, p. 373.
66 Kristeva, *La révolution*, p. 37.
67 Jones, p. 481.
68 Ryan and Majozo, p. 130.

tracking disseminated meanings, tracing floating signifiers, playing with open possibilities at the numerous entrances and exits of the self-deconstructive text, vibrating sensitive chords, voicing written melodies. Roland Barthes would call *Jazz* a "writerly text of jouissance," inciting the reader's cooperation and providing the "pleasure of a text,"[69] not simply that of real literature but also of true love. The reader is involved in the text (s)he cannot help being ravished, excited or deranged, feeling touched and marked by a unique language that is at the same time yearning and violent, a language tainted by desire and sensual corporeality, by melancholy and mourning, by silence, madness and music. Morrison's text, as a genuine écriture féminine "steals words and makes them fly,"[70] cheating words with words it transgresses symbolic language, shows ways of flight from the jailhouse of language, and provides heterogeneous, alternative identifications (with the desiring subject-in-process or the polyphonic, choral narrative voices) beyond the ideologically prescribed subject position. The reader of *Jazz*, liberated, can embrace – beyond (yet within) the Language of the Father – subversive languages of the "other." A Semiotic, renegade mother-tongue, body talk, languages of madness, revolutionary, rhythmic poetry and melodious music weave the text functioning as a "desire machine," narrating (on the thematic level), echoing (on the stylistic, linguistic level), exciting (on the receptive level) and operated by (on the level of the plot and of the deeper motor of text) yearning. Talking about love is a verbalized displacement of lovemaking. Reading about love can be very close to an amorous, affectionate encounter. Morrison, by an ingenious twist, ends (or rather leaves open-ended) her novel on desire by an unusual vow of love, that of the Book to its Reader. The erotic Text in love is sexually attracted to the Reader, offering her/him the love in the text and the love of the text, the pleasure of the Barthesian writerly reader cooperation. Reading, making the text, making (and disseminating) meanings equals making love with the text, in a dangerous liaison infected by desire, madness, mourning, sex and wild jazz. The reader's touch can remake the text, interpreting its embrace varying according to fugitives desires, past loves and intertextual background, and can produce a new jazzing text of desire, a fruit, a memento of this love between Book and Reader, a new r(ead)ing in the endless chain of interpretations, an answer to

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69 On the pleasure of the "texte scriptible" see Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).
70 Cixous, "The Laugh," pp. 343–344.

the invitation to dance, a playful performance to the rhythm of free jazz. Morrison's text speaks up in a melodic and metatextual, lovingly inviting "deep voice."

> *That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer – that's the kick.*
>
> But I can't say that aloud, I can't tell anyone that I have been waiting for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you, because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now. (229)

And the reader must respond. The present paper is a work of love, my Reader self and the Book dancing "close and shameless or apart and wild" (58) to the tune of jazz, of *Jazz*.

*Judit Friedrich*

# Who's Afraid of Content-Driven Criticism?

## An Introduction to Erica Jong for the Brave

**We might** want to reconsider our formalist critical attitudes to literature along the lines suggested by the question immortalised by Stanley Fish: "Is there a text in this class?"[1] Rather than staying with the notion of interpretive communities, however, I would like to use the question as a wake-up call to redirect attention from theory to text, and allow ourselves to ask another important question: "Is this text about anything?" We may find out, as a reward for our infinite courage, that for a text to be "seriously, even passionately, about some thing," as the eminent postmodernist novelist and author of fictional autobiographies John Barth insisted the case should be,[2] is not, after all, mutually exclusive with the text being poetically created, verbally spectacular, or structurally impeccable; we may indeed conclude that for a text to be about something will not necessarily diminish the pleasures of the text.

Why would it preclude any pleasure indeed, one might wonder. The answer leads into the heart of academic debates about the literary canon and the power struggles conducted around inclusion and exclusion of student bodies, bodies of texts, and members of staff. There are losses to suffer and privileges to gain, all hanging in the balance. The dangers of having to sit through defences of dissertations where one never even heard of the authors' names, let alone read the works discussed, will have to be pitched against the freedom to study what one is

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1 Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).
2 John Barth, *Chimera* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest, 1973), p. 36.

interested in; the fear of having to see wonderful works of literature one has practically grown up with pushed to the margin of interest will have to be weighed against the sense of discovery that literature can mean a body of texts relevant to the lives and respective backgrounds of the researchers in quite direct ways; the concern that the world and academia will go to the dogs if we step on this unstable ground of shifting values will have to be measured against the faith that critical guidance can be offered on any number of different literatures with equal thoroughness, virtuosity and erudition. A new syllabus may lead to a new department and to a loss of interest in an old subject. English literature may follow in the footsteps of Latin and Ancient Greek literatures – they offered the tools and approaches to use on the literatures springing up at the fringes of the old cultures. This time the language may be set forever, but the content will vary drastically.

Content, however, is such a critical minefield. How can we avoid taking content personally? How can we avoid making assumptions? And this is precisely the core of contention. Literature was invented to be taken personally; and we all make, and have, assumptions. For the purposes of claiming objectivity and scholarly approaches in literary criticism, if that is indeed our goal, it is infinitely easier to limit ourselves to quantifiable and measurable aspects on the one hand and theoretical ones on the other. It is significantly less complicated to have a cool critical discussion upon the form than the content of most literary works. It is considerably less controversial to discuss critical strategies in the abstract sense than to enter the realm of messy humanness and discover that so far ignored methods of presentation, selection of material and use of language have their own rules, their own histories and their own contexts. If we do not agree, it is reassuring to fall back upon well-established critical sources to quote and final authorities to appeal to, rather than having to immerse oneself in the quicksand of recently published doctoral dissertations pertaining to the subject that now seems impossible to ignore. It is easier to apply regulations of the kind orchestras and conductors have known for ages, with just two cornerstones, where rule number one is "The Conductor is Always Right" while rule number two states "If the Conductor is not Right, Rule number one applies automatically." It is easier to claim that one canon is enough for all of us than to accept the notion of multiple universes with their own specific canons whirling around one another and fading in and out of perception.

But enough already – it is time to bring a text into this discussion. The choice I offer is Erica Jong's most recent work, *What Do Women Want? Bread,*

*Roses, Sex, Power* (1998),[3] a volume of essays that represents Jong's entire oeuvre by touching upon themes and topics which are central to her interest and which have been also explored in her earlier works. The name of Erica Jong will no doubt serve as a reminder to discussions of content-driven criticism. Whether or not one read any of her works, there is a vaguely unpleasant ring to her name, conjuring up images of mass media presence, best-seller lists, controversial subject matter and possibly foul language. For Hungarian readers not even that much – whereas her most spectacularly successful book, *Fear of Flying* (1973)[4] was finally translated in 1990,[5] we seem to have lost interest once that was done. Not entirely surprisingly. In order for her books to be appreciated in Hungary the translator(s) would have to create an entire lexical field in mainstream Hungarian that would cover sexuality, especially, but not limited to, women's sexuality, with a range and scope quite unheard of and, so far, quite unvoiced in polite company.[6]

What, shall we discuss such topics, written in foul language, as part of an academic exercise? Well, that is precisely the question. The intrepid critic who actually goes and reads Erica Jong's works is in for a surprise. Jong's language, for one, is invariably rich and evocative. Jong in fact started as a poet, and a prize-winning one at that, and still considers poetry as the saving grace of humankind:

> People think they can do without poetry. And they can. At least until they fall in love, lose a friend, lose a child or a parent, or lose their way in the dark woods of life. People think they can live without poetry. And they can. At least until they become fatally ill, have a baby, or fall desperately, madly in love. [...] Poetry is the language we speak in times of greatest need. And the fact that it is an endangered species in our culture tells us that we are in deep trouble. [...] The skin, not the soul, has all our care – despite lip service to the contrary. And many of us are dying for want of care for the soul. The poet is the caretaker of the soul; in many civilizations, the poet's contribution is central.[7]

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3 Erica Jong, *What Do Women Want? Bread, Roses, Sex, Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

4 Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

5 Erica Jong, *Félek a repüléstől*, Hung. trans. András Gáspár, poetry trans. Péter Szentmihályi Szabó ([Budapest]: Fabula, 1990).

6 A new development since the time this paper was written has been the publication of a new Hungarian translation of *Fear of Flying*: Erica Jong, *Rettegés a repüléstől*, Hung. trans. Anna Pavlov (Budapest: Tericum, 2002). Tericum plans to publish the entire oeuvre of Jong in Hungarian.

7 Erica Jong, "Yeats's Glade and Bashō's Bee: The Impossibility of Doing Without Poetry," *What Do Women Want?*, pp. 189–190.

Jong also considers poetry her personal haven:

> When I am most perplexed, I return to my roots: poetry. I consider myself a poet who supports her poetry habit with novels and nonfiction. I know I am lucky to have supported myself as a poet for twenty-five years without ever writing a book I did not believe in. The novel is more elastic than the poem. It allows for social satire, cooking, toothbrushes, the way we live now. Poetry, on the contrary, boils things down to essences.[8]

Fanny, the heroine of Jong's pseudo-18th-century comic novel, who combines ambition as an author with beauty and a whole series of adventures in the various fields of highway robbery, prostitution, motherhood and piracy, is similarly enthusiastic when she is about to write her first great Philosophical Poem:

> And what was Poetry but a rhyming Means of leading the Human Race towards Perfection? And what was the Poet but a Human Creature inspir'd to raise his Fellow Creatures closer towards the Divine Spirit?
>
> Hot with the Fire of the Muse, I sat down to write – but, alas, I had neither Quill nor Ink![9]

But will her poetic language validate Jong's writing? She is one of those postmodernist verbalists who cherish the power of language, who enjoy the sounds, the rhythm, the imagery, who revel in the sheer pleasure of words, words, words. In true postmodernist fashion, Jong's words occasionally get arranged in lists. So far, all is well. These lists, however, may turn out to consist of more than fifty words and expressions for a prostitute[10] or similarly lengthy lexical explorations of female and male sexual organs.[11] Are we still to applaud her skill as a writer or shall we now shrink from her topics? Life was so much nicer in the 19th century. One could just blame an author for committing "the highest moral offence a novel writer can commit" and add one's choice of sin to replace Elizabeth Rigby's, who chose to chastise Currer Bell upon the publication of *Jane Eyre* of the highest moral offence "of making an unworthy character interesting in

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8 Erica Jong, "Writing for Love," *What Do Women Want?*, p. 178.

9 Erica Jong, *Fanny: being The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (Scarborough, Ontario: Signet, 1981), pp. 107–108.

10 Erica Jong, "Introduction," *Fanny*, p. 6.

11 As a starting point, may I suggest *Parachutes & Kisses* (New York: New American Library, 1984), or, to risk stating the obvious, *Fear of Flying*.

the eyes of a reader."[12] This is the type of criticism those engaged in the study of literature were hoping to avoid by placing the emphasis on form. But there is a chance that we managed to throw out the baby with the bath water, or, at least, to offer a double edged sword to those who wish to defend the study of literature in the name of objectified scholarly approaches and find public interest waning in their work: we remove our combined critical hands from the pulse of living literature at our peril. And living literature is often *about* something.

Yet Jong writes about so many things that have not been considered the proper study of literature – including sex, bringing upon her head the wrath of those who are always on the alert against pornography. But wait, sex has become an acceptable topic for generations of authors. Brothels were fine, as long as men wrote about them, and so were women in love. Indeed, the gory was, at various periods in literature, daring, new, and revolutionary. Moreover, it was held against women authors that they did not descend into the bloody, the political, or other dark regions beneath womanish propriety, thereby rendering themselves limited and boring. Jong recalls an incident from her college days to demonstrate the "damned if they do, damned if they don't" situation women writers find themselves in:

> [A] distinguished critic came to my creative writing class and delivered himself of this thundering judgement: 'Women can't be writers. They don't know blood and guts, and puking in the streets, and fucking whores, and swaggering through Pigalle at five A.M...' [...] It's ironic that the critic – the late Anatole Broyard – should have identified 'blood and guts' as the quality that women writers supposedly lacked, since clearly women are the sex most in tune with the entrails of life. But we can better understand the critic's condemnation if we remember that in the nineteenth century, women writers were denigrated for their delicacy, their excessive propriety (which supposedly precluded greatness), while in the past couple of decades they have been condemned by male critics for their impropriety – which also supposedly precludes greatness. Whatever women do or don't do precludes greatness, in the mind of the chauvinist. We must see this sort of reasoning for what it is: prejudice.[13]

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12 Elizabeth Rigby in *Quarterly Review*, 1848, quoted in Erica Jong, "Jane Eyre's Unbroken Will," *What Do Women Want?*, p. 49.
13 Erica Jong, "Blood and Guts: A Woman Writer in the Late Twentieth Century," *What Do Women Want?*, pp. 41–43.

