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## **Pathways of Desire**

### **The Appearance of an Amorous “I” in Shakespeare’s Procreation Sonnets**

This paper looks at Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets in an attempt to retrace the pathways that lead to the first appearance of the *Sonnets*’ lyrical “I” in Sonnet 10. In doing so, it focuses on the narrative evolution of subjectivity in Sonnets 1–9, observing the postures and poetic devices the lyrical “I” adopts to make room for self-reference. Mapping the conventions and contradictions in the span of which the speaking subject attempts to find the voice with which to address his other, the paper highlights the unconventionality of the sonnets, arguing that they can be read, even today, as writerly texts: passionate utterances restored to and questioning the status of amorous poetry.

*“Make thee another self for love of me”*

#### **Background**

The question of whether Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* are autobiographical or “merely” literary exercises has dogged poets, readers and Shakespeare scholars alike for centuries. Indeed, as Kenneth Muir and others before him have pointed out, it is not unheard of for a single commentator to have held both positions at the same time:

The curious change of heart undergone by Sir Sidney Lee with regard to Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* has been mentioned by Hyder E. Rollins and S. Schoenbaum. He began by claiming that Mr W.H. was William Herbert and ended by asserting with equal vehemence that he was the Earl of Southampton. But this volte-face was less surprising than the extraordinary difference between his article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as it appeared in England in 1897 and the version published in America in the same year. English readers were assured that the *Sonnets* were autobiographical; American readers were informed with equal confidence that they were “to a large extent . . . literary exercises.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 30.

Without endeavoring to adjudicate this well-worn conflict between the likes of Wordsworth, Browning, Swinburne, Frye and others, this paper takes its starting point from the seminal works of Roland Barthes<sup>2</sup> and Niklas Luhmann,<sup>3</sup> both of whom have described love as a discourse, “a symbolic code”<sup>4</sup> that one uses to convey and, as both Barthes and Luhmann have emphasized, create feelings of love, be they “genuine” or imitated, “made of truth” or uttered by the “false-speaking tongue”<sup>5</sup> of an assaying poet or an unfaithful paramour. With this distinction between love as a feeling and love as a discourse<sup>6</sup> in mind, this paper will attempt to explore the ways in which the lyrical “I” of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* sneaks into the discourse in the first part of the so-called procreation sequence, arguing that these sonnets too, despite being the ones in the volume that are perhaps the most widely regarded as exercises in the literary conventions of the era, can be read amorously, as part of “a lover’s discourse” that asserts itself by virtue of its being rooted in established conventions of love as much as by its tendency to contravene those very same conventions.

In exploring how the poetic first person is introduced in Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets, I will be treating Sonnets 1–17 as a sequence within the sequence even though “that word, with its suggestions of linearity and its promise of unity, was not used of sonnet books in the period.”<sup>7</sup> The primary motivation for this is not thematic: the Erasmian argument for marriage, with its requisite imagery of ploughing and tilling, is only one (and by no means the most interesting) cohesive factor that encourages a sequential reading. Instead of treating these sonnets as variations on a static unifying theme, I will try to account for the narrative evolution of subjectivity apparent in the way personal pronouns are distributed in the sequence, with the first-person singular personal pronoun lurking entirely (if at times conspicuously) concealed throughout Sonnets 1–9, only to appear no less than 28 times in Sonnets 10–17. In what follows, I will be focusing primarily on the rhetorical and poetic tactics Shakespeare adopts in the first part of the sequence to make room for self-reference, leaving aside, for the most part, the equally interesting question of the effect the resulting discourse has on the first-person poetic persona of the second

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2. Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).

3. Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).

4. Luhmann, p. 8.

5. Sonnet 138, in Colin Burrow, ed., *The Oxford Shakespeare Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

6. Cf. Luhmann, p. 8.

7. Burrow, ed., p. 110.

part of the procreation sequence and of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in general, which is an issue too large for this paper to address adequately in more detail.

## Introduction

"And therefore, Reader, I myself am the subject of my book," Montaigne says in his short *avis* to his "honest" essays, and one could legitimately supplant *myself* with *thysel* in an imaginary preface to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* 1–9, which are as obsessed with the second-person singular position as meticulously they seem to hide the speaking subject. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the "I" of the *Sonnets* does not surface at all until Sonnet 10, to take on a rather hefty role from that point on throughout the second part of the sequence in what might at first glance seem a drastic change of events.

	Nominative	Objective	Reflexive	Possessive	Total
<i>1st-person singular</i>	0	0	0	3*	3*
2nd-person singular	31	14	8	21	74
3rd-person singular†	7	4	1	14	26
1st-person plural	1‡	0	0	0	1
2nd-person plural	0	0	0	0	0
3rd-person plural	2	0	0	2	4

\* Printed between quotation marks in contemporary editions – though not in the (first) Quarto – these three occurrences of the first-person singular pronoun, all within the same two lines in Sonnet 2, are uttered on behalf of the young man.<sup>8</sup>

† The gender of the third-person singular pronoun does not make a difference from the perspective of this analysis.

‡ Not "we" as in "you and I," but "we" as in "we the world, people in general."

**Table 1.** The distribution of personal pronouns in *Sonnets* 1–9

	Nominative	Objective	Reflexive	Possessive	Total
<i>1st-person singular</i>	16	0	0	12	28
2nd-person singular	29	10	12	21	72
3rd-person singular	7	4	0	2	13
1st-person plural	0	0	0	0	0
2nd-person plural	0	0	0	0	0
3rd-person plural	1	1	0	3	5

**Table 2.** The distribution of personal pronouns in *Sonnets* 10–17

8. Cf. Burrow, ed., p. 384.

Looking at the distribution of personal pronouns in the procreation sonnets, there are two more aspects of their use that attract attention. First, a decrease is clearly in evidence in the number of third-person singular pronouns in the second part of the sequence, which contrasts sharply with the almost entirely even distribution of the second-person singular and all of the plural pronoun forms among Sonnets 1–9 and Sonnets 10–17. Second, in what Colin Burrow, the editor of *The Oxford Shakespeare Complete Sonnets and Poems*, thinks “may mark an increase in intimacy,”<sup>9</sup> the second-person singular pronoun form “thou” is replaced with “you” in Sonnet 13, and while the poetic<sup>10</sup> “thou” returns briefly in Sonnet 14, “you” – “the normal form of address between educated Elizabethans”<sup>11</sup> – is used throughout Sonnets 15–17.

In my analysis of Shakespeare’s Sonnets 1–9, I will attempt to show that these phenomena (the sudden increase in the use of the first-person singular personal pronoun, the noticeable decrease in the use of the third-person singular pronoun, and the switch from “thou” to “you”) are not random occurrences, but interdependent symptoms of a process of self-creation, in which a conventional allegory of self-creation becomes its own allegory, engendering an amorous “I” quite akin to the paradigmatically unconventional subject that a contemporary reader might also recognize as the subject of “a lover’s discourse.” In doing so, I will analyze the interplay of metaphor and mimesis in Sonnets 1–9, drawing on as well as arguing against the claims laid down by Joel Fineman in his book titled *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*.

### Sonnets 1–9

The starting point for Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets is *amitié*,<sup>12</sup> which, as opposed to the sexual and extra-marital *folle amour* (“mad love”), is a normative relationship rooted in benevolence and convention. Indeed, this distinction is partly what differentiates the young man sonnets from the dark lady sonnets for Fineman,

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9. Burrow, ed., p. 406.

10. Burrow, ed., p. 406.

11. Burrow, ed., p. 406.

12. Michael Andrew Screech, ed., *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne* (London: Alan Lane, The Penguin Press, 1991), p. 205, “In Renaissance French *amitié* includes many affectionate relationships, ranging from father’s love for his child (or for his brain-child) to the friendly services of a doctor or lawyer . . . and to that rarest of lasting friendships which David shared with Jonathan . . . Several terms are needed in English to render these different senses; they include friendship, loving-friendship, benevolence, affection, affectionate relationships and love.”

who regards the former as belonging to – or, at most, only implicitly questioning – the Petrarchist tradition of ideal admiration based on mimetic or metaphorical likeness.<sup>13</sup> There is much to support this argument, and Burrow is certainly unfair in his curt, barely half-page dismissal<sup>14</sup> of Fineman’s elaborate distinction between Shakespeare’s implicit and explicit rebuttal of Petrarchist panegyric. However, this paper is not concerned with the difference between the young man and the dark lady sonnets, nor does it want to explain this difference in terms of homo- and heteroerotic desire. Its aim is to pinpoint the (explicit and implicit) ways in which mimesis and metaphor, both traditional devices of epideictic discourse, serve to deconstruct praise as soon as the “I” implicitly enters the picture, as it inevitably will. In addition, it will attempt to show that the resulting reluctance to panegyricize is the only legitimate answer an amorous “I” can give to keep true to his vision of both the object and the substance of his praise.

### **Sonnet 1**

When first addressing the young man in Sonnet 1, Shakespeare evokes convention by using the personal pronoun “we” – a word that subsequently never recurs in the sequence. As a result, the speaker’s voice is blurred by a multitude of voices echoing each other in a generalized statement: conventional content is delivered in an impersonal tone with the help of a commonplace metaphor (“beauty’s rose”). On the rhetorical level, the poet presents himself as a disinterested spokesman for social consensus, representing the world’s and the young man’s allegedly interlinked interests while oscillating between tender reproach and unblushing praise. Binary opposites abound, and it is in the span of these that the speaking subject positions

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13. Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 59–62.

14. Cf. Burrow, ed., p. 135. By arguing that “the poems which praise the young man painfully do not, as Fineman would have them, identify the lover with his object and deny difference,” Burrow completely misstates Fineman’s argument. Quite contrary to denying difference, Fineman actually claims that “the young man sonnets generate division when they redouble the unity and unities of an ideal and an idealizing poetics . . . and import difference into the traditional phenomenology of likeness.” (Fineman, p. 278) Instead of denying the young man sonnets their fair share of difference, Fineman argues that these sonnets only implicitly express the difference that the dark lady sonnets will “literally make” by explicitly asserting this difference to be the reason why the lover, his object and his verse are of “a new epoch in literary history.” (Fineman, pp. 279–280) Burrow also jibes at Fineman’s claim that Shakespeare “invented modern consciousness” in the dark lady sonnets, even though Fineman repeatedly offers “comes upon” as an alternative to “invents” throughout his analysis to qualify his claim.

itself as a caring, supporting, and unselfish – one is tempted to say, *self-less* – sounding board.

So it might seem, that is, if one looks only at the propositional content. But what is the perlocutionary effect on the listener? Is the convincing convincing? The potential discrepancy between illocutionary content and perlocutionary effect will serve as the main theme for two of the procreation sonnets (Sonnet 8: “Music to hear, why hear’st thou music sadly?” and Sonnet 17: “Who will believe my verse in time to come”). While Sonnet 1 does not yet raise this issue explicitly, discussing its potential effects on the listener is important in determining what kind of speaking subject we have because, as Helen Vendler notes, we tend to define the speaker as one given to the characteristic speech-acts of the sonnets, of which many are already revealed in Sonnet 1.<sup>15</sup> In my analysis of Sonnets 1–9, I will be relying on Stanley Cavell’s definition of performative (illocutionary) utterances, according to which “a performative utterance is an offer of participation in the order of law.”<sup>16</sup> Then I will attempt to describe the shift that takes place in Sonnets 1–9 from performative to what Cavell calls passionate utterance, a mode of expression devoted to perlocutionary rather than illocutionary effects, constituting “an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire.”<sup>17</sup>

Cavell describes Austin’s six conditions for the felicity of illocutionary utterance as follows:

- (1) there must exist a conventional procedure for uttering certain words in certain contexts, (2) the particular persons and circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation of the procedure, (3) the procedure must be executed correctly and (4) completely, (5) where the procedure requires certain thoughts or feelings or intentions for the inauguration of consequential conduct, the parties must have those feelings or thoughts and intend so to conduct themselves, and further (6) actually so conduct themselves subsequently.<sup>18</sup>

In Sonnet 1, Shakespeare summons the conventions of *amitié* and praise, and casts these in a conventional form, that of the amorous sonnet, so that Austin’s first condition for a felicitous performative utterance is seemingly in place. However, conventional content and conventional form quickly turn on one another as, appar-

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15. Cf. Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 49.

16. Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 19.

17. Cavell, p. 19.

18. Cavell, p. 18.

ently, the particular addressee fails to behave in a manner appropriate for the invocation of the procedure of praise, which therefore cannot be executed correctly and completely. To be praised felicitously, the young man must change his intentions and his subsequent conduct, the sonnet says – at least on the rhetorical level.

However, there is an underlying tension among the various layers of convention Shakespeare adopts that sends seismic waves through the body of the sonnet. First, the sonnet is addressed to a man, and while the love of two men for each other was not uncommon in pastoral poetry,<sup>19</sup> its only other evidence in renaissance sonnets is found in Michelangelo. Second, the topos of procreation is also alien to the renaissance sonnet tradition,<sup>20</sup> which defines the beloved as an unattainable incarnation of Venus and hence of “light, form, desirability, beauty, and objective proportion.”<sup>21</sup> While the young man of Sonnet 1 is said to meet all these criteria, Northrop Frye also draws attention to Shakespeare’s “disturbing and strikingly original device of associating the loved one with Eros rather than Venus,”<sup>22</sup> Eros representing “heat, energy, desire, love, and subjective emotion”<sup>23</sup> and acting primarily as “a source of love rather than a responding lover.”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, there is plenty of metaphorical evidence in Sonnet 1 corroborating Frye’s claim about a shift in the beloved’s symbolic position. Although the young man is represented in the first quatrain as a fair creature of light, the second quatrain reveals that, in sharp contrast to Sidney’s star-like Stella, he himself is the source of his flickering brightness. The image of the candle lays the groundwork for a metaphor of waste that, instead of the passion exhibited by the Petrarchist lover<sup>25</sup> (his “heart’s excess”), is used to describe the beloved’s wasteful use of his own self, an excess that “begs all.”<sup>26</sup> This optical oscillation between the ideal image of the ideal and its negative, which Fineman calls an “excess of likeness,”<sup>27</sup> is what sets the scene for perlocutionary utterance, the deconstruction of praise, and the appearance of the

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19. Cf. Northrop Frye, “*How True a Twain*,” in *The Riddle of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Edward Hubler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 23–54, p. 36. Frye lists Virgil’s Second Eclogue and the first eclogue in Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender* as examples.

20. Cf. Fineman, pp. 250, 255.

21. Frye, p. 32.

22. Frye, p. 38.

23. Frye, p. 32.

24. Frye, p. 38.

25. Cf., for example, Petrarch’s Sonnet CCII, in which “He pleads the excess of his passion in palliation of his fault.”

26. William Shakespeare, “*A Lover’s Complaint*,” in *The Oxford Shakespeare Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 693–717, p. 698.

27. Fineman, p. 247.

amorous “I” in Sonnets 1–9. What this paper will try to show is that this double vision, projected onto the young man’s allegedly inequitable use of his qualities, is in fact an inevitable corollary of the lover’s position and the condition ultimately legitimizing his discourse; in other words, that it is a structural rather than descriptive element.

## **Sonnet 2**

Like Sonnet 1, Sonnet 2 also strikes a tone of common sense, but here the undercurrents of hunger, greed and death already lurking beneath the “tender” surface of Sonnet 1 loom larger on the poetic horizon. Since it does not associate “famine,” “glutton” and “decease” with any specific time frame, Sonnet 1 might appear sufficiently benign to the good natured reader. But with the first reference to the *Sonnets*’ lyrical “I” introduced in line 1 (“forty winters”) and its military metaphors, Sonnet 2 is substantially more explicit in its siege of the second person singular position. The distribution of power between “thou” and “they” also appears to have changed: instead of being asked to “pity the world,” the young man is now “being asked,” that is, summoned to answer. Not only are the boundaries of the second person singular sphere subsequently blurred to accommodate another, apparently harmless being (a “fair child”), but the possessive also gains control over the nominative throughout the first two quatrains: “thy” is dominant over “thou,” relegating the young man’s existence to his capacity of relating to his externalized aesthetic qualities. The wedge forced between the morphemes of the reflexive pronoun “thyself” in Sonnet 1 (“Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel”) is thereby driven deeper, and will remain an effective tool in carving out the locus of self-expression for the lyrical “I” throughout the initial procreation sonnets.

The resulting feeling of fragility is further compounded by the exacerbation of the double vision first shown in Sonnet 1. In Sonnet 2, various shadows of selves appear and fade in rapid succession: we see the young man gazed at, and then looked down on; we see him trying to conjure up the image of his “own deep-sunken eyes;” and we see him and the world peering into the future at the ultrasound picture of his child as if it was a sepia reproduction of himself. What is hard to see, however, is how any of these phantom images, these blurred edges of time can make us *see* his blood warm when we know he will *feel* it cold. The sonnet’s reasoning is lukewarm at best: it feels as though none of the young man’s replicas could emulate what he is *now*, since neither the passing of his beauty, nor its potential rejuvenation is tangible at the present moment.

By introducing such temporal self-difference into the self-contained “withinness” of the beloved, Sonnet 2 succeeds in displacing the second person singular position. As Fineman notes:

Turning upon himself, looking himself in his own I and eye, the young man discovers the death that “within thy own bud buriest thy content” (1). This “within” describes the same recessed and invert site and sight wherein, in sonnet 2, the young man’s “beauty” and his “treasure” “lies”: there “within thine own deep-sunken eyes,” there as an “all-eating shame” and “thrifless praise.” It is no exaggeration to say that this “within,” this circumscribed bisection of the self-contained, traces out the “depths” of all the sonnets addressed to the young man, spreading itself out as a kind of striated, interior hollowness<sup>28</sup>

In other words, this “within” serves as what Georges Poulet would call the procreation sonnets’ “point of departure,” the initial and central experience “around which the entire work can be organized.”<sup>29</sup> By “[redoubling], with a difference, master images of sameness that traditionally objectify the poetics of the poetry of praise,”<sup>30</sup> Sonnet 2 forces the young man to register “the frailty and fragmentation of the self in its exposure to the world.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, this “awareness of the frailty of our link with the world,”<sup>32</sup> which manifests itself rhetorically as an attempt to spur the awakening of the young man’s consciousness, also marks the appearance of a mind posing as time’s master, a poetic consciousness that, in the mask of continuity and homogeneity, “[gathers] scattered fragments of time into a single moment and [endows] it with generative power.”<sup>33</sup> However, this moment of generative tension, borne by the rhyming juxtaposition of “mine” and “thine” in lines 10 and 12, remains hidden from the world’s prying eyes for the time being, as the present – this moment of anxious intimacy – is affirmed hypothetically, dependent on an answer that only the sonnet’s “thou” “couldst” give.<sup>34</sup>

### Sonnet 3

The first condition of passionate (perlocutionary) utterance, Stanley Cavell says, is an absence of convention: “There is no conventional procedure for appealing to you to act in response to my expression of passion.”<sup>35</sup> By presenting traditional epideic-

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28. Fineman, p. 248.

29. Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983), p. 81.

30. Fineman, p. 25.

31. De Man, p. 105.

32. De Man, p. 87.

33. De Man, p. 90.

34. Cf. Sonnet 2, line 10 (“If thou couldst answer”).

35. Cavell, p. 18.

tic discourse through the distorted prism of a genre-alien theme and the temporal difference brought into play in Sonnet 2, Shakespeare reframes the convention of homogeneous praise in a way that gives him “the standing to appeal to or to question”<sup>36</sup> the young man (in Sonnets 1 and 2, respectively) – Cavell’s second condition of passionate utterance. Moreover, by scattering the young man’s image among hypothesized “eyes” and different moments in time, the lyrical “I” gathers enough momentum to temporarily suspend convention and become the master of his addressee’s image. This sets the scene for perlocutionary utterance, in which “the ‘you’ comes essentially into the picture,”<sup>37</sup> in Sonnet 3.

If the present is what Sonnet 2 was hiding, it is also what rips apart, with compelling force, the veil of superimposed continuity in Sonnet 3. The first quatrain’s emphatic “nows” are in sharp contrast with the pallid images of the-future-as-present and the-present-as-past presented in the previous poem, with the number of verbs<sup>38</sup> and the imperative mood of the first line also indicating urgency. These features evince what Stanley Cavell says are the further remaining conditions of passionate utterance: “In speaking from my passion I must actually be suffering the passion . . . in order rightfully to . . . Demand from you a response *in kind*, one you are in turn *moved* to offer, and moreover . . . Now.”

That the mimetic bisection of the beloved’s withinness – effected in the mirror, through repeated entreaties to procreate and by a subtle rewriting of epideictic praise – is expressed passionately should come as no surprise. According to Poulet and Paul de Man, the “point of departure” is always “experienced as a moment of particularly strong emotional tension:”<sup>39</sup> like a passionate utterance, which is “backed by no conventional procedure,”<sup>40</sup> the point of departure is “a present rooted in nothing.”<sup>41</sup> It is as the co-owner of such a passionate, unconventional “now” that an amorous “I” first makes its presence felt in Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets.

Exhibiting the linguistic stage props of an amorous scene, Sonnet 3 concludes with a couplet that is “phrased almost as a death curse.”<sup>42</sup> In sharp contrast to what Stephen Booth calls in his work on Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* “the comfort of the cou-

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36. Cavell, p. 18.

37. Cavell, p. 180.

38. There are two verbs each in lines 1 and 4. Shakespeare often deploys lines with two predicates in the couplet, but the first three quatrains characteristically employ single-predicate structures.

39. De Man, p. 89.

40. Cavell, p. 181.

41. De Man, p. 90.

42. Vendler, p. 58.

plet,”<sup>43</sup> Sonnet 3 closes with what Roland Barthes says “each partner in the scene dreams of having:”<sup>44</sup> the last word. Yet, as Stanley Cavell notes, “in this mode of exchange [i.e., the perlocutionary], there is no final word, no uptake or turndown until a line is drawn, a withdrawal is effected, perhaps in turn to be revoked:”<sup>45</sup> “we see once again that only death can interrupt the Sentence, the Scene.”<sup>46</sup> In this staged (since hypothetical) argument, which hinges on the couplet’s “if” which is the only thing that stops it from unfolding, the *Sonnets*’ as-yet-implicit poetic “I” becomes the co-owner of the present by being the co-owner of the language of the scene:

When two subjects argue . . . [they] are already married: for them the scene is an exercise of a right, the practice of a language of which they are co-owners; each one in his turn, says the scene, which means: never you without me, and reciprocally.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 1.** Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*



**Figure 2.** Vasari's *Venus at Her Toilette*

43. Cf. Stephen Booth, ed., *Sonnets*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 130–131. “The couplet concludes the poem . . . ties off one set of loose ends . . . [and] brings the reader’s mind back to conceiving of experience in a single system.”

44. Barthes, pp. 207–208.

45. Cavell, p. 183.

46. Barthes, pp. 207–208.

47. Barthes, p. 204.

To visualize the lyrical “I’s” position at and *on* this stage, one needs only to glimpse his eye’s reflection in the mirror image of the first line’s deliberately indefinite “face thou view’st.” In renaissance painting, most notably in Vasari’s *The Toilet of Venus* and Titian’s *Venus with a mirror*, a peculiar phenomenon in picture perception, known as the Venus effect, comes into play “when a picture shows an actor and a mirror that are not placed along the observer’s line of sight . . . and when the actor’s reflection in the mirror is visible to the observer”<sup>48</sup> – a setting similar to that staged by Sonnet 3. As noted by Bertamini, Latto and Spooner:

The problem is that the vantage point from which the scene is represented (as well as the vantage point of the viewer, were they to differ) is different from the vantage point of Venus. Therefore, if we see Venus’s face nicely framed inside the mirror, she must see something quite different. If the painter reproduced what he saw, then the model must have seen the painter in the mirror.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, even if we readers fail to register its presence in the scene, the lyrical “I’s” reflection is there for the young man’s eyes to see, visible in the glass in which we falsely perceive the young man to be looking at himself while what he sees is in fact the likeness of another face that his face is entreated to form.

#### **Sonnet 4**

By Sonnet 4, the *Sonnets*’ poetic “I” has acquired a decidedly authoritative voice and affirmed its position as the co-owner of the young man’s present, his image, and the language of confronting him to temporarily suspend his “withinness.” The tone of voice and the “rigid isomorphism”<sup>50</sup> of the rhetoric both reflect a firm footing in Sonnet 4: instead of the lover, we hear the master speak.

In his 1981–1982 lectures at the Collège de France, published under the title *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Michel Foucault gave a detailed account of what he termed “the care of the self” and “the soul-subject.” What is at stake in these lectures is Foucault’s primary concern in the works subsequent to Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*: the relation of the self to itself. In exploring the care of the self and the forms it takes in Greek philosophy, the word *khresthai* (use, usage), with its

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48. Marco Bertamini, Richard Latto, Alice Spooner, “The Venus Effect: People’s Understanding of Mirror Reflections in Paintings,” in *Perception* 32 (2003), 593–599, p. 593.

49. Bertamini, Latto, Spooner, p. 595.

50. Cf. Vendler, p. 63, “The aesthetic value proposed here is a rigid isomorphism (each of the four hectoring questions occupies two lines, and three of the questions use the same phrase, *why dost thou*).”

connotations of “having appropriate and legitimate relationships,”<sup>51</sup> is of primary importance to Foucault. The soul, he says, uses “the body, its organs and its tools” as well as itself, where “use” is not meant to designate “an instrumental relationship,” but “the subject’s singular, transcendent position, with regard to what surrounds him, to the objects available to him, but also to other people with whom he has a relationship, to his body itself, and finally to himself.”<sup>52</sup>

The appropriate and legitimate use of one’s self is also the axle around which Sonnet 4 revolves. Warning the young man about the dangers of disusing or misusing one’s self, the poetic “I” puts himself in the master’s position, which Foucault describes as follows:

The master is the person who cares about the subject’s care for himself, and who finds in love for his disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple’s care for himself. By loving the boy disinterestedly, he is then the source and model for the care the boy must have for himself as subject.<sup>53</sup>

What undermines this reading is, of course, the word “disinterestedly.” Sonnet 4 is all about interest in the financial sense of the word: the poetic “I” wants his beautiful boy to be profitable. Acutely aware of his metaphorical investment in the subject, the master starts sounding rather like a pimp, as his concern for the young man’s appropriate and legitimate use of his “sweet self” gradually acquires an increasingly inappropriate air. The sexual undertones of the enjambment at the end of the first line<sup>54</sup> and the word “traffic” in the third quatrain, together with the thematic innuendos brought into play by the metaphor of usury,<sup>55</sup> subvert the sonnet’s rhetoric step by step even as it unfolds. Ideology and metaphor turn on one another, engendering the sonnet’s unorthodox economics and equivocal ethics in which the young

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51. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, ed. Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, Arnold I. Davidson, tr. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 56.

52. Foucault, pp. 56–57.

53. Foucault, p. 59.

54. As Burrow notes on p. 388, “*spend* can mean ‘ejaculate’, and *Spend* | *Upon thyself* suggests masturbation.”

55. As Fineman notes (p. 256), “Dante puts usurers and homosexuals in the same circle of hell, on the grounds that they both attempt to generate an unproductive profit . . . by coupling kind with kind.” The juxtaposition of usury and homosexuality is also familiar from *The Merchant of Venice*, while in *Measure for Measure* Pompey, the pimp, refers to prostitution as “the merriest usury” (III/2.6–11: “Twas never merry world, since, of two usuries, the merriest was put down, and the worser allowed by order of law a furred gown to keep him warm.” Quoted in Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 50.

man is both debtor and creditor and is simultaneously urged to imitate “the husband . . . , who economizes his goods, his happiness,”<sup>56</sup> and to give in to a more lucrative type of usury, characteristic of “the young lover who lavishes his time, his faculties, his fortune”<sup>57</sup> (his “bounteous largess”) “without counting the cost.”<sup>58</sup> This oscillation between the sonnet’s normative illocutionary content and its disruptive perlocutionary effect culminates in a series of oxymorons, a usury of meaning<sup>59</sup> that puts the poetic “I” in a paradoxical light: part a philosopher, part a pederast, the speaking subject is still at pains to hide the painting hand in the picture he is painting and thereby maintain the vacillation of the subject without which “there is no erotics.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Sonnets 5 and 6**

Ostensibly, Sonnets 5 and 6 constitute a pair – a prelude and a fugue, the setting and the scene, the proverb and the personal implications of its meaning. Through a process of poetic distillation, an attempt is made to separate the components of the double voice and vision developed in the previous sonnets into two separate vessels: Sonnet 5, the only sonnet in the procreation series entirely missing a second person singular personal pronoun, is generalized in its claim, abstract in its imagery and normative in its tone, while Sonnet 6 is personal in the extreme with its emphatic focus on “thou,” direct with its references to breeding, worms and death, and passionate in tone and prosody.

Distillation is the central metaphor in both sonnets: cloaked as an alchemist, the poet is offering eternal youth and immortality to the young man together with a hundredfold increase in his “treasure” if only he were willing to consent to having his beauty distilled into an elixir of life, a “substance” that “lives sweet.” As Northrop Frye remarks in *How True a Twain*:

[The Renaissance poet] was expected to turn his mind into an emotional laboratory and gain his experience there under high pressure and close observation. Literature provided him with a convention, and the convention

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56. Barthes, p. 85.

57. Barthes, p. 84.

58. Barthes, p. 84.

59. Akin to what Shell defines as “verbal usury,” i.e., “the generation of an illegal – [or] unnatural – supplement to verbal meaning by the use of such methods as punning and flattering” (Shell, p. 49).

60. Cf. Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, tr. Linda Coverdale (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), p. 173, “There is no erotics without . . . the vacillation of the subject: everything is in this subversion, this perturbation of grammar.”

supplied the literary categories and forms into which his amorphous emotions were to be poured.<sup>61</sup>

In Shakespeare's emotional laboratory, an experiment is made to extract the second person singular element from the vial<sup>62</sup> of Sonnet 5 by construing the young man's eye and I as the place "where every eye doth dwell." This is achieved by the sonnet's allegorical abstraction of the personal and its personification of the abstract, and is also reflected in the sonnet's impersonal, almost factual tone, which culminates in the proverbially phrased couplet.<sup>63</sup>

The significance of Shakespeare's use of personification in Sonnet 5 and the couplet's proverbial phrasing can be understood in light of Brett Bourbon's analysis of two letters by Keats on the process of "soul-making."<sup>64</sup> In the first letter, Keats presents an allegory of the process of soul-making by personifying a rose whose life is "contingent on and limited by the opposing forces of an indifferent nature":<sup>65</sup>

For instance suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself, but then comes a cold wind, a hot sun – it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances – they are as native to the world as itself – no more can man be happy than worldly elements will prey upon his nature.<sup>66</sup>

In Bourbon's reading, the personification of the rose becomes an allegory of the conflict, on the one hand, between an indifferent nature and feeling ("those states of mind that are broadly characterized as intentional"),<sup>67</sup> and on the other hand, "between a non-intentional account of the world and an intentional one, between what science describes and what art imagines."<sup>68</sup> As Bourbon concludes, such a description of soul-making paves the way for "[separating] our humanity from the non-

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61. Frye, pp. 30–31.

62. Similarly to Frye, Vendler (p. 67) also conceives of the sonnet form and its conventions as the container into which "the emotionally labile contents of [the] sonnet" are poured. She develops this idea specifically in connection with line 10 of Sonnet 5 ("A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass").

63. Cf. Vendler, p. 67, "The couplet imitates the pointed brevity of [a] proverb."

64. Cf. Brett Bourbon, *Finding a Replacement for the Soul: Mind and Meaning in Literature and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 29–35.

65. Bourbon, p. 31.

66. Keats, quoted in Bourbon, p. 30.

67. Bourbon, p. 31.

68. Bourbon, p. 31.

intentional, indifferent world of circumstance and nature”<sup>69</sup> since “through our poetic imagination, which allows for this special recognition and figuration of the rose, we show ourselves as not indifferent to the fate of the rose in the way the cold wind is.”<sup>70</sup>

This master image of the human soul and its relationship to nature is also the starting point for Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets (“beauty’s rose”); however, Sonnet 5 turns the allegory inside out in a rather sinister manner. For what is personified in Sonnet 5 is no longer the rose; rather, “those hours” and “never-resting Time” – the once “gentle,” once “hideous” face of nature playing a zero-sum game with a single participant. Without a tenor in evidence, the “sap” and “leaves” of line 7 are no longer able to function as metaphors independently; they are merely “remembrances” of the metaphors employed earlier in the procreation sequence as well as by other sonneteers, and hence the indication of the presence of a “garden-ing poet”<sup>71</sup> rather than a description of his beloved’s qualities. Unlike Daniel’s “half-blown”<sup>72</sup> or Keats’s blooming rose, the rose of Sonnet 5 is *already* dead, stillborn in a world that is “inert . . ., cut off, thunderstruck – like a waste planet, a Nature uninhabited by man,”<sup>73</sup> where the only kind of soul to be “distilled” is “a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,” an “hourglass being,”<sup>74</sup> which, in the *disreality*<sup>75</sup> of the poem and of love, is the lyrical “I” itself,<sup>76</sup> looking at the world that “plays at living behind a glass partition; [as] in an aquarium; . . . close up and yet cut off.”<sup>77</sup>

As argued above, Sonnet 5 is an illustration of what is left in the vial after removing the second person singular element: the all-pervasive “bareness” it evokes is the lyrical “I’s” image of a world “bereft” of his beloved’s beauty. What is distilled in Sonnet 5, therefore, is the lyrical “I’s” very own soul as it wakes up to a world in

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69. Bourbon, p. 32.

70. Bourbon, p. 32.

71. Fineman, p. 252.

72. Daniel, Sonnet XXXI.

73. Barthes, p. 87.

74. Fineman, p. 249.

75. Cf. Barthes, pp. 90–91, “Sometimes the world is *unreal* . . . sometimes it is *disreal* . . . In the second case, I . . . lose reality, but no imaginary substitution will compensate me for this loss: . . . I am not ‘dreaming’ (even of the other); I am not even in the Image-repertoire any longer. Everything is frozen, petrified, immutable, i.e., *unsubstitutable*: the Image-repertoire is (temporarily) foreclosed.”

76. As Fineman notes on p. 249, “the poet identifies himself, spatially, temporally, but also, as will be seen, sexually, with ‘a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass’. . ., a dissolved liquidity within a brittle hardness, this hourglass being, again, the very image of the passing of an ideal time.”

77. Barthes, p. 88.

which his beloved's "lovely gaze" has replaced "every eye," functioning like a proscenium, a prosthetic eye without which the poet sees "bareness everywhere." This, of course, is not what Sonnet 5 *says* on the rhetorical level; it is what it *does*, or rather, what *happens to it* on the metaphorical level once the second person singular pronoun is extracted from its "substance." This is how – not so much "through [his] poetic imagination" but rather by pointing to that imagination's limits, the "walls of glass" imprisoning him – the lyrical "I" reveals itself "as not indifferent," in other words, as an amorous soul in the making.

In analyzing the proverbial pattern of Sonnet 5's couplet and its implications on both the beloved's and the poet's "I" in Sonnet 6, it is worth noting that Sonnet 5 is only the second sonnet so far in the procreation series whose couplet does not rhyme "thee" with "be." In Fineman's reading, "the poet's rhyming 'thee' . . . with 'be'"<sup>78</sup> takes its force from the fact that "at the beginning of the young man sonnets the young man . . . is presented as the (somewhat disturbing) image of identity per se"<sup>79</sup> and consequently "as an ego ideal – an ideal, that is, of what it is to be an ego or an 'I.'"<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, this idealization of the young man's self, Fineman argues, is contingent upon the young man's ideal duplication of his own self: "the young man is a copy that ideally should be copied,"<sup>81</sup> which according to Fineman is "the logic on which all the procreation arguments depend."<sup>82</sup>

In the following, drawing upon Brett Bourbon's analysis of another letter by Keats on soul-making, I will argue for an alternative image of the young man's identity and of the lyrical "I's" image of "identity per se" – one that is modeled on the relationship between Sonnet 5's couplet, understood as a proverb, and Sonnet 6, understood as a genuinely passionate but at the same time deliberately exaggerated plea to live out the meaning of that proverb. In addition, I will argue that this alternative image of identity is not contrary to the one Fineman describes in his analysis of the lyrical "I's" image of identity *at the beginning* of the procreation sonnets, but rather a corollary of how the lyrical "I" gains traction as the procreation narrative unfolds.

"Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – Even a proverb is no proverb to you till your life has illustrated it," says Keats in his letter,<sup>83</sup> "[modeling] the relation between a life and a proverb . . . on that between picture and text."<sup>84</sup> In Bourbon's interpretation,

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78. Fineman, p. 206.

79. Fineman, p. 206.

80. Fineman, p. 206.

81. Fineman, p. 206.

82. Fineman, p. 206.

83. Quoted in Bourbon, p. 32.

84. Bourbon, p. 32.

[a] proverb becomes a proverb when my life illustrates it. The proverb is a type, and our experience – our life – is a token of that type. . . Such proverbs are meant to be the means of guidance; they provide vectors for our understanding. If our lives illustrate them, then our lives are not meaningless. Illustration gives sense to that which is illustrated; it is not simply an example but a version.<sup>85</sup>

It follows from this logic that if Sonnet 6 is read as the lyrical “I’s” plea for the young man to live out the meaning of Sonnet 5’s couplet, then what the lyrical “I” urges the young man to produce in Sonnet 6 is not an ideal copy of his own self but rather an illustration of the lyrical “I’s” formulation of how an ideal process of self-duplication should take place. This is consistent with the way Fineman develops his argument by pointing out that

it cannot be said that the poet identifies himself with the young man. Rather, what the poet reproduces is the young man’s reproduction. And this repetition of repetition adds a wrinkle to the poet’s project. Developing his praise through the theme of procreation, identifying his praise with the young man’s “succession,” the poet does not epideictically point to the young man: instead, he points to the young man’s epideictic pointing.<sup>86</sup>

But to what extent is that pointing – i.e., the lyrical “I’s” pointing to the young man’s duplication of his self – epideictic, and precisely what kind of self-duplication does the lyrical “I” point to in Sonnet 6? Why is it that, as Helen Vendler notes,<sup>87</sup> Sonnet 6 develops the procreation argument in such a “labored” and “fanciful” manner? And what explains the fact that, as Northrop Frye remarks, although “the youth is urged to marry as the only legal means of producing offspring, . . . *apparently any woman will do* [and] *it is not suggested that he should fall in love?*”<sup>88</sup>

I believe there is a straightforward answer to all of these questions; one that might be said to do more justice to the *Sonnets* than Vendler’s claim about Shakespeare being “entranced by fancifulness”<sup>89</sup> or Frye’s charge that “the poet . . . does not lift a metrical foot to make the youth a credible or interesting person.”<sup>90</sup> The

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85. Bourbon, pp. 33–34.

86. Fineman, p. 207.

87. Vendler, p. 72, “In this rather labored conceit of interest-bearing funds, a play – deliberately situated in the tenth line – on a posterity of *ten* producing a posterity of *ten* times that number reveals the degree to which Shakespeare could be entranced by fancifulness.”

88. Frye, p. 26, my italics.

89. Vendler, p. 72, cf. footnote 83 for the full quote.

90. Frye, p. 27.

argument I would like to propose is a logical extension of Vendler's claim that the play on the ten-times-tenfold multiplication of the young man's reproduction is "deliberately situated in the tenth line"<sup>91</sup> to the "fancifulness" of the play. Indeed, if we contend that this play on words and numbers is consciously placed where it is, it becomes rather difficult to maintain that the fancifulness of its placement somehow escaped the author's attention without implying that Sonnet 6 represents a temporary failure in the poet's aesthetic judgment (which is essentially what Vendler claims). Instead, it makes more sense to posit that Shakespeare deliberately deflates the procreation argument in Sonnet 6 by artificially inflating the sonnet's rhetoric as well as the value of the promised reproductive profit.

Such a reading is also consistent with my previous statement that Sonnet 6 is not meant to impel the young man to copy his own self by reproductive means but to illustrate the distillatory process of self-creation described in Sonnet 5's couplet. In Sonnet 6, the procreation argument is what Vendler says it is: a "labored conceit,"<sup>92</sup> which is precisely why, in Frye's words, "any woman will do"<sup>93</sup> ("Make sweet *some* vial; treasure thou *some* place") and, as Vendler claims, the sonnet's "climax . . . is less than convincing."<sup>94</sup> By presenting the procreation argument as an exaggerated and therefore aesthetically discreditable way of duplicating one's self, Sonnet 6 contrasts reproduction with self-duplication through distillation, that is, with making a soul by illustrating through one's own life a proverb on self-duplication through distillation. What Sonnet 6 reveals through its apparent mimicking of the procreation argument, therefore, is that the procreation sonnets do not, in fact, point to the young man's progeny epideictically. The truth of Sonnet 6 does not lie in reproduction, but is to be distilled by replicating the experiment carried out in Sonnet 5 *the other way round*.

While Sonnet 5 attempted to extract the second person singular element from the vial, Sonnet 6 replicates the process by attempting to do the opposite, thereby creating a compound in which "thou" has an overwhelming share: the second person singular personal pronoun appears in the sonnet no less than 14 times in five different forms. However, no distillation process that involves two elements with different characteristics is ideal: "it is not possible to *completely* purify a mixture of components by distillation."<sup>95</sup> Just as a droplet of "thou" is detectable in the gentleness of the opening lines of Sonnet 5 (since "Those hours that with gentle work did frame / The lovely gaze" can be gentle only insofar as they mirror the tenderness

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91. Vendler, p. 72, cf. footnote 83 for the full quote.

92. Vendler, p. 72, cf. footnote 83 for the full quote.

93. Frye, p. 26.

94. Vendler, p. 72.

95. Pankaj Madan, Sangeeta Madan, ed., *Global Encyclopaedia of Environmental Science, Technology and Management* (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2009), p. 330.

with which the lyrical “I” frames his beloved’s image), so a trace of the lyrical “I” is left in Sonnet 6, resulting in an ever more explosive mixture.

What these two experiments reveal through the difference in tone between the two sonnets is that it is the second person singular component that makes the compound volatile: “thou” is what ravishes and engulfs the lyrical “I.” As Roland Barthes points out, this is symptomatic of a shift that has taken place in the lover’s symbolic position since “the archaic time”<sup>96</sup> when the lover was conceived of as the “conquering, ravishing, capturing”<sup>97</sup> party:

[I]n the ancient myth, the ravisher is active, he wants to seize his prey, he is the subject of the rape (of which the object is a Woman, as we know, invariably passive); in the modern myth (that of love-as-passion), the contrary is the case: the ravisher wants nothing, does nothing; he is motionless (as any image), and it is the ravished object who is the real subject of the rape; the object of capture becomes the subject of love; and the subject of the conquest moves into the class of loved object.<sup>98</sup>

The “distillative” – that is, metaphorical rather than literal – reading of Sonnets 5 and 6 proposed in this paper, therefore, provides further proof of Fineman’s argument that there is something fundamentally new about the way the subject of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* treats the idealizing tradition of sonneteering praise, portending the drift towards the symbolic positioning of the amorous subject as the subject of love-as-passion.

In addition, such a reading also underlines how Shakespeare’s practice of mimesis breaks with idealized *imitatio* as rather than perceiving Sonnet 6 as an appeal to the young man to produce a “thinglike copy,”<sup>99</sup> it sees “the activity of a subject which models *itself* according to a given prototype”<sup>100</sup> – a soul in the making, “making [*itself*] similar to an Other”<sup>101</sup> and thereby acting as a prototype for the other’s soul-making. Such a concept of imitation can be considered closer to Coleridge’s “alchemic” mimesis than to Sidney’s “speaking picture”<sup>102</sup> in that it “consists . . . in

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96. Barthes, p. 188.

97. Barthes, p. 188.

98. Barthes, p. 188.

99. Michael Cahn, “*Subversive Mimesis: T. W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique*,” in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory, Volume 1*, ed. Mihai Spărișu, (Philadelphia; Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 27–64, p. 34.

100. Cahn, p. 34.

101. Cahn, p. 34.

102. Philip Sidney, “*The Defence of Poesy*,” in *Renaissance Literature: An anthology*, ed. John Hunter, Michael Payne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 505; “Poesy therefore

the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or of the different throughout a base radically the same”<sup>103</sup> rather than in “counterfeiting”<sup>104</sup> in an attempt “to teach and delight.”<sup>105</sup> Therefore, we see again in Shakespeare’s use of mimesis how the *Sonnets* put familiar poetic devices to work in radically different ways, this time by making metaphor the basis for mimesis and thereby using poetic imitation to point to the presence of a lyrical “I” as it frames reality<sup>106</sup> rather than to an ideally copied (less than) ideal beloved.

That this lyrical “I” is the subject of love-as-passion – paradoxically, perhaps, to the contemporary reader – is also betrayed by his entreaties for his beloved to marry someone else. As Niklas Luhmann notes in *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, the (societal) freedom to choose one’s lover, which emerged in the seventeenth century as a key driver for the development of a semantic code for *amour passion*<sup>107</sup> and which, as this paper argues in Fineman’s wake, also informs the problematization of amorous subjectivity in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, was contingent on one crucial condition: “It cannot be emphasized enough that the freedom to choose someone to love applies to the extra-marital relationships of married persons. . . Freedom thus began with marriage.”<sup>108</sup> With this in mind, a parallel reading of Sonnet 6 comes into play in which marriage is merely a pretext, a metaphorical offshore account through which the amorous “I” can pay a “willing loan” and lay claim to his beloved without being accused of “forbidden usury.”

### Sonnet 7

“Sonnet 7 has little to recommend it, imaginatively; both the conceit of the sun’s predictable day-long *jour-ney* . . . and the conceit of the fall of favorites from public respect are well-worn topics,”<sup>109</sup> Helen Vendler says about Sonnet 7 in

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is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* . . . to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight.”

103. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Prose and Verse: Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1840), p. 324.

104. Sidney, in Hunter, Payne, ed., p. 505.

105. Sidney, in Hunter, Payne, ed., p. 505.

106. Cf. Michael Davis, *The Poetry of Philosophy: On Aristotle’s Poetics* (South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine’s Press, 1999), p. 3, “Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. Mimesis involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more ‘real’ the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes.”

107. Cf. Luhmann, p. 48.

108. Luhmann, p. 50.

109. Vendler, pp. 76–77.

what Fineman would agree is an accurate description of “a reader’s first responses to the poem”:

In general terms the sonnet’s point could not be clearer. The third quatrain follows on the octave like the night the day, but only so the couplet can in turn assure us that the young man’s son revives the young man’s sun. As in all the other procreation sonnets, therefore, we are invited to identify the young man with his issue, for this will make the young once again a “new-appearing sight” whose reappearance reconverts “the eyes (fore duteous) [that] now converted are.” . . . And it is this reasoning, as much as the implicit, though significantly never explicit, rhyme of “sun” with “son,” that governs a reader’s first responses to the poem.<sup>110</sup>

However, as Fineman goes on to describe, “by likening the son to both a youthful and an aged brightness, . . . sonnet 7 interferes with, even as it argues for, the sameness of the young man’s repetition,”<sup>111</sup> thereby bringing into play a “diagonal” reading of the poem that causes “the reader [to experience] a difference, not a likeness, in the ‘imitation’ that he reads about.”<sup>112</sup> Once again, as seen in Sonnet 6, Shakespeare’s use of mimesis is such that it “[identifies] likeness with difference.”<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of all its elaborate ingenuity, Shakespeare’s use of imitation as a differentiating device fails to differentiate the young man’s image from the multitude of conventional images that it is modeled on. The ceremonious vocabulary and tone of Sonnet 7 sound alien to the lover’s idiom that the previous sonnets have worked so hard to establish, so that the more the sonnet sermonizes the young man, the more even the most duteous readers’ eyes are inclined to turn away from the young man’s image, fulfilling the couplet’s prophecy of an “unlooked on” beloved.

Readers may very well content themselves with such an alteration of their view of the beloved’s image as long as they, like Vendler, consider Sonnet 7 as a conventionally boring literary exercise with only “word-games” to salvage it,<sup>114</sup> or as long as, like Fineman, they use Sonnet 7 to highlight how Shakespeare’s use of imitation uses difference to differentiate itself from a conventional, idealizing form of mimesis. However, an amorous reading of Sonnet 7, one that conceives of

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110. Fineman, p. 260.

111. Fineman, p. 261.

112. Fineman, p. 355.

113. Fineman, p. 261.

114. Cf. Vendler, p. 77, “It was perhaps because his topics here were so entirely conventional that Shakespeare looked to word-games to put him on his mettle in composing the poem.”

the sonnet as a love poem and hence the utterance of an amorous “I,” must account for the change in the lyrical “I’s” tone and the alleged temporary breakdown in his imaginative faculties that combine in Sonnet 7 to place the beloved’s previously so painstakingly cultivated image in the blind spot of both the poet’s and the readers’ eyes.

“The lover’s discourse is usually a smooth envelope which encases the Image, a very gentle glove around the loved being. It is a devout, orthodox discourse,”<sup>115</sup> Roland Barthes says in what could serve as an apt description of the “gracious” and “sacred” “homage” that Sonnet 7 appears to be to the “majestic” image of the young man as he is likened to the sun at the “highmost pitch” of “his golden pilgrimage.” However, as described above, Sonnet 7 alters this image by simultaneously likening the succession of the young man’s glory to its own decline, subverting the referential frame of the sonnet’s feudal metaphors and thereby “exposing” the young man “as *subjected* to an instance which is itself of a servile order . . . , yielding to worldly rites by which some sort of recognition is hoped for.”<sup>116</sup> Procreation is once again revealed as an inadequate means of preserving the beauty of both the young man and his image, since the very act of engaging in the rite of breeding in order to protract the recognition of his beauty would also shatter the young man’s image as the “gracious” sun, making him appear as a mere vassal to time, an “under-eye” that is forced to acknowledge the glaring triviality of its brightness in the glittering light of the real thing: a sun that does not need to reproduce itself to shine anew.

This is a conclusion that Sonnet 7 does not shy away from but, appropriately, blushes to formulate: the shame entailed in procreation, the blasphemy<sup>117</sup> of eternalizing one’s self by pointing to one’s own mortality in such a commonplace manner, is palpable in the abrupt clumsiness of Sonnet 7’s couplet and its pun, symptomatic of an amorous “I’s” “horror of spoiling”<sup>118</sup> his beloved’s image and paving the way for the gradual undoing of procreation as a metaphor for soul-making in the subsequent sonnets.

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115. Barthes, p. 28.

116. Barthes, p. 26.

117. Cf. Barthes, p. 28, “When the Image alters, the envelope of devotion rips apart; a shock capsizes my own language . . . A *blasphemy* abruptly rises to the subject’s lips and disrespectfully explodes the lover’s benediction; he is possessed by a demon who speaks through his mouth, out of which emerge, as in the fairy tales, no longer flowers, but toads. Horrible ebb of the Image. (The horror of spoiling is even stronger than the anxiety of losing.)”

118. Barthes, p. 28.

### Sonnet 8

The alteration of the beloved's image, Barthes says, is like "a counter-rhythm: . . . a syncope in the lovely phrase of the loved being."<sup>119</sup> This counter-rhythm is what an amorous reading registered in Sonnet 7 and what the "well-tuned sounds" of Sonnet 8 profess to offset. However, as Fineman observes, the "true concord" of Sonnet 8 bespeaks the same "excess of likeness" that has been causing a rift in the poet's vision and the young man's "I" from the beginning of the procreation series:

On the one hand, the "mutual ordering" of the fruitful lute "resembles" the concordantly nuclear triangle of "sire, and child, and happy mother." On the other hand, however, this is a marriage of true minds that makes each one of these three – "sire, and child, and happy mother" – too much "resemble" one another. Because each string is "sweet husband to another," there is an excess of likeness in the "all in one" of the lute's "true concord."<sup>120</sup>

On the contrary, the perlocutionary effect of this carefully orchestrated yet not quite *wohltemperiertes* unison manifests itself as an excess of difference: the young man is both annoyed and delighted by the melody – but, paradoxically, remains consistently and blatantly indifferent to the words – of what, in yet another less-than-obvious oxymoron, is characterized as a "speechless song" on the merits of procreation. This difference, which is intrinsic to the poet's lute as much as to the young man's "discordant unity,"<sup>121</sup> is further amplified through the lyrical "I's" binoculars as it observes, with obsessive relish, the minutest reactions that his own recital elicits from his beloved. Such excessive vigilance, Luhmann says, is the upshot of the totalizing experience a passionate lover undergoes:

Taking excess as the measure of love provided the basis for a new set of considerations. Above all, love totalizes. It makes everything that has something to do with the beloved, even trifling, appear relevant, and thus bestows a value on everything that enters its field of vision. The totality of the beloved's inner experience and activities demand continuous observation and assessment in terms of stereotyped oppositions such as love/indifference or sincere/insincere love.<sup>122</sup>

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119. Barthes, p. 25.

120. Fineman, p. 257.

121. Cf. Fineman, p. 259, "The young man embodies a discordant unity. . . And so too does the lute itself, whose sounding and moral both belie each other."

122. Luhmann, p. 68.

The implicit question Sonnet 8 seeks to answer, therefore, is whether the young man is a loving or an indifferent other. But to answer that question, the young man must first decide whether the sonnet can be interpreted as a sincerely amorous utterance. In the context of Sonnet 8, this is not an analytical but a musical question: by understanding Sonnet 8 as a “speechless song,” a passionately contrapuntal *Lied ohne Worte*, the young man can decipher the true meaning of the sonnet’s elaborate theatricality, the staged setting in which the lyrical “I” is looking anxiously at his beloved’s face as he listens to his lute, hoping that he will respond to the melody but remain indifferent to the message of his tune.

In this respect, Vendler’s observation that “the true intent of the verbal imagination is always to *make a chain of interesting signifiers*, with the ‘message’ tucked in as best the poet can,”<sup>123</sup> is spot-on: Sonnet 8 is concerned with signs, which “are not proofs,”<sup>124</sup> and hence it “falls back, paradoxically, on the omnipotence of language . . . as the sole and final assurance.”<sup>125</sup> Sonnet 8 is a failed rhetorical exercise: the lyrical “I” too “confounds . . . the parts that [it should] bear.” But its failure is a testament to Shakespeare’s greatness in both the art of poetry and the art of seduction since neither the verbal, nor the passionately amorous imagination needs justification<sup>126</sup> for its excessiveness; both are self-referential<sup>127</sup> because “in both poetry and love, reality is what is created.”<sup>128</sup>

### Sonnet 9: Summary

The first eight procreation sonnets point to the presence of an amorous “I” implicitly but with increasing momentum as the rhetorical force of the procreation argument is gradually subdued by the poetic logic and language of seduction. It is not until the couplet of Sonnet 9 that the word “love” is first mentioned in the procreation series, giving the young man and the reader an unequivocal indication of what is at stake for the first time. The sonnet, however, says nothing about love; it only presents its negative image – the likeness of a “makeless,” “issueless,” formless, weeping and wailing world banished from the bosom of beauty and of love.

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123. Vendler, p. 82.

124. Barthes, p. 215.

125. Barthes, p. 215.

126. Cf. Luhmann, p. 70, “[A]ll the justifications given for love failed in the final instance. To give some definite reason would be to contradict the spirit of love.”

127. On the self-referentiality of the code for *amour passion*, see Luhmann, pp. 67–70, or Shakespeare, *A Lover’s Complaint*, lines 264–266, “O most potential love; vow, bond, nor space / In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine, / For thou art all, and all things else are thine.”

128. Frye, p. 31.

But is it really the world that the young man's lack of thrift is causing to suffer? In the sonnet's peculiar frame of reference, it is "on himself" that the young man "such murd'rous shame commits," undermining the apparent treatise on love as an instrument of the common good. Ultimately, the young man is urged to show his love for others by reproducing *for his own sake*, which adds a twist to the procreation argument: the young man must reproduce out of love for others but not necessarily with the other that he loves. Sonnet 9 is significant in the amorous narrative because it explicitly calls upon the young man "to prove his love in his role as lover"<sup>129</sup> without specifying the identity of his other, and thereby it creates suspense that only the explicit appearance of the *Sonnets'* amorous "I" and the rhyming of "me" with "thee" will dissipate in Sonnet 10.

In my analysis of the first nine procreation sonnets, I have attempted to show that the entry on stage of the lyrical "I" in Sonnet 10 and, specifically, his entry on stage as a lover are not random occurrences; rather, they result from a methodical carving out of the passionate lover's position in a traditionally epideictic discourse. Drawing and expounding on Joel Fineman's analysis of Shakespeare's use of mimesis in the young man sonnets, I have attempted to illustrate how the initial procreation sonnets break with the idealizing practice of mimesis by using metaphor to introduce difference in the sameness of the procreation argument. In addition, I have attempted to point out different ways in which this metaphorical mimesis infuses the individual sonnets' syntax and rhetoric by pointing to the presence of an "I" that construes itself as an amorous soul in the making and as a model for his other's soul-making.

By no means do the resulting readings of Sonnets 1–9 constitute attempts at complete commentary: there is a lot more to be said about each sonnet. What this paper has tried to illustrate through these readings is that each of these sonnets can be read amorously, that is, as an utterance by an as-yet-implicit but more and more audaciously amorous "I." These amorous readings are metaphorical: each of them uses key metaphors from the sonnet under scrutiny to accentuate the ways in which these metaphors enter into contradictions with the sonnet's rhetorical claims. In addition, I have also attempted to point out similarities between the sonnets' metaphors and those used by Roland Barthes in his representation of *A Lover's Discourse* to underpin the sense of familiarity an amorous reader will experience when reading the procreation sonnets. I see this parallel as further justification for Fineman's claim that the subjectivity developed in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is a prototype for the modern subject of love as passion – a claim that I have also tried to illustrate with passages from Niklas Luhmann's analysis of how this type of subjectivity developed in the context of the social code for love.

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129. Luhmann, p. 71.

Admittedly, such metaphorically imitative readings of the *Sonnets* will resort to hypothesizing a certain amount of ingeniousness and role play on the lyrical “I’s” part. However, I believe this is a more elegant way of resolving the apparent conflict between the initial procreation sonnets’ oratory and poetics since it allows the reader to reanimate and relate to each of these sonnets as instances of amorous poetry, rather than forcing him or her to write some of them off as “fanciful” *études* on Shakespeare’s part in the art of sonneteering. This is how the amorous readings proposed in this article differ from the predominantly formalist approaches adopted by critics like Helen Vendler, whose brilliant observations this paper has nevertheless also relied on extensively since its aim is not to argue against such readings, but to build on their insights, follow up their misgivings, and thereby present an alternative to them, retracing the pathways of desire that lead to the appearance of an amorous “I” in Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets.

**János Barcsák**

## **Creativity, Singularity, Ethics in Pope's *Essay on Criticism***

This paper discusses Pope's *Essay on Criticism* in terms of Derek Attridge's theory of creativity. It argues that Pope's text is fundamentally based on the same commitment to the other that Attridge describes as constitutive of the singularity of literature and hence the 300-year-old *Essay* is a vital text which communicates itself to the present in significant ways. The success of poetry for Pope depends primarily on an appropriate relation to nature and the first chapter of this paper argues that the way Pope describes this relation is very similar to Attridge's description of the relation to the other. The three subsequent chapters discuss how Pope's concept of "expression" continues this theme and describes the pitfalls as well as the success of relating to nature as the other. The last two sections discuss the *Essay's* treatment of the rules. It is shown that the way the rules are presented in the *Essay* reflects Pope's fundamental ethical commitment no less than his concepts of nature and "true expression" do.

In his book, *Reconstructing Criticism: Pope's Essay on Criticism and the Logic of Definition*, Philip Smallwood reads Pope's *Essay* in the context of our modern perplexities about the concept of criticism.<sup>1</sup> He argues that the poem can "define a concept of 'criticism' able to penetrate our own thwarted struggles to say what criticism is."<sup>2</sup> The definition Smallwood traces in the *Essay* can thus correct some of our modern misconceptions about criticism and provide a framework in which all the important elements that have been associated with criticism fall into place and become interpreted as parts of an untotalizable whole. Smallwood's insights about criticism and his interpretation of Pope's *Essay* are interesting enough in themselves; however, what I find even more significant than these – and what I would like to emulate in this paper – is that he presents an image of Pope as a *vital* poet.

Since David Fairer's book on *Pope's Imagination*<sup>3</sup> this aspect of Pope's achievement has been somewhat neglected. From the mid-1980's new readings of

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1. Philip Smallwood, *Reconstructing Criticism: Pope's Essay on Criticism and the Logic of Definition* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

2. Smallwood, p. 151.

3. David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

his poetry, equipped with the techniques and strategies of “cultural studies” and “theory,” started to challenge the ideological positions that Pope apparently adopts by pointing out how the texts undermine these ideologies and by drawing attention to the troubling incongruities under the sugary surface of the neat heroic couplets.<sup>4</sup> This approach was countered by “the opposite image of Pope as embattled humanist, employing as precept and example his considerable poetic talents to turn the tide of cultural mediocrity that he saw as threatening to overtake his society.”<sup>5</sup> These approaches have no doubt produced many a valuable insight into Pope’s poetry over the last two decades. However, they both tend to neglect Pope’s significance for the present, the fact that his poetry raises issues and offers solutions that are of vital importance in our modern experience, as well.

This is why it is particularly refreshing to encounter an approach like Smallwood’s which assumes that – besides its historical and cultural embeddedness – Pope’s three-hundred-year-old *Essay on Criticism* also communicates itself to the present. To account for this communicative success Smallwood needs to postulate an informing vision which underlies and organizes all the disparate elements of the poem; a unified vision which exists beyond the multiplicity and apparent incongruity of the statements of the text. It is this unified vision which gets communicated to our present-day experience even in spite of the fact that it is formulated in the material of rather heterogeneous statements and contemporary allusions. To postulate such an “organic unity”<sup>6</sup> or, to use Smallwood’s term, “disunified unity,”<sup>7</sup> might appear to be an illegitimate step in the light of much of modern Pope scholarship, which has assumed and convincingly argued for the fundamental disunity of Pope’s texts. However, as Smallwood’s results have clearly demonstrated, the opposite assumption can also be fruitful; and what can better legitimate any postulate than the insights gained by it? Besides, what can further justify the validity of this approach is the fact that the postulation of a “disunified unity” in the text is in fact no more than the application of Pope’s own criterion for genuine criticism: the “[s]urvey the *Whole*” (236) principle.<sup>8</sup>

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4. Cf. Jennifer Snead, “No exit? Recent Publications on Pope,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.2 (2005), p. 349.

5. Snead, p. 350.

6. A term used by Patricia Meyer Spacks, author of the most comprehensive and insightful interpretation of the *Essay* previous to Smallwood’s. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Wit Governing Wit,” in *An Argument of Images: The Poetry of Alexander Pope* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 19.

7. Smallwood, p. 151.

8. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Alexander Pope, *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism: The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, Vol. I, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961).

What Pope apparently means by this principle is that one should allow the object of critical study to have its own singular order and organization and not impose one's own prejudices and specific requirements on it. Individual parts of the piece under critical scrutiny must be judged in terms of a unified whole which the critic must postulate. To put it in more modern terms, one must allow the object of study to be *other* and to propose its own terms in which it wants to come to us.

This approach to the poem, therefore, necessarily (and I think quite legitimately) postulates a "unified whole" which underlies the text. The search for this "disunified unity," however, is by no means a simple process: it entails certain methodological requirements. It is quite clear, first of all, that such a unity is not to be found in the discursive content of the text alone: one must also consider how "the poetry" interacts with the propositions of the text. In other words, one must see how formal elements (rhythms, rhymes) and especially the use of imagery demonstrate the meaning of the statements and how they also qualify, problematize and enrich the meaning.<sup>9</sup> This approach, however, will still not yield the "unified vision" which we seek. As Smallwood puts it "it is one thing to say that the *Essay on Criticism* uses imagery, another to say where all the imagery points."<sup>10</sup> Secondly, therefore, one must supplement the study of the local effects of "the poetry" with a study of how all (or at least most of) the images stem from and embody the same unified vision. Thirdly, one must keep in mind throughout this whole process that the unified vision which one seeks can never be exactly identified or abstracted from its particular manifestation in the text. Such a clear identification would be a reduction of the alterity of the work and would violate the "[s]urvey the *Whole*" principle. We postulate the whole precisely in order to avoid the danger of finding it in any particular formulation which is not the entirety of the text itself.

No matter how carefully one observes this last methodological precaution, however, one can still not eschew one's ideological positionality. Inevitably, one brings to the text what one discovers in it. It is thus that Smallwood finds in the *Essay* a "definition" of criticism and it is thus that I will propose my own reading, too. In particular, what I will propose as a unifying vision in the poem is a genuine experience of creativity. I will argue, in other words, that what organizes the heterogeneous and often seemingly paradoxical discursive content and the poetry (the similes, metaphors, imagery) of the text into a "disunified unity" is an attempt to account for this unaccountable but also undeniable experience. I will base my argument on an analogy that I think can be established between Pope's poem and

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9. This method of analysis has been beautifully outlined and employed in Patricia Meyer Spacks's *An Argument of Images*.

10. Smallwood, p. 152.

Derek Attridge's ideas about creativity<sup>11</sup> in art and especially literature. I choose Attridge's theory as a starting point because I think that it is perhaps the most lucid and systematic treatment of this aspect of the issue of creativity and, besides, it is clearly based – just as Pope's *Essay* is – on lived and felt experience.<sup>12</sup>

This comparison might at first seem to be striking, since no two things seem further apart than Attridge's tolerant and inclusive approach to the experience of creativity and Pope's strict, judgmental, rule-governed neoclassical attitude.<sup>13</sup> I will argue, however, that in spite of these apparent differences Pope ultimately speaks from the same ethical position as Attridge. Even the neoclassical rules, which seem entirely antithetical to Attridge's conception of creativity,<sup>14</sup> are treated by Pope to strengthen this ethical position. In fact, I will argue, Pope's discussion of the rules can be seen as a useful extension of Attridge's ethical position and might thus be seen as vitally relevant in our 21st century discourse on literature.

### Nature as the Other

For Attridge – as for Derrida, on whose essay “Psyche: Invention of the Other”<sup>15</sup> he relies heavily – creativity is always the invention of the other in the double sense of this phrase: firstly, creativity is the invention of the other in the sense that it consists in inventing the other, bringing it into the discourse of the same as the wholly new; but, secondly, if creativity is successful, the credit for this success always goes to the other, and thus creativity is the invention of the other also in the sense that the wholly new is invented *by* the other. What this double meaning of the phrase implies is that although in the experience of creativity we must always aim at creating the other, bringing it into the same, the actual appearance of the other is never something that we can predict, calculate with, or control in any way. What I think fulfils this function of the other in Pope's discussion of creativity in the *Essay on Criticism* is Nature.

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11. The two works that I will primarily rely on are Derek Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other,” *PMLA* 114 (January 1999) 20–31; and Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

12. For a different approach to the connection between modern accounts of creativity and Pope's work see Netta Murray Goldsmith, *Alexander Pope: The Evolution of a Poet* (New York: Ashgate, 2002).

13. Attridge's examples indeed often refer to neoclassical expectations and norms as the representation of the same which the coming of the other breaks down (e.g. Attridge, *Singularity*, pp. 31, 39).

14. Attridge even declares that “literature rests on a certain inaccessibility to rules” (Attridge, *Singularity*, p. 13).

15. Jacques Derrida, “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1–47.

This analogy between modern discussions of alterity and Pope's concept of Nature is of course by no means self-explanatory. Although it is true that the success of any work of art for Pope is dependent on the presence of Nature in the work, the terms in which he describes this concept seem to be directly opposed to the way the other is presented in modern theory. Attridge, for example, conceives of the other as something that is emphatically not an entity, but something that "beckons or commands from the fringes of my mental sphere," it is "other because it has not yet come into being."<sup>16</sup> For Pope, by contrast, Nature is apparently something that is given once and for all: it is a finished entity which exists in the form of a fixed and finite set of rules. This view is clearly expressed for example in the passage where Pope, after the introductory part of the poem, gives his first and most general advice to the poets and critics establishing the ultimate significance of Nature for poetry:

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same:  
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchang'd, and Universal Light,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*. (68–73)

Nature appears here as a never changing, omnipresent standard which has once and for all "fix'd the Limits fit" (52). The snappy brevity of this statement emphasizes arbitrary power and authoritative limitation – characteristics that are not usually associated with the other. However, if we take it seriously that the other should not be thought of primarily as an entity and it exists only in my relating to it,<sup>17</sup> then we cannot fail to observe that the way Attridge describes the creative relation to the other is remarkably similar to what Pope says about how the poet (and critic) should relate to Nature. The relation to the other, as we have learnt from modern theory, must first of all be a relation that lets the other be other; that is, that does not attempt to accommodate or appropriate the other in the same. I can have no demands on the other, while the other makes unconditional demands on me. I must cede control to the other entirely, because without this unconditional surrender it will not come. And indeed this is exactly how Pope describes the way the poet (or critic) must relate to Nature. Nature can in no way be influenced by us, we cannot add anything to it, we cannot take away anything from it: we can make no demands on it whatsoever. On the other hand, Nature demands unconditional

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16. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 23.

17. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 22.

surrender, for it is “At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*” (73): unless it comes, creativity cannot take place, but it will only come if we unconditionally accept its own terms.

In the way the poet or critic must relate to it, therefore, Nature functions in Pope’s *Essay* similarly to the other in modern accounts of creativity.<sup>18</sup> This similarity is further confirmed if we examine the metaphorical devices that Pope uses to convey his ideas about the significance of Nature in poetry. In the passage quoted above the image that expresses the unconditional demand of Nature as the other is the image of light. Light is certainly one of the most prominent images in the poem<sup>19</sup> and its association with Nature in this early and emphatic passage establishes its importance even more firmly. More particularly, what we can observe in these lines is the metaphorical identification of Nature with the source of all light, the sun. Nature, like the unchanging sun, shines on us from above, it gives life, force and beauty to everything: it is the ultimate given. Whether we know about it or not, whether we make use of it or not, the simple and universal order of Nature is always there like the unchanging sun.

This is so far not unexpected at all, since this use of the sun image can be easily accounted for from the characteristic “neo-classical” concept of Nature. Knowing how the Augustans thought of Nature, it is quite appropriate and according to our expectations that the sun should be associated with it.<sup>20</sup> And it is indeed the universal and unchangeable quality of something given that most of the major recurrences of the image of the sun confirm in the poem.<sup>21</sup> Curiously enough, however, there is

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18. My treatment of Nature in terms of the Attridgean conception of the other here and elsewhere in this paper inevitably overlooks a crucial element in Attridge’s theory: his focus on the culture-dependent quality of the other. Indeed one of the most insightful and inspiring elements in Attridge’s theory is his insistence that the other is in fact always just gaps, contradictions, tensions in the tissue of the same. And if this is so, Attridge argues, then the other is always dependent on a particular cultural situation, on a particular arrangement of the same in which those gaps, contradictions, tensions occur (cf. Attridge, *Singularity*, p. 25). It is always only *to* this particular cultural situation that the other is other (cf. Attridge, *Singularity*, p. 29). What is more, the other is also dependent in a similar way on the particular ideoculture of the individual subjectivity which experiences it either in creation or in reading. (cf. Attridge, *Singularity*, pp. 67, 78) This aspect is clearly neglected in Pope’s treatment of the concept of nature. However, I would still maintain that this is only a shift in emphasis rather than a substantial difference. In their description of the experience of encountering and relating to the other, the essential structural similarity between Pope and Attridge remains (see also note 49 below).

19. Cf. Spacks, pp. 32–4.

20. On the neo-classical view of nature see for example Audra and Williams, “Introduction” to *An Essay on Criticism* in Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, pp. 219–22.

21. In lines 399–405 the sun stands for the universal presence of talent and inspiration among the nations and ages, regardless of the particular time or place; and in the passage

an exception to this rule. In an emphatic passage on the concept of “expression” the sun image is used in a very different context:

But true expression, like th’ unchanging sun,  
Clears, and improves whate’er it shines upon,  
It gilds all objects, but it alters none. (315–7)

If we follow the “one image – one meaning” principle in our interpretation of the poem, then these passages clearly contradict each other. The light of the sun is once the universal order of Nature itself and then it is the expression of that order; and the universal order, which was the light itself in the first passage, seems to be the things as they are in the second, it seems to be what the light shines on.

This self-contradiction could of course be glossed over as just one of the many inconsistencies in Pope’s *Essay* that almost all commentators have dutifully noted since John Dennis’s famous attack on the poem.<sup>22</sup> However, paradox can also be looked at as a tool for producing meaning in poetry, and in the light of what has been said about the analogy between Pope’s poem and modern theories of creativity this particular paradox (as well as several other similar ones) can very well be accounted for as a representation of the experience of the coming of the other. Let us assume, therefore, that the paradox that the text establishes here is what Pope means to say. If the light of the sun is the universal order of the world and also the perfect expression of that order, if Nature is the light itself and at the same time it is what the light shines on and makes visible, then we can assume that Pope means to say that these things *are* (or should be) identical. The things as they are and the light in which they become visible are – at least ideally – one and the same thing, which is to say that the light in which things become manifest to us in fact *makes* the things the way they are but without changing them.

This paradoxical situation is indeed very similar to what modern theories of alterity say about the experience of creativity. Creativity occurs, according to these theories, if the other comes into the same. The other is prior to, more original than, the same; as Jacques Derrida puts it, “the other will have spoken first”;<sup>23</sup> nevertheless, the other can only become manifest, and thus can only come into being within

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where the sunlight is associated with Dryden and Homer (466–73), its function is to emphasise the universal and invincible power of “sense” and true “merit.”

22. John Dennis, “Reflections Critical and Satyrical, upon a Late Rhapsody, Call’d, An Essay upon Criticism,” in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 396–419.

23. Jacques Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” in *Memoires: for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 37.

the same, within a medium which is essentially different from it.<sup>24</sup> And it is precisely this double nature of the single experience of creativity that Pope's paradoxical use of the sun image demonstrates. The light of the sun is both Nature (the other) as it in itself is and *true* expression, that is, – to use Attridge's terminology – the same refashioned according to the demands of the other, since this is the only way in which the other can exist.

Nature and true expression, the other and the particular rearrangement of the same according to the demands of the other, are therefore united in the experience of creativity and whenever a work of art is created this union actually takes place. Thus all works of art that are innovative in Attridge's sense,<sup>25</sup> that is, that engender a creative response, bear testimony to the existence of this paradoxical union. For Pope it is the classics that primarily testify to this paradoxical union. It is no wonder, therefore, that in his discussion of the significance of the classics he repeats the same paradox that we have observed in his use of the image of the sun. As it was noted already by John Dennis,<sup>26</sup> Pope creates a paradox when in line 135 of the *Essay* he says that "*Nature* and *Homer* were . . . the same," while in lines 88–9 he claims that they are two different things when he says that the "rules" of the classics (which can here be identified with Homer) "are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*." This self-contradiction clearly exhibits the same pattern as the paradox hidden in the apparently inconsistent use of the light metaphor. In Homer, the text asserts, Nature and its expression, the other in its otherness and the way it becomes manifest to us in poetry, are one and the same thing, they are inseparable in the achievement of the great classical poet. Nevertheless, this ideal unity – as we have also seen in the use of the sun image – exists only as a union of two distinct and irreconcilable elements: Nature as it is in its unchanged and unchangeable order (the other), and its expression. The first of these elements is a universal given: it is totally impervious to any human attempt to alter it, damage it or grasp it (in the sense of extending control over it); the latter is the result of human action.

I believe that this connection between the other and its manifestation in the material of the same forms the basis of the major metaphorical constructs of Pope's poem. It underlies several of the master metaphors in the text, including for example the soul/body, the Nature (or thought)/dress, and the sketch/colour oppositions. In each of these metaphorical oppositions the former element represents the unchangeable, uncontrollable other, while the latter is its manifestation in the

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24. Cf. Attridge ("Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 21): "when I experience alterity, I experience not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other."

25. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 22.

26. Dennis, p. 401.

same; the former is intangible, invisible but, if it gives itself, it invests visible matter with form, while the latter is tangible, visible but in itself formless; the former is unaffected by any outside force and thus the same can have no power over it, while the latter can be brought under human control but is also fallible, corruptible. Ideally, as for example in the classics, these two are like the recto and verso of the same sheet of paper, but because of its origin in the same, the second element is corruptible; it is exposed to human weaknesses.

As Pope conceives of the former element in each of these oppositions in terms of the God-given order of Nature which is beyond the reach of conscious action, it is inevitable that he focuses his attention on the latter element, the one which can be brought under human control and which, therefore, is fallible. His conception of the other in terms of a divine given leads thus to a crucial difference between the *Essay* and modern discussions of the experience of the coming of the other. Whereas modern interpretations of this experience, like for example Attridge's, tend to focus on how the other disrupts and breaks down the same, Pope pays attention primarily to how the same prevents the other from coming, how human efforts to achieve the ideal unity of Nature and its expression tend to fall short of this ideal. This difference, however, is only a difference in the direction of approach, which leaves the fundamental structure of the experience intact. We can, therefore, read Pope's treatment of how the same tends to get in the way of the other as a useful extension of modern theories of creativity. What we can learn from Pope's *Essay* in particular is that the human error which prevents divine Nature from coming is a systematic error; that the various ways in which the same suppresses the other converge on the same recurring mechanism. This systematic error or mechanism is termed in the *Essay* "pride." If we want to understand Pope's treatment of creativity, therefore, it is essential that we first focus on how Pope describes the mechanism of pride.

### **The mechanism of pride: the cloud and a little learning**

Since Pope grounds his discussion of poetry and criticism on the heavily loaded word pride, the terminology he deploys is inevitably that of the moral and the pragmatic – considerations that are quite alien to Attridge and to modern accounts of the literary in general. However, I would like to argue that what informs Pope's moral and pragmatic considerations is always a commitment to the experience of creativity and invention; it is always the responsibility for the other. I will try to show, therefore, that what appears to be pragmatic and moralizing in the *Essay* is in fact always the expression of Pope's ethical commitment. Thus when Pope discusses pride as the ultimate moral error and as the main source of all human failure, his

moral indignation is in fact raised by the lack of sufficient commitment to the other and his pragmatic advice is directed at removing the same which always tends to get in the way of the other.

For Pope, as we have seen, the other (Nature) is like the unchanging sun which comes to us of its own accord, which gives itself whether we ask for it or not, whether we accept it or not, whether we know about it or not. Yet it is an undeniable fact that most of the time this light does not reach us; more often than not the other is prevented from coming into the same. The fact that it is possible for Nature (the other) to inform a human-made artefact is attested to by the classics, but it is undeniable that in most cases we fall short of this perfect union of the same and the other. The reason for this failure cannot be the other; for, according to Pope, it always gives itself like the light of the sun. The reason why this light usually does not reach us is rather that there is always something that stands between us and the light: a cloud that is always rising to obscure our sight and that we must constantly struggle to get rid of. This cloud is identified in the poem as pride:

Of all the Causes which conspire to blind  
 Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind  
 What the weak Head with strongest Byass rules,  
 Is Pride, the never-failing Vice of Fools.  
 .....  
 Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our Defence,  
 And fills up all the *mighty Void of Sense!*  
 If once right Reason drives *that Cloud* away,  
*Truth* breaks upon us with *resistless Day*. . .

(201–12)

The imagery Pope uses here implies a subtle description of the mechanism of pride. Like the cloud, human pride seems to rise without any provocation, without requiring any effort, just by the sheer force of inertia. It flows into, fills any void that it finds – not because it has any purpose or with an intention of doing harm, but because it is an inevitable tendency that gas fills out an empty space and that vapour rises when the sun shines.<sup>27</sup> To get rid of pride, however, we must make an effort; only if the cloud is consciously driven away can we have access to the light of the sun. Pride, in other words, works on the principle of entropy: it always obstructs and hinders, unless we invest great energies to get rid of it.

This description of the mechanism of pride implies a distinct ethical attitude; an attitude which is perhaps worth elaborating on even if in this passage it is only implicit, as it seems to underlie everything that Pope says about the task of the poet

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27. This latter simile is introduced only in lines 470–3 but in a very similar context.

and of the critic later on in the *Essay*. What this imagery implies is that the greatest human achievement is getting rid of one's own pride, the inertia of the same, and ultimately getting rid of that which is always at home in the same: the self. The truth which is simple and clear as the light of day (212) is given by the other, we cannot alter it, we cannot have any impact on it and least of all can we make it. All we can achieve is simply to commit ourselves fully to this truth; that is, to assume full responsibility for the other and for what comes from the other. And what this involves is ultimately driving the cloud of pride away, getting rid of the inertia of the same in order to clear our vision, and allow the gift of the other to come to us. Success, in other words, is the elimination of the self. When we are thus successful, however, the success is in fact not ours. All we achieve is only to drive the cloud away so that the sun can shine in, but the warmth, the clarity, the pure light is not ours; it always comes from the other.

It is a natural tendency, however, and this is also implied in the word "success," to think that when success is achieved, it belongs to the self. The inevitable tendency of the self is to accommodate the gift of the other in the same. However, as soon as we assume that the success is ours, we have fallen into the trap of pride and have blurred our own vision. To think that any success is ours is in fact failure itself. Besides, it is quite ludicrous, too, as in this way we only do harm to ourselves. When we raise the clouds of pride we do not offend against the light. The sun always shines, even above the thickest clouds. We just make it impossible for ourselves to see this light clearly.

As I have said, this mechanism of pride and the ethical commitment that it necessitates can be said to underlie everything that Pope says about the tasks of poetry and of criticism in the poem. His moralizing/pragmatic approach, therefore, derives from and thus becomes an expression of the responsibility for the other. Besides, this fundamental ethical commitment can also account for the conspicuous negativity of Pope's argument. Indeed it is very difficult to find any positive advice in the poem as to the poet's or the critic's task. Pope seems to say in the *Essay* very little about what a poet or a critic *should* do, while he is eloquent on what they *should not* do. In the light of the description of the mechanism of pride and the ethical position that is connected to it, it becomes clear why this is necessarily so. The task is in fact essentially a negative one: poets and critics (as well as any human being in general) must struggle against the force of inertia coming from the same which inevitably hinders all our efforts. The best way for Pope to give pragmatic advice, therefore, is to draw our attention to some particular manifestations of pride in poetry and criticism that typically plague these human activities and that we ought to get rid of.

The first and most general of the hindrances that poets and critics must struggle against is "a little learning," which can even be identified as pride in poetry and in criticism, as it seems to be the source of all errors that poets and critics are prone to.

*A little learning* is a dangerous thing;  
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:  
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
 And drinking largely sobers us again. (215–8)

It is, I think, no wonder that these lines have acquired proverbial status in English. The passage registers an experience that we have all had with such clarity, conciseness and wit that this really comes up to Pope's own standard of true wit: "What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*" (298). The intoxication with a new idea, with a new field of knowledge is a common human experience (a month after you have started taking karate lessons, for example, you take every opportunity to pick a fight because you believe that you can beat anyone). Besides spotting and wittily representing something characteristically human, however, in these couplets Pope also manages to convey a sense of the mechanism of pride which I have tried to describe above. The little learning is acquired without any effort; we are driven to acquire it by our natural curiosity and also by the prospect of inflating our own self by the power this knowledge might give us. Of course, as Pope points out, the best cure for such intoxication by a little learning is more learning (to stick with my previous example: learn more about martial arts and you choose to run away next time when a conflict might develop into a fight). But to acquire more learning we must already invest energy, which is especially difficult because the profit of this investment promises to be only the discovery of our own littleness, our insignificance. The supreme effort required and the disappointment that inevitably results from more learning is beautifully expressed in the passage that follows hard upon the one quoted above and that deploys the famous simile which Dr Johnson judged to be "the best that English poetry can show":<sup>28</sup>

Fir'd at first Sight with what the *Muse* imparts,  
 In *fearless Youth* we tempt the Heights of Arts,  
 While from the bounded *Level* of our Mind,  
 Short Views we take, nor see the Lengths behind,  
 But *more advanc'd*, behold with strange Surprise  
 New, distant Scenes of *endless Science* rise!  
 So pleas'd at first, the towering *Alps* we try,  
 Mount o'er the Vales, and seem to tread the Sky;  
 Th' Eternal Snows appear already past,  
 And the first *Clouds* and *Mountains* seem the last:

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Pope" in *Alexander Pope: A Critical Anthology*, ed. F. W. Bateson and N. A. Joukovsky (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 138.

But *those attain'd*, we tremble to survey  
 The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way,  
 Th' *increasing* Prospect *tires* our wandering Eyes,  
 Hills peep o'er Hills, and *Alps* on *Alps* arise! (219–32)

### What Poetry is not

After his general discussion of the dangers of a “little learning” in poetry and criticism, Pope levels his attack at more particular excesses, more particular manifestations of pride in critical judgment. More specifically, he discusses three typical poetic errors: the excessive use of conceit, the exaggerated fondness for style and eloquence, and the prejudice for smooth rhythms. Pope introduces these three errors in poetry as three ways in which poets tend to favour only one *part* of the poetic task and thus to forget about the *whole*. However, if we examine these three cases, and especially if we study the metaphors and similes that Pope uses in presenting them, we cannot fail to notice that what underlies each of them is precisely the mechanism of pride discussed above.

Each of these errors, then, is a particular instance of the general way in which the same obscures the other. In each case the same, that which should be a “true expression” of Nature (the other), assumes priority and thus prevents the other from coming into it. In each case the poetic medium (language, metre, wit, the use of metaphor), whose *raison d'être* consists only in expressing, making visible, giving way to, the other, draws attention to itself and thus blots out the light of Nature (the other) which should shine through it. And in each case this happens because of the sluggishness, the inertia of the poetic medium, that entropic movement of the same which, like a cloud, always blurs our sight and which Pope terms pride.

In the first instance, the discussion of *conceit*, Pope uses the analogy of painting to represent this entropic movement.

Some to *Conceit* alone their Taste confine,  
 And glitt'ring Thoughts struck out at ev'ry Line;  
 Pleased with a Work where nothing's just or fit;  
 One glaring Chaos and wild Heap of Wit:  
 Poets like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace  
 The naked Nature and the living Grace,  
 With *Gold* and *Jewels* cover ev'ry Part,  
 And hide with *Ornaments* their *Want of Art*. (289–96)

I think it is not difficult to see the mechanism of pride in operation here. The excessive use of witty similes or conceits in poetry is compared to the practice of bad

painters who try to draw the viewer's attention away from the lack of the true light of Nature in their painting by the abundant use of glaring colours. In other words, Pope juxtaposes here the difficult but truly creative activity of assuming responsibility for the other (tracing "the *naked Nature*") with the cheap sensuous effect of using a lot of glaring colours. The latter procedure, just as the use of too much wit in poetry, is merely a manifestation of the inertia of the same, it is an easy way to impress an audience, but its real effect is in fact to cause a kind of blindness. Like pride in general, the use of too much wit in poetry or too much colour in painting prevents the true light of Nature from coming to us. The image of the cloud is replaced here by the image of the blinding light of glaring colours but the effect is the same: we become unable to see the light, the gift of the other.<sup>29</sup>

This point is illuminated further in the next section of the poem where Pope attacks the excessive emphasis that bad poets sometimes lay on *language*, that is to say, on style and eloquence.

Others for *Language* all their Care express,  
And value *Books*, as Women *Men*, for *Dress*. . . (305–6)

The dress metaphor is evoked here and receives its most extensive treatment a few lines further on in this passage. I will examine Pope's use of this metaphor at some length in the next section. However, it is proper to observe at this point that there is a conspicuous similarity between the painting analogy and this metaphor, which, I think, is occasioned by the fact that the mechanism of pride underlies both. Dress, thus, appears here as a representation of the same (the poetic medium, language) whose proper function – as Pope explains elsewhere (297; 318–23) – is to show its wearer's features to advantage. It fulfils its role if it makes the man (Nature, the other) visible. However, in the absence of Nature, the dress inevitably tends to draw

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29. A similar situation is outlined in Pope's other use of the painting analogy in a previous passage where he develops a contrast between judgement and false learning:

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the *Seeds* of Judgment in their Mind;  
Nature affords at least a *glimm'ring Light*;  
The *Lines*, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.  
But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,  
Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd,  
So by *false Learning* is good *Sense* defac'd. . . (19–25)

Judgment (or at least the seeds of it) is associated here with Nature, it is a natural given. This natural given is analogous with the sketch, the design in painting, which the inappropriate use of colour, associated here with false learning, spoils in much the same way as too much wit spoils "the naked nature" in the passage on conceit.

attention to itself and thus to blind the observer with its excessive finery. A coxcomb (whose image is clearly implied in the use of the dress metaphor above) is tempted to such excesses because this is an easy way to create a dazzling effect. However, like the coxcombs of Restoration comedy, the wearers of such excessively decorated clothes use their dress only to cover up for their inner insufficiency, for the lack of Nature within. Similarly, if poets are excessively eloquent, they in fact only display the lack of Nature, the absence of the other in their work. The style and eloquence, which belong to the same, only serve for such poets as a dazzling effect to blur the sight of the beholder.

The next section in the poem presents yet another manifestation of the working of pride. In this passage Pope attacks the attraction of weak poets to smooth, rocking, but therefore monotonous rhythms, to what is referred to here as *numbers*.

But most by *Numbers* judge a Poet's Song,  
And *smooth* or *rough*, with them, is *right* or *wrong*. . . (337–8)

This poetic error, it becomes clear, is once again a falling away from the ideal unity of the same and the other, of expression and Nature. This ideal unity is represented here in the requirement that

'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,  
The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*. (364–5)

“*Sound*” and “*Sense*” are of course on a different level than Nature and expression, but the pattern is recognizably the same: sound, if we give way to our inclinations, gets in the way of sense and obscures what it should make visible.

### **What, then, is poetry?**

In these three passages (on conceit, on “language” and on “numbers”) Pope discusses, as is his usual way in the *Essay*, what poetry is not. However, from these primarily negative descriptions we can also gain some positive insight into the nature of true poetry. If the greatest poetic error is to let the poetic medium (the same) obscure the pure light of Nature (the other), then the poetic task, positively outlined, is to get rid of all that is contingent in the poetic medium, to purify it to the point where it becomes entirely transparent and thus lets the light of Nature shine through it.

This task, however, is a doubly paradoxical one. It is paradoxical, first of all, because it is a task of self-annihilation. The poetic medium (be it language, wit or meter) fulfils its function only when it ceases to be itself and exists only by virtue of something more valuable beyond it: Nature (the other). However, as we could see

above, the poetic medium is also essentially necessary, because, and this is the second paradox, it is only through this medium (the same) that the other can become manifest. On the one hand, then, the poetic medium is something that must be conquered, that we must struggle against and ultimately eliminate; on the other hand, however, it is only in this particular struggle, it is only in the face of the essential sluggishness and inertia of the same, that creativity can take place.

This paradoxical situation can I think very well be accounted for by what Derek Attridge describes as the act/event structure of creativity. "Creation, then," Attridge explains,

is both an act and an event, both something that is done and something that happens. Since there is no recipe, no program, for creation (this is part of what we mean by *creation*), it cannot be purely a willed act; but since creation requires preparation and labor, it cannot be purely an event.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed for Pope, as we have seen, the appearance of "the naked Nature" in successful poetry is not something that can be actively forced or controlled; it is rather the event when "[t]ruth breaks upon us with resistless day" (212) or, as Attridge puts it,<sup>31</sup> "the irruption of the other" – an event which we can only passively receive. However, this miraculous event can only come to pass by and in the active manipulation of the poetic medium; it can only exist as an act, as "the active reshaping of existing configurations,"<sup>32</sup> as the active manipulation of the same. When discussing the poetic task, therefore, Pope in fact talks about how the active manipulation of the poetic medium can make it possible that the event of creativity take place. Hence the paradoxes: the active manipulation of the same must always be the act of completely "surrendering one's goals and desires in deference to the other's,"<sup>33</sup> that is to say, annihilating the same; but at the same time the event of the coming of the other can only take place by and in the act of manipulating the same (the poetic medium) and thus the same and the conscious activity of the poet in his medium are also indispensable in the act/event of creativity.

What ultimately underlies Pope's discussion of the paradoxical task of poetry is, therefore, the experience of creativity whose structure is easily recognizable in the three passages discussed in the previous section. In the passage on *conceit* (289–96), for example, Pope uses the painting analogy to this effect. When we look at the painting, he suggests, what we should see is just "[t]he *naked Nature* and the *living Grace*," not the colour. However, he does not say that there is no need for colour. In

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30. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 22. Cf. also Attridge, *Singularity*, p. 43.

31. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 22.

32. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 21.

33. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 27.

fact it seems that colour is referred to as the necessary medium of painting, but the painter's task is to make this medium entirely transparent, to let "the naked Nature" shine through it. The use of colour is not in itself a fault, in fact it is a necessity, it is as necessary – to anticipate a metaphor that I will discuss later – as a physical body is necessary for a soul to become manifest. The fault is when one lets the colour dominate in the painting and thus obscure "the naked Nature" instead of letting it come forth, instead of manifesting it as it demands to be manifested. Similarly, what Pope seems to say here about wit in poetry (by which at this point he clearly means the use of simile and metaphor) is not that it is in itself a fault. On the contrary, on the analogy of colour in painting it seems that wit is a necessary medium, it is the medium in which alone poetry can operate. What Pope criticizes is the use of *false wit*, as in conceits, which tends to obscure the light of "[t]he *naked Nature* and the *living Grace*." "*True Wit*," as opposed to this,

is *Nature* to Advantage drest,  
 What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*,  
*Something*, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,  
 That gives us back the Image of our Mind. . . (297–300)

This passage is a central one in the poem and has therefore deservedly attracted a great deal of critical attention. However, much of the critical commentary on these lines has been directed at pointing out the inaccuracy of Pope's statements. What I think the commentators tend to overlook is that the centrality of this passage in the conceptual framework of the *Essay* is due to the fact that it is perhaps the most explicit statement in the poem of the paradoxical structure of the experience of creativity. If we examine these lines in the light of what has been said about the act/event duality, it turns out that what has seemed to some commentators to be a mere paradox, or at least an inaccuracy, is in fact constitutive of Pope's creative account of the creative experience.

What critics have traditionally found fault with in this passage is the metaphorical identification of poetic expression with dress; an identification which is further confirmed in another famous passage on "language":

Expression is the *Dress* of *Thought*, and still  
 Appears more *decent*, as more *suitable*;  
 A vile Conceit in pompous Words exprest,  
 Is like a Clown in regal Purple drest. . . (318–21)

In a letter to Pope Aaron Hill objected to the "*Nature* to Advantage drest" formula and went on to criticize the second passage suggesting that "the idea must have been *shape* (not *dress*) of *thought*; dress, however an ornament, being a *concealment*, or

*covering*; whereas expression is manifestation and *exposure*.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Dr Johnson was dissatisfied with the “What oft was *Thought*, but ne’er so well *Exprest*” phrasing, indicating that it merely meant the verbal elaboration of an accepted commonplace.<sup>35</sup> Following his lead Norman Callan suggests that if we altered this line to “What oft was thought, but ne’er so well thought” we would probably come nearer to an accurate description of Pope’s actual procedure. These criticisms are of course valuable in each case as they help to make interesting critical points clear. In the light of the two passages quoted above, however, we just cannot ignore the fact that for Pope to express *is* to dress<sup>36</sup> and that the dress, the expression, is not merely an outer cover but an essential constituent of the thought that it exposes.

I think that what we can thus recognize in Pope’s insistence on the metaphorical identification of expression and dress is precisely the paradoxical act/event structure of creativity. Pope insists that the experience of creativity can only be accounted for as the coincidence of two entirely incompatible notions: on one side we find the person who wears the dress (Nature, thought, the other), while on the other side there is the dress (expression, the poetic medium, the same). Of these two the first is a given: we cannot change it or influence it in any way. The latter, by contrast, can be tailored, manipulated, consciously controlled. The two are in themselves entirely incompatible, the same being *defined* as that which gets in the way of the other, the poetic medium as that which tends to obscure Nature, and the dress as that which covers and conceals. In the event of creativity, however, these essentially opposing sides suddenly coincide: the same becomes a container of the other, Nature shines through the poetic medium and the well-tailored dress shows off its wearer’s features to the best advantage. When this event takes place, it can only be accounted for as the coming of the other: we become aware of “*Something*, whose Truth convinc’d at Sight we find,” we are given immediate (unmediated) access to Nature (the other). Therefore, as we could see in what I have called the first paradox

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34. Quoted in Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 221.

35. In *Peculiar Language*, Derek Attridge also agrees that Pope is proposing here “the most pithy and the most familiar statement of the commonplace” (Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* [London: Routledge, 2004], p. 49). For him, however, this is not a shortcoming in Pope but a solution to the problems raised by the supplementary relation of art to nature (see below).

36. It is, I think, also significant that in both these passages Pope rhymes dress with express. In the light of W. K. Wimsatt’s analyses of Pope’s use of rhyme, we cannot but assume that he rhymes these words because he wants to indicate the essential connection between the two notions. Cf. W. K. Wimsatt, “One Relation of Rhyme to Reason,” in *The Verbal Icon* (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 161.

of creativity, the same seems to fulfil its function in self-annihilation: the good dress disappears as it makes its wearer visible and, similarly, good poetry (“true wit”) becomes invisible as it exposes the naked Nature. However, what comes thus, and this is the second paradox, can only come by virtue of the same: without the dress its wearer’s beauty could never become manifest, without the poetry Nature could never be exposed. It is only by virtue of what is in itself opposed to it that the other can come to light. Only by covering/concealing can the dress make visible and, similarly, only by being (and remaining) a *medium* can poetry provide *unmediated* access to Nature.<sup>37</sup>

To understand the experience of creativity, therefore, it is essentially important to keep these two notions apart: poetic expression is only dress, it cannot account for what comes through and in it; however, that which comes can only come (and therefore only exists) through and in the self-annihilation (responsibility) of the dress of poetic expression. It is this situation that can provide an answer to Dr. Johnson’s objection, too. When Pope insists that what must be made visible in poetry is “what oft was *Thought*,” he by no means implies, as Johnson believed he did, the received commonplace. What he implies is rather what Attridge describes as the tangled temporality and unusual causality of the experience of creativity.<sup>38</sup> What comes in this experience is “[s]omething, whose Truth convinc’d at Sight we find,” something that “breaks upon us” with the evidence of that which we have always already known and thought. As such it necessarily precedes in its being the experience in which it comes to us and is perceived as the cause of this experience. However, this does not imply that what we become aware of in this way is a received commonplace. Far from it; this realization of what we have always thought can in fact only take place within that singular encounter with a work of art. Without the experience, without the particular dress of poetic expression, I would never have been able to realize that I have always known this truth. My encounter with a particular poetic expression, therefore, *causes* me to realize that truth and thus it chronologically precedes the truth, too. What Attridge says about the creative process can thus be easily adapted to what Pope says in this passage about the encounter with a truly creative work:

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37. In *Peculiar Language* Derek Attridge describes a similar dynamic in the relation between nature and art in terms of the Derridean concept of supplementarity (*Peculiar Language*, pp. 17–45). Taking Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* as a starting point and guiding thread Attridge shows here in a brilliant and many-faceted analysis how the supplementary relation between art and nature is formulated in the thought of the renaissance and how it keeps determining the inquiry into the peculiar language of literature in later ages, including Pope’s age, too (on Pope see *Peculiar Language*, pp. 46–49).

38. Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics,” p. 28.

As has often been remarked, the sense of finding the appropriate word in a poetic line or articulating the next stage of an argument is that of achieving what one was seeking and would be accurately expressed not by “At last, I’ve made something new!” but rather by “At last I’ve got it right!” or even “At last I’ve got it!” . . . what is foremost in the creative mind is the issue neither of originality nor of communication; it is the demand that justice be done to thoughts that have not yet even been formulated as thoughts.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, what Pope seems to imply in the “What oft was *Thought*, but ne’er so well *Express*” formula is that the encounter with truly creative poetry produces not an experience of “I have never thought of this!” but an experience of “I have always thought this but could never put it so exactly!” The thought I encounter is thus the very image of my mind and true poetry merely gives my very own thought *back* to me.<sup>40</sup>

The paradoxical task of poetry is further elucidated in the passage on *language* where – apart from developing the dress metaphor as discussed above – Pope also introduces another simile, that of the prism. This simile is a further instance of Pope’s deployment of the imagery of light and thus its primary function, as we would expect, is to explain how the prism of “false eloquence” (*language*, the same) obscures the plain light of Nature (the other).

*False Eloquence*, like the *Prismatic Glass*,  
Its gawdy Colours spreads on *ev’ry place*;  
The Face of Nature we no more Survey,  
All glares *alike*, without *Distinction* gay:  
But true *Expression*, like th’ unchanging *Sun*,  
*Clears*, and *improves* whate’er it shines upon,  
It *gilds* all Objects, but it *alters* none. (311–7)

The mechanism of pride is clearly perceivable in Pope’s use of the image of the prism here. The prism, as false eloquence, stands in the way between the sun and what it shines on. It should mediate the light as directly as possible, but instead of doing this, it draws attention to itself, to its own “gawdy Colours,” and thus stains the white light and blurs our sight.

Apart from this negative function, however, the prism image is also used here to explain, by a logical and metaphorical contrast, the nature of “true expression”; that is to say, the nature of the poetic task. “[T]rue *Expression*” is introduced in this passage as the remedy for the pride of “*False Eloquence*” and it is compared to the

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39. Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics,” p. 24.

40. See on this Attridge, *The Singularity*, p. 46.

sun itself. We have seen in the section on “Nature as the Other” how this metaphorical identification between poetic expression and the sun forms an implicit paradox in the *Essay*, the sun image being associated both with Nature and with the poetic expression of it. If we now examine the more particular context in which this metaphorical identification appears, we will notice that it only further confirms the paradoxical act/event structure of creativity, highlighting what I have called in this section the double paradox of the poetic task.

What we first notice when we examine this more particular context is that the use of the sun image to represent true expression is no less striking here than it is in the context of the whole of the *Essay*. The phrase “true expression” obviously refers to the deployment of the poetic medium (the same) and we would therefore not expect it to be connected with the image of the sun which is here – as elsewhere in the poem – the representation of the source, Nature, the other. If false eloquence is compared to a prism, it would perhaps be more appropriate to contrast this prism to the *clear glass* of true expression; and indeed if we replace the sun image here with that of a clear window, we do not run into any contradictions either in this passage or in the whole of the poem. Pope’s point is that poetry, unlike the prism of false eloquence, should allow the light of the sun to come through without obstruction, and this can in fact best be compared to the effect of a clear window. It is also quite in accordance with Pope’s meaning here and elsewhere that the ultimate task of the poet is to clear the window, to make the poetic medium entirely transparent. Only if this is achieved can poetry come to fulfil its function, which is to provide unmediated access to the other. Only a clear window can provide us with a pure, distortion-free vision of the naked Nature.

We cannot assume, however, that Pope’s use of the sun image instead of the more appropriate and also implicitly present window image is just accidental. By implying the clear glass image and then replacing it with the image of the sun he in fact draws attention to what I have described as the second paradox of the poetic task, the paradox that even though the same is defined as the opposite of the other, the other can still only come to us by and in the same. When the poetic medium (the same) is successfully eliminated, when it ceases to be itself for the sake of the other, when it becomes the clear window of true expression, then it in fact does not disappear but in its self-annihilation becomes more than itself: it itself becomes the source of light, it becomes the light of Nature in which alone things can become visible. This, however, does not mean the elimination of the first paradox: when poetry becomes thus successful, this success is always only achieved at the cost of self-annihilation. What poets achieve can only ever be a negative achievement: as far as their conscious activity is concerned, poets can only be successful in getting rid of their own “gawdy Colours,” in *not altering* the

objects that they make visible.<sup>41</sup> If this negative achievement is accomplished, however, then the event of creativity can take place and poetry can become the light of Nature itself in which alone things can appear what they really are.

### “Those Rules of old”

Art and the Rules are presented in the *Essay*'s table of contents conjointly as means of improving judgment and they are described as being “but *methodis'd Nature*.”<sup>42</sup> Pope's presentation of these terms is, therefore, immediately connected to what has been described above as the paradoxical poetic task. If true expression is achieved, then – as we have seen – Nature itself becomes part of a work of art, it becomes “*methodis'd Nature*,” and this is what Pope equates with Art and the Rules. We could say, therefore, that what Pope ultimately means by Art and the Rules is the positive aspect of the fundamentally negative achievement of “true expression,” or – to put it in another way – the *result* of the negative task. Art and the Rules *are* Nature (the other) itself as it has become part of a human-made object, the work of art. This is succinctly expressed in the famous couplet which introduces in the poem the concept of the Rules and which echoes the table of contents:<sup>43</sup>

Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *divis'd*,  
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz'd. . . (88–9)

The word “*Methodiz'd*” does not imply here more order, for how could Nature be better ordered than it actually is?. Nor does it imply more abstraction, for whatever is made abstract ceases to be natural. What it implies is simply the paradoxical fact that Nature, which in itself is opposed to anything that is made by a human being, has become part of a work of art, that the other has come into the same. In this way Art and the Rules are no more and no less than Nature, and they are no more and no less than “true Expression.” They represent positively the impossible and fundamentally negative unity of these two.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Pope's treatment of Art and the Rules – as I will try to demonstrate in this section – reflects and is grounded on the same ethical foundation as the concepts of Nature and Expression. Moreover, as I will also try to show, by the use of these concepts Pope also adds a new perspective on his ethical

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41. That Pope has not departed from this pattern is also indicated by the fact that the next line after this passage contains the emphatic reestablishment of the dress metaphor: “Expression is the *Dress of Thought*” (318).

42. Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 237.

43. This echoing is of course not to be understood literally, since the table of contents was added to the poem only in its 1736 edition (Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 237n.).

foundation. By highlighting the positive side of the fundamentally negative and paradoxical unity of Nature and expression (the other and the same) he incorporates in his argument the practical perspective. In other words, through the use of the concepts of Art and the Rules he does not only *describe* the paradoxical experience of creativity but also discusses *how* the negative task of eliminating the same in order to let the other come can be achieved. In this respect Pope goes beyond the scope of Attridge's treatment of creativity, and I will attempt to show here how this can be seen as a creative extension of the Attridgean scheme.

The concept of Art is introduced in the *Essay* immediately after the concept of Nature: "Art from that Fund [Nature] each just Supply provides, / Works without Show, and without Pomp presides. . ." (74–5). The exact grammatical function of the phrase "from that Fund" is ambiguous in the first line of this couplet: it can either qualify "Art," in which case the meaning of the first line is that only that art which derives from nature's fund provides "each just supply"; or it can modify the verb "provides," in which case the meaning of the line is that any "just supply" that art provides comes from the fund of nature. In either case, however, it is clear that a complete continuity between Art and Nature is suggested, which is further stressed in the second line of the couplet where we learn that Art works exactly as Nature does: it always presides but without show or pomp.<sup>44</sup> This idea is further developed in the metaphorical contrast between body and soul presented in the passage that comes immediately after the couplet above:

In some fair Body thus th' informing Soul  
 With Spirits feeds, with Vigour fills the whole,  
 Each Motion guides, and ev'ry Nerve sustains;  
*It self unseen, but in th' Effects, remains.* (76–9)

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44. The fact that Pope meant this identification between nature and art seriously is also borne out by the history of the composition of this passage. It seems that in the original version of the poem the connection between nature and art was merely an analogy. Instead of the couplet above Pope wrote: "That art is best which most resembles her [Nature], / Which still presides, yet never does appear" (Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 247). In 1716 this couplet was replaced by the final version (the one above) in which Pope makes the connection between nature and art more than just a superficial analogy. The editors of the *Twickenham Edition* suggest that the main reason for this change was that Pope wanted to get rid of the expletive "does." I think, however, that the alteration can also be seen as reacting in an instructive way to Dennis's criticism (Dennis, p. 404), which pointed out the contradiction in that "In the fifth Line of this Page it was Nature that / Life, force and beauty must to all impart. / And here in the 10th we are told that 'tis Art that / With Spirit feeds, with Vigor fills the whole." This apparent contradiction is eliminated by Pope's direct identification of Art with Nature in the final version.

Just as Nature is the Soul, that is to say, the perfect order, of physical objects (the Body), so Art – the passage points out – is the perfect order (the Soul) of the Body of words and ideas, of the poetic medium. It exists as the “trueness” of “true expression.”

This use of the Body and Soul dichotomy can of course be easily recognized as yet another version of the same/other dichotomy and thus the concept of Art is immediately anchored in the ethical commitment that I think underlies the whole of Pope’s poem. More specifically, what Pope draws attention to here is something that Derek Attridge frequently stresses in his account of creativity: that the other is never itself fully present but is only retrospectively identifiable as the other after it has become assimilated in the same.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, what Pope emphasizes in this passage on Art is that the Soul (Nature, Art, the other) is never in itself visible, it can only become manifest indirectly, through the Body (the same). What we experience when we encounter a work of creativity is always only the same (Body) but this same can be experienced as a singular otherness if, and only if, it is successfully refashioned by the other (Soul). If the invisible Soul (Nature, Art, the other) does not “prevail,” if it does not entirely permeate and subdue the Body (the same), if the Body (the same) does not cease to be a body, it can never be beautiful. However, even when the event of creativity occurs, even when the Body is entirely subdued and thus becomes inspired (in-Souled), when the same ceases to be the same and allows the other to shine through it, the Soul (Art, Nature, the other) still remains “unseen.” We deduce its presence only from “the effects”; that is, from the particular refashioning of the Body that we encounter and that – we conclude – can only have been achieved by the agency of the Soul. The Soul (Nature, Art, the other) is thus never actually present or experienced, it can only retrospectively be identified as that which “in th’ *Effects*, remains.”

This introduction of the concept of Art as a never in itself manifest but retrospectively identifiable presence lays the foundation of Pope’s treatment of the Rules which, as we have seen, he directly identifies with Art. In fact it is, I think, only on this foundation that we can make sense of Pope’s otherwise rather paradoxical discussion of this all-important concept in the *Essay*. It is, for example, only on this basis that we can make sense of what is perhaps the most conspicuous paradox in Pope’s treatment of the Rules: the self-contradiction in that whereas the Rules are by definition mechanically repeatable patterns, and should therefore belong to the realm of the same, Pope frequently stresses that this is a misunderstanding of their true nature and function. Although he emphasizes the strict, arbitrary authority of the Rules, he takes special care to contrast his conception of them with “the Rules

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45. Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics,” pp. 23–24. The idea is of course one aspect of what I referred to in the previous section as the second paradox of creativity.

each *Verbal Critic* lays” (261), which he labels as merely “dull *Receipts* how poems may be made” (115).<sup>46</sup> Paradoxically, therefore, Pope maintains that, just as Nature has, the Rules have once and for all “fix’d the Limits fit” (52), but he also emphasizes that this does not mean that they can be abstracted, formulated in an unchangeable, definitive system. This seeming paradox is explained in the passage that follows the first mention of the Rules in the *Essay* (“Those RULES of old”):

Hear how learn’d *Greece* her useful Rules indites,  
 When to repress, and when indulge our Flights:  
 High on *Parnassus*’ Top her Sons she show’d,  
 And pointed out those arduous Paths they trod,  
 Held from afar, aloft, th’ Immortal Prize,  
 And urg’d the rest by equal Steps to rise;  
 Just *Precepts* thus from great *Examples* giv’n,  
 She drew from *them* what they deriv’d from *Heav’n*. (92–9)

The word “indites” suggests the unquestionable authority of the Rules of the classics; however, when Pope explains how ancient Greece dictates its “useful Rules,” it becomes clear that he does not mean explicit, abstract, unchangeable prescriptions. The Rules primarily exist *in* and *as* the successful artwork. The work of art is the ultimate fact and because it undeniably exists, we conclude that there must have been some Rules by which it came into being. These Rules, therefore, cannot be abstracted from the artwork itself; they exist as those paths that (retrospectively) explain how it was possible to reach the top of Parnassus, to bring into being the successful work of art. However, since Parnassus can be ascended by these paths alone, since any work of art can be brought into being only by Rules, the Rules are not merely rationalizations of something that can very well exist without them. They essentially belong to the being of the work of art; in this sense they *are* the work of art. Thus the function of the Rules is not to prescribe or provide an abstract recipe of success, but to urge emulation by pointing up the successful work of art itself in the act of rationalizing how its greatness has been achieved.

This conception of the Rules can also explain another, even more striking, paradox in Pope’s treatment of this issue, his discussion of poetic “licence”:

If, where the *Rules* not far enough extend,  
 (Since Rules were made but to promote their End)  
 Some Lucky Licence answers to the full  
 Th’ Intent propos’d, *that Licence* is a *Rule*. (146–9)

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46. A distinction which David Fairer compares to that “between Natural Law and mere legalism” (David Fairer, *The Poetry of Alexander Pope* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 35).

These lines and the passage in which they appear (141–80) are usually glossed in Pope criticism as an expression of the poet's response to Longinus and to the evolving critical tradition based on the sublime. As the editors of *The Twickenham Edition* put it,

The belief that irregular genius is preferable to a cold and flat correctness, that there is a criticism by *taste* as well as by *rules*, that the success of a work of art may depend upon a quality difficult to define, a *je ne sais quoi*, that a criticism of *beauties* is preferable to a criticism of *faults*, that departures from poetic rules are like irregular but pleasing objects in the natural world, is emphatic in the lines, and declares the lack of rigour with which Pope adhered to the "Rules."<sup>47</sup>

This is no doubt true of this passage. However, I think it would be a mistake to look at these thoughts as an incongruous part of Pope's treatment of the Rules. In fact these ideas fit in perfectly with the ethical foundations that underlie Pope's overall conception. If we examine the two couplets quoted above, it will become clear that what they emphasize is once again that the ultimate fact of creativity is the successful work of art. It is the end; the Rules function merely as a means to achieve this end. If a licence, that is, a deviation from the Rules, serves this end better than the Rules themselves, then that licence is to be preferred to the Rules. However, by insisting that "*that Licence is a Rule*," Pope stresses once again that, Rules are indispensable in any creativity. If the end is achieved, if the work of art has come into existence, then this could only have happened by some rule. The licence by which the work of art was produced is, therefore, also a rule and has always already been one, but we have not been aware of it until it manifested itself in this particular work of art, in this singular otherness.

What follows from this is that it is not in itself wrong that we tend to generalize rules, to abstract them, to formulate systems out of them. It is not wrong as long as we keep in mind the genealogy of the Rules; that is, that they are only retrospectively identified as means of accounting for the existence of the work of art. Derek Attridge's description of this paradoxical relation between Rules and the work of art is once again revealing. When discussing the experience of reading he writes:

An essential part of a full response to a text . . . is a deduction of its *modus operandi*, an accurate understanding of the repeatable rules according to which the text operates as a meaningful entity. . . . While generalizable norms are involved from the start . . . it is only retrospectively that we can

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47. Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 255n.

extract them as norms (and thus objectify the transition from the other to the same), although even this hypostatization remains revisable.<sup>48</sup>

Objectifying the transition from the other to the same, from Nature to the work of art, is rule-formation and such rule-formation is indeed indispensable in any account of creativity. However, any system of rules thus formed must remain revisable, must maintain the status of a hypothesis in relation to the fact of the work of art. And it is in part this point that Pope's paradox of licence and Rules expresses. If any work of art comes into existence which cannot be accounted for from existing Rules; that is, if any work of art is created by a deviation from the Rules, by a licence, then the work of art must be accepted as the ultimate fact, and the Rules must be revised. On the other side, however, Pope's paradox also emphasizes that when we alter the Rules, it does not mean that we admit chance into our account of the work of art – far from it. Any work of art, as we have seen, can only exist by Rules, “generalizable norms are involved from the start” – the Rules *are* essentially the work of art. What happens when an apparent “licence” achieves the end simply demonstrates the fact that we can never be fully aware of all the Rules that contribute to the making of works of art. Thus what appears at first to be a licence or even a fault turns out in the end to be a Rule that we have not been aware of previous to the encounter with that particular work of art, that singular otherness. The beauty a great work of art snatches “beyond the reach of Art” (155) will, therefore, in the end turn out not so much to go beyond Art as to reveal new reaches of it that we have not previously been conscious of.

What I have tried to show thus far is that Pope's treatment of Art and the Rules is fundamentally grounded on the responsibility for the other. These foundations, however, directly lead us to the issue of *praxis*, to Pope's discussion of *how* the Rules can bring about, or at least facilitate the event of creativity. The Rules, we have seen, *are* ultimately the successful work of art. As such, however, they belong to that part of the experience of creativity which rationalizes, objectifies the process in which Nature becomes part of a human-made artwork, in which the other comes into the same. Therefore – alone from the aspects of creativity that have been discussed so far – they lend themselves naturally to abstraction, to generalization, to systematic formulation. And this, as we have also seen, is not in itself wrong: “just

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48. Attridge, “Innovation, Literature, Ethics,” p. 25. In his restatement of these ideas in *The Singularity of Literature* (p. 81) Attridge stresses that the rules by which a work is meaningful are not inherent in the art object itself and can vary from age to age depending on the particular cultural situation. Although this aspect is clearly not emphasized in the *Essay*, I think that Pope's treatment of the licence/rule relation allows for the inclusion of such a view and leaves the overall structural similarity unchanged.

*Precepts*” can and indeed must be drawn from “great *Examples*.” We have to generalize and abstract rules from the great examples of the classics if we want to emulate their achievement. The act side of the act/event structure of creativity is unimaginable without such abstraction and generalization. Pope emphasizes thus that an essential part of our effort to bring the wholly new into existence must necessarily be that we learn and use explicit patterns, repeatable and mechanical rules.

This aspect is certainly less emphatic in Derek Attridge’s account of creativity, as well as in most modern discussions of alterity, than it is in Pope’s. It is, however, by no means a deviation from the ethical foundations of true creativity which Derek Attridge so suggestively outlines and which, as I have tried to show, also underlies Pope’s *Essay*. I would rather look at this aspect of Pope’s treatment of creativity as a creative extension of the Attridgean scheme.<sup>49</sup> For no matter how consistently Pope emphasizes the practical function of explicit, generalizable rules, he never loses sight of two crucial things: (1) that all abstract formulations of rules are valuable only insofar as and to the extent that they derive from successful works of art; that is, that they are based on encounters with the other; and (2) that no practical rule can ever affect Nature (the other); they only function as means of regulating, controlling the same (the poetic medium) in order to allow the other to come.

These points are made clear in the *Essay* immediately after the introduction of the Rules, more particularly in the passage on “learn’d Greece” quoted above. We learn here that “just *Precepts*” can only be drawn from “great *Examples*” and that these precepts are valuable not because they impose limitations but because by imposing limitations they show us the path to achieve the highest. Besides, we also learn that the lesson “learn’d *Greece*” teaches us by its “useful Rules” is not how to bring Nature into the poetic medium (the other into the same), but rather “When to

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49. One explanation for the apparent differences and the essential similarity between Attridge and Pope’s accounts of creativity could be their different approaches to the “same.” Whereas Attridge stresses that the arrangement of the same is always dependent on a particular culture and ideoculture, and the way it poses obstacles to (and thereby constitutes) the other is thus ungeneralizable, Pope seems to insist that no matter how different the cultural situation, the same will always get in the way of the other in very similar ways (see below). I think that both these approaches to the same are equally justifiable. As Shelley says in his superb lyric, “The Cloud” – which is based on an image remarkably similar to Pope’s cloud of pride and which I think can be interpreted as Shelley’s treatment of the “same” – the Cloud is “Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb”: it is both something wholly new and at the same time the same old thing. It is indeed in this way that we are always frustrated in our best efforts (or even in our most trivial ones such as compiling shopping lists or trying to avoid misprints) by the law of the same: we can never prepare for it beforehand, because it is always something totally unexpected; however, when it has happened, it always turns out to have been just the same old mistake.

repress, and when indulge *our Flights*" [italics added]; that is, how to comport ourselves, how to regulate the same, in the face of Nature, the successful work of art, the other.

This view of the practical aspect of creativity is further confirmed in another famous passage in the *Essay on Art*; in the couplet where the function of Art is explained through the analogy of dancing. This analogy – although it only occurs in a single couplet – provides, I think, a perfect image to grasp the proper practical function of the Rules. The couplet in which the dance simile appears is this:

True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,  
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance. (362–3)

We notice here once again how Pope stresses the significance of conscious study and effort in the act of creativity. Art is associated with learning: just as the steps of the dance must be learnt and practiced before one can become a good dancer, so the Rules must be consciously studied and applied if one wants to be successful in poetry. This, however, is a requirement not because any rules can teach one how to dance well or be a good poet, but because, as we have seen, the Rules are always directed at the regulation of the same (the body in dancing and the poetic medium in writing). They are thus a necessary part of the “act” aspect of the act/event structure of creativity, of that aspect which we can consciously control, and which – although it cannot bring about the event of creativity – is indispensable in making it possible. It is indispensable precisely because Nature can only come to us in the successful artwork, because the other only exists *in* and *as* a particular refashioning of the same. And that refashioning will not come by chance; it will not come without conscious effort, without learning and following the Rules. If one is told just to move naturally on the dance-floor, one will be at a loss. Without learning and practicing some steps one just cannot control one’s body as a dancer. And similarly, we will not achieve a natural effect in writing without consciously learning and practicing the Rules.

No matter how much Pope stresses the necessity of conscious study and effort, however, it is evident in his use of the dance metaphor, too, that he never forgets that true creativity always comes from the other. As the couplet above makes it clear, the aim of all acquisition and application of explicit rules must always be the “true ease” and complete naturalness of the successful work of art. The aim must, therefore, always be something that cannot be controlled by any conscious effort or explicit rules; it must always be the *event* of creativity. What Pope stresses is merely that this event will not take place without Art, without a proper application of the Rules.

In this discussion of the practical aspect of creativity we have come rather far from what I identified at the beginning of this section as Pope’s basic insight about

the Rules: that the Rules *are* the successful work of art. This insight, however, is I think not contradicted by Pope's emphasis on learning and conscious effort either. What he points out by his use of the dance metaphor is, as we have seen, that success in poetry (just as in dancing) comes from Art; that is to say, that the event of creativity takes place if and only if the Rules are properly applied. He emphasizes furthermore that Art, the proper application of the Rules, can only be achieved by making a conscious effort, by learning and practicing explicit, repeatable, mechanical patterns. However, he does not say that any learning, any mastery of explicit patterns can guarantee that the Rules are applied properly. The Rules, just as in his previous discussions of them, go beyond any explicit system in which they could be totalized. The Rules no doubt are made up of repeatable, learnable patterns, but they are also more than any totality of these patterns. Thus while one can learn and master any number of precepts and rules, one can never master the Rules. The only sure test of whether the Rules have been applied properly is the success of the work of art, which remains the ultimate fact of creativity. If "true ease" and complete naturalness have been achieved in dancing or in writing, then, and then alone, can we be sure that the Rules have been properly put to use.

### **Nature, Expression and the Rules: a Holy Trinity**

The image of dancing can thus serve as a perfect expression of the significance and practical function of the Rules. This image, furthermore, can also reveal how the Rules are connected to the two other central concepts of the *Essay* that have been examined above: Nature and true Expression. Even though the dance simile is not as fully developed as some of Pope's other images, it clearly conjures up the body/soul metaphor and can thus create a link between these three key concepts in the *Essay*. In this section, therefore, I will attempt to summarize what has been said about these three concepts and their relations by dwelling a little longer on the analogy of dancing.

As we have seen in the discussion of the image of dancing above, the end of all creative activity is "true Ease," which can only be thought of as an event. This event happens of its own accord; however, it will not happen unless we learn the Rules and work hard to apply them. The proper application of the Rules in the case of dancing is always to affect the medium of this art, the Body, and by controlling, regulating this medium to make it capable of receiving the other (the Soul). The situation is, therefore, very similar to what we saw in the discussion of "true Expression." The aim of true expression is to bring Nature (the other) into the poetic medium (the same) by regulating, controlling and even eliminating the latter, by making the poetic medium entirely transparent. These ideas are perfectly conveyed

by the dance metaphor, too. The medium of dancing, the Body, is primarily characterized by its inertia; the body is a body insofar as it is heavy. In order to achieve the aim of creativity (“true Ease”) one must, therefore, work against the body, annihilate it entirely so that it gives way to its opposite: the Soul (Nature, the other). Paradoxically, however, it is only by and in this annihilation of the Body that the Soul can manifest itself. In the art of dancing thus the Body must be regulated and consciously controlled so that by annihilating itself it can become all Soul and thus provide the only possibility of manifesting the Soul.

So far this is just another beautiful representation of the paradoxes of true expression. What the dance metaphor’s emphasis on conscious study and practice adds to this is the insight that the self-annihilation of the same (the Body, the poetic medium) which is the essence of “true Expression” can be achieved by learning and applying the Rules. The proper way of regulating and controlling the Body in dancing does not come spontaneously. One must learn how to defeat the inertia that affects and determines the Body in its being a Body. Since the Body is affected by gravitation in regular ways, we can form laws as to how to defeat this inertia. And this is how we can connect the Rules to what has been said about “true Expression” above. Just as the Body as the medium of dancing is essentially characterized by its being affected by inertia, so the poetic medium is determined in its being by an essential sluggishness and inertia that Pope generally terms pride. And just as gravitation affects the Body in systematic ways, so pride is a systematic error. Thus the Rules in dancing, in writing and in all creative activities are no more and no less than the systematic, reproducible and learnable patterns that counteract the systematic entropic forces that essentially characterize the medium of the creative activity. They serve to eliminate the Body (the self, the poetic medium, the same), not to create the Soul (Nature, the other). However, by binding the Body they do liberate the Soul. Their proper function is thus not to limit us, but by curbing what is sluggish and inane within us to free us to receive what cannot be forced to come, but what – like the light of the sun – gives itself if it finds no obstacle in its way: the Soul, Nature, the other.

Thus what we can learn from the dance metaphor and from Pope’s treatment of the practical in general is that without the Rules there is no true Expression. Similarly, as we could see in the discussion of Expression above, Nature cannot exist for us without true Expression. We can conclude therefore that Nature *is* true Expression and true Expression *is* the Rules. These three form a kind of “holy trinity” each representing a different aspect of the same indivisible unity. This insight is powerfully expressed by Pope in one of the most paradoxical passages of the *Essay*, the passage on Virgil, whose paradoxes, however, are resolved in the light of what has been said about the connection between Nature, Expression and the Rules.

When first young *Maro* in his boundless Mind  
 A Work t' outlast Immortal *Rome* design'd,  
 Perhaps he seem'd *above* the Critick's Law,  
 And but from *Nature's Fountains* scorn'd to draw:  
 But when t' examine ev'ry Part he came,  
*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*:  
 Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design,  
 And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine,  
 As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlook'd each Line. (130–8)

What Virgil realized, according to this passage, is that what he had thought of previously as an independent Nature can only exist and has always already existed as true poetic expression, as artistic creation. And the conclusion that he draws from this realization is that he must learn and follow the Rules without which no true Expression and thus no access to Nature could exist.

## Conclusion

One might object to such a reading of Pope's *Essay* that after all the ideas and even the imagery that I have examined above can be traced back to their sources in Pope's vast readings in the neo-classical critical tradition. The idea that the Rules are methodized nature goes back, for example, to René Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* and was formulated both by Dryden and Dennis before Pope;<sup>50</sup> the paradoxes of licence and rule derive from Roger de Piles's *The Art of Painting* and were also expressed by Boileau;<sup>51</sup> and the image of dress as a representation of poetic expression was a commonplace of neo-classical criticism, having been used previous to Pope by the Earl of Roscommon, by Roger de Piles and by Dryden.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, what I identified above as meaning-productive paradoxes of the text and what I relied on so heavily for my claim that the *Essay* is essentially an account of the experience of creativity can also be explained as merely deriving from Pope's use of his sources. As the editors of the *Twickenham Edition* point out, Pope used highly eclectic material for the composition of the *Essay*, attempting to harmonize the apparently opposing attitudes that his various sources embraced and

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50. Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 249n.

51. Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, pp. 256–7n.

52. Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 273n, pp. 274–5n.

this, as Audra and Williams conclude, “was bound to appear at times vague and paradoxical.”<sup>53</sup>

To these objections we might simply answer that after all neo-classical criticism, just like any treatment of the literary, must also involve some account of creativity. Therefore, if we maintain that creativity always arises from the coming of the other, then we can conclude that Pope’s sources must also have responded to this fact. Their insights and even their apparently contradictory principles might thus very well derive from a genuine response to the other. Indeed when one reads Pope’s sources, for example such critical masterpieces as Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, one is constantly aware that the focus of these works is not so much on rule and precept as on that unaccountable but also undeniable sense of perfect naturalness which characterizes the successful work of art; that is to say, on the otherness we experience in a genuine response to creativity. If, therefore, Pope used the material provided by the neo-classical critical tradition, it is by no means a proof against the *Essay*’s being based on a responsible relation to the other. One might say that Pope discovers these ideas, not devises them, but this certainly does not prevent him from selecting that part of his sources which best express a genuine commitment to the other, nor does it prevent him from embracing contradictory attitudes which, being transformed into the paradoxes of the *Essay*, further confirm this fundamental commitment.

Although this answer to the above objections might legitimate my approach to the text, it certainly does not do full justice to Pope’s achievement. For even if we can trace all the ideas expressed in the *Essay* back to their sources, the poem – as commentators seem generally to agree – still cannot be reduced to these sources.<sup>54</sup> It cannot be reduced to them precisely because although Pope may indeed present in the *Essay* “what oft was *Thought*,” he presents it so that it was “ne’er so well *Exprest*.” True expression – as we have seen – is a genuine response to the other and as such it brings into being the wholly new. Thus while it is no doubt true that Pope selects, organizes, responds to material that he found in his readings – indeed who can do without this? –, it is also undeniable that with his true expression he in fact *creates*, brings into being the wholly new. To apply Johnson’s praise of Dryden we could say about the relation between Pope and his raw material that “he found it brick and he left it marble”; or we could even paraphrase this to emphasize the essential transformation that true expression achieves and say that he found it coal

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53. Audra and Williams, “Introduction” to *An Essay on Criticism* in Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, pp. 211–2.

54. Cf. for example Audra and Williams, “Introduction” to *An Essay on Criticism* in Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, p. 223.

and he left it diamond. Just as under great pressure coal is transformed into diamond, so under the influence of poetic creativity Pope's common raw material is crystallized in the poem into an exceptionally transparent and precious form. If we analyze it, we can of course identify its raw material, just as we can truly say that diamonds are made of carbon; but to stop at this level would be a major oversight and would certainly not be responding creatively to the text. A responsible reading of the *Essay* must also respond to the singularity of the poem: besides identifying its material (which can indeed be as common as carbon), it must also account for the uniqueness the treatment of this material creates (the transparency, the brilliance, the special value of the diamond). It must, in other words, "[s]urvey the *Whole*" which can in no way be explained from tracing the origin of its individual parts.

In my attempt to emphasize the singularity of the *whole* I have inevitably fallen short of this ideal for at least two reasons. Firstly, because I did not discuss – for lack of space – all the aspects of the *Essay* that are relevant to my approach. I have omitted, most conspicuously, the discussion of the issue of criticism which is no doubt a central issue in the poem and which could otherwise very well fit in with what I have tried to reveal as the ethical foundation of Pope's *Essay*. Secondly, I have fallen short of doing justice to the *whole* in Pope's poem precisely by postulating a whole and thereby confining the poem's richness within the bounds of my approach. Although, as I argued in the Introduction to this paper, this is an inevitable move and the necessary price one has to pay for any responsible response to a work of creativity, I want to stress once more that this is nevertheless a reduction and that I do not believe that my approach can in any way contain the *Essay* as a whole. However, what I do hope to have achieved by the comparison I have drawn between the poem and Attridge's theory of creativity (a theory to which once again I cannot claim to have done full justice) is the demonstration of my original claim that Pope's *Essay* is a vital text. Three hundred years after its first publication it remains "a friend to man," or, in Attridge's terminology, it continues to be a most intimate stranger.<sup>55</sup> It keeps communicating itself to us in our world, in our time, challenging our entrenched and unreflected beliefs and enlightening us where we most need enlightenment.

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55. Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics," p. 26.

**György Fogarasi**

## **Teletrauma**

### **Distance in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*\***

This paper seeks to trace the notion of distance in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, by first indicating how the critical distance between Burke and Kant can be rethought in terms of an intrapersonal distance within both; then, as a second move, by looking at Burke's general theory of the passions as it differs from that of Locke; and thirdly, by moving to the more specific question of how the passion of fear or terror is related to both pain and the sublime – an investigation which in turn necessitates a focus on the way attention figures as a duplicitous shifter between an-aesthesia and suffering. Interestingly enough, while Burke conceptualizes the sublime as a passion based on mediation or distance, and therefore distinguishes it from “simple” fear, later it turns out that fear itself is far from being a “simple” notion for immediacy, since immediate danger or threat still presupposes a mere apprehension of pain, rather than pure pain itself. This double distance (between fear and the sublime, as well as between fear and pain), puts fear in an intermediate position, which is more traumatic than that of the sublime, but which contains an element of distance with relation to pain, and is therefore a form of “teletrauma,” an amalgam of an-aesthesia and suffering. Being thus positioned between the sublime and pain, fear appears as the site of contamination, where detachment and involvement merge. In this respect, it may serve as a conceptual tool for a critical rethinking of the problematic nature of both aesthetic distance and perceptual immediacy.

The history of philosophy is often rendered as a multi-linear narrative, whose individual storylines are made up of different conceptions following upon one another through a logic of negation. Conceptions included in the narrative are supposed to mark important stages in the development of philosophical thought. It is precisely their capacity for a critical distance from preceding conceptions which earns them a

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\*This paper is the belated progeny of a research I began to pursue between 2005 and 2008, with the support of a Bolyai Research Scholarship. In its early stages, it was presented, with different accents, at conferences in Athens (2005) and Piliscsaba (2008). More recently, it has been substantially reworked for an international colloquium on *Sensation – Mediation – Perception* at the University of Szeged, 7–9 June 2012 (see proceedings at <http://uj.apertura.hu/2012/osz/fogarasi-teletrauma-distance-in-burkes-philosophical-enquiry/>).

place in the narrative. The history of 18th-century aesthetics is patterned much the same way. As far as Edmund Burke's aesthetic treatise (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757/59), and more specifically, its general theory of the passions, is concerned, the text clearly indicates the point of reference from which the author wishes to distance himself: the ultimate target is John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690), whose ideas are criticized at several points in Burke's discourse. At the same time, however, the person negating inevitably turns into the one *being* negated, when about three decades later, in a seminal section of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant names Burke as a major precedent not simply to be honoured but, more importantly, to be critically surpassed.

While the Locke–Burke–Kant lineage is certainly a cliché among historians of aesthetics, oversimplifying the otherwise non-linear and rather complex network of interrelations both in the sources and the reception of Burke's *Enquiry* (involving Le Brun, Du Bos, Addison, Hume, Shaftesbury, Baillie, Diderot, Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Herder, among others), it still may serve demonstrative purposes with regard to the notion of distance and the logic of distancing.

### **Burke/Kant**

Kant's polite but highly resolute gesture of distancing himself from Burke is something of a common-place, but it still makes one ponder for at least two reasons. It deserves scrutiny, because, on the one hand, both Burke's and Kant's argument centres on the idea (or rather, the hardly granted possibility) of distancing or distanciation, and, on the other, because such seemingly interpersonal relations are not necessarily limited to connections between two persons.

One could argue, for instance, that the same displacement (from empiricism to transcendental philosophy), which appears as an interpersonal difference between Burke and Kant, could in fact be discerned within Kant himself as a passage from so-called "precritical" to "critical" philosophy. In this respect, Kant's biographic reference to Burke is but the projection of an *autobiographical* relationship, as if the sage of Prussia rejected, in the image of his Irish colleague, his own younger self (the naïve thrust of his own *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, 1764), and as if this gesture of out-placement was needed precisely because the autobiographical relation might make the distancing much more difficult. According to the logic of autobiography, every negation must be a *determinate* negation (as Hegel tells us) since the negated element determines its own negative. And since the negative (as a determinate negative) is an heir to, or survival of, the very element it negates, the latter will ceaselessly haunt it, as one of the readers of the Kantian

sublime has shown. Jean-François Lyotard claims that, with respect to the passions, Kant is “closely following Burke,” and “no matter what he says,” his conception of the sublime as a “negative pleasure” (*negative Lust*) is but an echo of the Burkean concept of “delight.”<sup>1</sup>

The need for critical distancing, within an autobiographical relation, also emerges with reference to Burke’s own career, whenever his “early” aesthetic speculations are contemplated, following Burke’s own suggestions, from the perspective of his “late” contributions to political philosophy. This kind of approach is often accompanied by the conclusion (or rather, the presupposition) that the boyish carelessness and radicalism of the *Philosophical Enquiry* is corrected, as it were, by the mature and deep historical wisdom of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and that thus, in his later years, Burke distances himself, however implicitly, from extremist and revolutionary modes of thought inspired by the sublime. Somewhat less frequent and therefore more remarkable are readings, which – inverting the direction of criticism – analyze the *Reflections* from the perspective of the *Enquiry*, submitting to aesthetic analysis his political discourse. Even less frequently, however, does one encounter readings which do not place these two works on a seesaw, praising the one by blaming the other, but rather, uncover different and less distinct relations between them, which are more cumbersome to articulate, but perhaps more promising in their heuristic potentialities.

Since *critical* distance (both along biographical or autobiographical terms) is in fact just another name for the kind of *aesthetic* distance (distanciation or negativity) Burke and, of course, Kant is talking about, it seems highly practical, if not wholly necessary, for any effort at circumscribing the critical position of the *Enquiry*, to consider how the notion of distance is inscribed into Burke’s aesthetics. As we shall see, this inscription is far from being a simple or single one, it is rather multiple or multi-layered, which produces a level of complexity high enough to be worthy of a sustained analysis. It is the element of distance which distinguishes the concepts of pain, fear, and the sublime – with fear functioning as a point of articulation dividing as well as connecting pain and sublimity, thereby pointing toward a broader conceptual field, which offers a somewhat less common conception of the passions through the twin concepts of tension and attention. It is these five notions (pain, fear, and the sublime, on the one hand, and tension and attention, on the other), along which the route of my argument will evolve.

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1. Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (Kant’s ‘Critique of Judgment,’ §§23–29)*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 24 and 68.

## Locke/Burke

In order to accurately trace the distinctions between pain, fear, and the sublime, and to shed light upon the role played by distance in drawing these distinctions, we first need to get a somewhat detailed picture of the properly Burkean general conception of the passions, paying special attention to elements which mark a move away from the Lockean scheme.

The general theory of the passions, spelled out in Part 1 of Burke's discourse, has a double function: *retrospectively*, it continues the project of Longinus, whose fragmented rhetorical treatise breaks off precisely with the promise of an investigation of the passions,<sup>2</sup> while at the same time it *prospectively* lays down the conceptual fundamentals, which are supposed to allow for a sophisticated analysis of the categories Burke himself is about to develop (notably, those of the beautiful and the sublime). Burke outlines the passions according to two different schemes: one could be called "structural," and the other "thematic." As opposed to the latter, "thematic" division, which groups the passions either under the heading of self-preservation, or that of society (subsuming the sublime into the former, and the beautiful into the latter group), what we need to pay attention to at the moment is the other division, the one I called "structural," since that is where the element of distance acquires a key role, as part of a debate with Locke.

Having underlined, in the very first section, the importance of novelty in evoking intense passions, Burke attempts, in the next four sections, to question the popular Lockean idea that pleasure and pain are passions emerging from one another: "Mr. Locke . . . thinks that the removal or lessening of a pain is considered and operates as a pleasure, and the loss or diminishing of pleasure as a pain. It is this opinion which we consider here" (34 [1.3]).<sup>3</sup> The Lockean conception under consideration here presupposes a tightly closed economy of the passions, insofar as

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2. All parenthetical references are to this edition: Longinus, "On the Sublime," trans. W. H. Fyfe, rev. by Donald Russell, in Aristotle, *Poetics*; Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Demetrius, *On Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). In fact, Longinus' treatise does not merely promise the discussion of the passions, of which the author plans to write in a "separate treatise" (307 [44]), but already signals their place among the congenital sources of the sublime (181 [8]), sporadically discusses them (185–225 [9–15]), while at the same time he also warns us that a passionate state is not in itself equivalent to sublimity (169–171 [3]).

3. All parenthesized references are to the following edition: Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); this is a re-edition, with a revised introduction, of the 1958 critical edition of the *Enquiry*, also edited by Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 219 (II.21.16).

any increase in either of the two basic passions is imaginable only in correlation to an equal decrease in the opposite passion, following the logic of expenditure and income.<sup>4</sup> Just as one man's income is another man's expenditure, the emergence or intensification of any of the two basic passions can occur only with the simultaneous disappearance or weakening of its counterpart. For Burke, however, passions are subject to a certain amortization or erosion, they get worn with the passage of time (just as coins), without inducing any increase, i.e. any compensation, on the opposite side. The basic form of their emergence is likewise asymmetrical, and in that sense an-economic (just as the minting of coins), since they are in no way, in their occurrence, bound to the partial or full diminishing of their opposites. This is why in their basic form both pleasure and pain are independent, i.e. "positive," passions. Their positivity resides precisely in their capacity not to emerge from the negation of their opposites:

Pain and pleasure are simple ideas, incapable of definition. People are not liable to be mistaken in their feelings, but they are very frequently wrong in the names they give them, and in their reasonings about them. Many are of opinion, that pain arises necessarily from the removal of some pleasure; as they think pleasure does from the ceasing or diminution of some pain. For my part I am rather inclined to imagine, that pain and pleasure in their most simple and natural manner of affecting, are each of a positive nature, and by no means necessarily dependent on each other for their existence. The human mind is often, and I think it is for the most part, in a state neither of pain nor pleasure, which I call a state of indifference. (32 [1.2])

Burke questions the economic relationship between the passions under investigation. An increase in pain does not necessarily imply a decrease in pleasure, just as the intensification of pleasure does not involve the lessening of pain. While, for Locke, the total sum of the passions (of pleasure and pain) was at all times constant (according to a principle of passion conservation, as it were), in the Burkean framework, passions can both appear and disappear – an-economically. Once passions can be inscribed or erased similarly to the minting or abrasion of coins, a moment

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4. A similar economy is present already in the very concept of "passion" as it is conceived by Aristotle or Descartes, insofar as passion (*pathos*) is thought to be the "passive" correlative of an active impression according to some principle of energy conservation. See Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul*: "all sense-perception is a process of being . . . affected" (424a [II.11]), trans. J. A. Smith (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.html>). Descartes opens his discourse on *The Passions of the Soul* with the same idea, as he starts out from the co-determination of passion and action; see René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 18–19.

of violence enters Locke's system. This is how, in their basic form, both pleasure and pain can be considered as "positive" (in other words, "simple," "independent," or "unrelated") sensations, provided that positivity is by no means a category of value, but refers rather to the structural necessity of a moment of violence.

But to be able to introduce the concept of positivity, and thereby distinguish independent (i.e. positive) from relative (i.e. negative) pleasure or pain, Burke first has to introduce a third state of mind, which does not exist in the Lockean scheme. And this is what he calls "indifference," a state of tranquillity or apathy.<sup>5</sup> It is only with relation to such a state, that any notion of positive pleasure or pain makes sense, the reason being that these sensations do not emerge through the negation of their opposites, but rather appear through a move away from the neutral state of tranquillity, also returning to that state when they vanish. The other passions, which emerge through the negation of their opposites (and are therefore "negative"<sup>6</sup>), are given individual names for the sake of clarity: relative pleasure will be called "delight," whereas relative pain will be called "disappointment" or "grief."<sup>7</sup> Once these names are established, the basic forms of the passions can be referred to without the constant use of word "positive," by calling them simply pleasure and pain.

Thus, with the insertion of the hypostatized state of indifference, Locke's dichotomous system (pleasure/pain) is extended to involve five elements: beside indifference Burke develops the categories of positive pleasure and positive pain, as well as those of negative pleasure (i.e. delight) and negative pain (i.e. disappointment or grief).

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5. In fact, a very similar notion, that of *indifferency*, does exist in Locke's terminology, but it appears in a different context, attached to the notion of liberty, and does not bear on his own conceptualization of the passions of pain and pleasure in any significant way (see Locke, pp. 257–259 [II.21.71]). The notion of indifference plays a more important role in the early Greek hedonist school of the Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus of Cyrene, who held that sensations can be subsumed into the three categories of pleasure, pain, and indifference, depending on whether the impulse is gentle, violent, or calm.

6. This adjective makes its appearance only in the Introduction (18) to the second edition of the *Enquiry* in 1759, where it appears in apposition to "indirect." In the main text, Burke keeps speaking of "relative" pleasure or pain throughout. For Kant, the notion of negativity informs the concept of "negative pleasure" as well as that of "negative exhibition," see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), pp. 98 (cf. p. 129) and 135.

7. The distinction between the two forms of relative pain is drawn in terms of the temporary or final nature of loss: in the case of disappointedness, there is still hope to recuperate the pleasurable object, whereas grief is a state of mourning over an irreversible loss (cf. 37 [1.5]).

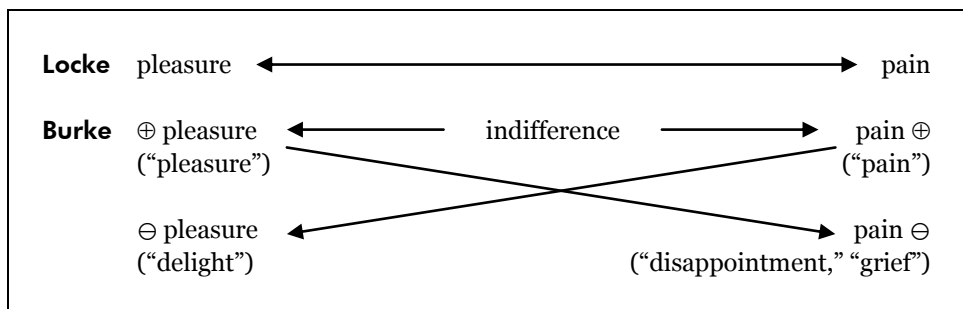


Diagram 1

Since the whole Burkean system is based upon the insertion of the category of indifference (for it is that very insertion that generates the disjunction of the positive and negative levels), the status of that category seems crucial. One could easily take it as a metaphysical postulate that has to be granted hypothetically for the matrix to evolve. From later passages in the treatise, however, we might get the impression that there is a different consideration in the background.

For when in Part 3 Burke briefly returns to this concept, he provides an account, which suggests that the state of indifference is by no means a supra-historical state, given by nature, but is indeed a historical formation, a product of custom or use:

For as use at last takes off the painful effect of many things, it reduces the pleasurable effect in others in the same manner, and brings both to a sort of mediocrity and indifference. Very justly is use called a second nature; and our natural and common state is one of absolute indifference, equally prepared for pain or pleasure. (104 [3.5])

Indifference is nothing but a faded or worn passion, which has lost its power due to the repetition of the affect, and can therefore appear as a “second nature,” in the ideological mask of naturalness (just like the dead metaphors that Nietzsche likens to worn coins).<sup>8</sup> Strangely enough, Burke speaks of “absolute” indifference in the

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8. This notion appears in fact at the very beginning of the *Enquiry*, when emphasizing the importance of novelty Burke describes repetition’s negative effect on effectiveness: “the same things make frequent returns, and they return with less and less of any agreeable effect” (31 [1.1]). A similar description of repetition had been offered a decade before by John Baillie, in his “Essay on the Sublime” (1747): “Admiration, a passion always attending the sublime, arises from uncommonness, and constantly decays as the object becomes more and more familiar” (John Baillie, “An Essay on the Sublime,” in *The Sublime: A Reader in British*

passage just quoted, while his perspective sheds light precisely on the fact that this indifference is anything but absolute: behind its apparent naturalness historical contingency is hard at work. Thus, it cannot be taken as a state “absolved” from all historical reference. Since Burke conceives the passions in their historical formation, his passion theory has in fact history as its latent object.