Oh, but there is more. Not only does Jong write about sex; she also writes about women as humans with ambitions as persons, as lovers, as professionals, as mothers, as friends and as spiritual beings. Perhaps it really would be wiser just to ignore her. How are we ever to categorise books based on these topics? At least *Fanny* and *Serenissima: A Novel of Venice* (1987), which was later renamed as *Shylock's Daughter* ("it never occurred to me anyone might *not* know that the *Serenissima* is simply another name for Venice," explains the author)[14] are safely within the realm of historical fiction: Fanny is placed within the conventions of 18th-century English novels, while Jessica in *Serenissima* or *Shylock's Daughter* goes back to 16th-cenury Venice and falls in love with Shakespeare himself. Jong's volumes of poetry will also surely be forgiven; poetry is a Good Thing in the world of literary criticism, and anyone who insists on writing poetry should be praised rather than scorned. Besides, we can always call her a Woman Poet and thus put her in her Proper Place, once we realise what those poems are about.[15]

But those works of fiction and non-fiction are truly a problem. This is partly a formal question, and as such would be safe for any critical scrutiny: it is a worthy ambition to examine how fictional Jong's works of autobiography are on the one hand, and how autobiographical her fiction is on the other. The answer is, on both counts: very much so. This in itself is not a particularly surprising answer; if one looks at another American postmodernist novelist, John Barth, who also wrote a pseudo-18th-century novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960, 1967), one could trace how autobiographical elements increased in his oeuvre until his fiction reached the level of saturation best described as autobiographical fiction, see for example his *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991), only to be followed by a book of fictional autobiography in *Once Upon a Time* (1994).[16]

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14 Erica Jong, "Introduction" *Shylock's Daughter: A Novel of Love in Venice* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987, 1995), p. 14.

15 Erica Jong, *Fruits & Vegetables* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, 1997), *Half-Lives* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), *Loveroot* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), *At the Edge of the Body* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), *Ordinary Miracles* (New York, New American Library, 1983), *Becoming Light: New and Selected* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

16 John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960, 1967), *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (Boston, New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1991), *Once Upon a Time* (Boston, New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1994). For more details see Judit Friedrich, "Recycling Literature: Myth, Postmodernism, and John Barth's Later Fiction" (Kandidátusi értekezés [Ph.D. Dissertation] Budapest, 1994), pp. 148–153.

Erica Jong's models and inspirations, Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller, whose example guided her in her exploration of being a woman writer and of writing freely about sex, also provided examples of working around the artificial division between fiction and life. Writing about Henry Miller, Jong voices her own position as well:

> His contradictions were many. Victorian and bohemian, *schnorrer* and benefactor, sexual guru and tireless romantic, he made women up out of pen and ink (and often watercolor). Did he make up his autobiographies too? In a way, he did. In a way, we *all* make up our autobiographies.[17]

Jong also examines Anaïs Nin's first two volumes of journals, which were finally published unexpurgated, in accordance with Nin's wishes, only posthumously. Jong finds in Nin not only a perfect example of what women authors have to overcome in order to become and survive as authors but also, again, the question of the borderlines between fiction and autobiography:

> If Nin was such a pivotal and important figure in the history of modern literature, why has she been so maligned?
> The first reason is obvious: sexism. The second is also obvious: our unique cultural fear of sexuality. The third reason is equally obvious: What she has created is new (a kind of writing that hybridizes autobiography and fiction). [...]
> There are signs that as this century ends, her innovations have become part of our literature. The incest taboo has been broken. Autobiography and fiction have been merged into one form. Women writers have a degree of freedom undreamed of by her generation. And the unexpurgated journals will keep on coming. They will continue to be attacked by women who are afraid of freedom and by men who like women that way. But for our daughters and granddaughters they will be there.[18]

As for herself, having produced four volumes of the Isadora Wing stories,[19] a series that was generally perceived as thinly disguised autobiography, and two volumes of memoirs[20] to add to her two works of historical fiction that clearly

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17 Erica Jong, "Good-bye to Henry-San," *What Do Women Want?*, p. 119.

18 Erica Jong, "Incest and Anaïs Nin," *What Do Women Want?*, pp. 112–113.

19 Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (1973), *How to Save Your Own Life* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), *Parachutes & Kisses* (1984), *Any Woman's Blues* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).

20 Erica Jong, *The Devil at Large: Erica Jong on Henry Miller* (New York, Random House, 1993), *Fear of Fifty* (New York, HarperCollins, 1994).

represent some of her deepest concerns from motherhood to being an artist, Jong is ready to sum up her own views:

> I think I've begun to understand how the process of making fiction differs from that of making memoir. A memoir is tethered to one's own experience in a particularly limiting way: The observing consciousness of the book is rooted in a historical person. That historical person may be rich and subtle, but he or she can never be as subtle as the interplay among various characters who all grow out of aspects of the author. In the memoir, the 'I' dominates. In the novel, the 'I' is made up of many characters' 'I's. More richness is possible, more points of view, deeper imitation of life.
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> When I finished *Fear of Fifty*, I felt I had quite exhausted my own life and might never write another book. What I eventually discovered was that I was liberated rather than exhausted. Having shed my own autobiography, I now felt ready to invent in a new way. [...]
>
> A character who is not oneself may even access some deep memory in the brain that seemed lost forever. Fictional characters excavate real memories. Flaubert, after all, claimed to be Emma Bovary, gave her his restlessness and discontent. In some ways an author may be freer to expose himself in a character unlike himself. There is liberty in wearing a mask. The mask may become the condition for speaking the truth.[21]

After all this hope in approaching Jong through her genre, we are back again at the problem. The sorry scoundrel of a writer actually wants to speak the truth. How are we ever going to get away from content? She may even think it is a compliment if people cannot remember all her authorial strategies because they were so riveted by what she wrote about. Sadly, there were entire cultural periods when artists were not supposed to foreground their technique; the text was supposed to flow effortlessly and elegantly. How retro of Jong not to break under the lack of critical appreciation; she has only herself to blame if she chose to bask in the light of readerly love.

Shall we face what she writes about, then? Be brave, Reader! Jong writes about being pregnant, about birth, about being a young mother, about the tremendous guilt involved in trying to balance her roles as a mother, a lover and a writer, about the difficulties of earning one's living as an artist, about being a woman artist at that, about having lovers, about growing older, about having dreams, about having nightmares. She has also published a work of non-fiction

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21 Jong, "Writing for Love," *What Do Women Want?*, pp. 178–180.

about witches[22] and some words of fictional advice for children and parents on divorce.[23] Her writing is not only sexy, it is also funny and wise, irreverent and free, uninhibited and poetic. And it is, passionately, about what it is like being a woman who is neither angel nor devil but, as Fanny says, "is made of Sweets and Bitters," is "both Reason and Rump,"[24] is a complex human being. Jong writes about all of this in all of her books, historical, autobiographical and fictional. She explores as many facets of the condition of being the female of the species as possible. She seems to think this matters. Millions of her readers seem to agree. Should we study her writing? As you wish. Should we read her? By all means.

What do women want? Do we care? Not very likely. And we care even less about who Erica Jong is or what she says. Academically speaking, that is. Otherwise we might. And here is the bone of contention. If we are ready to leave behind the postmodernist conviction that highbrow and lowbrow are artificial distinctions within the arts, even the verbal kind, driven by the struggle for power among publishers, academics, the media, and critics of all sorts, we will argue ourselves into complete separation with not only the public at large but, specifically, with our students. Do we really want to retire into a corner where nobody will want to follow us, let alone listen? Do we really want to give literal or figurative wall-lectures, in the time-honoured tradition of the 1660s, when candidates for a degree "were required to give six lectures on natural philosophy, called *wall* lectures because, as a rule, only the four walls were there to hear"?[25] We could. All we need to do is maintain traditions, make sure that we do not venture on uncertain grounds, we do not explore territories that have not been mapped. Let us all just talk about the weather. Nice day, isn't it?

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22 Erica Jong, *Witches* (New York: Abrams, 1981, 1997, 1999).
23 Erica Jong, *Megan's Book of Divorce: A Kid's Book for Adults* (New York: New American Library, 1984); *Megan's Two Houses: A Story of Adjustment* (Los Angeles: NewStar Media, 1996).
24 Jong, *Fanny*, p. 187.
25 Morris Marples's *University Slang* (1950), quoted in Jeffrey Kacirk, *Forgotten English: A 365-Day Calendar of Vanishing Vocabulary and Folklore for 2002* (Pomegranate, 2002) 18 April.

# An Interview with J. Hillis Miller

[The occasion for this brief interview was a research seminar organised by the University of Pécs in May 2000. Thanks are due first of all to J. Hillis Miller for his exemplary patience and generosity, and also to Professor Antal Bókay, the organiser of the event. The following interview is the almost entirely unedited transcript of a video recording. – István Adorján]

*In one of your essays you exemplify deconstruction, and I am alluding here to another statement of yours, namely that deconstruction, like all other methods of interpretation cannot be defined but only exemplified. Do you exemplify deconstruction as a mode of reading practised by Derrida, de Man, yourself and some others? Would you sketch briefly your relation to the work of these two as well as your own position?*

I think that "briefly" is difficult. I was and am with Derrida, a close personal friend of these people, but from the point of view of the theory of their influence on me, it is more a matter of reading. Certainly the reading of the works by both of those people and tending to summarise what they taught was decisive in my own work, even though I would have no hope to imitate their rigour and inventiveness. And even though I have written in general about different authors, that is to say, in general, but not exclusively, on English and American authors, I feel myself still pretty close to them and their theories.

*To continue with "weak" definitions of deconstruction, in the same essay you assert that deconstruction is "a currently fashionable or notorious name for good reading as such. All good readers are, and always have been, deconstructionists." Couldn't this be read as a dangerous leap into the transhistorical? Is it avoidable to read this as a kind of pre-emptive universalisation?*

Sure, I would deny that. When I made that statement it was meant to be somewhat ironically disarming (probably it didn't work). That is to say, to invite other people to recognise that if they are good readers they are also deconstructionists. Certainly the history of reading is the history of changes, the history of protocols and so on. On the other hand, I would certainly think that what I meant by that was that good reading at any time, at least within the

Western tradition, involves a certain kind of attention to detail, to rhetorical features and so on, that you would find present already in, say, Aristotle and Plato, in rather different ways. When Plato occasionally talks about a passage from Homer, he is very shrewd in what he says about it. And Aristotle was, among other things, a distinguished literary critic, so that we could still take the *Poetics* as a kind of model for good reading, even though as I tried to show, there is some strangeness about Aristotle's assumption, for example, that all good work has to be perspicuous, that is to say, you have to be able to see through it, meaning that it has to be of a certain length. But it has always seemed to me that he shows us the mark of genius of a literary theorist or a literary critic, when he chooses in the *Poetics* the work among Greek tragedies, namely *Oedipus the King*, that is going to cause his own theory, which is a very rational theory, the most difficulty since it's an irrational play. It is like Austin choosing examples which give his theory difficulty.

> *You have always stressed the importance of attending to the text, of undertaking the laborious task of vigilant textual scrutiny. One of your books bears the telling title* Theory Now And Then, *that is, in one possible reading, one needs theory only now and then. Or, as de Man also pointed out, one must always start from the experience of reading the text. You said yesterday that what we need is not so much Derrida, for instance (and I think he would agree with you), but a responsible reading. Could you elaborate a bit more on the relation between theory and the practice of reading?*

I think reading theory or theoreticians is probably for most people indispensable as a way of learning how to read; good reading does not fall out of the sky. Different people are differently equipped with a kind of curiosity for good reading. It is possible, though, that you don't have to read Derrida or [Kenneth] Burke or anybody else necessarily to be a good reader. But it probably helps, and it helps not so much as to imitate these people as it gives you questions to ask or things to look for. That is to say, you learn, if Derrida in talking about Proust attends to words like *prendre*, *compris* and *pris*, etc., that it might be that you get good results by looking not for that word but looking for recurrent words in another text. That is really not so much the theoretical side of what the theorists say as their methods of reading. And I am not sure that one would be helped all that much, to do a good reading by, say, taking de Man's sentence about the paradigm for all texts consisting of a figural system of figures and deconstruction

following, and saying: "I am going to demonstrate that this is true for *Great Expectations.*" I am not sure, because you could do that, but it would all too likely to be a kind of mechanical process, just as in earlier years, during the work of Northrop Frye – I used to read, and still read, a lot of journal submissions – there was a period when most or many of them were what seemed to me a kind of mechanical application of Frye's principles. They would start out by saying: "I'm going to show that this is a work that belongs to the Spring or the Summer," or something like that. And this seemed to be not all that helpful. Whereas Frye himself not only was the great maker of this system, the *Anatomy*, which has vast ambitions to accrue all literature, but the part of Frye's work that really interests me is the essays which are actually readings. For example, there's a quite remarkable essay on Wallace Stevens, and there are others, on Shakespeare and so on. And the quality of those readings is not predictable from the system; it has something to do with something else in Frye. So, theory helps, but not all that much.

> *According to a notorious claim of yours, the text deconstructs itself, it expresses its own aporia without any help from the critic. You have also said that deconstruction is conservative as far as the canon goes; the canon is pretty much taken for granted in deconstruction. This was de Man's stance when he admitted in an interview his reluctance to write on contemporary fiction, except, perhaps, Borges or Calvino. Is it the case perhaps that many "postmodern" texts, so to speak, are so overtly and flauntingly self-subversive and self-deconstructing that they make the critic superfluous?*

I would think not, absolutely, that is to say they might require different strategies to bring this out, but the critic's work is always that of mediation, of leading the reader back to the text, and I would think that one could safely generalise to say that that could be done for almost any text, but not mechanically and not always in the same way, so that you can figure out for each text what is needed. What I mean by saying that every text deconstructs itself is fairly obvious. That is, it contains its own vocabulary that you can appropriate from the text itself to use as tools of a kind of self-analysis, and that is much more attractive to me than imposing some foreign terminology, for example saying: "I am going to show how this is a system of figures and its deconstruction." And it is in fact consistent with the procedures of Derrida that those notorious terms of his, like *différance* and *dissemination*, arise from some particular work of criticism, analysis, and tend to come from the writer in question, and tend then to be, sometimes, referred to

later, but not deployed as universal terms. So, *dissemination* was a term he got from Mallarmé, he uses for the analysis of Mallarmé, but he doesn't say that everybody should use this term. It is appropriate for Mallarmé, and it fits the concept of language within Mallarmé, so that it would be impossible to abstract a fixed terminology from Derrida's work. It is not quite so true for de Man, the trajectory was somewhat shorter, but even in de Man there is a change from a phenomenological terminology of subjectivity to a linguistic one, and there is a replacement of a certain kind of linguistic terminology of tropes with a speech act terminology. His terminology was always changing, it is not a kind of fixed system.