### **Pain, Fear, and the Sublime**

The above system of the passions, so symmetrical in terms of structure, is determined by a double asymmetry. Firstly, the categories of the beautiful and the sublime are both situated on the side of pleasure – the beautiful being subsumed into the rubric of positive pleasure, while the sublime into the rubric of negative pleasure (or delight).<sup>9</sup> The categories of positive and negative pain are clearly left empty, as if Burke had nothing to say either of actual pain, or of relative pain deriving from the temporary or final loss of the source of pleasure. Secondly, he attributes greater intensity to pain, than to pleasure,<sup>10</sup> so the passion turning on positive pain, that is, the passion of the sublime as negative pleasure, comes to the fore due to its sheer force, as opposed to the passion of the beautiful as positive pleasure.<sup>11</sup> The latter

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*Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 91).

9. Burke connects the beautiful (i.e. positive pleasure) to the feeling of love: “By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it” (91 [3.1]); “the beautiful is founded on a mere positive pleasure, and excites in the soul that feeling, which is called love” (160 [4.25]). If the beautiful implies the intimate immediacy of love, then the sublime feeling of respect (i.e. negative pleasure) might be considered as a sort of tele-love, in which the threatening object is always respected “at a distance” (111 [3.10]). According to Burke, we relate to objects of love by looking down on what is weaker than us, and to the objects of respect by looking up to what is stronger (65–67 [2.5]). The same attitude manifests itself, in relation to the sexes, in the love for (weak) women and the respect for (strong) men, while in relation to generations, it appears as a cordial kindness toward grandparents and a reverence toward parents. From the juxtaposition of these two areas (the sexes and the generations) it becomes clear that a mother cannot be a “parent,” and a grandfather cannot be a “man” (111 [3.10]). For Burke, mothers are per definition girls, and grandfathers are per definition castrated.

10. In this, he is following Locke: “pleasure operates not so strongly on us, as pain” (Locke, p. 218 [II.20.14]).

11. Just noting: it is by no means necessary to follow Burke in his zeal for the sublime. In a certain respect, his concept of beauty is just as, if not even more, thought-provoking. From the perspective of theatricality, one could easily show that the conception of the beautiful leads us to steeper slopes than those the sublime could ever reach, precisely because, unlike sublime “precipices” which at least give us a chance to locate and evade them, beautiful

asymmetry is replicated in the thematic division of the passions, privileging the passions of self-preservation over those of society.

As a result of these two kinds of asymmetry, Burke's structurally balanced scheme begins to slope, as it were, toward its lower left corner, to the rubric of negative pleasure. And since that point can, in turn, be reached only from the diametrically opposite corner of positive pain, it comes as little surprise that later on Burke's attention is aimed primarily at that movement, the transition from pain to the sublime. This is what happens when in the recapitulatory discussion of the passions concerning self-preservation he writes the following:

The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances . . . Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*.  
(51 [1.18]; Burke's emphasis)

The force of the sublime derives from its connection to pain, while its capacity to cause pleasure implies a mediated relation, a spatial or temporal detachment. It is in such a context that, at an earlier phase, the element of distance enters Burke's argument:

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain *distances*, and with certain *modifications*, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.  
(40 [1.7]; my emphases)

The juxtaposition of the notions of "distance" and "modification" might suggest an interpretation of the former as a strictly spatial notion (as distance *per se* in the narrow sense), and the latter as a temporal concept. Yet, it seems more likely that within the Burkean lexicon "distance" is meant both in a spatial and temporal

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"slopes" are more difficult to cope with, because their seductive gravity is less discernible. At one point, Burke himself acknowledges that the alleged weakness of women, which generates their beauty, is not without a certain theatrical performativity (110 [3.9]), one which is intricately related to the "deceitful maze" of the female body considered as a surface which captures the male gaze precisely with the "easy and insensible" variation of its forms (115 [3.15]). Burke formulates his insight in a concluding question: "Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface *continual and yet hardly perceptible at any point* which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?" (115 [3.15]; my emphasis). To confine myself to a single comment: change is hard to perceive *precisely because* it is continual. – I am trying to take steps in this direction in the framework of another essay, on "Terror(ism) and Theatricality," focusing on Burke and specific segments of contemporary theory.

sense,<sup>12</sup> while the concept of “modification” refers to the concomitant change in the modality or intensity of the passion, as when he speaks of the “modifications of pain” (38 [1.5]).

Although the word “safety” appears only once in the discourse, in a relatively late and by no means strategic argument about Locke’s opinion concerning blackness (143 [4.14]), the *notion* of safety seems highly important for Burke, since distance is first and foremost a *safe* distance, whether it is reached in terms of time or space. This is true even though Burke insists that our safety (he uses the word “immunity”) is only a prerequisite for our delight, and by no means its ultimate cause (48 [1.14]).<sup>13</sup>

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12. This reading can be supported by other passages in Part 1, where a similar notion of distance is present without any reference to the difference between spatial or temporal aspects: delight is defined as “the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger” (37 [1.4]), implying that one’s life is “out of any imminent hazard” (48 [1.15]), in other words, that we can perceive the terrifying object “without danger” (50 [1.17]).

In contrast to Burke’s rendering, a clearly spatial notion of distance is present in Joseph Addison’s lexicon, where the word appears as the spatial counterpart of temporal detachment: “we are delighted with the reflecting upon dangers that are *past*, or looking on a precipice at a *distance*” (*The Spectator* 418 [Monday, June 30, 1712]; my emphases). While Addison’s emphasis on “safety” contains no explicit reference to a distinction between temporal and spatial detachment (“the more frightful appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the sense of our own safety,” *The Spectator* 418), from a later formulation one may nevertheless have the impression that spatial distance may in certain situations prove to be “too close” as compared to temporal (or representational) detachment: “we are not capable of receiving [delight], when we see a person actually under the tortures that we meet with in a description; because, in this case, the object presses too close upon our senses” (*The Spectator* 418). One could say that, for Addison, “live” (as opposed to “recorded”) suffering does not allow for sublime delight, no matter how safe (i.e. spatially distanced) spectators are. Burke makes no such restrictions when he considers the difference between actual vs. represented suffering (either authentic or fictitious). For him, “terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close” (46 [1.14]), and distance (even in cases of “live,” i.e. spatially mediated, suffering) certainly implies that the object of terror does *not* press “too close.”

13. Just as Burke (and Addison), Kant also lays emphasis on the key element of safety in the experience of the sublime. The Burkean notion of “immunity” is smoothly translated into Kant’s idea of “resistance” (*Widerstand*). What is, however, unique about the Kantian conception is the way he splits the very concept of fear into two crucially different concepts, distinguishing sublime fear (fear from a safe distance) from panic fear (fear without safety). To fear God is sublime, but to fear “of” God has nothing sublime about it: “Thus a virtuous person fears God without being afraid of him [*So fürchtet der Tugendhafte Gott, ohne sich vor ihm zu fürchten*].” This conceptual distinction prefigures another one, to be introduced a

More important for our purposes is the fact that the two passages cited above do not resemble merely in their common emphasis on safe distance (spatial or temporal), but also because of a rather disturbing circumstance, one to which interpreters of these otherwise much quoted formulations have paid little attention so far. For, if we dare ask the hardly unimportant question, from what exactly we have to distance ourselves, Burke's text gives a surprisingly vague answer. For neither of the two passages mentions only pain (or rather, the necessity to distance oneself from pain), but both make mention of danger as well (and of the necessity to move away from danger) – even though they do so in different ways: in a different word order and with different conjunctives, the first one saying, “pain *and* danger,” the second one, “danger *or* pain.”<sup>14</sup> But it is far from clear how danger (and the fear or terror evoked by it) is related to pain, since the two different conjunctives (“and” and/or “or”) can mean both the difference and sameness of the conjoined elements, and thus the conjunctives themselves can be both different and identical in relation to each other. The question remains therefore, how pain is related to danger (the sensation of pain to the sense of danger), and how the feeling of sublimity is related to both, whether from the same distance, or not. To answer this question is tantamount to trying to explain why Burke can claim, first, that without distancing the source of the passion would be “simply painful,”<sup>15</sup> and, second, that it would affect us as something “simply terrible.” Are pure pain and pure terror one and the same sensation, or are they different? And, whatever their relation, are they indeed simply “simple”?

The answer comes at a much later point in the discourse, since the general theoretical matrix of the passions sketched out in Part 1 does actually not spell out the relation between pain and fear. That is exactly what happens, however, at the beginning of Part 4, where Burke's focus is expressly directed on the difference between these two passions. He examines the similarity and difference between pain

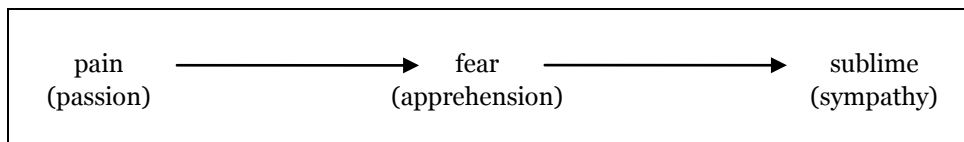
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few pages later, between religion and superstition. The Kantian sublimation of fear into sublime or religious fear (fearing God *without* fearing “of” God, *Gott fürchten ohne sich vor Gott zu fürchten*, to put it succinctly) presupposes that the person fearing is at a safe distance from the threat of God's will. As Kant puts it, he “does not think of wanting to resist God and his commandments as a possibility that should worry *him*” (or, in relation to natural disasters: “provided we are in a safe place [*Sicherheit*]”). See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 120; *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 184–85.

14. In fact, the same oscillation is present within the latter section itself, as it opens with a definition of the sublime in terms of “pain, and danger,” only to underline later, in the passage I quoted, the necessary distance from “danger or pain” (39–40 [1.7]).

15. The notion of a “simply painful” effect also returns later in the discourse (see 46 [1.14], and 85 [2.21]).

and fear in the framework of an argument, whose prime objective is to trace the efficient causes of the sublime – an investigation to be repeated later (in the second half of the same part) with regard to the beautiful. In Part 4, Burke defines fear as “an apprehension of pain or death” (131 [4.3]), exactly the same way he defined it two parts earlier, in Part 2, in the second section on terror (57 [2.2]). Fear (or, in its extreme form, terror) appears in both places as the sensation of a sensation, as an “apprehension,” or misgivings, the presentiment of the sentiment of pain.<sup>16</sup> In the state of fear only the idea of pain is present to us, the very pain itself, which we try to evade, is deferred to the future. Thus, there can be no doubt that fear itself is already at a certain (albeit unsafe) distance from pain, so when Burke places the feeling of the sublime not only beyond pure pain, but also beyond pure fear, he in fact puts it at a double remove from actual suffering, suggesting that distance does not necessarily imply safety, but can just as well be a dangerous distance.



*Diagram 2*

According to the logic of this double remove, the sublime is conceived as a distance from a distance. But since the distance to be distanced is an unsafe or dangerous one, there is no guarantee that the secondary distance from this unsafe distance will produce safety. Rather, what is implied is that any effort at distancing from an un-

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16. The most recent German translation of the *Enquiry* translates “apprehension” as *Sorge* (concern or worry); see Edmund Burke, *Philosophische Untersuchung über den Ursprung unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen*, trans. Friedrich Bassenge (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), pp. 91 and 171. I mention this to open Burke’s discourse to the Heideggerian discussion of *Sorge*, either as a concern about this or that particular entity, or as concern as such without any specified object to be concerned about. This double aspect of *Sorge* could be articulated along Heidegger’s distinction between fear (*Furcht*) and anxiety (*Angst*) (see especially §68 in *Being and Time*, and more specifically, the subchapter on “The Temporality of Disposition [*Die Zeitlichkeit der Befindlichkeit*]”). While no such distinction seems to inform the Burkean definition of fear as apprehension, the disposition of anxiety is a permanent threat whenever the spectral nature of the object of fear is considered, most notably, in the potentially threatening aspects of the beautiful (see fn. 11 above). Thus, it is the very distinction of fear from anxiety which is problematic for Burke. One could conclude that it is the spectral contamination of fear and anxiety (the contamination of the two aspects of *Sorge*), which constitutes Burke’s “concern.”

safe distance will itself lead to just another level of un-safety, raising distance to the second power without any ensured move from danger to the pure absence of danger. An unsafe distance from a previous unsafe distance will never add up to safety (no matter on which arithmetic power distanciation is repeated), but will only reproduce danger on yet another level of complexity. As a result, the sublime remains in constant danger of relapsing into danger, and thus, into a state of panic fear. Sublimity is endangered by danger, safety is threatened by threat. That is how the intermediate position of danger or threat (and the attendant passion of fear or terror) gains a special critical importance.

The relation between pain and the sublime – between passion and sympathy, *pathos* and *syn-pathos*, or trauma and safety – is articulated by the intermediate state of fear, which functions as a point of articulation not only dividing the two polar positions, but also connecting them. While fear is the sentiment, or rather, presentiment (“apprehension”) of pain, it is still not “simple” pain, as it also implies a certain distance. In this respect, it is something like a distant injury or distant wounding: a teletrauma. Neither is it im-mediate pain, nor is it pure painlessness. It simultaneously involves the mediatedness or structural anaesthesia of any instances of trauma (i.e. the distance of what is near), and the disruption of our safe detachment from events occurring in other spaces or times, through some sort of tele-sensing, or telaesthetic traumatism (i.e. the nearness of what is far away). At the same time that it articulates, it also disrupts the conceptual distinction between pain and the sublime (or, passion and sympathy), and becomes the site of their spectral contamination. Being an amalgam of suffering and anaesthesia, fear may function as a critical tool undoing received notions of perceptual immediacy and aesthetic distance.<sup>17</sup>

What needs to be investigated therefore, in what remains, is why every trauma must necessarily become distant, on the one hand, and why, on the other hand, “sublimation” itself (that is, any form of seemingly intact or anaesthetized observation) must inevitably turn traumatic. Burke’s treatise has much to say about both sides of the problem. That investigation, however, must follow a different line, running along the Burkean notions of tension and attention.

A small remark, before I proceed further: my calling the contamination “spectral” a few lines above was by no means an accident. Although Burke concentrates on the transition from pain to the sublime, the problem we face here seems to be

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17. On the late 18th-century conceptual history of anaesthesia (its transition from a perceptual deficiency to a medical procedure), see Steven Bruhm, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics at the Revolution,” *Studies in Romanticism* 32 (Fall 1993) 399–424. For other investigations into the conceptuality of anaesthesia (and its relation to *aesthesis* or perception), see the rich work of Odo Marquard and Wolfgang Iser.

structurally identical with the one we might face along the other, less frequently discussed axis, leading from positive pleasure to negative pain. As I have indicated earlier, the latter route goes from the feeling of pleasure to the feeling of loss, and here too an intermediate articulating element could be isolated, even if it remains concealed in the discourse, since Burke does not name it, as he names the element of fear on the other axis. We know, however, from others like Hobbes or Locke, that fear is just one of a pair of passions oriented toward the future, the other passion being hope, whose point of reference is not potential pain (*malum futurum*), but potential pleasure (*bonum futurum*). Behind this orientation toward the future, however, there lies in both passions a fundamental reference to the past, since the future is desired or feared precisely because it is connected to past experiences and is therefore coming as a return of the past: what is to come is thus a re-coming, in which the future comes about as a come-back of the past, the *avenir* as *revenant*, the future as a haunting ghost.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the structural resemblance of fear and hope does not simply reside in the kinship of two future-oriented passions, but implies their common spectrality as well. The moment of contamination we located on the axis leading from positive pleasure to negative pain inserts, between the pleasure of what is present and the mourning of what is lost, a state of hauntedness, in which the semi-distant (never entirely departed) thing keeps returning in the mode of the living dead. The same logic of haunting is present along the axis leading from positive pain to negative pleasure, in the state of fear, which contains a reference to pain as a returning anguish. And this is how the retro-aspect of fear and hope spectralizes the conceptual or sensual contamination taking place in each.

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18. In §68 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates the classical distinction between fear and hope as follows: “Hope has been characterized in distinction from fear, which refers to a *malum futurum*, as a waiting for a *bonum futurum*” (345). In both cases, this implies the potential return, the very “repeatability” (*Wiederholbarkeit*) of former occurrences, and accordingly, the inevitable “spectrality” (*Unheimlichkeit*) of the present (343). Temporality is thus defined as a “past-presenting future” (*gewesende-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*), that is, the coming of an event which re-presents (i.e. makes present anew) that which has passed (away), and which comes therefore, in a zombie-like fashion, as a come-back of the dead. For Heidegger, this kind of temporality defines the “structure of concern” (*Sorgestruktur*) which determines human existence (350). From a previous remark, however, it is clear that this leaves open the question of the animal (which Heidegger calls the “merely-living-being”): “How the stimuli and impulses affecting the senses in a merely-living-being [*in einem Nur-Lebendem*] are to be defined ontologically, how and where the existence of animals, for example, is constituted through ‘time,’ remains a specific problem” (346). Parenthetical references to Heidegger’s *Being and Time* are to the following edition: Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001); English translations are mine.

## Tension and Attention

Burke also argues that the difference between pain and fear is a difference in degree, rather than being a purely qualitative leap. This idea already appears in the above mentioned passage from the section on terror in Part 2, when he says: “fear being an apprehension of pain or death, *it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain*” (57 [2.2]; my emphasis). It won’t be until Part 4, however, that we get a more detailed account and a selection of demonstrative examples for this resemblance. There, Burke brings the examples of a man under torment and a dog terrified by the apprehension of physical punishment.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the relation between pain and fear comes to be demonstrated by examples for human pain and animal fear. By juxtaposing these specific instances, Burke does not only problematize the difference between pain and fear (in other words, actual or present pain and imaginary or future pain), but willy-nilly also questions the received notion of a hierarchy between human and animal modes of sense-perception (their different sensitivities to space and time). So, before citing the passage in question, some preliminary remarks must be made.

The notion of self-consciousness as a derivative of mourning is a widespread anthropological cliché in the 18th century, teaching us that man is a specific being, because he can envision or foresee his own future death in the past deaths of others – because he can melancholically (according to a logic of *proleptic retrospection*) mourn himself in advance. It is this relation to his own self which elevates him from a merely animal existence, in which there is no self-consciousness, because no idea of futurity exists, which in turn is because mourning is pure mourning, without any involvement of specularity, of mirroring or self-reflection (that is, without any self-recognition or any re-plication of consciousness upon itself). It is in this sense that Wordsworth calls man “a creature endowed with the faculties of foresight and reason,”<sup>20</sup> opposing him to the dog or horse, which are deemed to be incapable of melancholic self-mourning, since they are incapable of an imaginary identification with their future survivors.<sup>21</sup> That is how the idea of futurity becomes the special charac-

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19. The fact that, in Burke, examples for pain are often instances of punishment (sometimes even of horrendous torture), also seems remarkable, given that the English word “pain” comes, via French mediation, from the Latin *poena* meaning “penalty” in the sense of “payment” (something close to the semantics of the German word *Schuld* which means both “guilt” and “debt”).

20. William Wordsworth, “Essays upon Epitaphs,” in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Vol. 2, p. 52.

21. “The dog or horse perishes in the field, or in the stall, by the side of his companions, and is incapable of anticipating the sorrow with which his surrounding associates shall be-

teristic of humans, along with the habit of cautious thoughtfulness called prudence, which in turn implies a forward-looking, pro-spective premeditation or precaution, in short, providence. This is the idea lurking in the background, when Marx subordinates the industrious work of bees to human labour, his distinction being still based on the human ability to pre-conceive the design of future products.<sup>22</sup> Burke's argument hardly fits into such an anthropocentric conception. For him, human investigations of the future never exceed the "investigations of a dog" (*Forschungen eines Hundes*), to use Kafka's phrase. When the dog's state of fear is shown as the fundamental form of any (potentially human) relation to the future, we may witness a double displacement of related conceptions by Hobbes and Locke, who defined fear, in opposition to hope, as one pole of the passions oriented toward the future.<sup>23</sup>

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moan his death, or pine for his loss; he cannot pre-conceive this regret, he can form no thought of it; and therefore cannot possibly have a desire to leave such regret or remembrance behind him" (Wordsworth, Vol. 2, p. 50). This same notion that animals have no future in the sense that they have no capacity for melancholic self-mourning (and thus no self-awareness) lurks behind the Heideggerian formulation that "Only humans die. Animals perish [*Nur der Mensch stirbt. Das Tier verendet*]" (Martin Heidegger, "Das Ding," in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994], p. 17).

22. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), Vol. I, p. 284.

23. As Hobbes puts it: "Which kind of thoughts, is called *Foresight*, and *Prudence*, or *Providence*, and sometimes *Wisdom*," or elsewhere: "*Aversion*, with opinion of *Hurt* from the object, FEARE," see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22 [1.3] and 41 [1.6] (emphases in the original). In Locke's formulation: "*Fear* is an uneasiness of the mind, upon the thought of future evil likely to befall us" (Locke, p. 218 [II.20]; emphasis in the original). Such formulations (also present in Descartes and Le Brun) certainly go back to the treatment of the passions in ancient Greek rhetorical thought. Aristotle, whose conception of fear is also referred to by Heidegger, defines it in his *Rhetoric* as "a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future," and associates it with "the expectation that something destructive will happen to us" (1382a–b, [II.5]), see Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, accessed 1 June 2012 (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html>).

The Aristotelian emphasis on fear as a state of disturbance or confusion re-emerges in the 18th century in the category of the pathetic, conceived as a state lacking sublime calmness and tranquillity. Unlike the "solemn sedateness" of the sublime, which in Baillie's rendering "rather composes than agitates" the mind (p. 97), the pathetic is a state of ceaseless distraction ("agitation," "hurrying," "crowding," p. 97), which is not too far from what Heidegger calls "curiosity" (*Neugier*: lust for what is new) and "entertainment" (*Zerstreuung*: dispersal or dissipation), and it seems to be fairly close to Burke's own opening argument on novelty and curiosity (on "children perpetually running from place to place to hunt out something new") in the very first section of the *Enquiry*. Schiller's conception of the pathetic runs along different and rather divergent lines of thought; see his 1793 essay *Über das Pathetische*, and

Burke does not simply underline the otherwise trivial, but often unmentioned fact that the animal is itself capable of fear and trembling, that is, of relating to the future, and that the notion of futurity entertained by the human being is not necessarily different from animal fear. Equally important seems the fact that Burke focuses on pain (and consequently, on fear as a passion turning upon pain, or on the sublime as a passion turning upon fear) precisely because the fundamental form of every sensation, considered as a passion passively suffered, is trauma. And since, according to this asymmetrical scheme, even pleasure is traumatic, and to that extent painful, it follows that hope as a disposition related to pleasure is not so much the opposite, much rather a subclass of fear. The future can only be conceived or sensed in the modality of fear, even if we expect it to be a pleasant one.

Let us now turn to the passage mentioned. As we shall see, pain and fear are put in parallel on the basis of a common physiological reaction: the “tension of the nerves,” the convulsive contraction of the muscular fibres.

A man who suffers under violent bodily pain; (I suppose the most violent, because the effect may be the more obvious). I say a man in great pain has his teeth set, his eye-brows are violently contracted, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence, his hair stands on end, the voice is forced out in short shrieks and groans, and the whole fabric totters. Fear or terror, which is an apprehension of pain or death, exhibits exactly the same effects, approaching in violence to those just mentioned in proportion to the nearness of the cause, and the weakness of the subject. This is not only so in the human species, but I have more than once observed in dogs, under an apprehension of punishment, that they have writhed their bodies, and yelped, and howled, as if they had actually felt the blows. From hence I conclude that pain, and fear, act upon the same parts of the body, and in the same manner, though somewhat differing in degree. That pain and fear consist in an unnatural tension of the nerves. . . (131–132 [4.3])

As I have mentioned, the peculiarity of this passage does not only reside in its demonstration of a physiological resemblance between pain and fear, but just as much in its suggestive juxtaposition of human and animal reactions. By bringing the example of a dog in terror, the passage suggests that fear might just as well be the future oriented passion of a non-human. What we have here is the instance of an animal equipped with self-preserving foresight or self-protecting precaution (provi-

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his two discussions of the sublime also touching upon the notion of the pathetic: *Vom Erhabenen* from 1793, and *Über das Erhabene* from 1793–96.

dence or prudence), which in turn is much closer to, say, Robinson Crusoe's paranoid safety measures, with all the famous examples of technical and economic invention inspired by the terror of native or alien invaders, than it is to the elevated notion of a self-aware and cool-headed orientation toward the future, which Wordsworth (or for that matter, Marx) attributes to humans, but certainly not to animals in the sense of "merely-living-beings" (as Heidegger calls them). Burke's example provides a rather prosaic picture, in which "human" carefulness is born from panic fear, which may in turn transform even dogs into "rational" animals, since it belongs to all animal beings.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, the prime function of the passage is to demonstrate how fear resembles pain. Both passions produce tension, which is "a violent pulling of the fibres," as Burke specifies in a footnote. He can thus conclude that these passions differ only in degree, their scope and mode of action being the same. One should, of course, never mix up fear with pain, for it does matter whether we fear pain, or actually feel the pain which we would otherwise "only" fear. Nor does Burke confuse them. He insists on their difference, but claims that it is only a difference in degree. To fear something and to actually feel what one feared are two points along the same axis, so the difference between sentiment and presentiment, real and imaginary experience (feeling "actually" and feeling "as if . . . actually") can no longer be taken for granted, at least in qualitative terms. Fear fades into pain, and pain fades into fear. To suffer and to see someone suffer partake in the same physiology, in the same logic of *physis*, of physicality conceived in terms of the senses.

At this point, Burke's argument runs parallel to Adam Smith's statement, repeated several times in the opening passages of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a work published in 1759, the year when the second edition of the *Enquiry* was issued. Although Smith talks about sympathy, rather than fear, the insight he repeatedly underlines is very similar to that proposed by Burke: in the disposition of sympathy (just as in fear) we "tremble and shudder at the thought of what [the sufferer] feels," which is a clear evidence for the fact that the idea of suffering excites in us "some degree of the same emotion."<sup>25</sup> And since, for Smith, pain implies physical contact, while the source of any idea of suffering is primarily visual (the subject of sympathy

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24. On the Cyrenaic derivation of prudence from the fear of punishment, see Richard Parry, "Ancient Ethical Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed 1 June 2012 (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/ethics-ancient/>).

25. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 14 [1.1.1]. The notion of attentive spectatorship returns later in the all-pervasive figure of the "impartial spectator."

being an “attentive spectator”<sup>26</sup>), the above resemblance between suffering and sympathy, or passion and compassion, can be seen as a resemblance between touching and vision, as if the author of the treatise wanted to open a discourse on the pains of spectatorship, de-differentiating received distinctions between tactile and visual modes of perception in an Aristotelian manner.<sup>27</sup>

For Smith (as for Burke) sympathy is an imaginary substitution allowing us to participate in the pains (or pleasures) of others: “By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”<sup>28</sup> One of the many examples mentioned by Smith shows us the weak frame of those who have little immunity to the traumatizing sight of beggars, and who are thus fatally exposed to the mechanism of emotional transference: “Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the street, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies.”<sup>29</sup> This mechanism of transference is akin to the way words convey the passions from one man to another in Burke’s description near the end of the *Enquiry*: “by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another” (175 [5.7]).

But while the Burkean notion of “contagion” suggests a continuity between the passion of one person and the compassion of another, and implies the unquestionable authenticity of sympathetic feeling, the tendency of Smith’s argument points to a different conclusion. Smith’s abundant examples, about which Burke himself expressed his fascination both in a letter he sent to Smith on 10 September 1759 and in the review he published the same year in the *Annual Register*, are suggestive in a way that no longer supports, much rather threatens to subvert or at least unbalance Burke’s stance. For at least three of these examples point toward the possibility, neglected by Burke, of a mistaken sympathy or a “mis-sensing” of sorts. For when he comes to the image of the madman or the moaning infant, both of whom may feel very well or only slightly uncomfortable, while their spectators might feel extremely sorry for them, his meaning is that sympathy is often in error. And this is even more clearly so in situations of grief

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26. Smith, p. 15 [1.1.1].

27. See Book 2 in Aristotle’s treatise *On the Soul*, and especially his argument on the relation of sense-perception to mediation in Parts 7–11, moving from vision (via hearing, smell, and taste) to touch.

28. Smith, pp. 13–14 [1.1.1].

29. Smith, p. 14 [1.1.1].

(which is his last example), when survivors feel compassion for the deceased person, who himself no longer feels anything, and yet those mourning over his loss constantly imagine his continued suffering, and thereby paradoxically perform what I would call a *sympathy for apathy*. In all three of these cases, sympathy is left groundless and shown redundant. It is presented as the sheer redundancy or overperformance of a function which has no basis in the physical world. Interestingly enough, the reverse possibility, that of an underperforming sympathy, remains out of sight for Smith, although a pain without any visible (or in any other way perceptible) symptom and thus without any sympathetic recognition must have been a common experience already in his time (even if the somatic production of symptoms for the acknowledgment of pain by others might still have gone unrecognized).<sup>30</sup> Thus, sympathy may often be erroneous, not only because one

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30. Cf. Elaine Scarry, "Among School Children: The Use of Body Damage to Express Physical Pain," *Interfaces* 26 (2007) 11–36. Interestingly, neither Smith, nor Burke appears on Scarry's critical horizon, her celebrated book *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) included. Scarry nevertheless seems rather critical regarding the expressibility of pain. At one point, she frames this problematic as a question of deciding whether something is a "tool" or a "weapon": "If, for example, someone were to object that the ax that cuts through the tree . . . should be called a weapon rather than a tool, the person making the objection would almost certainly turn out to be one who believes that the vegetable world is sentient and capable of experiencing some form of pain; conversely, if one were to object that the knife that cuts through the cow is a tool the person would be someone who has retracted the privileges of sentience from the animal world and thinks of cows as already-food and therefore, not-quite-alive (as we more routinely think of trees as not-quite-alive)" (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 173–74).

The question of the animal seems decisive. Since the animal – at least since Aristotle – is defined (in opposition to the plant) as a sensitive being, any attempt to tell animals from plants presupposes our human sensitivity to the sensitive, our ability to sense the sensing of another being, ultimately reducing to human (or rather, since man himself is an animal, "humanimal") sensibility all other forms of animal sensibility. It is no wonder that investigations of the sensing faculty in the 18th century (the age of "sensibility") included the most extreme instances of eliciting pain, and finally, of vivisection. The most widely known example is the Swiss physician and anatomist Albrecht von Haller, in whose vocabulary the term "sensibility" refers to a mental faculty exclusively human, and it is only the physical capacity called "irritability" which is common to all animals. Haller's "devotedness" to specify animality along this principle of irritability resulted in the lethal agony of a large number of dogs. One is hardly surprised that La Mettrie, who held radically different views and located the relations between man and animal along a continuum of mechanistic operations, dedicated his essay on *The Man-Machine* precisely to Haller, as an ironic token of his utmost "respect." In the background of Haller's experiments, it is not very difficult to detect a claim for the human meta-sensation of all animal sensations, without any considerable "sensitivity" to the

might sympathize with a passion which is unlike the one really felt by the other person, but more radically because one might feel sympathy where one shouldn't and feel no sympathy where one certainly should.<sup>31</sup>

At a closer look, it seems that the potential malfunction which Smith locates in the imaginative workings of sympathy is not entirely unfamiliar to Burke, who faces a similar difficulty when, right before the passage on the tormented man and the threatened dog, in a section devoted specifically to association, he addresses the etiological problem of the origin or efficient cause of the passions. This is a strategic point in the discourse since its function is nothing less than to give an account of the association that would allow for the maintenance of Burke's empiricist stance. The empiricist methodology had of course been announced well before, back in the Introduction, where Burke voted for the fundamentally natural (vs. acquired) operation of taste: "It is confessed, that custom, and some other causes, have made many deviations from the natural pleasures or pains which belong to these several Tastes; but then the power of distinguishing

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paradox this implies (namely, to the gesture of humanizing or "humanizing" the animal, and thereby positioning the human sensorium as the criterion for all animal modes of sensing, including invertebrate species as well as semi-animal life forms such as mushrooms, for instance). In her recent book on *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Ildikó Csengei discusses these issues very informatively; see especially the chapter on "The Feeling Machine" (75–118), an early version of which appeared in the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9.2 (2003) 155–80. Csengei also draws on Scarry's analyses, laying little emphasis, however, on the aforementioned critical aspects I find so crucial. As long as the criterion for an ethical response is conceived (as it is in the last subchapter, 112–18) as an attentive listening to the woeful cries or begging of the victim, we keep repeating the Hallerian gesture, and neglect the possibility so clearly discerned by Adam Smith (apropos of the potentially errant, i.e. redundant or absent, character of sympathy), and so emphatically taken up by Scarry, namely, that there might be a discontinuity between the perceptual apparatus of the animal and the perceptual apparatus of the human, and in fact, between *any two singular beings* – whether "human," "animal," or "plant," or even "mineral," these categories themselves no longer being taken for granted – wherefore neither of them can serve, occupying the position of a meta-sensor, as a criterion for any of the others.

31. Smith's argument on the possibility of "mis-sensing" (as I would call it) could be said to circumvent what a few decades later is depicted by Friedrich Schlegel as a problem of "mis-understanding" (of someone else's meaning or "sense") in his 1800 essay *On Incomprehensibility*. This constellation of mis-sensing and misunderstanding (of sense) does not only shed light on the moral aspect of Schlegel's discourse, but it also turns Smith's moral philosophy into a theory of language written in a peculiarly moralistic dialect. It gives his examples a hermeneutic or rhetorical twist, and opens a link to his own treatment of language three years later in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1762).

between the nature and the acquired relish remains to the very last” (Introduction, 14). Still in the Introduction, right in the next paragraph, Burke speaks of “unnatural habits and associations” (ibid. 15). Association (itself “associated” to custom or habit, and implicitly to the notion of indifference as “second nature”) appears to be “unnatural” in that it denaturalizes *physis*, while its very process is itself part of *physis* and is to that extent as natural as can be. Association becomes the most natural denaturalizing function, nature’s self-deprivation, the split of the material base. It hinders any etiological reach for the senses presupposed in this project as “the great originals” of all our ideas (ibid. 23), and consequently, it also weakens the seemingly firm status of the natural object. To that extent, it threatens to shake the “ground-work of taste” claimed to be “common to all” (ibid.), and has the potential to call into question the empirical basis and methodological scheme of the whole endeavour. No wonder that association will re-emerge later, in the framework of a separate section, as “no small bar” for a project which attempts to trace all emotions back to their undistorted natural sources (130 [4.2]).

The greater the difficulty caused by association, the greater the urge to purify passion from associative intervention by anchoring it in a (supposedly) uncontaminated experience of immediate pain. In the section devoted to association, Burke distinguishes two kinds of fear, one affecting us by the natural properties of the object, and the other affecting us by association. He then claims the necessity to derive the latter from the former in a logic similar to the derivation of the figural from the literal sense of a word. Burke’s claim seems utterly justified since the very notion of the figural implies literality as its origin: “some things must have been originally and naturally agreeable or disagreeable, from which the others derive their associated powers” (131 [4.2]). Since however the “originally and naturally” terrifying character of an object is based upon what Burke in the previous section calls “the immediately sensible qualities of things,” naturally elicited fear (as opposed to fear by association) must ultimately go back to the notion of pain understood as an immediate sense-perception. For Burke, the source of associated fear is a natural fear, whose source in turn is pain. Thus, all fear must be ultimately anchored in pain. But whereas the reference of naturally elicited fear is pain, the reference of associated fear is itself just fear, albeit one which in turn refers to pain. In this respect, the distinction between natural and associated fear appears as the mere repetition (within the notion of fear) of the prior distinction between pain and fear. In linguistic terms, one could again compare this Burkean scheme to the Augustinian gesture of deriving the difference between literal and figural meanings from a prior difference between things and signs, the implication being that the meaning of literal signs are things, whereas the meaning of

figural signs are themselves signs, and it is only the meaning of these latter signs which are things *per se*.<sup>32</sup> But at the same time, fear as such (that is, even “natural” fear) appears to be based on association in a radically intrinsic or ineluctable way, for it seems that the very concept of fear presupposes association. And perhaps this is why a few sections later, Burke himself speaks of terror in a general sense as an “associated danger” (136 [4.8]), implying that fear as such is structurally based upon association, since even “originally and naturally” fearful things are feared because former traumatic memories are imaginatively connected to the sensual reappearance of these things. Association is indeed “no small bar” for Burke, it structurally governs fear, and as we shall see, it also radically enters the realm of pain, at the precise moment when pain itself becomes fear, that is, when pain attains the structure of fear.

This happens at a point when Burke no longer discusses their fundamental resemblance (the tension implied in both), but begins to specify their difference. He does so by reference to a reciprocal relation between the body and the mind:

The only difference between pain and terror, is, that things which cause pain operate on the mind, by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting the danger. (132 [4.3])

His example is the Italian physiognomist Tommaso Campanella, famous for his ability to penetrate into other people’s minds by mimicking their bodily behaviour, but even more famous perhaps for his legendary power to feign madness in the face of the torments he had to suffer when he was subjected to the Inquisition’s thirty-six-hour *veglia* torture in 1601.<sup>33</sup> The first of these magic abilities uses the body as a

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32. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis & New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958). For the distinction between things and signs, see I.2 and II.1. The distinction between the literal and the figural (II.10) remarkably appears after a distinction between natural and conventional signs (II.1).

33. In fact, the torture itself was inflicted on Campanella with the purpose of finding out whether he had been feigning madness to escape punishment for heresy. As Joseph Scalzo pointed out, the so-called *veglia* torture was originally invented in the mid-sixteenth century as a sleep-deprivation torture (cf. *vigilia*), but had been by the early seventeenth century improved, as it were, into an even more excruciating agony, which “prevented any relief from constant pain” (“Campanella, Foucault, and Madness in Late-Sixteenth Century Italy,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21.3 [1990] 359–371, p. 367). The torture started on 4 June 1601. “Campanella, after having been stripped naked, had his hands tied behind his back, and by means of a rope pulled tightly upward, was forced to balance his heavy frame on his toes, while his shoulder blades and joints were placed in a painfully distorted position. Moreover, a *cavallo* or horse was placed behind him. This device, composed of a seat or board studded

medium to access the minds of others, by using it to alter one's own state of mind in a like manner.<sup>34</sup> A few lines later, the same procedure is illustrated by the influence of drugs upon the mental or emotional disposition of a person. To the extent that this procedure uses the body to act upon the mind, it seems to follow the logic of pain. The second faculty, the power to resist pain, seems to work the other way round, using the mind to program the body, by utilizing a mechanism which Burke has described under the heading of fear. According to Burke's description, the central element of this mechanism is attention.

Campanella . . . could so abstract his attention from any sufferings of his body, that he was able to endure the rack itself without much pain; and in lesser pains, every body must have observed, that when we can employ our attention on any thing else, the pain has been for a time suspended.

(133 [4.4])

What seems interesting, even baffling, in Burke's description is the very possibility of pain itself being mediated, and operating in a manner which makes it rather difficult, if not utterly impossible, to account for traumatic impulses as "the immediately sensible qualities of things," which is what Burke aims at in this otherwise empirically committed endeavour. What modern psychology has formulated in the

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with sharp spikes or nails, would tear into the flesh of his posterior if he tried to relax from the agonizing position in which he was placed" (Scalzo, p. 367). While at first Campanella responded to the questions and requests of his tormentors with all sorts of "nonsensical exhortations amid vile cursing and swearing," later on he grew utterly silent and motionless, and "no longer showed any visible sign of pain" (Scalzo, p. 367). As one of the testimonies cited by Scalzo puts it: after the torture, Campanella "left everyone confused, and in more doubt than ever as to whether he might be mad or wise" (Scalzo, p. 367).

34. A famous description of this method of physiognomic identification is to be found in Poe's story of "The Purloined Letter," in the schoolboy's confessional remark concerning his success at guessing in the game of "even and odd": "When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression" (James A. Harrison, ed., *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* [New York: Putnam, 1902], Vol. VI, p. 41). The mention of Campanella (among others) right after this passage is hardly surprising, and links 19th-century physiognomy (in Poe or Baudelaire) to late-renaissance thought. For somewhat more on this, see S. L. Vardano's brief but suggestive article: "The Case of the Sublime Purloin; or Burke's *Inquiry* as the Source of an Anecdote in 'The Purloined Letter,'" *Poe Newsletter* 1.2 (October 1968), p. 27. As Vardano notes, Poe was acquainted with, and even discussed, Burke's speculation on physiognomy.

so-called “gate control theory” of pain is described here rather prosaically as a function of attention.<sup>35</sup> Attention works as a painkiller, alleviating or entirely erasing the suffering it is called to cope with.<sup>36</sup> It seems important to note however that attention can only do so, by superimposing another pain upon the pain it wants to suspend. For attention, as the very word tells us, is based on tension much the same way as the pain which it wants to transcend. Attention is a form of tension, or convulsion, implying an attendance or tendency or tending which causes the stretching or pulling of the nerves or fibres. The tension of attention is then itself an instance of pain, but one which is no longer based upon immediate sense-perception, but is contaminated, so to say, by an element of distance, both a move away from, and a move toward, the “traumatic.”

Attention is “teletrauma” both because, as a potential painkiller, it may distance us from suffering, and because, due to its very structure, it can only do so by triggering tension in relation to something distant. As Peter de Bolla put it some ten years ago, “distance is a necessary component of attention; it has, say, a focal length, hence the sense that at closer ranges or more distant reaches things are relegated to the field of the inattentive.”<sup>37</sup> For de Bolla, this has to do with the direction or trajectory of attention, inasmuch as attention is a mode of focusing. To focus means to attain a specific distance in relation to the object attended to, the implication being that all other objects are simultaneously relegated to the twilight zone of inattention. As de Bolla rightly points out, “Attention always comes attached to the inattentive, since in bringing one thing into the right distance everything else is removed to different distances.”<sup>38</sup> In that sense, inattention is by no means opposite to attention, but rather “attention *includes* inattention.”<sup>39</sup> For de Bolla, the opposite of attention is “distraction.” He argues that distraction is defined by a lack of focus, and

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35. Cf. Ronald Melzack and Patrick David Wall: “Pain Mechanisms: A New Theory,” *Science* 150 (19 November 1965) 971–79. The “gate control theory” is challenging earlier conceptions known as the “specificity theory” and the “pattern theory” of pain. See also Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

36. Descartes seems more moderate about this: “the soul, in becoming extremely attentive to something else . . . can easily overcome lesser passions, but not the most vigorous and the strongest, until after the excitation of the blood and spirits has abated” (Descartes, p. 60).

37. Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 61.

38. De Bolla, p. 61.

39. De Bolla, *Art Matters*, p. 62. At this point, de Bolla’s assertion resonates with Wolfgang Welsch’s earlier claim, formulated in a different lexicon, that “No *aisthesis* without *anaisthesis*,” because “a kind of anaesthetics is inscribed into perception itself” and “this internal anaesthetics is a necessary condition for the external efficiency of perception” (Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010 (1990)], pp. 32 and 34); for a similar argument, see also Welsch’s *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), pp. 130–131.

accordingly, by a lack of attention. If however we pay “attention” to the suggestive resonance of the words *contraction* and *distraction*, we may conclude rather that distraction is not entirely different from the contractive tension of attention, but is rather a diversive acceleration or fragmentary accumulation of it, in short, a *diversion* of *adversion*. In other words, distraction is the very drifting of attention, its continual *turning* elsewhere, which is in fact a continual *being* turned elsewhere, just as the description of children’s curiosity at the very beginning of Burke’s treatise suggests in the opening section on novelty (31 [1.1]). The superficiality manifested in the perpetual reorientation of infant attention appears now as a structural component of attention’s necessarily drifting motion, which also makes it impossible for us ever to “employ” it (precautiously, preventively) as a painkiller. The focusing moves of attention can never be intended, if intention itself is a mode of tending, and, as such, part and parcel of the process we are trying to indicate here (i.e. the tension of attention), rather than being an external principle directing its move. Attention may certainly lessen or even kill pain, but it cannot be instrumentalized to do so, since one should first intend such instrumental employment or usage, but intention is already a form of attention, rather than being a preparation for it – which means that, all appearances to the contrary, Campanella was, at the most, fortunate.

Later, in Part 4, Burke also insists that attention is labour or work, “an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles” (135 [4.6]). To the extent that this “exertion” is beyond instrumental employment, the work of attention emerges as the work of an unemployed power. What is implied here is not simply that unemployed attention is still attention hard at work, much rather that this work begins where any employment ends. Since I know very well how painful such attentive tension or contraction can be, now let me finally thank the reader’s painstaking work.

**G. St. John Stoff**

## **Conduct Books and *Pride and Prejudice***

Like many families in Regency England, the Bennets of *Pride and Prejudice* owned a copy of Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* (1766). Lydia Bennet's horror at the thought of hearing it read aloud, and Elizabeth Bennet's failure to satisfy those who thought themselves qualified to speak for society have led critics to think the novel a rejection of conduct-book morality. I read the novel differently, however, and argue that Elizabeth marries Fitzwilliam Darcy and becomes mistress of Pemberley because she follows the advice of Fordyce and his peers, managing her life with the touchstones of virtue, sense and prudence. She does not, as some critics have suggested, throw over conventional ideas about female propriety and deference, but interprets them within the tradition Fordyce helped to create so that, by the end of the novel, the middle-class morality of Samuel Richardson and the conduct books triumphs over the superficiality and display of those (like Lady Catherine de Bourgh) who are devoted to society and the season.

### **1 Elizabeth and the Conduct Books**

For those interested in the marriage choices of young women of the gentry and professional classes at the end of the eighteenth century, a key literary text is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (begun in 1793, published twenty years later) – a work that is often thought to celebrate the triumph of individual desire over conventional behaviour,<sup>1</sup> but which, as I will show, validates the conventions laid out in the conduct books of the time. Although Lydia Bennet is horrified at the thought of listening to readings from the best-known of them, James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young*

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1. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 194; David Monaghan, "Jane Austen and the Position of Women," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (London: Macmillan, 1981), 105–21, p. 108; Johanna M. Smith, "The Oppositional Reader and *Pride and Prejudice*," in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 27–40, p. 35. Judith Lowder Newton describes *Pride and Prejudice* as "Austen's fantasy of female autonomy": *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 74.

*Women* (1766 – it had reached its fourteenth edition by 1813), her sister Elizabeth's actions reflect the importance of such works; indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that she only becomes mistress of Pemberley by following their advice. Readings that presume that Elizabeth "defies every dictum about female propriety and deference propounded in the sermons and conduct books"<sup>2</sup> are far from the mark.

To note this is not to say that Austen was comfortable with all of the (male) views of gender, knowledge and power that are found in these works. There is no reason to doubt the bitterness of her aside in *Northanger Abbey* (1817):

To come [before others] with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can.<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that critics have thought that Elizabeth, blessed with the "quickness" which her father admires and the "liveliness of . . . mind" which attracts Darcy, superior to the conduct-book ideal of womanhood. Such books stressed the need for female diffidence and discretion,<sup>4</sup> and since these seem to be qualities that Elizabeth lacks those looking for parallels have turned to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) rather than Fordyce's *Sermons*.<sup>5</sup> However, conduct-book advice was more nuanced than critics have realized. Sarcasm and the display of learning was criticized in men and women when it would humiliate those with a lesser understanding,<sup>6</sup> and style of address was linked to social distance. Intelligence and wit – or in Fordyce's

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2. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. xxiii–xxiv.

3. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 76.

4. See, for example, *The Polite Lady; or, A Course of Female Education in a Series of Letters, from a Mother to her Daughter* (1760), 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1798), p. 205.

5. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ed. Charles W. Hagelman, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 81; cf. Lloyd W. Brown, "Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 28 (1973) 321–38, p. 332.

6. Although such displays were thought particularly inappropriate in women – see Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance Into the World* (1799), ed. Stewart J. Cooke (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 283; cf. Fordyce, pp. 97–98; *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford Clarendon Press 1965), vol. 1, p. 465 (issue 113, 10 July 1711) – such behaviour was not excused in men either. Mr Knightley faults Emma Woodhouse for her rudeness at Box Hill because she spoke without respect for Miss Bates' "character, age, and situation," not because she transgressed gender roles (Jane Austen, *Emma* [1816], ed. Stephen M. Parrish, 3rd ed. [New York: Norton, 2000], pp. 243, 245).

words, “sprightliness and freedom, when supported by sense, and chastened by decency”<sup>7</sup> – were valued in the family, among friends, and in the company of those who would not presume familiarity.<sup>8</sup> Conduct-book authors did not expect “that women should always utter grave sentences, nor men neither. It were inconsistent with the state of mankind.”<sup>9</sup>

Such authors did, however, counsel discretion. As Thomas Gisborne would explain, when cautioning against too much freedom in conversation in his *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1796):

Women in various occurrences of life are betrayed, by a desire of rendering themselves agreeable, into an indiscreet freedom of manners and conversation with men of whom they perhaps know but little and still more frequently into a greater degree of freedom with those of whom they have more knowledge, than can be fitly indulged except towards persons to whom they are connected by particular ties.<sup>10</sup>

In short, freedom which might be enjoyed amongst family members or between friends could be quite inappropriate when offered in public – a point that Austen did not contest, and indeed makes herself in *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>11</sup>

Another possible objection to the idea that Austen accepted conduct-book values might be that authors like Fordyce could adopt an evangelical tone, and Austen

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7. James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1809), vol. 1, p. 87; for the importance of decency cf. the criticism of Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* (1814): “She was in high spirits, and surrounded by those who were giving all the support of their own bad sense to her too lively mind” (Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson [New York: Norton, 1998], p. 285). Seventy years before delicacy was expected of men as well as women; see Hugh Jones, *An Accidence to the English Tongue* (London: John Clarke, 1724), pp. 56–57; cf. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 298.

8. John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (Manchester: G. Nicholson, 1797), pp. 9–10. In Burney’s *Cecilia*, published the year before Austen began work on *Pride and Prejudice*, the eponymous heroine discovers that unwittingly allowing a man too much freedom in conversation could be both unpleasant and socially damaging. Cf. Frances Burney, *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress*, ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 136.

9. Fordyce, vol. 1, p. 92.

10. Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1796), pp. 184–85, cf. pp. 270–71.

11. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Donald Gray, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton), pp. 124, 150.

is well-known to have observed that she did not like the Evangelicals.<sup>12</sup> However, Austen's religious thinking is more complicated than such a throw-away line would suggest. Writing to her niece Fanny Knight in 1814, she responds to Fanny's doubts about a suitor who seemed to be betraying signs of incipient Evangelicalism by recommending the young man, and going on:

And as to there being any objection from his *Goodness*, from the danger of his becoming even Evangelical, I cannot admit *that*. I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason & Feeling, must be happiest & safest.<sup>13</sup>

Besides, although Austen had little sympathy with their theology, she was very much concerned with the social issues Evangelicals raised.<sup>14</sup> She might laugh at exaggerated fears of the evils of the metropolis,<sup>15</sup> but she recognized that London could be corrupt and life in society had its dangers. Had she read the contemporary reflections of the Methodist writer Hester Ann Rogers that, as a young woman, "Sin had so blinded [her] eyes that [she] could not at this time believe, or at least would not, that dancing, cards or attending plays was sinful," Austen would have found Rogers' talk of sin unhelpful if not uncomfortable,<sup>16</sup> but she would have recognized that dancing, cards, and attending plays could be problematic activities. Though the first was often begun with "gaiety and innocence of heart," it could be a prelude to seduction,<sup>17</sup> and card-playing could be dangerous when the party was "playing high."<sup>18</sup> And as for at-

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12. Letter to Cassandra Austen, 24 January 1809 (Letter 65), in R. W. Chapman, ed., *Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 256 (henceforth referred to as *Letters*).

13. Letter to Fanny Knight, 18 November 1814 (Letter 103), *Letters*, p. 410.

14. Letter to Cassandra Austen, 8 September 1816 (Letter 133), *Letters*, p. 467; Doreen M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 43. Mary Waldron suggests that "From poking fun at Fordyce in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen seems almost to have joined forces with him [in *Mansfield Park*]" ("The Frailties of Fanny: *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16 [2004] 259–81, p. 261); however, this misreads both novels.

15. Letter to Cassandra Austen, August 1796 (Letter 3), *Letters*, p. 7.

16. Hester Ann Rogers, *A Short Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers* (New York: The Methodist Connection in the United States, 1813), p. 9; for Austen's views on sin, see Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1993), pp. 184–88.

17. For the innocence, see Gregory, p. 16; Fordyce, vol. 1, p. 125; for the dangers, see the way Elizabeth prepares "for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of Wickham's heart" (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 61).

18. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 26; letter to Cassandra Austen, 7 October 1808 (Letter 56), *Letters*, p. 215. Austen enjoyed playing cards (see e.g. the letter to Cassandra Austen, 4 January

tending plays: although Austen did not share the evangelical horror of the theatre, she distrusted the stage, and when she herself attended the theatre it was to see the “safe” adaptations of restoration comedy that the conduct books recommended.<sup>19</sup>

## 2 Morality and Marriage

Austen did not need to have read widely in the conduct literature of her day for my thesis to hold. No doubt she knew Henry Mackenzie’s *The Mirror*, for her mother was a subscriber,<sup>20</sup> and she certainly read Fordyce; the *Sermons* would have been in the rectory library at Steventon, and textual evidence suggests that in any case she had them to hand – or had recently looked into them – when she was at work on *Northanger Abbey* in 1803.<sup>21</sup> But by the late eighteenth century conduct books were no longer an aristocratic preserve<sup>22</sup> – and, as is always the case with best-sellers, they would have been more talked about than read. Con-

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1809 [Letter 63], *Letters*, p. 247), but she understood the conviction of conduct-book authors that money and time could be better spent. For this see Fordyce, vol. 1, p. 124; Gisborne, pp. 206–207; Gregory, p. 17.

19. Lady Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761), in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library or Parental Monitor* (Dublin: John Archer, 1790), pp. 90–91; Austen to Anna Lefroy, 29 November 1814 (Letter 112), *Letters*, p. 415. Even latitudinarians thought the contemporary theatre “not fit to be permitted in a civilized, much less Christian country” (John Tillotson, *The Works of John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury*, 10 vols. [London: Richard Priestley, 1820], vol. 9, p. 114); this explains the importance of such texts as Gisborne’s *Enquiry* for Fanny Price’s disapproval of private theatricals: Gisborne, pp. 173–74; Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (London & New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 93, 108, 151; David Morse, *The Age of Virtue: British Culture from the Restoration to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 171–72.

20. Irene Collins, *Jane Austen: The Parson’s Daughter* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1998), p. 68; cf. *Northanger Abbey*, p. 166, with its reference to the 6 March 1779 issue. More generally, see Phillipa Hardman, “Jane Austen and the Periodical Works of Henry Mackenzie,” *Studia Neophilologica* 52 (1980) 323–31.

21. George Holbert Tucker, *Jane Austen the Woman: Some Biographical Insights* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 133; Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers* (London: Athlone Press, 2012), p. 42. Cf. Laura Mooneyham White’s list of at least nine sermon collections that Austen knew in *Jane Austen’s Anglicanism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 47. For Austen’s pleasure in Thomas Sherlock’s sermons (most probably *Several Discourses Preached at the Temple Church*, 1756), see the letter to Anna Lefroy, 28 September 1814 (Letter 108), *Letters*, p. 406.

22. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 68.

duct-book values structured drawing room conversation even when those talking had not actually read Fordyce and the others.

The importance of this point should not be exaggerated. These books *were* read, and could even feature on the reading list of those who would happily pick up works of gothic fiction or contemporary politics. For example: amongst the “recent reading” of Agnes Porter in the spring 1804 (Porter was governess to the children of Lord Ilchester, and at the time around fifty years old), we can find Agnes Maria Bennet’s “pretty novel,” *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* (1794), William Vincent Barré’s *History of the French Consulate, under Napoleon Buonaparte* (1804) – and Fordyce’s *Sermons*.<sup>23</sup> We see a similar range in the reading of the twenty-eight-year-old Austen,<sup>24</sup> who (as noted) had probably tackled the *Sermons* the year before, but my point is not that Austen read this or that particular work, but that she, like many of her contemporaries, took note of what conduct books said. If, as Mary Lascelles suggested, at the end of the eighteenth century the novel provided “a common ground of intercourse among readers of all sorts,”<sup>25</sup> novelists themselves were usually echoing the conventions of the conduct books. Such works, no less than the novel, provided a common ground.

On the subject of marriage there was a general agreement amongst conduct-book authors. First, the advice went, marriage should be companionate (based on love and respect, not dynastic need), for it was more likely to be successful when the married couple liked each other than when they were yoked together at parental behest. “The first thing which parents ought to consult in disposing their children in marriage is certainly their inclination,” William Buchan explained in 1769, in his popular handbook *Domestic Medicine* (it had reached its eleventh edition by 1790).<sup>26</sup> But (and this was a second point made), inclination should not be equated

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23. Joanne Martin, ed., *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen: The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter* (London: Hambledon Press, 1998), p. 240.

24. An early but still useful account of Austen’s reading is found in Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

25. Lascelles, p. 52.

26. William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine; or, A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines*, 11th ed. (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1790), pp. 119–20. For Buchan’s importance see David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), p. 2; for Elizabeth’s use of “inclination,” see *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 123, 232. See also Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 55; John Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 163; Lawrence Stone and Jean C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 73. Harriet Byron’s country relatives repeatedly insist that she must “judge for [her]self” in

with infatuation. In an age without easy divorce, trusting one's emotions without any other assurance that the marriage could be happy could have disastrous consequences. The ideal courtship involved the head as well as the heart, in a balance succinctly described by the Countess in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752):

And when I tell you . . . that I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper Education, receiv'd the Addresses of my Lord – through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him with their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in great Harmony together, I have told you all the material Passages of my life, which upon Enquiry you will find differ very little from those of other Women of the same Rank, who have a moderate Share of Sense, Prudence, and Virtue.<sup>27</sup>

The Countess, a relatively minor character in the novel, is introduced to criticise the desire of the work's protagonist to see life as a romance, and no doubt Lennox deliberately presented the noblewoman's life as one without "Adventures"<sup>28</sup> – but this does not mean that we should doubt the importance for women in Regency England (as well as for fictional Countesses half a century before) of the three touchstones named: virtue, sense, and prudence.

Vivien Jones has noted how the conduct book genre "constructs female identity in imagined contention with anti-social, deviant or extreme, forms which its powerful example then exorcises: the irresponsible, the overrefined, the ungoverned, the under- or over-educated."<sup>29</sup> Lennox's Countess is an example of this construction within a work of fiction and, as I hope to show, the virtues she relies on – found again and again in the conduct books of the age – were what legitimated a woman's acting on her inclination. Austen's female characters are to be judged by their standards.

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choosing a husband (Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* [1753–54], ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols. [London: Oxford University Press, 1972], vol. 1, p. 64); Clarissa Harlowe's troubles begin when she is not allowed this freedom of choice, but is pressured to marry Mr Solmes.

27. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 327; Lascelles, p. 55 notes Austen's enjoyment of the work.

28. Scott Paul Gordon, "The Space of Romance in Lennox's *Female Quixote*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38 (1998) 499–516, p. 510.

29. Vivien Jones, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 26.

## 2.1 Virtue

“By the early nineteenth century,” John R. Gillis has noted, “even the slightest degree of independence in sexual matters could render a middle class woman unfit for marriage and society,”<sup>30</sup> and the significance of this for *Pride and Prejudice* should be obvious. Lydia’s conduct could have had disastrous consequences, and when Elizabeth learns of what her sister has done she presumes the worst. “I have just had a letter with such dreadful news,” she tells Darcy. And she goes on: “It cannot be concealed from any one. My youngest sister has left all her friends – has eloped; – has thrown herself into the power of – of Mr. Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. You know him too well to doubt the rest. She has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him to – she is lost for ever.”<sup>31</sup>

Elizabeth’s horror at Lydia’s leaving Brighton with Wickham, and then – arriving at Clapham – willingly taking a hackney-coach for London rather than continuing to Gretna Green and a Scottish wedding,<sup>32</sup> would have been understandable for the novel’s first readers, especially if they remembered the 1804 trial of the Rev. Lockhard Gordon and his brother Loudoun Gordon for the abduction of Rachel Lee. The Judge had stopped the Gordons’ trial once the court had learned how, “in the chaise on the road to Uxbridge,”

[Lee] had said to Loudoun Gordon, that she found it useless to make further resistance, and tearing from her breast a gold locket and a camphire bag, she exclaimed, “the charm that has preserved my virtue hitherto is dissolved,” (adding, as she threw it away) “now welcome pleasure.”<sup>33</sup>

The incident was the subject of prints and caricatures, as well as self-exculpatory pamphlets by the parties involved.

A real-world Lydia, no less determined on pleasure than Miss Lee,<sup>34</sup> would have received little pity when Wickham eventually abandoned her. Had Darcy not intervened to broker a marriage, her conduct would have irreparably damaged the Ben-

30. John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 130.

31. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 323.

32. *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 178, 183 (“it is most shocking indeed . . . that a sister’s sense of decency and virtue . . . should admit of doubt”). This is not to say that elopements were approved of, but a wedding certificate would go a long way towards repairing the damage done by running away.

33. *The Times*, 7 March 1804, quoted in A. D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s* (London: George Duckworth, 1994), p. 53.

34. Wickham had not asked Lydia to leave Brighton with him, and presumably justly lays the blame for her loss of reputation to “her own folly alone” (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 210).

net family name. Indeed, even with Lydia married, Jane and Elizabeth might well have remained single if Bingley and Darcy had not already been in love with them.<sup>35</sup> The world never forgives in women what it overlooks in men, Fordyce had unhappily explained; “one young lady going astray shall subject her relations to such discredit and distress, as the united good conduct of all her brothers and sisters, supposing them numerous, shall scarce ever be able to repair.”<sup>36</sup> Feminists insisted that the men and women should be judged equally: “Has vice then a sex?” Mary Robinson would ask, specifically with respect to gambling, but intending the point to have more general application.<sup>37</sup> Authors like Fordyce would have agreed that it did not, but though they recognized the injustice of the double standard they were more concerned to help young women navigate the dangers of a less than perfect world than to promote reform. Austen fully appreciated those dangers, and though she had nothing but contempt for men like Wickham, could still see Lydia’s narrow escape from disaster as a cautionary tale.

## 2.2 Sense

No less important than virtue was sense, the “strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment” that in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) qualified Elinor Dashwood to be a counsellor to her mother. Although “her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong,” we read, Elinor “knew how to govern them.”<sup>38</sup> In Austen’s next novel Elizabeth’s unwillingness to question first impressions and govern strong feelings nearly leads to disaster.

At first Elizabeth’s likes and dislikes seem justified; indeed, when she and Jane discuss their new acquaintance, Mr Bingley, the younger seems more honest.

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35. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 210. When Jane’s engagement is learnt of, “The Bennets were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Lydia had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune” (p. 228; cf. pp. 180–81).

36. Fordyce, vol. 1, pp. 8–9.

37. Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination with Anecdotes* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), p. 10.

38. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 8. The *OED* has “practical soundness of judgement” (def. 11a), and notes the use in Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 446 (“You speak, ma’am, like a lady of sense”); see also Everett Zimmerman, “Admiring Pope No More than is Proper: *Sense and Sensibility*,” in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 112–22, p. 113. For Elizabeth’s use of “sense,” note her surprise that her elder sister would be blind to the follies of others, given her “good sense” (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 11), and her description of Darcy as “a man of sense and education . . . who has lived in the world” (p. 116).

“He is just what a young man ought to be,” said [Jane], “sensible, good humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manner! – so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!”

“He is also handsome,” replied Elizabeth, “which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete.”<sup>39</sup>

However, though Elizabeth is of course right to point out (no doubt with a smile) that good looks are not to be ignored, she is wrong to think they could be trusted.<sup>40</sup> It is better to let other, more reliable indicators of character be one’s guide. “True Love is grounded on Virtue, not on . . . low, mean, sordid Outsides: Shadows, Vanities, Fooleries all!” wrote the author of *Reflections upon Matrimony* (1755).<sup>41</sup> “The chief point to be regarded in the choice of a *companion for life*,” advised Lady Sarah Pennington six years later, “is a really virtuous principle, an unaffected goodness of heart.”<sup>42</sup> Or as John Gregory would insist in *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1797), “True love is founded on esteem, in a correspondence of tastes and sentiments.”<sup>43</sup>

Such counsel was not meant to be taken in isolation and, as noted above, sensibility had its part to play alongside sense. “No rules of duty can oblige you to involve yourselves in misery and temptation, by entering into engagements to love and to honour, where your hearts withhold their consent,” Fordyce had cautioned.<sup>44</sup> But even when this was acknowledged, the need for judgement could not be forgotten. The thought of a lifetime with a companion that one could not respect or whose company one could not enjoy was hardly pleasant and care needed to be taken not to accept a partner for whom one only felt contempt.<sup>45</sup> Compromise over one’s ideal was no doubt necessary. Frances Burney might protest that she had “determined not to marry without having the highest value & esteem for the man who should be my Lord,” but she knew that finding such a man would be far from easy. As Austen explained to Fanny Knight, a perfect companion in whom “Grace & Spirit are united to Worth, where the Manners are equal to the Heart and Understanding” was “one

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39. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 10.

40. Wickham “had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address” (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 49).

41. *Reflections upon Matrimony, and the Women of this Country, in a Letter to a Young Gentleman* (London: R. Baldwin, 1755), p. 30.

42. Pennington, p. 96.

43. Gregory, pp. 32–33; 36.

44. Fordyce, vol. 2, p. 95; cf. Austen’s letters to Fanny Knight, 18 and 30 November 1814 (Letters 103 and 106), *Letters*, pp. 410, 418.

45. Gisborne, p. 225. Austen knew that marrying without esteem could lead to disaster: see her letter to Cassandra Austen, 20 June 1808 (Letter 52), *Letters*, p. 197; cf. *Mansfield Park*, p. 139; *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 146.

in a Thousand.”<sup>46</sup> Yet even though realism suggested that one might have to settle for less than perfection, it did not deny that a young woman should take care to marry someone she might have *some* respect for.

Hence the need for sense and prudence. Recognizing who *was* worthy of respect was far from easy;<sup>47</sup> indeed it called for detective work on the part of the young lady, her family and friends. As Gregory explained to his daughters:

If a gentleman makes his address to you, or gives you reason to believe he will do so, before you allow your affections to be engaged, endeavour, in the most prudent and secret matter, to procure from your friends every necessary piece of information concerning him; such as his character for sense, his morals, his temper, fortune, and family; whether it is distinguished for parts and worth, or for folly, knavery, and loathsome diseases.<sup>48</sup>

Such questions needed to be asked, as Austen’s readers would have quickly recognized, for not all men were what or who they claimed to be.<sup>49</sup> Elinor Dashwood, distrustful of first impressions, was perfectly right to enquire about Willoughby “Who is he? Where does he come from?” – and her questions, if followed up on, would have spared her sister a lot of pain.<sup>50</sup> As Gisborne soberly reflected: “A woman who receives for her husband a person of whose moral character she knows no more than that it is outwardly decent, stakes her welfare upon a very hazardous experiment.”<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth was taking a tremendous risk in not being sensible about Wickham, and not even seeking to discover the truth about his past.

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46. Frances Burney, Letters to Samuel Crisp, 15 and c. 22–25 May 1775, Lars E. Troide, ed., *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Volume II: 1774–1777* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 126, 129; Austen, Letter to Fanny Knight, 18 November 1814 (Letter 103), *Letters*, pp. 409–10.

47. See Johnson’s introduction to *Sense and Sensibility* (p. xii).

48. Gregory, p. 34; Richardson, *Grandison*, vol. 1, p. 67. For syphilis (“loathsome diseases”), see Mary Margaret Stewart, “‘And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse’: Syphilis and Wives,” in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. Linda E. Merians (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 103–13.

49. Ben Wilson begins his study of Victorian values with a story from 1819 in which a Captain Phipps, supposedly the nephew of a peer, arrives in Taunton, establishes credit and is engaged to marry before he is exposed as a penniless vagrant. Cf. Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain 1789–1837* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007), p. 17, citing the *Examiner*, 12 December 1819.

50. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 34; cf. Elinor’s later approval of Colonel Brandon on the report of those who had “long and intimately” known him, as well as her own knowledge of his character (p. 239).

51. Gisborne, p. 237.

### 2.3 Prudence

Since sound judgement was only possible when sufficient evidence was to hand, the use of the third touchstone, prudence, was essential.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, the word has been given too narrow a focus by those writing on *Pride and Prejudice*. Wendy Jones, for example, summarising the different kinds of love in the novel, has suggested that “Darcy’s sentimental love for Elizabeth Bennet contrasts with the companionate feelings she is eventually able to return, and both are sharply distinct from Charlotte Lucas’s prudent interest in Mr Collins and Lydia’s romantic passion for Wickham.”<sup>53</sup>

Although the contrasts she describes are important, nevertheless, prudence is poorly represented by Charlotte. It is not that her concern for financial security was inappropriate. After all, Elizabeth herself marries wealth, and as she tells Jane, her first sight of Pemberley helped focus her attention remarkably.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Charlotte was taking a dangerously narrow view of prudence, and it is hardly surprising that when she bitterly suggests that it is “better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life,” Elizabeth immediately objects that her friend’s thinking is unsound.<sup>55</sup> Though Elizabeth hardly practised what she preached (she flirts with Wickham and sets out to secure his attention before she knows anything about him other than what he had told her),<sup>56</sup> she was right to protest: the more one knew the better. As we have seen, Gregory thought the enquiries he recommended only prudent – and no less prudent was the advice that Marchmont gave to Edgar in Burney’s *Camilla* (1796): “Whatever she does [*she* being Camilla herself] you must ask yourself this question: ‘should I like such behaviour in my wife?’ Whatever she says, you must

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52. The *OED* has “Ability to discern the most suitable, politic, or profitable course of action” (def. 1); cf. *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 91, 102, and note the way prudence is linked to discretion (148, 187), and Lady Catherine prioritizes “honour, decorum, prudence . . . [and] interest” (232) – an important listing even though we might question the moral authority of its source. Claudia Johnson sees the “venturesomeness” of *Persuasion* (1818) as Austen’s rejection of prudence (*Sense and Sensibility*, p. xiv), but to do so is to limit the word to considerations of finance and status (in Johnson’s own phrase, “the world of status-seeking and manor houses”) which is a reduced meaning of the word. Besides, Anne Eliot’s decision to accept Captain Wentworth is hardly imprudent, given his wealth.

53. Wendy Jones, “The Dialectic of Love in Sir Charles Grandison,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8 (1995) 15–34, p. 34.

54. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 244; see also p. 159 (where her not being “the declared mistress” of Pemberley fills Elizabeth with regret) and cf. Richardson, *Grandison*, vol. 3, p. 269.

55. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 16.

56. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 96.

make yourself the same demand.”<sup>57</sup> This was good advice for both potential partners to an engagement, and if the answer was in the negative, if the behaviour was not what one would welcome in a wife – or a husband – then all thought of marriage to that person should be dismissed. “[I]f his deficiencies of Manner &c &c strike you more than all his good qualities,” Austen wrote to Fanny Knight of a young man the latter was hesitating over, “if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once.”<sup>58</sup>

But this was not all. Not only did a woman need to set out to learn what she could about a man who interested her; she needed, as Fordyce advised, to rely “upon the enquiries of virtuous relatives” to fill in any gaps in her knowledge.<sup>59</sup> In other words, as Austen’s title suggested, Elizabeth needed to exercise “prejudice” and arrive at what the *OED* calls “a preliminary or anticipatory judgement” before setting her cap at Wickham, or Colonel Fitzwilliam, or even Darcy. The novel’s title has, of course, been read as a unnuanced criticism of Elizabeth: she was prejudiced and Darcy was proud, and prejudice and pride are failings that needed to be overcome. But a more careful reading shows that Elizabeth’s failing was not in being prejudiced, but in arriving at her “anticipatory judgement” of Darcy (and Wickham) on inadequate grounds. She needed to be prudent – and fortunately, learning from her mistakes, she eventually is. She asks questions about Darcy, and takes note when unsolicited testimony is given. “What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?” she reflects after her visit to Pemberley, continuing: “Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character.”<sup>60</sup> After all, as Lady Pennington had written:

if a man is equally respected, esteemed and beloved by his tenants, by his dependants and his domestics . . . you may justly conclude he has that true

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57. Frances Burney, *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth*, ed. Edward Allan Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 153–54.

58. Letter to Fanny Knight, 18 November 1814 (Letter 103), *Letters*, p. 410.

59. “Virtuous relatives,” because, as Burney had demonstrated at length in *Cecilia*, advice could only be trusted when not motivated by self-interest (Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 24), and for the rest of the novel wherever Mr Monckton is the actor; *Gisborne*, p. 241; Fordyce, vol. 2, pp. 95–97. Note in Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 140, Mrs Smith’s reluctance to advise Anne Elliot because she thought that she might herself benefit from her school friend’s marriage to Mr William Elliot. As we have seen, Lennox’s Countess would take the advice of her parents (*Female Quixote*, p. 327), but whether that could be wisely done depended on the quality of their advice: see *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 76.

60. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 162; Richardson, *Grandison*, vol. 3, p. 285.

good-nature, that real benevolence, which delights in communicating felicity, and enjoys the satisfaction it diffuses.<sup>61</sup>

After her visit to Derbyshire, with such information available to her, Elizabeth can legitimately, prudently conclude that the master of Pemberley really has the qualities she could admire.<sup>62</sup>

### 3 Elizabeth and the Culture Wars

Despite – indeed, because of – Elizabeth’s conduct-book morality some readers criticised her. “[I]t is impossible not to feel in every line of ‘Pride and Prejudice,’ in every word of Elizabeth,” Mary Russell Mitford noted, “the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine” – a comment which Austen had no doubt anticipated. It was, after all, prefigured in Caroline Bingley’s dismissal of Elizabeth for “self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable.”<sup>63</sup> The charge is the same in both cases (a want of taste, an insensitivity to what was fashionable), and in both cases it was seriously intended. Indifference to the demands of fashion was an indifference to the currents of fashionable life – and that, for those who thought society important, was troubling. The elite of Georgian and Regency London expected to be observed and imitated,<sup>64</sup> and those who refused to judge themselves by society’s image were faulted

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61. Pennington, p. 101.

62. Similar points could be made about the other half of the title. “Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us,” Mary sententiously remarks, echoing Hugh Blair (“Pride makes us esteem ourselves; Vanity makes us desire the esteem of others”: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 3 vols., 3rd ed. [London: A. Strahan, T. Cadell and W. Creech, 1787], vol. 1, pp. 249–50; cf. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 14), and a just appreciation of oneself could be thought a virtue. “Ignorance and Superstition are well known to be eternal Enemies of Nobility,” Richard Smyth had argued; “Education discards the former; Pride dissipates the latter. . .” (*A Letter to a Gentleman, on the Subject of Religious Controversy* [London: J. Robinson, 1752], p. 21; Smyth’s italics) – and if that were granted Darcy’s pride could be seen as a strength as well as a weakness. Note how Austen would echo Darcy’s initial objections to Elizabeth in a letter to Fanny Knight: cf. *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 125, 130–31, and the letter of 20 February 1817 (Letter 140), *Letters*, p. 450.

63. Letter to Sir William Elford, 20 December 1814, in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 54; *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 176. Morse exaggerates when he writes that the novel “cannot be viewed as anything but a sustained attack on the selfishness and arrogance of the aristocracy” (p. 166), but the criticism of society is there and was recognized.

64. As Hannah More explained, “those . . . filling the higher stations in life, are naturally regarded as patterns, by which the manners of all the rest of the world are to be judged”; cf. *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*, new ed. (Lon-

for failing to conform. The “performing society” that had flourished in the capitol’s theatres, amusement parks and pleasure gardens; the society “in which appearance itself . . . began to count as much as standing, longevity, and tradition,”<sup>65</sup> could not admit that other values were important or even existed. And yet they did (even shaping British politics in the two-and-half years when Spencer Perceval was Prime Minister),<sup>66</sup> and had done so for many years before the Regency began. Reflecting on the story he had told in *Clarissa* (1747–1748), Samuel Richardson had been quick to question whether “the constant Frequenters of Ranelagh and Vauxhall” could live a moral life,<sup>67</sup> and even before then conduct book authors, sharing these doubts, had offered an alternative, bourgeois morality of restraint which challenged that of fashionable excess.<sup>68</sup> To follow metropolitan fashion, one author explained, showed “that delicacy, the chief grace of the female character; and oeconomy, the support not merely of honesty alone, but of generosity, are deemed objects only of secondary importance”<sup>69</sup> – and that was not acceptable. It was hardly right, another reflected (taking pains to distinguish good-nature or benevolence from good-humour or “cheerful deportment”), that “gaiety, good humour, and a thoughtless profusion of expence, [could]

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don: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), pp. 1–2. For fashion as a source of identity, see Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: “Society,” Etiquette, and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973); for those who were not themselves fashionable being “measured against the perfection of [an] image,” see Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 13.

65. Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 46; cf. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 11; Wilson, pp. 17–18.

66. October 1809 to May 1812. Perceval’s distrust of the hypocrisy of the “professedly modest . . . in high life” would even lead him to take Princess Caroline’s side against the Prince Regent (whom he dismissed as a liar and a bankrupt); cf. Denis Gray, *Spencer Perceval: The Evangelical Prime Minister, 1762–1812* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), pp. 82–83.

67. Samuel Richardson, “Postscript” (1751), *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), vol. 8, p. 329.

68. Morris Golden, *Richardson’s Characters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 107. See also Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the “Spectator” to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 9–30; Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 134; Styles, p. 181. Burney, *Cecilia*, opposes the values of country and city from first (p. 17) to last (p. 938). In what is now a classic account, Armstrong sees conduct books generating a belief in middle class values even before they were instantiated in social life.

69. Gisborne, pp. 119–21; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 192–93.

throw a lustre around the faultiest characters.”<sup>70</sup> Or as More would warn, the fact that a “fair reputation” could be obtained “by a complaisant conformity to the prevailing practice, and by a mere decorum of manners” invited hypocrisy and worse,<sup>71</sup> and put middle-class values at risk. “The habits of life which prevail in the metropolis, and particularly in fashionable families,” Gisborne wrote, “are . . . totally repugnant to the cultivation of affection and connubial happiness.”<sup>72</sup>

Since each party in these culture wars viewed the other with distaste we should not be surprised at the way that Caroline Bingley and her sister seize upon the slightest evidence that Elizabeth did not belong. Her manners, her conversation, even her walking to Netherfield – everything was scrutinized and found wanting. The last was perhaps a small failing, but it was chalked up against her nevertheless. For the Bingley women, walking was a matter of social display – hence their concern with Elizabeth’s disturbed dress;<sup>73</sup> for Elizabeth, it was a practical alternative to taking a carriage, and a pleasurable source of exercise. Walking, Gregory had explained, “will give vigour to your constitutions and a bloom to your complexions,” and Darcy famously agrees. His friend’s sisters can only see a failure in decorum.<sup>74</sup>

This is not to suggest that Austen was indifferent to fashion. She (like Elizabeth) was certainly interested in what people were wearing in London.<sup>75</sup> However,

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70. Pennington, pp. 98–99; More, p. 15.

71. More, p. 3; Morse, p. 168. There is some irony here, as imitation did not in itself ensure social mobility. L. B. Namier suggested some fifty years ago that access to the highest levels of society came from the possession “uncontending ease, the unbought grace of life” (*England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 2nd ed. [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1961], pp. 13–14); cf. the way in which it was “ease, with . . . breeding” that set Bingley apart and made him Darcy’s intimate (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 10). However, this did not stop people trying to achieve greatness by imitating the great.

72. Gisborne, p. 329. Middle class values were not always those of the gentry and the two groups were often uncomfortable with each other (see e.g. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 119), but both groups could be equally uncomfortable with the dictates of society.

73. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 25; cf. Burney’s comments on the Duchess of Devonshire, seen in Hyde Park and observed to be “young & handsome,” yet “undressed & slatternly” (Troide, pp. 203–4).

74. Gregory, p. 14; *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 25; and cf. Austen’s half-humorous complaint about the weather (letter to Cassandra Austen, 30 November 1800 [Letter 28], *Letters*, p. 97): “it is too dirty even for such desperate Walkers as Martha & I to get out of doors, & we are therefore confined to each other’s society from morning until night, with very little variety of Books and Gowns.” I read the reference to gowns as irony.

75. Letter to Cassandra Austen, 8 January 1799 (Letter 17), *Letters*, p. 49; cf. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 93: “The first part of Mrs. Gardiner’s business on her arrival, was to distribute her presents and describe the newest fashions.”

interest did not imply a desire to follow fashion's dictates; she was unconcerned to imitate the clothes or manners of London, except when not doing so would be thought singular<sup>76</sup> and it should not surprise that the conduct books had advised just such an avoidance of singularity. Instructing her daughters to be "always perfectly clean and neat, both in . . . person and clothes," Pennington had cautioned:

Look upon all beyond this as immaterial in itself, any further than the different ranks have made some distinction in habit generally esteemed necessary; and remember that it is never the dress, however sumptuous, which reflects dignity and honour on the person; it is the rank and merit of the person that gives consequence to the dress.<sup>77</sup>

Austen would have agreed, but to the disinterest that authors like Pennington recommended she could add contempt. On 8 January 1801 she wrote to her sister Cassandra of a Mrs Powlett that she "was at once expensively and nakedly dress'd; we have had the satisfaction of estimating her Lace and Muslin. . ." Two weeks earlier she had described Powlett as "silly, and cross, as well as extravagant."<sup>78</sup> To borrow a phrase of Rebecca Arnold's, Austen "[took] part in fashionable consumption while laughing at those who [were] taken in by its excesses."<sup>79</sup>

Given this disinterest in the extravagantly fashionable, and her lack of sympathy for the values or the habits of those who thought themselves her superior,<sup>80</sup> it is no wonder that Austen not only enjoyed taking down the insufferable Lady Catherine de Bourgh in what is perhaps the most famous scene in *Pride and Prejudice*,<sup>81</sup> but did so by reworking the one in *Pamela* (1740–41) where Lady Davers rebukes Pamela for her presumption in thinking she could marry Mr B.

Well, Child, said she, sneeringly, how dost find thyself? Thou'rt mightily come on, of late! – I hear strange Reports about thee! – Thou'rt almost got into Fool's Paradise, I doubt! – And wilt find thyself terribly mistaken in a

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76. In this usage, "not complying with what is customary, usual, or general" (*OED*); cf. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 26; Gisborne, pp. 119–21, 123; Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 792.

77. Pennington, pp. 83.

78. Letters to Cassandra Austen, 8 January 1799 and 18 December 1798 (Letters 17 and 14), *Letters*, pp. 49, 39. Alison Adburgham suggests that Mrs Powlett's extravagance was her having her dresses made in London rather than by the village dressmaker or the visiting sewing woman (*Shops and Shopping, 1800–1914: Where, and in What Manner the Well-Dressed Englishwoman Bought Her Clothes*, 2nd ed. [London: Allen and Unwin, 1981], p. 2).

79. Arnold, p. 2.

80. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 232; Vickery, p. 36.

81. John Sutherland, *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet? Further Puzzles in Classic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 17.

little while, if thou thinkest my Brother will disgrace his Family, to humour thy Baby-face!<sup>82</sup>

There are differences between the scenes, of course.<sup>83</sup> But the similarities are more important. Austen, like Richardson, insists that a woman's "depths" should be more valued than her "surface"<sup>84</sup> – and Lady Catherine, like Lady Davers, appears ridiculous when she cannot agree.<sup>85</sup> Urging Elizabeth to abandon hope of her nephew on grounds of "honour, decorum, prudence, [and] interest," she makes it clear that Darcy's feelings and Elizabeth's merits are by the way,<sup>86</sup> just as Lady Davers, arguing that marriage to a social inferior was as degrading for a man as a woman, refused to allow for more than blood line in her calculations, or to consider her brother's argument that a partner could bring moral capital to a marriage.<sup>87</sup> Readers of *Pride and Prejudice* would have known better,<sup>88</sup> and delighted in the way that, in Elizabeth's trouncing of Lady Catherine, Pamela (who had been humili-

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82. Richardson, *Pamela*, 383. The scene in *Pride and Prejudice* is, as Michael Giffin points out, "the only direct confrontation in an Austen novel . . . between a commoner and a member of the nobility" (*Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002], p. 123; note that Lady Catherine's status as a member of the aristocracy is important to her, and she regrets that Darcy's paternal line, though "respectable, honourable, and ancient" was "untitled" [*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 232]).

83. In a comic yet suspenseful scene Pamela escapes out of a window while Lady Davers is at the other end of the room they are in (Richardson, *Pamela*, p. 422). Although, like Pamela, Elizabeth refuses to be dictated to, she does not take to flight.

84. Armstrong, p. 120.

85. Strangely, it has not been noticed how very much alike the two women are. Ignoring the echoes of Richardson, critics have pointed to a scene in Burney's *Cecilia*, where the titular character defers to Mrs Delvile; however, the situation there is different. Mrs Delvile approves of Cecilia Beverly and would welcome her as a daughter-in-law, but is horrified by the thought that by the terms of Cecilia's estate her son would have to take his wife's name (p. 677).

86. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 232; Austen had always found such behaviour ridiculous: see *Catherine and Other Writings*, ed. Margaret Doody and Douglas Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 33.

87. Richardson, *Pamela*, p. 424. Lady Davers reveals, as Morris Golden has observed, in *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 98, an "excess of the ego"; cf. Smith, 34; Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance Into the World* [1799], ed. Stewart J. Cooke (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 315.

88. For Austen's readers see Lee Erickson, "The Economy of Novel Reading: Jane Austen and the Circulating Library," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 30 (1990) 573–90. Thomas Lowndes could think it worth informing Frances Burney that all the polite world (including a "Lady of Fashion") was sending for her novel (Margaret Willes, *Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], p. 150); her readers were usually less distinguished.

ated by Lady Davers) had her revenge. They would also have appreciated Darcy's recognition of Elizabeth's intelligence as well as her looks, so reminiscent of the way Mr B fell in love with Pamela because of her physical attractions, but was persuaded to marry her by "the Beauties of her Mind."<sup>89</sup>

Jocelyn Harris has suggested a different parallel: that just as Pamela's country clothes had attracted Mr B's attention, so Elizabeth's "country-town indifference to decorum does her no harm with Darcy"; but this will not do. Elizabeth *has* decorum; she just does not imitate the manners of society or aspire to be presented at St. James.<sup>90</sup> Schooled in conduct-book morality, following the example of Harriet Byron and avoiding the mistakes of Clarissa Harlowe, she makes a marriage that exemplifies the ideals of Fordyce and his peers. It is no wonder that those presuming to speak for society were shocked.

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89. Richardson, *Pamela*, p. 406. A similar point is made by Grandison when he praises his wife: "When charms of mind and person meet, / How rich our raptures rise!" (Richardson, *Grandison*, vol. 2, p. 275; cf. the words of an earlier admirer: "Lovely as Miss Byron's person is, I defy the greatest Sensualist on earth not to admire her mind more than her person" – vol. 1, p. 9). Elizabeth herself attributes these motives to Darcy, although she self-depreciatingly discounts the idea that her beauty had played any part in winning him (*Pride and Prejudice*, p. 248). For Grandison – "the best of brothers, friends, landlords, masters, and the bravest and best of men" (*Grandison*, vol. 1, p. 303) – as a model for Darcy, and Grandison Hall as a model for Pemberley House, see Darryl Jones, *Jane Austen, Critical Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 99.

90. Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 109, referencing Richardson, *Pamela*, p. 56.

**Irina I. Simonova Strout**

## **The Exploration of Female Identity in the Father-Daughter Dynamic in Caroline Bowles's Poetry**

The work and literary accomplishments of Caroline Bowles Southey established her significance as a poet in the Romantic tradition as well as contemporary culture. Similar to many other women writers, she worked within the established poetic genres against the conformity of the masculine norms of Romanticism. The father-daughter relationship is not new, yet in Caroline Bowles's poetry it becomes a symbol of the patriarchal relation of women and men in society, a precursor to the questioning of woman's role and place in culture. This paper aims to examine the father-daughter dynamic in *Ellen Fitzarthur* and *Birth-Day*. Bowles interrogates the ambivalence of self: the private and the public persona, which has to come to terms with the demands and pressures of patriarchal society. To achieve self-fulfillment a woman has to be free from the power of the father. Caroline Bowles's poetry is such an attempt to strive towards the personal and poetic independence from the expectations of the patriarchal society.

*My poor child, you resemble me too  
much in all things. . .*<sup>1</sup>

Caroline Bowles Southey, a second-generation Romantic poet, has too long been ignored and has recently been rediscovered as one of the "major writers" of the Romantic period. Still, her work and literary accomplishments established her significance as a poet in the Romantic tradition as well as in the contemporary cultural framework. Often referred to or known as Robert Southey's wife, Bowles's poetry in her "fondness of rural life, melancholy, pathos and moral satire,"<sup>2</sup> deserves recognition of its own.

Defining female Romanticism, Meena Alexander argues that "male Romantic poets had sought out the clarities of visionary knowledge while women writers, with their lives dominated by the bonds of family and the cultural constraints of

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1. Edward Dowden, ed., *The Correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowles* (London: Longmans Green, 1881), letter 16 (July 1822), p. 30.

2. Duncan Wu, *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* (Malden, Mass., Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 602.

femininity, altered that knowledge, forcing it to come to terms with the substantial claims of a woman's view of the world."<sup>3</sup> Similarly to many other women writers, Caroline Bowles worked within the established genres against the conformity of the masculine norms of Romanticism. She established a genre of poetic autobiography as she frequently experimented with various literary genres. In her insightful analyses of culture she presented "a feminist sensibility and worldview . . . that male writers . . . could not offer."<sup>4</sup>

The father-daughter relationship is not a new subject in the literature of the period, yet in Caroline Bowles's poetry it becomes a symbol of the patriarchal relation of women and men in society, a precursor to the questioning of woman's role and place in culture. As for her own father, not much is known about his life. When Caroline was born, Captain Charles Bowles had retired from East India Company to a smaller rural place. He suffered from depression, "leading finally to a nervous illness which carried him off by a series of fits in January 1801"<sup>5</sup> when Caroline was fourteen. It is important to remember that in a patriarchal society, unmarried women found financial support from a father or a brother. Caroline Bowles had a 'brother,' Colonel Bruce who is thought to be her father's adopted, and perhaps illegitimate, son. He lived in India "but came to his 'sister's' rescue a year or so after her mother's death."<sup>6</sup> Having some financial difficulties, he offered Caroline an annuity, which helped her not to lose her home; she was "enormously grateful for his generosity."<sup>7</sup>

In a psychoanalytical framework, the preoccupation with the father figure comes from a daughter's idealized desire for her father as "desperate . . . 'Love' is entangled with the question of woman's complicity; it may be the bribe which has persuaded her to agree to her own exclusion."<sup>8</sup> It is often a reinforcement of a sense of self-worth. Caroline Bowles is preoccupied with the theme of a father-

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3. Meena Alexander, *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley* (Savage, MD: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1989), pp. 2–3.

4. Kathleen Hickok, " 'Burst are the prison bars': Caroline Bowles Southey and the Vicissitudes of Poetic Reputation," in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. Harriet Linkin and Stephen Behrendt (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 192–211, p. 199. Hickok gives a fine overview of Bowles's contribution to the Romantic canon and its processes, which often excluded women writers.

5. Virginia Blain, *Caroline Bowles Southey, 1786–1854: The Making of a Woman Writer* (Aldershot, Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), p. 18.

6. Blain, *Caroline Bowles Southey*, p. 19.

7. Blain, *Caroline Bowles Southey*, p. 19.

8. Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1982), p. 79.

daughter relationship in both her early and late works: from *Ellen Fitzarthur* to *Birth-Day*. In *Ellen Fitzarthur: A Metrical Tale, in Five Cantos*,<sup>9</sup> written in 1820, Bowles reworks what at first seems an old story of betrayal and seduction of a young girl. The plot is seemingly simple: an innocent and sweet Ellen who is living with her widowed father falls in love with a man she nurses back to life after a shipwreck. De Morton who claims his love to Ellen persuades her to leave with him. Later he abandons her and their child in London, as marriage between them will ruin his inheritance opportunity. Ellen travels back home only to find her old father is passed away. Full of grief and despair, she dies on his grave with her child pressed to her chest.

The poem is much more complex than that; it reveals how a societal structure and its systems set women up as children who never grow up and remain dependent on a stronger male presence. One of the broader issues coming out of the poem is the problem of daughters who do not exist as individuals in a society that lacks female education. Ellen's mother's education is limited and consists of needlework, music and singing. After her death, Ellen's father becomes centered on his daughter, his only comfort and hope: "One earthly love he still confest, / One tie, the purest and the best, / That bound a widowed father's care / To one sweet blossom, frail and fair. . ." (line 7). Ellen, gentle and nurturing, resembles her mother in many ways: "His youthful heart's selected bride, / When first she breathed that fond 'for ever!' / E'en so she looked, she moved, she spoke, / But that soft sound th'illusion broke: / 'Father!' it cried" (line 11). Describing Ellen, Bowles uses the word 'inmate' as Ellen becomes imprisoned in a botanical garden of her father's home and village life; she is a fragile 'plant' that can only grow on a familiar soil. The only education she receives is from her father, a pious shepherd, who "trained her pliant youth / With lessons of eternal truth" (Canto I, line 15). Gradually, Ellen becomes the replacement of his wife, as they share 'the tender and pure union' that only death is capable of separating them: "A parent, tho' his heart may break, / From that fond heart will never tear / The child whose last retreat is there!" (Canto I, line 19). Ellen's home life is "an earthly Paradise she found" (line 19) until the seducer De Morton appears in the village.

The shipwreck brings a stranger home whom Ellen and her father, as God's mediators, rescue and nurse back to life. Ellen sees a 'brother' figure in him, for whom she has longed for a long time. De Morton is first described as "the cherished stranger," an outsider who comes from "foreign fields of conflict" yet he experiences the "shipwreck on his native land" (line 28). Ellen's father sees him-

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9. All parenthesized references are to Caroline Bowles, *Ellen Fitzarthur: A Metrical Tale, in Five Cantos* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820).

self in De Morton, as “he will protect, sustain, and bless / My Ellen when she’s fatherless” (line 31). Despite De Morton’s assurance of his decent intentions, his union with poor Ellen jeopardizes his inheritance prospects; therefore he proposes a secret marriage. Ellen’s father objects to his proposal as it will taint Ellen’s reputation: “never shall my Ellen’s hand, / In secrecy’s dark shade be given; / In open day, and sight of man, / Her virgin vows shall rise to Heaven!” (line 37). De Morton leaves Ellen who can only hope for his return.

Similar to Madeline in John Keats’s *Eve of St. Agnes* who dreams of her future husband, Ellen perceives herself as De Morton’s wife: “And in her dreams! . . . The suit was gain’d, the time was past . . . he came at last / His bride, his promis’d bride to claim; / She murmured the beloved name, / And woke. . .” As she waits in vain, “nor line, nor message came, / No sound that bore De Morton’s name” (Canto III, line 42). Ellen possesses a fortitude, a strength of character that does not let her give up her hopes: “*There* seek her in her loveliest dress, / (Long suffering, mild, meek tenderness) / In woman’s fair and fragile form, / That bends, but breaks not in the storm” (line 49). Her heart remains pure and sweet as her “love knows no chill” (line 50). However, her father perceives the change in Ellen: “as with a father’s anxious dread, / Its presage of appalling gloom, / He marked his Ellen’s fading bloom,” (line 51) yet Ellen continues to believe in their happiness together. When he returns, De Morton offers Ellen a choice: “Two paths are open in thy sight – / Decide – one word, and all is ov’er; / Fly far from hence with me to-night, / Or stay, and see my face no more!” (line 60).

When Ellen leaves her home, the Paradise is lost forever: “Since Ellen left her father’s cot, / Her heart, remorseful and unblest, / Has sought for peace, but found it not” (Canto IV, line 65). Her guilt is unbearable, stabbing her heart like a “poisin’d dart” (line 65). Her father cannot sustain life without her as “A father’s forfeit love – in vain – / No parent’s tender eye beheld / Those lines by cruel fraud withheld – / Destroyer! was it not enough / From his old age’t have torn away / The last, the only prop, that lent / Its dear support to life’s decay” (Canto IV, line 67). Ellen cannot maintain her existence without him as well: “So seemed his silent scorn to show, / And Ellen wept in hopeless woe. . .” (line 68). De Morton becomes unattached and cold to Ellen: “Kind looks, and gentle words, were changed / For sullen tones, and eyes estranged, / And love’s assiduous cares were lost / In cold indifference’ killing frost. . .” (Canto IV, line 68). Gradually, Ellen too becomes ‘shipwrecked’ without a loving force, left both by De Morton and her father: “all she had loved in better days, / Involved in that impervious haze, / Or dimply shaped, like distant coast, / Thro’ twilight mists just seen and lost” (line 78). She hopes her father will forgive her and welcome her home with a child: “He cannot from his heart expel / All thought of her he loved so well / He cannot from

his heart erase / All record of her infant days, / When widowed love was wont to trace / Her mother's likeness in her face. . ." (Canto IV, line 71).

Ellen makes a decision to return home and as she passes the church, she encounters an old pastor who reminds her of her father; her memories of her father become alive. She becomes the wanderer who is taken in as a substitute daughter of a mother who lost her child: "And young and helpless, as thou art, / As was my child, a mother's heart / Finds in thy fate, a sympathy / That wakens all its cares for thee" (Canto V, line 106). Bowles invokes the Prodigal Son theme here: as Ellen hears the Biblical story, she desires to return home as her father "may greet his child with pard'ning love as sweet" (line 87). Ellen is the only child whose father does not expect her to come and live; however, her social recognition shrinks as her mind expands. Ellen's only want is "To sink upon her father's breast, / By his mild accents lulled to rest; / To breathe her last repentant sigh, / To look upon his face and die!" (line 91) Thoughts of homecoming give Ellen strength to continue with her journey: "So near her home – so near the close / Of her long travel – that dear thought / Came, scarce with gleam of comfort fraught" (line 107). Memory preserves home as a constant for her "pure and happy" life (Canto V, line 108). However, she returns to find that no one is waiting for her, "like Ellen's fate, / All there was dark and desolate," with "no sound of life was near" (line 112). Ellen's self, her whole existence depends on her father; when he is gone, her identity disintegrates as well: "but life was fled, / And the poor wand'rer's weary head / Had found, at last, a resting place / Upon her father's grave; her face / Was turned to earth, as if to hide / The bitter pang with which she died" (line 116). Ellen never finds personal or social fulfillment; forced into marginality, she is left with no other option but death.

After her parents' death, Caroline Bowles wrote to Robert Southey for some publishing advice, which began their long correspondence and friendship. It resulted in an 1839 marriage two years after Southey became a widower. Southey, thirteen years older, was a friend, a mentor and very much a father-like figure for Caroline. He encouraged and supported her talent, which he recognized as superior to his own poetic gift: "the flow of verse is natural, and the language unconstrained – both as they should be."<sup>10</sup>

There has been some gossip about the Bowles–Southey marriage,<sup>11</sup> such as the decline she brought upon him (she nursed a senile and ill man), her marriage to Southey for his money (in fact, she lost her money and supported his family) and her tense relationship with Kate, Southey's daughter. Both women had a need

10. Dowden, ed., letter 8 (20th November 1819), p. 17.

11. Blain, *Caroline Bowles Southey*, pp. 200–219.

for love and protection by Southey and Bowles, who had no children of her own, might have had a hard time adjusting to a new 'mother' role.

The father-daughter theme is reopened in her autobiographical masterpiece *Birth-Day: A Poem, in Three Parts, to Which are Added Occasional Verses* (1836),<sup>12</sup> which she began writing in 1819 and continued for the next fifteen years. The poem has been called an unconscious "seduction poem for 'father' Southey"<sup>13</sup> as he was one reader she tried to please and impress. For example, early in the poem Bowles gives a general view on the notion of father-daughter relationships:

And little Annie – what will Annie be?  
The fair-haired prattler! she, with matron airs,  
Who gravely lectures her rebellious doll –  
"Annie will be papa's own darling child,  
Dear papa's blessing." Ah! she tells thee truth:  
The pretty mockbird with his borrowed notes,  
Tells thee sweet truth. Already, is she not  
Thy darling child? Thy blessing she will prove –  
The duteous prop of thy declining years. (387–95)

In the idyllic life she describes in the passage, little Annie will always be her father's child, "remaining unmarried in an unbroken pre-Oedipal dyad with her complacent papa."<sup>14</sup> His sons will grow up and fly out of the nest but not his Annie. Despite marriage and children, Annie will remain a part of his life because "she will never change. That tender heart, / Though wedded love, and infant claimants dear, / May waken there new interests – new and sweet; / Thine in that loving heart will ne'er decrease. . ." (403–406). Even the barrier of marriage will not remove her from the close relationship with her father.

Bowles's narrative then moves from a general to a more personal, individualized description of the father-daughter dynamic. Caroline Bowles recalls how happy she is to accompany her father on numerous fishing trips: "Soon came the days, / When *his* companion, his – his only one / My father's – I became" (2018–2019). She invokes one fishing episode with her father as she reminisces on her childhood as "supremely happy" (2023–45). As her father is fishing on the bank

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12. Caroline Bowles, *Birth-Day: A Poem, in Three Parts, to Which are Added Occasional Verses* (Edinburgh / London, 1836).

13. Virginia Blain, " 'Be these his daughters?' Caroline Bowles Southey, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Disruption in a Patriarchal Poetics of Women's Autobiography," in *Tradition and Poetics of the Self in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry*, ed. Barbara Garlick (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 8.

14. Blain, " 'Be these his daughters?'," p. 8.

of the river, his child preoccupies herself playing in a “Naiad’s grot”: “I found a cave, / A little secret cell, one large flat stone / Its ample floor, embedded deep in moss” (2076–2079). This scene reinforces the words of Jane Williams, who wrote on the mid nineteenth-century gender dynamic: “Men stand, as it were, upon a promontory, commanding extensive views, and open to immediate impulses from all above, below, and around them. Women sit like the genii of secluded caves, receiving echoes, and communicating mere reverberations from the outer world.”<sup>15</sup> Later Caroline plays the role of a “wife,” lovingly and yet possessively getting lunch ready for her and her father: “The busy, bustling joy, with housewife airs / (Directress, handmaid, lady of the feast!) / To spread that ‘table of wilder-ness!’ ” (2095–2100). She is meticulous in setting and arranging the table and is sad when he leaves the table:

The rod securely fixed; then into mine  
 The willing hand was yielded, and I led  
 With joyous exultation that dear guest  
 To our green banquet room. Not Leicester’s self,  
 When to the hall of princely Kenilworth  
 He led Elizabeth, exulted more  
 With inward gratulation at the show  
 Of his own proud magnificence, than I,  
 When full in view of mine arranged feast,  
 I held awhile my pleased companion back,  
 Exacting wonder – admiration, praise  
 With pointing finger, and triumphant “There!”           (2144–2156)

Despite the fairytale imagery of grotts and caves, the little girl does not fashion herself as a princess, or a fairy. She takes on a role of a “masculine protector: Leicester escorting Queen Elizabeth (her father).”<sup>16</sup> She is in control of the entire situation rather than her father.

The poem is set in the month of December (the month of her birthday) as the poet is alone, all her family members are dead and therefore “the jump from prized daughter to undervalued spinster” is a traumatic one.<sup>17</sup> She does not regret the lack of a husband or children, but her parents, especially her father, are very much missed. Sexual desires are absent throughout the poem, as the mood remains pre-pubescent.<sup>18</sup> When the poem was published in 1836, Caroline Bowles

15. Jane Williams, *The Literary Women of England* (Saunders, Otley, 1861), pp. 2–3.

16. Blain, “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 12.

17. Blain, “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 13.

18. Blain, “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 13.

was fifty years old and the poem symbolically opens with a celebration of mid-life. It is full of somber and desperate notes, as the present is bleak and dark. The happy times are associated with the childhood self when her parents were alive and she was “the golden child.” She reconstructs her identity as a woman through memory flashbacks of a much happier past, as memory links her past selves into one. As an artist, Caroline Bowles strives towards creative independence and her own poetic voice. Yet she has moments of frustration with her limits: education and the social expectations that nineteenth century woman had to face. By the end of the poem, the “narrative falters and breaks off, in the face of a lack of positive reinforcement from the Father.”<sup>19</sup> Southey’s opinion was very important for Bowles and her address to God in a way is a final speech to her “poetic guide”:

Oh precious seed!  
Sown early; soon, too soon the sower’s hand,  
The immediate mortal instrument withdrawn,  
Tares of this evil world sprang thickly up  
Choking your promise. But the soil beneath  
(Nor rock nor shifting sand) retained ye still,  
God’s mercy willing it, until *his* hand,  
Chastening as fathers chasten, cleared at last  
The encumbered surface, and the grain sprang up. –  
But hath it flourished? – hath it yet borne fruit  
Acceptable? Oh Father! leave it not  
For lack of moisture yet to fall away! (3034–3045)

In her search for poetic self-fulfillment Bowles touches upon the father-daughter interactions as well as on the maturation of a girl into a woman. Her voice shifts in scenes describing a pagan garden altar and its destruction, her rejection by her Mother during the chicken pox and a few others. In a clock scene she touches upon the issue of marriage, which she later dismisses in favor of freedom and artistic independence: “When I’m a woman / I’ll have’, quoth I, / – so far the *will* and *when* / Tallied exactly, but our difference lay / Touching the end to be achieved. With me, / *Not* settlements, and pin-money, and spouse / Appendant, but in unencumbered right / Of womanhood – a house and cuckoo clock!” (2867–2886).

Bowles misses her family and the fact that she owns a house is because her family is gone: “Years past, the pledge (self-plighted) was redeemed; / There hangs with its companionable voice / The cuckoo clock in this mine house. – /

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19. Blain, “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 15

Ay, *mine*; / But left unto me desolate” (2890–2894). Bowles’s writing in this passage is “conceived as a household task”<sup>20</sup> rather than a poetic task. Her concept of self (recalled from the past) is one of a child rather than an adult writing, which reinforces the issue of women who are never allowed to grow up. Bowles desires independence, the space of her own to create and be fulfilled. She is on the quest for the poetic voice as writing can free her female self from societal constraints.

It is significant that the Mother presence is vague in the poem yet the Father image is quite circumspect. Her Nurse and her father who are substitute ‘maternal’ figures for her raise her. Bowles had a mother, however, the poem stresses the emotional ties with her father. The mother in the poem is very much of a stranger; when young Caroline is sick with smallpox, the only woman who cares for her like a mother is her Nurse. The poem does not clarify that Caroline’s mother is the one who pushes her away yet there is a strong sense that she is more concerned for herself than for her own daughter. A number of feminist critics, Angela Leighton and Dolores Rosenblum<sup>21</sup> in particular, have noted that the poem is a search for the mother, while the father’s role is strongly emphasized; the word ‘father’ is mentioned twenty four times in the course of the poem and often is very emotional.

The autobiographic aspect of *Birth-Day* as well as other works by Caroline Bowles investigates the father-daughter dynamic. Similarly to her many contemporaries, Bowles interrogates the ambivalence of self: the private and the public persona, which has to come to terms with the demands and pressures of the patriarchal society. Both poems can be seen as the cautionary tales of nineteenth century women who in order to achieve self-fulfillment should free themselves from the power of the father: “it may be historically necessary to be momentary blind to father-love; it may be politically effective to defend – tightly, without lucidly – against its inducements, in order for a ‘relation between sexes,’ in order to rediscover some feminine desire, some desire for a masculine body that does not respect the Father’s law.”<sup>22</sup> In order to articulate herself, a woman should leave the father’s presence behind, and move away from worshiping him: “by dephallicizing the father and avoid[ing] the pitfall of familial thinking in order to have greater effect upon the much more complex and powerful societal relations which structure our world.”<sup>23</sup> Caroline Bowles’s poetry is an attempt to interrogate the father-daughter relationship and to strive towards both personal and

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20. Blain, “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 17

21. Blain disagrees with Angela Leighton and Dolores Rosenblum, who see the poem as the search for the mother figure. Cf. “‘Be these his daughters?’,” p. 20.

22. Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. xv.

23. Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 79.

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poetic independence from the expectations of the patriarchal society. In her works, she follows the female poetic tradition, defining female subjectivity and then enriching the Romantic literary canon on her own terms. Her poetry should be read as a literary and cultural phenomenon, breaking the silence and the absorption into the male ego so many Romantic women writers endured and experienced.

**Lorene M. Birden**

## **Saki as Dauphin of the Wildean Witticism**

Saki and Wilde are often compared in biographical articles or book reviews, and the direct point of the comparison is their use of aphoristic humour. However, one notices that only one of these two authors is quoted regularly. This study attempts a considered comparison of the two authors on the basis of their terse commentaries, here called witticisms. It offers a more in-depth look at Saki, considering him as the “underdog” in the comparison. The article begins with basic information, including a brief explanation of the use of the term “witticism,” in keeping with humour studies practices. It then proceeds with theoretical considerations of humour and English culture, and ends with detailed analysis of some of each author’s productions. The final conclusion is twofold: first, that Wilde’s witticisms are more quoted because they can be more easily detached from their context; second, that Wilde produces more of the type of witticism that Saki produces, but these remain unquoted, for the same reason as Saki’s.

### **1 Introduction**

Considering the witticism, the quip, the *bon mot*, or whatever, one thinks immediately of Oscar Wilde. I need only evoke a few of his comments to awaken recognition:

I can resist anything except temptation.  
Everything matters in art except the subject.  
I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex.  
The proper basis for a marriage is a mutual misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup>

These below, however, may be difficult to place.

All kindnesses are doubtful.  
You can’t expect a boy to be vicious before school.  
Addresses are given us to conceal our whereabouts.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 424, xix, 477, 163.

2. Saki, *The Complete Works of Saki*, intro. Noel Coward (Garden City: International Collectors Library, 1976), pp. 141, 92, 86.

These comments come from the one who was considered Wilde's dauphin of the *bon mot*, Saki. Few but the most devoted fans ever recognize them; Saki's witticisms never became quotable in the way that Wilde's did. In fact, we will see that all of Saki's quips and some of Wilde's have been equally forgotten, and for the same reasons. This study looks at the main reasons for this difference; as we will see, they are both literary and extra-literary.

## 2 Biography, terms and times

There are apparently many people who have not read Saki. He enjoys what is often known as a "cult" following; those who have read him are usually ardent fans, able to quote excerpts and ready to laugh at the mere mention of a title or character. Saki was born Hector Hugh Munro in 1870 in Akyab, Burma (now Myanmar), the third child of Colonel Charles Augustus Munro and Mary Frances Mercer Munro. His mother died in Devon when he was an infant, and he and his brother and sister were left there to live with his father's widowed mother and spinster sisters. The sternness of these aunts is often echoed in the aunts of Saki's stories.

After abandoning a beginning career in the colonial police because of ill-health, Munro attempted to earn his living as a historian – he was one of the last men of leisure and enthusiasm to write a history before that task fell to university professors – then began a double career as writer of satire and fiction and foreign correspondent for *The Morning Post*. (He ended the latter career in February of 1909.) He came quickly to public attention in July 1900 through the publication in *The Westminster Gazette* of the first of a set of satires that would, when collected, take on the name of *The Westminster Alice*, first published in book form in 1902. This work contained a very close imitation of the prose of Carroll's Alice books, but the nonsense of the original was used in this case to criticize the heads of the Liberal party and the government's handling of the Boer War. It attracted so much attention that a serious article criticizing the war, "The Soldier and the Statesman," refers approvingly to the satirical texts.<sup>3</sup>

Other political satires followed throughout the author's career, with titles such as "The Political Jungle-Book," "Not So Stories," "Heart-to-Heart Talks," or "Potted Parliament."<sup>4</sup> Most of this satire, especially the early works, was published under the pen-name of Saki, taken from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

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3. "The Soldier and the Statesman," *Westminster Gazette* (11 Oct 1901), p. 1.

4. "The Political Jungle-Book," *Westminster Gazette* (Feb–May 1902); "Not So Stories," *Westminster Gazette* (Oct–Nov 1902); "Heart-to-Heart Talks," *Bystander* (Jul–Aug 1912); "Potted Parliament," *Outlook* (Feb–Aug 1914).

Parallel to this political satire, Saki wrote social satire contained in humorous short stories that were published in such dailies and weeklies as *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Bystander*. J. W. Lambert says that these stories “upend respectability,” because most of them involve a character liberated from the stilted social norms of the time playing pranks on those adhering to them.<sup>5</sup> Three such characters, or havoc-wreakers, appear regularly: Reginald from 1901 to 1904, Clovis Sangrail from 1909 to 1916, and Vera Durmot from 1911 to 1913.<sup>6</sup> The pranks in which they engage were seen at the time as “the most extraordinary things. . . Charming and amusing things, of course, and all so delightfully immoral.”<sup>7</sup> His writing was seen as that of a “non-moral writer, with a freakish wit.”<sup>8</sup> This “immorality” or “non-morality” is contained in the liberation from social norms that the havoc-wreakers display. Vladimir Jankélévitch refers to this as the ill-ease that ironists create by contradicting social conventions.<sup>9</sup> Irony pulls one away from traditions.<sup>10</sup> He was felt to have written in his short stories “a handbook of the gentle art of dealing faithfully with social nuisances – bores, cadgers, ‘thrusters’ and ‘climbers’.”<sup>11</sup> He fashioned sharp darts to throw at the pathos of such people.<sup>12</sup> Again, Saki’s writings were so popular that a contemporary article referred to the average Londoner as trying to imitate Saki’s characters.<sup>13</sup> Critics consider him to have exercised a considerable influence on Maugham, and a great one on Wodehouse. Noel Coward was a great admirer of these works.

In addition to the short stories and political satire, Saki wrote two novels, *The Unbearable Bassington* (1912) and *When William Came* (1913), and a heretofore unproduced play, “The Watched Pot” (first published in *The Square Egg* in 1924). He died at Beaumont Hamel on 14 November, 1916, four days before the end of the Battle of the Somme, having attained the rank of Lance Serjeant in the Royal Fusiliers; his name is listed on the Thiepval Memorial. Saki has been called the humorist

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5. J. W. Lambert, “Introduction” to *The Bodley Head Saki* (London: Bodley Head, 1963), 7–67, p. 7.

6. For the use of the term “havoc-wrecker,” see Lorene M. Birden, “‘One’s bitterest friends’: dynamique de caractère et humour chez Saki” (Diss. U Nice, 1996).

7. “Reginald’s Successor,” review of *The Chronicles of Clovis*, *Morning Post* (23 Oct 1911), p. 2.

8. “Beasts and Super-Beasts,” review of *Beasts and Super-Beasts* by Saki, *Spectator* (11 July 1914), p. 61.

9. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’ironie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1964), p. 12.

10. Jankélévitch, p. 74.

11. “Beasts,” p. 61.

12. Jankélévitch, p. 96.

13. Digamma, “The Brilliant Young Man,” *Westminster Gazette* (16 Jan 1904) 1–2, p. 1.

who “provided more laughter to the paragraph than almost any of his contemporaries. . . He was in the great tradition of wit with Swift, Voltaire and Byron.”<sup>14</sup> His so-called *Complete Works* (in reality his *Collected Works*, which have left out quite a few tales) are still regularly re-issued.

Both Saki and Wilde were known for their use of brief witty comments in their works. Both were light in their irony; Jankélévitch says that the goal of an ironist is never to be profound; that irony can only be superficial.<sup>15</sup> Different terms have been used at different times to describe the succinct, humorous comments that these authors specialize in. In addition to this abundance of terminology, there is disagreement among humour researchers as to what the terms mean; the very term “humour” receives different interpretations according to the researcher using it. The one thing that humour researchers agree on is that they should make their terminology clear for the study that they present. The following paragraph presents in succinct form the different choices possible and the decisions made.

References to Wilde’s rapid-fire comment first began to be coined by himself. He has two of his characters referred to as making “paradoxes” or “aphorisms”: Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*. In the play *Vera*, Prince Alexis says that the wittiest of his father’s courtiers, Prince Paul, “would write an epigram upon a tombstone.”<sup>16</sup> His story “The Remarkable Rocket” inspired some of his critics to call his turns of phrases “verbal fireworks.”<sup>17</sup> All of these give us four choices, no one of which is usually satisfactory to everyone. Aphorisms are not necessarily ironic or comic, nor are paradoxes. The original, Roman epigram was a poem, not a saying, but did produce a witty comment. And fireworks can come from anger or holiday celebrations as much as from humour. The *bon mot* defines concise wit, but is perhaps unacceptable to non-French speakers. Emil A. Draitser prefers the word “travesty,” but uses it as much for an entire work as for a saying, and uses it only to describe a saying or work which has been altered.<sup>18</sup>

A “quip” is also a concise comment, but can also be sarcastic. Wilde and Saki can be sarcastic. Beerbohm’s famous description of Wilde’s behaviour in a restaurant is well-known: “Tell the cook of this restaurant with the compliments of Mr Oscar Wilde that these are the very worst sandwiches in the whole world and that,

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14. Gerald Gould, “Saki,” *New Statesman* (Nov 1917) 159–160, p. 160.

15. Jankélévitch, pp. 33, 34.

16. Wilde, p. 698.

17. See for example Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Fireworks of Oscar Wilde* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1989).

18. Emil A. Draitser, *Techniques of Satire: The Case of Saltykov-Shchedrin* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 126–129.

when I ask for a watercress sandwich, I do not mean a loaf with a field in the middle of it.”<sup>19</sup> Maurice Baring reports that when Saki was asked “how his book could be got” he responded, “Not at an ironmonger’s.”<sup>20</sup> Saki presents what seems to be a more polite and elaborate version of this quip when he says in “The Sex that Doesn’t Shop”:

But it is in catering for her literary wants that a woman’s shopping capacity breaks down most completely. If you have perchance produced a book which has met with some little measure of success, you are certain to get a letter from some lady whom you scarcely know to bow to, asking you “how it can be got.” She knows the name of the book, its author, and who published it, but how to get into actual contact with it is an unsolved problem to her. You write back pointing out that to have recourse to an ironmonger or a corn-dealer will only entail delay and disappointment, and suggest an application to a bookseller as the most hopeful thing you can think of. In a day or two she writes again: “It is all right; I have borrowed it from your aunt.”<sup>21</sup>

However, both writers engage more often in irony than in sarcasm. Their wit is too fine for the sarcastic mode.

“Witticism,” Dryden’s neologism, seems to offer the best description of what we have in the kind of verbal play that Wilde and Saki engage in. The ideas of succinctness and wittiness are contained in the term, and other connotations are absent. This then will be the term used here, although acknowledgements of Wilde’s preferences can be made by using his terms for the sake of variety.

The witticism as practiced by Saki and Wilde and the general ability to form witticisms are very characteristic of the humour of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. They are antidotes to the “narrowness and disfigurings” of those times.<sup>22</sup> Concise humour based on wordplay is present in “The Dolly Dialogues” of Anthony Hope, in the parodies contained in Max Beerbohm’s *Christmas Garland*, in the short stories of Rachel Neish, who wrote for the *Westminster Gazette*, and in John Oliver Hobbes. J. W. Lambert explicitly indicates the genealogy of this trend: “First [Saki’s] stories made their mark . . . by their success in witticism and pinpoint flippancy. The field already well cultivated by Oscar Wilde, Anthony Hope, ‘John Oliver Hobbes’ and the rest was still popular.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, this form of verbal pyrotechnics was so over-cultivated that “Digamma” complains about it in a letter to the

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19. Max Beerbohm, *Max Beerbohm’s Letters to Reggie Turner*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 36.

20. Maurice Baring, *The Puppet Show of Memory* (Boston: Heinemann, 1922), p. 332.

21. Saki, p. 55.

22. Jankélévitch, p. 35, my translation.

23. Lambert, p. 39.

*Westminster Gazette* titled “The Brilliant Young Man”: “the ‘brilliant young man’ naturally loves to say something striking and unexpected.”<sup>24</sup> The critic devotes five paragraphs to this person’s capacity to create paradoxes, without ever once being convinced of either their accuracy or their entertainment value.

To give a more complete picture of the humour situation of the time, here are some examples of Hobbes’s wit, taken from the play *The Fools’ Hour*, written with George Moore:

*Lady Doldrummond* . . . where is the pleasure of having a son if you may not direct his life?

*Sir Digby Soame* Julia de Trappe? She must be the daughter of that Mrs. Howard de Trappe who gives large At Homes in a small house, and who spends her time hunting for old lovers and new servants.

*Lady Doldrummond* I daresay he already regards you as his wife.

*Julia* (with an inspired air) Perhaps that is why he treats me so unkindly. I have often thought that if he were my husband he could not be more disagreeable!

*Mandeville* Lady Doldrummond . . . would find immorality in a sofa-cushion.

*Mandeville* Whenever I hear of a charming husband I always think that he *must* be an invalid.<sup>25</sup>

These examples represent the type of verbal vivacity prevalent in the comedy of the time; the high master of it was of course Wilde.

The explanation for such a common current of humour style is that there is always a close relation between verbal humour and language which comes from a parallel link between language and culture, and there was a particularly strong one in English culture at that time. For example, historian Paul Thompson points out that the different classes in Victorian and Edwardian England each had distinctive ways of speaking and that in order to go up in the world one had to learn the modes of speaking of the superior class.<sup>26</sup> Philip Dodd indicates that the English gentleman was duty bound to have impeccable pronunciation, use transitive verbs, and express himself in the virile, simple style exemplified by the poems of

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24. Digamma, pp. 1, 2.

25. John Oliver Hobbes and George Moore, “The Fool’s Hour,” *The Yellow Book* 1 (1894) 253–272, pp. 258, 259, 267, 268.

26. Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p. 93.

Alfred Austin.<sup>27</sup> This insistence reflects the relative narrowness of the society against which Wilde and Saki battled, each in his own way (a fact that will be further elucidated below). They opposed their world of discourse to the prevailing world.<sup>28</sup> Linda Hutcheon points out that irony is an important element in oppositional rhetoric because it involves an intentionally complicated interpretive process.<sup>29</sup> Such a process is detectable in Saki's and Wilde's ironies, which highlights the oppositional stance of the authors.

It should be underlined that both of these authors were on the outside looking in. As Marshall McLuhan shows us, one can only criticise a context when one has succeeded in pulling oneself from it.<sup>30</sup> Jankélévitch notes the disparity in irony between our perceptions and our letting go of them.<sup>31</sup> He describes irony as "the melancholy gaiety that the discovery of a plurality inspires in us."<sup>32</sup> Wilde's grandson Merlin Wilde commented, on the unveiling of the Wilde windowpane in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner, that it was appropriate because Wilde was neither inside nor outside.<sup>33</sup> And V. S. Pritchett mentions that Saki participates in the activities of the drawing room, but he "writes like an enemy" and behaved in those drawing-rooms like a half-tamed lynx.<sup>34</sup> Hutcheon points out that the ironist "would stand outside, in a position of power (or at least masking any vulnerability)."<sup>35</sup> Pritchett says that such ironists "are left frightened and alone," thus vulnerable.<sup>36</sup> Ironists like Saki and Wilde wish to wake ideological contradictions to jar them.<sup>37</sup> As true ironists, they go along with society expressly to reveal its foibles.<sup>38</sup>

Jankélévitch recognizes a weapon in the *bon mot*.<sup>39</sup> In the ironist's war with society, he must always battle the enemy with his own arms; discourse being the prime means of access to power, appropriation of discourse by social rebels consti-

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27. Philip Dodd, "Englishness and the National Culture," Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, eds., *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 1–28, p. 6.

28. Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 89.

29. Hutcheon, p. 12.

30. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet-New American Library, 1964), p. 21.

31. Jankélévitch, p. 11.

32. Jankélévitch, p. 37, my translation.

33. This commemoration took place on 14 February 1995. The source is unfortunately impossible to find at present.

34. V. S. Pritchett, "The Performing Lynx," *New Statesman* 53.1347 (1957), pp. 18–19.

35. Hutcheon, p. 17.

36. Pritchett, p. 18.

37. Hutcheon, p. 31.

38. Jankélévitch, p. 12.

39. Jankélévitch, p. 16.

tutes a kidnapping, an assault on power, and a dismantling of the structures of power.<sup>40</sup> Hutcheon says that ironists will take and use the social language to attack a society.<sup>41</sup>

Different researchers emphasize the rapport between language, culture, and literature. Dieter A. Berger develops a detailed analysis of Victorian and Edwardian literary conversation seen from the goal that George Meredith delineates for comedy: “the exclusive pursuit of [characters] and their speech.”<sup>42</sup> Berger finds in nineteenth-century literature parodies of the British norms and values contained in what he calls conversational culture. From this point of view he reveals the sometimes subtle contrast between the superficial politeness of a fictional conversation and the wit that aggresses this conversation “from below.”<sup>43</sup> This model helps greatly to establish the different levels of the witticism in the two authors presented for study.

Considerations of sentence structure and rhythm also contribute to an understanding of the witticism. Susan Lohafer devotes part of her study of the short story to questions of sentence density and word intensity.<sup>44</sup> For the witticism, of necessity dense in its concision, word intensity comes from judicious choices; as will be seen below, the essence of many witticisms is in the new meaning acquired through the changing of a single word or a single syllable in a known turn of phrase. These concepts also receive additional amplitude when studied in terms of James Paul Gee and François Grosjean’s studies on the effects of rhythm on a narrative.<sup>45</sup> Although these researchers analyze pauses rather than words, their general comments on rhythm are useful for the study of verbal rhythm in these authors who rarely pause. In fact, it is the lack of silence which constitutes an important element in their works; Maurice Baring says of Saki:

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40. For a detailed analysis of the relation of power to discourse, see Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Susan Purdie elucidates the link between humor and power, placing discourse in the framework of “correct” use of language, in the Lacanian sense (*Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 16).

41. Hutcheon, p. 30.

42. Dieter A. Berger, “British Conversational Culture and its Reflection in Literature,” *Anglistentag 1990 Marburg, Proceedings*, ed. Claus Uhlig and Rüdiger Zimmermann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991) 362–372, p. 371; George Meredith, *The Egotist: A Comedy in Narrative* (London: Kegan Paul, 1880), p. 1.

43. Berger, pp. 362–66.

44. Susan Lohafer, *Coming to Terms with the Short Story* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 1983), pp. 44–45.

45. James Paul Gee and François Grosjean, “Empirical Evidence for Narrative Structure,” *Cognitive Science* 8.1 (1984) 59–85, p. 68.

Every page . . . is starred with witticisms, felicitous phrases, pointed comments or verbal pyrotechnics.

At its worst, it is mere verbalism, an indulge [*sic*] in witticism more for the sake of the sound than the sense, or for the fun of twisting phrases or juggling with words and syllables and antitheses. . . But in [*The Unbearable Bassington*. . .] the level of Saki's wit and the dexterity of his phrasing is high. . .<sup>46</sup>

Among the comments about Wilde we find those of P. S. Pathak, who talks about Wilde's addiction to words for the sake of their sounds, and of George Woodcock, who says Wilde "wrote best when he was more or less reproducing his conversation."<sup>47</sup> Woodcock in fact makes the same negative comment about Wilde's work that Baring does about Saki's: "he often wrote artificially and shallowly, and spoilt some of his best work by self-conscious elaboration."<sup>48</sup> These comments on verbal art highlight the fact that verbal rhythm plays an important part in the elaboration of Wilde's and Saki's humour.

### 3 The authors

The importance of these analyses will become clearer as we look more closely at the authors themselves. No one ever evokes Saki's witticisms without invariably comparing them to Wilde's. Apart from the comment by Lambert quoted above, V. S. Pritchett, S. P. B. Mais, R. Ellis Roberts, G. K. Chesterton, A. J. Langguth and J. C. Squire have all alluded to this resemblance. Of all these authors, only Pritchett offers a negative comparison: "And then there are all these echoes of Wilde's witticisms and paradoxes – some brilliant, some too facile and flat."<sup>49</sup> In his opinion, Saki does not often surpass his elder. On the other hand, the other critics approve of Saki's efforts. Mais, after a moment of hesitation, confirms the superiority of Saki's *mots*: "[they are] conversationally brilliant in a way that unfortunately reminds one of Wilde at very rare intervals . . . but he escapes from the sterile artificiality of the Wilde school very quickly. . ."<sup>50</sup> Thus Mais associates Wilde's quips with sterility and, by implication, Saki's with life, congratulating

46. Maurice Baring, "Introduction," *The Unbearable Bassington, The Complete Works of Saki*, by Saki (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1926) ix–xxii, pp. xv–xvi.

47. R. S. Pathak, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study* (Allahabad: Lokbharti, 1976), p. 43; George Woodcock, *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. V. Boardman, 1949), p. 48.

48. Woodcock, p. 12.

49. V. S. Pritchett, "Saki," *New Statesman* 66.1703 (1963) 614–615, p. 614.

50. S. P. B. Mais, "The Humor of 'Saki'," *Books and their Writers*, ed. S.P.B.Mais (London: Grant Richards, 1920) 311–330, p. 315.

him for the freshness of his creations. As we will see, this comparison is both inevitable and misleading.

Roberts finds a direct parallel between Saki's style and the style of the *Dolly Dialogues* and of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and puts their verbal fireworks on the same level: "witticisms as near poetry and the lighter imagination as nonsense can be. . ."51 In this way the critic traces a direct line through the humoristic tradition from Wilde through Hope to Saki. Chesterton partially reinforces this connection with his favourable comments on Saki's play *The Watched Pot*, which has never been produced: "[it] deserves more serious criticism than it has perhaps received; for its dialogue has a compact and costly quality in the jewellery of nonsense not unworthy of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and more genuine than *Lady Windermere's Fan*. . ."52 *The Watched Pot* contains a mine of witticisms and other verbal humour in Wilde's style but richer in meaning.

When Langguth compares Wilde to Saki, he finds the basis of their verbal style in their sexuality. Thus he attributes to the witticism an insurrectional function already postulated in the preceding elaboration of the link between verbal humour and power. The following commentary by Langguth forms a parallel with those of Michel Foucault on power and discourse and Jeffrey Meyers on homosexuality:

It is hardly surprising that men with inconvenient lusts that could send them to jail could hold some opinions in common. And since each man was a wit, he would express himself in the witticisms that only wit can fashion. Hector was influenced by Wilde but wit cannot be learned. The two did, however, ring harmonious changes on the same themes. . . . wit is often rueful, and homosexuals have reason to rue; wit is often intolerant, and intolerance is a quality that they know; wit can be self-mocking, and it is when homosexuals mock themselves that society allows itself to relax in their presence. Oscar Wilde once illustrated perfectly the special quality of homosexual wit when he expanded upon the common lament that life is unfair. "Life is unfair," said Wilde, "for which most of us should be very grateful."<sup>53</sup>

In this passage, Langguth notes a common source, an influence, and a difference all at the same time. He suggests that there is a direct connection between Reginald, the most witticism-prone of Saki's characters, and *Earnest*; at the same time, he suggests that this link comes from a more profound source than Wilde's works. The

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51. R. Ellis Roberts, "Saki," *New Statesman* 27.691 (1926), p. 416.

52. G. K. Chesterton, "Introduction," *The Toys of Peace, The Collected Works of Saki*, by Saki (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1926) xi-xiv, pp. xi-xii.

53. A. J. Langguth, *Saki: A Life of Hector Hugh Munro* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), pp. 76-78.

homosexual, like the satirical author, seeks revenge for the narrowness of others by an appropriation of discourse, an example of which is found in the modification of the commonplace perpetrated by Wilde.

With this comment on appropriation I return to a fact already indicated earlier in this study: both Wilde and Saki were social rebels who placed themselves at a certain distance from their society in order to cultivate their irony. Hutcheon sees any ironist as always detached from his society.<sup>54</sup> Using the power of play that irony offers, they make quips that always contain some commentary, expressed in tones ranging from simple humour to biting satire.<sup>55</sup> They were both outsiders and observers; however, they differed in the manner and degree of condemnation, as will be seen presently.

When one sees the nearly equal status that is accorded Saki's and Wilde's witticisms, it is at first sight surprising that Wilde's have remained longer in the public mind than Saki's. One reason for this is that Wilde was by far the more inclined to self-publicity: "his personality was imposing and he delighted to dramatize it, putting form and flourish into everything he did or uttered, thus making himself unforgettable."<sup>56</sup> According to those who witnessed Saki's improvised productions, he possessed as much invention as his elder; the main difference was that he did not use it to put himself forward. Contemporary memoirs show a tendency in Saki to avoid being flamboyant and yet to succeed in amusing those around him. J. A. Spender describes the moment of his first meeting with Saki to discuss the creation of *The Westminster Alice*: "at the beginning one had to dig hard to get a word out of him. But the word when it came was pungent and original. . ."<sup>57</sup> Lambert quotes the comments of Saki's cousin, the writer Dornford Yates: "[Saki] had beautiful manners, talked easily and well and possessed the precious gift of adaptability. . . his conversation was always brilliant and amusing. . . His personality stood right out always."<sup>58</sup> Through these accounts we can see that Saki was as amusing as Wilde, but in a more restrained, more "gentlemanly" way. The Saki who has his listeners doubled over with laughter through an imitation of Sarah Bernhardt in a French recitation of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" is certainly the equal of the Wilde who annoys André Gide by expressing the wish to cut a waistcoat out of curtain material.<sup>59</sup>

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54. Hutcheon, p. 120.

55. Jankélévitch, p. 17.

56. Desmond McCarthy, "Oscar Wilde," *English Wits*, ed. Leonard Russell (London: Hutchinson, 1940) 47–69, p. 49.

57. J. A. Spender, "Foreword," *The Westminster Alice, The Collected Works of Saki*, by Saki (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1926), vii–xvi, p. vii.

58. Lambert, pp. 34, 35.

59. F. Anstey, *A Long Retrospect* (London: Oxford U P, 1936), p. 338; André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1975), p. 332.

Thus the difference in fame can be said to come from a difference in style between the two authors. For Wilde one important thing was to be seen and heard, and for this reason he established as his favourite mode of expression the monologue; those who were present were supposed to find their diversion as spectators. On the other hand, Saki often exhibited a humour in which the surrounding people participated. When he danced in the middle of Oxford Circus one New Year's Eve, it was not alone, but with a group of friends and strangers.<sup>60</sup> He included Lambert, his sister, and another guest in a sun dance around a fire one summer.<sup>61</sup> For the imitation mentioned above, Saki was not the centre of attention, but Sarah Bernhardt was; he had decentred himself, abandoning his own personality in order to embody another. Saki always carried spectators and targets off with him, and thus they became celebrants in a general gaiety. These celebrants remembered the joy of the occasion without giving as central a place in their memory to the instigator of that joy. This way of amusing others through their own participation is strictly Sakian and is absent in Wilde's performances.

#### 4 The works

Like their behaviour, Wilde's and Saki's witticisms clearly show differences in construction and utilization. As we shall see, in the case of both authors, irony "undermines stated meaning by removing the semantic security of 'one signifier-one signified' and by revealing the complex . . . nature of ironic meaning-making."<sup>62</sup> This operation "removes the security that words mean only what they say," a concept that Edwardians clung to.<sup>63</sup> These authors both function by replacing terms in an utterance by other, unexpected terms. A comparison of Wilde's witticisms with Saki's shows that the former operate almost exclusively by replacing a word in a phrase by its contrary. As a true ironist, he (like Saki) plays meanings one against the other.<sup>64</sup> The effect is thus created simply by the inversion of things; Desmond McCarthy is led by this effect to consider the Wildean witticism as rather "mechanical and tiresome."<sup>65</sup> Wilde remains at a basic level for his witticisms, that of verbal

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60. Ethel M. Munro, "Biography of Saki," *The Complete Works of Saki*, by Saki, 2 vols. (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1930), 2:635–715, 2:691; Rothay Reynolds, "A Memoir of H. H. Munro," *The Toys of Peace* by Saki (London: Bodley Head, 1919) ix–xxiv, p. x.

61. Lambert, p. 38; Munro, 2:690.

62. Hutcheon, p. 13.

63. Hutcheon, p. 14.

64. Hutcheon, p. 105.

65. McCarthy, p. 59.

play, and rarely takes the meaning farther. This game of inversion is in itself very amusing, as Louis Cazamian explains it:

the humorist reaps the benefit of his startling slyness through the concrete realism of his manner; the more objective his picture, the more vividly does the soul of his subjective intent flash out. Thus the surprise of humorous treatment rejuvenates the commonplaces of actuality, and from its mere fun there tends to radiate the suggestion of a topsy-turvy universe. Now topsy-turviness for its own sake is one of the most profound desires, as it is one of the most soothing values, of art and thought; it has always been longed for by mankind, driven and vexed under the iron laws of things; there is a delicious release in extravagance. . .<sup>66</sup>

This critic explains the mechanism of the Wildean witticism flawlessly: the extravagance of a phrase turned topsy-turvy and the humour created by this surprise are what constitute it. What is important here is to highlight the difference between Wildean topsy-turviness and Saki's witticism, couched in its contextual dimension. In order to illustrate this difference, it is useful to quote some of the more representative of Wilde's witticizers.

Lord Henry Wotton, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

There is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.  
Being natural is simply a pose.  
The worst of having a romance . . . is that it leaves one so unromantic.<sup>67</sup>

Algernon Moncrieff, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*:

The way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.  
Divorces are made in heaven.  
Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable.  
The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It's simply washing one's clean linen in public.<sup>68</sup>

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66. Louis Cazamian, *The Development of English Humor* (Durham: Duke U P, 1952), p. 6.

67. Wilde, pp. 19, 20, 25

68. Wilde, pp. 358, 359, 361, 362.

Thus Wilde plays on the reader's or listener's expectations, and thwarts them by this change of words. But most frequently his language play does not proceed past this stage. It is a play on forms and not on meanings. Wilde does not take advantage of this inversion in order to attain the goal suggested by Reed J. Hoyt: "[to] direct the reader towards several possible meanings."<sup>69</sup> Algernon's "Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable" reveals nothing more than the will of this character to be amused by the explanation; it reveals no commentary on his friend Jack or on society. He criticizes nothing and no one with his *mot*. Saki will play precisely on this register; what is important for him is not only to create verbal fireworks to amaze his readers, but also to communicate some aspect of the story through this witticism.

Saki starts by the substitution of a word or a syllable in an existing maxim, rather than inversion of a stock saying; this can already be considered a parody of the maxim in question, and therefore of the society that was so eager to spout maxims.<sup>70</sup> The resulting altered phrase is humorous in itself through its incongruity or in the displacement created by it.<sup>71</sup> But beyond this word play, the juxtaposition of meanings created by the new witticism adds one, sometimes even two, levels to its function and its overall meaning. New connotations and resonances, often ironic ones, communicate to the reader attitudes, implicit descriptions, or other aspects of the character's subjectivity. John Gore illustrates this phenomenon when he refers, not to combinations of words, but to combinations of ideas in his definition of wit: "the power of giving intellectual pleasure by unexpected combining or contrast of previously unconnected ideas or expressions."<sup>72</sup> It is also important to point out the use of the word "intellectual" in this definition; by playing on different levels of the witticism, Saki leads the reader beyond the sensorial pleasure obtained through word play and into the mental pleasure of the connotations of the phrase.

This idea of playing on several levels reveals another reason for the relative lack of popularity of the Sakian witticism: it is closely connected to its context. Lord Henry Wotton does not express a definitive attitude towards gossip in the first quotation; he takes no explicit position in relation to the society whose talk he is refer-

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69. Reed J. Hoyt, "Reader-Response and Implication-Realization," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43.3 (1985) 281–290, p. 282.

70. G. D. Kiremidjian, "The Aesthetics of Parody," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28.2 (1969) 231–242, p. 235.

71. Cazamian, p. 5; Patrick O'Neill, "On Playing with Worlds: The Sense of Humor and the Sense of Literature," *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29.1–2 (1987) 31–38, p. 32.

72. John Gore, "Saki," *English Wits*, ed. Leonard Russell (London: Hutchinson, 1940) 307–326, p. 309.

ring to. Thus the Wildean witticism can be quoted completely out of its context. In fact, Wilde himself often borrowed quips or whole series of quips from one work in order to insert them into another, the most flagrant example being the pillaging of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to feed *A Woman of No Importance*.<sup>73</sup> The Sakian witticism, on the other hand, cannot at all be separated from its context. Reginald expresses something in relation to his society, and thus delineates his position in relation to it. For this position to be clear, the structure in which it has been taken must be present. Thus the Sakian witticism is indissociable from its narrative. This is another reason why Squire's comment on Saki is apt: "though many of his sentences might be mistaken for Wilde's none of his pages could be attributed to another man."<sup>74</sup> Saki's context of social satire is immediately recognizable, as well as vital to the sense of his witticism.

The close tie between the words and their context also serves the more concrete goal of preparing the story for publication in a journalistic context. We are dealing with short fiction and the necessity for density in terms of the information communicated. Saki's witticisms function the same way as his final sentences do; the need for concision makes the witticism accomplish the double aim of diverting and informing. It always contains information connected to the central plot or conflict of the narrative, or to some of the characters or character relations.<sup>75</sup>

It is ultimately essential to remember that the Sakian witticism exists in order to accomplish the aim of the classical witticism, that of ridiculing someone or something. His irony serves, as Hutcheon says, to "expect people to understand not only what you actually do mean, but also your attitude toward it."<sup>76</sup> Saki is writing satirical witticisms in order to target a specific aspect of society. And, as Hutcheon also points out, any target is a good one.<sup>77</sup> Saki goes from tea parties to country weekends to theatre performances to art exhibits, and all are treated with irony and detachment. The levels of meaning that Saki's witticism can have correspond to this need to satirize; the opinion that the character emits in his *mot* is negative and hidden under the glitter of wordplay, just in the way in which Berger described it for us. The laugh provoked by the witticism serves as much as the witticism itself to destroy the power/discourse of the ridiculed society: "Laughing at someone involves our constructing them as discursively powerful, and then denying that construc-

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73. See for example Wilde, pp. 41–44 and 469–472.

74. J. C. Squire, "Introduction," *The Square Egg, The Collected Works of Saki*, by Saki (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1926) xi–xvi, p. xv.

75. For a detailed analysis of the Sakian surprise ending, see Birden, pp. 142–60.

76. Hutcheon, p. 2.

77. Hutcheon, p. 10.

tion. . .”<sup>78</sup> Jankélévitch considers this as a refusal to be “enchanted”; I read this for the case of Saki as a refusal to be hypnotised by social norms.<sup>79</sup> Thus Edwardian language, convictions, proverbs are “unmasked and destroyed as something false,” an action that Bakhtin identifies as the main characteristic of comic fiction. In fact, in his analysis, stratification or hierarchization of language is an indispensable prerequisite to the production of comic style.<sup>80</sup> The rigidity of certain Edwardian verbal conventions contributes heavily to the creation of Saki’s witticisms; his inverted proverbs illustrate the concept of “robber robbed” suggested by Bergson.<sup>81</sup> The witticism itself, however, is of infinite suppleness. According to Hugh Walpole, the common flaw in witticisms is that the effort made to produce the effect is often evident; he does not find this in Saki’s.<sup>82</sup>

This is perhaps the point on which one finds the highest cultural misapprehension concerning Wilde. Wilde does occasionally engage in social criticism, as in his comment in “The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile”: “on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists.”<sup>83</sup> However, more frequently, as in the case of Lord Illingworth or Lord Darling, the wit is there for surface brilliance. Wilde had a double intention: performance and commentary. His *Lady Bracknell* is as much an indictment of the culture as any of Saki’s duchesses is. However, as a second pole of wished-for brilliance was so carefully and wilfully developed, Wilde cut his own effect in the public eye. As his rejection of Victorian middle-class values was so thoroughly embodied in his actual behaviour, the condemnation contained in his texts has been enveloped by the extravagance, and the bite has been veiled. Saki did not suffer this eclipse, as he was more subtle in his behaviour. As has been indicated, his wit is also more linked to the texts, and therefore not quotable outside of them. Thus Saki is seen as a pure satirist, Wilde as a pure showman.

Since the Sakian witticism is less known and more clearly satirical than the Wildean variety, it is perhaps necessary to give a few more examples of the former to show how the social commentary works; this is perhaps easiest to do by presenting the character who most unfailingly uses them. Reginald, “one of those flippant

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78. Purdie, p. 64.

79. Jankélévitch, p. 32.

80. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U Texas P, 1981), p. 311.

81. Henri Bergson, *Le rire: Essai sur la signification du comique, Œuvres* (Paris: P U France, 1970) 381–485, p. 438.

82. Hugh Walpole, “Preface,” *Reginald, Reginald in Russia, The Collected Works of Saki*, by Saki (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1926) vii–xiii, p. xi.

83. Wilde, p. 160.

young men about town (not very common) who are as neat in their speech as they are in their clothes,” is, of all of Saki’s characters, the most skilful at and the most prone to manipulating witticisms.<sup>84</sup> This first version of the flippant joker contains in embryonic form all of young Saki’s talents, which produce a basic character who leads an unperturbed life as a sort of social dare-devil, impeccable in his words and in his vengeance. The witticism is the weapon that is the best adapted to this seemingly uncomplicated personage.

Reginald begins to establish his position in “Reginald on the Academy,” with a critique of the semi-annual Royal Academy exhibition that is subtle and succinct: “The pictures are all right, in their way; after all, one can always *look* at them if one is bored with one’s surroundings. . . .”<sup>85</sup> At first sight, this comment seems to resemble Lord Henry Wotton’s in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: “Whenever I have gone [to the Academy], there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse.”<sup>86</sup> However, Lord Henry’s comment is ultimately ambiguous; his exact opinion of the Royal Academy’s efforts is not clear. At one moment he complains of being unable to see them, and at another of being able to. The designations “dreadful” and “worse” do nothing to clarify the situation; they indicate the relative positions of the two entities involved, the visitors and the paintings, without giving a definite value to either one or the other. On the other hand, Reginald makes his position very clear; for him, the paintings are only there as a last resort against boredom (a comment which implies that the visitors are capable of inspiring it). Reginald not only creates an inversion in his witticism (that of the idea of coming to an exhibition is to look at the items exhibited), but also clearly states his opinion in the witticism through this inversion. Lord Henry’s comment is amusing in its inversion, but Reginald’s establishes his position and informs the readers of it, all the while amusing them.

Reginald also uses the witticism in order to express his opinion of different representatives of the culture and the time. In this way the witticiser joins forces with the Sakian havoc-wrecker to remind the reader of his position as social rebel at the same time as he amuses. In “Reginald’s Christmas Revel” Reginald uses a witticism to explain his repeated refusals to spend the holiday at the home of some distant relatives, “a sort of to-be-left-till-called-for cousin,” as he laments: “why the sins of the father should be visited by the children. . . .”<sup>87</sup> The substitution of “by” for “on”

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84. Mais, p. 314.

85. Saki, p. 10. For a description of the mediocrity of these exhibitions, see Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Oxford U P, 1968), pp. 314–316.

86. Wilde, p. 18.

87. Saki, pp. 32–33.

places the expression in the diegetic reality surrounding it; Reginald is in fact visiting relatives who are perforce connected to him though one or the other of his parents. However, by linking the maxim and the notion of sin to these parents, Reginald comments on the situation; to have boring cousins is a “sin” that it should be the responsibility of the “father” to “expiate,” by undergoing the ordeal of this visit. A further note of irony enters the comment through the fact that it comes originally from the Bible, an oddly appropriate source for commenting on the most important religious holiday in Anglophone Christian culture. By a gesture of “robber robbed,” Reginald turns the proverb against the society which uses and believes in it.

In the same way, in “Reginald on House-Parties,” another story which dwells on his boredom with society’s habits, this languorous young man comments on a guest’s dress: “a frock that’s made at home and repented at leisure. . .”<sup>88</sup> As with his other witticisms, Reginald uses a substitution, although here it does not constitute a direct inversion; “made at home” is substituted for “made in haste.” This substitution, coming at the beginning of the expression, creates an effect of belated recognition; it is only when readers come to the second half of the phrase that they recognize the whole expression. They thus proceed by doubling back in order to reconstruct the meaning of the expression within its context. It is only at that point that they can arrive at the second level of the witticism and understand the actual meaning of it in relation to its producer. Reginald is classifying this young woman as a type often seen at these parties, a bit poor, a bit gauche. She is a type that would fit in or want to fit in with precisely this social group that bores Reginald, the country-house set. Through this witticism he expresses his distaste for such dull events and his disdain for such dull guests. In this form, the Sakian witticism comes closest to the goal which Charles A. Knight attributes to the classical witticism:

A poem as short as two or four lines must launch itself towards its satiric victim . . . must identify the fault of which the victim is guilty, and must condemn that fault in a particularly witty way. In a flash the grammatical connections fall into place, and the acerbic dig both identifies and castigates the victim’s failings. . . . [Its] linguistic intensity formalizes the insult but also gives it a privileged status, freed from the social restraints of conventional speech.<sup>89</sup>

The last sentence of this description also constitutes a direct response to L. P. Hartley’s criticism of Saki: “True, the dialogue is artificial – people don’t talk like

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88. Saki, p. 21.