> *In recent years deconstruction has repeatedly been declared by some people passé, defunct and outmoded. One might also think of the rather unjustified and distorting view of deconstruction as being hermetic, ahistorical and without sufficient political commitment. On the other hand, you have argued that some versions of what is broadly referred to as cultural studies, while clamorously insisting on the need to historicise and politicise, tend to restrict their focus to the thematic level. In other words, by overlooking the rhetorical-tropological dimension, they paradoxically prove to be more conservative than they believe themselves to be. How do you see present-day cultural criticism?*

I am biased, obviously, but I would be willing to say that the strongest part of cultural criticism has been inspired in one way or another by the previous rhetorical criticism, and either consciously or un-self-consciously makes use of it, so that the current developments would be impossible without the prior stage of deconstruction or rhetorical criticism, and they forget that stage in my opinion. So, the work of someone like Judith Butler, though it is not Derridean or de Manian in any narrow sense, nevertheless would be, I think, impossible with its interest in recurrence and so on without her having read those people, and I think she would be willing to admit that. But she appropriates them for her own purposes, and that is the way it ought to be. You cannot go on doing the same thing over and over again. Each new generation of young critics has to find something else to do; it is no use trying to redo the work that Paul de Man or Derrida did, and that is perfectly understandable. On the other hand, you don't want to forget that they existed, and that sometimes is difficult, because you are likely to feel (Bloom was right about this): "this is our shadow, these great figures, I would probably do better if I didn't even read those people, if I pretend they

didn't even exist." And that would probably be a mistake. A really strong critic would have the ability to read them and do his own type. Jameson would be a good example: somebody who knows this work very well, but does not use it in a straightforward way, nevertheless it is incorporated somehow into his practice. His review essay on Derrida's Marx book was very interesting from that point of view. He did not start as you might think a sort of orthodox Marxist would do, full of hostility, saying, "How could Derrida understand Marx?" It was a very thoughtful and careful, productive evaluation. But that is because Jameson is so strong a person in his own thinking and so productive and creative that he does not have anything to fear from Derrida's influence.

*In one of your recent essays ("Marcel on the Telephone") you write about the transformation and indeed the formation of the self and of subjectivity by the new media. In* Illustrations *you go as far as to claim that a whole new discipline, the discursive field of Cultural Studies, has been in fact shaped and enhanced by multimediality. How do you see the future of literature, the future of criticism, and the future of what in Deleuzean parlance could be called "man-becoming-machine"?*

I would say two contradictory things. One: the book is going to be around for quite a long time, people are going to go on reading books, and it is hard to imagine a situation in which universities would not – even for purely historical purposes, in order to understand their own past, the past of their country or the countries that they associate with – read literature, some literature. Literature was so important in the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, and there would be lots of new books written. On the other hand, I do think that we are coming to the end of something and that gradually our culture dominated by print will be replaced, and is being replaced, by other media forms, which are equally worthy of study, but will require different forms of study etc. So, literary study will certainly outlast my time, but I might be a little more anxious if I were a whole lot younger, and I think that is manifest in the fact that so many younger people now want, even if they are trained as literary scholars, to do film criticism, they want to do popular culture and other things. I think that in spite of the claims made that literature still has the same power in our societies, in our countries, I do not think that is really true. I think that is some wishful thinking, and claims made, for example, by my good friend, Phyllis Franklin, who is the executive secretary of the MLA, that people read just as much as they ever did, and that Shakespeare is still taught in all the colleges, and she gathers a lot of

statistics. On the basis of my knowledge of my own grandchildren, I see that their culture, and I am not in any way denigrating it, is formed by popular music. Sure, they read books, but it is not the centre in quite the same way as it probably was in the nineteenth century, when there was not any alternative. They watch a lot of television, and in the case of my grandson, he does not even watch television or video, he is a computer person. He is one of those "wired" people, and I respect that. But there is no use pretending that his ethos is fundamentally formed by literature, and that seems to me... not dismaying, but interesting. It does not bother me as long as I am allowed to go on reading books

*ISTVÁN ADORJÁN*

# "I'm a Tradesman... "

## An interview with Ádám Nádasdy, the translator

*You are a teacher, a linguist, a poet and a literary translator. In this
interview I would like to enquire especially into the latter two, with a
special emphasis on translation. Firstly, I would be interested in how these
roles complement each other.*

They do overlap to a great extent. Being a teacher is not a separate activity, it
links both to linguistics and translation. I take up translating jobs that challenge
me as a linguist, for instance, jobs that require careful philological work. I think
poetry is the most independent out of these involvements.

*In the translator's note that you wrote to your translation of* Hamlet, *you
made a hint that in your general intention to clarify there is something from
the attitude of the teacher.*

My expectation of my translation is that spectators understand everything from
beginning to end. One of the critics of my translation of *Hamlet* is Géza Fodor,
the well-known drama editor and professor of criticism, who read the translation
on a friendly basis. For a period of four and a half hours he just went on and on
listing his problems with it. He concluded, "every single corner is floodlit." In his
opinion, this actually becomes a disadvantage, because in this play, he says, a
portion of gloom is beneficial. So, he praised and criticised my work at the same
time.

*How did you take it?*

I agree that every single corner is floodlit. On the other hand, the original itself is
also comprehensible, at least on the lexical level. I don't deny that there is a kind
of gloom in the whole of the text, but as a translator you don't have to deal with
it.

*Do you think your translation is obscure?*

It is much less obscure than what people are used to. We do understand the words
of the characters, what we don't cope with is their motivations, aims, fears and so
on. Nevertheless, we might attribute more mystery to this play than it deserves.

*Do you write yourself into your translations?*

I think I can say yes. I have had remarks from friends regarding lines that "sound like me." I don't suppose this is a problem. After all, I am an interpreter, like a pianist. It is just natural if one can tell by hearing that it's him who plays the piece, and not somebody else. Provided the piece remains recognisable... Doing a translation gives me more pleasure if I find a self-portrait in it... When I am happy about a freshly translated line, it might be because it expresses me. The measure is fidelity to the original.

*Fidelity must be difficult to measure in practice.*

It is like when a pianist reads Chopin's instruction saying *andante*, but he decides to play it a little bit faster, because he knows the music will sound better this way in his interpretation. The tempo is relative; the point is to achieve an effect with your performance. However, it is not easy to see when the piece becomes a different one, not the one you are supposed to play. What can I say? You need good ears, and good taste. In this sense, translation can be regarded as art.

*This leads on to one of my crucial questions. To what extent do you consider translation to be artistic, a kind of co-production with the author? Do you think translations belong to the literary oeuvre of the translator? I'm not only asking this about your own work, but literary history in general.*

I think translations can be part of one's oeuvre, even though there are a lot of poor translations owing to routinised, less dedicated work. Apart from these there are translations where the challenging nature of the task, the high standard of the work as well as its success secure them a place of esteem in the translator's oeuvre. For instance, János Arany's translations of Shakespeare form an integral part of his work. I cannot decide about my own achievement. It will be your generation that can judge after a while whether my translations survive or not. I wish this were true at least about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*.

*How does your reading of the text inform your translation?*

Not too much, I hope. I wanted to avoid this. It would be a bit aggressive. I don't think I succeeded completely; a good parodist doesn't exclude himself, either. A good parodist is not identical with a mirror. I made an effort to recognise the differences in the language of the characters and communicate these, but I may not have always kept the proportions. I can bring one example of this phenomenon,

that of Polonius. I wanted to do justice to this gentleman, to show that he was not as stupid or as childish as many think. Actually, he's a benevolent person. Maybe he tells his daughter a bit too bluntly what he is inevitably supposed to tell her in some way: the prince cannot marry her. Ophelia is just one of Polonius's numerous duties. He does not embrace his daughter with tender loving care, but tells his opinion in telegraphese. Albeit in the wrong way, he does something which is right.

> How can you grasp the difference between translating and writing? There is
> a commonplace in literary theory saying that the act of translation, since it
> is rewriting, shouldn't be so much separated from writing. What do you
> think about this?

This is really complicated. When I translate, I know what I would like to write – what the author of the original wrote. I'm a tradesman... For me, it is as simple as that. When I write my own work, it is the language, the form itself that shows me the way. I hear the rhyme, and I find words to go with it. Even in free verse, the beat of the rhythm leads me. When I translate, I am aware of what I have to say. I struggle with it until it says the very same.

> Can you say the outcome is the equivalent of what you read in the foreign
> language? When you work, you probably read a passage and interpret it. So,
> you try to find words in Hungarian for your interpretation of the
> original...

It is evident that the activity is not a simple act of re-coding. The solution comes by intuition, too. My principle is to write the same word by word, which is not always possible.

> I appreciate this ars poetica, but isn't this word-by-word attitude an illusion?
> Almost every word can be translated in different ways. How do you find the
> most proper meaning in a context?

Let me refer to music again, to my own experiences as a less talented piano student. My teachers always told me to play exactly as it is written in the sheet music. I was never encouraged to interpret. That would have been a great danger of amateurism. Of course, in reality, you can't push your personality aside, but you shouldn't place yourself in the foreground on purpose. More precisely, a word can be associated with different situations. In this sense, the work of the literary translator does not differ from that of an interpreter or a technical translator. Translation as a profession expects you to realise which meaning belongs to a certain situation.

*How do you think translation as a profession can be taught?*

I myself learnt a lot in courses. Analysing translations by others, comparing rival translations, preparing sample translations are all very useful.

> *Who is a good translator? One to whom we pay attention? Or does a translation fulfil its goal when it reads so well that it does not even occur to us to check who translated it?*

The wider reading public will never be interested in the name of the translator. (In the case of popular books, the author's name is often similarly irrelevant.) Nevertheless, in a smaller circle of connoisseurs you can and indeed must gain a name with your individual style, a method which might even get spread, like that of Arany or the representatives of the great Modernist generation circled around the journal *Nyugat*.

> *The translator himself might often be blind to the interpreting-rewriting nature of translation. In many cases it is only the more accomplished receiver who notices this.*

It works like parody. Let's pretend that we are experienced actors, good at parody. I have to parody you, and you have to parody me. People can tell that my performance is Márta Minier's parody, even if it is similar to her style in every respect. I don't have to intend not to be a perfect Ms Minier. Human nature and frailty will see to that. And the way I parody you will be different from the way anybody else would do it.

> *I am really glad that you mentioned parody. Don't you think your* Hamlet *is a bit parodistic in the context of its previous Hungarian translations?*

You can have a similar impression in connection with a modern Crucifixion. Or if you see two pieces of rusty iron with the title 'Madonna with the Baby Jesus.' And for a moment you don't know whether to laugh at it or not. If you watch it for a while, you may find the Madonna and the child somehow in a large and a smaller piece of iron. Let alone a contemporary Mass with guitar music. This tendency can apply to any classical theme.

> *What do you think of congeniality? Does it exist at all?*

Yes, I think it does. I have had translating jobs that were no more than burdens. I didn't understand the author's intention. It's like when one pianist is good at

playing Chopin, and another one at playing Bartók. You can't be congenial with everyone.

*How did you become a drama translator and a Shakespeare translator, in particular?*

My first task was the translation of Goldoni's comedy *Il Campiello*, commissioned by Tamás Ascher. The play was written in the Venetian dialect, like a number of plays by Goldoni. I know that variety of Italian through my grandmother, who was from there. I agreed to translate the play because it challenged me as a linguist and as a teacher of Italian. A few years later Péter Gothár commissioned the translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was aware that I had done some work in English linguistics, including the history of the English language. He also knew my Oberon poems, which evoke the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

*Is there a less practical explanation as well? How does the genre match your personality?*

I do have a preference for plays. I could have translated novels, too, but I didn't take the opportunity. In drama, I have also translated from contemporary English. Translating *Live Like Pigs* by John Arden was a much different task from Shakespeare. The characters were gypsies and working class people, but I think I did a good job there.

*What kind of task was* Live Like Pigs? *Especially from a sociolinguistic perspective...*

Forty years had passed since the work was written, and sometimes it annoyed me to what extent the original was devoid of dirty language. Obviously it was not possible to stage something really obscene in the fifties in England (or anywhere). I didn't put anything like this in the text, either, but actors occasionally grumbled with swearwords because the situation needed it. Like the original, I used very short co-ordinate sentences with a meagre vocabulary. To keep the same length of sentences as in the original was almost as important to me as when one translates the lines of a poem. I did not intend at all to compensate for the Northern English dialect. The theatre, much to my agreement, consulted a Romany expert, Zsolt Csalog about the playtext. At a few points he changed my expressions to more vulgar ones. It is interesting that the play had also been translated by Tibor Bartos many years ago, who used a more folkloristic, thus richer vocabulary, while I used a more urban, proletarian one, rather spare of build.

*Do you translate poems, too?*

I translate poems quite rarely, only when I am requested to. I have a wish, but I'm not sure it will ever come true. When I'm sad and tired, I think of translating W. H. Auden's poetry into Hungarian. I don't think the existing Hungarian translations are witty or entertaining enough. He could be more popularised in Hungary.