89. Charles A. Knight, “Imagination’s Cerberus: Satire and the Metaphor of Genre,” *Philological Quarterly* 69.2 (1990) 131–151, p. 137.

that.”<sup>90</sup> If the witticism is freed from the constraints and conventions of conversation, then it is also released from any need to resemble discursive reality. At the same time, the artificiality of the witticism serves the goal of subversion of conversational culture suggested by Berger.

In addition, two other elements distinguish the witticism quoted from the others mentioned. First, there is a third level of resonance in this comment; by the association of “home” and “haste” made by the substitution, Saki links these notions. Not only is the girl’s dress “homemade,” it is badly made, “in haste,” and the suggestion is that this haste is visible. In this way Reginald renders the imperfections of the dress more visible to readers. Secondly, the witticism is built on a favourite maxim of Victorian and Edwardian culture, one which warns the listener against any rapid or energetic action, which by its very properties would be considered “rash.” The original expression embodies all the torpor that Saki finds in this society; Reginald appropriates it in order to turn it against that society. In this way, the witticism gives us an example of a direct attack on the structure of discourse and power. Thus a critique of a specific character becomes at the same time a commentary on the whole of society.

Reginald enlarges the sphere of this secondary, social target in a very subtle way in “Reginald’s Rubaiyat” when he says of the Duchess: “I can never remember which Party Irene discourages with her support. . .”<sup>91</sup> By the inversion from “encourages” to “discourages,” Reginald surprises the reader, criticizes the Duchess, and forms a critique of another facet of contemporary society, the tendency of women to try more and more to “help” politicians and participate in politics. At the same time, Reginald also indicates what he finds are the effects of women’s participation, precisely the reverse of what the women were hoping. Through all of these levels, Reginald’s disapproval of this endeavour is clear. Moreover, by indicating this disapproval Saki enlarges the domain of the witticism in order to include politics and political activities.

## 5 Conclusion

All of this shows Saki’s ability in using the witticisms for something that is constructive for his fiction and destructive for society. It brings out some of his irony, which, as Hutcheon tells us, depends primarily on the interpreter to be recognised as such.<sup>92</sup> As can be seen, this takes his witticisms beyond the shallowness and sterility seen in Wilde’s. However, the latter’s *bon mot* on the Academicians should be a clue

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90. L. P. Hartley, “Saki,” *Bookman* 71.424 (1927), p. 214, pp. 216–217, p. 217.

91. Saki, p. 36.

92. Hutcheon, p. 11.

to us; first, it fits in well with the Sakian model that I have explicated. Second, it is decidedly not one of those witticisms that are the most often quoted. The impression that Wilde is a superficial quip-forger is in fact that: an impression. What Wilde did was to create a large body of sterile, superficial, facile, brilliant fireworks that everyone knows, and a certain small set of more subtle comments that function in the same way as Saki's did. And just like Saki's, they go unnoticed.

A second fact that needs to be given a last note of importance is the opposing, centripetal/centrifugal energy of each of these men. Saki's other-oriented outlook brings him more to criticize others, while Wilde's in-turned focus prompts him to glorify himself. This makes for a spectacular man whose critical eye is drowned in his showiness. Saki stands as a better social critic mainly because he can be seen criticizing society.

Ultimately, one could say that both Saki and Wilde "question the validity and even the possibility of unassailable verities" in their witticisms.<sup>93</sup> For Wilde, the very existence of the comment implies an attack; for Saki, the content conveys it. They both present the "engaging anger" and "affective charge" that Hutcheon finds in displays of irony.<sup>94</sup> Thus in two different ways, these two epigrammatists create fireworks that explode different domains with different results, except for one; laughter is the common product of their work.

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93. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1968), p. 231.

94. Hutcheon, p. 15.

**Ewa Macura-Nnamdi**

## **Of Women and Decadence**

### **Travel, Pleasure and Waste in Ella D'Arcy's "The Pleasure-Pilgrim"**

This paper reads Ella D'Arcy's short story "The Pleasure-Pilgrim" as a text engaging with late-nineteenth century discourses of femininity and decadence as they are enacted in the realm of travelling, on one hand, and of decadent aestheticism, on the other. The particular narrative construction of the main heroine, Lulie, is seen here as problematising the gendering of the consumption/production dichotomy and as challenging the masculinist bias of the aesthetic transgressions of decadence. Given this, D'Arcy's story emerges here as a text that reveals how and why certain assumptions of late-Victorian aestheticism only made room for women as objects but never as subjects of decadent aesthetics.

Ella D'Arcy's story "The Pleasure-Pilgrim" (1895)<sup>1</sup> was first published in the *Yellow Book* and reprinted in her collection of short stories *Monochromes* (1895). Its heroine, Lulie Thayer, is an American traveller who, together with her confidante and chaperone, Miss Dodge, spends a couple of months at a German castle, changed into a "boarding-house" (59). There she meets a writer and aesthete – Mr. Campbell.

Fascinated with Lulie at first, Campbell loses interest when his friend, Mayne, reveals Lulie's scandalous reputation, which Lulie confirms with her unabashedly expressed love for Campbell. As her inward repulsiveness slowly mars her outward beauty, Campbell cannot conceal the disgust he feels at the confessions of love of the infatuated Lulie. The less Campbell is interested, the more Lulie is determined to convince him of her love. Irritated with Lulie's vexatious demands that he believe in her affection, Campbell jokingly dares her to barter her life for truth. Lulie shoots herself in an act that demonstrates her honesty. "The Pleasure-Pilgrim" is a story of degeneration, the degeneration of a virgin into a whore, of a woman into a New Woman, of beauty into ugliness, and of truth into lies.

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1. Ella D'Arcy, "The Pleasure-Pilgrim," in *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Period Anthology in Prose and Verse*, chosen by Martin Secker with an introduction by John Betjeman (London: The Richards Press, 1948), 58–84. All parenthesized references are to this edition.

According to Margaret D. Stetz,<sup>2</sup> D'Arcy's narrative is a critique of the aestheticisation of women by male writers. Lulie Thayer, the heroine, is represented as a spectacular object of exchange and visual appreciation, whose body and history are subjected to men's harmful speculations. At the hands of two aesthete-connoisseurs (Campbell and Mayne), Lulie shifts from an innocent and pure, still to be explored, beauty to the rapacious ugliness of a fallen woman. A fatal seductress, Lulie not only transgresses the boundaries of gender propriety but she also threatens, as Stetz argues, the homosocial bond between Mayne and Campbell, and unlawfully usurps the position of an aesthete. Her tragic end is a consequence of flouting gender roles and expectations by appropriating the realm of aestheticism in which women could only take a passive position, and by laying claim to experiences traditionally reserved for men.

Along similar lines, Sarah E. Maier<sup>3</sup> argues that in "The Pleasure-Pilgrim" D'Arcy exposes men's mythologizing of an idealized womanhood that leads to stigmatisation of those women who depart from the ideal. Where Lulie departs most visibly is in her open expressions of sexuality, which give rise to an inevitable conflict, the solution of which can only be Lulie's self-destruction. The despairing woman driven to suicide represents both the impossibility of her sexuality and the failure of resistance: "Lulie must die,"<sup>4</sup> argues Maier, as she threatens the social order and men's position in it.

The first part of this paper, *but for pleasure*, looks at D'Arcy's "The Pleasure-Pilgrim" as a story that rambles over the production/consumption divide as its heroine, Lulie Thayer, travels around Europe in search of pleasure and sensations. It is concerned with the effects produced when the decadent anti-productive and anti-utilitarian pose is adopted by a woman. Here, this pose comes to be assumed in travelling, a fruitless, and unlawful, consumption of the public realm which calls for productive inhabitation (itself marked by productivity) and thus removes her from its territory. Thus the narrative is steeped in, and progresses within, spatial economies consequential for the characters. What is brought to the fore is how space is marked by gender and how this gendering, in turn, comes to mark pleasure and aesthetic connoisseurship. Lulie's problematic relation to the public sphere of travellers does not so much complicate the assumptions of bourgeois marriage economy as it tampers with the logic that this sphere presupposes. It also brings up the poli-

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2. Margaret D. Stetz, "Debating Aestheticism from a Feminist Perspective," in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 25–43.

3. Sarah E. Maier, "Subverting the Ideal: The New Woman and the Battle of the Sexes in the Short Fiction of Ella D'Arcy," *Victorian Review* 20.1 (1994) 35–48.

4. Maier, p. 46.

tics of travel itself. Within this politics, travelling, one of the many ways of inhabiting the non-domestic space, can only be granted worth once it satisfies the demand of productiveness and proper use. Lulie is closer, therefore, to a mere tourist, a personage who, in the nineteenth-century discourses on travelling, frequently aligned with women, signals an unproductive cultural undertaking. Yet amidst the implications of Lulie's bold pilgrimage, D'Arcy's narrative retains a productive ambivalence which results from the tension between the positions she is made to occupy and the positions she herself chooses to assume. While Lulie searches for new experience and lays claim to aesthetic appreciation, she is nonetheless textualised as a fascinating realm for other travellers. Couched in imperial metaphors, the relation between Lulie and Campbell (the decadent connoisseur infatuated with Lulie) works along the lines demarcated by these metaphors whereby Campbell, in a truly colonial fashion, becomes a discoverer of, and an expert on, beauty while Lulie figures as a land discovered into a beautiful and pleasurable surface. Within the terms of this conquest she is also cast into an exoticised object of the fantasies of decadence. The doubleness of Lulie's narrative figuration, where she is, at once, a traveller and a territory travelled to, proves productive of undermining Campbell's privileged position and of problematising the gendering of the consumption/production dichotomy.

The second part, *you don't know what you have lost!*, engages with both Lulie's decadent femininity and her performance of decadence. Cast by men into the role of a typically decadent *femme fatale*, Lulie, at the same time, claims the poetics of decadence. The tension resulting from the encounter between these two conflicting narratives works to cast doubt on Campbell's cultural and aesthetic mastery. It also points out that the terms of a decadent, anti-bourgeois transgression prevent a woman from enjoying its benefits. Unless Lulie remains within the bounds prescribed by the parameters of a dangerous seductress, she offers an exquisite and sensational character, an object of aesthetic appraisal and others' speculations. Yet when she assumes a decadent pose she becomes subjected to certain practices of verification which demand that she shed the garb of decadence because it threatens masculine privileges and the logic on which they are based. While she comes to embody a hermeneutic model with which to read her performance of decadence, she at the same time disrupts the unproblematic correspondence between seeing and knowing, one that underlies men's aestheticism and constructs her into an embodiment of duplicity. This duplicity persistently renders her inordinate speech meaningless as it fails to conform to an economy productive of truth. Together with her unrestrained consumption of pleasure, her verbal excess aligns Lulie with wastefulness where what is wasted, and thus lost, are things which do not properly belong to her. It is because, within the bourgeois marriage economy, Lulie literally comes to embody what remains susceptible to misuse and hence waste, that her

performance of decadence is, from the start, impossible. This impossibility is given a theoretical elaboration in Georges Bataille's notion of unproductive expenditure, a notion which seems to align Bataille himself with the politics of decadence (through his celebration of non-utilitarian expenditure), and therefore, shares in excluding Lulie/women from its transgressive realm. It is because a woman's creation of unproductive values depends upon the fact that there is something about her *subject to loss* that she is precluded from playing a decadent subject.

### 1 *but for pleasure*

"How long will you stay in India?"

"Oh, I'm not coming back."

"Not coming back! That's impossible."

(Olive Schreiner, "The Buddhist Priest's Wife")

"The sharpest, most violent stimulus, we may say, the true essence of pleasure, lies in some gratification which has no claim whatever, in any sense, to be beneficial or useful, or to have any ulterior motive, conscious or instinctive, or any lasting result, or any fulfilment of any object, but which is simple gratification and dies naturally in its own excess."

(Victoria Cross, "Theodora: A Fragment")

"not alone, Prince – with someone to explain things – someone who knows all about it – and in this lovely spring weather. You see, I am a bad traveller. . ."

(Vernon Lee, "The Legend of Madame Krasinska")

The story's title already prefigures and encapsulates Lulie's transgressions; it already attributes a certain impossibility to the heroine's excursion into the pleasurable. What the title indicates is that pleasure lies outside the domain of the home, that it belongs to the foreign, into which one has to venture in order to taste it. It involves a journey into a more attractive territory, a relocation from the homely; that is, from the familiar and plain, into a zone of unfamiliarity and indulgence. The domestic, which is always also feminine according to Victorian middle-class gender politics, is a common-place of the mundane and the moderate. Mayne, for instance, expresses this point when he convinces Campbell that Lulie's indulgent pilgrimage will be followed by a return home: "When she's had her fling, I suppose she'll go and marry him [her fiancé]" (71). It is, then, negatively contrasted with the public space, which affords pleasure, and which also genders this pleasure as masculine. Thus Lulie's escapades into the realm which is not hers will be marked by deprivation.

Her pilgrimage in search of pleasure is a risky enterprise, not only because Lulie must leave the confines of homely safety, but because in leaving it she leaves behind her (respectable) femininity. Lulie's pilgrimage, then, renders her out of place, homeless, in a sense, and also morally dubious. Unlike Lulie, Campbell enjoys "the pleasures of his home-coming" (59) when visiting the Schloss, which suggests a different relation to the public realm. He is welcome at Altenau, a familial space of familiarity and moral safety, a hospitable space which receives him as its own. Thus, while Campbell comes to simply inhabit the place, Lulie, not allowed to feel at home in the public sphere, is seen as a trespasser. Lodged in an off-limits territory, she is left to negotiate the discourse attached to travelling women.

Women moving outside the domestic interior indeed provoked sharp comments among the more conservative critics of the late nineteenth century. For instance, in her famous, and unfavourable 1894 article "The New Woman," Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée)<sup>5</sup> sees travel as a severe threat to womanhood:

Seclusion lends an infinite seduction to the girl, as the rude and bustling publicity of modern life robs woman of her grace. Packed like herrings in a railway carriage, sleeping in odious vicinity to strangers on a shelf, going days and nights without a bath, exchanging decency and privacy for publicity and observation; the women who travel, save those rich enough to still purchase seclusion, are forced to cast aside all refinements and delicacy.

It is said that travel enlarges the mind. There are many minds which can no more be enlarged, by any means whatever, than a nut or a stone. The fool remains a fool, though you carry him or her about over the whole surface of the globe, and it is certain that the promiscuous contact and incessant publicity of travel, which may not hurt the man, do injure the woman.<sup>6</sup>

In Ouida, travelling deprives the woman of both moral and bodily cleanliness. The deprivation resonates with sexual overtones as travel turns what is seductive into what has *already* been seduced. The shift from "girl" to "woman" – implicitly a 'fallen' one – hints at the loss at stake. For a woman to travel amounts to *having had* sexual intercourse. The woman who travels forever advertises what/that she has lost (it). The public exposure to which the travelling woman lends herself, and which Ouida finds so objectionable, is an exposure of that loss. Paradoxically, then, the disgrace is not about her presence amidst the "bustling publicity of modern life"

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5. Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée), "The New Woman," *North American Review* 158 (May 1894) 610–19, in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 153–160.

6. Ouida, p. 159.

but about an absence made visible. The seductiveness of being untouched – that Ouida sets against the contaminating proximity of other bodies – turns into a repulsiveness of being defiled. The loss incurred on the way bespeaks a failure to keep her body intact. The travelling woman is robbed of her grace, Ouida tells us, suggesting that there is something unlawfully and forcefully taken from her, and the injury (contrasted with a more ambiguous “hurt”) that summons up the physical, points to a material wound at stake in her travels. Moreover, Ouida assures that “the women who travel” have nothing to gain and everything to lose: the latter has already been lost; the former resolved by biological determinism. Travelling may broaden the mind, yet it is only those at the top of the evolutionary and financial ladder who may benefit: capacious minds and pockets are required if travelling is to perform its educational function.

What lurks in Ouida’s view of the travelling woman is an economic loss, too. For one thing, the exchange of “decency and privacy for publicity and observation,” which compromises her womanhood, yields no profits. For another, leaving behind her privacy, she eludes privatization, thus complicating the question of ownership. The point is not that she is nobody’s but that she might be anybody’s. Thus her entry into the realm of “modern life” unsettles the marriage economy in which women are defined in terms of belonging. “The promiscuous contact” to which she is exposed offers neither permanence nor possession. In the casual proximity of others she can merely, like Lulie herself, expropriate herself at the cost of her “refinements and delicacy” that leave behind only a bleeding wound.

W. T. Stead, a more favourable critic, who was editor of the *Review of Reviews* and supportive of New Women, takes travel to represent women’s struggle for freedom. He envisages their emancipation in terms of a strenuous and precarious journey:

Having discovered, apparently very much to her own astonishment, that she has really a soul after all . . . [woman] is not going to go back to her old position [as man’s dependent]. Through whatever stormy seas and across no matter what burning desert marked by the skeletons and haunted by the ghosts of those who have fallen by the way, she will press on, fleeing from the monogamic [*sic*] prostitution of loveless marriage and the hideous outrage of enforced maternity as Bunyan’s Pilgrim fled from the City of Destruction. All social conventions, all religious teachings, and all moral conceptions will have to be reconsidered and readjusted in harmony with this new central factor.<sup>7</sup>

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7. W. T. Stead, quoted in Ann L. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 20.

Stead clearly aestheticizes New Woman's liberating journey. Despite a certain ugliness of the images (and also of failure) she might encounter on the way, there is beauty waiting, alluringly, in a realm which is other than the hideousness of her present condition. The discovery of her soul coincides with a newly acquired aesthetic awareness. Able to discriminate, at last, between the ugly and the beautiful, she will head for the latter. What we are witnessing here is a scene of risky departure set in a picturesque, if terrifying, scenario of formidable obstacles, which, Stead seems to caution, may or may not be conquered. Determined, as she "will press on," and undeterred by others' failure, the New Woman is depicted as embarking on an almost frantic flight. In Stead's vision, this journey is, potentially, a dead-end one: her threatening reality either disintegrates into ghastly remains or is turned into a threadbare, spectral form with no prospect of advancement. What sounds, in Stead's words, like a believable scenario, strikes a note of disbelief as woman is cast into a disappearing figure. Represented in images of what is/has gone – "ghosts" and "skeletons" – the New Woman, interestingly, claims no return. Left to decay as she withers on the way, or spirited into a movement of incessant returning, "she is not going to go back" anyway. Thus built into her rebellious creed is, as Stead knowingly envisages and as Lulie demonstrates, a one-way journey.

Campbell literally produces Lulie's beauty, a gesture which is in contrast with Lulie's unproductive pilgrimage. She can neither do beautiful things nor can she make things beautiful. The point is not only that she unlawfully ventures into the public space but also that she is incapable of its productive inhabitation. Unlike Campbell, who comes to Schloss Altenau "for a second quiet season with his work" (58), and hopes to spend a "profitable" (58) time there, Lulie inhabits the space squandering the possibilities it offers. Her exclusion from production marks her entrance into the narrative space. "She doesn't travel for profit, but for pleasure" (66), Mayne informs Campbell and readers, confining Lulie to cultural barrenness. He thus differentiates between good and bad travelling, the former being about measurable doing, the latter about triviality and fruitlessness. The differentiation is gender-inflected and emblematic of the masculinisation of travel with its underlying ethos of purpose, which always aims at the productive. As James Clifford argues, "The marking of 'travel' by gender, class, race, and culture is all too clear. . . . 'Good travel' (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men (should) do. Women are impeded from serious travel."<sup>8</sup>

It could as well be said that women are impeded from all kinds of travel. Not because they have not travelled, but because travel is, as Georges Van Den Abbeele's

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8. James Clifford, quoted in Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p. 122.

discussion of the notion of travel demonstrates,<sup>9</sup> conceptualised in masculine terms. The banality of Lulie's travels is counterposed to the seriousness of Campbell's. Her travels are wasteful as she will neither engage in intellectual labour nor reap any profits. In Mayne's logic, her pleasure has no value that could be measured with either gain or loss. It is purposeless and useless, rendered trivial, a violation of productivity that comes to define the public space.

For a number of reasons, Lulie's travel is bad travel because it fails to emulate the ethos of what, in the nineteenth century, counted as acculturating experience. Lacking in seriousness that can only be granted by "work" done while travelling, it turns Lulie into a loiterer, indolent, unproductive, and solely interested in "[acquiring] new sensations" (66). Mayne's dismissive remark not only downplays her pleasure-pilgrimage but also locates the narrative within the production/consumption dichotomy, which, in turn, corresponds to a distinction between two different kinds of travelling that James Buzard characterises as "genuine and spurious cultural experience."<sup>10</sup> The former refers to "true travellers;" the latter to "mere tourists."<sup>11</sup> Buzard has shown how the nineteenth-century travel discourse persistently aligned women with tourism marked by "a misuse of the acculturating potential of travel."<sup>12</sup> Wasting the possibilities travelling offers, a (female) tourist is also dedicated to "attention-getting displays"<sup>13</sup> of herself, unlike a true traveller who always prefers "polite self-effacement."<sup>14</sup> Lulie's spectacular apparel and appearance testify to the tourist's desire to produce a sensational sight out of herself. Indeed, being watched was part and parcel of feminine touristic experience. As Buzard argues, woman "was a natural tourist to the men who observed her: she was another avatar of that plural person destroying real travel. . ."<sup>15</sup> Thus, in terms of the Victorian gender politics of travel, Lulie's own pilgrimage can only be read as a sign of frivolity and triviality.

"The urge for travel is the urge for 'experience', with all its alarming connotations for the proper fathers of ripening daughters,"<sup>16</sup> writes Buzard, pointing to the risky component of anti-tourism (unobjectionable in the case of men) which worked to exclude women from the realm of travelling. Experience, including sexual experi-

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9. Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau*, (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

10. Buzard, p. 80.

11. Buzard, p. 81.

12. Buzard, p. 140.

13. Buzard, p. 96.

14. Buzard, p. 96.

15. Buzard, p. 151.

16. Buzard, p. 147.

ence, was understood to be part and parcel of touring, a fact which placed women on the move in a precarious position.<sup>17</sup> While Lulie's "rich father somewhere away back in Michigan" (65) is absent (which actually makes her even more vulnerable to what Ouida called "promiscuous contact"), she nonetheless finds herself in the paternal company of Mayne and Campbell, whose solicitude about her exploits clearly evokes the connotations at stake: "And she's been travelling about since last May: Paris, Vienna, the Rhine, Düsseldorf, and so on here. She must have had some rich experiences, by Jove, for she's done everything" (65).

Deprived of proper fatherly supervision, Lulie becomes a collector of the most extraordinary, and purportedly perilous, experiences gaining knowledge she is not supposed to possess. Yet these experiences, culled from a number of visits, come to thwart Campbell's expectations about Lulie's innocence and ignorance. Perceived as a worldly woman whose travels are motivated by a desire to "amuse herself" (66), Lulie invalidates Campbell's claims to visual and cultural mastery.

While in the story Lulie is, undeniably, on a journey around Europe, travelling from place to place in search of adventures, the narrative itself turns her into a visited land, a territory to be explored and discovered in a travel-like fashion by the collectors of feminine beauty in pursuit of aesthetic experiences. As Margaret Stetz notices, imperial imagery underwrites Campbell's aesthetic appreciations of Lulie: "The narrator's language exposes the easy slippage from the seemingly apolitical world of art collecting and accessions to imperial conquest and domination, as Campbell fancies himself the 'discoverer' of, quite literally, virgin territory."<sup>18</sup>

The link between the aesthetic and the imperial was, as Deborah Cherry demonstrates, a powerful component of the colonial project. "Pictorialising," the key term Cherry uses to characterise the visual attitude and conception of the colonial space, not only framed that space and its people "within the European visual systems" but also "rendered them intelligible within them."<sup>19</sup> The transformation of "sites into sights,"<sup>20</sup> the central strategy of (economic) exploitation, involved a violent gesture of "landscaping." It is the category of landscape, a turning of "earth into world, land into visual culture . . . restructur[ing] land for leisure and tourism as well as visual and spiritual refreshment, sensory pleasure and a pictorialising vision,"<sup>21</sup> which best represented the colony's "pictorial disposition."<sup>22</sup> This disposi-

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17. Buzard, pp. 130–132.

18. Stetz, p. 37.

19. Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850–1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 80.

20. Cherry, p. 79.

21. Cherry, p. 77.

22. Cherry, p. 85.

tion entails that the land is “uninscribed,” offering availability and inviting new forms of arranging. The aesthetic pleasure generated by the turning of land into landscape was inseparable from “the fantasies of possession and exploitation.”<sup>23</sup> The turn, Cherry further argues, was not only about re-inscription but also about framing the land “within a pre-existing pictorial order.”<sup>24</sup>

In Campbell’s visual practice Lulie emerges as an eroticised beauty. Lulie, who had “the most singular eyes he had ever seen; slit-like eyes, set obliquely in her head, Chinese fashion” (60), undergoes an imaginary relocation which mobilises a set of recognisable associations and establishes positions where she is turned into the object of a typically decadent fantasy of the exotic “consumable ‘foreignness.’”<sup>25</sup> Reduced to an emblem of exoticism, Lulie’s eyes become the figure of the unfamiliar, the strange, the locus of the elsewhere which Campbell tours, in a colonial fashion, in order to frame it. The construction of Lulie as otherworldly binds the aesthetic to exoticism: figuring as an Orientalised beauty and thus transcending the here and now, she embodies the necessary distance from the familiar everyday which was seen as contaminating ‘true’ art. Detached by Campbell from the banality of the common and aligned with the exotic she also assures his position as an aesthete *par excellence*. As Felski argues, “the aesthete seeks to differentiate himself from the dull mediocrity of modern society by taking refuge in the solitary cultivation of the arcane and the exotic.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, this differentiation becomes a badge of his exquisite taste and uniqueness.<sup>27</sup>

Thus to cast Lulie within a frame of exoticism is also to summon relations which such a framing implies. The evocation of the exotic provides a setting in which the parts to be played are couched in an imperial language. As Stetz aptly notices, Campbell imagines himself as a self-appointed discoverer and author of Lulie’s beauty. Lulie, in turn, figures as an un-inscribed, pure territory facilitating Campbell’s superior I/eye.<sup>28</sup> In this relationship, it is Campbell who emerges as the real traveller – Lulie, quite evidently, relegated to the realm of stasis: “his eyes travelled over to . . . where she sat” (69). Campbell’s rambling eyes, perusing Lulie’s immobile body, usurp vision creating thus a relation that denies her the status of a traveller. Here, seeing and travelling converge to produce an amorous conquest with Campbell as its subject and Lulie as its object. Campbell’s pictorial perception of

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23. Cherry, pp. 87–90.

24. Cherry, p. 98.

25. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 140.

26. Felski, pp. 98–99.

27. Felski, pp. 98–99.

28. Stetz, p. 37.

Lulie, performed in the mode of exploration, which necessarily immobilizes her, assures her passivity for Campbell's active role. Lulie, who is reduced to an item of exoticism, can yield to Campbell's aestheticising, creative gaze as she is assumed to be a neutral, blank page of territory waiting for inscription. As Felski notes, the exotic space, so often evoked in *fin de siècle* culture, gained much of its appeal due to its atemporal character.<sup>29</sup> In Campbell's imagination, Lulie is both outside and without history. Indeed, this assumption becomes a precondition for his fascination, which will, with time, wear away once he learns she not only has a history but indeed one of her own fashioning.

For Lulie, to leave the confines of the domestic is inevitably for the pleasure of others. If her own claims to pleasure are illegitimate, her fate as a pleasurable spectacle is fully sanctioned even though it is not taken for granted at the beginning. Indeed, her value as an aestheticized object is measured by her capacity to (dis)please, and vice versa - the (dis)pleasure she affords depends on how beautiful she can get. It is, obviously, Campbell who fixes the limits of her beauty. His initial uncertainty of Lulie's aesthetic worth is gradually dispelled as he transforms her into a collection of picturesque surfaces, a pictorial vista of "something altogether unique" (64): "the uncurled wisp which strayed across her white forehead was soft and alluring . . . soft masses of it tucked up beneath her hat-brim. . . . When she suddenly lifted her red-brown lashes, those queer eyes of her had a velvety softness too. Decidedly, she struck him as being pretty - in a peculiar way" (62-63).

Campbell's careful assessment, which brings about this miraculous transformation of undecided attractiveness into unquestionable beauty, mirrors the progression of pleasurable sensations. "The pleasure he did not feel" (60) - on first meeting the ladies - undergoes a revision as he begins to discern Lulie's beauty: "Her strange little face, with its piquant irregularity of line, its warmth of colour, began to please him" (62). What underwrites his pleasure is both aesthetic appreciation and complacency for Campbell, in an authorial fashion, takes full credit for beauty's discovery: "It seemed to him that he was the discoverer of her possibilities. He did not doubt that the rest of the world called her plain, or at least odd looking. . . . Campbell saw superiority in himself for recognizing it [beauty], for formulating it; and he was not displeased to be aware that it would always remain caviare to the multitude" (63).

Thus Lulie is not merely an occasion for Campbell's aesthetic indulgence; she is a test for his aesthetic abilities and expertise. But to enable this expertise she must remain neutral, both for herself and others, unmarked by beauty or ugliness that are as yet to be inscribed upon the surface of her body. What assures this neutrality is a

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29. Felski, p. 136.

certain blindness: for to enable Campbell's superior vision it is required that Lulie does not see (herself). Thus pondering upon Lulie's perception of herself, Campbell assumes her inability to formulate her own beauty, which is predicated upon an incapability of self-seeing:

He wondered now what she thought of herself, how she appeared to Nannie. Probably as a very ordinary little girl; sisters stand too close to each other's qualities. She was too young to have had much opportunity of hearing flattering truths from strangers; and besides, the average stranger would see nothing in her to call for flattering truths. (63)

Lulie's blindness partakes of patriarchal mythology where visual deprivation becomes women's property, a defining principle that marks their bodies and conditions their habitation within its logic. To use Naomi Schor's words slightly out of context, "Beauty's blindness underwrites two potent and complementary myths of misogyny: first, that women should be seen rather than see; second, that despite their beastly appearance, men possess an inner beauty waiting to be revealed."<sup>30</sup>

And yet, amidst the connoisseurship to which she is exposed, Lulie powerfully defies the imperial logic that assumes her blindness, that frames her into a sightless and mute surface subject to aesthetic exploration. Lulie's discreditable past sketched so vituperatively by Mayne and endorsed by Campbell works to unmask the logic of what Stetz calls "masculine aesthetic practices."<sup>31</sup> It is against this past, glimpses of which can be caught during Lulie's sojourn at Altenau, that Campbell's attempts at the pictorial appropriation of Lulie are made visible and futile. Revealed at the beginning of the story, and substantiated throughout its course by Lulie herself, this past allows us to see how Campbell's artistic expertise stumbles over Lulie's self-fashioned history that persistently refuses to yield to his mastering discourse. For while the conflicting narratives criss-cross in an upsetting encounter, Lulie slips off (in the end, quite literally) the picture she is meant to represent. Campbell, cast by the imperial discourse, into the role of an explorer, never comes to conquer the presumably passive Lulie/land. Lulie speaks back, refusing the muteness inscribed onto her body by the metaphors of colonial conquest. Her resistance also disturbs the production/consumption paradigm on which the narrative's gender relations rest, for Campbell, in the end, proves unproductive of beauty and hence incapable of validating his presence within the public domain.

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30. Naomi Schor, "Blindness as Metaphor," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.2 (1999) 76–105, p. 88.

31. Stetz, p. 40.

**2 you don't know what you have lost!**

Mademoiselle, listen to me!  
Does it hurt when you lose your body?  
(Jean Lorrain, "The Unknown Lady")

I felt there was no price I would not have paid to have stood for  
one half-hour in intimate confidence with her, and been able to  
tear the veils from this irritating character.  
(Victoria Cross, "Theodora: A Fragment")

If a man loves a woman he has a right to try to make her love him  
because he can do it openly, directly, without bending. There need  
be no subtlety, no indirectness. With a woman it's not so; she can  
take no love that is not laid openly, simply, at her feet. Nature or-  
dains that she should never show what she feels; the woman who  
had told the man she loved him would have put between them a  
barrier once and for ever that could not be crossed;  
(Olive Schreiner, "The Buddhist Priest's Wife")

Only consumption and tuberculosis still kill.  
(Jean Lorrain, "The Man Who Loved Consumptives")

Lulie Thayer could be seen as a typically decadent *femme fatale*. Dangerously beautiful, boldly seductive, sexually rampant, with "buccaneering instincts (84), a perverse collector of carnal sensations and men, she flirts "for mere devilry, for a laugh" and "goes about seeing how many masculine hearts she can break" (68). In a sport-like fashion, she measures her success with the "spoils" she can get. Men become a list of "a long succession of names," whom she dupes seductively with "unblushing coolness" (67):

Mayne fetched an alpenstock from a corner of the hall; it was decorated with a long succession of names, which ribbon-like, were twisted round and round it, carved in the wood. "Read them," insisted Mayne, putting the stick in Campbell's hands. "You'll see, they are not the names of the peaks she has climbed, or the towns she has passed through; they're the names of the men she has fooled. (67)

Lulie represents moral decay, which may not mean death for the men she encounters but which is infectious enough to place them in a precarious position. If she does not threaten their lives directly, she threatens their rational sobriety for "the men she has fooled" can only become susceptible to fooling once they are imagined as literally losing their minds. Mayne, who himself has been imperilled

by the charms of the seductress, recalls the moment as one jeopardising his ability to think: “It took me a minute or two to recover the presence of mind. . .” (67). The loss thus enacts a moment of emasculation, which through this momentary suspension of reason amounts to a metaphorical decapitation echoing the decadent metanarrative of Salomè and John the Baptist.

The deprivation which un-mans Lulie’s flirts also disrupts the relation between seeing and knowing as the gaze lavished upon Lulie’s beautiful body no longer secures adequate knowledge. Insight does not follow seeing, for what the men she has fooled have been unable to see is Lulie’s duplicity. Because Lulie does not easily yield to Campbell’s imperial gaze, she disrupts the relation between knowing and mastery. Campbell, in turn, subscribes to a logic where “seeing is the origin of knowing” and “knowledge is gained through vision” while “vision is a direct, unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent object.”<sup>32</sup> This assumption, which Campbell bears out, leads to confusion, for what he sees is painfully at odds with what he knows:

He could feel nothing but dislike for her – disgust even; and yet he was conscious how pleasant it would be to believe in her innocence, in her candour. For she was so adorably pretty; her flower-like beauty grew upon him; her head, drooping a little on one side when she looked up, was so like a flower bent by its own weight. The texture of her cheeks, her lips, was delicious as the petals of a flower. (70)

The sense of disappointment comes already with Mayne’s elaborate story of Lulie’s romantic and other exploits. Campbell is left to come to terms with the discrepancy between surface and depth, between his vision of Lulie and the contents of her marvellous, pure body: “Campbell’s impressions of the girl were readjusting themselves completely. . . He wished with all his heart that Mayne would stop, would talk of something else, would let him get away. The young girl had interested him so much; he had felt himself so drawn towards her; he had thought her so fresh, so innocent” (66, 67–68).

Despite Campbell’s attempts to inscribe innocence onto Lulie body and into her history, she assumes the decadent posture of an aesthete offering judgment on beautiful things and men. Thus she deems the castle, to Campbell’s disagreement, “So wonderfully picturesque,” its frightening medieval interior “delightful” and “lovely” (61). She also subjects Campbell to her appraising gaze as she comments on his beauty: “You have such blue and boyish eyes, you know” (76). This

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32. Joan W. Scott, “‘Experience,’” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 20–40, pp. 23–24.

indulgence in appreciation culminates in Lulie's exercise of aesthetic taste as she places Campbell amidst other men in order to single him out as the most pleasurable: "I've always known a lot of young fellows who've liked to take me round. . . And I enjoyed it, and there wasn't any harm in it, just kissing and making believe, and nonsense. But I never really cared for one of them – I can see now, when I compare them with you" (82). In Stetz's words, "from her opening speech, Lulie lays claims to spectatorship. . . She shows an easy familiarity with the aesthetic credo, preferring artifice to nature. . ." <sup>33</sup> Indeed, Lulie comes to express this preference most pronouncedly associating truth with lack of aesthetic value.

Unlike Lulie, who, in a truly decadent fashion, declares that "Truth is so uninteresting!" (69), Campbell stubbornly insists on a sheer truth that, he believes, must lie somewhere beneath the veneer of theatricality Lulie performs. Throughout the story, Lulie never steps off the stage, introduced first as a flirtatious liar acting "always and to everyone" (74), and then withdrawn as "the most consummate little actress," whose role "demanded a sensational finale in the centre of the stage" (84). Claimed "an actress, a born comedienne" (74), she harbours a "histrionic sense of the fitness of things" (84). Her behaviour "well-simulated" (72), her actions "excellently contrived" (74), Lulie "chooses to pose" (74), complicating her relationship with men who opt for transparency, who, as in the case of Campbell, aim to expose her masquerades where her innocent appearance and speech conceal a terrifying, "monstrous, preposterous" (72) reality. The narrative, in fact, revolves around the tension between Campbell's obsessive belief in truth, which he believes he can masterfully tell from duplicity, and Lulie's refusal to submit to this logic. Because Campbell differentiates between sincere self-presentation and deceitful theatricality he will spend his narrative time searching for, and bemoaning the loss of, Lulie's authentic self hidden behind the costume of artificiality she wears so scandalously.

Campbell reproduces, therefore, what Barbara Spackman refers to as "a hermeneutic model" where "appearance conceals reality, surface conceals depth, artifice conceals truth, rhetoric conceals plain speech and reference," <sup>34</sup> thereby turning Lulie into a model of hermeneutics. As she comes to embody this model, Lulie substantiates yet another logic, mentioned by Spackman, according to which the concealed is revealed as femininity *par excellence*. Indeed, as Spackman further argues, what belies the collection of these concealments, is sexual difference. Referring to Derrida, Spackman restates that "the truth" masked by

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33. Stetz, p. 39.

34. Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunzio* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 39.

artifice, “is the ‘truth of woman,’” a principle which finds its most graphic representation in the “figure of the enchantress turned hag . . . in which an alluring enchantress . . . is revealed to be a toothless hag.”<sup>35</sup> It is this revelation of a monstrous, “tarnished . . . beauty” (73) that comes to replace the seductive “flower-like beauty” (70), that brings out the lurid truth about Lulie.

Campbell persistently subjects Lulie to the imperative of truth-telling. Yet the more she speaks the less truthful she is; the more she talks, the less she says. As Jane Gallop eloquently argues,

In the ideology of our culture women are objects described, not speaking subjects. Women as women, as incarnations of the myth of Woman, do not produce culture. Woman was never considered to be actually non-speaking. Talking constantly, women emitted chatter, gossip, and foolishness. Naïve men were ensnared by the siren’s song, because they took the woman at her word, taking that word out of the context of its unending protean flow. So women were called liars, and their speech, not conforming to male rules of logic, clarity, consistency, deemed nonsense. . . . Women could not be trusted to tell the truth about themselves.<sup>36</sup>

The love-chatter Lulie keeps emitting fails to convey true meaning. In Campbell’s idea of meaningful speech, loquacity and truth do not go together. What is veritable, that is, believable, calls for restraint, for a moderate expression which shuns superfluous flow. Feminine truth originates in taciturnity, in a modest production of words, which Lulie never comes to recognise. Thus Campbell, for whom “the damnable iteration of the one idea became monotonous” (76), grows impatient with Lulie’s continual “But I love you” (82) which bespeaks an improper excess in place of the properly feminine reserve. He will muse, therefore, that “real love,” requires “reticences” and is “full of delicacy” (75). Real love abides in verbal restraint and discretion; it avoids ostentation, knows restraint, and does not offer un-called for speech. Campbell, forewarned by Mayne not “to fall prey to the wiles of this little American siren” (77), continues to disregard Lulie’s confessions. Since she fails to procure silence, she is bound to remain unheard.

Her speech, like her pilgrimage, trespasses upon the ethos of (self)restraint, exceeding the limits of acceptable femininity. Lulie’s annoying, useless babble proves totally unproductive (here, of sense, of meaning) also because it is addressed, promiscuously, to “every man she meets” (67). Her excessive talk par-

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35. Spackman, p. 39.

36. Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 71.

takes of an economy which ignores temperance in favour of consumption and reckless expenditure. Driven by a ravenous appetite for new sensations, she consumes places, men and desire. Cultivating a taste for “new ways of kissing” (66), she abundantly offers kisses (Campbell reproachfully asks: “How many men have you not already kissed, even since you’ve been here?” [72]) that symbolise Lulie’s consumption of pleasure, the underlying principle of which is waste. Given away, to everyone, at no cost, and against the logic of marriage economy, these kisses violate the proper relations that should lead to the production of legitimate matrimonial felicity.

Right at the beginning, Mayne, drawing a portrait of Lulie’s peculiar conduct and in a way advertising her to Campbell, foregrounds her alignment with loss, excess and wastefulness. In this realm of economic transgression beauty becomes attractive once it is not properly guarded, but is, instead, spent and generously dealt out: “Though it’s not so much her beauty,” Mayne continued. “After all, one has met beautiful women before now. It’s her wonderful generosity, her complaisance. She doesn’t keep her good things to herself. . .” (64).

Presumably, liberal of her body, Lulie shares out what materially, physically constitutes her beauty, and what, when kept, and saved for restricted interest, is not subject to a generous dispensation. Mayne’s remark implies that, in the first place, there are things Lulie should keep to herself, things she should make neither visible nor shareable. These good things, for Campbell, become an equivalent of her beauty, something that literally makes it up and guarantees certain benefits. Thus in his numerous and eloquent vituperations Campbell bemoans Lulie’s imprudent, careless squandering of her things. Here, the waste of purity is concurrent with the waste of beauty, the two assets collapsed into one property, virtually beyond distinction:

And you don’t know what you have lost! You have seen a fruit that has been handled, that has lost its bloom? You have seen primroses, spring flowers gathered and thrown away in the dust? And who enjoys the one, or picks up the others? And this is what you remind me of – only you have deliberately, of your own perverse will, tarnished your beauty, and thrown away all the modesty, the reticence, the delicacy, which make a young girl so infinitely dear. (73)

Lulie is censured for discarding, destroying things that could, otherwise, flourish in usefulness, things whose real value materialises in legitimate use defined by someone other than herself. It is this use she never comes to recognise, that makes woman dear, that is, beloved and costly at the same time. Lulie unlawfully throws away something precious, becoming worthless, no longer useful, a

moral bankrupt who has nothing to offer, nothing that could serve the desired end of marriage. So Campbell will reiterate, to himself: “So much youth and beauty tarnished; the possibility for so much good thrown away” (78).

The idea that Lulie has irretrievably lost something is combined with Campbell’s conviction that she does not know what it is that she lost. He returns to this point once more, deploring her profligate kiss-giving: “To me,” said he, “to all right-thinking people, a young girl’s kisses are something pure, something sacred, not to be offered indiscriminately to every fellow she meets. Ah, you don’t know what you have lost!” (73).

Lulie’s wastefulness, her deliberate wasting of what should be spared for one pair of hands only, is motivated by her failure to understand the rules of marriage economy, to understand how the good things should be used. What Lulie does not know is that she is not the one who decides on their usage. The violation of moral propriety that Lulie brings about results from the usurpation of the good things with which bourgeois marriage economy has credited her. It is because she appropriates what, traditionally, she does not own, thereby placing herself in a position from which she dispenses it at will, that she is put beyond the pale. Lulie is ignorant of the rules of economy in which her good things are not quite hers, even though they belong to her by dint of her (physical) constitution.

With her unproductive pilgrimage and speech, her wasteful and unrestrained consumption, the losses she incurs on the way, and even her inability to produce a successful Victorian plot, Lulie could be seen as an exponent of unproductive expenditure, an idea elaborated by Georges Bataille,<sup>37</sup> and considered an alternative to Thorstein Veblen’s theory of utility and productiveness. It turns out, however, that Bataille’s challenge to bourgeois values, and the economy that produces them, assumes a particular subject that can take it up. This assumption excludes women from the benefits of the transgressive potential this challenge offers.

As John Frow argues, Bataille’s notion of unproductive expenditure, exemplified in the institution of *potlatch*, is a theorisation of “antieconomic and antiutilitarian excess”<sup>38</sup> whose value is waste or loss. Since the various forms of unproductive expenditure entail discharge of “a bodily waste or wealth doomed to uselessness,”<sup>39</sup> it is ultimately the category of waste that is given the greatest value in Bataille’s theory. And yet, as Frow remarks, the category of waste cele-

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37. Georges Bataille, “The Notion of Excess,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 116–129.

38. John Frow, “Invidious Distinction: Waste, Difference, and Classy Stuff,” in *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, ed. Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2003), 25–38, p. 32.

39. Frow, p. 32.

brated by Bataille for its potential to subvert bourgeois economy, does not succeed, ultimately, in escaping this economy's logic. What Bataille's theory of unproductive expenditure demonstrates, Frow continues, is precisely the futility of a possible transcendence of utility and profitability:

What seems to me to be demonstrated by the failure of Bataille's radical attempt to find a way out of the restricted economy of social interests is the impossibility of imagining a point that exists outside of economy. No object can be withdrawn from its uses, isolated in a space beyond social interest, and indeed even the absolute loss that Bataille envisages can and will ultimately be put to the ends of gain.<sup>40</sup>

Further, pointing out the indispensability of the notion of waste to the theories of value, Frow writes: "Waste is the degree zero of value, or it is the opposite of value, or it is whatever stands in excess of value systems grounded in use."<sup>41</sup> Thus waste is what exceeds the parameters of usefulness, an excess value-neutral or value-less, and uselessness is what defines it. And yet despite its seeming lack of value, waste is, Frow continues, "constitutive of the structure of value;" it is "residually a commodity,"<sup>42</sup> something that always retains the potential for profit, that might still come into use and thus value. Thus the meaning "waste" conveys is to some extent deceitful in that there can be no absolute waste which could be posited, once and for all, as an opposite to utility and usefulness. To say that waste is "residually a commodity" is, it seems, to say two things: that waste (excess) is stipulated by the very economy it sets out to evade and that, therefore, it can be co-opted by the values it defies. Indeed, in his short text "The Notion of Expenditure" Bataille ultimately fails to escape the economy of utility, and in particular, the bourgeois marriage economy. It is precisely at the point where Bataille mentions woman that his indebtedness to this economic contract (one that comes to circumscribe Lulie herself) is given away. It is not only that Bataille's notion of "anti-economic and anti-utilitarian excess" reproduces a set of gendered metaphors, but that it rests on a relation where woman is the property of man by dint of having something that is traditionally placed in his hands, something that subjects her to expropriation and that can be lost, taken away either against or in accordance with the rules of economy, yet still only within its logic, and for use within its parameters.

Bataille's notion of "non-productive expenditure," set against rational acquisition and consumption, is a celebration of "considerable losses" in the name of

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40. Frow, p. 34.

41. Frow, p. 25.

42. Frow, p. 26.

“the satisfaction of disarmingly savage needs.”<sup>43</sup> This act of satisfying what surpasses the limits of civilising control is an attempt to go beyond the “utilitarian justification for his [man’s] actions,”<sup>44</sup> which is, beyond an oppressive father-son relationship, where the son, in unquestioning obedience to his father, is denied the right to articulate *his* pleasures, and “express his will.”<sup>45</sup> Thus non-productive expenditure originates in the negation of the father and a violation of the father-son bond (the son “indulges in his unavowed pleasures as soon as he is no longer in his father’s presence”<sup>46</sup>); it requires the father’s absence for the son’s non-productive expending, and becomes possible when “the father’s interest”<sup>47</sup> gives way to the son’s pleasures extricated from the utilitarian fatherly mantle.

Bataille distinguishes between two kinds of consumption. The first is a form of sustenance that keeps people alive and active, that conditions productive activity. It is a consumption in the service of production. Bataille writes, “the use of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals’ productive activity.”<sup>48</sup> The other involves unproductive expenditure, activities which “have no end beyond themselves,”<sup>49</sup> which neither produce nor further production, which are, therefore, in excess of the bare necessities of life. What underlies this expenditure is a loss, subversive of an economy of “balanced accounts” where what is expended always returns in the newly acquired. This loss becomes constitutive of unproductive expenditure, whose primeval forms Bataille locates “in primitive economic institutions”<sup>50</sup> where the need to lose, and not the need to acquire, dominates exchanges.

Bataille argues that in the market economy forms of exchange have been dissociated from unproductive expenditure and have come to be dominated by “an acquisitive sense.”<sup>51</sup> Fortunes became stabilised and immunised to losses. Nevertheless, expenditure is still the aim of economy though it is carried out “in obscurity,” a shameful activity (“as belching”) that is best hidden away lest it should betray signs of an appetite satiated beyond propriety. Driven by the rules of “functional and restrained expenditure,”<sup>52</sup> the bourgeoisie renounces the exces-

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43. Bataille, p. 117.

44. Bataille, p. 117.

45. Bataille, p. 117.

46. Bataille, p. 117.

47. Bataille, p. 117.

48. Bataille, p. 118.

49. Bataille, p. 118.

50. Bataille, p. 121.

51. Bataille, p. 123.

52. Bataille, p. 124.

sive and brings expenditure under rational control. There is an implicit affinity between unproductive expenditure and an unrestrained bodiness (the “generous” and the “orgiastic” define what has been wasted by the bourgeois) whose incalculable excess, Bataille suggests, has been subjected to the decency of the bourgeois household. In the bourgeois era the display of wealth, and hence expenditure, becomes privatised (“wealth is now displayed behind closed doors” of the bourgeois home and “in accordance with depressing and boring conventions”<sup>53</sup>) and conventionalised. Privatisation of expenditure means the loss of its unproductiveness, the private the end of excess and generosity, the façade of ostentatious spectacle compromised to the “sordid and rapacious face”<sup>54</sup> of the bourgeois (home).

What Bataille bemoans, therefore, is the fact that under the bourgeois economy, unproductive expenditure has been domesticated, that is, stripped of its subversive potential and subjected to the conventionalising regularities of the home. The household is not a place hospitable to excess because excess needs (a) public(ity) for its manifestations. The private is a space of obscurity, of invisibility that by this very fact reduces what falls within its territory almost to non-existence. It is not a space where expenditure can retain its unproductive quality since for Bataille the household signals a return to the values of the bourgeois. In Bataille, domestication inaugurates what Rachel Bowlby has eloquently discussed as a regrettable regress to “dominant culture”<sup>55</sup> when a given theory or idea is said to be domesticated:

Once someone or some idea is deemed to have been sent home . . . it is as if there is no more to be said. The front door closes definitely on a place removed and retired from the open air of its previous existence. . . . If a theory gets domesticated, that’s the end of it. It becomes like everything else. . . ‘domestication’ is used to signal something unproblematically negative that happens to a theory, when – what? – well, when it loses its radical edge, gets tamed, is co-opted or institutionalised.<sup>56</sup>

Yet despite the limitations of “reasonable conceptions”<sup>57</sup> (such as functional expenditure) which appear to produce “closed systems”<sup>58</sup> organising human life,

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53. Bataille, p. 124.

54. Bataille, p. 125.

55. Rachel Bowlby, “Domestication,” in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 71–92, p. 74.

56. Bowlby, p. 73.

57. Bataille, p. 128.

58. Bataille, p. 128.

there are always, Bataille argues, possibilities of transgression intimated in the system's "deficit"<sup>59</sup> that open up spaces for the labours of "insubordination" – "the immense travail of recklessness, discharge, and upheaval."<sup>60</sup> Thus the acts of recalcitrance involve a laborious effort to elude predictable ends and so avoid subordination to anything in advance. The immense travail, for one accountable end at least, that is, the insubordination, requires an "illogical and irresistible impulse"<sup>61</sup> which allows one "to reject material or moral goods that it would have been possible to utilize rationally."<sup>62</sup> This impulse to transcend bourgeois reason manifests itself in what Bataille calls "the states of excitation"<sup>63</sup> comparable to intoxication, which defy the logic of balanced accounts, of utility governed by rationality. It is only when one yields to this illogical and irresistible impulse that resists expenditure governed by reason that loss can emerge as value. It is only when one *rejects* goods, which could be put to some rational use, that losses can be "realized." Extricating expenditure from usefulness Bataille aims to offer an alternative value of unproductiveness. Thus instances of rejecting what might be recuperated in utilisation lead to a valuable effect where what is lost, wasted, contributes, nonetheless, to production: "connected to the losses that are realized in this way – in the case of the 'lost woman' as well as in the case of military expenditure – is the creation of unproductive values."<sup>64</sup>

The origin of unproductiveness is the rupture of the father-son bond, a bond that occurs between men, where the father must disappear, abdicate, so to speak, in order to give way to another man (father). Women are excluded from this important relation and its disruption (Bataille does not speak about any other relationship) but are, nonetheless, to return as figures for unproductive expenditure when the case of the "lost woman" emerges as a site for the production of unproductive value. The case of the "lost woman" is a case of how losses come to be realized. What is lost is the potential for rational utilization of certain goods (Lulie's "good things") according to bourgeois frugality. It is a case where "material or moral goods" are not utilised rationally giving rise to values extricated from bourgeois (sexual) economy. The lost woman is a woman who has lost her reputation, and who has lost it in a place other than the home/marriage. The lost woman is a fallen woman, a woman who has fallen outside the realm of legitimate loss, an "outside" where what she has to lose can be lost irrationally and illogi-

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59. Bataille, p. 128.

60. Bataille, p. 128.

61. Bataille, p. 128.

62. Bataille, p. 128.

63. Bataille, p. 128.

64. Bataille, p. 128.

cally, against the logic of marriage; that is, uselessly. She is a woman who transgressed the boundaries of the reputation guaranteed by her sojourn in the home where the moral good can be consumed without incurring an illegitimate loss. She is a woman whose moral good (the moral good that woman is) has not been consumed in accordance with marriage economy and not in the right place, and has therefore been purposefully wasted. Man does not become Bataille's case because man has no reputation to lose, that is, no reputation to be lost in this way. The moral good (that she traditionally is) forever posits woman as material for waste. Within the sexual economy which credits her with something to lose she can always offer it to be wasted, spent against reason. In other words, to talk about the lost woman is only possible once it is assumed that there is something that she can lose no matter where.

Lulie, called a "wanton" (68) and implicitly rendered as a lost woman (also literally, by the end of the story, through her death), comes to learn the painful lesson of realised losses. The many references to good things wasted, euphemistically evoked as beauty, culminate in Campbell's fiery speech which addresses Lulie's implication in an economic logic, that she, as a woman, cannot transgress. Shortly before her spectacular suicide, Campbell lashes out against Lulie, infuriated with her immodest ways and her ignorance of the economies of feminine love:

"For God's sake, drop that damned rot," he cried out with sudden fury. "It wearies me, do you hear, it sickens me. Love, love – my God, what do you know about it? why, if you really loved me, really loved any man – if you had any conception of what the passion of love is, how beautiful, how fine, how sacred – the mere idea that you could not come to your lover fresh, pure, untouched, as a young girl should – that you had been handled, fondled, and God knows what besides, by this man and the other – would fill you with such horror for yourself, with such supreme disgust – you would feel yourself so unworthy, so polluted. . . that. . . that. . . by God, you would take up that pistol there, and blow your brains out!" (82)

For all its elaborate rendition, Campbell's point enacts the case of Bataille's lost woman together with its implications that woman is not in a position to defy the economy of "balanced accounts" because this economy needs her as an object both for its re-production and for transgression (a fact that, willy-nilly, assigns to her a utilitarian function). Campbell's rhetoric posits Lulie as a thing that can be taken, if offered at the right time and in the right way, its worth calculated by rules of ownership. Extravagant in speech and conduct, Lulie is brutally reminded that she is the good things she never kept to herself (giving them away unproduc-

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tively) and her mistake was not to recognise that it is brand new things that are valued most. Because too many hands have laid claim to her body, Lulie loses the economic game which credited and equated her with something to lose (either legitimately or not). Acting irrationally, against the role she has been given, against the *raison d'être* of the game, the only loss she can afford with her unproductive expenditure and excessive consumption is a hurtful wound in her bosom, a hole left by the bullet that bespeaks the loss of her body.

**Hannah Swamidoss**

## **“You’re So Yeller”**

### **Identity, Land, and the Third-Culture Subject in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden***

Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) has given rise to a wide array of critical responses – from seeing Mary’s gardening linked to her sexuality to post-colonial readings of the text. One element that such readings have missed is the peculiar displacement in identity within which Burnett situates her protagonist, Mary. At the beginning of the narrative, Mary belongs to no culture, neither the Anglo-Indian culture that she should belong to as an English child residing in India nor the local Indian culture with which she frequently interacts. While postcolonial readings of the text account for some of this displacement, the concept of “third culture” in social theory provides a better understanding of this cultural and political displacement that Burnett uses, and more importantly, Burnett’s value of fixed cultural identity and her emphasis throughout the narrative of changing Mary’s displaced status by having her acculturate to English culture. This reading of Mary as a third-culture subject addresses an important aspect of *The Secret Garden* that has not been examined before and shows a formation of identity and power different from postcolonial models. This reading also highlights the problematic nature of the concept of “home” in the text and the type of subjects who can gain a home in England.

In her celebrated children’s book, *The Secret Garden* (1911), Frances Hodgson Burnett creates a poignant moment when her orphaned child protagonist, Mary Lennox, stranded in India and awaiting passage to England, asks another child, “Where is home?”<sup>1</sup> The other child, Basil, responds with derision: “She doesn’t know where home is!” and then states for Mary’s edification, “It’s England, of course.”<sup>2</sup> Mary’s dislocation from her “home” England emphasizes the other types of dislocation and alienation that Burnett structures around her protagonist. For instance, growing up in India under the British Raj, Mary has no close relationship with her parents or anyone in the Anglo-Indian community. Instead Mary spends much time with her Indian ayah, but even in this relationship, Burnett depicts Mary having little emotional contact or nurture because the ayah lets Mary do exactly as she pleases. Con-

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1. Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (NY: Harper Collins 1998), p. 11.

2. Burnett, p. 11.

sequently, when Mary's parents and the ayah die of cholera, Mary has no knowledge of any of these events and waits alone in her house until discovered by British soldiers. The culmination of Mary's dislocation occurs when she goes to England to live with a distant relative whom she has never met. The rest of the narrative depicts Mary's transition from this alienated state to one where she has rich and satisfying relationships with various characters as a result of her interest in gardening. To the question, "What must one do to cure alienation?" Burnett seems to provide a simple and easy answer: one must garden.

*The Secret Garden* has given rise to a wide array of critical responses – from seeing Mary's gardening as linked to her sexuality to postcolonial readings of the text.<sup>3</sup> Jerry Phillips, for instance, argues that Burnett reveals the effect of empire at home particularly in the context of identity displacement and class relations.<sup>4</sup> György Tóth, on the other hand, sees the work as a "latently subversive novel infused with anti-imperialism."<sup>5</sup> Mary Goodwin compares Burnett's garden with Kipling's jungle and notes that the garden morally corrects Mary's temperament, stating that "the garden that Mary discovers requires cultivation in order to reach its full potential, and repays this care in turn by healing the gardener."<sup>6</sup> While these readings do take into account the shift from Mary's initial rootless state to her "planted" state at the end of the book, they fail to account for a key element of her cultural displacement. Ariko Kawabata, in her examination of a different children's book, *The Borrowers*, comes closest to identifying this cultural displacement. Kawabata compares one of the characters in *The Borrowers*, the Boy, with Mary, stating that "not only the Borrowers, but also Mary and the Boy, being Anglo-Indian children, are such deracinated beings, lost between the two cultures and two countries. They are not familiar with English culture, although they are English; neither

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3. Maire Messenger Davies, "'A Bit of Earth': Sexuality and the Representation of Childhood in Text and Screen Versions of *The Secret Garden*," *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television* 48 (Fall 2001): 48–58. Although Maire Messenger Davies examines the film version of *The Secret Garden*, she neatly summarizes the position that sees Mary's gardening as closely linked to her sexuality. Davies sees Burnett combining contemporary understanding of physical exercise (and the need for the outdoors), health, and child development with the sensual and organic aspects of gardening (48–49). She concludes, "The growth to maturity is both personal/sexual and sociopolitical in *The Secret Garden*" (50).

4. Jerry Phillips, "The Mem Sahib, the Worthy, the Rajah and His Minions: Some Reflections on the Class Politics of *The Secret Garden*," *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 17.2 (1993) 168–94.

5. György Tóth, "The Children of the Empire: Anti-Imperialism in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*," *The AnaChronisT* (2003) 117–47, p. 117.

6. Mary Goodwin, "The Garden and the Jungle: Burnett, Kipling, and the Nature of Imperial Childhood," *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011) 105–117, 107.

can they be Indian, though they were born in India.”<sup>7</sup> Kawabata argues that Mary and the Boy as “Anglo-Indian returnees” create their identities through storytelling.<sup>8</sup> Kawabata makes two important points: that Mary belongs to neither Indian nor English culture and that her identity falls into the category of a returning native.

I find that Burnett adds an element of displacement that Kawabata misses. At the beginning of the narrative, Burnett situates Mary in an unusual position by displacing her from the Anglo-Indian community. While the Anglo-Indian settler colony certainly had cultural differences from Britain, England still remained the focal point: England meant home. Burnett depicts Mary not knowing this particular location of home. She consequently portrays Mary residing in-between three cultures: British, Anglo-Indian, and Indian. Although the postcolonial readings of the text account for some of this cultural displacement, a better understanding of the subject that Burnett presents in Mary lies in the concept of “third culture.” The concept of “third culture” in social theory accounts for certain types of cultural displacement, typically where children growing up in a foreign land reside between the cultures of their parents and the host countries. Understanding Mary, as a third-culture subject, and the displacement and alienation that comes with residing between cultures, provides better insight into Burnett’s discourse on identity and the importance she places on Mary becoming acculturated to England.

Understanding Mary as a third-culture subject also provides insight into another discourse that Burnett enters – the changing nature of the Raj. While most readings of the text acknowledge Mary’s status as “returning native,” these readings do not situate *The Secret Garden* as a discourse on the amorphous concept of “home.” The third-culture displacement that Burnett addresses in *The Secret Garden* and the type of gardening that she advocates to remedy this situation tie in with contemporary discourses concerning the British Raj, land, and identity; Burnett’s treatment of the family and the home reveal the influences of these discourses, and the final form of community that Burnett leaves the reader with reveals a paradigm that incorporates disparate elements. To better explicate this position, I will first look at the concept of third culture in social theory, next examine the discourse of return and home, and then read *The Secret Garden* in these contexts.

### **Third-Culture Displacement and the Third-Culture Subject**

“Third culture,” at first, referred to the space people in expatriate situations used for cultural exchange. In “Work Patterns of Americans in India,” John Useem uses the

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7. Ariko Kawabata, “Sense of Loss, Belonging, and Storytelling: An Anglo-Indian Narrator in *The Borrowers*,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 37(2006) 125–131, pp. 125–126.

8. Kawabata, p. 126.

terms “first” and “second” culture to represent Indians and Americans while the “third culture” represents “the patterns which are created, shared, and learned by men of the two different societies . . . in the process of linking their societies . . . to each other.”<sup>9</sup> In his analysis, Useem argues that the third-culture indicated a shift in power from “super-subordination” to “co-ordination.”<sup>10</sup> The importance of Useem’s description of third culture lies in how it relates to space and power; third culture is a necessary, mutual space that provides room for cultural interaction unavailable elsewhere. To this initial concept, Ruth Useem added the idea that the third culture “is changing culture, highly protean within a rather firm outline.”<sup>11</sup> Building on the idea of equal power in the space between cultures, Ruth Useem introduces the concept of differing uses of power by individuals placed within particular third-culture spaces.

A significant development in this discourse occurred when Ruth Useem and Richard Downie began to discuss third culture as an interior state found within the individual, in this case the expatriate child. Expatriate children lived between the first culture of their parents and the second culture of the host country; the children’s displacement from both cultures resulted in an *interior* “third culture.”<sup>12</sup> One could argue that *all* children begin with third culture, residing in a liminal state before being acculturated by parents or other adults. Third-culture displacement, however, adds an extra dimension to a child’s liminal state, and this type of cultural displacement continues on into adulthood.<sup>13</sup> David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken further explicate the strengths and weaknesses of this “culture between cultures.”<sup>14</sup> They and other theorists noted the difficulty in identifying “home” and a sense of belonging and the prevalence of a sense of being rootless and a “migratory instinct.”<sup>15</sup> Yet the concept also opens

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9. John Useem, “Work Patterns of Americans in India.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 368 (1966) 146–156, p. 147.

10. John Useem, p. 147.

11. Ruth Useem, “The American Family in India.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 368 (1966) 132–145, p. 135.

12. Ruth Hill Useem and Richard Downie, “Third Culture Kids.” *Today’s Education: The Journal of the National Education Association* 65.3 (1976) 103–105.

13. Denise A. Bonebright, “Adult Third Culture Kids: HRD Challenges and Opportunities,” *Human Resource Development International* 13.3 (Jul 2010) 351–359; Kate A. Walters and Faith P. Auton-Cuff, “A Story to Tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing Up as Third Culture Kids,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12.7 (2009) 755–772.

14. David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *The Third Culture Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press), 1999, p. 20.

15. Debra Ann McLachlan, “The Impact of Globalization on Internationally Mobile Families: A Grounded Theory Analysis,” *Journal of Theory, Construction, and Testing*, 9.1 (Spring 2005) 14–20, p. 15.

up the possibilities of a "portable home" and the strengths and the advantages of mobility.<sup>16</sup>

Ruth Useem, Pollock and Reken began to account for more types of experience (outside expatriate experience) that could create third-culture displacement; the ongoing, "protean" nature continued, and while its outline changed and expanded, the third culture remained recognizable. I would like to further expand these theorists' paradigm to account for situations of third culture within the confines of a *single* culture. Repeatedly in British fiction prior to Burnett, authors such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray create characters with displacement similar to the third-culture model. Austen's Fanny Price and Dickens' Sissy Jupe, for instance, face issues of place, identity, "belonging," and "home" much as Mary Lennox does. The third-culture model, consequently, accounts for disparate cultural variance both within monocultures and between cultures.

A point of intersection that I see with the ideas of the "third culture" and the "interstitial space" in social theory and postcolonial theory is in the multi-valence model that the interstitial space suggests. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* argues that theory ought to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences"<sup>17</sup> and that "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself."<sup>18</sup> The interior displacement seen in the third-culture individual certainly displays a location and site that reveals cultural formation, mobility, alterity, and agency, but this subject formation does not necessarily propagate itself. Like the third-culture kid who does not fit neatly into either the binary of the parent culture or the host culture, the interstitial space does not represent the meeting of binaries but of differing forms of power. This new model of power and space accounts better for Mary's displacement than the postcolonial framework within which Phillips, Tóth, and Kawabata situate her. True, the concept of third-culture theory occurs well after the time period in which Burnett wrote and certainly the British would not have recognized this concept. Yet third-culture displacement can still be seen in the time period of the Raj as cultural interaction increased. To miss depictions of third-culture displacement in the texts of the British Raj would be to ignore an important understanding of the problems and resolutions

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16. Pollock and Reken observe: "For some TCKS, however, 'Where is home?' is the hardest question of all. *Home* connotes an emotional place—somewhere you truly belong. There simply is no real answer to that question for many TCKs." Pollock and Reken, p. 124.

17. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge), 1994, p. 2.

18. Bhabha, p. 2.

that these authors depicted. Burnett, for instance, locates Mary firmly in the interstitial space at the beginning of the narrative: Mary cannot find mental, emotional, or intellectual comfort in any one of the monocultures around her. Instead of seeing potential in the interstitial space, however, Burnett moves Mary into a new location – English culture. The social formation that emerges at the end of the narrative, however, is not completely English and displays some qualities of Mary's initial state.

Applying third-culture displacement to *The Secret Garden* can raise the question of genre: why does Mary's cultural dislocation, found in a *children's book* with no well-defined genre, merit such close attention? Peter Hunt addresses the problematic nature of children's literature and literary criticism, observing that "as a body of texts, as well as a body of criticism, [children's literature] does not fit into the dominant system's hierarchies or classifications, and consequently, like colonial or feminist literatures, it has presented an irritant to established thinking."<sup>19</sup> Hunt continues to develop this idea by arguing that in the pecking order of academia children's literature is "at the bottom of the heap," but that there has also been a change in academia, "a revolution in critical thinking, that has allowed the subject to be *thinkable*."<sup>20</sup> So while *The Secret Garden* may not be easily classified into a particular genre other than the amorphous category of children's book (or children's novel, novella), its "irritant" nature to established genre has great value. The discourse of cultural dislocation that Burnett raises and resolves in the narrative reflects the particular political, socio-economic contexts of her time, and while this discourse may have a different audience than Jane Austen has in *Mansfield Park* or Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*, Burnett's discourse still engages cultural values and posits moral worth.

### **"It's England of Course!"**

#### ***The Changing Nature of "Home" in British Discourse***

To re-examine the scene where Basil "educates" Mary on the location of home proves helpful in understanding the changing nature of British discourse on the relations between Britain and the Raj. At first, Basil's position seems to reflect the typical perspective of the British community in India, a perspective that consistently imagines and refers to England as home. Burnett's juxtaposition of two English children unable to define England, however, points to the altering composition of the Raj in the early twentieth century. Whereas Mary has no conceptual image of

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19. Peter Hunt, *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism* (London, NY: Routledge), 2003, p. 2.

20. Hunt, p. 3.

England whatsoever (Basil's response does not really answer her question), Basil, who claims to have knowledge of this "home," cannot offer her a detailed picture of England; he can only inform Mary that she will live with a seemingly unpleasant relative. Basil himself has not been to England; only one of his siblings has visited their grandmother, who resides there. This stance of identifying England as home, but having no real knowledge of it, typifies the latter period of the British Raj in which English domiciles in India had been established, and families spent longer periods in India than they did in Britain. English expatriate children could relate to the fictional Basil, with their own lack of actual experience of the geographic entity of the British Isles.

Basil's identification of home by what is not home, however, has its roots in an earlier stage of British identity in India. Marjorie Morgan, in her examination of British travel writing in the Victorian age, observes that British national identity forged itself in these texts through a series of contrasts between Britain and the local cultures that British travelers visited. For instance, a British subject who had never been outside the British Isles might find it difficult to define "British cuisine." However, a country like France or Germany would offer a contrasting cuisine, and the same Briton, now traveling, could define British cuisine through the differences he or she encountered.<sup>21</sup> While Morgan limits herself largely to examining the formulation of this identity with travelers who visited European nations, the principle she outlines also applies to the initial experience of the British in India. Basil's definition of "home" (while using the opposition of India to define England) is problematic because Basil has nothing in his experience with which to truly contrast India. Instead, when Mary travels to England, she understands different elements of English culture by contrasting England to India. More importantly the "India" that Mary uses to understand England is not Anglo-Indian India but the India of Mary's ayah and the other servants.

Mary's use of India to puzzle out English identity neatly encapsulates the history of the Raj and the formulation of British identity in this context. Using Morgan's model, the initial transient British presence in India understood English identity by what was not-English in India. The concept of Britain as home, therefore, took on very similar forms to the British who traveled in other parts of the world. India became a useful foil to British identity; Britain provided geographical stability to its citizens who traveled back and forth from it. With the Indian mutiny of 1857 and the subsequent British political involvement and creation of a larger infrastructure, a British settler colony began to form. Once women were allowed to travel and re-

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21. Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave), 2001.

side in India, the British presence in India became much more fixed to location. In establishing households in India, the British community began to raise an expatriate generation that still viewed England as home but had no direct experience of it as a geographical or cultural entity. While the forging of British identity still occurred in contrast to India, England had become equally “other” in direct experience to the expatriate community of the Raj.

In this context of the changing countenance of the Raj, Georgina Gowans examines how the concept of returning to England became very important to the British community in India, no matter how nebulous a form the “return” took. This concept of Britain as “home” had several facets: the idea of return, the idea of Britain as a general home, and the idea of the particular home to which the family would return both in its location and status. Gowans argues that “repatriation to Britain continued to be seen as critical to the maintenance of imperial rule . . . and, as portrayed as home, images of Britain concentrated on a number of established themes frequently emphasizing a patrician lifestyle based on rurality, domesticity and tradition.”<sup>22</sup> The reality of this return was quite different. In the mid- to late-1800s, repatriates could expect to establish an aristocratic lifestyle in Britain through monetary acquisitions made in India.<sup>23</sup> However, toward the turn of the century, the purchasing power of these fortunes had altered, and repatriates settled in suburban areas and in much smaller establishments. The depiction of England in both these contexts, nevertheless, focused on the land and its restorative powers, whether it was a country estate or property close to a spa town.<sup>24</sup> Gowans emphasizes that this rhetorical position of England as home (shored up in many ways, even in advertisements for tea) was important to the imperial enterprise.<sup>25</sup> It presented the British presence in India as elitist but not local; toiling in the colonies would yield its just rewards.

A different aspect of the trope of return that Gowans examines is the actual experiences of women in the early twentieth century who traveled between India and Britain, and who did not always find the periods in Britain pleasant. Domiciles in India could not be acknowledged as “home,” but the realities of these domiciles and the amount of time spent in India frequently made visits to Britain less than satisfactory.<sup>26</sup> The slippage between homes in India and homes in Britain only became

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22. Georgina Gowans, “A Passage from India: Geographies and Experiences of Repatriation, 1858–1939,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 3.4 (2002) 403–423, p. 403.