*Why do you find it important for Hungarians to read Auden?*

What I find important is that those who cannot read Auden in the original, should have access to good translations. I appreciate his poems because he can be bitter and joyous, or playful and decadent at the same time. He is a typical 20th-century character, an excellent poet. In Hungarian literature it is Sándor Weöres who can be compared to him with his frequent use of lyrical masks. He can also be both nonsensical and very serious.

*What do you expect from a translator of poetry?*

Again, fidelity. If you read a translation, you need to know that you are not receiving the same experience as a reader of the original. You are lucky if you get the literal meaning. Some of the poetic value might also be evoked. If you are interested in how beautiful a poem is, you have to read the original. Atmosphere cannot be translated. That would be cheating. Translation is like a symphony adapted to the piano. One can compare the two movement by movement, and for a few moments the piano adaptation might echo Beethoven's full orchestra.

*Can you grasp how the different Shakespeare plays challenged you as a translator?*

I'll start with the latest, *The Taming of the Shrew*. The first major scene between Petruchio and Katherine is nothing but verbal fencing. A great deal of linguistic humour is unfolded in the characters' finding faults with one another's sentences, misunderstanding one another on purpose. It is a piece of farce. I never diverted so much from the original than in this scene, because I knew that a sudden effect is needed at this point on the stage, and it wouldn't be satisfactory to compensate for it in another scene. The audience feel that it is time for something very funny, and it is frustrating if this does not happen. There's a very expressive word in the English language – *unfunny* – for something that is supposed to be funny but it isn't. So, I didn't want this scene to be unfunny. I knew I had to be uninhibited

here. The play is built in the way that you know the great scene is coming now. I think I was faithful regarding the importance of this scene in the drama. The previous translators were not as cheeky as I was, they didn't divert that much. There's a strong bourgeois and business-like element; it is tasteless and revealing how men bargain for women, it is like business negotiations, a bit like some people sitting around us now in the cafeteria, with their mobile phones and bank cards. So, there is social satire in it besides the excellent psychological satire – the latter stresses how foolish both men and women are. Out of my translations this one has proved to be the most popular in the theatre market, it has been staged four times, in Budapest, Miskolc, Kecskemét and Gyula. *The Comedy of Errors* did not cause any problems. In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the large number of the rhymes and the strong changes in the style made my task difficult. The fairies, the tradesmen, the young and elderly Athenians... all speak in a distinctly different register. Puck speaks in a different metre every time. There was no problem like this with *Hamlet*. In that case, the text was loaded with gross intellectual filling, like a well-stuffed strudel, and it falls apart when you try to slice it.

*What did you do with the intellectual stuff?*

I threw half of it out, simply because it couldn't be retained on stage. I hope the method of selection was right. The quality of my work depends on whether I selected properly or not. A translator of novels, for instance, has fewer problems like this. When I omitted something, I had the spectator in mind. I included wordplays that can be understood within three seconds. In 1864 Arany translated much more precisely than me, since he retained much more of the original. On the other hand, you can find a lot of enjambments in his text, while in Shakespeare's there are end-stopped lines. So: who translates more precisely? Arany, who inserts almost every wordplay in his translation, like a mathematician, or me, who leaves half of this out, but the text breathes like the original? Are we translating the author who wished to express the pulse and rhythm of the human heart and the process of interpersonal communication, or the one who put three puns in a line? When I was working on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the actors said that they did some minute thing at the end of each line; for instance, they shifted their weight. This works as a principle that co-ordinates stage action. Being an experienced teacher must have helped me unconsciously with the selection. A good teacher, e.g. a good teacher of history, does select from the material to give a relevant picture of Napoleon. This can be

enriched or altered later. A literary translator can hope that the reader, 'the student' will also read either the original alongside his translation, or the alternative translations by István Eörsi and Dezső Mészöly, and will be able to put together from the different points of view what the original is like. As for me, I would happily read bilingual editions. A good parallel has come to mind about the task of the translator. It is like when the photographer can take only one picture of a statue, and he wants to show the heart of it. After walking round the statue a few times, he will find a position. Translation is similar. Translators of the same text use different perspectives. It is advantageous to have more than one translation of the same play because they together show what the original is like. Classics are still read in this way at universities. Students prepare translations for the seminar, and they compare their results. I read Milton in this way with a couple of competent friends.

*What do you find most important to put across from a Shakespeare play?*

To write exactly the same as in the original, and to do this in the same style. In *Hamlet* Claudius has the most distinguished diction. His style is smooth and the easiest to translate. Hamlet was very difficult to render. His style is fragmented, actually, he has hardly any style at all, unless one sees his style as consisting of an imitation of others. I thought for a while that it was my mistake that I didn't find the right linguistic material for him, but then I realised that the play itself is about something like this. He is exposed to a number of influences, he echoes the style of the person he had just been talking to, until he achieves an ironic sense of humour (e.g. when he gives an account of changing the letters, or when he talks to Osrick).

*How many co-texts do you use when you translate? What do you use apart from the primary source text?*

I have used more than one text in each case. In the case of *Hamlet*, I used the New Arden version edited by Harold Jenkins as a main source. I also consulted the OUP one, edited by Hibbard. Schlegel's German translation from the beginning of the 19th century was of great help, just like Yves Bonnefoy's contemporary French version. The latter was accompanied by a rough translation in German, prepared for guest performances in Germany. Jenkins's edition is based on the second quarto. Some of the other translators used editions based on the folio. Using more texts enables you to be alert to minute differences.

*Talking about different versions of 'the original,' I'd like to ask a question
about a particular solution from your Hamlet. In Act III, Scene 1, Ophelia is
sent to a nunnery by Hamlet. Both Arany and you use the dictionary
meaning of the word 'nunnery.' Both of you use two different Hungarian
synonyms, though. None of the translators of* Hamlet *try to refer to another
meaning suggested by linguists: 'brothel.'*

I am entirely convinced by Harold Jenkins, according to whom the very few
occurrences which the defenders of this assumption refer to, are occasional uses.
The word did not have such a permanent meaning. The two notions can
occasionally meet in Hungarian, too, with a pinch of irony.

*Do you imagine an ideal audience for the plays you translate? Are they
readers or spectators in the first place?*

I think of spectators in the first place. Even more specifically, I keep in mind
secondary school students, for whom it is often the first Shakespeare performance
they see. What's more, it might be their first encounter with the theatre. The four
Shakespeare plays I have translated are among the popular ones. If I were a
teacher of lit, I would take kids to these performances. They want to understand
what's going on, their reactions are direct. One of my friends took her adolescent
daughter to a *Hamlet* performance that used Arany's translation. Although the
girl knew the plot very well, she could only follow the 19th century text up to
halfway through the performance. Then we might as well perform it in a foreign
language, or even in the original... When an actor says 'Oh Hamlet,' that cannot
be missed.

*Your decision is to translate for the spectators in the first place. Can you
draw such a sharp dividing line between Shakespeare in reading and
Shakespeare in performance?*

I see a huge difference between the two. When you read a translation, you can
jump from one page to another, return to problematic points, use the footnotes to
understand the mythological references, the contemporary allusions, or the
outdated words. In a performance, all this cultural stuff would damage the plot,
and thus, the overall effect and atmosphere of the play. Today stage action is
much faster than in Arany's day. Church sermons can also serve as a good
example here. When I was a child, priests were talking without a microphone.
They needed to talk loudly and slowly at the pulpit, and wait for the echo after

each sentence. Today this would be ridiculous, and yet, I find it a bit daunting when the priest almost whispers into the microphone as if it were the listener's ear. The case is similar with Arany's translations of Shakespeare. I would happily attend a stylised performance of Arany's *Dream* or *Hamlet*, where beautifully dressed actors would work with a lot of pathos, with very few gestures. It could be repeated every year, like a passion play, just for connoisseurs, who know the text by heart and want to hear it as it is – because what you get in contemporary theatres under the name of Arany hasn't got too much to do with him any more.

*Nevertheless, you don't mind if people turn to Arany's translations again, having met yours.*

Oh no, not at all. A few acquaintances started to reread Arany's translation having seen the performance of my text. The result was that they enjoyed it much more than they did before, because they knew from my translation what it was going to say. They had no problems with comprehension. There is a similar phenomenon in connection with the Bible. As far as I know, all churches use up-to-date translations now. I have heard young people saying that they find pleasure in reading the 16th century translation by Károli, with the knowledge gained from contemporary translations.

*Regarding your translation, even if we bypass the intention of the translator, the text itself intends to appear very different from that of Arany.*

I cannot outperform Arany's voice. I cannot sound more Arany-like than he himself. I am so different, there's no need me blinking towards him. That would be unnerving for me, which would result in a worse translation than it is now. I cannot just simply quote a line or two from Arany out of the blue in the middle of the play. When they started rehearsing my *Hamlet* in Debrecen, some of the actors were upset by not being able to say certain phrases widely known from Arany's classical translation. The director asked me what I would think about a mixed version. I let him shoulder the responsibility, and after a few rehearsals the actors themselves realised that they didn't feel like inserting quotations by Arany on the stage.

*You find it very important to attach explanatory essays or at least a short programme note.*

It was the theatre that commissioned a few paragraphs for the programme booklet of *Hamlet*.

*The translation of* A Midsummer Night's Dream *was more advertised beforehand, if I remember well.*

Yes, it was, without a doubt. It was the first Shakespeare I came up with. My friends encouraged me to 'defend myself.' I think people are interested in such apologies, whether they welcome the new translation or refuse to accept it.

*The rhetoric of these essays contains very strong statements. It is very confident, even provocative.*

The style might not be as modest as that of others, but I think I take criticism quite well, it feeds into my work. I cannot imagine working without being constantly criticised.

*Some critics have found faults with your claim that your translation of* A Midsummer Night's Dream *was intended to be a neutral text.*

I meant it wasn't archaic, folkloristic, or too modern. I could have said colloquial. I meant neutral in the sense when someone goes to a first night dressed in a neutral way. And a gentleman knows he is expected to wear a dinner jacket on a first night at the opera. So, I didn't want to add any extra peculiarity to the text.

*It is also stressed in these essays that a new translation is offered.*

I can only say that I aimed at a new translation. My intention was to roll the ball back where it belongs. To put everything to its own place, according to the meaning in Shakespeare's time. I emphasised that it was new because many people felt that I retranslated Arany's translation into contemporary Hungarian. I was accused of altering the text. Some people said, the original goes like this... and they started to recite Arany's translation. I had to draw attention to the fact that the original is not by Arany, but by Shakespeare.

*Did you notice Arany's legendary prudishness?*

Well, Arany is occasionally charged with prudishness. Some people discover this in his translations as well. I was a very meticulous reader of his translations, but I didn't notice such a phenomenon. Arany didn't mollify any of the prankish expressions. This is a layer of language that changes very fast; the words he chose are not as startling now as they must have been in his time.

*I have the impression that the essay that accompanies* Hamlet *is more humble and respectful. Does this voice address Arany?*

It might be addressing Arany, whose *Hamlet* is a much better work than his *Dream*. It is a question whether I managed to keep up with that quality at all. Another factor might be that my previous Shakespeare translations have been received quite favourably; their necessity didn't need that much explanation any longer.

*Do you follow how your text is interpreted in the theatre?*

I watch it with keen interest, and I'm really content with it. I don't think I have ever noticed any abuses. It has only happened in one of the stagings of *The Comedy of Errors* that they 'reinforced' the style of the quarrels in a way which is far from both the original and my text, but in a comedy...

*Was it the verbal or non-verbal part of the staging?*

Oh yes, I'm talking about the verbal side now. I cannot form a competent opinion of the other part of the staging. I always imagine the scenery somehow, but I don't expect to see that on stage.

*After completing a translation for a performance do you make any more changes? How, on the basis of what factors is the 'final,' publishable version formulated?*

I listen to a number of opinions from colleagues, theatre people, spectators, and readers. Observations made at performances help a lot. Lately, when my Shakespeare translations were published in a separate volume, the texts reached a 'final' status. But who knows till when...

December 1999–April 2002

*MÁRTA MINIER*

[First published in Hungarian, in *Holmi*.]

# An Everlasting Gospel

G.E. Bentley, Jr.:
*The Stranger from Paradise:*
*A Biography of William Blake*
(Yale University Press, 2001)

G.E. Bentley, emeritus professor of English at the University of Toronto has long established his name as an eminent Blake scholar. Besides numerous other publications, his *Blake Records* (1969) and the subsequent *Blake Records Supplement* (1988) – in which he traces the theretofore known documents concerning Blake – have become indispensable for researchers. The long-awaited new and updated edition of *Blake Records* is scheduled to be published in November 2002.

In *The Stranger from Paradise* Bentley has set out to portray William Blake the human being, very much like ourselves. The Blake we get to know from this new biography is not the eccentric madman as he was most frequently labelled by his contemporaries, nor is he the mystical visionary whom posterity regarded with a distinct awe, but much rather an artist put in the context of his own age.

The biography encompasses virtually everything that can be known of Blake's life. Starting with his baptism at St James's, this generously documented account traces Blake's carrier from the house of his dissenter parents to his "removing from one room to another" (as he considered death). The biography spans over a century, from 1720 to 1831; it records not only Blake's life but also investigates his family background, as well as the years after Blake's death; how his wife, his "Shadow of Delight," as Blake called her, handled his legacy and how she coped with Blake's absence. As we read the pages of this affectionately written account, we learn about Blake's lifelong companion, Catherine; tribute is given to the patrons, without whose support some outstanding works of art would not have been conceived. It is especially important to note that while we like to think of Blake as a neglected genius who lived in pathetic poverty and obscurity, Bentley's biography formulates a more sophisticated vision: we can follow Blake from his five-room flat of his relatively profitable years to the heart-rending conditions of his late years. What is exemplary in Blake's life is the fact that he could maintain his essential humanity; although in his poems he may be eccentric and mystical in his ways he was just a person who was able to retain his confidence in the divine vision, despite his frustrations with this-worldly matters.

That he was not living completely in his visionary universe is eloquently proved by the fact that he was a keen theatre-goer. Nor was he always living in total obscurity. Bentley's documents show Blake among prominent contemporaries, even if he did not actively look for the company of well-known (or well-to-do) people. Towards the end of his life Blake lost his patrons but gained some dedicated friends. His young admirers, the "Ancients" (hardly out of their teens) looked upon him as their revered Master (the "Interpreter"). When Blake died, young George Richmond, a future Royal Academician, closed his eyes "to keep vision in." This group of young artists handled on their knowledge of Blake to Alexander Gilchrist, Charles Algernon Swinburne and William Michael Rossetti and initiated a Blake worship.

What is especially impressive about Bentley's biography is not only that it conveys very interesting new materials but also that what has been well known and taken for granted is now reconsidered in the light of new findings. Thus some of the canonical accounts of Gilchrist (a platform from which Blake's twentieth-century reputation was launched) are questioned and collated with other sources to get a more reliable picture of the artist. In the Addenda we are given extracts from John Clark Strange's abandoned biography (hitherto unknown) to round out Gilchrist's vastly influential work. Similarly, previously published biographical accounts are commented upon and updated.

Blake enjoyed a very slight reputation in his lifetime as a poet. He was trained, and indeed earned his living as a visual artist, as Bentley illustrates. Hence the biography does not concentrate on Blake's poetical works, no analysis is given of the *Poetical Sketches*, the *Songs* or the *Prophetic Books as poems*; instead everything is disclosed *about* them as marketable products or books as artefacts: their method and mode of publication, how Blake engraved or illustrated them, how much he earned from these works (when applicable); in short, we find the sort of information that we are not likely to come across in any monographs on Blake. Although all the remarks and comments of the outstanding contemporaries (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Hazlitt, to mention just a few) are carefully noted, the book is more of a masterfully documented biography of an artist (visual, above all) than an interpretation of the poetic credo of the idiosyncratic visionary. *The Stranger for Paradise* was not

316

conceived to supersede Erdman, Frye, Raine, Damon, Bloom or the other canonical Blake scholars but to complement them. What is missing from the hitherto published monographs, however, is provided here: a comprehensive mapping of the life of Blake as a craftsman. Bentley gives a minutely detailed rendering of his everyday life as an apprentice, then engraver and painter, discussing not only the great influences, artworks and projects (even those aborted) but the seemingly more trivial matters of his financial and housing conditions, his studio and tools of trade, or even the china he drank his tea from. While providing an all-encompassing picture of Blake, Bentley delineates contemporary London with its streets, beliefs, people; we get a compelling glimpse of its everyday commercial, intellectual and artistic life.

Of the many novel aspects in the biography, suffice it to mention just a few that can help us formulate a new image of Blake. It is customary in Blake scholarship to relate him to a wide variety of traditions; Kathleen Raine provides an exhaustive study of the poet's Neo-Platonic ideas, while Harold Bloom's Blake is a Christian visionary. Bentley points to the importance of the Dissenting tradition in Blake's family and asserts that the essence of the credo of his Enthusiasm is to be traced back to this family inheritance. While substantiating this claim he tells us a great deal about the impressive erudition of these Dissenting circles. It is interesting to point out that according to Bentley's research, there seems to be not enough evidence to support E.P. Thompson's assertion that Blake had close links with the Muggletonians, an idea he formulated in his highly acclaimed book, *Witness against the Beast*.

It is fascinating to note that while most commonly Blake is thought of as an exalted mystic visionary, Bentley shows a new side of him as a teacher. Blake taught not only his wife and brother (which is well-known) but also in the 1790s "he taught Drawing & was engaged for that purpose by some families of high rank." It is quite likely that he taught at Mrs Butts's boarding school for young ladies, and probably far more of his "time and income were involved in teaching than we have direct evidence for."

Bentley also argues that Blake, pressed by financial needs was reduced to engaging in commercial designs, "rather surprisingly, one of his most ambitious commercial plates was a folio advertisement designed and engraved by Blake for Moore & Co.'s

carpets (1797), showing a palatial carpet factory scattered with royal emblems in enough detail to suggest that Blake had actually visited the factory." Furthermore, the man who created the magnificent Illuminated Books and Prophecies, engraved the ambitious Canterbury Pilgrims and made the remarkable designs to Young and Gray, was bound to humble copywork. Upon Flaxman's persuasion he was employed by the famous pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood to engrave for the firm's catalogue. "Wedgwood would send to Blake the soup terrine or bedpan to be represented, and Blake would draw it and send the drawing to Wedgwood, who would despatch another piece of pottery. When all the drawings were completed, Wedgwood directed how they should be arranged on the copperplates."

In *The Stranger from Paradise*, this beautifully illustrated biography of Blake, Bentley successfully makes a case against the common mistake of Blake's contemporaries who regard him as a decided madman, as well as against the mistake of our present day to consider him as a religious mystic, who "is always in Paradise."

It is time, asserts Bentley," to let the unmediated evidence for Blake's life speak for itself, purged as far as possible of the myths that have been industriously spun around him." Indeed, as any reader of the book will justify, Blake's "life is more that an illumination of his own poetry and designs. It bears the shape of great art itself. From his youthful vaulting ambitions in painting, engraving, poetry, and music, through his mature flirtation with Goddess Fortune, to his joyful return to the vision and confidence of his youth, Blake's life provides a pattern to noble self-sacrifice and wise self-understanding which inspired admiration and love in his generation and in ours."

Despite some unappreciative voices (as in *The Observer* 13 May 2001 or *Daily Telegraph* 19 May 2001), *The Stranger from Paradise* was very favourably received. The biography sold out so rapidly that a new (paperback) edition is to be published soon.

*DÓRA JANZER CSIKÓS*

# Modern Irish Drama in Perspective

Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa (ed.): *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000)

The birth of modern Irish drama well deserves multiple celebrations, all the more so as it was actually taking place in a number of significant steps. Christopher Murray's plenary lecture delivered at the 1997 ESSE Conference in Debrecen under the title "The Foundation of the Modern Irish Theatre: A Centenary Assessment" commemorated the fact, as the published version of the talk words it, that the modern Irish theatre was "initiated by Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn exactly one hundred years ago this year." On a wet, late summer afternoon in a picturesque spot of County Galway in 1897, those three made plans for the anticolonial project of the Irish Literary Theatre, which had its first performance, staging Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *The Heather Field*, in May 1899.

1999 was, then, another year offering due cause for centennial celebrations. The volume surveyed by the present review contains an impressive selection from the papers delivered at a conference hosted by Indiana University in Bloomington in May that year, under the straightforward title "Nationalism and National Theatre: 100 Years of Irish Drama." Providing the book that stemmed from the event with the subtitle *Widening the Stage* alludes to at least two of its important qualities. On the one hand, that the essays give credit to the diversity of the modern Irish theatre, discussing its heterogeneous manifestations in the light of recent scholarship. The subtitle, on the other hand, also suggests that modern Irish drama has undergone considerable thematic as well as technical enrichment during its century-long existence. Bearing in mind that in 1997 Christopher Murray published *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation*, which constitutes a detailed historical overview of the subject, to be followed by Nicholas Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama* in 1999, a book scrutinising the interplay of drama and political context through the comparative analyses of a selection of texts by playwrights from the 19th century Dion Boucicault to our contemporaries, the new collection seems to employ yet another set of perspectives to widen the discourse about modern Irish drama. At the same time, undeniably, it dis-

plays both the advantages and the disadvantages of being a multi-authored venture, colourful and kaleidoscopic though not without certain constraints imposed on by the sweep of the material initially available.

Part I of the book presents essays under the title "Challenging the Received View of Early-Twentieth-Century Irish Theatre." The three authors are involved in persuading the reader that the movement we have become accustomed to identifying as the Irish dramatic renaissance was broader both in scope and strategy than the concepts and politics associated with the Abbey Theatre. John P. Harrington's "The Founding Years and the Irish National Theatre That Was Not" highlights the contradiction that Irish drama proved to be international from its origins, despite the founders' repeated claim, first laid down in their famous manifesto, that it was strictly national. The opposition of "cosmopolitan influence and the ambition for singularity that was intrinsically local" culminated in the inevitable tension between "goals and practices" (6, 15) when Yeats considered Ibsen then Shakespeare to be a model, the Irish plays were taken for tours in Britain and America, and Gregory translated Molière into "Kiltartanese." Thus a

"provocative tradition" emerged, concludes Harrington (16), pointing toward the complexities of the present. In short, the Irish national theatre, represented by the early Abbey, was conceived as decidedly anticolonial but saved itself from turning essentialist. The essays by Nelson Ó Ceallaigh Ritschel and Laura E. Lyons draw attention to the existence of alternative theatrical ventures. Focusing on urban playwriting which hallmarked the activity of the Theatre of Ireland in contrast with the mostly rural settings of the Abbey, and the representation of regional nationalism in Ulster drama, both authors redeem some important works of the period for the interested reader. These achievements had, without doubt, their value in being consciously different from and even satirical of the rivals, yet it is probably the lack of the international element, so conspicuously fertilising the choices and decisions of the Abbey, that rendered them dated too soon.

Called "Theorizing and Historicizing Theatre Controversies" Part II includes theoretically grounded approaches to early twentieth century theatre polemics which, in their own ways, address the question of how competing versions of nationalism affected the writing, staging policy and reception of plays. One crucial

aspect of the Irish Literary Revival was that texts often responded to texts. Lucy McDiarmid extends the notion and practice of intertextuality to theatre controversies in her essay "The Abbey and the Theatrics of Controversy, 1909–1915," contending that the production career of some plays tended to be constructed in view of that of others. Her convincing example is G. B. Shaw's *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*, a play that was banned in England but welcomed by the Abbey, which, two years after the *Playboy* riots of 1907, was happy to "advertise itself to the world as defying the authority of English law and thereby win back its nationalist supporters" (60). Nationalism Abbey style aside, hardboiled nationalist politics was, of course, underpinning the original scandal over Synge's *Playboy*, the motives of which are reinterpreted here by Susan Cannon Harris's essay titled "More Than a Morbid, Unhealthy Mind: Public Health and the *Playboy* Riots" in the context of the eugenist movement. The argument details English scientific ideas about health and the predictable Irish resistance to their influence attributing, concomitantly, "the anti-*Playboy* hysteria" to the anxieties "which referred to the health and purity of the *male* body" (73) rather than to the concern with

the irreverent representation of Irish womanhood, as it was formerly believed. Contemporary comments on the play are quoted from in support of the new interpretation, yet it remains hardly questionable that the elusive complexity and multiple ironies of Synge's work must have provoked nationalist feeling for several different reasons, of which the anxiety about males being shown as degenerate could well have been one, but just one. Once the scandalous reception of *Playboy* has been revisited, a reconsideration of Sean O'Casey's, in its own time similarly provocative, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) cannot be far behind. "Saying 'No' to Politics: Sean O'Casey's *Dublin Trilogy*" by Shakir Mustafa, however, limits its approach to a narrowly understood political perspective. The author repeatedly states that O'Casey denies narrativity to Irish nationalism (96, 107), and criticises the playwright for his "insistence that nationalism is synonymous with its retrograde elements," with which he facilitated the growth of revisionism (103). While elsewhere Mustafa argues that "the cultural nationalism of the Gaelic Revival may be read as a benevolent component of the colonial experience,"[2] paying attention to several factors, he fails to analyse O'Casey's

critique of nationalism in context and in view of its particular aesthetic here.

A widely held assumption about the development of Irish drama is that the period between the 1930s and the early 1960s constituted a kind of impasse, paralleling the conservatism and isolationism of the postcolonial nation state. However, Part III of the book, under the title "Reconstructing Drama During the 'Fatal Fifties'" dedicates itself to demonstrating that Irish drama did not go dormant even at that time. Not accidentally, the choice of the essayists falls on authors who spent most of their life in self-imposed exile from Ireland or, in Brendan Behan's case, could not accept the country's political direction.[3] References to "theatre business," as Yeats put it, abound at the beginning of the section; in his "O'Casey's *The Drums of Father Ned* in Context" Christopher Murray analyses the troubled history of the play set against the contemporary decline of the Abbey, a telling sign of a cultural crisis. According to the discussion that says "no" to any reductionist view of the playwright, "the wider drama the text establishes is the story of Ireland in the 1950s, a story of secrecy, pretence, acquiescence, and oppression" (127). An intriguing focus of the other two

essays is the issue of self-construction and identity. Stephen Watt's "Love and Death: A Reconsideration of Behan and Genet" deploys the concerns and terminology of cultural studies, a discipline unarguably international in its goals and strategies. Supported by the study of the two playwrights' respective autobiographies, it is the "performative dimension" (133) of their juxtaposed dramatic works that Watt compares here, stressing, as he does, Behan's inquiry into post-war English-Irish relations at the same time. Last in the chapter comes Judith Roof's paper titled "Playing Outside with Samuel Beckett." Selecting plays that are justifiably regarded as masterpieces of the international memory theatre,[4] the author interrogates how they perform "the relation of self to self through time" (150). It is especially in the case of *That Time* (1974) that Roof highlights how, through its patterned references to place, the play posits Ireland "as an unrecoverable past" (154), which is apparently connected with the Irish Protestant Beckett's oscillating, exiled identity.