23. Gowans, “Passage,” p. 404.

24. Gowans, “Passage,” pp. 408–410.

25. Gowans, “Passage,” pp. 411–412.

26. Georgina Gowans, “Imperial Geographies of Home: Mem-Sahibs and Missie-Sahibs in India and Britain, 1915–1947,” *Cultural Geographies* 10 (2003) 424–441, pp. 462–428.

more pronounced in the changing global political scene. Britain had an influx of repatriates as colonies became independent, and this influx changed the demographics in Britain for both the repatriates and the local communities in the areas in which they settled. During this later stage of the Raj, repatriates faced a drop in economic status on their return and faced declining living standards in Britain.

In this historical context of empire and colony, the land took on great value. The physical entity of the British Isles not only shaped identity but anchored it. Instead of viewing the land only as a source of economic wealth as the Fabians did, the discourse over the British landscape in the context of empire invested the land with different worth: the value of having ancestral roots and tradition. In the rhetoric surrounding the land, nostalgia played a key role; expatriates in the colonies spoke longingly about the comfort and restorative powers of the English landscape. For returning Britons, acculturation to both the representation of the imagined English countryside and to the actualities it presented was required for successful repatriation.

Elizabeth Buettner notes that British rhetoric of this period saw a need for expatriate-English children to return home because of concerns over education, health, and the types of knowledge to which Indian culture exposed children.<sup>27</sup> Boys were more likely to return to England first for their education. When financial circumstances made it so that children were educated in India, parents were anxious that their children's accents would set them apart from their compatriots who had been educated in England.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, parents worried that if children continued to remain in India they would be physically debilitated by the hot climate and also would acquire sexual knowledge that was not in keeping with their age. This fear of sexuality and the debasement of English blood (either being weakened by the climate or through miscegenation) segued into a larger concern that if the British remained in India without traveling to England, then the race would no longer be unique or would be doomed to extinction.<sup>29</sup> Returning to England both for education and retirement meant upholding the purity of the race, both physically and morally.

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27. Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (NY: Oxford UP, 2004). Buettner uses both *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* as brief examples to show how children living in India were portrayed. Buettner argues that life in India as a child was seen either as idyllic or difficult and sees Burnett offering both these representations. For instance, Buettner sees Sara Crewe's relationship with the Indian servant as affectionate and one that indicates happiness. However, the harsh nature of the Indian climate is seen in *The Secret Garden*. One aspect that Buettner overlooks in her reading of Burnett's work is the displacement that Mary experiences in India.

28. Buettner, pp. 9–10.

29. Buettner, pp. 30–45

### The Third-culture Subject, Home, and Social Formation

It is significant that over the course of her writing for children, Burnett portrayed different stages of visualizing England as home that remain consistent with both the points that Gowans and Buettner raise. Burnett's representations of England as home in both *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* prove astute in their depictions of the British community in India, particularly when Burnett managed to accomplish her portrayals from what was commonly known about India, never having traveled to the region. The idea of returning to England, however, made its mark in an even earlier work, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), and here at least, Burnett could draw from personal experience, as she herself moved between Britain and America. Her biographer Gretchen Gerzina writes of Burnett's own cultural hybridity, "she spent her life as neither British nor American but reveled in straddling both countries' opportunities and attitudes."<sup>30</sup> While Burnett capitalized on opportunities, Gerzina also sees a sense of loss in this lifestyle; Gerzina writes of Burnett, "she saw herself as a transatlantic person, someone who longed for one place whenever she was in the other."<sup>31</sup> Gerzina attributes a spillover of this displacement from Burnett's life into her fiction: "It was no mistake that nearly all of her stories and books would have to do with reversals of fortune and shifts in class status."<sup>32</sup> This persistent theme of class displacement that Gerzina observes is certainly clear in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*, but in *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox's displacement is not one of class, because she belongs to the same social class as the Cravens. Unlike her fictional predecessors Cedric Errol and Sara Crewe, Mary's displacement lies in culture; in *The Secret Garden*, Burnett examines the questions of identity, place, and community with respect to cultural displacement. Significantly, whether it is class displacement or cultural displacement, Burnett consistently turns to the land, *English* land, to find resolutions.

America and India prove to be vastly different in their respective relationships to the British Isles, but it is important to note that Burnett displayed a persistent interest in the theme of returning to England. Burnett's privileging of England over the United States helps in understanding the primacy of location that Burnett places on England. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric Errol, born in America, returns to England to take up an earldom and achieves reconciliation between his estranged American mother and his English grandfather. While Burnett does not seem to be as interested in how identity forms itself in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as she would be

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30. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. xiii.

31. Gerzina, p. xiv.

32. Gerzina, p. xiv.

in *The Secret Garden*, she does explore the means of gaining and securing access to English land in both books. Cedric's displacement not only stems from the death of his father, but also in the exclusion from England that his mother faces. In showing how he inherits his title and gains, through his impeccable behavior, his grandfather's approval, Burnett delineates a rapprochement to the initial access to England that Cedric's mother had enjoyed. This interest that Burnett displayed in the primacy of England as location continued in *A Little Princess*. Sara Crewe, the angelic protagonist, had already lost one parent in India and relocates to England for her education. Her father, financially successful in India, provides her with the means to live well in England, hence the sobriquet "princess." However, as her father succumbs to sorrow and illness in India, Sara goes from prosperity to poverty in England. A mysterious English gentleman redeems the situation through the efforts of his Indian servant and not only restores Sara's fortune in England but becomes her guardian as well. Through this narrative, Burnett portrays the earlier stage of the British presence in India. Sara's father displays mobility in his business transactions between India and England. Burnett portrays him as rich and influential in England, and although he relocates Sara to a city and not the suburbs or the countryside, it becomes clear from the text that he could establish and maintain a household in the tradition of the rich Nabobs. Burnett also depicts his wealthy friend as being able to maintain a luxurious establishment in the city. Again, as in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett does not seem to be as interested in how British identity formed itself as she is in exploring the concept of location. Despite the exoticism Sara brings to the English boarding school she attends, she easily fits in as English; her identity as an English girl is already established. On the other hand, the primacy of England as location becomes even more apparent in *A Little Princess* than in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett did not portray America as an undesirable location in itself, whereas in *A Little Princess*, the harshness of life in India certainly makes India a detrimental place to live. Burnett's rhetoric at this point is typically Victorian; she presents uncomplicated relationships between the United States and Britain, and India and Britain.

In *The Secret Garden*, the textual space that Burnett provides for the scenes set in India amounts to little over a chapter, and this brevity raises the question of whether India plays an integral role in the narrative or not. While I believe this brief portion does present long-range implications to the narrative (particularly in Mary using Indian culture as a lens to understand English culture), the paradigm of third-culture displacement occurring in monocultures is also present in the text. As mentioned earlier, Mary Lennox's cultural displacement is similar to the displacement Austen presents in Fanny Price and Dickens in Sissy Jupe. Although Fanny and Sissy's initial dislocation displays elements of class displacement, by the end of their

respective narratives, both characters remain equidistant from the dominant culture which they have entered (Bertrams/Gradgrinds) and the cultures from which they originated (Prices/circus). The interstitial spaces in which Fanny and Sissy reside have much agency; the final social formations of both novels reformulate around these interstitial characters. Moreover, each character's lack of cultural fixity becomes a moral center: both the Bertrams and Prices can learn from Fanny, while Sissy can provide restoration to the Gradgrinds and the circus. British fiction of this period reveals a discourse on the ongoing nature of cultural variance both in texts portraying monocultures and in texts depicting two or more cultures. *The Secret Garden* incorporates elements of both. Burnett's use of India and Mary's expatriate situation helps emphasize her lack of fixed cultural identity and offers a means for Mary to gain knowledge about English culture. Likewise, Mary being a cultural anomaly, particularly to English characters in the text, reveals elements of third-culture displacement within a monoculture.

Understanding Burnett's use of India in *The Secret Garden* as more deliberate, however, is in keeping with the Victorian understanding of India. By the time Burnett had started writing, India as a British colony (with the anxieties and privileges it created) had been long established and represented a part of what it meant to be British. Burnett, like her fellow Victorians, joined the discourse on India; *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* reflect some of the standard British views of India at the time. Gerzina notes Burnett's interest in "Hindu philosophy and art" and that "like many British Victorians, she decorated her London houses with Indian artifacts."<sup>33</sup> Burnett's interest in Hindu philosophy manifests itself in her attention to theosophy and reveals an additional awareness of India. Burnett's interest in spiritualism, theosophy, and Christian Science became particularly pronounced after her older son's death.<sup>34</sup> Jen Cadwallader observes that Burnett refused to be pinned down to the specifics of her belief, but Burnett's mixture of "New Thought" certainly makes its way into *The Secret Garden*, particularly in Mary's cousin Colin's use of the word "magic."<sup>35</sup> Apart from the initial chapter set in India, Burnett repeatedly makes free-floating references to India throughout the narrative, particularly to climate, the growth of plants, servants, and Mary's observation to her cousin that his haughtiness reminds her of a young Rajah that she had once seen in India.

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33. Gerzina, p. 117.

34. Jen Cadwallader, "The Three Veils: Death, Mourning, and the After Life in *The Secret Garden*," in *Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden: A Children's Classic at 100*. eds. Jackie C. Horne and Joe Sutliff Sanders (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), p. 122. Angelica Shirley Carpenter and Jean Shirley, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: Beyond The Secret Garden* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications), 1990, p. 48. Gerzina, pp. 241–242.

35. Cadwallader, pp. 121–122.

Moreover, Burnett sets the circumstances of Mary's cultural displacement in India, and Burnett's India and England reflect the contemporary thinking that Gowans and Buettner document. Understanding the narrative in the context of the late Victorian/early Edwardian discourse of India proves fruitful in understanding Mary's displacement and "re-placement" in England.

In *The Secret Garden*, Burnett presents a very different picture of the British presence in India and the consequences it has for its expatriates than she does in *A Little Princess*. Burnett delineates a settled community with several families present, representing different walks of life. Burnett also portrays a class structure within the British community. For instance, she portrays Mary's mother as upper middle class; Mrs. Lennox wears pretty clothes and attends fashionable parties. After her parents die, Mary lives with a poor English clergyman whose family has shabby attire. Burnett depicts the Raj in its later stages when English households had been established in India and many aspects of British life had been replicated in the colonies, including class. The social life that Burnett depicts for the women, one of parties and dependence on Indian servants, drew criticism in Britain. Burnett's depiction of Mrs. Lennox as flighty and irresponsible fits into a feminist discourse of the period, where the memsahibs of the Raj received criticism for their indolence and taste for finery. In founding such domiciles, the British employed Indians as servants, and Burnett's depiction of Mrs. Lennox refusing to raise her daughter and leaving Mary to the care of her ayah also fits into the behavior of British expatriate women which drew the most censure and disapproval from Britain.

This frivolous lifestyle forms Mary's third-culture identity. Burnett links the neglect which Mary suffers from her mother to the alienation Mary has from the people around her and consequently the cultures surrounding her. While haughty toward the servants and curious about her mother, Mary has no real relationships with anyone; this isolation leads to a lack of knowledge which further shapes Mary's identity. Of her own identity, she only knows that she is not Indian and should be similar to the British around her, but that is as far as her knowledge goes. Mary does not know her place in India as a settler; this displacement becomes most apparent through the contrasts Burnett structures between Mary, her mother, and Basil, the parson's child. Burnett, for instance, portrays Mrs. Lennox embracing the lifestyle of the Raj; her behavior not only points to class but also to the characteristic traits of a settler colony. Mrs. Lennox replicates an English social life in India; she clearly has knowledge of Anglo-Indian culture and chooses her own role in this culture. Mary, however, does not participate in this lifestyle and cannot observe or have knowledge of it. While Basil does not represent the social aspects of the British in India, he does offer an example of the identity that settler children had. Burnett depicts Basil as well integrated into his family life; because Basil's parents do not

relegate him to the care of servants, he can absorb the values of what it means to be English and living in India even if he cannot completely comprehend or explain these values.

In addition to having very limited knowledge of the Anglo-Indian community, Mary does not display much knowledge of the Indian community even though she spends most of her time with her ayah and the other servants. Burnett gives Mary some knowledge of Indian songs and stories through the ayah, but Burnett wrote at a time when there were literary representations of English characters intimately knowing local cultures, Rudyard Kipling's character Kim (1901) being a good example. Mary, consequently, appears as a very different character; one that initially resides in-between all the cultures around her, and this cultural dislocation affects her identity. The first element of Mary's character affected by third-culture displacement is her temper: she consistently behaves in a selfish and disagreeable manner. Mary also suffers from ill health, and at first this seems to be due to the Indian climate and not to ambivalence in identity. Later in the narrative, however, Burnett connects the creation of identity with good health. Consequently, when Burnett provides the remedy for Mary's lack of identity by moving her to England and rooting her in the land, Burnett systematically addresses the issues of cultural knowledge, bad temper, and ill health.

In the move to England and clearer identity, Burnett reveals that the type of land in which Mary will be "planted" matters. In this aspect, Burnett did not represent the changing situations that expatriates faced as to residence when they returned to the British Isles. Gowans points out that most repatriates could not afford country estates and settled in the suburbs. Burnett, however, portrays her returning native, Mary, "going home" to a country estate, Misselthwaite Manor, in the Yorkshire moors, and peoples this countryside with strong, working-class folk who live in harmony with the land. Mary, of course, does not possess the financial means to purchase any type of residence in England, and Burnett leaves it unclear whether Mary's guardian, Mr. Craven, had connections with the Raj. Mary's going to a country estate instead of the suburbs shows that Burnett followed or preferred the earlier trope of returning natives being able to settle well. This preference for the landed estate also occurs in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*. Burnett offers Misselthwaite Manor as the perfect site for Mary to gain knowledge, recover from her ill health, and move from the interstitial space to well-demarcated ground.

At first, Burnett presents this acquisition of knowledge through a series of contrasts: the servants in England behave differently from the servants in India, the English climate invigorates while the Indian weather dulls the inhabitants, and English soil provides slow fruitful growth instead of the quick and transient explosion of growth seen in India. Burnett reverses the process that Morgan describes in

her study of travel writing; identity still forms through a series of contrasts, but instead of traveling "abroad," Mary "travels" in England. Mary's nebulous third-culture identity begins to change as she encounters definitions of what it means to be "English." The gardening metaphor in the book becomes particularly pertinent in the formation of English identity as it encompasses all of these contrasts. At Misselthwaite Manor, Mary must learn what it means to be British and actively grow into this identity.

Burnett uses the gardening trope to create other characters' identities, and these identities in turn become models for Mary. For instance, the "secret garden," a walled garden, originally belonged to Mrs. Craven; she nurtured it and spent much of her time there. Mr. Craven and other characters begin to connect the garden, that particular *land*, with her. After Mrs. Craven's death, Burnett depicts Mr. Craven associating that particular piece of land so closely with his wife's identity and memory that the garden becomes intolerable to him that he locks it and allows entry to no one. Burnett portrays Mr. Craven's choices affecting his identity and shaping his son Colin's identity as well. When Mary finds the key to the garden and begins to revive it, her British identity also begins to form; she becomes less imperious and develops relationships with both the servants and local inhabitants as she begins to depend on these people's knowledge of gardening. At first, Mary relies on some instinctive knowledge of her own; she knows, for instance, that she must clear the weeds around shoots. But her third-culture identity can only take her so far in her gardening, and then she needs much more specific information about English plants. To identify the shoots, for instance, Mary needs knowledge from the head gardener, Ben Weatherstaff and Dickon, a working-class boy, who can tell Mary everything she needs to know about plants and animals. By offering a progressive acquisition of knowledge, Burnett provides a paradigm for the formation of identity. In the process of acquiring this knowledge, Mary also begins to form relationships with the servants. Likewise, gardening provides Mary with exercise, which in turn creates an appetite, and her health improves. As Mary's identity begins to root itself in the garden, she begins to resemble the dead Mrs. Craven. Mary, like Mrs. Craven, begins to spend much of her time in the garden and also begins to love this piece of land. When alive, Mrs. Craven clearly was at the center of her household, and Burnett positions Mary, who is now healthier, better tempered, and growing into her English identity, to take this place.

Just as the type of land mattered to Burnett, she also placed emphasis on the type of knowledge that arises from the land. The text provides numerous references to the difference between the climates and vegetation of India and England; instead of the quick and short-lived burst of growth that plants display in India, English foliage takes time to develop, but by implication offers something more substantive.

Burnett portrays the “gardening” that Mary’s identity undergoes occurring both in India and in England. In one of the incidents which takes place in India, the narrator states: “She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms into little heaps of earth.”<sup>36</sup> This type of gardening proves futile when the flower cannot take root. Pretending to garden is also one of many things that Mary did in India to keep herself amused; the text does not depict any real commitment to gardening or the land until she moves to England. Likewise, Burnett structures Mary’s disagreeableness as stemming from the Indian type of gardening. For instance, Basil tries to play with Mary when she pretends to garden in India, but Mary persists in her isolation and rebuffs him. Basil then begins to taunt her by calling her “Mistress Mary quite contrary.”<sup>37</sup> Mary does not gain either knowledge or community through the gardening she does in India; Burnett provides no Dickon figure. Whereas Mary *played* at gardening in India by sticking flowers into the sand, at Misselthwaite, Burnett portrays Mary as no longer playing but gardening in earnest by weeding, pruning, and planting. By choosing to garden, Burnett has Mary choose her identity, and this identity is closely tied to the land. Instead of the insubstantial growth of India, the English soil provides deep growth. Similarly, Dickon’s relationship with nature invokes images of both Pan and Francis of Assisi: two Western figures. Consequently, the knowledge that Mary attains also makes her more and more British, as it is a very Western form of knowledge.

The connection between identity, land, and knowledge found in the text reveals the anxiety that “un-fixed” identity creates. The question of skin color and its connection to the land provides a good example of the resolution to this particular anxiety, the “fixing” of identity. Burnett presents a range of skin color in the book: black, yellow, and a rosy pink or white. Mary starts out as a sickly yellow and progresses toward a healthy pink. The racial overtones are undeniable, but there is a subtlety in Burnett’s argument that can easily be overlooked. Mary’s first encounter with Martha, one of the English maids at Misselthwaite, illuminates the particular problem of being yellow; Martha expects Mary to be black, and Martha expresses her surprise (and disappointment) when she discovers that Mary is “no more black than me—for all you’re so yeller.”<sup>38</sup> While “yellow” is typically associated with Asians, Burnett’s characters do not use the term “yellow” in this manner. Both Mary and Martha firmly associate Indians with the color black and the English with pink or white. Burnett portrays Mary as being incensed when she learns that Martha thought she was black. Martha responds to Mary’s anger by saying, “You needn’t be

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36. Burnett, p. 3.

37. Burnett, p. 3.

38. Burnett, p. 32.

so vexed. That's not th' way for a young lady to talk. I've nothing' against th' blacks. When you read about 'em in tracts they're always very religious. You always read as a black's a man an' a brother. I've never seen a black an' I was fair pleased to think I was goin' to see one close."<sup>39</sup> While natives are still objects to Martha (she wants to see one close up), Burnett portrays a credible attempt toward equality and acceptance, particularly in the reference to the abolitionist slogan "Am I not a man and a brother?" Martha offers this acceptance both to Mary and other characters in the book. Mary, however, by being "yeller," stands apart from both the blacks and the whites; yellowness places her in the interstitial space between being Anglo-Indian, Indian or British. The yellowness of Mary's skin, however, leaves her with no land: not the Anglo-Indian settler claims to India, not the Indian claims to India, or the British claims to Britain. Burnett posits that a choice needs to be made: Mary can remain yellow and isolated and landless, or she can learn, change, and become pink and English. Subjects have well-defined existing categories and need to fit into these categories; being in-between these categories proves untenable, destabilizing, and points to illness. Mary chooses to garden; consequently, she becomes well-defined.

Fittingly, the walled, secret garden offers not only the interstitial locus for various aspects of cultural displacement to interact, but also the resolution for cultural dislocation. Burnett structures the story around the garden in such a way that the garden moves from being exclusive (only Craven and his wife use it) to secret (Craven locks up the garden when his wife dies) to being open once more, but again to an exclusive group. The garden begins as a site for fixed identity; the garden represents Mrs. Craven and English identity through the plants it holds. When "secret," the garden's identity becomes un-fixed, making it interstitial. The garden's potential for creating identity also lies dormant; it displays its own form of being "yellow." Although Mary entering the forbidden garden may be seen as an act of transgression, the garden's hidden nature in itself is an act of transgression. Craven's locking up the garden brings the household nothing but grief; it also represents his own sequestration and Colin's. Consequently, Mary's un-fixed identity and the garden's interstitial quality – their "yellerness" – reveal an ideal match; the transgressive nature of being interstitial makes them both "unknowable." The on-going nature of such displacement becomes apparent; in the case of the garden, it affects the entire household.

The slipping signifier of being "yeller," and of also becoming less yellow, repeatedly makes its way into the narrative in the context of the garden. After a period of time has passed from Martha's initial proclamation of Mary's undefined skin

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39. Burnett, p. 32.

color, Martha suggests a cure for Mary's yellow skin, "You go on playin' you out' doors every day an' you'll get some flesh on your bones an' you won't be so yeller."<sup>40</sup> Mary immediately goes toward the yet undiscovered garden. While this comment may initially only have reference to skin color, the narrative portrays Mary's character improving and becoming more British as her yellowness begins to slip away. Once Mary does enter the garden and begins her covert gardening, she begins to interact with Weatherstaff more positively; the text points out that she was "more civil."<sup>41</sup> Weatherstaff responds to this difference in her character by noting the improvement in her physical appearance; he states, "Tha's a bit fatter than tha' was an' tha's not quite so yeller."<sup>42</sup> The more Mary gardens within the secret garden, the more her identity and the garden's become fixed, and the garden becomes less interstitial and more open. Mary invites Dickon into the garden and tells Colin of its existence. Mary's growing concern and care for Colin become apparent; she thinks that by taking him into the garden it could produce both a physical and psychological cure, "he might not think so much about dying."<sup>43</sup> The final reference to Mary's yellowness occurs almost immediately after this moral milestone: Martha has noticed the change and declares, "Tha'rt not nigh so yeller and tha'rt not nigh so scrawny."<sup>44</sup> Mary has attached herself to the land and fixed identity, and by her opening the garden to an exclusive group, the garden also loses its interstitial nature.

A problematic outcome of fixed identity and the shrinking of the interstitial space occurs when Colin appropriates Mary's knowledge that stems from the interstitial space and makes it his own. At key moments in the text (the robin hopping up to Mary, Mary's first encounter with Colin, Mary hearing of Dickon's escapades), Burnett has Mary frequently use the word "magic" with references to stories from India about magic to understand new experiences in England. Mary also uses the word "magic" to explain Dickon's extraordinary ability to draw animals (and people) to him. Colin learns of this "magic" (both Eastern and Western) from Mary and toward the end of the narrative makes it into a philosophy of his own for good health which he later expounds to his father. Similarly, Mary tells Colin that he reminds her of an Indian Rajah, and Colin begins to ask her how the Rajah would act and mirrors his behavior. As Mary's identity becomes more fixed and her character more improved, the narrative subtly shifts toward Colin becoming more dominant. However, there is a loss in this transfer of agency from Mary to Colin and the reinforcement of gender roles. Mary's knowledge of magic is much more fluid and

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40. Burnett, p. 53.

41. Burnett, p. 108.

42. Burnett, p. 109.

43. Burnett, p. 183.

44. Burnett, p. 183.

alive; it encompasses an element of wonder and gratitude. Colin's use of the word magic is more of a means to an end; fresh air and exercise are utilitarian and will produce the "athlete," the "lecturer," and the "scientific discoverer."<sup>45</sup> Instead of the garden being a place of wonder that slowly reveals its delights, once it is no longer hidden to Colin it remains beautiful, but merely becomes a site for his healing. The narrative's privileging of fixed identity also circumscribes new knowledge, limiting it to familiar structures. There is loss and also the possibility of stagnation.

This need for well-defined categories, whether in class or race, has its effect on social formations, but Mary's undefined, interstitial space does not completely disappear. Burnett juxtaposes Mary to her cousin Colin, and the cousins share some similarities in temperament. Mr. Craven's grief over his wife's death leads him to neglect his son, and Colin gets the mistaken idea that he is gravely ill and will die soon. These two factors lead to Colin secluding himself in the house and acquiring whatever he desires through imperious demands or harrowing temper tantrums. Mary defies Colin's wishes, and when he throws a tantrum, Mary responds with anger and threatens Colin that she can out-scream him. What makes this scene so interesting is that Burnett uses Mary's "yellowness" to resolve the situation; ironically, Mary's temper, acquired through parental neglect and her isolation (and repeatedly censured by Burnett), saves Colin from himself. Mary, unlike the others in the household (including Mr. Craven), does not feel intimidated by either Colin's tantrums or his pathos and can address them with her own belligerence. Other third-culture aspects creep back into the narrative from the margins of well-defined identity; Colin's interest in going outdoors (and the start of his own physical and emotional healing) occurs only because the secret garden is *secret* – its unfixed, interstitial quality intrigues him. In forming her own identity, Mary can help Colin learn how to live in community with those around him (even if it is in a rather imperious, rajah-like manner). Colin, like the garden, tries to keep himself secret and walled, but Mary, because of her third-culture attributes, can break down this isolation and relate to him. Burnett presents the paradox of Mary's need to become British and lose the contrariness that she learned in India and her ability to use this contrariness beneficially in England. Despite this paradox, Mary's rooting in English soil and identity completes itself when she restores Colin to the outside world.

Notwithstanding the strong drive in the narrative for clear-cut identities, the final social formation and the picture of the home with which Burnett leaves the reader still has tinges of yellow. Without the interstitial nature of the garden or Mary, the rapprochement between Colin and his father could not have happened; Mary's need for identity and land provides Colin and his father with a model of

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45. Burnett, p. 356.

exercise and gardening which breaks their isolation. Ironically, Mary's third-culture displacement, which creates such anxiety over undefined identity and the lack of place for this type of subject in the text, also provides the agency for creating identity and community. While isolation can occur both at home and abroad, laying claim to the land becomes the potent means to bring about identity, change, and reconnection. Mary, Colin, and Craven, all isolated figures, have finally broken this isolation and entered into healthier relationships with each other, the land, and the larger community. The grouping of Mary, Colin, and Craven reveals a new social formation that has the potential to grow stronger, but at this point in the text, the community appears tenuous. Although the garden is now unhidden and includes Mrs. Sowerby, Dickon, and Ben Weatherstaff, the it remains the possession of the Cravens, exclusive to their desires and tied to their particular identity – qualities that un-fixed it and made it secret in the first place. The new-found stability at Misselthwaite Manor is only at its nascent stage; the possibility remains that stability could be undermined. The “remedy” of attaching oneself to the land cannot quite eradicate the interstitial space.

Ultimately, the loss suffered in the narrative lies not in the tenuousness of the final social formation, but in allowing no room for the interstitial subject. Although being interstitial causes Mary's initial disagreeableness and alienation, the interior third-culture also demonstrates great agency. The concept of “home” which seems so nebulous to Mary at the beginning of the narrative does not become more concrete; rather, Mary leaves un-fixed identity and takes on a fixed identity to mold herself to this concept. The narrative's solution of attaching identity to the land also proves problematic in the context of the larger socio-political discourse of the time: what if one does not have the means to access land? *The Secret Garden's* final resolution seems to suggest that to have a home (particularly an English home) one must be the right type of subject and belong to an exclusive group.

**Márta Asztalos**

## **Family Romances in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!***

This paper examines narration and storytelling in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Narration and storytelling are a paternal legacy and a family destiny as well, which bind the son to the father and the Grandfather. However, they also become the means of overwriting the paternal meta-narrative and endeavors of narrative self-fathering, self-begetting. In this reading, the "story-weaving" of the narrators and the story woven (by them) swirl around the same conflict: the "battle" of fathers and sons. It is explored how these paternal-filial power relations and conflicts work in both "layers" of the novel and how they influence each other. The argument will build on the insights of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the theory of the Freudian family romance.

Faulkner, as critics like Richard P. Adams, Andre Bleikasten,<sup>1</sup> or Lynn G. Levins have rightly observed, was obsessed with the questions of fatherhood, patriarchy, and the metaphor of the father as the key fantasy of the South. Almost all of his novels can be read, or even offer themselves to be read, as inquiries into the functions and malfunctions of fatherhood and father-son relationships. His world "abounds in orphans and bastards,"<sup>2</sup> and "in at least four of his major novels – *The Sound and The Fury*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* – the father-son relationship is assuredly one of the crucial issues."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Faulkner himself stated in an interview that *Absalom, Absalom!* – one of his most important novels – is a "story of a man who wanted a son and got too many, got so many that they destroyed him."<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is a story of fathers and sons and their mutually dependent and mutually destructive existence. There is no

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1. "[T]here is an abiding fascination with the question of fatherhood" (André Bleikasten, "Fathers in Faulkner," *The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text*, ed. Robert Con Davis [Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1981], p. 120).

2. Bleikasten, p. 116.

3. Bleiksten, p. 120.

4. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995), p. 71.

father without a son and no son without a father; however, the son not only creates the father<sup>5</sup> but also poses a threat to him with his very existence.

In spite of the fact that the story of Thomas Sutpen and his family is reconstructed and related not by his descendants, in the literal sense of the word,<sup>6</sup> but by four narrators consanguineously unrelated to him, I claim that the novel can be looked at as a genealogical one, as all four narrators act as “genealogists,” endeavoring to retrace the Sutpen family history and to fathom the mysterious murder through the enigmatic family relations. Moreover, the novel can be termed genealogical in another sense of the word as well: it seems that among the narrators in the Compson family, the story and the right of storytelling are family legacies handed down in the paternal line from grandfather (General Compson) to father (Mr. Compson) to son (Quentin). “It was part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, somewhat simplifying the matter, we can say that one of the main lines of story-transmission or story movement is also mainly patrilinear and genealogical.

As the story of the father(s) anterior in time is (re)constructed by the “sons,” and since storytelling itself is not only a legacy but a family destiny as well, the story functions like a ritual thread which binds the son to the father, and through the father to the grandfather. In this way it strengthens paternal authority: the sons are subject to the story of the fathers’ and to the obligation of storytelling. They are doomed to function like channels, as the story has to be told, the narration has to be continued.

On the other hand, as narrators they can overwrite or reconstruct/deconstruct the hereditary, paternal narrative and, through that, paternal authority itself. Thus, we can state that it is not only the Sutpen drama, the inner stage,<sup>8</sup> or, to use Clifford E. Wulfman’s expression, the “told layer,”<sup>9</sup> of the novel that centers on paternal and filial conflicts but the “outer stage”<sup>10</sup> or the “telling layer”<sup>11</sup> as well. Thus, “story-

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5. Fathering a son makes a father out of a man.

6. However, according to Patricia Tobin: Sutpen is the “father” for all the Southern narrators . . . to the extent that they perceive the Sutpen family as a paradigm of the rise and fall, the virtues and defects, of the South, a paradigm which dominates their own self-definition. Patricia Tobin, *Time and the Novel: The Genealogical Imperative* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1978), p. 111.

7. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 7.

8. Ilse Duso Lind, “The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *PMLA* 60 (1955) 887–912, p. 895.

9. Clifford E. Wulfman, “The Poetics of Ruptured Mnemosis: Telling Encounters in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Faulkner Journal* 20.1–2 (2004–5) 111–132, p. 124.

10. Lind, p. 895.

weaving” of the narrators, using Mieke Bal’s concept the *narrative text*, and the story woven (by them), the *story* in Bal’s terms, swirl around the same conflict. The “battle” of the fathers and sons takes place on many levels of the novel.

According to Bassett, “critical commentary on *Absalom, Absalom!* falls into two major categories,”<sup>12</sup> following the above-mentioned structural and temporal duality of the novel:

one focusing on the nineteenth-century story of Thomas Sutpen and the other emphasizing the twentieth-century dilemma of Quentin Compson. The first is concerned with the social themes, myth and legend, tragic form and character; the second deals with narrative techniques, epistemological issues, and the novel’s connection through Quentin Compson, to the *Sound and the Fury* (1929).<sup>13</sup>

The two “layers” of the novel, however, are inseparably linked not only by their seemingly similar mode of operation but also by the fact that the story (the Sutpen drama) naturally would not exist but for the story-weaving (narration) and the “dramatists”<sup>14</sup> who (re)construct, fabricate, and transmit the story. The two “layers” cannot be examined discretely, as the reader (or critic) gets to know the narrators only through the stories they tell. Moreover, the stories constructed cannot be detached from the narrators, their personalities, and motivations, the way they (are able to) comprehend and piece together the provided “factual” information, and the pattern they prefer to use in putting together the pieces. As Donald M. Kartiganer puts it: “each narrator tells the Sutpen story in accordance with his own private needs,”<sup>15</sup> using the act of narration as a way of self-articulation.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, anyone who sets out to examine the “outer” and “inner stage”, the *narrative text* and the *story* separately, attempts the impossible and violates the novel in a rather unnatural and insensitive way.

Trying to act/write in accordance with the above presuppositions, I will attempt to give a comprehensive reading of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* examining how

11. Wulfman, p. 124.

12. John E. Bassett, “Absalom, Absalom: The Limits of Narrative Form.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 46.3 (1985) 276–292, p. 276.

13. Bassett, p. 276.

14. Lind, p. 897.

15. Donald M. Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner’s Novels* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979) p. 71.

16. Ilse Dusoir Lind compares the performance of the three narrators (ignoring the importance of one of them) to that of three Greek dramatists “composing tragedies about the same mythical figure . . . each spinning his version of the legend out of his own psyche” (Lind, p. 896).

these paternal-filial power relations and conflicts work in both “layers” of the novel and how they influence each other. In my reading, I will make use of the insights of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the theory of the Freudian Family Romance.

### **The Four Narrators and the Three Narratives**

The Sutpen drama takes shape before the reader’s eyes through the contribution of four narrators: Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson and Shreve MacCannon with united efforts. All the four narrators approach the story material from different perspectives and with different dispositions, in consequence of which they come to very diverse conclusions concerning the major enigmas that trigger the story: the reason behind Henry Sutpen’s repudiation of his father on the Christmas Eve of 1860 for his college friend Charles Bon; and the motivation behind his murdering the very same man at the gates of Sutpen’s Hundred four years later.

### **Rosa Coldfield and the Initial Lack**

Rosa, the first in the line, is unique among the narrators, being the only homodiegetic one with firsthand experience. Although some critics claim her to be an “inadequate,”<sup>17</sup> “impotent,”<sup>18</sup> “both physically and psychically misshapen,”<sup>19</sup> “near-hysterical,”<sup>20</sup> and, thus, unreliable narrator, I think her role is crucial. She sets the story in motion, motivating the other narrators (Quentin directly, and the others indirectly) to solve the enigma, to weave the diverging and sporadic information about the Sutpen family into a consistent, linear narrative. Thus, she launches in the novel what Patricia Tobin calls the *genealogical imperative*: “[A]ll possibly random events and gratuitous details are brought into an alignment of relevance, so that at the point of conclusion all possibility has been converted into necessity within a line of kinship – the subsequent having been referred to the prior, the end to the beginning, the progeny to the father.”<sup>21</sup>

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17. Richard C. Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990) p. 27.

18. Eric Sundquist, “*Absalom, Absalom!* and the House Divided,” in *William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!* ed. Fred Hobson (Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2003) 107–49, p. 112.

19. Lind, p. 891.

20. Kartiganer, p. 76.

21. Tobin, pp. 7–8.

Many critics who aim at coupling the four narrative perspectives with different literary genres, such as Richard P. Adams,<sup>22</sup> Lynn G. Levins,<sup>23</sup> John E. Bassett,<sup>24</sup> and Philip J. Egan,<sup>25</sup> claim that her narrative operates in the Gothic mode. She attributes “larger than life proportions” and “supernatural powers”<sup>26</sup> to the characters, especially to Thomas Sutpen, taking him for a “demon” (Faulkner 8), “an ogre or a djinn” (16). Abruptness of action, illogicality, and lack of causality (or magical causality) characterize her narrative. Her narratee, Quentin also points this out, reflecting upon her “telling”/narration that it has the “logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream” (15). She just recounts the events she witnessed (and also those she only heard of), admitting that she does not understand the reason or motivation behind them: “I saw Henry repudiate his home and birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister’s sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown” “without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse” (12). As Peter Brooks puts it, she offers “a completely nonhermeneutic narrative” with “no structure of meaning for the sequence of events.”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, I would state that her deficiency of understanding and her narrative’s lack of causality constitute that initial lack which needs to be there in the beginning of every narrative, the vacuum of which calls for filling in and, thus, triggers storytelling. Her not knowing provides the mystery that launches the hermeneutic quest, since the subsequent narrators try to patch this hole in the cloth of the narrative, providing different justifications, revealing different, up to that point, hidden or nonexistent information.

### **Mr. Compson and His Fatalistic Romance**

Mr. Compson, the next narrator in the line, is the one who starts coloring Rosa’s rather black and white, “somewhat” extremist picture. He reshapes the figure of Thomas Sutpen, Miss Rosa’s rather demonic and demiurgic villain, who becomes the self-made American hero of Mr. Compson’s narrative. He also tries to come up with a logical explanation concerning the central enigmas of the novel and “starts out . . . with confidence in his ability to understand the past and tell the story of

22. Richard P. Adams, *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1968) 181.

23. Lynn G. Levins, “The Four Narrative Perspectives in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *PMLA* 85 (1970) 35–47, p. 36.

24. Bassett, p. 38.

25. Philip J. Egan, “Embedded Story Structures in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *American Literature* 55 (1983) 199–214, p. 199.

26. Bassett, p. 37.

27. Peter Brooks, “Incredulous Narration: *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982) 247–68, p. 250.

Sutpen.”<sup>28</sup> According to him, Henry’s reason for murdering Bon was the latter’s intended bigamy, since he already has an octoroon wife and a son in New Orleans, kept secret. In Mr. Compson’s version, this is the information that Sutpen had found out and exposed to Henry on the ominous Christmas day, causing Henry’s to repudiate him and leave Sutpen’s Hundred with Bon the very same night. Four years later the same fact, plus Bon’s unwillingness to renounce the other woman and the child, were the reasons of Henry’s murdering the man for the sake of whom he had given up everything.

There seems to be a consensus among critics that Mr. Compson constructs his story in the pattern of classical Greek tragedies and epics.<sup>29</sup> I do agree with these critics that some elements of his narrative resemble those of the Greek tragedies, such as Sutpen’s introduction, the epic proportions, and the crucial importance he attributes to “the machinations of a fatality” (81). Fatality is, indeed, one of the two most important characteristics of his narrative. He claims, at several points in the novel, that the tragic events were “instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstance, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human being for tools, material” (94).

Besides being the result of his laying great emphasis on the machinations of fate in recounting the story, I maintain that the fatal overtone of his narrative is also due to his narrative technique. He often constructs his narratives in a spiral, opening the story with the effect, the final tragic outcome,<sup>30</sup> and going back only after that to relate the cause, the events leading up to it. Moreover, he keeps revisiting the tragic ending in references and flash-forwards. For example, in Chapter IV, his narrative starts spiraling between Bon’s Christmas Eve visit to Sutpen’s Hundred and the next, final time he ever gets close to the gates of the Sutpen mansion:

Because Henry loved Bon. He repudiated blood birthright and material security for his sake, for the sake of this man who was at least an intending bigamist even if not an out and out blackguard, and *on whose dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph of the other woman and the child . . .* he and Bon rode side by side through the iron dark of that Christmas morning, away from the house where he had been born *and which he would see but one time more and that with the fresh blood of the man who now rode beside him, on his hands. . . .* (71, my emphasis)

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28. Margaret Dickie Uroff, “The Fictions of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979) 431–45, p. 435.

29. Kartiganer, p. 78. Adams, p. 181. Bassett, p. 39.

30. For example with a tombstone in his last narrative.

The other hallmark of his narrative is the major role assigned to love and romance. He constructs his story along the lines of male-female relationships: Bon-Judith, Bon-the octoroon, provoking the required conflict in the plot by intersecting them. Moreover, he hints at romantic attachment in both cases: "he [Bon] loved her [Judith]" (102), "a woman with a face like tragic magnolia, the eternal female" (91), "the woman and the child that Bon would not renounce" (94). Actually, to be more precise, instead of constructing two mutually exclusive, linear, one-to-one love relationships; he constructs two "love-triangles": an Oedipal triad, Bon – the octoroon – their son (Charles Etienne de St. Valery Bon); and an incestuous one, Bon – Judith – Henry. He keeps emphasizing the motive of incest or the presence of incestuous attraction between Henry and Judith:

In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband. . . (77)

The two "love-triangles" drawn by Mr. Compson, actually, work quite similarly in terms of how desire functions, how it is barred and gets resolved through a substitution. In Freud and Lacan, the fundamental desire is the incestuous desire for the mother, the primordial *Other*.<sup>31</sup> The child (son) desires the mother and wants to become her object of desire; the circuit of mutual desire between mother and child is broken with the intervention of the father, who makes the child abandon his desire for the mother and substitute it for the *Name-of-the-Father*, which leads to the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Through a symbolic identification with the father, the child accepts "substitution" and lets go of the mother, "giving her over" to the father.

In Henry and Judith's case, we can perceive something very similar: Henry cannot commit incest in the literal sense of the word, in spite of the fact that he, according to Mr. Compson at least, would love to. He is, thus, ready to "commit" it through substitution, through an identification with the "rival." He lets go of Judith, giving her over to Bon. However, the situation is made even more exciting, since Henry is ready to choose Bon not only as a substitute, as a "rival," who would "despoil" the sister instead of him, but as his own "despoiler" as well if only "he could metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride" (77). His affection and unconditional love for Bon are often portrayed as bordering on homoeroticism: "Because Henry loved Bon" (71), "Yes, he loved Bon, who seduced him" (76). Quite a number of critics, like John T.

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31. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 67.

Irwin, Ilse Duso Lind, etc. assign Henry's homoerotic attraction to Bon to Quentin or/and Shreve's similar tendencies. John T. Irwin states that "the latent homoerotic content in the story of Bon and Henry may well be the projection of Quentin's own state made in the act of narration."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Ilse Duso Lind argues that "Shreve ... projects the fraternal affection, mildly homosexual in basis, which exists between his roommate and himself."<sup>33</sup> However, we need to notice that it is Mr. Compson who starts inscribing this thread into the narrative; Quentin and Shreve only take up the thread and weave it on. This initiative of Mr. Compson is, in fact, made necessary by the fact that he tries to "rationalize" everything with "love," and male-female affection (Bon's supposed affection for Judith) is not able to account for most of the events of the plot. "Love" in his narrative works quite similarly to "the machinations of a fatality" (102). Whatever he is not able to give a logical explanation to, he attributes to "love." As Robert Dale Parker puts it, "it's easy enough and maybe even plausible enough for him to write off as love what he doesn't understand."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, fatality and love are the patches that he uses in an attempt to cover the gaps remaining.<sup>35</sup> In other words, he tries to make a hermeneutic clue from the lack of those, tries to pass off the lack of a motive as a motive. Moreover, on the surface, he manages to do this quite successfully, as Peter Brooks points out: he ends up having a "complex, intricate, seemingly highly motivated plot."<sup>36</sup> However, he himself acknowledges the discrepancies: "It's just incredible. It just does not explain" (80). However, pretending that everything is apt, he short-circuits the problem by stating that: "Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know" (80). Hence, the story-triggering, narrative-provoking lack, having been imputed to "that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate" (94), remains exactly where it was, calling for further storytellers.

### **Quentin Compson and the Proliferation of Romances**

Quentin, both previous narrators' patient audience, takes over the thread of the story from his father and continues reconstructing the past, trying to fit together the pieces of the puzzle. As Quentin joins the line of narrators, the Sutpen drama takes

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32. John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1996) p. 78.

33. Lind, p. 892.

34. Robert Dale Parker, *Absalom, Absalom! The Questioning of Fictions* (Boston: Twayne, 1991) p. 52.

35. For example his version does not offer any acceptable explanation concerning Henry's four-year delay.

36. Brooks, p. 255.

another, renewed shape. He relies on story patterns different from those of the previous narrators and approaches the story from a radically different viewpoint, which is his own perspective: the perspective of a son.

Referring to his perspective is, however, not totally valid, as he relates his story to his college roommate, Shreve MacCannon, who, at quite an early point, changes from passive audience to active participant in the narration. From that point on, they construct the story as "sons," in brotherly unison.

Quentin starts his narrative in the same pattern as the previous narrators did: reshaping the figure of the Father, Thomas Sutpen. From his/their narration the reader gets another radically different picture of the Father. He draws the figure of the old Sutpen. While Rosa created an all-powerful demon, almost the devil himself, and Mr. Compson shaped the self-made American hero, a "conquistador," who "turned his back upon all that he knew . . . and . . . set out into a world which even in theory . . . he knew nothing about," he/they formulate the figure of a "*mad impotent old man who realized at last that there must be some limit even to the capabilities of a demon for doing harm,*" an "*old wornout cannon*" (40, 148). They dethrone the omnipotent Father, the great general, showing him in his utmost misery: "*running his little country store now for his bread and meat*" (149), degrading himself to seducing Milly Jones, the fifteen-year-old granddaughter of his tenant in desperate hope for a male heir. Thus, we can rightly say that they start their narrative with a symbolic castration and murder of the father. Moreover, they perfect the picture with a literal patricide as well, recounting the murder of Sutpen in detail, a description unworthy of a colonel.

Having read the first twenty pages of their narrative, the reader can rightly have the impression that they are obsessed with the figure of the Father. This anticipation is justified as one reads on, since having related the story of Charles Étienne Saint-Valéry Bon (Charles Bon's son whom Judith "adopts", having learned about the octoroon's death), Quentin "exhumes" the Father and goes on to recount the story of Sutpen's childhood to Shreve and the reader. This is the first time in the novel when Sutpen's character is shaped like a human figure and not like a demon, a superhuman hero, a monster, or a freak. Probably it is not accidental that this human figure is a son.

However, Quentin's obsession with the figure of the Father is not exhausted with recounting the story of how the son became (or endeavored to become) a Father, but appears as a proliferation of Oedipal threads and romances on the thematic level of the novel. Quentin and Shreve inscribe several real and imaginary sons and fathers into the story and attribute all dramatic situations to some kind of paternal-filial tension. I also argue that the inscribed Oedipal threads strongly resemble the pattern of the Freudian *family romance*, which not only can be detected in

all threads that the Quentin/Shreve narrational function introduces but works as the main structuring device.

The “family romance,” according to Freud, is a common fantasy among children, which, with neurotics, may reappear in later life as well. “Small events in the child’s life which make him dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticize his parents. . . . [T]he child’s imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing.”<sup>37</sup>

In his article “Children of the Idea: Heroes and Family Romances in *Absalom, Absalom!*” T. H. Adamowski examines the novel from the perspective of the Freudian family romance and Otto Rank’s concept of the hero. He states that “Sutpen’s desire is structured in such a way by the narrative” that it is reminiscent of the Freudian family romance.<sup>38</sup> He provides a detailed examination of Sutpen’s life story from the given perspectives. Moreover, he proclaims that Bon and Henry also act out different aspects of the family romance as “Sutpen’s experience haunts that of his children and they repeat various aspects of it, almost compulsively.”<sup>39</sup> However, he attributes the inscription of the family romances to Quentin and Shreve in a rather vague manner in one single sentence: “The account offered by Shreve and Quentin of the family reunion begins to suggest romances within romances.”<sup>40</sup> He suggests that it is worth considering Quentin and Shreve’s conjecture in the light of the family romance, however, he does not exploit the possibilities of the idea: he tries to understand neither their “conjecture” nor the act of “conjuring” in the suggested “light.” He only comes to the conclusion that Quentin “does become fascinated with the ‘other family’” and states that “Faulkner’s many references to Shreve and Quentin as being ‘both of them,’ Henry and Bon, must inevitably suggest identification.”<sup>41</sup>

I consider the direction outlined by Adamowski more than valid. Moreover, I would claim that Quentin’s obsession with paternity and paternal authority is not only evident if one reads the narratives constructed by him and Shreve, but is crucial in understanding his main motivation for storytelling. I also argue that the family romance fantasy is not only a recurring, constitutive element of Quentin and Shreve’s “conjecture,” playing a crucial role in working through father-son

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37. Sigmund Freud, “Family Romances,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 9 (London: Vintage, 2001), 236–41, pp. 237–39.

38. T. H. Adamowski, “Children of the Idea: Heroes and Family Romances in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Mosaic* 10 (1976) 115–31, p. 117.

39. Adamowski, p. 129.

40. Adamowski, p. 125.

41. Adamowski, p. 127.

relationships and the anxieties present in them, but that the final stage of the romance (desire of self-fathering) functions as the main motivation behind their act of “conjuring.”

John T. Irwin also gives a psychoanalytically informed reading of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* In his article entitled “The Dead Father in Faulkner,” he comes a lot closer to considering Quentin and Shreve’s “conjecture” from a similar perspective, in spite of the fact that he does not operate with the concept of the Freudian family romance in his text. In his study, he brings together Nietzsche’s ideas about the nature of time<sup>42</sup> and Freud’s notion of the repetition compulsion with the concepts of fathering and filiation. He states that a son’s fate is determined by that of his father’s “because to come after is to be fated to repeat the life of another rather than live one’s own.”<sup>43</sup> In consequence of this, a son is also “fated” to struggle against his father and against time. Thus, Irwin comes to the conclusion that, for Quentin, the act of narrating the Sutpen story becomes a similar struggle against the nature of time and his father, “in which he tries to best his father” and “seize ‘authority’ by achieving temporal priority” to him in the narrative act.<sup>44</sup> His struggle is to transform repetition as a compulsion or a fate into repetition as “a means of achieving mastery” over time.<sup>45</sup> Freud refers to this “mastery through repetition” as revenge with two major elements: repetition and reversal – one repeats the traumatic situation but reverses the roles. When there is no chance of taking revenge on the one who delivered the affront, the revenge is inflicted on a substitute (quoted in Irwin). Following this idea, Irwin also argues that through the act of narration, Quentin endeavors to take revenge against his father on a substitute – his roommate Shreve.

I do not see how Quentin could achieve temporal priority in the narrative act; however, I do agree with Irwin’s claim that Quentin’s main motivation to tell the story is closely connected to his desire to “best his father.” Moreover, I claim that storytelling is not only a family destiny, a dynastic inheritance to which Quentin subjugates himself, but a way, or, rather, the only way, through which he can “walk[.] out of his father’s talking at last” (142): it is his only chance to grow up, to “walk out of” paternal authority. His telling the story is an attempt to overwrite (cancel out) the paternal meta-narrative, thus an endeavor of narrative patricide

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42. “[E]very moment in it exists only insofar as it has just consumed the preceding one, its father, and then is immediately consumed likewise” (Irwin, “Dead Fathers,” p. 145).

43. Irwin, John T. “The Dead Father in Faulkner,” in *The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P. 1981), 147–68, p. 148.

44. Irwin, “Dead Father,” p. 152.

45. Irwin, “Dead Father,” p. 152.

and self-fathering. In the following, I will attempt a close reading of the *family romances* inscribed by Quentin and Shreve and an examination of the extent to which they can serve Quentin in his attempt at self-fathering.

### ***When the Father was a Son: the Family Romance of Thomas Sutpen***

The first story that Quentin recounts is that of Sutpen's childhood<sup>46</sup> and the birth of his "design." We get to know from him that Sutpen was ten when his family, following his father's abrupt decision, left their home in the Virginia mountains and set out towards new frontiers. Together with the family's journey, the boy Sutpen's initiation also started. He is presented primarily as a *son*, suffering a series of disappointments in his father and, consequently, losing faith in him. Since on the journey towards their new home, he has to witness his father degrading himself, right in front of his children and strangers as well, at almost every tavern on the way, where "the old man was not even allowed to come in by the front door and from which his mountain drinking manners got him ejected before he would have time to get drunk good" (183). When they finally settle down, his father starts working at a plantation where the owner makes a huge impression on the young Sutpen. He starts looking at the plantation owner as an ideal, a model and adopts him "as his surrogate father."<sup>47</sup> As T. H. Adamowski and André Bleikasten<sup>48</sup> also observe, at this point Sutpen's story starts to show an uncanny resemblance to the Freudian family romance. Even the surrogate father's occupation fits the Freudian scheme: of Freud's two examples to illustrate higher social standing, one is "the Lord of the Manor,"<sup>49</sup> whom Sutpen chooses as an imaginary father.<sup>50</sup>

Other critics, like John T. Irwin, and, in his footsteps, Carolyn Porter, also point out the importance of choosing an ideal father and deciding "to become him" in the birth of Sutpen's design, however, they do not draw on Freud's family romance fantasy when examining Sutpen's behavior.<sup>51</sup> Both of them use Freudian psychoa-

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46. Henceforth I will refer to Thomas Sutpen as "Sutpen" and to Henry Sutpen as "Henry."

47. Irwin, "Dead Father," p. 154.

48. "His career begins like any other Oedipal 'family romance'" (Bleikasten, p. 139.).

49. Freud, "Family Romances," p. 239.

50. Faulkner could actually have read Freud's "Family Romances," as the article's first English translation appeared in Otto Rank's *Myth of the Birth of the Hero* in 1913, and he started working on the novel in 1933 (Ursula Brumm, "William Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance," in *American Literature Since 1900*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe [London: Penguin, 1973], 173–205, p. 195).

51. Carolyn Porter, "Absalom, Absalom! (Un)Making the Father," in *The Ridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 168–96, p. 179.

analysis in their readings, however, instead of the family romance fantasy they rely on the concept of Oedipalization, which I do not think can account for the crucial momentum of replacing the actual father with somebody more apt for the position.

In Sutpen's romance the vital turn takes place when his father sends him to that big house with a message to the plantation owner (229), but he is ejected by a "nigger" "even before he [had] had time to say what he came for" (188). "He never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was the nigger told him . . . never to come to the front door again but to go around to the back. He didn't even remember leaving" (188). Many critics emphasize this incident at the mansion door as the central moment of his life, the "traumatic affront,"<sup>52</sup> which "puts an end to Sutpen's childhood,"<sup>53</sup> determining the course of subsequent events. However, they attribute the "trauma" to different aspects and details of the incident: according to Patricia Tobin, it is caused by Sutpen's "recognition of his own anonymity";<sup>54</sup> Adamowski states that, at the front door, in the other's gaze, Sutpen acquires a "sharp sense of himself as an object in the world, among other objects."<sup>55</sup> According to J. G. Brister, this is Sutpen's first moment of self-consciousness, of self-perception" resulting from "his feeling of racial 'otherness.'"<sup>56</sup> He claims the encounter between Sutpen and the "monkey nigger" to be a replication of the Lacanian mirror stage, but, "in this case, the mirror is a racial 'other.'"<sup>57</sup> He also argues that

Sutpen's sense of self is not born out of an identification with the white plantation owner . . . but out of the realization of racial difference: fundamentally unaware of difference, Sutpen is awakened by his encounter with the black servant to the dialectic between oppressor and oppressed . . . , between rich and poor, between self and other. This encounter ultimately leads to the revelation of the self he will become, of the patriarchal authority he will assume.<sup>58</sup>

I consider all the above-mentioned arguments highly relevant; however, I would also add my, somewhat different, perspective to the picture. In my view, the ominous encounter is so traumatic for him because it mirrors those humiliating incidents which called forth his disillusionment in his father: the father's not being

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52. Irwin, "Dead Father," p. 154.

53. Adamowski, p. 120.

54. Tobin, p. 109.

55. Adamowski, p. 120.

56. J. G. Brister, "Absalom, Absalom! and the Semiotic Other," *Faulkner Journal* 22.1-2 (2007) 39-53, p. 43.

57. Brister, p. 43.

58. Brister, p. 44.

allowed to enter the taverns through the front door and his being thrown out by a nigger once he tried to do so. Moreover, he comes to the big house in place of his father, as his metaphorical substitute, trying to speak the words of the father and all of a sudden finds himself “really” in his father’s place, suffering weirdly similar humiliation to what the old man did. He is experiencing himself being “transformed” into his father, with whom he does not want to identify any more.

The humiliation at the front door functions as a trigger and determines the rest of Sutpen’s life. He cannot pass that affront without determining to take revenge on the aggressor. However, instead of killing him, he rather chooses to identify with him:

*He knew* that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life . . .  
*He thought* . . . ‘So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see?’ (189–90, my emphasis)

Thus, his romance culminates in the desire to create, to father himself<sup>59</sup> by realizing his design outlined above. However, the term “his design” is not entirely appropriate, since he, driven by what René Girard terms *mimetic desire*, wants to copy an already existing pattern. His desire is a borrowed desire, like the Proustian snob’s, who “slavishly copies the person whose birth, fortune, or stylishness he envies,”<sup>60</sup> wanting to become his mediator, intending to steal from the mediator his very being.<sup>61</sup> He wants to reach autonomy and become *origin*-al through turning into a copy, thus losing his autonomy in fact. The failure of his self-fathering quest is, therefore, predetermined. Despite all his efforts, he can never get out of the symbolic paternal power structure, he can never free himself, as the design through which he wants to define and father himself is that of the ancestors, his desire is the desire of the *Other*.<sup>62</sup>

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59. According to Freud, the desire to take his father’s place and “to be his own father” (Sigmund Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide,” in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 21, 173–96, p. 173) is the ultimate wish of the child in the family romance fantasy.

60. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1984), p. 24.

61. Girard, p. 54.

62. According to Girard the desire of the snob and that of the child (puerile bovarysm) have much in common and work according to the same mechanism (Girard, pp. 35–36.). Apparently the concept of puerile Bovarysm/the Proustian snob’s imitative desire may communicate with the Freudian idolization and mimesis of the father in the family romance in a fruitful way.

***The Bastard's Romantic Family Romance: Charles Bon***

As Quentin recounts the story of Sutpen's second endeavor to accomplish the design, we reencounter the central dilemma of the novel, which has already been presented to us twice by the previous narrators but remained unsolved: the mystery of Henry's repudiation<sup>63</sup> of his father for Charles Bon, and the reason of his murdering the very same man four years later. In Quentin and Shreve's interpretation, just as one would expect, paternal-filial conflicts are lurking below the surface here as well. Their "solution" of the dilemma comes in a rather unexpected fashion: they reveal Charles Bon to be Sutpen's firstborn, repudiated, part negro son seeking the acquaintance and recognition of his father. By doing so, they break away from Mr. Compson's love-triangles theory. In spite of this, many critics argue that Quentin and Shreve's story follows the pattern of a romantic love story,<sup>64</sup> a chivalric (or traditional medieval<sup>65</sup>) romance, celebrating the eternal verity of love,<sup>66</sup> or as Donald M. Kartiganer claims: it is modeled after a Byronic romance.<sup>67</sup>

In partial agreement with these critics, I am inclined to say that Quentin and Shreve's story is organized around the problem of love, but the concept of love is radically different from the ones used by the previous narrators, or classical love stories. In Rosa's narrative, love means the "affection" of Bon and Judith; it is always used in reference to male-female relationships. Mr. Compson adds some more subversive colors to the concept, portraying Henry as cherishing incestuous desires for Judith and possessing brotherly love of such intensity for Bon that it borders on homoeroticism. In Quentin and Shreve's textual world, however, love gets a further meaning and connotation. When Shreve introduces the topic: "And now . . . we're going to talk about *love*" (253, my emphasis), the reader, judging by the antecedents, (rightly) expects that s/he is going to read about the budding affection between the only hypothetical couple of the fiction. However, in spite of the fact that Shreve starts talking about Bon and Judith, his thoughts wander on, in search of a "more appropriate" love object. Judith as a love object, as a Platonic object of desire does not and cannot appear in Quentin and Shreve's version, as "desire exhibits a structure of the wish; it is based on the absence or privation of its object,"<sup>68</sup> and she is portrayed as somebody always there waiting to be gathered:

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63. Sutpen's only legitimate son, "so glib to the design" (Faulkner, p. 211.)

64. Adams, p. 181.

65. Levins, p. 43.

66. Levins, p. 42.

67. Kartiganer, p. 93.

68. Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan, a Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 64.

*She would be easy* like when you have left the champagne on the supper table and are walking toward the whiskey on the sideboard and you happen to pass a cup of lemon sherbet and tell yourself. That would be easy too only who wants it . . . besides knowing that that sherbet is there for you to take. Not just for anybody to take but for you to take, knowing just from looking at that cup that it would be like a flower that, if any other hand reached for it, it would have thorns on it but not for your hand. (258–59)

The Barthesian “staging of an appearance-as-disappearance”<sup>69</sup> cannot even emerge, as the veil, which should cover the woman and is necessary for the operation of desire, is missing; she is there exposed: “He must have known all about her before he ever saw her – what she looked like, her private hours in that provincial women’s world that even men of the family were not supposed to know a great deal about; he must have learned it without even having to ask a single question” (253).

Since Judith is not able to function as an object of desire, their attention shifts on to Henry, the other angle of Mr. Compson’s incestuous love triangle. It is interesting to notice that they seem to take into consideration the solutions offered by the previous narrators, especially those provided by Mr. Compson, since he is the first one who tries to offer real solutions to the dilemmas. Henry, however, with “the eagerness which was without abjectness, the humility which surrendered no pride,” with “the entire proffering of the spirit” (254) has also no chance to take the place of the *object petit a*, and thus needs to be discarded as well.

Through the brother’s face, however, Shreve’s attention shifts to the person who is the unapproachable, the unattainable entity per se, thus the perfect object of desire: the father of the illegitimate child:

I shall penetrate by something of will and intensity and dreadful need, and strip that alien leavening from it and look not on my brother’s face whom I did not know I possessed and hence never missed, but my father’s, out of the shadow of whose absence my spirit’s posthumeity has never escaped. (254)

In Sutpen’s figure, they have everything together: the momentum of rejection in the past, the mystery of the unknown, heroic stature. The formula seems to work, since Bon’s first utterances mentioning Sutpen as his father clearly designate him as the object of desire (*object petit a*) and bear strong resemblance to a declaration of love:

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69. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), p. 10.

"All right. I'll come home with you for Christmas," not to see the third inhabitant of Henry's fairy tale, not to see the sister because he had not once thought of her: . . . but thinking *So at last I shall see him, . . . whom I had even learned to live without, . . .* Because he knew exactly what he wanted; it was just the saying of it – the physical touch even though in secret, hidden – the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood it had bequeathed him to warm his own flesh with. (255)

In their version, Bon shows the slightest interest in the marriage with Judith only to get near Sutpen. The sole motivation behind all his actions is to get the recognition of his father: "that instant of indisputable recognition . . . *That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son*" (255). He is willing to subdue everything for that instant of acceptance, for "the living touch of that flesh" (255), which would provide him with a subject position in the world, which would inscribe difference into that "original undifferentiated stage before the emergence of subjectivity."<sup>70</sup> In J. G. Brister's words, he desires the "castrating" touch of the father that would "hail him into the symbolic," that would "stabilize the drives that 'run hot and loud' in his body, that he may be castrated into the repressing patriarchal design."<sup>71</sup> His yearning for being named by the father, for "*a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand,*" also confirms this. Brister argues that his "unsymbolized" status is not only due to the lack of the Father in his life, but to his racial otherness and his resulting intimate relationship with the realm Kristeva calls the semiotic. "Bon represents the semiotic" in the world of the novel, while "Sutpen embodies the symbolic."<sup>72</sup>

His longing for objects like "*a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand. . . Or a lock of his hair or a paring of his finger nail*" (261), on the other hand, also illustrate his wish to possess the object of his desire through possessing a partial object, a token. His behavior, the emotional stages he is portrayed as experiencing, closely resemble those of the yearning "lover": "suspense and puzzlement and haste," and later "passive surrender" (265). Taking all these into consideration, we can come to the conclusion that the Lacanian *objet petit a* (*autre/other*) and *Autre/Other* coincide in his case, and the coincidence happens in a highly romantic overtone.

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70. Doreen Fowler, "Revising The Sound and the Fury: *Absalom, Absalom!* and Faulkner's Postmodern Turn," in *Faulkner and Postmodernism: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, ed. John N. Duvall and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2002), 95–108, p. 103.

71. Brister, p. 48.

72. Brister, p. 47.

### **Another Romantic Family Romancer: Henry Sutpen**

In Shreve's version Henry is portrayed as nourishing similar affection towards Bon, whom he looks at as a "mentor" (254), a Father. He apes his clothing, his speech, his movements, everything about him, "completely unaware that he was doing" so (252). There is nothing Bon could not "*do with this willing flesh and bone*" (254), there is nothing he could not "*mold of this malleable and eager clay which that father himself could not*" (254). Moreover, as we have already learned from Rosa, when the time comes for Henry to choose between Bon and his father,<sup>73</sup> he formally abjures his father and renounces his birthright (62) for his chosen ideal. Moreover, his affection for Bon, similarly to that of Bon's for Sutpen, is also related with words that belong to the vocabulary of love: "*We belong to you, do as you will with us*" (262). "*All right. I'm trying to make myself into what I think he wants me to be; he can do anything he wants to with me*" (264). "*Hers and my lives are to exist within and upon yours*" (260).

Thus, the word "romance" seems to be highly relevant, though not in its "conventional" meaning. In Quentin and Shreve's narrative, "romance" and "love" are concepts which are always mentioned with reference to imaginary father-son relationships. In their world, love can be directed only towards an ideal father, an idealized hero<sup>74</sup>—such as Bon for Henry, or Sutpen for Bon. Hence, romance is relevant in the Freudian sense of the word. The Freudian family romance, however, acquires an additional "romantic" overtone.

### **The Closure of the Romances**

In Sutpen's and Henry's cases, we can find all elements of the Freudian family romance: disappointment in the real father, choosing a surrogate father, idolizing and miming him. In Bon's case the situation is somewhat different, as his family romance seems to have undergone some curtailment. Being born a bastard, he does not need to imagine himself as such; having grown up without a father, he does not need to pretend not to have one. Thus, the usual first steps in his family romance are missing. Sutpen (who is his biological father "according to Shreve") refuses to fill that part, causing an absence, a lack. As the "knowledge of the father's empty

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73. Henry chooses his ideal (Father) and turns away from Sutpen when Sutpen reveals to him the "truth" about Bon's descent and on account of that prohibits Judith and Bon's marriage.

74. Henry "looked upon Bon as though he were a hero out of some adolescent Arabian Nights" (Faulkner, p. 76). For the analysis of Bon's character as a Rankian hero see T. H. Adamowski's "Children of the Idea: Heroes and Family Romances in *Absalom, Absalom!*".

place . . . constitutes desire itself,"<sup>75</sup> the figure of the biological father, in this case, may become the Girardian mediator,<sup>76</sup> and the object of desire, thus, the ideal father of the family romance.<sup>77</sup>

However, Henry's fratricide, triggered by Sutpen's uncovering the secret of Bon's "negro" descent, brings about a tragic closure of all the hitherto mentioned family romances. *Le non du père* pronounced to Henry by Sutpen<sup>78</sup> prohibits incest and miscegenation and reestablishes Sutpen's paternal authority over his legitimate son. Henry kills Bon, his "ideal" father, obeying his biological father's order and, thus, reintegrating himself into the Law of the Father. Bon is to die without his father's recognition. His quest is destroyed; he cannot become a son, a subject: he has to remain a bastard, a non-subject, a non-entity, a "de-sign." Turning his only legitimate son into a murderer, an *outlaw*; Sutpen loses his only chance of accomplishing "his design." Thus, he is not able to become his own father, as the son able to make a dynastic father out of him is destroyed. What is more, after a last failing attempt to father a son with the fifteen-year-old Milly Jones, Sutpen dies at the hands of Wash Jones – a drunkard – who closely resembles Sutpen's own father. Therefore, all filial quests fail, all three sons (Bon, Henry, and Sutpen) are retracted by their origins, and the romances relapse back to their starting points.

At this stage the following questions arise: if Quentin and Shreve want to "get even with," or walk out of paternal authority by telling this story, why do they construct filial tragedies and family romances destined to fail? Why do they choose to enter a game they have already lost even before entering? Is it lost at all?

If we regard Quentin's story as a family romance on the level of the narrative text, aiming at self-fathering through the construction of a narrative, working better than his own father's did, the formation of filial tragedies should not necessarily mean the tragedy or fall of Quentin (and Shreve). Provided that they were able to come up with a neat, well-constructed narrative; they could successfully overwrite the paternal meta-narrative and beat paternity "on home ground," especially because Mr. Compson's narrative, as many critics have pointed out, lacks ground: there are too many gaps, too many inexplicable incidents attributed to the caprice of fate. Let us see now if their family romances can prove to be more "successful" on the level of the *narrative text* than on the level of the *story*, if they are able to fulfill the expectations attached to them and can become the means of Quentin's self-fathering.

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75. Robert Con Davis, "The Discourse of the Father," in *The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1981), 1–26, p. 9.

76. Girard introduces this term for the model who determines or seems to determine the object to be pursued for the disciple (p. 2).

77. Sutpen is also Lord of the Manor; his figure complies perfectly with the Freudian model.

78. "He must not marry her" (Faulkner, p. 283; my emphasis).

### Narration as a Family Romance

Sutpen's story is recounted by Quentin, but, according to him, it originates from his Grandfather, to whom Sutpen himself "told . . . about it . . . 'when the architect escaped'" (177). Narrating Sutpen's story, Quentin constantly uses him as a point of reference, trying to prove the authenticity of the story. His narrative is scattered with references such as "he told Grandfather" (177, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 186, 193, 195, 200, 203, 208), "he remembered" (181, 182, 183, 200, 201, 207), "[t]hat was how he [Sutpen] said it" (193), "[t]hat was how he told it" (181, 204). Thus, at the beginning of his narrative, it is the *Name-of-the-Father* that corroborates the story, that keeps it together, functioning as the focal point, as a Lacanian *point de capiton*. At certain points, however, these references are overused to such an extent that some suspicion rightly arises in the reader that they might be trying to hide something or make up for the lack of something.

Moreover, the reader may notice some "uncanny" elements in the story of Sutpen's life, in his portrayed behavior, which can be weirdly familiar from earlier points, or, to be more precise, from Quentin's earlier behavior. The child Sutpen's split consciousness in the cave – the image of someone arguing with oneself about something – may ring a bell from the beginning of the novel, where Quentin is portrayed in exactly the same manner: "he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now – . . . – the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence . . . *It seems that this demon – his name was Sutpen – (Colonel Sutpen) – Colonel Sutpen . . .*" (5). These signs may indicate that he weaves the story after his own fashion; that his Sutpen acts, feels, and talks like Quentin would in a similar situation.

Quentin's changing the references used in his narrative also illustrates that as he gets into the swing of storytelling, he forgets about anchoring his narrative in the past. To be more precise, the gesture remains, but the introductory verbs of his indirect speech go through an alteration, mirroring a change in his narrative attitude. In the first half of his narration, he uses verbs of mediation or reporting – such as *say*, *remember*, or *tell* – which, by referring to Sutpen's actual speech act, keep his position as the origin, the source of the *story* intact. However, after a certain point, Quentin starts using verbs of mental activity – *know*, *think*, and *see* – and via these, slips into Sutpen's character: he knows, remembers, and sees in lieu of him. Hence, he becomes active in the creation of the story, not being content with the role of the mouthpiece. Gaining confidence as a narrator, he starts seizing authority over the/his story, venturing out from the camouflage of the ancestors for some moments. However, the reader can also observe the countermovement when Quentin loses ground and falters in the narration. " 'He went to the West Indies.' Quentin

had not moved, not even to raise his head from its attitude of *brooding bemusement*. . . ‘*That was how Sutpen said it*’ (192, my emphases). This is a point of rupture after which he is spectacularly unable to continue the story. He tries to gain some time by depicting how Sutpen told it, from at least three different perspectives, bracing himself to go on, but he gets stuck at the very same point each time he tries to continue. The reader can easily trace his struggle: the same or very similar versions of the above quote are uttered four times in two pages. “‘He just said, “So I went to the West Indies,” ’”(193) “‘telling Grandfather . . . “So I went to the West Indies” ’”(194). But for his *brooding*, he does not manage to come up with a creative continuation. Finally, he tries to solve the problem by claiming that Sutpen did not tell “how he got there, what had happened during the six years between the day he had decided to go to the West Indies and become rich” (199). Thus, we can see that the moment Quentin’s creativity and narrative talent falter, he returns to the Father’s shadow, claiming emphatically that the discrepancy is Sutpen’s or his Grandfather’s fault: “that was how he [Sutpen] said it” (193), “[t]hat was how Grandfather remembered it” (198). He puts the blame for the narrative’s lack of regard for “logical sequence and continuity” (199) on Sutpen, trying to keep the illusion of “truthfulness.”

Quentin is still in the middle of depicting Sutpen’s hypothetical musing about the inscrutability of his fate, when Shreve – tired of Quentin’s fiddling about with trivia, and his dragging the story on without slight amount of development – leaves the room for some time, and then returns, flinging the “joker” onto the table with a graceful move.

He did not say Wait, he just rose and left Quentin sitting before the table, the open book and the letter, and went out and returned in the robe and sat again and took up the cold pipe, though without filling it anew or lighting it as it was. “All right,” he said. “So that Christmas Henry brought him home, into the house, and the demon looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago. *Go on.*”  
(213; my emphasis)

Thus, refuting the common critical (mis)conception<sup>79</sup> that this radically new information is introduced by Quentin, we have to notice that it is Shreve’s creation, who, by this act of intrusion into the narration, sets absolutely new rules for the “game.” Shreve takes the step that Quentin was reluctant or unable to: to step out from the shadow of the fathers, to exercise the potential creativity and freedom, which is within the power of the storyteller. By doing so, he gives an impetus to the

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79. Lind, p. 896.

so far jolting narration. At this point, it becomes clear for the reader that Shreve's previous urging, sometimes impatient gestures – “All right. Don't bother to say he stopped talking now; just *go on.*' . . . 'Just don't bother,' . . . . 'Just *get on with it*' ” (208, my emphases) – also try to persuade Quentin to stop wasting so much time and energy on making the story look faithful to those of the fathers. Shreve encourages him instead to take over the narration from the ancestors not only apparently, but in reality as well.

In spite of Quentin's “Yes,” (210), which is probably meant not only as the verification of Shreve's statement about Bon's descent, but also as the acceptance of the new rules; he does not quit his previous narrative strategies. He imports the new information provided by Shreve into the story, but keeps referring to the ancestors as its source; what is more, he cites both his father and his grandfather just to make sure: “Father said he probably named him himself. Charles Bon. Charles Good. He didn't tell Grandfather he did, but Grandfather believed he did, would have” (213). At this point, however, we can observe Shreve's taking up the function of the catalyst, as he does not leave it at that, he does not let Quentin get away with such a striking inconsistency, but forces him to rectify, to get it straight:

“Your father” Shreve said. “He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick. . . . If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?”