While the discussion of some of Beckett's later drama obviously steps out of the targeted time span of Part III, Part IV, under the strangely narrow title "Contemporary Theatre Companies and Revivals," reaches

further back in time than the 1950s. The first three pieces address women playwrights' works, registering the widening of the Irish stage toward gender issues and alternative forms of dramatisation. All three contributors imply, as part of their argument, what Mary Trotter (in the essay "Translating Women Into Irish Theatre History") directly posits concerning the use of "the familiar feminist strategy of placing female characters and their stories in the subject position of the drama, reclaiming an aspect of the Irish experience – women's – which has been alternately idealised and ignored in the Irish mainstream tradition" (164). It is a highly welcome fact that in "Neither Here nor There: The Liminal Position of Teresa Deevy and Her Female Characters" Christie Fox contributes to the revaluation of an Abbey playwright's work which, despite its psychological complexities, has been a noticeable casualty of the gender bias in the Irish theatre until quite recently. Fox's main interest lies in tracing how Deevy portrays "a profound ambivalence about the position of women in the Irish society of the 1930s" (197). However, the analysis of the drama *Katie Roche* (1936), while intending to offer an alternative interpretation of Katie's puzzling final submission to move to

Dublin with her husband at his demand, does not probe into the inherent ambiguity of this conventional gesture which will probably advance the young woman's achievement of freedom and selfhood. In a measure comparably, I believe, to Grania's famously shocking choice to rejoin the old king at the end of Lady Gregory's play about her. On the other hand, the "attraction for the glamorous" and the "deeply serious striving after identity and fulfilment" that another critic recognises in the character of Katie Roche[5] resurface in most female protagonists of Marina Carr in the 1990s. Trotter's paper and Carla J. McDonough's "'I've never been just me': Rethinking Women's Positions in the Plays of Christina Reid" focus on the characteristic matrilineal narratives and the stories of generations of women in the respective Southern and Northern visions of Carr and Reid. Deploying feminist criticism, the interconnected analyses become the vehicle of pointing out some differences between these two prominent figures of contemporary Irish women's playwriting. While Carr's work appears to be more sophisticated in technique, it is Reid who, most radically in *Tea in a China Cup* (1983), emphasises women's questioning of social and family traditions from within.

Still in Part IV, the contributors' interest in experimentation as well as in the work of alternative theatre enterprises continues. Under the title "Playwrights of the Western World: Synge, Murphy, McDonagh" José Lanters compares the representation of the West, once considered to be the heart of the nation and national identity, in the plays of three authors. What ties them together, according to Lanters, is the use of storytelling as a characteristically "Western" device, "but through that device, each dramatist reflects the concerns and anxieties of his age" (221). In Synge the need for transformation gains expression, in Murphy speaking out proves to be the way to personal healing, while for McDonagh language and identity are both in crisis. The essay also contains some insightful diagnostic remarks about the latter's postmodernism with its spotlight on the deceptiveness of words, which might evoke Tom Stoppard and especially his *After Magritte* (1970) as yet another parallel for the reader to help locate the allegedly controversial McDonagh phenomenon. Lauren Onkey's "The Passion Machine Theatre Company's Everyday Life" sets out to document the ex-centric existence and socially committed operation of one of the "small theatres" proliferating in contemporary Ireland, which started in

1983. The description of the company's goals refers to the construction of "the everyday" (225), a fairly loose term to invite the author to look at its interpretation in some Passion Machine plays. One of the examples, *Brownbread* (1986) by the novelist Roddy Doyle is found to have a story hilariously funny and frightening at the same time.

Part V of the book, "Irish History on the Contemporary Stage," presents essays that interrogate the dramatisation of an issue of absolutely paramount importance for the postcolonial nation's understanding of itself, which keeps on challenging writers down to our time. In "The End of History: The Millennial Urge in the Plays of Sebastian Barry" Scott T. Cummings quotes Fintan O'Toole on the already widely noticed literary phenomenon that in Ireland, because past and present are so intricately overlapping, there are no history plays only plays about history, that is historiographical plays (291). It is not the facts of history primarily, but the questions of its perception and representation that these works raise, as attested by the contributions. Kathleen Hohenleitner's "The Book at the Centre of the Stage: Friel's *Making History* and *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*" reads Brian Friel's historiographical play and the highly

controversial anthology, both products of the Derry-based Field Day, side by side, to foreground the power of the written record to negotiate identity in its relation to history. Coincidentally in a telling way, a self-conscious interest in the reading and writing of texts has been found a significant element in some of the best contemporary poetry of Northern Ireland as well.[6]

Dealing with three outstanding playwrights the rest of the essays is best surveyed for new insights regarding the strategies of dramatising experience steeped in history, while they also recycle some of what has been pointed out by other scholars in the literature. Marilynn Richtarik, in "'Ireland, the Continuous Past': Stewart Parker's Belfast History Plays" underscores the "multiplicity of voices" with their simultaneous comments on the interaction of past and present (267) in the writer's best work. The essay "Frank McGuinness and the Ruins of Irish History" by James Hurt turns to Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" for its theoretical underpinning to identify McGuinness' treatment of the past in a form called "the history of moments" (275). The view of settings as spatial metonyms is another addition of the author to the bulk of criticism on McGuinness, stating that

places related to death and incarceration (like the cemetery in *Carthaginians* or the prison cell in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*) are associated with the destructiveness of history and the ruins it has left behind (283). In the essay concerned with Barry, already cited above, the author registers some devices of the kind of memory play under scrutiny (294); a more thorough investigation here might have led to a better understanding of the form so current on the Irish and postcolonial stage, but usually too vaguely described in its technical realisation. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious that Barry is a playwright who inspires much further critical comment on his dramaturgical choices. For instance, in another collection by international scholars, Csilla Bertha provides an appropriate frame of reference for the analysis of how the protagonist of the play *Our Lady of Sligo* (1998) has been defeated by history, when tracing in her desolate character ironic echoes of "the one-time goddesses and queens."[7]

Modern Irish drama and theatre forming one complex body, the links between parts of the book establish themselves in several ways; suffice it to mention how national and international, traditional and experimental, mainstream and alternative, political and aesthetic, central and

marginal emerge as key-concepts that structure the essays both individually and together. The volume does not define itself as an assessment, yet it is clearly a landmark in the informed critical investigation and interpretation of a century of Irish drama by telling a seamless narrative which relies on, interlocks with, challenges, as well as inspires others. Since the Irish National Theatre Society was founded in 1903, and 1904 was the year when the Abbey Theatre opened, the ongoing series of celebrations will by no means end here.

<div align="right"><em>MÁRIA KURDI</em></div>

## NOTES

1 Christopher Murray, "The Foundation of the Modern Irish Theatre: A Centenary Assessment," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 4.1–2 (1998), pp. 40–41.

2 Shakir Mustafa, "Revisionism and Revival: A Postcolonial Approach to Irish Cultural Nationalism," *New Hibernia Review* 2.3 (1998), p. 53.

3 Cf. Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), p. 149.

4 Analysed in a chapter of Jeanette R. Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 37–69.

5 Cathy Leeney, "Themes of Ritual and Myth in Three Plays by Teresa Deevy," *Irish University Review* 25.1 (1995), p. 100.

6 Neil Corcoran, *Poets of Modern Ireland: Text, Context, Intertext* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 79.

7 Csilla Bertha, "'A Haunted Group of Plays': The Drama of Sebastian Barry," in: *Twentieth-Century Theatre and Drama in English: Festschrift for Heinz Kosok on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Jürgen Kamm (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1999), p. 540.

# That Fantastic Century

Tom Shippey:
*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

The review is a particularly ominous genre for Tolkien Studies; apparently it has always been its nemesis. The dismissive early reviews of *The Lord of the Rings* (henceforward: *LR*, published in 1954–55) seem to determine Tolkien criticism to some extent to this day, giving it a decidedly apologetic tone. Generally, Tolkien's reception is still, sixty-five years after the publication of *The Hobbit* (henceforward: *H*) in 1937, rather cold and measured (if that), and the reputation of his texts still mirrors the extremes of the first reviews: enthusiasm or contempt. The popular Tolkien 'cult' has usually not moved academics to appreciation, and although there are certain cracks that might be observed in the canon today, Tolkien has by no means penetrated the critical canon or the publishing space of 'high academia.' The 'Tolkien phenomenon,' nevertheless, remains a peculiar and interesting one; but writing about it in a review certainly has its ironies.

The Tolkien cult and Tolkien criticism developed in originally separate but later frequently intersecting ways, producing a schizophrenic situation in the possible relations to Tolkien. The cult and eventually the phenomenon started as early as the publication of *LR*, and has continued unabated since then, now again strengthened by Peter Jackson's film adaptation. Fan clubs and Tolkien Societies sprang up on both sides of the Atlantic, publishing many newsletter-type fanzines and periodicals (which eventually grew into [near] respectable journals: e.g. *Mythlore*, the periodical of the US-based Mythopoeic Society, or *Mallorn*, that of the British Tolkien Society) in which much critical writing is printed. Fans had their part in initiating the writing of Tolkien criticism; academic commentary first tried to position itself in opposition to fans and to disparaging reviews. C.S. Lewis and W.H. Auden were two professional critics who (besides writing appreciative reviews) fostered this other side of the approach to Tolkien. The interaction of the two kinds of criticism has become much more complex and cooperative by now, and much 'fan criticism' has definitely been absorbed in 'academic criticism.' Yet Tolkien 'fandom' is alive, and the tensions between it and criticism are still to be observed in their reactions to each other and to the prolifera-

tion of their material in recent years.

For the Tolkien corpus has been considerably expanded in the post-humous publications, and the importance of this cannot be underestimated. More Tolkien texts appeared in the last twenty-five years than he had ever published in his life: his youngest son and literary executor Christopher edited fourteen volumes of material between 1977 and 1996 (*The Silmarillion* [1977; hence-forward: *Sil*], *Unfinished Tales* [1980], and the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* [1984–96; hence-forward: *HME*]). *Sil*, a continuous text, gave historical and mythological depth both to *LR* and *H*; it is in fact an editorial text made up of several distinct manuscript versions. But *HME* made evident that most of the material is essentially unlike the 'finished texts' (*H* and *LR*); the whole *nature* of the corpus has radically changed. These are writings unlikely to be appreciated, showing the development of Tolkien's work (hence the series title) in the variants of stories, never finished but (despite that) always reworked and rewritten, related in some problematically definable way both to each other and to the 'finished texts.' Their significance is great; yet criticism is slow to turn

towards them, and even interpretations of *Sil* are very rare still.

However, serious and scholarly Tolkien criticism runs up against the silence of the 'theoretical side.' No one seems to respond to this work from inside the poststructuralist critical context; strangely enough, since Tolkien's texts offer much that could interest the theorist and the post-structuralist critic. The essential plurality of the expanded corpus, its peculiar conception of textuality and story, fit in very well with directions of the New Philology and some narratological considerations, while the parallels in (and allusions to) manu-script culture and orality enable a wider Cultural Studies perspective. The suggestion of meaning as 'fluctu-ating' between versions, always under revision, should be attractive for most theories of interpretation. But approaches now cannot fasten on any one text any more (*H* or *LR*, or even *Sil*) – they should take in the whole in its plurality. Tolkien's work is a radical cultural (not only literary) fiction, demanding thought and re-sponse. That it is, despite all this, not acknowledged as the object of 'le-gitimate' study, is symptomatic of something; something that could be detected in the earliest disparaging reviews. Tom Shippey's *J.R.R. Tol-*

_kien: Author of the Century_[1] sets itself the task of finding out what it is.

Perhaps no scholar has done more for the understanding of Tolkien than Tom Shippey. His first book on Tolkien, _The Road to Middle-earth_[2] has been called "the single best thing ever written on [the topic]."[3] Its importance lies in its methodological coherence, and its historical perspective: it was the first to systematise and set out in meticulous philological detail how Tolkien's relation to his sources determined his texts. Shippey's exposition and virtuoso use of the method of philological reconstruction showed how the integration, adaptation, and imaginative reworking of ancient literature worked. His discussion of the adapted generic, characterisational, and narrative conventions and authorial techniques was underpinned by a sensitive detection of the many conceptual patterns and elements Tolkien also subtly built in (like the Christian and Germanic pagan concepts in _H_ and _LR_). In _Road_ Shippey collected pieces of philological detail (obscure words, stories, unexplained references in medieval texts) which Tolkien started with, and showed how the linguistic, narrative, and mythological context was built up around them. He also examined how the insertion of characteristic (and dar-

ing) anachronisms (like the hobbits) served to mediate this world successfully. In this historical perspective, _Road_ was also the first to answer, comprehensively, validly and wittily, Tolkien's early and later detractors. It is a massively useful 'resource cum interpretation,' written with elegance and formidable erudition.

While _Road_ served to "set Tolkien's work in a philological context" (xxvii), the scope of _Author_ is more contemporary but necessarily wider and less specific: to supply the synchronic complement to _Road_'s diachronism. "While I remain convinced," Shippey writes, "that Tolkien cannot be properly discussed without some considerable awareness of the [philological context], [...] I now accept that he needs also to be looked at and interpreted within his own time, as _an_ 'author of the century'" (xxvii). And Tolkien is perfectly in place in that century, itself peculiar: 'the fantastic' has apparently been its "dominant literary mode" (vii). Comparisons with canonically undeniably influential authors and texts (e.g. with James Joyce, see 310–12, 261; vii–viii, generally 305–28) back up the point. The 'fantastic,' Shippey hints, is defined as in opposition to modernist and realist conventions (viii), deliberately contradicting or even ignoring the way

twentieth-century readers and critics routinely read and take for granted. *Author* builds on the argument of *Road*, continuing it to different conclusions, situating Tolkien's anachronism inside a contemporary context, and seeks to understand it in this relation.

The difference is primarily in method and approach. The account of philology and the idea of historical and comparative reconstruction (the first fifty pages of *Road*) are summarised in five pages (xii–xvii), with definition, method, and history. Shippey begins in medias res, with the texts, not only illustrating but making the methodological point in their discussion. This surely results from the difference in outlook. *Road*, heavy with detail, historical linguistics and comparative mythology, was rather an 'academic monograph' with notes, appendices, written in a more specialised and scholarly style. But in (/with) *Author* Shippey concedes that "not everyone takes to Gothic, or even (in extreme cases) to Old Norse" (xxvii). This book is clearly aimed at a more general readership: there are no notes, few references (though there is a useful bibliography), a less painstaking exposition of philological evidence and source material. It is written in an elegant, lucid but unmistakably more accessible

style than was *Road*. It has been said that *Road* attempted to expound a basically medievalist approach to Tolkien to those who are not medievalists; *Author*, then, explains a more generally critical approach to those not critics.

Consequently *Author* is built up around chapters on the more accessible Tolkien texts; and this is necessarily a smaller corpus than *Road*'s. The centre is occupied by *LR* (three chapters), with *H* and *Sil* (one chapter each) running up; some minor works (where Shippey maintains his view of the 'autobiographical allegories,' contested since *Road* by Verlyn Flieger and David Doughan[4]) and problems of the critical context are also discussed. The focus is on the 'fixed texts,' in a way seeing much of Tolkien's work in relation to *LR*. This is, considering the general reading chronology, the thing to do – but the *HME* corpus, for example, is not always readily meaningful in that relation, and the implications of these texts is a point which is merely touched upon. But a broader audience means focus on the texts that this audience reads, and a loss of the implications of the texts it does not.

Chapters 1–2 treat the creation and structure of Tolkien's Middle-earth through *H* and *LR*. The emphasis falls on the role of language, in all its

levels, historical forms and stylistic registers, in the creation of the 'fantasy world.' The result is a "complex map [...] of cultures, races, languages, and histories" (102). It is a 'philological fiction,' based on ancient English and Norse literary sources, produced by a consistent use of the philological reconstructive method. Tolkien "took fragments of ancient literature, expanded on their intensely suggestive hints of further meaning, and made them into a coherent and consistent narrative" (35). Various devices and techniques are used to mediate this deeply traditional world (anachronistic mediator figures, the hobbits, integrated ingeniously into the context; the handling of the authorial voice in narrative and comment; the anchoring effect of names; historically and linguistically different styles and rhetoric in creating and maintaining character, etc.), leading to a "sense of variety and verisimilitude" (65). The cultural parallels and contrasts, and the use of the narrative technique of interlacement (107) give this world further "inner consistency" (84). One particularly important quality which Tolkien's texts share with their sources, and which Shippey determinedly stresses all through is the suggestion of historical and narrative depth; another is the underlying idea of the continuity of

traditions which make the traditional world 'mediateable' at all.

How this world actually works to produce meaning in *LR* is the subject of Chapters 3–4. What makes it relevant, Shippey argues, is the characteristically twentieth-century problems it presents, most of all that of the connection of evil and power. Tolkien's powerful and psychologically plausible images of the wraiths and orcs comment on this effectively, complemented by the adaptation of two traditional conceptions of evil (in Shippey's terms, Boethian and Manichean, evil as absence or substantial presence), the oscillation between which is emblematised in the ambiguities of the Ring. Tolkien's reactions to evil include adapting another traditional stance, the "Northern theory of courage" (149). It is this profound 'traditionalism,' Shippey now suggests, that causes critical hostility: critics simply find this irremediably outdated and irrelevant (156, 158–60). Yet Tolkien transcends both the nostalgically traditional and the allegorically contemporary: Chapter 4's examination of the 'mythic dimension,' both in particular cases and in general, argues for a 'mythical' interpretation. Myths as stories, texts or symbols are "always available for individuals to make over, and apply to their own

circumstances, without ever gaining control or permanent single-meaning possession" (192); the connection with Tolkien's made-over traditions is obvious. But in its mediator function too, myth has a parallel in *LR*, itself mediating both between the Christian and the pre-Christian and the Christian and post-Christian worlds (213). The very concept of depth, perspective, and detail used as a 'reservoir' of meaning to draw upon and apply reflect the similar traits and functions of mythology.

Why depth is emphasised all through is explained in Chapter 5, about *Sil*. *Sil* is essentially different from the previously discussed 'fixed texts' (which are in effect its "offshoots," 226) in its having become a "fixed tradition" (228) in the complicated writing chronology of Tolkien's work. His reconstructive creation of world and story was at its most ambitious aimed at producing a 'mythology for England,'[5] stories which could 'fill in' for the lost mythological material of Old English (and by descent, English) culture. In the process not only historical/ narrative depth was created ('a suggestion of more stories'), but an impression of age, sources, authors and compilers. Depth in *Sil* is not merely a quality of a shady background, it is the effect of tradition; for Tolkien,

this role is played by 'the' traditions of the elves and is mediated by them (242). But their story is again produced by reconstructive starting points and expansion, structured along cultural, familial, and linguistic divisions, so that its organisation "makes demands upon its readers which no other modern work has ventured" (246). These structures and themes are always mirrored in language (Tolkien's famously elaborated elvish languages), and in another sort of mediation, the relationship between elvish and human cultures, found in the "human-stories," which concern *elvish* tradition and central concepts (death and immortality, fate, evil again, only from the elvish viewpoint).

Myth and Christianity are also inserted by way of reconstruction: the central story of intercession and forgiveness, with elements from both traditions, the "complexes of meaning [apparent in this fusion] suggest that history, and linguistic change, keep on generating new meanings from words and demanding new versions of story" (260). The mere fact that "myths always need retelling" (261) could explain the proliferation of versions; and while the form of *Sil* as a 'compendious' corpus conceived of as a text is a reflection on tradition and its transmission, it also reflects on authority and textuality. *Sil* is thus seen in its

problematic textual status, as a more 'plural' and 'mobile' text; itself a *corpus* of texts.

Finally, Shippey also touches upon the generic question in Tolkien's texts. In a Fryean typology, he says, *LR* is "a romance, but one which is in continuous negotiation with and which follows many of the conventions of the traditional bourgeois novel" (223). *Sil*, on the other hand, "stays resolutely on the level of 'high mimesis' or above" (256), which makes it difficult to read and to appreciate. The clash of two or more of narrative and stylistic traditions thus effectively explains some of the academics' bafflement, and also why *LR* is thought to be 'more central': it is more accessible.

The Afterword deals with questions of criticism, and appropriately returns to the question of Tolkien's noncanonicity and his general dismissal by literary critics. One of the conclusions is perhaps that 'fantastic' is not an entirely convenient term for Tolkien's work, and 'traditional(ist)' would probably serve better; unless we are ready to label the greater part of literary history 'fantastic.' Technically, 'fantastic' has not been defined – only signalled by references to authors and texts supposedly in this category. The politics of criticism is clearly problematised here: not only

is criticism hostile to Tolkien, but it is also strongly marked by its ignorance of what it criticises, or only a very superficial knowledge, applied in tendentious and wilfully imperceptive ways. Shippey here, as in *Road*, elegantly refutes such positions. He shows (here employing the comparison with James Joyce) that the 'modernist' principles of writing and criticism will not cover Tolkien because his work presents tradition as "on principle not *literary*" (315), not 'high' or 'low' but pervading culture and present in the 'lowest' of its strata and stories. This is a highly professional approach, but "populist, not élitist," threatening "the authority of the arbiters of taste" (316), traditional over the head of those who think to be controlling tradition and the forms it can be presented in. Dismissive and hostile criticism shows all the rhetorical traits of attempted marginalisation, and Tolkien is often dismissed even from discussions of the 'fantastic.' The 'fantastic,' then, seems to be just a (post-)modernist construction (going back to Todorov), positioned as vs. 'realistic (and/or ironic),' yielding a term of rather limited literary historical applicability.

Shippey's comparison with Joyce also points out the paradox that in other instances exactly this lack of

realistic convention is lauded loudly. There is nothing in Tolkien's writing or concept that would inherently exclude him from the canon; but it is no wonder that texts with which critics refuse to engage in the first place will not be canonical. Shippey finds the cause of this refusal (in a way, this is another conclusion of the book) in the 'ideological gap' between modernist principles and Tolkien's popular appeal – and indeed he cannot do anything else, since hostile criticism produced only superficial arguments against him. Looking further, though, one can see various other 'excluding factors' levelled against Tolkien, all of them heavily ideological: he has been called fascistic, sexist, racist, escapist, and other names which are blatantly untrue[6] – the problem is, I think, merely Tolkien's traditionalism, which the critics sense as an incurable anachronism. In Barthesian terms, Tolkien attempted to write the 'unwritable,' the 'readerly,' the 'classic' (even with success, as it turned out, and quite meaningfully and relevantly, as Shippey shows); this is supposed to be a 'theoretical impossibility,' and since critics of modern /postmodern/contemporary literature are simply not equipped to deal with such texts (their conceptual framework, historical dimensions, stylistic subtleties) and cannot grasp the nature and importance of the relationship to the medieval parallels, they choose to exclude it rather than bother to modify their theoretical frameworks. The earlier modernist adversaries did this by reference to the taste of the 'literati'[7] (thereby excluding him from the canonical 'high culture'), while postmodernists now do the same by reference to any particular ideologies the poststructuralist framework might focus on (thereby excluding him from the theoretically/ideologically determined canonical 'contemporary'). But while refusing to acknowledge Tolkien's work, criticism is refusing to see the cultural phenomenon of 'fantasy literature,' none of which, Shippey says, "has managed to escape the mark of Tolkien" (326), and where he has become a sort of 'substratum' of a literary culture. When ignoring to engage with literature that is really read, this kind of criticism also ignores that the distinction between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms has generally broken down, and that tradition can legitimately be utilised in other ways than those favoured by critics in any given historical period. A.J. Minnis's words ring true: "[l]iterature is not firmly controlled by the literary theory contemporaneous with it (to think

otherwise is, in my view, to be naive about the nature of literary theory)."[8]

Shippey closes *Author* by remarking that there is nothing inherently more direct, more immediate in the representations within realistic conventions – *Adam Bede* is just as much a fiction as *LR*. The 'fantastic' by implication is defined not as a way of writing but as a 'cultural discourse,' by the radicalness of its insistence on fictionality, opposed to realist and modernist principles and conventions of interpretation. It implies a specific mode of reading and another kind of critical relationship. *LR* can perhaps be read as a modern 'novel' (though Shippey warns of the dangers of reading it entirely as one), but *Sil* and *HME* (the greater part of the Tolkien corpus) certainly cannot: their conception, narrative techniques, characters and themes, and most of all, language and style, simply will not stand if read within a novelistic framework. Yet they undoubtedly succeed to produce meaning, and not only in the fans (the argumentum ad populum is always suspicious, as is the automatic contempt for the fans) – complex and entirely legitimate structures of meaning can, as Shippey shows, be detected in them by exactly the same critical methods that work on other, canonical text. The

irony in this is that after all Shippey too is dragged into the politics of criticism, suggesting (as he did at the beginning) that Tolkien's most appropriate critic is the medievalist. Theorists (literary, cultural, and otherwise) usually do not care to read the literary historical background; and the whole of *Author* is proof that it is essential. Tolkien's traditionalism, then, is projected back onto the critical plane: he introduced "a new, or possibly re-introduce[d] an old and forgotten taste into the literary world" (328). His work now highlights the possible use of an old and near-forgotten method, philology, for criticism.

Though Shippey only goes this far in a book aimed at a general audience, his argument holds much for more specialised Tolkien Studies to go on with. Surely Tolkien's traditionalism is not merely a 'modernistbashing' device – it has its own conception of literature, understanding it as a focus of language, culture, and narrative, all of them historically conceived, pinned down to and determined by ancestry and history instead of 'floating in a flux.' One consequence is the enormous theoretical significance of textuality in Tolkien, and this points out what is missing from *Author*: a discussion of *HME*. *Road*, and more recently an

335

essay collection *Tolkien's* Legendarium[9] treated it – but the lack of a discussion of the essential variation and fragmentedness of most of the Tolkien corpus (thirteen volumes – eventually leading up to *Sil*, an editorial construct as a 'fixèd text') is definitely felt here. It implies a division of the corpus to the 'popular canon' of 'fixed texts,' and a 'critical' one of entirely different nature.

*H* and *LR* are 'offshoots'; *Sil* is a cross-section; *HME*, being the 'tradition,' enables critical appreciation of further foci of the 'philological theory of literature' – what we have to realise is that Tolkien's work is the whole corpus, including all texts. The 'fixed texts' rely on the variants as ancient texts on ancient culture; not only (a particular) culture is suggested, but whole frameworks, contexts. Not separate and distinct cultures are examined (in relation to each other, as in *LR*) but culture itself, in its relation to its expressions (such as orality or textuality), functions (such as transmission of traditions or identity production), and history. Tolkien's uses of texts can be seen in this light: the text as never fixed, always rewritten and revised parallels the revision and adaptation of story, and thus reflects on the mythological dimension (cf. 261). Language in this is seen as the 'glue'

of culture: the inevitable lens through which we see the world, ourselves; the medium producing its own realities in stories; and our only way to make sense of these. As in mythology (with which Tolkien is frequently associated), the telling of the story keeps tradition alive; the use of the story gives it its peculiar status. Tolkien's work 'models' tradition in a unique way which is very much relevant and legitimate today.