“He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it.” (214)

Shreve persists until he forces Quentin to come out from the shadow of the fathers, to undertake the place of the narrator with all its hardships, risks, setbacks, and possibilities (self-fathering).

“Then who did tell him?”

“*I did.*” Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. “The day after we – after the night when we – ” (214, my emphasis)

With this “I did,” Quentin takes over the responsibility of accounting for the newly imported information (Bon's descent) from Shreve. However, since Quentin is not able to come up with a meaningful rationalization, it is Shreve again who offers the solution, gallantly making it appear as if it came from Quentin: “‘Oh,’ Shreve said. ‘After you and the old aunt. I see. *Go on. And father said –*’ ” (214, my emphasis). Having offered the decisive piece of information again, and having

set up a game of provocation, Shreve withdraws to the background<sup>80</sup> to let Quentin fight his battles.

As the narration proceeds, however, this separation resolves, the manner of storytelling is transformed: Shreve also takes a more active part in story-weaving; it becomes more and more difficult to tell the narrative voices apart. "It was Shreve speaking, though . . . it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one. . ." (243). The narrative soon starts working as a duet, as "some happy marriage of speaking and hearing" (253), both of them being Henry Sutpen, and both of them being Bon, compounding each of both yet neither (280). Their narration starts functioning as the "other," the counter-discourse of the realistic "patrilinear" narrative tradition: it operates according to different rules. They do not "remember" and "recollect" any more what the ancestors said, but they "believe" (267), "invent" (268), and sometimes "dont [sic] know" (259). They turn to inventing the story instead of relating it. Their mutual aim is to create "between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere" (243), to tell a story which is "probably *true* enough" (268, my emphasis). However, *true* here does not mean corresponding with something "outside," being true to historical facts and thus being "realistic;" but it is defined "inside" this paradigm, constructed by the two of them. Their concept of "true" means "fit[ting] the preconceived" (253).

Accepting Shreve's idea that he (Quentin) got hold of the decisive information when he went to Sutpen's Hundred with Rosa, Quentin shifts the most important point of reference, the one which keeps the structure of the story together, the Lacanian *point de capiton* from the figure of Sutpen (and Grandfather and Father) to the night incident about which the reader has learnt little so far. Thus, the point of reference, the "preconceived" pillar of their story is projected ahead to the point where their narrative reaches this past incident. By this, the disclosure is postponed, and Quentin gains some more time to "brood" over the solution.

"And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie. Is that right?"

"Yes," Quentin said. "Grandfather was the only friend he had."

"The demon had?" Quentin didn't answer, didn't move. . . paid no attention whatever. . . his face still lowered, still *brooding*. . .<sup>81</sup> (220–21)

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80. If we consider that Shreve's name closely resembles the word *to shrive*, meaning to hear somebody's confession, we can say that this behavior fits the task.

81. The verb *brood* is frequently used in reference to Quentin's narrative effort. If we take into consideration that it originates from the verb *breed*, it also backs up the theory that Quentin's unconscious motivation of storytelling is self-fathering (my italics in citation).

The story of the night incident is recounted only when it cannot be put off any longer, at the very end of the narrative. It is Shreve again who pushes Quentin to reveal the mystery of his knowledge and understanding, extracting the climax of Quentin's romance: "You dont [sic] know. You dont [sic] even know about the old dame, the Aunt Rosa" (289).

The tension gradually increases as they get nearer and nearer to the hidden secret of Sutpen's Hundred: Henry Sutpen, who has been hiding there for four years. He is the living past who is in on all the secrets, the meeting with whom has been designated as the source of Quentin's supposed understanding of the Sutpen drama: "you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there" (220). The relation of their meeting is supposed to justify their narrative retrospectively. "We have been prepared for it as a climactic moment of understanding."<sup>82</sup> By this act of justification and ratification, their narrative would be able to reach a coherent formal pattern, and via that, could become "true," could be accepted as (the Sutpen family) "history," and could take the place of the incoherent paternal master-narrative(s). However, the designated point of reference is empty. No meaningful or relevant information gets transferred between them:

*And you are -- ?*  
*Henry Sutpen.*  
*And you have been here -- ?*  
*Four years.*  
*And you came home -- ?*  
*To die. Yes.*  
*To die?*  
*Yes. To die.*  
*And you have been here -- ?*  
*Four years.*  
*And you are -- ?*  
*Henry Sutpen.* (298)

As Peter Brooks puts it "the passage reads nearly as a palindrome, virtually identical backward and forward, an unprogressive, reversible plot" (264), which provides no kind of information about the mysteries. Thus, I would argue, it is unable to function as the verification of Quentin's narrative. It signifies the collapse of the sons' narrative, which was standing on this "pillar," thus denoting the failure of their quest for narrative authority, for "self-fathering."

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82. James Guetti, "Absalom, Absalom! The Extended Simile," in *The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1967), 69–108, p. 99.

In spite of the fact that Peter Brooks also identifies the palindrome as “a kind of hollow structure, concave mirror or black hole at the center of the narrative,”<sup>83</sup> he does not recognize this moment as the one proving Quentin wrong and denoting the failure of his hermeneutic quest. This is due to the fact that Brooks designates a different incident as the source of Quentin’s understanding of the Sutpen drama: “the discovery of a certain formal pattern of the crossing of categories: Clytie’s Sutpen face with its negro pigmentation, the very design of debacle.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, he elevates Clytie to be a “hermeneutic clue” in the novel. This does not mean that Brooks is happy with the narrative design of the younger generation. He, however, assumes that the problem lies elsewhere: the story of the House of Sutpen as told by Quentin and Shreve, according to Brooks, seems to be caught between two figures: on the one hand, incest, “which overassimilates, denies difference, creates too much sameness”;<sup>85</sup> on the other hand, miscegenation, “which overdifferentiates, creates too much difference, sets up a perpetual slippage of meaning.” The two young men are “never able to interweave them in a coherent design” (266). “Incest and miscegenation, sameness and difference . . . fail to achieve a pattern of significant interweaving . . . the tale can never be plotted to the final, thorough Dickensian accounting” (266); there is a residual meaning embodied in Jim Bond, who seems to be “the very principle of nonsignificance” (266).

At this point, it is also worth having a look at how other critics evaluate Quentin’s endeavor or achievement: T. H. Adamowski states that “Quentin’s own heroic adventure, his decision to climb the old Sutpen staircase and look into the bedroom . . . allows him to overthrow his own father, or at least reject Mr. Compson’s interpretation of the Sutpen disaster.”<sup>86</sup> John T. Irwin also considers Quentin’s accomplishment as a narrator a success:

In the struggle with his father, Quentin will prove that he is a better man by being a better narrator – he will assume the authority of an author because his father does not know the whole story, does not know the true reason for Bon’s murder, while Quentin does. . . . Moreover, in terms of the narrative act, Quentin achieves temporal priority over his father, and within the narrative Quentin takes revenge against his father, against time, through a substitute.<sup>87</sup>

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83. Brooks, p. 264.

84. Brooks, p. 259.

85. Brooks, p. 265.

86. Adamowski, p. 127.

87. John T. Irwin, “Repetition and Revenge” in *William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! A Case Book*, ed. Fred Hobson (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 47–69, p. 64.

However, the question rightly arises: If Quentin's endeavor was successful, if he managed to "overthrow"<sup>88</sup> his father, "prove that he is a better man by being a better narrator," or "achieve temporal priority"<sup>89</sup> over him; why would he "conclude" his narrative with the following words: "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore" (298).

His physical appearance also leads me to somewhat different conclusions. He is lying on his back "still and rigid . . . with the cold New England night on his face" "his eyes wide open" (298), like somebody dead but still breathing, his soul haunted, tortured by some unknown restlessness or anxiety.

If we look at the dialogue from another perspective, it can provide us with the clue to the failure of their narrative. Henry and Quentin's supposed conversation is not only a palindrome but a circular, reclinate structure, which returns to the exact point where it began. As we have seen before, circular structuring is one of the main characteristics of Mr. Compson's paternal narrative, providing the reason for his story's appearing to be so fatalistic. He almost always starts with the final scene, the outcome, and portrays the events leading up to it later. Quentin also takes over this structuring principle, as it is traceable at several points in his narrative; for example, in the story of Sutpen, where they start with the final scene, his murder, and then relate his life story in detail, only to get back to the murder again in the end of Chapter VII. This, in other words, means that he also falls victim to the Girardian *mimetic desire*, which seems to be contagious among the sons in the novel – Sutpen miming an already existing design (the design of the plantation owner, his ideal father), Henry miming Bon's behavior and style. This understanding can also give us a possible explanation for the highly interesting romantic overtone of Quentin and Shreve's family romances as well. They come up with new, crucial pieces of information, providing their characters with new motivations for their deeds and granting a different pattern of logic to the events of the plot. However, they keep certain elements of the father's narrative, like the overtly romantic tone and the pattern of "love"-triangles driven by desire. Family romance also has a triangular structure (driven by desire) with the son in one angle, the father to be replaced and the ideal father in the other two.

This puts Quentin's failure as a narrator into a new light as well. Being left on his own, he is not able to come up with an *origin*-al solution, to become the origin, the father of the story; but, like Sutpen himself, he looks to the outside, to a/the father for a *design*. He copies and repeats the design (and the mistake) of the father, drowning his narrative in circularity, in *mimetic desire* turning against itself.

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88. Adamowski, p. 127.

89. Irwin, "Repetition," p. 64.

**Tamás Tukacs**

## **Memory, War and Trauma in Late Modernism**

### **Henry Green's *Caught***

This paper deals with Henry Green's *Caught* (1943), with occasional references to Green's previous novel, *Party Going* (1939), examining how the war setting influences the nature of remembering and how remembering is traumatised by these circumstances. The paper ultimately argues that in the 1930s and 40s a definite shift may be detected from the High Modernist, epiphanic, revelatory, transcendental kind of remembering, initiated by the Proustian "mémoire involontaire" towards traumatic modes that enact the invasion of the present by the past, rather than their happy co-existence in a moment of epiphany. The essay introduces elements of trauma in Green's novels in general and then moves on to identify the three main facets of traumatic narratives: their ontological, epistemological and narrative paradoxes. Most of the characters in *Caught* can be regarded as strange survivors of traumatic occurrences, who have to bear the consequences of this ontological dilemma and fight against the principles of fluidity and the danger of invasion that seem to threaten the boundaries of the past, the present and the future. The essay also presents the three main strategies of coping or failing to cope with trauma, exemplified by the three main characters, Roe, Pye and Christopher.

### **Henry Green's Fiction and Trauma**

In his autobiography, *Pack My Bag* (1940) Henry Green (1905–1973) evokes the traumatic episode when he got to know that his parents were dying, following an accident in Mexico (97).<sup>1</sup> He recalls that he had never had a similar experience before, when "a shock blankets the mind and when I got back to my room I walked up and down a long time" (97). He did not, however, regard the experience as necessarily traumatic: "I began to dramatize the shock I knew I had had into what I thought it ought to feel like" (97). But, he "was given a push further down this hill about five weeks later" when his parents got better and sent him photos "with bandages

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1. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Henry Green, *Pack My Bag* (London: Vintage, 2000).

around their heads” (98). “This gave me a return of hysteria,” Green claims (98). This is a classical (Freudian) traumatic scenario in which the second event recalls and re-interprets the first, seemingly harmless one as traumatic.

In the same section, with a fine metonymic link, the narrator starts to talk about his parents’ visit to Mexico every other year. Once, when the parents were on leave, there was a girl in the house who seemed reluctant to show Green her private garden, her little kingdom. In the end she agreed, but the child Green grabbed a spade and wanted to dig up the garden. “Rightly she would have none of this and tried to stop me. She was the stronger and was succeeding when in a last attempt to get my way I swung the spade with all my strength against her leg and cut her to the bone” (101). The only solution for the shock, he thinks, is a similar wound inflicted upon himself, *the repetition of the wound*: “I saw nothing for it but to cut my own leg open and was carried to bed screaming for a knife” (101).

What connects the two episodes, the news of the parents’ accident and the spade scene, is the motif of wounds, that is, *traumas*. At the beginning of this part of the autobiography, Green interprets memory with the help of the metaphor of a foxhunt, in which it is presumably the rememberer who, “like the huntsman, on a hill” “blows his horn” (97) to evoke memories. By the end, however, it is the fox that he identifies with: “They say the fox enjoys the hunt but the sound of the horn as he breaks covert [sic] must set great loneliness on him” (101); “Later, when the accident I have described disrupted me, I felt, and it is hard to explain, as though the feelings I thought I ought to have were hunting me. I was as much alone as any hunted fox” (102). Thus, in Green’s concept of memory, instead of the rememberer hunting, retrieving, violently recalling memories, the subject becomes the hunted – or perhaps more appropriately, *haunted* –, inflicting wounds on himself, and what remains is “shame remembered” (102).<sup>2</sup>

Trauma is central to Henry Green’s oeuvre, especially in his novels written in the 1930s and the 1940s (chiefly in *Party Going*, *Caught* and *Back*). My starting assumption is that Green’s fiction between the world wars is part of the general memory crisis of the late modernist period when – together with the appearance of a new, young literary generation, the Auden Group – the first wave of the reaction to and the rewriting of the high modernist tradition, together with its concept of memory, begins. According to Richard Terdiman, the basic fantasy of modernism is constituted by excluding every factor external to the work or the realm of art in general,

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2. Jeremy Treglown points out that Green had originally intended to entitle his autobiography “Shame Remembered.” Treglown, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 120.

“the effort to suppress extra-artistic determination.”<sup>3</sup> He claims that “the entire somatic and psychological *attitude* of modernism,” which had been uncannily anticipated, nearly forty years before Proust was born, by Théophile Gautier, could be summed up like this: “artistically indisposed, recumbent, disengaged – and distinctly paranoid concerning the menace of the world outside the writer’s bedchamber.”<sup>4</sup> Proust and Gautier, in Terdiman’s view, are linked by “the common intent to evade domination by outside forces . . . to slip free of external determination by resolutely barricading oneself.”<sup>5</sup> It is, however, precisely *memory* that subverts the self-enclosed fantasy of modernism; and so Proust’s monumental work, a quest narrative, demonstrates that “relations won’t go away,”<sup>6</sup> and that the present remains dominated by the past.

Several variants of this subversion of the original agenda of modernism’s self-enclosure, were treated in thirties novels, staging the dominance of the past over the present. Most of these texts exhibited ways in which the peaceful coexistence of the past and the present was disrupted by invasion, repetition, loss and futile longing, using the idioms of trauma, melancholia or nostalgia. Graham Greene and Daphne du Maurier (especially in *Rebecca*), for instance, attribute great significance to traumatic occurrences, in which the characters are unable to fight the spectres returning from the past.<sup>7</sup> Christopher Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell

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3. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), p. 160.

4. Terdiman, p. 160.

5. Terdiman, p. 160.

6. Terdiman, p. 183.

7. Besides the recurring motif of the mysterious “green baize door,” that separated the family’s home and the school, most of Greene’s writing is replete with childhood traumas, returning fears and phobias. In his autobiography, *A Sort of Life* completed in 1971 (London: Penguin, 1986), he often mentions how in his adult life he was still possessed by infantile phobias. Recalling the terror of seeing bats and birds, he adds, “The fear of bats remains” (p. 24). This terror is also referred to, within the context of the then popular discourse of psychoanalysis, in his travelogue *Journey Without Maps*, written in 1936 (London: Penguin, 1980): “It was an inherited fear, I shared my mother’s terror of birds, couldn’t touch them, couldn’t bear the feel of their hearts beating in my palm. . . . The method of psychoanalysis is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there . . . until one has to face the general idea, the pain or the memory” (pp. 96–7). Apart from childhood fears, the memory of his public school, similarly to most of his contemporaries, also seemed to exert a traumatic influence on Greene. In his autobiography, he claims that around 1968, while planning a novel about a school, he revisited the scene of his childhood education. He, however, abandoned the novel, for he “couldn’t bear mentally living again for several years in these surroundings,” and wrote

use the central idiom of melancholia to stage this memory crisis, which, at least in the thirties novels, was connected with a characteristic, dry, “empty,” surface-bound style, apt to enact the loss and emptiness effected by melancholia. James Hilton (especially in *Lost Horizon*) and George Orwell (most spectacularly in *Coming Up for Air*), on the other hand, tended to question the validity of nostalgia, highlighting the pathological aspects of futile longing. There is an important difference, however, between the Proustian, high modernist mode of remembering and its late modernist variant. By the 1930s, it was realised that the basically Proustian, epiphanic and revelatory model of memory simply did not work any more and, consequently, those modes of remembering came to the forefront that denied or at least called into question the aesthetic conception of memory that had emphasised a metaphoric identification of the past and the present, as in Proust’s famous *madeleine* scene.<sup>8</sup>

Lyndsey Stonebridge boldly asserts that “Green is a trauma writer, not before, but very much of his time.”<sup>9</sup> With a little exaggeration, Henry Green’s idiosyncratic novels function almost like a traumatising wound in the English literary landscape of the 1930s and in English late modernist fiction in general, seemingly evading easy classification and rational explanation. Green’s texts question the mere possibility of acquiring knowledge, thereby providing a broader context for the epistemological paradox of traumatic occurrences in the novels as well. In the words of Andrew Gibson, his is “an art, above all, of surfaces, surfaces that are suggestive and yet, in the end, blandly impenetrable.”<sup>10</sup> It is as if Green provided a meta-commentary to his texts in the first page of *Party Going* (1939) by describing the situation after the death of the pigeon as “everything unexplained.”<sup>11</sup> According to György Dragomán, Green presumably suggests in his novels that everything in life is modelled “on this (un)structure of secrecy,” which “may evolve into the ultimate structure sustaining the whole construction of a fictional reality.”<sup>12</sup> In psychoana-

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*A Burnt-Out Case* instead, thinking even a leper colony a more preferable location (*A Sort of Life*, p. 54).

8. It may obviously be asserted that this late modernist mode of remembering, which emphasised the pathological (traumatic, melancholic, nostalgic) aspects of recollection, could be regarded as the intensification or radicalisation of the Proustian, high modernist concept or remembering, highlighting its aspects denying metaphoric identifications and epiphanic revelations that had always already been inherent in the former, Proustian version.

9. Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety. Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 57.

10. Andrew Gibson, “Henry Green as Experimental Novelist,” *Studies in the Novel* 16.2 (1984) 197–214, p. 198.

11. Henry Green, *Loving. Living. Party Going* (London: Pan, 1978), p. 384.

12. György Dragomán, “‘Everything Unexplained’: The Structure of Secrecy as Structure in Henry Green’s *Party Going*,” *The AnaChronisT* 2 (1996) 231–42, p. 242.

lytic terms, the death of the pigeon and other unexplained occurrences serve as traumatic spots in the fabric of the text, impossible to be contained by any linear, rational and progressive sort of plot. Furthermore, Green's plots in general seem to be deceptively simple, and, therefore, the reader feels compelled to go "deeper" and attempt to look for parallels, structuring symbols and correspondences between different layers of the text. As, in *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode points out, "[*Party Going*] belongs to a class of narratives which *have* to mean more or other than they manifestly say."<sup>13</sup> The possible points of entry, however, are false landmarks: they let the reader in but the roads of interpretation fork in so many different ways without consistency or any significant meaning that they throw the reader back to the surface of the text.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Green's novels (like most late modernist novels) seem to deny the convictions of high modernism as far as the function of memory is concerned. The main difference between modernists and Green appears to be the lack of the belief in the ordering function of memory, and, in his case, the emphasis falls on the uncontrollability of memories that invade the characters' consciousness in the present in a traumatic manner. Several critics are aware of this contrast between the two attitudes to memory, claiming that Green denies the epiphanic aspect of recollection, foregrounding the subversive element of modernist remembering. Michael Gorra, for instance, juxtaposing Green's work with that of Woolf, asserts that "Green has no faith in the mind's ability to re-order 'the myriad impressions of an ordinary day' " and that his characters "remain overwhelmed by their sensations," being unable to establish a meaningful relation between the self and the world.<sup>15</sup> He claims that Green's fiction highlights the suppressed and subversive supplement of Mrs Dalloway (who is able to establish an order over chaos), the shell-shocked soldier: "Green's characters are nearly all like . . . mad Septimus Smith."<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Victoria Stewart points out that "the inclusion in the narrative of the psychologically damaged war veteran Septimus Smith allows Woolf to explore a different kind of memory, one which intrudes with a violence that is counter to the free-flowing associations experienced by Clarissa."<sup>17</sup> Randall Stevenson, however, con-

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13. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 7.

14. Ferenc Takács, "Henry Green" [Afterword to the Hungarian edition of *Caught*], in Henry Green, *Csapdában* (Budapest: Magvető, 1981), 255–71, p. 260.

15. Michael Gorra, *The English Novel at Mid-Century: From the Leaning Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 27.

16. Gorra, p. 27.

17. Victoria Stewart, *Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 8.

trasts the nineteen-thirties and the period of high modernism by asserting that “equipped with clearer recollections of a better world in the past, the modernists restructured their fiction to retreat from a disturbed life after the First World War into inner consciousness. . . . Thirties authors, on the other hand, faced the difficulties of contemporary life and the threat of a future second war with less opportunity of ‘retreating or advancing,’ ” and so felt obliged “to engage more directly with contemporary history.”<sup>18</sup> Stevenson’s statement may seem valid on the surface, but the problem is that it reiterates the superficial contrast so often made between the modernism of the 1920s and the “realist” literature of the 1930s, stating that the thirties were more “present-oriented” than the previous decade. The past was no less important for the 1930s authors, including Green, only emphases shifted: the modernist concept of the Proustian *mémoire involontaire* can be seen as lingering on in the 1930s, only with a modified function. Thirties characters no longer aestheticise the present in order to make it fit for nostalgia, like John Haye in Green’s *Blindness*,<sup>19</sup> or Mrs Dalloway for that matter, but suffer from the painful intrusion of the past into the present and their uneasy co-existence. In the 1930s, the epiphanic moment of Proust’s *madeleine* scene came to be replaced by instances of more painful and traumatic intrusions of the past into the present.

The problem of how Green’s texts in the 1930s and the early 40s relate to the idiom of trauma, exhibiting the problematic relationship with the past, might be examined through three interconnected motifs: the characters’ being frozen, suspended in one situation; the occurrence of frontiers; and the frequent presentation of closed spaces.

In Henry Green’s novels we can see characters immobilised and caught up in certain situations. They find it very difficult to break out from these spaces and places, and thus remain suspended between destinations; they stay passive, subject to outside circumstances. John Haye in *Blindness* (1926) loses his eyesight due to a train accident and is confined to his room after that; the “Bright Young Things” in *Party Going* (1939) can hardly leave for France due to the fog around the station; Richard Roe in *Caught* (1943), serving as a fireman during the Blitz, is doomed to wait weeks until the raids begin.

These situations may be termed traumatic inasmuch as they show a strong parallel with the *ontological aspect* of trauma, by which I mean the manner in which the traumatised victim experiences the shocking situation, and the way he is able to live

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18. Randall Stevenson, *A Reader’s Guide to the Twentieth-Century Novel in Britain* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993), p. 58.

19. Michael North, *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1984), p. 22.

after surviving it. First and foremost, the trauma victim feels hopelessly passive, betrayed,<sup>20</sup> immobile, frozen, characterised by “panic inaction,” “catatonoid reactions,” immobilisation and automaton-like behaviour.<sup>21</sup> They submit themselves to circumstances, claiming that the traumatic event was justified by its causes,<sup>22</sup> exhibiting symptoms of anhedonia (fear of joy) and alexithymia (rejection of emotions).<sup>23</sup> At the moment of the trauma, the ego is dissociated into a subjective emotional system (that feels the trauma but cannot represent it, of which the result is the appearance of conversion symptoms) and an objective intellectual system (that perceives the trauma but cannot feel it, as if it were happening to another person).<sup>24</sup> The success of the therapy naturally depends on extent to which the gap can be bridged between emotional and intellectual selves, on the desire to tell and the imperative to stay silent and remain between the past and the present. Most of Green’s characters feel as if they had been trapped, caught in a situation that stops the forward movement of time and, concomitantly, opens a space for the invasion of traumatic past occurrences.

Trauma victims are also bound to confront, not primarily their own trauma, but their “enigma of survival”<sup>25</sup> and the insight they gained through the traumatic experience.<sup>26</sup> This “enigma of survival” is beautifully illustrated by Henry Green’s short story entitled “Mr Jonas” (1941) whose protagonist, rescued in a fire operation, is “unassisted once he had been released, out of unreality into something temporarily worse, *apparently unhurt*,<sup>27</sup> but now in all probability suffering from shock . . . *to live again* whoever he might be, this Mr Jonas” (my italics).<sup>28</sup> Does Mr Jonas know what happened to him at all?

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20. Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 4.

21. Henry Krystal, “Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 76–99, p. 80.

22. Krystal, p. 83.

23. Krystal, p. 86.

24. Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 131.

25. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), p. 58.

26. Cathy Caruth, “An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 128–47, p. 134.

27. In fact, those are almost the precise words that Freud uses in *Moses and Monotheism* to illustrate the incubation period following the trauma of the sufferer of a railway accident: “It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot, where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision” (quoted in Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 16).

28. Henry Green, “Mr Jonas,” in *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. Matthew Yorke (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 83–89, p. 89.

This epistemological aspect of trauma is strongly related to its ontological aspect. The *basic epistemological paradox* of trauma is that the sufferer does not necessarily experience the original occurrence as traumatic and does not necessarily know that he has undergone a trauma. As Freud very early explained in “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” it is not the original event itself that exerts a traumatic influence on the victim, because it very often comes too early in his childhood to be understood and assimilated. Nor is the second event inherently traumatic, but it triggers a memory of the first one that is retrospectively given a traumatic meaning.<sup>29</sup> Between them is the period of temporal delay, which defers interpretation and prevents immediate reaction. Amnesia, latency, or as Freud put it, an “incubation period” follows the scene of trauma, due to the fact that the patient, during the occurrence of trauma, could never become conscious of its significance, he simply *does not know* that he underwent trauma, and thus exists in a state of epistemological void. The experience of trauma, Cathy Caruth maintains, “would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself.”<sup>30</sup> The victim may leave the site of the accident, like Green’s Mr Jonas, *apparently unharmed*, without realising that he has, in fact, become a victim. Perhaps he never returns again, but he cannot leave the trauma behind. Amnesia is most clearly indicated by the fact that the psyche cannot treat the “event” as memory, which is unable to be integrated into the life story of the patient on the basis of a past-present dichotomy. What lets one know that a traumatic event took place at all is that the shock returns in nightmares, flashbacks, bodily and conversion symptoms, nightmares, repetitions, traumatic re-enactments, and so on, in the latency period. “Survival” thus gains a very ambiguous meaning: the “passage beyond the violent event” is accompanied by “the endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction.”<sup>31</sup> In Green’s novels, characters typically “survive” a traumatic situation but they rarely grasp its real significance. Those, like Pye in *Caught*, for instance, that cannot resist the invasion of the traumatic return of the repressed material usually end their life in a tragic manner.

The second characteristic feature of Green’s novels – something that links him to the dominant idiom of the 1930s, mainly practised by the Auden group – is his intense interest in frontiers, borders, margins, possibilities of passage, thresholds, problems of accessibility and the dilemma of “going over.”<sup>32</sup> I shall argue that the

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29. See Leys, p. 20.

30. Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 17.

31. Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 63.

32. The term is borrowed from Carol A. Wipf-Miller, “Fictions of ‘Going Over’: Henry Green and the New Realism,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 44.2 (1998) 135–53.

significance of this process of crossing frontiers, “going over” barriers and being suspended between two places and the past and the present is not, primarily, a political or moral dilemma in Green, but a corollary of the characters’ past, mainly gaining temporal and psychological significance. The routes for almost all of the characters are closed both backwards, in the direction of the past and also forward, into the future, thus they remain suspended in a temporal no-man’s land and are locked up in the permanent present of trauma.

The spatial symbol of this inertia is the abundance of closed spaces in Green’s fiction. The blind Hays spends most of his time in his room, the young people’s lives in *Living* (1929) take place in the factory or at home, the scene of *Party Going* is the hall and hotel of a railway station, the characters in *Caught* can be seen either at home, or in pubs or at the fire station. The characters do break out in one way or another, but most of these attempts prove to be temporary solutions. The expression of this temporal stasis effected by trauma and other crises of remembering is by no means limited to Green in late-modernist fiction. Similar examples may be found, for instance, in Graham Greene’s thrillers, which, by definition, stage some sort of suspension of time within the frame of the plot; James Hilton’s Shangri-La in *Lost Horizon* (1933) is also a spatial metaphor of nostalgia in crisis. Maxim de Winter’s estate in Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938) is, similarly, the object of the couple’s troubled attempts at remembering and Bowling’s nostalgically evoked Lower Binfield is likewise such a scene in George Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air* (1939). What connects these spaces and places is that the central characters would like to see them as unchanging, free of external temporal invasion, or even aestheticize them with the help of memory. The failure to preserve them in their ideal state in recollection, however, shows that, to quote Terdiman once again, “relations won’t go away.”

### **Invasion and Repetition: Trauma in *Caught***

Henry Green’s fourth published novel, *Caught*, on which he began working in 1941 and which was eventually published in 1943, is, on the one hand, a semi-autobiographical novel about the experiences of Richard Roe, an auxiliary fireman in the Blitz. On the other hand, it is a continuation of, or sequel to, *Party Going*. It deals with the major themes of the previous novel, while the chief motifs and certain correspondences between characters also make a link between the two texts. If we compare the two novels, no essential difference seems to exist between Green’s pre-war and war novels. Seen from the perspective of *Caught*, *Party Going* could metaphorically also be evaluated as a “war novel,” or, to put it in another way, *Caught* is not primarily a war novel but can equally be described

as a text that stages certain situations that traumatised individuals have to face, to which the Blitz is a mere historical backdrop.

The plot, though somewhat more complicated than that of *Party Going*, is still easy to follow. It has two main threads: the first one is represented by Richard Roe, an Auxiliary Fire Service fireman who is stationed in London during the Phoney War and the Blitz, and regularly commutes between the station and his country home. He is a widower bringing up his son, Christopher with his sister-in-law, Dy. The other main line belongs to Albert Pye, a middle-aged fire service instructor, whose sister was put into a mental asylum after she had tried to abduct Roe's son from a shop. Later Pye convinces himself that he had had an incestuous relationship with his sister and commits suicide. The novel shows the internal life of the fire station, full of intrigues, gossips and secrets, as well as several fire operations and the effects they have on the main characters.

Like *Party Going*, *Caught* also explores the problem of memory in an apocalyptic setting. It begs the question as to what extent memory and remembering are possible as refuges from the impending catastrophe in a situation imperilled by death, and in what ways people can shield themselves against the insistence of traumatic wounds in the present. As Stonebridge points out, "*Caught* is not only a psychoanalytically informed genealogy of trauma, an exploration of the belated effects of the past upon the present lives of war-anxious characters [but] it is also a text which . . . gives poetic form and shape to the trauma, not of the told, but of the telling."<sup>33</sup> The greatest enemy of recollection is waiting, being in transit, a suspended state between event and non-event, war and non-war, "which stubbornly refuses to unfurl into an event."<sup>34</sup> Historically, the time of *Caught* is the period between the declaration of war and the first systematic air-raids on Britain (September 1939 and July 1940), the so-called "Phoney War." The life of people in this span of time is defined by the structure of anti-climaxes. As Green put it in one of his later essays: "The whole point of a fireman is that he is endlessly waiting. And most have lost their nerve."<sup>35</sup> The anxiety is mainly centred around the problem of memorialisation, that is, the quest for events suitable to be delegated into the realm of memory.

As an exceptional state when "there were no week-ends off," when "public holidays were not recognised" (5),<sup>36</sup> war creates extreme difficulties for remem-

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33. Stonebridge, pp. 58–9.

34. Stonebridge, p. 61.

35. Henry Green, "Before the Great Fire," in *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. Matthew Yorke (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 260–79, p. 276.

36. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Henry Green, *Caught* (London: Hogarth, 1978).

brance. According to Mark Rawlinson, the present is a fictive, unrealised state in the novel, because the characters are cut off from their past by alien identities forced on them by the war, apprehending themselves through memories which are not of their own.<sup>37</sup> It seems that storing memories is almost impossible. Characters either forget very quickly, or they are burdened by too many and too painful memories intruding into their lives, preventing the “normal” workings of remembering and the accumulation of new memories. As a third alternative, they begin to construct false memories. For instance, “at the height of the first Blitz” Roe cannot recall how his son was given a bicycle, he cannot recollect how much pleasure it gave, and he is not able to distinguish between this bicycle and a tricycle he gave a year before (25): he “found his memory at fault. But the rest he thought he remembered very well” (26). When on a leave, walking around the garden with his son, Roe “had forgotten his wife,” which is all the more surprising because he lost her only a couple of months earlier (178). It is as if this forgetfulness were transferentially repeated when, in a conversation with Roe, Dy, his sister-in-law, is not paying attention and “she forgot Richard” (188).

This absent-mindedness or light amnesia is extended even to Christopher, his son, who is also found wanting as far as memories are concerned: “Roe asked whether he remembered how in the summer they had all gone to get something for his rabbit. . . . Christopher said he did not know and then added coldly that his rabbit was sent away” (8). That is why Roe is so anxious about creating suitable memories for his son: when the boy falls ill, “Roe was afraid his son would only remember the leave by how ill he had been” (6). He would like to engage his son in shared memories, by the presents he gives and by creating a mystery place in the garden “where the hob-goblins lived” (9), but the son systematically downplays these attempts (in a rather anti-climactic way), denying the presence of mystery: “Christopher said, ‘but nanny knows, Rosemary knows, oh everybody knows’ ” (9). When the boy demands that they build something, Dy eagerly supports the common game, since “she meant to make the few days they were to have together as much a memory to the boy as they would be to the father” (29). Creating these memories serves a practical purpose in the novel, since they are to compensate for the loss the boy had suffered.<sup>38</sup> The problem is, however, that creating pleasant memories is bound to fail under the circumstances, for the war infects the past, the present and the future as well. Christopher constructs a battleship

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37. Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 103–104.

38. Similarly to the girls dancing in night clubs after they bid farewell to their men: “they were driven to create memories to compare, and thus compensate for the loss each had suffered” (63).

from bricks (26), and when they go into to garden to build a bonfire, they are similarly caught up in images evoking burning houses in the Blitz: “From a window came a blind of smoke, as though rolls of black-out material, caught in the wind, had been unwound and been kept blowing about. Just like the smoke from one of their bonfires at home” (79).

According to Rod Mengham, fixation on memories, self-deception and remembrance paralyse the present in the novel.<sup>39</sup> In fact, for most of the characters, no proper place exists between the past and the future. They are entangled in a complex web, the present unconsciously repeats past episodes, memories are reinterpreted in the light of present events and both are caught up in the expectation of an apocalyptic future. For the characters there is no middle ground between “caught” (the present of the fire station) and “adrift” (in falsely remembered worlds),<sup>40</sup> they are typically bogged down in the trap of the present and set adrift towards the past and the future. Roe often returns to the memory of his wife, an inclination that verges on obsession, in which the distinction between past and present fades: “Now that he was back in this old life for a few days, he could not keep his hands off her in memory . . . he could not leave her alone when in an empty room, but stroked her wrists, pinched, kissed her eyes, nibbled her lips while, for her part, she smiled, joked, and took him to bed at all hours of the day, and lay all night murmuring to him in empty memory” (33). However, this memory cannot remain a pleasant one, similar to the episode when Roe recalls their first meeting in the early spring in a rose garden (64). The setting seems idyllic, yet the whole scene is corrupted, colonised by the presence of war, marked by the motifs of hotness and roses:

He turned to her and she seemed his in her white clothes, with a cry the blackbird had flown and in her eyes as, speechless, she turned, still a stranger, to look into him, he thought he saw the hot, lazy luxuriance of a rose, the heavy, weightless, luxuriance of a rose, the curling disclosure of the heart of a rose that, as for a hornet, was his for its honey, for the asking, open for him to pierce inside, this heavy, creamy, girl turned woman.

He had been sticky, then, in flannels, but not so hot as he was now, dressed in thick labourer’s uniform, proofed against fire and water. (64)

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39. Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), p. 77.

40. North, p. 112.

The plight of remembering, or rather, the uncontrollable invasion of the present by the past is signalled by sharp contrasts, like those between the white dress and the blackbirds, the gentleness of the rose and the motif of piercing. Moreover, the colonisation of the present is even more emphatic by the use of oxymoron in the “*heavy, weightless, luxuriance of a rose*” that perfectly stages the mechanism of trauma inasmuch as trauma weighs upon the present, but it is also “weightless” for it is invisible and unintelligible for the traumatised subject.

While Roe would like to break out of this trap by creating memories for himself and for his son, there is not much hope for the boy in this respect, who enacts and repeats the hollowed-out present of the war in symbolic gestures, and builds memories relying entirely on the war. This distance is signalled by their two different strategies: “Neither was sorry to go his own way. The boy would be building up memories particular to himself. . . . Neither was much with the other, the one picking up the thread where the war had unravelled it, the other beginning to spin his own, to create his first tangled memories, to bind himself to life for the first time” (33–4).

Two main kinds of fear dominate the text: the fear of *invasion* and the fear of *repetition*. It is the tension between immobility, being caught in the trap of the present and the dangerous fluidity of frontiers that set up the traumatic situation in *Caught*. The barriers between the past, present and the future are in peril, and the text presents several symbolic manifestations of this danger. However much Roe would like to set up clear boundaries between his life at home and at the station, the two slip into each other: either there is nothing to do at either place (33, 36) or a war is going on, there is a constant state of emergency, represented by his anxiety over creating memories and his tense relationship with his son.

Fluidity and the absence of clear frontiers are not difficult to discover as far as names are concerned (just like in *Party Going*). Roe’s name recalls “roses” and also “the heraldic cattle” they see together in the field; combined with Pye, Roe’s name gives the Greek for “fire” (pyro);<sup>41</sup> Pye’s name refers to Piper, who is often called “Pied Piper,” which evokes both the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and the Roe’s “pied garden” (26), but the word “pied” also recalls birds, so characteristic of Green’s novels. The motif of fluidity also characterises life at the station where there is a high stake in knowing, not knowing, secrecy, letting out secrets and spreading gossip. Secrecy pervades the whole station, the auxiliary firemen are spying on each other, and most of the rumours centre around Pye’s story, his sister’s abduction of Roe’s son, Christopher and his own relationship with his sister. It is a rapidly accelerating process exacerbated, for instance, by

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41. See Takács, p. 270.

old Piper, who “let fall so many hints that a story of Christopher’s abduction eventually got out” (150); “This was how the story got around, in bits and pieces, and it was this way that it grew, and it grew in a short time, for there was not much time left” (151). There is no putting an end to the “growing” of rumours, which, just like an unstoppable fire, destroys Pye’s life. While in *Party Going* the dominant image of the transgression of the frontiers is the motif of water, metaphorically engulfing and invading the present, here it is the image of fire that respects no boundaries.

The text of the novel is likewise entrapped in complex webs of repetitions and parallels, creating a traumatic text of uncanny returns. Unlike most modernist texts, in *Caught*, these repetitions and parallels do not contribute to creating an aesthetically unified, self-enclosed world that creates epiphanic moments by force of the metaphoric collation of past and present events. On the contrary, repetitions gain traumatic significance that undermine the stability of the present. Old Piper, for instance, is always annoyingly echoing what the instructor says (21); his story of abduction in Africa parallels Christopher’s abduction (37); Pye’s experiences in the First World War are prefigurations of the Blitz and also of his own traumatising, for it was around that time that he first had a sexual experience with a girl by moonlight (41); Pye visits his sister in the asylum the same day the cook, Mary Howells visits his son-in-law, who “deflowered” (79) Brid, her daughter; the word “deflowered,” in turn, evokes the pink roses on the china pot she was given as a wedding present, which is a link to Roe’s rose garden scene; both leave without permission; Pye’s liaison with a girl named Prudence evokes his sister’s abduction scene, and so on.

Examples could be listed almost endlessly to illustrate that one of the master principles of the novel is repetition against which the characters try, consciously or unconsciously, to protest. Their anxiety is in fact the same as that of the whole 1930s generation, which was largely defined by “the horrifying sense of living the same old nightmare all over again”<sup>42</sup> as a result of which images of encirclement, invasion, infection, symptoms of a deep fear of repetition, mainly the repetition of the horrors of the Great War within only twenty years’ time, are abundant within the fiction of the decade.<sup>43</sup> Against the constant peril of repetition Roe (and people at war, in general) would like to create memories for the future. This, however, proves to be a futile attempt, as we have seen, since out of the present, always already infected by the past and the future, no pleasant memories grow.

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42. Stewart, p. 33.

43. James Gordin, *British Fiction in the 1930s: The Dispiriting Decade* (New York: St Martin’s, 1992), p. 14.

However much the characters repeat that “all was over, seemingly forgotten, done with” (17), “it’s all over and done with” (104) or “it’s all over now, anyway” (159), nothing is over, because the past continuously intrudes into the present.

These two kinds of fear, that of invasion and repetition – embedded in the war condition as the fear of the repetition of previous war(s) and fear of being invaded by hostile forces – define the experience of trauma in *Caught*. In what follows, I shall examine the three main characters, Roe, Pye and Christopher, who exemplify the traumatic effects of “tangled memories” (for the traumas of all three characters are interwoven into each other).

### “Tangled Memories”: Through the Stained Glass

Christopher’s obvious traumatic experience is his abduction from a shop by Pye’s sister. The intensity of the boy’s trauma is marked by the colour symbolism used in the description of the shop. All sorts of warm colours, mainly pink and red flood the interior through the stained glass windows which, together with the sight of the sailboat that he covets, completely fascinate the child. This is how Roe imagines later what must have happened: his son was “held to ransom by the cupidity of boys, and had been lost in feelings that this colour, reflected in such a way on so much that he wanted, could not have failed to bring him. . . . He was done. He stood rooted, one finger up a nostril, his hot sloe mouth pressed against mahogany, before those sails the colour of his eyes. . . . the father imagined his son must have pointed a finger and shouted, ‘I want, I want’ ” (13–4). When he is led off by a stranger, Pye’s sister, he is robbed of this object of desire, the sailboat, and it is this profound loss, not necessarily the fact of abduction, that traumatises him: “the saleswoman had engulfed it in a bag so that he could not see the glory, that is, the transfiguration” (14) and later “he sat, holding the bag on his knee, gradually losing what he held” (15). It is this object loss that underwrites the whole mechanism of trauma in the novel,<sup>44</sup> a loss that repeats the anxiety of the primal separation from his mother, recalling Freud’s interpretation of the *fort-da* game. The memory of the primal separation is even more intense in the room where the woman takes him, which uncannily repeats the experience in the shop: “It was very hot. It had coal fire. . . . She did not turn on the light, so that he could see her eyes only by their glitter, a sparkle by the fire, which, as it was disturbed to flame, sent her shadow reeling, gyrating round sprawling rosy walls. . . . ‘My tea,’ he announced, surprised to find none” (15). The story seems to “progress” by metonymic replacements and repetitions, which unsuccessfully attempt to master

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44. Stonebridge, p. 69

the loss of the mother: Pye's sister cannot offer him tea, an object of desire that could replace the lost ship, which Christopher smashes (16), unconsciously realising that it is a futile substitute for the lost object, losing its mystery, while Pye's sister also wants to convince herself that the boy is also a replacement for her lost or unborn child, "in the sadness of not finding" (9). After the event, Christopher, on the one hand, shows the classic symptoms of trauma, he can never play with a sailboat again (17). On the other hand, he perpetuates this traumatic experience by acting it out, when he builds a battleship from bricks (instead of a sailboat), using shadows "to build up substance" (26), recalling the shadows cast in the shop and the room, and then smashes the whole thing (29). Moreover, this traumatic event is not even represented directly, we can only get to know what might have happened through Roe's later reconstruction of the event, which, again, is a clear example of the epistemological dilemma of trauma: one does not know or recognise what might have happened, and it is only with considerable difficulty that the traumatic "event" can be accessed later on.

What the sailboat meant for Christopher is precisely what Christopher means for Roe. What is more, Green complicates the meaning of "loss" in three different ways. First, when he is travelling back to London, Roe "felt he had lost everything, in particular the boy" (10). Secondly, the child was really lost in London (10) and, thirdly, Christopher "had been lost in feelings" in the shop (13). Every time Roe says goodbye to him, it is like losing him again and again: "he was soon saying farewell to Christopher away out in the country whenever he was alone, losing him" (28). Another episode when he has to bid farewell to his son is described like this:

The nurse came out of the iron gate to fetch him for his goodbye to his father. . . . And as Richard turned back, and the car came out of the back drive to go to the front door, he did not know how he was going to get through his goodbye. What he had just seen was so like all he had known and might never find again, and, as he clutched at her [his dead wife's] arm, which was not there, above the elbow, he shook at leaving this, the place he got back to her nearest, his ever precious loss. (34)

Retrieving an object and losing it perfectly summarises the significance of the *fort-da* game. As *Party Going* exemplifies and as Green formulated it in his autobiography, "every farewell is to die a little."<sup>45</sup> While re-enacting the memory of his lost wife with the metaphorical loss of his son again and again, Roe risks dying several times – no wonder that at the end of the novel he calls his son Opher

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45. Green, *Pack My Bag*, p. 33.

(173), a chunked version of the original name, splitting off the “Christ” part, the hope of salvation and transcendence. What remains is Opher, “to carry,” carrying the burden of the loss, like Miss Fellowes is carrying about her dead pigeon in a brown paper parcel in *Party Going*. This is the reason why he would like to re-experience his son’s abduction unconsciously and to re-enact the loss of his wife: “When, from curiosity, he went to see for himself the store out of which Christopher had been abducted, he stopped, unknowing, by the very counter with the toy display which had so struck his son as to make him lost” (12).

The stained glass windows of the shop link this experience to a much earlier one, which connects his unconscious repetition of his son’s loss and his work as a fireman. At the age of sixteen, Roe is taken by a friend of the family to study the stained glass windows of Tewkesbury Abbey. A very narrow step runs along the wall, with no balustrade, no rail “and then, in his own case, as he faced right to bring his right leg over, he had that terror of the urge to leap, his back to the deep violet and yellow Bible stories on the glass, his eyes reluctant over the whole grey stretch of the Abbey until, they were drawn, abruptly as to a chasm, inevitably, and so far beneath, down to that floor hemmed with pews” (11–2). The similarity between his losing himself in the heights and his son being dazzled by the colours in the shop is obvious. What is interesting is what the stained glass represents: in the Abbey, Bible stories can be seen, while shop windows depict “trading scenes, that is of merchandise being loaded on to galleons, the leaving port, of incidents in the voyage, and then the unloading” (12). Both of them are full, teleological narratives with a firm beginning, middle and an end, illuminated (both metaphorically and physically) by the light of either transcendence or practicality, contrasting the subversive, traumatic events taking place within the shop or the church and “normal,” linear narratives.

These narratives are in sharp contrast with the logic of traumatic occurrences and raise the problem of the narrativisation of trauma. Reformulating the words of Walter Benjamin, who wrote about the link between war and narrative, quoted by Stonebridge,<sup>46</sup> we can say that trauma threatens and provokes narrative at the same time. It threatens because it degrades experience to such an extent that narrative communication is thrown into a crisis and it provokes for precisely the same reason. A traumatic occurrence, conceived as *a narrative and temporal problem*, subverts several basic notions of “normal” existence: linearity, teleology, narrative logic, symbolic integration, remembering, representation and the sense of possession and ownership of one’s life story. Since the effect of trauma is permanently present (at least until the end of therapy), it is impossible to tell it,

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46. Stonebridge, p. 57.

remember it, for it is inconsistent with the field of knowledge pertaining to memory.<sup>47</sup> As Slavoj Žižek puts it, “the essence of trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our symbolic universe.”<sup>48</sup> At the heart of traumatic memory (which is, it shall be added, an oxymoron) there is the idea of unrepresentability, for trauma interposes the disruption of memory between an event and its representation.<sup>49</sup> To put it in another way, traumatic narrative at best can only exist as a story, the different elements remaining isolated to only to be linked by continuatives (“and. . . and”), but it is the task of therapy to emplot the fragmented story of trauma. Trauma, however, induces a strong urge to tell, which is supposed to lead to some sort of cure automatically. But, as Dori Laub puts it, “there are never enough words or the right words.”<sup>50</sup>

Another important dilemma of trauma narratives is whether telling would not lead to an even greater pain (the victim going over his “memories” again), and whether he should remain silent, risking the “perpetuation of [trauma’s] tyranny.”<sup>51</sup> Trauma, in fact, reveals “inhumanity, the bare life,”<sup>52</sup> therefore it exists outside the realm of language, and the attempt to bring it back to this realm, by setting it within a linear narrative form, is to destroy its truth.<sup>53</sup> The victim thus becomes entrapped in a vicious circle of repressing the desire to talk about trauma or remaining in constant search for words apt to transform the meaningless, subversive traumatic occurrence into a symbolic narrative. Dominick LaCapra terms this paradox “a fidelity to trauma,”<sup>54</sup> which creates “a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma.”<sup>55</sup>

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47. Linda Belau, “Introduction: Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through. Remembering and the Limit of Knowledge,” in *Topologies of Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Memory*, eds. Linda Belau and Petar Ramadanovic (New York: Other Press, 2002), xiii–xxvii, p. xv.

48. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 272–3.

49. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, “Introduction: Contested Pasts,” in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, eds. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 1–22, p. 6.

50. Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 61–75, p. 63.

51. Laub, p. 65.

52. Edkins, p. 214.

53. Edkins, p. 214.

54. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), p. 22.

55. LaCapra, p. 23.

Jenny Edkins asserts that trauma

is outside the realm of language, and to bring it back within that realm by speaking of it, by setting it within a linear narrative form, is to destroy its truth. There is a gap or abyss at the heart of subjectivity, according to this account, because every formation of a subject in relation to language is flawed. It produces an excess or surplus: the real. Trauma is what happens when this abyss, normally hidden by the social reality in which we live our daily lives, is suddenly revealed.<sup>56</sup>

Roe also has to face this gap, this abyss, this chasm (in the Abbey, literally) when trying to come to terms with his traumatic experience and he cannot do anything but transferentially repeat the experience. In his mind, the loss of his wife is linked to his son's abduction, which recalls the abbey scene that becomes retrospectively traumatised, for which he tries to find the cure in becoming a fireman: "He signed on because he had for years wanted to see inside one of these turreted buildings [resembling the Abbey], and also because he had always been afraid of heights" (27). The repetition of the Abbey scene as a prototype of war trauma is reinforced by the interesting twist that the hard pews they have at the substation were lent by a church (29). Following the "logic" of repetition and invasion mentioned above, Roe's attempt to fight his traumas takes a metonymic path, going through the Abbey experience, the loss of his wife and son, the latter connected to the Abbey by the motif of vertigo, and his job as a fireman.

The narrative problem that trauma raises is best exemplified by Roe as a shell-shocked soldier returning home. After nine weeks of air-raids in London, "Roe was unlucky one morning. A bomb came too close. It knocked him out. He was sent home, superficially injured" (172). He returns, superficially injured, *apparently unhurt*, but struggling with the great task of the traumatised to narrate his experiences to Dy, who proves to be a rather impatient and indifferent listener, asking the most meaningless question under the circumstances: "I wonder what's the meaning of it all?" (194). Roe claims that "The extraordinary thing is . . . that one's imagination is so literary. What will go up there to-night in London, every night, is more like a film, or that's what it seems like at the time. Then afterwards, when you go over it, everything seems unreal, probably because you were so tired, as you begin building again to describe to yourself the experience you've had. It's so difficult" (174) and "there is always something you can't describe and it's not the blitz alone that's true of" (180). The problem recognised by Roe is precisely the problem of invasion, and it is "not the blitz alone that this is

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56. Edkins, p. 214.

true of.” Just as the warplanes invade Britain, so do traumatising experiences invade the ego, which is helpless in the face of the attack, similarly to the way the stained glass images flood the church or the interior of the shop. After the event, creating narratives in the manner of a Bible story or any teleological plot, seen on stained glass windows, is impossible, since trauma always leaves a residue that will be acted out or repeated or transferred to another person. Both Roe and his son are thus “invaded” by different kinds of trauma. What remains for both of them is “the deep colour spilled over [fire engines and sailboats] that, by evoking memories they would not name, and which they could not place, held them” (12).

Pye’s strategies in warding off his traumas are significantly different from those of Roe. To examine them, we shall have a look at the conjunction of the metaphors of war and trauma. Lyndsey Stonebridge suggests that Freud’s *Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety*, to some extent at least, “can be read as a metapsychological companion to Green’s text.”<sup>57</sup> She maintains that the signal theory of anxiety helps to interpret the characters’ reaction in *Caught*, inasmuch as the signal, the protective action that warns the ego of the imminent danger (like an air-raid siren) protects it because it prepares the ego for the peril. However, because it is predicated on the repetition of a past trauma, it casts the ego into traumatic anxiety anew and thus devastates its defences.<sup>58</sup> The main difference between Albert Pye and Richard Roe is that in the case of the latter his “dreading forward” (by literary imagination) protects him against trauma, while Pye is left helpless, consumed by his anxiety. One could say that Pye was not so much ruined by his “dreading forward” as by “dreading backwards.” In his mind, the memory of his First World War experiences are related to sexuality, to the “cold, wet, frozen, thawed or warm” ground (40) and, metonymically, to the “first girl he had known” and to the black night illuminated by moonlight (40). Sexuality and war are inextricably connected in his discourse, recalling the formulation of his girlfriend, Prudence: “war, she thought, was sex” (119). But while Roe is able to channel this metaphoric equation of war and sex in a relatively normal way, in the act of “rosy pictorial memory-making,”<sup>59</sup> Pye is not able to treat sex as nostalgic memory. He shifts his memory from the First World War, connected to making love, first to his girlfriend, Prudence, and then to his own sister, engaging himself in incestuous fantasies that, obviously, recall Christopher’s abduction again: “With all her other warmth they [her sister’s hands] set a glow about him just as, in childhood, when, watching the impossible brilliance climb slowly high

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57. Stonebridge, p. 66.

58. Stonebridge, p. 66.

59. Stonebridge, p. 62.

then burst into fired dust so far away, so long ago, over that hill the time his sister put her hand inside his boy's coat because he was cold, to warm his heart" (121).

When Pye imagines his visit to the doctor in the mental asylum, the doctor asks him: "Is there any history in your family, Mr. Pye?" Pye's answer is another question: "'istory, what d'you mean, 'istory?" (86).<sup>60</sup> First he does not understand the full meaning of history, here meant as a particular case history, or a genealogy of madness, his misunderstanding, his difference from the discourse of analysis being marked by his non-standard use of the word "history." Later, however, he himself becomes implicated, engaged in history, in at least two ways. First he is "caught up" in the history of the world wars, and he can only conceive of the Second World War as a repetition of the first one, which is inscribed in the "sex is war" idiom. The war blackout is repeated as the black night of his first sexual experience, lit by the moon. Moonlight, however, proves to be "impartial," "intolerant," and illuminates nothing (163, 165), just as the fog obscures the scene in *Party Going*, rendering "everything unexplained." Moonlight is also linked to history outside, "for the evacuation of Dunkirk was on. In the deadly moonlight brothers were dying fast, and not so far off" (165). The evoked scene is, significantly, both an episode of the failure of military defences in history (at Dunkirk) and the failure of Pye's own defences against traumatic invasions.

The second manner in which Pye is implicated in history is the way he creates a (case-)history for himself. While Roe creates self-deceiving memories, Pye, symbolically speaking, evacuates his forces (cathexes) from the lost object, the girl in the First World War, and then shifts them onto Prudence and then his own sister, who, as in the *fort-da* game, is in the state of "fort," "gone," put safely in a mental asylum. While Roe progresses relatively safely through the metonymic links of lost wife – abducted son – stained glass windows – Blitz, Pye's "progress" comes full circle and closes upon itself in the dead-end of a fantasy of incest. After "realising" that he may have committed incest, a realisation that comes "without any warning" (140), just as the siren goes off "without warning" (79), a recognition that comes too abruptly, he pathologically repeats, recreates the rape scene: "He went into the vast, moonlit night" (162), where he has a "fit of rememberin' back" (166). Moreover, he re-enacts his sister's abduction scene in the street with an unknown boy whom he takes to the station (168–70). Upon getting to know that Pye committed suicide, Roe summarises this simply as "it was sex finished him off" (195). Although he is right in the sense that Pye's tragic fate was brought about by sex as equated to war, the confusion, "the tangled memories"

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60. Again, just as in the episode when Roe imagines his son's abduction, we cannot see Pye actually visiting his sister in the asylum.

that the Blitz made return painfully as repetition involved both Pye and Roe, with different results, in similar traumatic re-enactments. The main difference between the strategies of Roe and Pye, both in a pathological and in a poetical sense, is that Roe's identifications work only in a *metonymical* manner, thereby they are able to channel and control the possibly traumatic effects of the invading past events and "evacuate" his forces. Pye, however, is unable to do that because he *metaphorically* identifies his first sexual experience in the context of war with later occurrences, whose framework is created by motifs of darkness, earth, moonlight, loss and war. In a more general sense, then, Pye's metaphorical and, hence, pathological, "remembering" may also be regarded as a reaction to and the criticism of the high modernist Proustian *mémoire involontaire*, which proved to be non-viable in the late modernist period, especially after the outbreak of the war.

**Antonio Sanna**

## **Are Human Beings Ultimately Ignorant?**

### **Huxleian Preoccupations in**

### **H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds***

This paper analyzes that part of Huxley's theories which denied the absoluteness and certainty of science and compares it to the representation of science given in the fin-de-siècle novels *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. I shall argue that the scientific and the agnostic enterprises aimed at the explanation of knowledge as conducted by Huxley in the last decades of the nineteenth century inexorably led to an admission of ignorance. The same concerns are present in the scientific romances of Wells. In order to affirm this, I shall initially investigate how the scientific journalism that underpins Wells's early fiction shares Huxley's insistence upon the contingency of human knowledge, and then demonstrate how his novels take up these Huxleian preoccupations. This is achieved by means of the representation of the protagonists' accounts as not completely accurate and reliable because they are passionately involved in the events they witness. Moreover, Wells characterizes human knowledge of the external reality as imprecise and not offering any certainty which could guarantee lasting safety and comfort for human beings. Science and its method are finally represented by Wells as offering no definitive and useful knowledge of reality.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the debate over whether knowledge could be complete or was actually limited became central. The faculties of perception were put under analysis in order to establish the limits which prevented the human mind from reaching the "final truth." The study and application of the scientific method as advocated by the scientific naturalists was deemed to be conducive to an improvement of the individual's character, forging it with the discipline of reason, imagination and patient industry, and leading it to a rational, empirical and objective approach to reality. Nevertheless, the results of scientific research and the dissemination of knowledge advocated by the scientific naturalists were contradictory: on the one hand, science was deemed to better human life. According to Thomas Henry Huxley, in fact, science was extremely useful in the very material products it could furnish to the individual in everyday life, in the simple occasions of his daily actions. Huxley argued that practical life was being, and would increas-

ingly come to be in the future, permeated by the ideas and subsequent products of science, in a sort of continual mutual exchange of facilitations between science and industry, because, since their interests were identical, the advances of both would contribute to each other's progress.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the scientific method brought no objective and ultimate knowledge of reality. All of the most brilliant scientists and agnostics of the age, such as John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer, Leslie Stephen and Karl Pearson, confessed that they were unable to furnish any final explanation about the reality surrounding human beings, nor any ultimate solution to the problem of the existence of God. What was asserted were basically "the demonstrated limitations of human intellect, which bounded the thought and knowledge of all people," as Bernard Lightman has argued.<sup>2</sup> Humanity was then condemned to be confined to physical phenomena and natural laws because of its own physicality and its being grounded in temporality. This was explicitly stated by Huxley in the phrase "outside the boundaries of [the province susceptible of clear intellectual comprehension, scientific people] must be content with imagination, with hope, and with ignorance."<sup>3</sup> Huxley argues that the universal laws that could be extrapolated from the order of nature are human explanations of the phenomena, not their actual causes: they are only the human expression of the order in the universe, not the illustration of its first causes.<sup>4</sup> Ontological issues were therefore ignored in favour of a mere re-statement of reality according to formulas and phrases which could help the practical development of each individual's life through the subsequent inventions made by industry, but which could not explain life's origins, its end, nor its scope. As Huxley states, science "takes as its province only that which is susceptible of clear intellectual comprehension."<sup>5</sup> Science being a methodology artificially created by human beings which is based on the rules of inductive and deductive logic, a product of the supremacy of human reason, it deals only with that which is compatible with human intellect. In this respect, therefore, human intellect being limited by its physicality and temporality, science and its method cannot transcend them and, consequently, absolutely certain knowledge cannot be obtained.

Especially in the works published in the 1880s and 1890s, Huxley explicitly insists, in effect, on the fact that the knowledge laboriously acquired about external as

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1. Thomas Henry Huxley, "The Progress of Science 1837–1887," in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1 (London: Appleton, 1898), 42–129, p. 55.

2. Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 135.

3. Thomas Henry Huxley, "The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature," in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 4 (London: Appleton, 1893), 139–163, p. 161.

4. Thomas Henry Huxley, *Science Primers: Introductory* (London: Appleton, 1880), p. 13.

5. Huxley, "The Interpreters," p. 161.

well as mental phenomena can aspire only to a maximum level of probability, because the human faculties involved in such a study are limited. He admits that he is not capable of furnishing any explanation about the conditions of the appearance of life on earth by arguing: "I find no record of the commencement of life, and therefore I am devoid of any means of forming a definite conclusion as to the conditions of its appearance."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, by stating that "the limitations of our faculties are such that we never can be in a position to set bounds to the possibilities of nature," Huxley affirms the insolubility of the forces underlying the phenomena witnessed by humankind.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, according to him, knowledge of what extends beyond the human faculties of observation and experiment is a priori excluded from the subject-matter of the natural sciences. On the other hand, and most importantly, even the phenomena forming part of what can be grasped by human faculties cannot be observed in an "absolutely exact and exhaustive" way.<sup>8</sup> In this respect, the limits of human knowledge prevent final gratification of the intellect: the method of observation of reality is valuable only in terms of approximation to the real nature of things, in terms of probable description of the external appearance of things-in-themselves as they are observed by the individual. Humankind, and men of science as part of it, have no other choice but to adapt to such conditions, to the lack of definitive knowledge.

In his writings on agnosticism too, Huxley repeatedly reaches the conclusion that an agnostic in the end "has no positive knowledge, [but only] . . . more or less probable ground for accepting any given hypothesis about the spiritual world."<sup>9</sup> Knowledge thus seems to be based on probability rather than certainty, and, for this reason, agnosticism is presented not as a creed, but, in the same way as science, as a method. Such a method is based on the single principle of following reason and distrusting everything that is "not demonstrated or demonstrable:" the individual must affirm no truth unless supported by the logically-justifiable certainty offered by evidence.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the scientific and agnostic enterprises aimed at the explanation of knowledge as conducted by Huxley inexorably led to an admission of ignorance, to "a tolerably strong opinion as to the probabilities of

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6. Thomas Henry Huxley, *Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: Appleton, 1870), p. 17.

7. Thomas Henry Huxley, "Possibilities and Impossibilities," in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 5 (London: Appleton, 1894), 192–208, p. 198.

8. Huxley, "The Progress," p. 63.

9. Thomas Henry Huxley, "Agnosticism and Christianity," in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 5 (London: Appleton, 1894), 309–365, pp. 327–328.

10. Thomas Henry Huxley, "Agnosticism," in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 5 (London: Appleton, 1894), 209–262, p. 245.

the case,” not to a final generalisation transcending the single cases or underlying them.<sup>11</sup>

The preoccupation with epistemology and ignorance is central in H. G. Wells’s works as well. Firstly, we should consider that Wells himself was a student of Huxley, whom he defined as “the greatest man I was ever likely to meet,” and whose teachings he described as “three years of illuminating and good scientific work.”<sup>12</sup> Such an encounter with the scientific naturalist definitely formed Wells and his positions on scientific matters, which came to reflect his mentor’s assumptions. In his article “The Scepticism of the Instrument,” Wells clearly affirms that man is “finite and not final, a being of compromises and adaptations.”<sup>13</sup> As he argues, this is primarily caused by the imperfection of the human senses and their limits: “we distinguish between an external reality and the poor sides of it that our senses perceive.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, according to Wells, human reasoning is fallacious because it is often based on the belief in the existence of concepts such as the Absolute and the Infinite that are finally unprovable. Specifically, Wells thinks of what he calls the “Instrument of Thought” as imperfect as the human senses: “Human reason, in the light of what is being advanced, appears as a convenient organic process based on a fundamental happy misconception, and it may . . . take us away from, rather than towards, the absolute truth of things.”<sup>15</sup> An explanation of things-in-themselves cannot be reached by the human mind, a concept which was formulated by Huxley as well.

Wells thus argues that ignorance is the final result of many investigations conducted by the human being both on the external reality and on the human mind itself. In his 1895 article “Bye-Products in Evolution,” for example, he affirms: “with regard to the subtle mechanism of mind, we are even more in the dark than when we deal with the chemical equilibrium.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, man’s confidence in his understanding of the external reality as well as in his capacity to subjugate nature and to evolve towards an improvement of the individual self and of society is questioned by Wells. He does not offer a pleasant picture of the future of humanity and expresses his doubts on the

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11. Huxley, “Agnosticism and Christianity,” p. 311.

12. Respectively: H. G. Wells, “Huxley,” *Royal College of Science Magazine* 13 (April 1901) 209–211, p. 209; and H. G. Wells, “The Scepticism of the Instrument,” eBooks@adelaide <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/wells/hg/w45mu/appendix1.html>> (accessed 26 November 2010).

13. Wells, “The Scepticism of the Instrument.”

14. H. G. Wells, “Intelligence on Mars,” in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 175–178, p. 177.

15. H. G. Wells, “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings*, 21–31, p. 25.

16. H. G. Wells, “Bye-Products in Evolution,” in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings*, 203–205, p. 205.

enduring safety and happiness of humankind. Indeed, in his 1894 essay “The Rate of Change in Species,” he argues:

Man, for instance, is indisputably lord of the world as it is . . . but his capacity for change as a species is, compared with that of a harvest mouse or a green-fly, infinitesimal. He would very probably go before the majority of such slight and flexible creatures. No doubt man is lord of the whole earth of to-day, but the lordship of the future is another matter.<sup>17</sup>

The present state of humanity, the contemporary advancement of knowledge and progress of science are thus seen in a positive way by Wells, but he does not believe with definitive certainty in the continuation of such a path in the future. Wells’s scientific journalism thus apparently praises the present supremacy of the human being over the external world, but, instead of confiding in progress and development, presents the future as uncertain for humanity.

Such epistemological concerns are also reflected in the fin-de-siècle literary works of Wells. Indeed, science is the very foundation of both novels *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* according to different critics of the past decades. *The Time Machine*, for example, has been considered as a narrative which is “invested in evolution” but simultaneously undermines the concept of continual improvement of the species.<sup>18</sup> Apart from its concern with technological advancement (as represented by the aliens’ machines and weapons), *The War of the Worlds* has also been interpreted as reproducing “the perfect nineteenth-century myth of the imaginary war,” or as an “anti-imperial satire” that allegedly offers a “postcolonial” perspective on the culture of the late-Victorian period by depicting a contrary colonization of the British Empire.<sup>19</sup>

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17. H. G. Wells, “The Rate of Change in Species,” in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings*, 128–131, p. 131.

18. Sylvia A. Pamboukian, “What the Traveller Saw: Evolution, Romance and Time-Travel,” in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Steven McLean (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 8–24, p. 8. David C. Smith affirms that Wells’s intention was to put “evolutionary theory into fictional practice”: David C. Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 48. Emily Arder argues, instead, that in *The Time Machine* Wells mainly addresses “the discourse of degeneration”: Emily Arder, “‘Building of the New Age’: Dwellings and the Natural Environment in the Futuristic Fiction of H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson,” in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 114–129, p. 115.

19. Keith Williams, “Alien Gaze: Postcolonial Vision in *The War of the Worlds*,” in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 49–73, respectively pp. 53 and 69. See also Alexander C. Irvine, “‘War’ and the Disease of Imperialism,” in *Flashes of the Fantastic: Selected Essays*

These novels' investment in science is firstly visible when we consider that the protagonists of both tales are described as learned and practical men and, thus, they represent the nineteenth-century intelligentsia that was born out of the scientific milieu. In this way, they are presented as possibly capable of an effective, factual and truthful narration of the events they witness and experience. Nevertheless, they are often portrayed as irrational and not objective, and are therefore also characterized as unreliable narrators, whose testimony is questioned by the other characters of the story and (indirectly) by its reader. In *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller is presented by the narrator as "one of those men who are too clever to be believed" (11).<sup>20</sup> The protagonist is "a master of several sciences" by which he can build the machine capable of travelling through the fourth dimension which is time.<sup>21</sup> However, as Patrick Parrinder has noted, he "often fails to live up to his ideal of scientific detachment."<sup>22</sup> Although he frequently attempts to look at things "in a scientific spirit," (68) his reactions are rarely those of a man of science and "[his] behaviour in moments of crisis is typically hysterical, panic-stricken, negligent."<sup>23</sup> He often lingers on the description of the moments of "hysterical exhilaration," (20) "panic fear" (23) and "anguish of mind" (39) rather than on an effective analysis of the new world around him. He does not hesitate to describe the "kind of madness growing upon [himself]" (20) during the journey through time, the "passion of fear" (38) seizing him when suspecting that the Time Machine has probably been stolen, or his being "oppressed with perplexity and doubt" (55) at the discovery of the existence of the Morlock species. It would seem then that he fails to live up to the improvement of character guaranteed by the study and application of the scientific method as advocated by Huxley, although science is the discipline he appeals to in order to understand the world of the future.

However, the scientific theories elaborated by the Traveller are never based on facts, on the verification by experiment considered by Huxley to be the foundation of

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from *The War of the Worlds Centennial, Nineteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. David Ketterer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 33–41, p. 38.

20. All parenthesized references are to this edition: H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention* (London: Signet Classics, 2007 [1895]).

21. Patrick Parrinder, *Shadow of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), p. 44.

22. Parrinder, *Shadow*, p. 44.

23. Parrinder, *Shadow*, p. 44. See also J.R. Hammond, "Time as a First Novel: Myth and Allegory in Wells's Romance," in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference 'The Time Machine: Past, Present, and Future'*, eds. George Slusser, Patrick Parrinder and Danièle Chatelain (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 3–11.

the scientific and human understanding of reality. As Peter Firchow has pointed out, in fact, “The Traveller’s understanding of the future is solely based on his deductions, which . . . remain mere hypotheses to the very end.”<sup>24</sup> None of his theories is a finally verified and assured certainty. The several hypotheses formulated during the tale about the causes of the Eloi’ and the Morlock’s behaviour and appearance, such as vegetarianism (29) and communism (31), are recognized by the Traveller himself to be “very simple . . . and plausible enough – as most wrong theories are” (36). On another occasion, he admits: “this . . . was my speculation at the time. Later, I was to appreciate how far it fell short of the reality” (32). These phrases seem to recapitulate Huxley’s epistemological thought regarding the fact that natural laws and formulas are but the human explanations of the phenomena registered by the senses which have no actual correspondence with the phenomena themselves.

By the end of the tale, no ultimate knowledge shall be presented then to the Traveller’s circle of listeners or to the reader about the causes of such radical mutations of human beings in the year 802,701 AD. Since there is no proof about such a reality either, we are not able to establish with certainty any part of the Traveller’s tale as true and clearly explained. His are, in the end, human explanations of the witnessed phenomena – explanations which do not reveal the real nature of the external reality, the things-in-themselves, and which, considering the only support of his senses as a guarantee of the facts he reports (reason for which he decides to prove such a reality by going back into that future with a photo-camera), are therefore limited by the insecure capacity of understanding assured by the human body. The scientific method which, according to Huxley, allows us to interpret and deal with daily occurrences “by inductive or deductive reasoning” seems to be applied only to the organization of a daily plan by the protagonist, when he orders in his mind the important things to do in order to feel safe and secure a way out of the Eloi’s world.<sup>25</sup>

Besides, the Traveller himself doubts the truth of his own adventure. When returning to his laboratory, he spends a couple of minutes wondering about the reality of his experience in the future and asks himself: “Did I ever make a Time Machine, or a model of a Time Machine? Or is it all only a dream?” (99) The reader is left to wonder whether it really has been a fantastic journey of the Traveller’s mind rather than of his whole persona. The testimony of the narrative given by the Traveller is therefore severely questioned as merely based on the limited understanding of reality that can be obtained by human beings. This is specifically epitomized by the fact that the Time

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24. Peter Firchow, “H. G. Wells’s *Time Machine*: In Search of Time Future – and Time Past,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 45.2 (Winter 2004) 123–136, p. 127.

25. Thomas Henry Huxley, “Scientific Education: Notes of an After-Dinner Speech,” in *Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews* (London, 1870), 60–79, p. 73.