Tolkien can also be effectively claimed for postmodernism (such an attempt has been made by Patrick Curry[10]), and *Author* sometimes hintingly suggests lines of interpretation which fit in well with poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives. The way the linking of knowledge with ideology and power is presented, the role of authority as a controller of discourse and thus of knowledge (a decidedly Foucaultian theme), the all-pervasive role of textuality in culture and the problematics of authority and the transmission of authority in text and history are unquestionably of interest to current schools of critical thinking. The imaginative depiction of the 'Fallen World of Men' could be seen as a world where language is not stable and does not provide anchors to 'truth.' Tolkien, however, handles these problems on the theological

level, not a general theoretical one; but then theology itself is integrated into the network of cultural interactions, discourses, and frameworks of thought. What *Author* does is entirely justified and valid: complementing *Road*'s diachronic approach, it opens up the synchronic dimension in a widely accessible way, and yet is pregnant with new critical perspectives, pointing to directions for further work.

Tolkien Studies is in some sense, after nearly fifty years, a relatively young field of study. The 'phenomenon' continues, but is not only a 'popular' one any more; at any rate it cannot be contemptfully dismissed as such. It has become evident too that Tolkien does not need an apology; nor do Tolkien fans, or academics finding interest in his writings. But work on the sources is largely done; other 'traditional Tolkienist topics' (like the Good-and-Evil question) are tired and exhausted;[11] new approaches are needed. Tolkien Studies, as one critic recently put it, seems to have come of age, and goes towards more contemporary directions, opening up more theoretical fields, to explore the connections between the traditional and the theoretical in textual and cultural space. But Tom Shippey's books will remain benchmarks, and stay with us to remind

critics of the importance of the conception and method of philology.

*GERGELY NAGY*

## NOTES

1 Henceforward: *Author*. Unqualified page references in my text will be to this book. I am most grateful to Professor Shippey for having sent me a copy.
2 T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (London: Grafton, 1982; rev. ed. 1992), henceforward: *Road*.
3 Michael D.C. Drout and Hilary Wynne, "Tom Shippey's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* and a Look Back at Tolkien Criticism since 1982," *Envoi* 9.2 (Fall 2000) 101–165, p. 101.
4 See *Author*, p. 297. David Doughan, "In Search of the Bounce: Tolkien Seen through Smith," *Leaves from the Tree: J. R. R. Tolkien's Shorter Fiction* (London: Tolkien Society, 1991), 17–22 (I also owe thanks to Professor Shippey for sending me a copy of this rather rare publication); Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997).
5 Tolkien's best-known formulation of this is found in his long letter to Milton Waldman (1951), found in Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 143–161 (my thanks are due to Verlyn Flieger for making this volume available to me). A portion of this letter in now customarily printed in the new editions of *Sil*. See also Drout and Wynne, pp. 111–13.
6 See Patrick Curry, "Tolkien and His Critics: A Critique," *Root and Branch: Approaches towards Understanding Tolkien*, ed. Thomas Honegger (Zurich and Berne: Walking Tree Publications, 1999), 81–148. I think Curry over-politicises Tolkien (if not the critical reaction to him), which perhaps detracts from the value of

his defence. (I am grateful to Professor Shippey, who sent me a copy of this book.)

7 C.S. Lewis and W.H. Auden obviously did not count as 'literati' for such reviewers, an irony in itself.

8 A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Late Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Wildwood, 1988), p. xvii.

9 Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter, eds., *Tolkien's* Legendarium: *Essays on* The History of Middle-earth, (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 2000).

10 Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (London: Harper Collins, 1997); Shippey, p. 309.

11 Drout and Wynne, pp. 106–11.

# Beauty Is Almost Truth

István D. Rácz:
*A szép majdnem igaz: Philip Larkin költészete* [Beauty Is Almost Truth: The Poetry of Philip Larkin]
Orbis Litterarum Series 7 (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1999)

*Poets and Masks: The Quest for Identity in British Poetry after 1945* was a pioneer work of István D. Rácz, both in terms of opening up formerly lesser-known realms of contemporary British poetry for the Hungarian reader and in paving the way for other academic studies in the Orbis Litterarum series. His second book, which is not a sequel to the first one, narrows down its scope to Philip Larkin's poetry and further explores it in fine details.

Defining its aims and methods, *Beauty Is Almost Truth* identifies the relationship of Larkin the poet to the Larkin oeuvre as a matter of frequent debate, adding that the book intends to answer what the proper nature of this relationship is. Analyses of biographical data and interpretation of literary texts form the bases of the investigation, serving well Rácz's attempt to write a guide to the Larkin canon. The categories he employs ('poet,' 'lyric I' or 'implied author,' 'speaker') may sound famil-

iar from his first book, which in turn may explain why the present publication lacks the bulky "Theoretical Questions" section in *Poets and Masks*.

The book opens with a short biography mentioning Sydney Larkin's dominant father figure and the young Philip's inhibitions as two important factors from the poet's childhood, Larkin's friendship with Kingsley Amis and the two (relatively) short spells in Wellington and Belfast as significant in his adult life. The sketchy account of Larkin's later years in Hull is mostly taken up by the description of his editing *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse.*

The same part continues with listing and analysing three main characteristics of Larkin's personality: his conservatism, his relation to transcendence and the tension arising from the mental constraint to confess and the urge to conceal himself. Rácz sees the "wish to conserve" as ever-present both in Larkin's personality and his poetry, just as his "ambivalent" and "contradictory" relationship to transcendence is apparent in both. Considering the third category, Rácz maintains that it reflects both Larkin's personality and general characteristics of 19th and 20th century English literature.

The author does not ignore Larkin's letters and the many heated debates his poems have generated in literary circles. Rácz uses the former to refine the picture of Larkin's personality and, in other chapters, to support his own interpretations of the texts, the latter to present different critical voices of the age (Charles Tomlinson, Stephen Regan, James Booth, Janice Rossen, Andrew Motion).

The second part, "The Beginning of the Career," encompasses the period of maturation from 1940 until the publication of "The Less Deceived," Larkin's first literary success as a poet in 1955. In the next three chapters – "The Construction of the Poetic Identity," "The North Ship (1945)," "Jill (1946) and A Girl in Winter (1947)" – Rácz tries to recreate the mental process which formed Larkin's poetic identity. Reckoning that the poet's early works are not of Larkin's best, Rácz mostly traces the influences rather than analysing and interpreting individual texts in depth.

The first chapter is a biographical-based analysis of Larkin's first attempts at forming his own (poetic) identity. Having collected an impressive amount of data on Larkin, Rácz manages to draw the intricate system of correspondences between Larkin's early years as a poet and the three

books of poetry written later. Especially interesting are the paragraphs on Larkin's inventing the figure of Brunette Coleman, which seems an essential discovery from the point of view of his great dramatic monologues and masks.

While "The Construction of the Poetic Identity" relies heavily on Larkin's correspondence with Kingsley Amis and James Sutton, "The North Ship (1945)" focuses on Larkin's first volume of poetry. The few passages cited here and the observations that follow present much evidence of the early works' being forerunners of certain poems from The Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings or High Windows ("XVI" vs. "Sad Steps," "Love Again" or "Aubade").

The next chapter with the analysis of Jill and A Girl in Winter is reminiscent of "The Agnostic Lyric I: The Poetry of Philip Larkin" from Poets and Masks, where Rácz had already discussed and identified the main characteristics of mask creation employed fully-fledged in Larkin's poetry.

The second part describing the beginning of Larkin's career comes to an end around page fifty, once again leaving us content with the findings and assured that the author's conclusions are based on a thorough re-

search. Yet it is also here that some readers will first find fault with the book.

The last three chapters might induce disappointment in those who have read *Poets and Masks*, which may well be attributed to the many resemblances between *Beauty Is Almost Truth* and Rácz's first publication in the Orbis Litterarum series. Some of these "resemblances" include rephrased passages and conclusions already arrived at in the earlier book, but perhaps more disturbing are the copy-paste sections of the "The Construction of the Poetic Identity" and "Jill and A Girl in Winter" (the creation of Brunette Coleman's figure, John Kemp and Jill, excerpts from Larkin's letters, etc). Sadly, the same is true for the following parts as well; the fifty pages of "The Agnostic Lyric I: The Poetry of Philip Larkin" are all included in the present hundred and thirty-page analyses of *The Less Deceived*, *The Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows* almost word for word.

Even though the aims and methods of *Poets and Masks* and those of *Beauty Is Almost Truth* are similar, the "guide book" character of the second would certainly have allowed for a change in the wording and organisation of the (otherwise immense) material.

It is also true, however, that the majority of readers will not compare the two books and readily follow Rácz's compelling and otherwise relevant analyses.

The third part of the book, "The Mature Poet," is by far the bulkiest, concentrating on Larkin's three, significant volumes of poetry. Working himself through the Larkin oeuvre, Rácz discusses individual poems while keeping his original aim in mind, that is, the analysis of the relations within the tripartite system of poet, lyric I and speaker in the poem. Fortunately Rácz's never stops at discussing the relations within Larkin's poetry only, but manages to trace influences back to predecessors as well. Browning, Yeats and Eliot are all comfortable reference points, first of all because of these poets' obvious association with the dramatic monologue and with masks in British poetry.

Comparing *The Less Deceived* with *The North Ship* and *XX Poems*, Rácz characterises the new volume as "not only thought-provoking, but one that is able to reveal something significant about the agnostic lyric I, who is, nonetheless, willing to discover the world." The author discusses most of the volume's twenty-nine poems and, in the majority of cases, arrives at the conclusion that

the lyric I stays in the background while experience is pushed into the foreground (as in "Deceptions"). Citing Swarbrick's opinion on "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" he seems to agree that Larkin – though he was a literary heir to both Eliot and Yeats – managed to find a path different from theirs and "construct a voice that is socially identifiable, yet preserves its own anonymity."

There is a poem which Rácz separates from the rest on the basis of its divergence. In "Church Going" the lyric I and the speaker merge into one, which Rácz identifies as a convergence of Larkin's ontological conservatism and his obsession with the conservation of acquired experience. The poem with its final epiphany, he claims, revitalises certain characteristics of romantic poetry.

The parallel with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* seems a valuable new addition to the analysis, just as the many references to other critics (Parkinson, Watson, Eduard Vlad, Press & Booths, Tolley, Kennedy).

The poems of *The Whitsun Weddings* are still centred around the same questions with experience and its relation to the lyric I in the focus of attention. What is new in the book is in its foregrounding the problems of time and space, with the latter becoming the main topic in many of the major poems ("Whitsun Weddings," "Here," "The Importance of Elsewhere"). Rácz – once again citing Andrew Swarbrick – claims that the "wish to dissolve in otherness" becomes more emphatic in Larkin's second volume of poetry as opposed to *The Less Deceived* poems' self-analysing approach.

In connection with "Naturally the Foundation with Bear Your Expenses" Rácz echoes Booth, who separated four poems in the Larkin oeuvre on the basis of their containing a distinctly different speaker from the lyric I ("Wedding Wind," "Study of Reading Habits," "Livings"). According to the author "the mainstream of *The Whitsun Weddings* is signalled by the poems in which the other becomes part of the lyric I in one way or another."   ·

As in the earlier chapter, Rácz again identifies a few poems in the volume as divergent in tone from Larkin's usual texts which reflect his typically agnostic stance. "For Sydney Bechet," "Toads Revisited" and most notably "Whitsun Weddings" exhibit playfulness and jocundity.

"Love" is the central problem of *The Less Deceived*, while those of *The Whitsun Weddings* are "isolation" and "death. *High Windows*, Larkin's last volume of poetry, is characterised by

its "angry voice" – says Swarbrick, a critic Rácz often seems to agree with. In this case he shares Swarbrick's opinion on *High Windows* claiming that the "cynic, coldly supercilious and sometimes boorish" character is Larkin's favourite in this volume. He views the frequent use of the "angry voice" as resulting from the changes in the poet's life and in the socio-cultural conditions of the second half of the sixties. "Aubade" and "Love Again," two poems that Larkin did not include in any of the volumes, close the third part of the book with a short conclusion to follow afterwards.

On the whole István D. Rácz has given us another impeccably researched book, one that will surely become a landmark in Larkin-criticism among students and teachers alike. According to Rácz's original intentions, the publication successfully balances between the different roles, and may serve as an informative university textbook both for English speakers and others, with the academic standards always kept in mind.

Due to its "guide book" character the publication might perhaps foster an interest in the wider Hungarian public towards contemporary British poetry, and it might also bring with it the need for new translations of the *Collected Poems of Philip Larkin* as well.

*PÉTER PÖLCZMANN*

# ERRATA

In Karen Mulhallen's article
(*The AnaChronisT*, 2001, 1–18),
the reproduction in Figure 1
shows Night VIII, page 37 in-
stead of Night IX, page 37,
and thus fails to support the
argument in the article.

The following pictures ac-
companying the article are
Copyright © The British
Museum: William Blake, Night
Thoughts, Nos. 455, 498, 91,
349, 291, 396, 507, 345, 509,
321, and 512; and Europe,
Plates 5, and 11; Copy D.

The editors would like to
apologise for these mistakes.

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