Machine arrives in the future in front of a gigantic white marble sphinx, a mythological creature associated with riddles and unsolved enigmas.<sup>26</sup> In the Greek myth, the sphinx is a malevolent monstrous hybrid being, who asks “lethal questions” and kills those who cannot give the right answer to her riddle.<sup>27</sup> In *The Time Machine*, the sphinx is described as a sort of silent observer of the Traveller’s actions, which also stimulates his reflections on the journey in the future. Indeed, he reports that “the sightless eyes seemed to watch me; there was the faint shadow of a smile on the lips. . . the full temerity of my voyage came suddenly upon me” (22). He later adds: “[the sphinx] had seemed to watch me all the while with a smile at my astonishment” (27). After the Machine is stolen by the Morlocks, the protagonist is almost convinced that it “seemed to smile in mockery of my dismay” (38). It is the Traveller himself who interprets the inexpressive and silent sphinx as an arbiter of his own actions, and therefore inexplicitly associates his own mission with the insolubility of a riddle. We could interpret this as a metaphorical representation of the veracity of the Traveller’s ineffectual pretensions to advance human knowledge through his invention and journey. This is particularly true if we consider that, in the Greek myth, the answer to such a creature’s famous riddle is “Man.” Therefore, the Traveller is silently confronted by a representation of a being hypothetically reminding him that he is just a man, with all the cognitive limits implied by his nature as a human being.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, an opinion contrary to the possible veracity of the Traveller’s theories and account of the events is expressed by the various components of the circle of his listeners. Filby argues: “It’s against reason . . . you will never convince me;” (5) the Psychologist comments: “of all the wild extravagant theories,” (6) and the Medical man thinks of the disappearance of the Machine’s miniature model as “a trick” (10). The unacceptability of the Traveller’s version of the events is further stated in the second chapter of the novel, when the narrator explicitly states: “at the time none of us quite believed in the Time Machine. . . We distrusted him” (11). The second group of people reunited to listen to the protagonist’s story is equally sceptical about the truth

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26. Jan Bremmer, ed., “Oedipus and the Greek Oedipus Complex,” in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm, 1987), 41–59, pp. 46–47. See also David Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 365.

27. Willis Goth Regier, *The Book of the Sphinx* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 42.

28. David Ketterer affirms: “the presence of the sphinx suggests that, like Oedipus, the Time Traveller must solve a riddle”: quoted in John S. Prince, “The ‘True Riddle of the Sphinx’ in *The Time Machine*,” *Science Fiction Studies* 27:3 (Nov. 2000), 543–546, p. 543. See also Frank Scafella, “The White Sphinx and *The Time Machine*,” *Science Fiction Studies* 8:3 (Nov. 1981), 255–265, p. 255.

of the Traveller's affirmations: the narrator reports that "the Journalist, too, would not believe at any price, and joined the Editor in the easy work of heaping ridicule on the whole thing" (14–15).

In *The War of the Worlds* too, the figure of the narrator is portrayed as possibly unreliable in the accuracy of his presentation of the facts and in the validity of the theories he formulates. In this novel, the narrator is presented as "a professed and recognised writer on philosophical themes," a learned man and curious observer of the extraterrestrial invasion who, however, often reacts hysterically and very emotionally to the events occurring in front of him (150).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as he admits, when the first cylinder opens "ungovernable terror gripped me. I stood petrified and staring," (19) and he is subsequently "overcome with disgust and dread" (20) at the sight of the aliens. Later in the narrative, he is often struck with "a panic terror," (24) "blank astonishment," (44) "a sense of dethronement" (138) and "indescribable horror" (140). The adjectives used by the narrator to describe his own feelings and perceptions (such as "blank" and "indescribable") point to the inability to define, comprehend, accept and rationalize the facts that he witnesses. This is apparently confirmed by the fact that, in the last chapter of the novel, he says: "I cannot but regret . . . how little I am able to contribute to the discussion of the many debatable questions which are still unsettled" (169). With this statement, the narrator explains his actual lack of knowledge and inability to offer any definitive answer and to contribute to the acquisition of new information through his own testimony.<sup>30</sup> This is particularly emphasised by the subsequent affirmation: "I must confess the stress and danger of the time have left an abiding sense of doubt and insecurity in my mind" (171). Doubt and insecurity thus come to form the basis of the narrator's thoughts, almost invalidating his own narrative at large.

Furthermore, the various hypotheses formulated about the nature of the Martians and their technological advances are repeatedly revealed as wrong. The main difference, however, with the theories elaborated by the Time Traveller consists in the fact that, in this case, the formulation of hypotheses is made by the whole population of England. An example is the idea that the gravitational difficulty would have forced the Martians into their pit, a theory which is immediately denied by the following assault and invasion of the aliens (30). In the same respect, the information diffused by the various periodicals continually referred to during the tale and constituting the most

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29. All parenthesized references are to this edition: H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: Everyman, 1993 [1898]).

30. According to Parrinder, this could be due to the fact that he is "a traumatized survivor . . . demoralized and disoriented by his experiences" (Patrick Parrinder, "'God's Ministers'? Reinterpreting the Martian Invasion in *The War of the Worlds*," in *Flashes of the Fantastic*, 9–24, p. 11).

important source of knowledge for the whole population of England is depicted as approximate, late, imprecise and conjectural. The narrator reports that “the morning papers on Saturday contained, in addition to lengthy special articles on the planet Mars, on life in the planets, and so forth, a brief and vaguely worded telegram” (67). This news misreads the murder of the first humans and deludes the readers of the fact that the Martians would not have left their pit. The telegram which should inform the English people about facts close to them is given secondary importance and is not properly commented upon or elaborated. Primacy is instead given to the fanciful paper commenting on life on Mars as if it was proven knowledge and more useful information. Furthermore, by specifying that “the majority of people in London do not read Sunday papers” and are, for this reason, ignorant about the Martians until too late could mean that the tragic end of the metropolis is partly due to the lack of interest in knowledge of its population (68). The information held by the British people who are later forced to run through the countryside and desperately fly from London is based on such fragmented knowledge. All the knowledge they have about the Martians assumes the form of rumours, of conjectural reports that are subjectively interpreted.

Not only is the narrators’ knowledge of external reality partial and the reliability of their accounts compromised, but the representation of science itself given by Wells in these two works is negative. Since the Time Traveller has spent so many years trying to build a machine capable of travelling into a future he is then not able to understand or prove, since the Martians can cripple the nineteenth-century confidence in science and technology as sources of human power and safety (as we shall see later in detail), science is shown as almost useless for the individual and as not granting him/her the real power derived from certain and definitive knowledge. Such a position is initially expressed explicitly in the 1891 journalistic essay “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” where Wells compares science to

a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room . . . and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated – darkness still.<sup>31</sup>

Science is pictured as offering very little help for the human comprehension and control over the external world. The understanding of external reality is presented as very limited and actually only circumscribed to the human being. Darkness is what

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31. Wells, “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” pp. 30–31.

really surrounds humanity at present. An exemplary instance of this in Wells's literary fiction could be the insistence, throughout *The Time Machine*, on the Eloi's verbally-unexpressed terror of darkness and particularly on the importance of matches for the main character (47). Matches help the protagonist to win the admiration of the Eloi and fight off the Morlocks as much as, on the other hand, they cause him to burn an entire forest and lose his only companion, Weena, in the fire. We could also specifically refer to the passage in which the Time Traveller descends into one of the wells in order to explore the underground domain of the Morlocks. The matches that he uses in order to illuminate his way through the dark corridors could be seen as the light of science helping him to discover such a place as well as helping him to defeat his adversaries. However, as Parrinder has suggested, "it is the extent of darkness that terrifies."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the Time Traveller is not able to understand the complex machineries present in the underground – which he once calls "the big unmeaning shapes" (59) – and their function or to have a clear vision of the vast arched cavern "stretch[ing] into utter darkness beyond the range of [his] light" (58). Nor can he understand or communicate with the inhabitants of such a place: it is darkness itself which makes him realize the extent of his ignorance. In fact, he admits: "the sudden realisation of my ignorance of their ways of thinking and doing came home to me very vividly in the darkness" (59–60). We could even read the fact that the Morlocks fly "incontinently, vanishing into dark gutters and tunnels" at the sight of the lit match as their will not to be known (58). It is significant, in this respect, to note that Wells refers to a match as very partially illuminating the world around it, not around the human being, but merely the space around the match. In a certain way, we could then affirm that science – in this specific case, the matches as the only technology available to the Time Traveller – does not help Wells's character to understand the technological advances represented by the ventilation shafts and the constantly cleaned and oiled machines present in the underground chamber or the evolutionary progress embodied in the Morlocks themselves.

Humans are thus clearly depicted by Wells as ignorant about the surrounding phenomena. In *The War of the Worlds*, the narrator admits his own cognitive limits when affirming "I did not consider these points at the time, and so my reasoning was dead against the chances of the invaders" (30). Human intellectual faculties are presented as prejudiced and useless. This is the case of the soldiers going to the front, for example, who "didn't know anything" and are sent to the battlefield with no idea about the incoming enemy (37). Similarly, the character of the curate is much preoccupied with the questions "What does it mean? . . . What do these things mean?" (64) and thinks of the Martians as "God's ministers" (66). He interprets their arrival as "the

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32. Parrinder, *Shadow*, p. 34.

great and terrible day of the Lord” – certainly, the most mistaken hypothesis of all those formulated in the tale (64). The curate is a man of faith who completely loses his belief in the salvation of the soul as much as he loses “all vestiges of reason and forethought” (128). This renders the picture of humanity even darker in that, since all individuals could be slaughtered by the aliens and none can create any means to stop them, not even the refuge of faith is granted for humans who are therefore left to strive in ignorance. This is epitomized by the fact that human beings have no part at all in the defeat of the Martians, who are “slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared; . . . slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, had put on this earth” (161). Certainly, it is not thanks to the deployment of the artillery that humans are victorious in the end. Indeed, the technology employed by the soldiers defending London is shown as utterly useless against the fire power of the inimical intruders. The advances made by industry thanks to the development of science, the mutual exchange of products advocated and wished by Huxley are depicted as leading to no practical results: only one tripod out of at least six is destroyed by the human army. The second tripod which is brought down is immediately rescued by its companions and quickly repaired. The earthly defences lined up in Richmond are not even able to reply to the fire of the Martians and are slaughtered by the Black Smoke or even completely ignored by the advancing enemy.

Knowledge is presented as unattainable in the present but also as unachievable in the future. This is particularly true if we consider that both tales by Wells are told some years after the fictional occurrences narrated. In *The Time Machine*, the protagonist’s friends depicted in the framing section remain ignorant about both of the Traveller’s journeys. On the one hand, they do not believe in his visit to the Eloi’s world and even laugh about it, thinking that it could be an entertaining fictional story (98). The narrator of the frame section admits: “For my own part I was unable to come to a conclusion. The story was so fantastic and incredible, the telling so credible and sober” (100). He thinks of the story as a fictional tale, a work of literature rather than a scientific statement or report. On the other hand, both the narrator and the circle of listeners have no knowledge about the Traveller’s end. The only knowledge they possess is that “he has never returned” (101). The very epilogue is structured through a series of questions as to the destination of the Traveller’s last journey. However, this is done with a negative note on humankind’s progress. The narrator does not accept that his contemporary “days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man’s culminating time” and refuses to admit that the apex of evolution and technological advancement has already been reached (102). He is not willing to admit that ahead lies only the decline and degeneration of human beings. The narrator of *The Time Machine* also states: “to me the future is still black and blank – is a vast

ignorance,” precisely as Huxley argues in his theories (102–3).<sup>33</sup> The thought of the scientific naturalist is almost explicitly restated in the epilogue of this novel by Wells. The blankness of the future invoked by the narrator seems to represent the impossibility for the individual to know reality because of his/her cognitive limits, as stated by Huxley. Of course, we could think again of the light of science as illuminating such a black future, although nothing certain can be affirmed at present by the narrator, as was the case of the scientific naturalists and agnostics.

Ignorance is a repetitive theme of *The War of the Worlds* too. This is stated at the very beginning of the tale, when the narrator affirms:

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that . . . as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. (5)

From the first sentence of the novel, human beings are presented as overconfident in their incomplete knowledge and partial control over external reality, and as literally ignorant or mindless about major concerns. They are compared to the lowest creatures present on the planet and, in a curious reversal of roles, are positioned at the level of an object of study and examination. Science is thus not presented as contributing to the acquisition of a definitive and useful knowledge, as granting the humans a comforting security from the achievements hitherto obtained. This is confirmed by the fact that the narrator defines the present preoccupations of human beings as “petty concerns” (9). Subsequently, he specifies that “few of the common people in England had anything but the vaguest astronomical ideas in those days” and “‘Extraterrestrial’ had no meaning for most of the onlookers,” thus completing the picture of human beings as interested only in their private and actually unimportant affairs (5).

Later in the narrative, all the speculations made by humans during the invasion are finally unproven and remain mere hypotheses. The narrator affirms that “it is still a matter of wonder how the Martians are able to slay men so swiftly and so silently” and that “no one has absolutely proved” the details of the Heat Ray (9). In the same respect, he also specifies that “we are still entirely ignorant of the nature” of the deadly Black Smoke (81). In this way, the invasion carried out by the biologically superior alien creatures, though finally guaranteeing the discovery of the “Secret of Flying,”

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33. Pamboukian argues that the “future remains unclear and mysterious because of the limited power of humanity to comprehend evolutionary change” (Pamboukian “What the Traveller Saw,” p. 20).

brings about no knowledge or certainty about the real nature of the hostile intruders or of their technological advances (166). This could be confirmed by the fact that the story's narrator explicitly compares human reasoning to Martian intelligence by wondering: "Did they grasp that we in our millions were organised, disciplined, working together?" (79) He considers human beings as powerless as ants when compared to the aliens. Specifically, Martians are described as "huge round bodies—or, rather, heads—about four feet in diameter" that are supported by sixteen slender tentacles (118).<sup>34</sup> The narrator suggests that their bodies are principally constituted by the brain and, therefore, can utilize reasoning better than human beings can. This theory is further elaborated later, when he states: "Without the body the brain would, of course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the emotional substratum of the human being" (121). The technological and organizational advantage of the aliens could therefore be seen as due to their superior intellectual faculties and their not being limited by human feelings and emotions. The supremacy of human intellectual faculties is thus severely questioned also on a biological level, because emotions are considered as hampering the evolution of the individual. We could even argue that this is indirectly epitomized by the very unscientific and emotional reactions experienced by both the narrator of this novel and the Time Traveller, as we saw before.

In this respect, in the accounts of both Huxley and Wells, human beings are finally considered as ignorant in matters of ultimate knowledge of external reality. If we refer to Shearer West's argument that the "fin de siècle" meant "a belief on the part of the literate and voluble bourgeois that the end of the century would bring with it decay, decline and ultimate disaster" it is interesting to note, indeed, that Wells represents human beings as epistemologically decadent creatures.<sup>35</sup> This is exemplified by the depiction of the two races of the future representing the descendants of contemporary human beings. The beautiful but frail Eloi are "exquisite creatures" (25). However, the Traveller soon realizes their childlike intellectual level, their indolent natures and lack "of interest" (30) and "of intelligence" (35). He is particularly disappointed by the delusion of his own assumption that the people of the distant future "would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything" (26). He then attempts to explain such a devolution as the result of a condition of perfect comfort and security which was possibly due to the scientific advances and subsequent subjugation of nature achieved by the previous generations of humans. After achieving what is revealed to be a useless knowledge of the natural world, humanity is destined to a condition in which obtaining knowledge is no longer considered as an important accomplishment

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34. Liz Hedgecock interprets the Martians as representing "hyper-evolved parodies" of human beings. Quoted in Williams, "Alien Gaze," p. 60.

35. Shearer West, *Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), p. 93.

or stimulus. The “humanity upon the wane” (33) represented by the Eloi could then be read as characterized by epistemological decay. The Traveller admits this when saying that “the dream of the human intellect . . . has committed suicide” (86).

Similarly, the Morlocks are pictured as “obscene, nocturnal Thing[s],” (50–51) “filthily cold at the touch” (55) and “nauseatingly inhuman” (60). They instinctively provoke loathing and shrinking in the protagonist and are finally revealed to be voracious cannibal beings intent on preying upon the naïve and disorganized Eloi. They make several attempts on the protagonist’s life, physically fight against him and finally manage to kidnap (and, allegedly, murder) Weena in spite of the Traveller’s several attempts to prevent it. They have therefore lost any vestige of morality or interest in the welfare of the entire community and, similarly to the human beings pictured at the beginning of *The War of the Worlds*, they care only about the satisfaction of their appetites and needs, about the execution of their daily “little affairs” (5).

Lack of knowledge on the part of human beings could be also exemplified by the very fact that, when visiting the palace of green porcelain, the decaying museum of technology and science, the Time Traveller finds no record of his own invention (70–75). This definitely implies that his creation was never constructed again and that the knowledge that could have been obtained through it has not been available to the future generations. The invention of the Time Machine in the nineteenth century has offered no help or benefit to the Traveller’s contemporaries: he has created a machine which could not be appreciated or utilized by his people. In a very unscientific way, his own knowledge of such an invention has therefore not been distributed to the public.

The metaphorical darkness of human ignorance is finally expressed by the Traveller, when he journeys more than thirty million years ahead in the future until the earth becomes a cold, silent and almost dead planet.<sup>36</sup> As he observes the landscape around himself, the protagonist witnesses the beginning of a solar eclipse:

the darkness grew apace. . . . In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. . . . A horror of this great darkness came on me. . . . I shivered, and a deadly nausea seized me. (94–5)

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36. This chapter has been repeatedly interpreted as referring to the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the physicists’ theories of the dissipation of energy, which allegedly revealed that the energy of the sun was finite and thus accentuated contemporary fears of decline and entropy. According to Crossley, for example, Wells here “does not simply gloss the Second Law of Thermodynamics, [but] orchestrates it.” See Robert Crossley, “Taking It as a Story: The Beautiful Lie of *The Time Machine*,” in *H. G. Wells’s Perennial Time Machine*, 12–26, p. 24. See also Gillian Beer, ed., “The Death of the Sun: Victorian Solar Physics and Solar Myth,” in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 219–41.

As in the case of the descent into the Morlocks' underground realm, darkness terrifies the Traveller: he experiences the reactions typical of the characters of a Gothic tale, being horrified by the unknown hidden in (and represented by) the darkness. Most importantly, the Traveller does not advance any clear explanations for the earth's fate: he contemplates the annihilation of human civilization and life, but merely lingers on a description of his physical sense of oppression and feelings of revulsion and fear. The only comment uttered by the Traveller on such a future is: "I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world" (93). Solitude, silence and death: these are the defining characteristics of the protagonist's last journey into "the mystery of the earth's fate" (93). As in *The War of the Worlds*, human testimony of the facts is reduced to a simple description of the events and is focused upon the human and subjective impression of them, with no actual scientific analysis or verified explanation clarifying them with certainty.

In this way, we could say that, in the interpretation of Huxley and Wells, it is the human lack of ultimate knowledge itself which is seen as the possible cause of disasters. In *The Time Machine*, the acquisition of knowledge is even disregarded or ignored by the representatives of the future evolutionary stages of humankind. The possible attainment of knowledge in the near future does not bring about any lasting benefits for the human species. Similarly, the catastrophic invasion carried out by the aliens in *The War of the Worlds* seems to be partly favoured by the fact that human beings are not able to acquire any precious and useful knowledge about the Martians. This is explicitly stated by the narrator at the very beginning of the tale when affirming that "the world went in ignorance of one of the gravest dangers that ever threatened the human race" (7). These texts highlight how scientific discovery forces us to confront the limits of human knowledge. Indeed, human beings are shown by Wells as ignorant about the real nature of the events they witness, with no effective help from the scientific theories and instruments in their possession. In both the theoretical analysis offered by Huxley and the literary representation given by Wells, late-nineteenth-century science and its method of analysis bring no certain help to the evolution of humankind and the progress of society; nor, most importantly, they do not offer any advancement to human epistemological abilities, to a definite knowledge of the world. Neither Wells nor Huxley are completely "negative" about science, but they both acknowledge its role in our realisation of the limits of human knowledge.

**Samara Anne Cahill**

## **An Untidy Finish**

### ***Atonement* as Political Gothic**

In the controversial epilogue of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), Briony Tallis informs the reader that she has "always liked to make a tidy finish." The statement is formally ironic because it renders the conclusion of *Atonement* untidy: only in the epilogue do readers learn that Briony, a character within the narrative, also constructed the narrative. Her guilty consciousness, haunted by the ghosts of the past, the villains of the present, and the dementia that awaits her in the near future, is the filter through which readers have experienced the story of the love affair between Briony's sister, Cecilia, and Cecilia's lover, Robbie Turner. An exploration of the ethical crafting of narrative – both fictional and historical (that is, ostensibly "non-fictional") – *Atonement* formally mimics the comforting conventions of both religious ritual and realist description in order to suggest that "reality" is much more accurately apprehended (and represented) by a gothic, rather than a realist, sensibility.

Set in England in the years immediately before and during World War II, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) charts the thwarted romance of cross-class lovers, Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Turner, the son of the Tallis family's charwoman, and the recipient of a university education financed by Cecilia's father. Yet the novel is more centrally concerned with the ethical representation of reality through fiction. The person who best embodies how fiction can affect (and effect) reality is Cecilia's younger sister, Briony, who sends Robbie to jail based on a story she has created: the false accusation that Robbie raped Lola, Briony's cousin. Further, after three lengthy segments detailing the trajectory of Cecilia's and Robbie's love affair (starting in 1935 and continuing during World War II) and Briony's attempt to atone for the harm she caused them, readers learn in the coda (titled "London, 1999") that Briony has narrated the preceding novel – all that readers know, or think they know, of Cecilia and Robbie has been filtered through Briony's guilty consciousness. Cecilia and Robbie do not survive to love and to live happily ever after. They remain separated throughout the war (except for one brief encounter) and they die apart – Robbie at Dunkirk, Cecilia in London.

Several scholars have ably examined Briony's manipulation of the narrative conventions of the realist novel, but none of them has so far focused on the peculiar recurrence of religious symbolism in the novel, despite the religious resonance of

the title.<sup>1</sup> I contend that the references to repetitive religious ritual – explicit mentions of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as well as the practices of atonement, praying the rosary, making the sign of the cross, and genuflecting in church; structural allusions to the Stations of the Cross, pilgrimage, and the Passion of Jesus Christ – are significant because they ultimately underscore the damage caused by a too ready and unthinking reliance upon formal, predictable structure. Furthermore, the specifically Roman Catholic associations of *Atonement*'s religious allusions hint at the novel's gothic allegiances, for gothic novels often rely on Roman Catholic stereotypes – villainous figures of corrupt, absolutist religious authority such as Schedoni in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) or Ambrosio in *The Monk* (1795) – to propel their narratives of persecuted innocents. Yet the Roman Catholic characters in *Atonement* (Betty the maid; the working-class family sheltered at the Tallis household during the war) are victims of the class hierarchy just as much as Cecilia and Robbie are. There are no easy, tidy symmetries in *Atonement*; at least, no symmetries that should be trusted. "Reality" is unjust, disorderly, and nightmarish – any attempt to fit it onto a procrustean bed of poetic justice will fall short of actual justice. Fiction ought to reflect the monstrosity of reality and a gothic sensibility may be more critically aware than a "realist" one.

This is why Briony's "atonement" for the crime of falsely accusing Robbie – her rewriting of the story of Cecilia's and Robbie's love – ultimately falls short, for, as the elderly Briony informs us in the novel's coda, as a storyteller (and a famous novelist) she has "always liked to make a tidy finish" (353).<sup>2</sup> Taken as a whole – the novel written by Briony and the confessional coda that complicates it – *Atonement* does *not* make a tidy finish. Briony reveals Cecilia and Robbie, retrospectively, to be phantoms – the fantasies of Briony's guilty consciousness. In other words, readers are meant to endure the pain, as Briony (facing dementia and death) no longer can,

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1. Particularly insightful have been the analyses of Brian Finney and Kathleen D'Angelo, as I will discuss below; however, Alistair Cormack's position that classical realism is *not* overturned in *Atonement* is worth noting. Cormack argues that rather "than belonging to the uncertain postmodern era, *Atonement* belongs to a world in which Enlightenment thinking, far from being in crisis, is confident enough to chastise fiction and its fripperies: an identifiable real world lies beneath, and casts a critical eye on, the fictional surface created by the novel's narrator" (Alistair Cormack, "Postmodernism and the Ethics of Fiction in *Atonement*," in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sebastian Groes [London: Continuum, 2009], 70–82, p. 78). I must disagree. "Enlightenment thinking" (by which I take Cormack to mean an ideological privileging of rationality, realism, and probability) is laid out in *Atonement*'s epigraph only to be refuted by the novel in its entirety.

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Vintage Books, 2002).

of an untidy finish. In the epilogue Briony raises the question of who an author can turn to for forgiveness in a world in which the author is God. She concludes that there is “no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists” (371). *Atonement*, therefore, while not a religious novel, is a novel about the individual’s ethical relationship to creation, history, fiction, and the ritual through which we construct meaning.

*Atonement*’s allusions to religious ritual (such as praying the rosary, partaking of communion, going on a pilgrimage) function alongside its negotiation of formal structures familiar to readers of the canonical novels *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*. I conclude that McEwan invokes familiar narrative structures in order to “mash” them up, challenging the readers’ comfort and inciting them to a greater tragic awareness of the horrific gothic dimensions of everyday life. In order to make that case, however, I must first outline the ethical import of McEwan’s narrative sleight of hand by setting up the thematic and formal significance of *Atonement*’s epigraph.

This epigraph is taken from the famous passage in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818) in which Henry Tilney confronts Catherine Morland, a naïve reader of gothic novels, with the damage that her reading of “reality” in terms of the conventions of gothic novels has done. Tilney sternly reprimands Catherine,

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open?<sup>3</sup>

For Tilney, the real world – at least, the real “England” – is nothing like the nightmare world found in gothic novels in which evil monks and other sinister figures orchestrate elaborate, improbable rituals of emotional torture for doomed innocents amidst imposing architectural monstrosities, dramatic weather patterns, lurking shadows, and bloody evidence of foul deeds. Catherine – who has anticipat-

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3. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Susan Fraiman (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 136.

ed experiencing some or all of these conventions in Henry's home of Northanger Abbey – runs off in tears of shame, clearly convinced of the truth of Tilney's statement. One might, following the epigraph, expect to encounter in *Atonement* the narrative of a young woman learning the perils of using fictional conventions to interpret real life experience.

Predictably, *Atonement* opens with thirteen-year-old writer Briony Tallis feverishly preparing for the rehearsal of her play *The Trials of Arabella*. Over the course of the next day Briony will encounter and misread a consensual sexual act, a rape, and an obscene letter. The narrative she crafts from these misreadings will send an innocent man to jail. Briony's "atonement" will be her attempt to use narrative to make amends for the suffering she has caused. In other words, the thematic relevance of the epigraph seems perfectly clear: just as Catherine Morland incorrectly assumed that Henry's father, General Tilney, had murdered his wife (as an aloof figure of patriarchal authority might be expected to do in a gothic novel), so Briony assumes that because Robbie Turner engaged in a consensual sexual act with her sister, Cecilia, so he must also be the rapist of her cousin, Lola. The "truth was in the symmetry," as Briony believes (169). Yet the truth is never clear or symmetrical in *Atonement* and neither, I argue, is the epigraph. Rather, with the title of his novel (*Atonement*) and the epigraph (a key passage from *Northanger Abbey*), McEwan has invoked two systems of belief – institutional religion and realist prose fiction – that depend for their meaning on communally agreed upon conventions. *Atonement* indicates that these conventional structures must be encountered anew for the sake of the intersubjective experience of both "real" life and fiction.<sup>4</sup> McEwan does this not simply by using *Atonement's* infamous coda ("London, 1999") to alter the diegetic level of the preceding narrative (Briony reveals herself to be both character and "author" of the narrative); the coda alters the diegetic level of the epigraph, too.

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4. By "communally agreed upon conventions" I mean the repetitive, tradition-oriented nature of religious ritual (particularly in Roman Catholic practice because that church bases its authority on the historical continuity of the Pope's direct succession from the apostles of Christ and because several distinctly Roman Catholic practices are mentioned in *Atonement*) and the "formal realism" of prose fiction which is frequently (though problematically) associated with the genre of the novel. As Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan describe it, formal realism is "a set of procedures through which the novel specifies the setting, the time, and the individuality of the events and personalities that it imagines." Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan, *Making the Novel: Fiction and Society in Britain, 1660–1789* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4. Emphasis mine. *Making the Novel* provides a particularly lucid overview of the peculiar blend of utility and inadequacy that "formal realism" offers for studies of the novel. Formal realism is, significantly, the "pointillist approach to verisimilitude, the correction of detail that cumulatively gives such satisfaction" that Briony as a novelist celebrates (359).

McEwan is contradicting the fictional Henry Tilney's description of "reality." Paradoxically, this circling back to the epigraph prevents *Atonement* from ever having the "tidy finish" its fictional author, Briony Tallis, always wanted. *Atonement* is not a postmodern novel; it is a twenty-first century political subgenre of the gothic – a genre devoted to that most asymmetrical, distorted, and nightmarish of realities: monstrous institutional authority. The shared subtext of *Atonement* and *Northanger Abbey* implicates history, genre, and reading practices in the crafting of political "reality."

*Northanger Abbey* is unusual among Austen's novels for at least two reasons. First, it is the novel in which she defends the community of novelists as "an injured body" (22). In fact, Austen's narrator delivers a rousing manifesto in which she concludes that in a novel "the greatest powers of the mind are displayed . . . the most thorough knowledge of human nature" (23). In other words, both *Northanger Abbey* and *Atonement* (signaled by the epigraph) are meditations on the value of fiction for the human community. They can both be interpreted according to Adam Zachary Newton's important argument in *Narrative Ethics* that fiction is concerned with the ethics of intersubjectivity. Newton argues that there is an inbuilt ethics of narrative, that narratives – especially ones that, like *Atonement*, are about the act of storytelling – establish an intersubjectivity between the isolated reader and the narrative he or she is encountering. Newton is clear that by "narrative ethics" he does not mean "moral paraphrases"; rather, "narrative ethics" entails the recognition that in encountering a text in its full "particularity" the reader necessarily becomes responsible to it.<sup>5</sup> There is "a reciprocity between life and fiction" even though they are not identical to each other.<sup>6</sup>

Newton's interpretive framework coincides with Margaret Doody's conclusion in her monumental *The True Story of the Novel* that our "sense of 'being alive' is not attained through a series of imagined contacts with things, but through a myth that makes sense of things, sensation and desire, together. This myth is connective. . . . The Novel through the generosity of 'character' enables us to enter."<sup>7</sup> The novel, in other words, is ethical, intersubjective, connective, and it is all of these things because it invites anyone who wishes to enter into a realm of constructed meaning. That meaning has a relation to "reality" even if it is not a strictly mimetic representation of the world beyond the page. Myth, like the two institutions McEwan invokes in *Atonement* – institutional Christianity and realist fiction – enables the experience

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5. Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 33, 30.

6. Newton, p. 8.

7. Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 479.

of a “reality” that is not available to the senses: the realm of belief, faith, fantasy, hope, dreams as well as nightmares, and imagination. Perhaps these are all enabling fictions. Perhaps.

Second, *Northanger Abbey* is Austen’s most political novel. Several scholars have pointed out that Henry Tilney ignores the unrest of Austen’s contemporary England in his defense of reality against the irrationality of gothic representation. Most prominently Robert Hopkins has argued that *Northanger Abbey* addresses the “nightmarish political world of the 1790s and very early 1800s” (including the effects of enclosure on the rural poor and, according to Walton Litz, whom Hopkins cites, the Gordon Riots).<sup>8</sup> Further, Claudia Johnson argues that “the gothic is in fact the inside out of the ordinary . . . *Northanger Abbey* does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways.”<sup>9</sup> So, too, does *Atonement*.

Tilney’s rejection of gothic conventions as a guide to interpreting “reality” hinges on an invocation of what is “probable” and a description of the clearly structured, civilized society of England. McEwan uses the conventional structures of religious ritual and narrative form to turn “reality” inside out. “London” in “1999” is a nightmare world of ghosts, unavenged corpses, victorious villainy, and a systemically abusive network of institutions. The “gothic” – asymmetrical, improbable, violent, unjust, a world in which innocence languishes while villainy flourishes – is the “real.”

The tidy forces of rationality and civilization so insisted upon in *Atonement*’s epigraph seem, by the end of the coda, to be in the thrall of the evil Lord and Lady Marshall. *Atonement* has been characterized as a postmodern novel masquerading as a realist novel<sup>10</sup>; but in fact McEwan has created a novel much more aligned with the aesthetics and sensibility of the gothic, a genre characterized by everything that seems antithetical to the Enlightenment appreciation of order, harmony, symmetry, reason, probability. Moreover, as Margaret Doody points out,

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8. Robert Hopkins, “General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*,” *Philological Quarterly* 57.2 (Spring 1978) 214–24. Excerpted in *Northanger Abbey*, Norton Critical Edition, 294–302, p. 301.

9. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 28–29, 32–48. Excerpted in *Northanger Abbey*, Norton Critical Edition, 306–325, p. 310.

10. Brian Finney, who argues that *Atonement* is “a work of fiction that is from beginning to end concerned with the making of fiction,” positions himself against the “minority of reviewers” who, he asserts, “[I]ulled by the long Part One . . . into the security associated with the classic realist novel . . . dismisses the coda as an instance of postmodern gimmickry.” Brian Finney, “Briony’s Stand against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27.3 (Winter 2004) 68–82, p. 70.

all-or-nothing Realism cuts out fantasy and experiment, and severely limits certain forms of psychic and social questioning. . . . It is noticeable that the eighteenth century, the first in which the Novel is apparently cramped into domesticity . . . also invents the “Gothic” novel, a momentous invention first wrought by women and homosexuals who could not be happy with the conceptual “reality” on which domesticated Realism was founded.<sup>11</sup>

The gothic – from Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) through Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) to Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) – presents reality as often frightening, overwhelming, dark, uncertain, and not structured by the comforting symmetry of poetic justice by which virtue is rewarded and vice punished. It is my contention that McEwan, like the eighteenth-century authors described by Doody, uses ostensibly comforting structures (religious ritual; literary conventions) to underscore that *no one* ought to be satisfied with the “reality” upon which “all-or-nothing Realism” is supposedly based. McEwan’s negotiation of the effects of form is further indicated by his intertextual use of two highly influential pre-gothic eighteenth-century novels – Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747/8) and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) in the first part of *Atonement*.<sup>12</sup> McEwan, in other words, places *Atonement* in conversation with two of the most canonical eighteenth-century novels, thereby commenting on the formation of the novel as a genre and challenging the genre’s mimetic relationship to the reality that it ostensibly represents. *Atonement* presents a “reality” that is just as nightmarish as the most excessive gothic novel.

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Both social and literary history feature prominently in *Atonement*. Brian Finney, for instance, has argued that McEwan’s “enduring concern with the act of narration in *Atonement* surfaces . . . in his frequent use of intertextuality.”<sup>13</sup> While other critics have dwelt on the frequency of *Atonement*’s intertextuality, they have not – with the exception of Elke D’Hoker’s analysis of *Atonement* in terms of the *secularized* confessional genre – dwelt on the possibility of seeing religious works as intertexts in McEwan’s novel.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly puzzling given not only the religious

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11. Doody, p. 294.

12. By “pre-gothic” I mean published prior to the publication of what is taken to be the first gothic novel: Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

13. Finney, p. 72.

14. Elke D’Hoker, “Confession and Atonement in Contemporary Fiction: J. M. Coetzee, John Banville, and Ian McEwan,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 48.1 (2006) 31–43, p. 37.

inflection of *Atonement's* title, but also given the scholarly attention to the resonances between *Atonement* and its intertext *Clarissa* (a novel based on a “religious plan” in which the villain, Robert Lovelace, famously dies declaring, “LET THIS EXPI-ATE”).<sup>15</sup> I will argue that in using these religious references McEwan is certainly concerned with the ethics of reading, as Kathleen D’Angelo has persuasively argued, but that he is particularly demonstrating the ethical imperative to question the comfort offered by familiar structures on *and* off the page.<sup>16</sup> *Atonement* is a call to encounter narratives in their full particularity.

### Trinities

*Atonement* is, in part, a novel about “literary memory.”<sup>17</sup> D’Angelo situates *Atonement* in relation to the narrative techniques of the eighteenth-century novels *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*, and, thematically, to Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752), a novel about the real-life consequences of bad reading that is itself intertextually linked with perhaps the first modern European novel, the humane satire on reading practices, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605; second part, 1615). Jocelyn Harris sees *Atonement* as a “re-visioning” of *Clarissa* with an alternate ending provided.<sup>18</sup> Building on D’Angelo’s argument in reading *Atonement* in terms of *Clarissa* and its contemporary text *Tom Jones*, I will show that McEwan engages contrasting narrative structures familiar to readers of classic novels – tragic epistolarity in Richardson’s case, comic architectonics in Fielding’s – to challenge

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15. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross, Penguin Classics edition (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 1495, 1488.

16. Kathleen D’Angelo, “‘To Make a Novel’: The Construction of a Critical Readership in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” *Studies in the Novel*, 41.1 (Spring 2009) 88–105.

17. Pilar Hidalgo, “Memory and Storytelling in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 46.2 (2005) 82–91. p. 86. Hidalgo has also pointed out “the subtle deployment in part 1 of narrative forms developed by the English novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (p.85). Hermione Lee argues, “all through, historical layers of English fiction are invoked – and rewritten.” Hermione Lee, “If your memories serve you well,” *The Observer* (23 September 2001) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/sep/23/fiction.bookerprize2001>> (22 June 2011). As mentioned above, Elke D’Hoker has considered it in relation to the literary genre of the confession. Geoff Dyer has described it as “creatively extending and hauling a defining part of the British literary tradition up to and into the 21st century.” Geoff Dyer, “Who’s afraid of influence?” *The Guardian* (22 September 2001), <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/sep/22/fiction.ianmcewan>> (22 June 2011).

18. Jocelyn Harris, “Clarissa Lives! Reading Richardson through Rewritings,” in *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, edited by Lisa Zunshine and Jocelyn Harris (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006), 140–146, p. 140.

the reader's investment in the comfort of structure. Primarily, McEwan does this by manipulating the reader's expectations in a way comparable to Clarissa's manipulation of her protean, mercurial rapist, Robert Lovelace, a man committed to the act of transmuting tragedy into comedy. *Atonement* may not, as *Clarissa* does, have a "religious plan," but it does, like the earlier novel, interrogate the failure of its contemporary society to encounter suffering adequately.

In Part 1 of *Atonement*, we are introduced to the future lovers, Cecilia and Robbie, during an interchange about their shared university reading material:

"How's *Clarissa*?" [asks Robbie]

"Boring." [replies Cecilia]

"We mustn't say so."

"I wish she'd get on with it."

"She does. And it gets better."

(25)

The interchange presumably refers to the notorious prolixity of Samuel Richardson's monumental epistolary novel, a prolixity produced by the author's subordination of plot to sophisticated representations of psychological response. The eponymous heroine of *Clarissa* doesn't escape from her family's house, Harlowe Place, until the fourth volume of the novel (as published in its first edition). Furthermore, her lengthy house arrest precedes the central drama of the prolonged sexual power play between Clarissa and Robert Lovelace that results in her rape and death. Apart from the intertextual resonance of mismatched lovers, both novels are concerned with tradition, social hierarchy, and property (Harlowe Place and the Tallis estate); with sex and trauma; and with the power of the letter – it is Robbie's accidentally obscene letter to Cecilia that Briony uses to support her accusation that he raped Lola.

To begin the comparison with Richardson's text – like *Atonement*, a narrative of rape, persecution, and misreading – Clarissa is a beautiful paragon of English womanhood. Her grasping materialist family, the Harlowes, try to coerce her into an advantageous match with a repulsive man while the unscrupulous libertine, Robert Lovelace, simultaneously tries to wriggle his way into her affections. Frightened and overwhelmed, Clarissa inadvertently runs off with Lovelace. His overtures progressively escalate until he drugs and rapes her. Ultimately Clarissa dies, having constructed a sympathetic community around her example of suffering virtue.

Lovelace is an appealing villain with a charming sense of play. Yet his penchant for comedy, his commitment to the belief that no consequences are truly final, results in his misreading of Clarissa's character and his lack of understanding that the suffering he causes her has real consequences. He believes that anything can be turned to a comic purpose, one characterized by a happy ending and a satisfying, symmetrical, and conventionally expected conclusion. He is very much like Briony.

His misrepresentations of Clarissa to others increase her isolation and vulnerability, culminating in the rape. Clarissa ultimately responds by getting “on with it,” that is, by beating Lovelace at his own game.

Harassed by Lovelace after the rape, Clarissa decoys him away from her location by promising to meet him at her “father’s house” (1233). Lovelace misinterprets this to mean Harlowe Place, when in actual fact Clarissa means heaven (her “father” is God, not Mr. Harlowe). Lovelace ignores the biblical language Clarissa uses to open her message – “I have good news to tell you” (1233) – obtusely missing an important intertextual resonance. Lovelace later blames Clarissa for her manipulation, but the misinterpretation is actually his own fault and a predictable consequence of his inadequate reading practices, themselves a product of his lack of moral and emotional responsiveness. As Belford, Lovelace’s friend and a former rake writes, upon Clarissa explaining the allegory to him, “A *religious* meaning is couched under it, and that’s the reason that neither you nor I could find it out. . . . I stood astonished for a minute at her invention . . . and at thine and my own stupidity, to be thus taken in” (1274). Having been taken in by Lovelace’s fabrications, Clarissa “gets on with” her life by fabricating a fiction of her own. Like Lovelace, Richardson’s readers felt taken in and betrayed that Clarissa would choose heaven over the temporal pleasure of marriage. Some even engaged in their own rewrites of the narrative.<sup>19</sup> *Atonement* has provoked similar reactions and it, too, can be seen as “getting on with” the business of decoying readers in order to critique complacent reading practices.

*Tom Jones* – perhaps the most rigorously symmetrical of novels – ends happily and is a significant intertext in *Atonement*, too. *Atonement*, like *Tom Jones*, is organized into three geographically specific sections: country–road–city (London) with a final return to the country estate (Paradise Hall in *Tom Jones*; the Tallis estate, now significantly renamed the Tilney Hotel, in *Atonement*). Part 1 of *Atonement* sets up the crisis – a rape occurs on the Tallis country estate and Robbie is arrested for it based on Briony’s accusation; Part 2 follows Robbie as he journeys through France on foot to reach the shore at Dunkirk; Part 3 follows the adolescent Briony as she works as a nurse in London during World War II and attempts to atone for injuring Robbie and Cecilia; there is also the coda titled “London, 1999” in which the elderly Briony journeys back to the Tallis Estate to celebrate her birthday and to contemplate a life afflicted by vascular dementia (which entails the gradual loss of her memory). Similarly, *Tom Jones* is famously divided into eighteen books: the first six books describe Tom’s childhood and adolescence in the countryside on Squire Allworthy’s estate; the middle six books follow Tom, exiled from Paradise Hall because of a false accusation, as he journeys on the road suffering various acci-

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19. Harris, pp. 141–142.

dents and injuries associated with an army; the final six books describe Tom's misadventures and repentance in London. At the end of the novel Tom returns to the country with his love, Sophia. Yet it is Briony, not Robbie and Cecilia, who returns to the Tallis Estate (Tilney Hotel) to preside over her birthday celebrations, which include a family reunion and a completed performance of her childhood play, *The Trials of Arabella*. Unlike *Tom Jones*, *Atonement* offers no happy ending for the lovers: the coda substitutes the guilty Briony.

But there are further points of interest in McEwan's organization. Part 1 of *Atonement*, unlike that of *Tom Jones*, is the longest section and comprises half of the book. Part 1 is also the only section divided into chapters, of which there are fourteen. Given the title, *Atonement*, the number of chapters in this important section is significant, especially given Briony's reference to the Roman Catholic meditative tool of the rosary in the final chapter of Part 1 (Briony's "guilt refined the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime," 173), and her ironic frustration that Robbie appears to be a "good shepherd" in rescuing Lola's younger twin brothers after they run away at night (183; it is during the search for the twins that Lola is raped). The Roman Catholic imagery, the reference to the repetitive, ritualistic prayer of the rosary, should suggest some connection to the fourteen Stations of the Cross, a formal, communal ritual most often practiced by Roman Catholics during the forty days of penitence prior to the celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection at Easter. The Stations, which are generally depicted pictorially along the walls of every Roman Catholic church to encourage mental reflection and imaginative, participatory commemoration, enumerate the events of Jesus Christ's Passion – his arrest, unjust condemnation, journey to Calvary, crucifixion, and shameful death. Part 1 of *Atonement*, in short, is the "eternal loop" of Briony's memories and imaginative projections leading up to her crime and Robbie's unjust condemnation; Part 2 is Robbie's Passion, his military pilgrimage to Dunkirk in the hope of salvation (his longed-for reunion with Cecilia).<sup>20</sup> Briony's imaginative recreation of it is a ritual recreation that she returns to just as a penitent fingers the beads of a rosary.<sup>21</sup>

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20. The religious dimension of Robbie's pilgrimage is reinforced by the description of his ritual touching of Cecilia's letters (carried in the "breast pocket" of his military uniform) as "a kind of genuflection" (226). Genuflection is the practice of kneeling and making the sign of the cross when approaching, or passing in front of, the crucifix (which is not simply a representation of a cross but specifically the depiction of Jesus Christ's body *on* the cross) placed near the altar in every Roman Catholic church.

21. The recreation of the Passion is divided across the fourteen chapters of Part I (the false accusation and condemnation) and all of Part 2 (the injured Robbie's walk to his death at Dunkirk mirrors that of Christ's journey, after being scourged, to his crucifixion at Calvary).

We might notice something else about the structure of Part 1 – especially as the narrator draws our attention to the fact that it has all occurred in a single day; that Mrs. Tallis sees Robbie as a “polluting presence”; and that the young Briony herself describes it as a “tragedy” (182–185). The narrative unfurls according to the three unities of time, place, and action and terminates with a bright young man of ambiguous paternity being condemned by temporal authority. Part 1 is modeled, therefore, on both the classical Greek tragedy of Oedipus and the biblical Passion of Jesus Christ. Briony is a Judas but also a chorus member and artist who constantly reworks the same discrete experiences into alternate narratives. Her compulsion to narrate is that of both the artist and the penitent. Her narrative is a confession, the work of the artist-as-penitent.<sup>22</sup>

McEwan offers two narrative outcomes associated with two reading practices for consideration: Richardson’s claustrophobic epistolary domestic tragedy of psychological and sexual trauma and Fielding’s classically freighted social panoramic comedy of young adult sexuality. McEwan “gets on with it,” just as Clarissa does, by doing the unexpected: taking a reader’s horizon of expectations for granted in order to undo those expectations. Mashing up Richardson’s and Fielding’s narrative techniques – Richardson’s epistolary tragedy, Fielding’s architectonic comedy – and both pagan and Christian narratives of suffering, McEwan criticizes any unreflective investment in any of them as inadequate. McEwan’s formal cues suggest that the comfort offered by structure should itself be questioned. Ultimately, the ethical reader may enjoy the pleasure of the text, but he will not refuse the pain it gives.

### Fingering the Beads

McEwan makes a significant allusion to the rosary as a model of Briony’s narrative practice, so a brief description of the practice associated with it is in order. The rosary is a set of prayer beads, a meditative tool that encourages imaginative projection and a participatory engagement in biblical narratives through the process of repetitive prayer. The rosary, traditionally associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, was standardized during the papacy of Pope Pius V (1566–1572) as a set

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22. *Atonement* could be fruitfully analyzed using René Girard’s theory of mimesis, communal violence, and the scapegoat. Robbie clearly functions as a scapegoat for the Tallis family (a domestic community riddled with internal rivalries but also a microcosm of English class inequalities in the pre-World War II era). Girard’s “metanarrative” about the structural similarities of myth, religion, and fictional narrative, though controversial, would afford a productive interpretive framework for analyzing what is at stake in the persecution narrative of *Atonement*. See René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1989).

of fifteen “mysteries” or scenes from biblical accounts of Jesus Christ’s life and the formation of the early Church. The fifteen mysteries are divided into three chronologically and thematically organized narratives of five mysteries each (“Joyful,” “Sorrowful,” “Glorious”).<sup>23</sup> The structure of the rosary is meant to assist an imaginative and emotional engagement with discrete moments in the narrative of the formation of the Christian church. As the “Advertisement” to an anonymous English guide, *The Method Of saying the ROSARY Of our BLESSED LADY* (1669), explains, “the use of the following Method or manner of saying the Rosary, consisteth in a devout application, or attention of the mind to the Mystery assigned, while the Decad [*sic*] is saying, and raising correspondent affections in the will.”<sup>24</sup> The structure of the rosary enables, indeed requires, personal imaginative engagement – an intersubjective response to the experience of another. This imaginative engagement, especially in contemplating the suffering of the other, is also what makes the reading of fiction an act of ethical significance, a moment of intersubjective attention to the particularity of something or someone beyond the isolated self, as Newton would say.

However, some of Briony’s beads are more phantoms than mysteries. In Part 3 Briony, now a nurse, takes a walk across Clapham Common meditating on the marriage of Lola and her rapist, the chocolate magnate, Paul Marshall, a marriage that prevents the real rapist from ever being brought to justice. But this Briony is a phantom, a ghostly recreation of the starting point of Briony’s life as she would wish to revise it, a life in which she could achieve “atonement.” This becomes clear only at the end of the novel. Initially we are informed that, after witnessing Lola’s marriage to her rapist, Paul Marshall, Briony “as she walked along the Common . . . felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back toward the hospital. Perhaps the Briony who was walking in the direction of Balham was the imagined or ghostly persona” (329). Perhaps. But as Briony, the 77-year-old novelist says in the coda, “my walk across London ended at the church on Clapham Common . . . a cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital” (370). Briony never went to the café. The timing of this departure from reality, this division of her selves, is significant, for Briony had just realized – upon encountering the church in which Lola and Paul are married – her mistake in using gothic conventions to read “reality.” Briony is surprised by the church, which resembles a “brick barn of elegant

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23. A fourth set, the “Luminous Mysteries,” was added in 2002.

24. *The Method Of saying the ROSARY Of our BLESSED LADY As it was ordered by Pope PIUS the Fifth, of the Holy Order of Preachers. As it is said in Her Majesties Chappel at S. James* (London?: s. n. Printed in the Year 1669), A2. I was able to access and compare several editions of this text thanks to the Early English Books Online database. All occurrences of the long ‘s’ have been modernized.

dimensions, like a Greek temple,” for she had envisioned it as “the scene of a crime, a gothic cathedral, whose flamboyant vaulting would be flooded with brazen light of scarlet and indigo from a stained-glass backdrop of lurid suffering” (322–323). Briony’s gothic expectations are false. Henry Tilney would seem, then, to be vindicated in *Atonement*, too, except that the implication of Briony’s misreading is even more unsettling. For it is far more horrifying that character does *not* map onto appearance, that the gothic reality *looks* like an Enlightenment structure of neoclassical symmetry and “harmonious proportions” (323). In other words, Tilney was wrong: reality is not civilized, it just looks that way. “Reality” is a white-washed sepulcher that conceals guilty consciences, unpunished crimes, and rotting corpses. The reader has unknowingly encountered ghosts and phantoms from beginning to end; the love story of Cecilia and Robbie is also a ghost story. *Atonement*’s coda springs this information on the reader and it is no wonder that readers feel betrayed.

Yet this feeling of betrayal is important for the reader’s participation in the narrative. Considering the structuring principle of religious ritual, it becomes clear that while Briony may not believe in a God higher than herself she sees Robbie as a Christ-figure whom she has betrayed. His unavenged ghost haunts her memory. Furthermore, her betrayal was facilitated and encouraged by the temporal authorities who ought to have questioned more thoroughly a narrative with so many “hair-line cracks” (168) as that provided by the young Briony. These authorities include Briony’s wealthy parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tallis; the class-conscious police who accept cigarettes from the gold cigarette case of Paul Marshall, who ought to be considered a suspect (and is indeed the rapist; 175); the medical authorities who write Robbie off as “morbidly over-sexed” (204); the military that won’t let him serve as an officer but the officers of which respond automatically to Robbie’s “toff” university accent in emergencies (193, 223); the Imperial War Museum that, while it houses the documentation Briony has used in constructing the “novel” that would vindicate Robbie, is funded by Lola and her rapist, now the litigious Lord and Lady Marshall (353, 359–360, 371). The question at the end of *Atonement* is not to whom Briony could atone but, rather, who could grant atonement to a society that would enable a child to commit such a crime?

*Atonement* is the pilgrimage of a Christ figure as imagined by a repentant Judas, but the trauma at the heart of the novel remains untreated: if a society sacrifices an innocent man to its own selfish financial interests how can it atone for this sacrifice? What author can write humanity’s cultural narratives when what terrorizes is inside rather than “out there”? Briony does not represent one girl, or one writer, or even the project of historical fiction. Briony represents collective guilt and this becomes clear when considering McEwan’s sustained engagement of *Northanger Abbey*. Brian Finney has studied the epigraph in terms of how it signals

McEwan's engagement with narrative method. While I agree with Finney's insightful analysis, the engagement of *Northanger Abbey* can be pushed further. Indeed, McEwan launches a sustained rebuttal of Henry Tilney's paean to British civility.

To turn back to the epigraph, the indictment of a naïve reader who did not extrapolate from the fact that "we are English . . . we are Christians" to logical, probable conclusions about the world: which reader is truly the naïve one – Henry or Catherine? The scaffolding of Tilney's self assurance rests on specific identities (Christian, English) being forces of order, civility, and goodness. Yet *Atonement* disrupts a faith such as Tilney's in the orderly structure of what is real or probable (or unquestionably admirable about one's own culture). Mapping Tilney's reassuring descriptions of his contemporary England on to the England described in the coda of *Atonement* reveals that Catherine's "gothic" reading of reality may not be so unrealistic after all. In fact, *Atonement* could be seen as a point-by-point refutation of Tilney's description of England.

What is probable, after all? Robbie's section (Part 2), detailing his march across France as he slowly dies, dwells on the *surreal* experience of war: bodies instantaneously vaporize; dismembered limbs hang from trees; individuals exist one moment and vanish the next; the world is *not* probable, sensory perceptions are *not* reliable. Further, in *Atonement* education is inadequate because it does *not* prepare young men and women for war. (Cecilia and Robbie both graduated from Cambridge.) Laws *do* connive at atrocities when the interests of the wealthy are privileged above basic justice. Crimes *can* be perpetrated despite the presence of voluntary spies. As a surprised Briony remarks of the police during the rape investigation, it seemed "as if these terrifying authorities, these uniformed agents had been lying in wait behind the facades of pretty buildings for a disaster they knew must come" (169). Newspapers do *not* lay everything open because publishers can be bankrupted by being sued for libel by people like Lord and Lady Marshall (359). Neither do roads necessarily lay everything open for, as the teenage Briony experiences in World War II London, all "the signs had been taken down or blacked out" to confuse possible German invaders; indeed, most "plans and maps of the city had been confiscated by order" (318). And, as the elderly and dying Briony reflects as she is driven across London in 1999, "the addresses of the dead pile up" (355). London – the center of England's political, economic, and cultural power – is a map of the dead, a graveyard haunted by ghosts.

Briony cannot escape from the nightmare community of that ghostly walk across Clapham Common in which her cowardice persuaded her to prefer her own comfort to an encounter with her "recently bereaved sister" (371). The artist-as-penitent has no higher power to offer her salvation. She has only the comfort of a fabricated structure; the reader does not even have that.

### The Comfort of Structures

Like another unconventional narrator, Tristram Shandy, Briony staves off illness, impotence, and death through artful digression. Imitation and imaginative recreation not only constitute an attempt to understand another or to prolong one's own pleasure (though they are those, too), they are ultimately the attempt to acknowledge another's suffering. Yet while the "attempt was all" for Briony Tallis, who is both writer and actor in her own tragedy, it is not enough for the reader (371). This insufficiency mirrors the frustration of some reviewers of *Atonement*, a frustration similar to that felt by Richardson's contemporaries. Like Clarissa's decoying of Lovelace, McEwan presents readers with a happy resolution, one that is revealed to be historically false, to demonstrate to readers the ethical implications of accepting comfortable conventions rather than recognizing another's suffering.<sup>25</sup>

Fiction and imaginative meditation merge in the penitent's desire to atone. Yet if Briony, in writing fiction, figuratively fingers her rosary for the rest of her life, reliving her memories, she acknowledges in the coda that she has no God other than herself to turn to and that that god is slowly losing her memories. Nor are historical records reliable. We are left, ultimately, with a virtual world of ephemera, memories, loss, and corrupt social powers – Paul and Lola, Lord and Lady Marshall – invested in keeping the truth unknown and having the power to ensure that it remains so, at least in their lifetime. You can only speak the unpleasant truth about yourself and the dead, as Briony observes of libel (370), and because she cannot condemn (or feels she cannot condemn) the Marshalls in print, she instead resurrects another couple, Robbie and Cecilia, in fiction. Understandably, Briony wants to end her narrative happily – her emotional investment and her desire for a "tidy finish" seem to demand it – but the narrative reflects on her contemporary society. Briony's society enabled the couple outside of her power, the Marshalls, to thrive, to exercise institutional authority, indeed – given the Marshall's hefty monetary gift to the very museum to which Briony donated her archives – the ability, perhaps, to make evidence of their crime disappear (353, 360). The Marshalls have, after all, silenced dissenting voices, according to Briony, since the 1940s, when Paul Marshall made his fortune from the war (370). When Paul tells Lola to "bite" his candy bar (with the suggestive and polysemous brand name "Amo"), in the afternoon before he rapes her, he signals his investment in consumption, an investment underscored by his complacent reference to the tragedy of *Hamlet* – the most famous line of

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25. Indeed, McEwan's narratives evince a deep distrust of symmetry and geometry going as far back as the short story "Solid Geometry" of *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) in which the narcissistic narrator uses the "plane without a surface" – the textual portal to an alternate reality (like fiction) – to cruel effect.

which he quotes off-handedly without having read or seen the play (60, 62). This investment he successfully persuades Lola to share, given her passing familiarity with only an interrupted pantomime version of the same tragedy (61). The future Lord and Lady Marshall objectify and consume tragedy and it is no wonder that Briony refuses to reproduce it.

For readers the ending is not happy – people like the Marshalls do go unpunished for terrible crimes. Further, readers may wonder if the war (and the crime), as described by Briony, ever happened. Briony’s perceptions were unreliable throughout Part 1 of the novel and she is not alone, for a group of adults could not perceive “reality” any better than a misguided child. This becomes clear in perhaps the most explicitly gothic scene in *Atonement* – the moment of terrible misrecognition just before Robbie is arrested. In the early morning light, the police and members of the Tallis family see a figure moving across the lawn:

There was a collective murmur . . . as they caught sight of an indefinable shape, no more than a greyish smudge against the white . . . As the shape took form the waiting group fell silent again. No one could quite believe what was emerging. Surely it was a trick of the mist and light. No one in this age of telephones and motor cars could believe that giants seven or eight feet high existed in crowded Surrey. But here it was, an apparition as inhuman as it was purposeful. The thing was impossible and undeniable, and heading their way. Betty, who was known to be a Catholic, crossed herself as the little crowd huddled closer to the entrance. (182)

Of course, it is a trick of the mist and light – there is no giant, Robbie is carrying one of the twins on his shoulders. But this scene perfectly captures what is at stake in McEwan’s engagement of literary and social myth. Robbie appears, out of context, like the giant helmet that crushes Conrad at the beginning of *The Castle of Otranto* (itself the beginning of the gothic genre); no one can correctly perceive him because they have no point of reference. Though Betty’s making the sign of the cross (a tacit plea for divine protection) might seem at first to be superstitious she is no more ignorant than any of the other spectators. Indeed, her ritual act associates the community’s misrecognition of Robbie with the text – the obscene letter – that is used as evidence of his sexual depravity.

Betty crosses herself, thinking she is seeing a monster. Robbie’s letter is considered obscene because it contains the word “cunt,” but the narrator, describing Briony’s reaction to the expletive, associates it with the scene of Christ’s crucifixion: “The smooth-hollowed, partly enclosed forms of its first three letters were as clear as a set of anatomical drawings. Three figures huddling at the foot of the cross” (114). In other words, the apparent obscenity can be read as a depiction of the Vir-

gin Mary, John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene “huddling” at the foot of the crucified Christ just as the small crowd confronted with a mysterious, larger-than-life presence “huddled” at the entrance to the Tallis mansion. Text, sacrifice, and religious ritual are all tied to together in the four-letter word that persuades Briony and Lola that Robbie is a “maniac” who must be responsible for the rape (119).

Lola and Briony’s misrecognition of Robbie as a “maniac” and the crowd’s visual misrecognition of Robbie as a giant underscore the legal misrecognition of him as a rapist. It is only Robbie’s mother, the Tallis family’s charwoman (aptly named Grace) who is able to see the fabricated reality being constructed around her son for what it is. She denounces them as “Liars! Liars!” (187). And that is what they are, and how they thrive.

*Atonement* is therefore a meditation on the reliability of both fictional and historical narratives, the social myths human communities use to fabricate meaning. It points beyond the textual author to the hegemonic authors of the “real” world, those who control the representation of “reality.” McEwan’s Marshalls and Richardson’s Harlowes are the crass materialists of the world; Clarissa and Robbie are their sacrificial victims; and the tragic recognition that the reader does not have the power to resurrect them is both ethically and aesthetically necessary. Reuniting Robbie and Cecilia suggests that all is right with the world, that “the truth [is] in the symmetry,” as the young Briony believes (169). But symmetry is what characterizes the neoclassical architecture that, as Finney has shown, is associated in *Atonement* with the Marshalls. The truth is not symmetrical, and as long as people like the Marshalls have hegemonic power the world is a gothic reality – a white-washed sepulcher. Briony’s final draft (1999) is an entombment rather than an atonement.

*Atonement* ends with Briony’s birthday celebration – a last supper, a communion – that returns to the origin of the trauma. *The Trials of Arabella*, the play Briony wrote and was rehearsing with Lola and the twins during that fateful afternoon in 1935 is finally performed by a younger generation of their family. Briony’s narratives have always been written for approval, have always been directed to an audience whom she wishes to be sympathetic. The danger, however, the potential trauma of contemporary life, is that the audience, whether through corruption or complacency, may approve her efforts too well. Briony and her publishers do not have the courage to try the public taste; ultimately they are afraid of being sued, afraid to speak the truth to power. And because the tragedy of *Atonement* is *not* formed on a “religious plan” there is no God to turn to; even the comforting structure of religious ritual is inadequate.

If Briony’s London in 1999 is a whited sepulcher, an institution concealing a victim of institutional abuse in its bowels, then what is a contemporary Henry Tilney to do? For the Tilneys of the world are wrong: a girl’s nightmares – Cruella

de Vil (as Briony calls the elderly Lola, 358), a woman of the devil but also of the city – walks the streets of London in 1999. The horror is that whatever Lola wanted, Lola got. The same is true of Paul, who, in old age, finally cuts the figure of a “cruelly handsome plutocrat” (357). Like Dorian Gray, the Marshalls seem, by all appearances, to have even time in their thrall. Moreover, the newspapers, the museums, and the government all applaud their philanthropic efforts. “London” in 1999 is revealed to be a negative-image landscape – seemingly orderly and rational, just like the church in which the Marshalls were married, but really a gothic construction contaminated by death, illness, hypocrisy and injustice.

If *Northanger Abbey* is Austen’s defense of novelists, *Atonement* is the defense of Catherine Morland’s gothic sensibility – a sensibility that turns out to be a much better guide to “reality” than Tilney’s “sense of the probable.” For *Atonement* implicitly, but ironically, asks the same question regarding the relationship of reality and atrocity that Henry Tilney poses to Catherine Moreland: “what ideas have you been admitting?” By the end of *Atonement* the “reality” of England makes much more sense when interpreted in terms of gothic rather than “realist” conventions.

But there is something more. If, as Newton asserts, there is an “ethical mandate built into language use: vocative, interpellative, or dative impulses in utterance, we might say, which take narrative shape as address, command, plea, gift, and trust” and if these “become even more palpable” in “the light of an alternate narrative counter-text of secrecy, gossip, coercion, or control” (25), then what is the ethical response to *Atonement*? What myths, as Doody might put it, does humanity need to enter into and rewrite? McEwan invites us through the looking glass.

**Éva Pataki**

## **On the Move**

### **The Tourist and the Flâneur in Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism***

Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006), as a contemporary British Asian novel, counts as postcolonial fiction yet adds a post-postcolonial and postmodern twist by presenting itself in the context of tourism. Although generally perceived as pulp fiction for its provocative themes and pornographic scenes, the novel's portrayal of the second-generation immigrant experience, urban space and tourism invites a close reading from the perspectives of spatiality and movement, as well as an analysis that is interdisciplinary in its approach, its theoretical background situated at the intersection of tourism, cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies. The present paper investigates Dhaliwal's novel in terms of the relationship of identity, space and movement, or more specifically what I call mobile subjectivities: the figures of the tourist and the flâneur, and argues that the basic elements of flânerie and tourism are indispensable attributes of British Asians' diasporic identity and experience, and thus integral to the analysis of movement and subjectivity in British Asian fiction.

#### **1 Tourism**

Bhupinder, the protagonist and autodiegetic narrator of Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism*, who goes by the nickname Puppy, is a young second-generation Punjabi immigrant living and working in London, or rather idly strolling the streets of the metropolis, observing people and places and seeking physical pleasure at various places of entertainment. When asked to explain what he is about, Puppy identifies himself in the following way: "I'm a tourist. . . I just look at the view" (85).<sup>1</sup> This self-identification echoes the words of another decadent protagonist, namely Michel in the French author Michel Houellebecq's controversial novel, *Platform*: "what I really want, basically, is to be a tourist. We dream what dreams we can afford."<sup>2</sup> According to Silvia Albertazzi, "Dhaliwal has never denied his debt to

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1. All parenthetical references are to this edition: Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, *Tourism* (London: Vintage, 2006).

2. Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: Knopf, 2003).

Houellebecq: his views on sex and race as well as his critique of Western consumerism and narcissism are clearly modelled on those of the French novelist.”<sup>3</sup> Although both characters engage in some sort of tourist activities, and both display the detachment and shallow interests of the tourist, as well as a postmodern cynicism and alienation, Puppy’s tourism also suggests further connotations of the figure of the tourist, such as that of the ethnographer and the second-generation immigrant as an outsider in his home country – notions that I shall return to and investigate further on.

But Puppy conforms to what is defined as tourist behaviour only in certain respects. The only occasion when he really follows the patterns of tourist behaviour is when he is invited for a long weekend at the country house of his love interest Sarupa Shah, in the heart of the Cotswolds: “I was on my way to see a bit of real England and was looking forward to it” (119). Puppy is streetwise and world-weary, knows his way about in the multicultural metropolis, but he has never really seen the country (usually identified with authentic Englishness); his excitement about this first-time experience seems genuine and childlike, also suggesting a desire for an (in)authentic<sup>4</sup> tourist experience. He explores the countryside with the consciousness and preparedness of both a tourist and a tourist guide, reciting the history and architecture of the village learned from the Internet, studded with the clichés of a Baedeker: “England is a beautiful country and Chipping Campden is the epitome of English rural beauty. The buildings are historic artefacts, protected by law; shops and offices are located in pristine honey-coloured terraces, built with lime-rich Cotswold stone. . .” (120). Puppy’s preparations and superficial knowledge imply that he is in search of the signs of Englishness, and he is “reading landscapes and cultures as sign systems.”<sup>5</sup> According to Sabine Nunius, Puppy “has evidently internalised the association of Englishness with a specific type of scenery” as well as “various quintessentially ‘English’ ideas and clichés,”<sup>6</sup> thus associating the English countryside with “the

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3. Silvia Albertazzi, “Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal’s Tourism: How to Exploit Diaspora and Live Happily Ever After,” in *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post Colonial Literatures*, ed. Igor Maver (Lanham: Lexington, 2009), 165–178, p. 168.

4. On their opposing views on the authenticity of the tourist experience see Dean MacCannell, “Staged Authenticity: Arrangement of Social Space in Tourist Settings,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79.3 (1973) 589–603, and Daniel Joseph Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper, 1964).

5. Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 161.

6. Sabine Nunius, *Coping with Difference: New Approaches in the Contemporary British Novel (2000–2006)* (Berlin: Lit; New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009), p. 125.

hope of a more wholesome, safer, less regulated way of life than available in the city.”<sup>7</sup> This suggests Puppy’s ambivalent insider-outsider status in England, by implying the contradictory position in yet resonant perception of the English countryside by the Englishman and the tourist.

An “ultra-urban homeboy” (103) “born into city life” (7), Puppy is used to walking in the crowds and gazing at the familiar cityscape – in the country, however, he witnesses a “quiet, easy and predictable” (120) life. He finds himself gazing at a space alien to him both culturally and in terms of class: “The atmosphere here was of complete tranquillity. People walked quietly about their business; unlike in London, they were generally older and unhurried. There was plenty of money here. . . history seemed set in the walls; it leaked from the stone, into my thoughts. The aura of these buildings impressed me” (121). It is exactly the unfamiliarity of rural space and it being “a cultural construct, a product of imagination”<sup>8</sup> that enables Puppy to perceive it through the tourist’s eyes and to engage in pleasurable tourist activities.

Although there are several definitions in use, and many diverse forms of tourism, most theories agree on two significant aspects: first, that the tourist is “one who travels for pleasure,”<sup>9</sup> and, second, that the “gaze” is an essential part of tourist behaviour and tourism practices, which “involve the notion of departure, of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane.”<sup>10</sup> Puppy’s behaviour in the countryside conforms to most of the characteristics of the social practices of tourism identified in John Urry’s *The Tourist Gaze*: Urry defines tourism as a leisure activity as well as a movement to and a period spent in various destinations outside one’s normal place of residence and work, which one intends to return to in a relatively short time. Puppy also follows what Urry says about the tourist gaze, which, on the one hand, is “constructed through signs” and “directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience.”<sup>11</sup> Puppy, accordingly, begins by noticing and appreciating the features that he has read about – seeing what he already knows. On the other hand – continues Urry – places are chosen to be gazed upon, “because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleas-

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7. Clive Aslet, *Anyone for England? A Search for British Identity* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), p. 173.

8. Aslet, p. 173.

9. Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*, Tourism Social Science Series, (Boston: Elsevier, 2004), p. 19.

10. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, Theory, Culture, and Society (London: Sage, 1990), p. 2.

11. Urry, p. 3.

ures.”<sup>12</sup> Theoretician Erik Cohen also emphasises the pleasure-component of tourism: “A ‘tourist’ is a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round trip.”<sup>13</sup> Puppy’s pleasure, however, eventually exceeds the joy of recognising something he has seen in a guidebook: in the countryside, he finds both beauty and pleasure at its purest, and not only in the predictable “touristy” things: besides the landscape and the eclectic and culturally rich interior of the Shahs’ house, he also enjoys the beauty and pleasure offered by a lively and loving dog. The generally aloof, wry and uninterested Puppy seems to come to life in rural space as he is “entering the envelope of [Sarupa’s] life” (124), and is also reminded of the roots he has never felt his own: “I felt good. I could smell the country – a healthy gust of cut grass, flowers and dung – and relished it. It reminded me of India” (122).

What is particularly noteworthy – and perhaps not unrelated to the intimation of India – is the fact that, even though the “tourist” aspect of the trip reeks of clichés, Puppy’s tourism does lead to a genuine experience of bonding with Sarupa:

I was truly at ease with her. The light in her eyes proved that I had nothing to fear. I had always been tense before, too concerned with what she might think of me; as a result, I was over-cocky. Our walk in the country had opened doors between us. We’d talked and laughed; I held her hand as we climbed over gates. . . . We looked openly into one another’s eyes and shared moments of comfortable silence. I knew now that she liked me. I felt secure and unworried. (191–2)

After having lusted for Sarupa for years, Puppy’s dreams finally come true: on the long walk to the nearby village to taste his first ever cream tea (an epitome of Englishness, reduced to a sign), the two of them finally open up, have a meaningful conversation sharing future plans and childhood memories, and eventually make love in an old graveyard. The reason for this unlikely yet natural union, complicated by Sarupa’s engagement and social status, as well as Puppy’s fear of commitment and belonging, may be the fact that for the first time in years Puppy stops pretending to be something he is not; he avows himself as a Sikh, sets aside his languidity, and places confidence in Sarupa. By doing so, he enables rural space and human relationships to influence his identity formation. Breaking away from his everyday behaviour and practices, Puppy experiences new joys and perceives hitherto unseen beauties on his pleasure trip in rural England; he acquires a sense of belonging in a place other than his home and at the same time becomes a tourist in his own country.

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12. Urry, p. 3.

13. Cohen, p. 23.

## 2 The Tourist versus the Flâneur

Upon his return to the city, the multicultural space in which he claims to be a tourist, Puppy walks along familiar streets again, gazing the city and its inhabitants in search of pleasure. Being in his normal place of residence and looking at familiar sights, Puppy's is not a classic case of tourism but a mere identity performance.<sup>14</sup> By claiming to be a tourist, he is trying to give a name to his sense of unbelonging, or perhaps to put on a mask to conceal his otherness and detachment: "I'd have to feel relevant to the world in order to care about it. I don't" (85). The mask of the tourist, thus, signals both Puppy's alienation from people and places, and his inability and unwillingness to belong. It is exactly this unbelonging that may testify the special position of second-generation British Asians and justifies Dhaliwal's unusual representation of them. In Albertazzi's view, "*Tourism* can be seen as a step ahead in the representation of the children of the Indian diaspora: the young second-generation Asian does not want to achieve success in the whites' world any longer nor does he live as an in-between. . . He does not look nor feel any kind of belonging: he just wants to take advantage of the whites, invade their own territory and colonize it by way of using and abusing their women and their things."<sup>15</sup> Puppy's "tourist behaviour" in London is, then, both a state of mind and a mask, seemingly manifested in hardly more than constant movement and a reluctance to feel attached to his environment.

To understand the logic of Puppy's metropolitan perambulations, we must look at the point of departure first: for Puppy, the starting point is the London suburb of Southall, a multicultural and diasporic space (with the largest concentration of South Asians in Britain), close to the metropolis but still on the periphery, an in-between space inhabited by "inbetweeners," first and second generation immigrants living in closely-knit communities. Puppy, however, does not experience a sense of community and communion; his satiric depiction of his family already emphasises alienation and a refusal to belong: "Behold!, the Asian family: unit of tradition, moral strength and business acumen. Behold!, my mother: matriarch and fulcrum, proud bearer of sons" (34). Puppy's family appears to be Other in more ways than one: different from the dominant British culture and the traditional diasporic family as well, as Puppy's father had left them, making the mother turn into a religious zealot and enabling her to establish matriarchy as the ruling domestic order.

His mother's insistence on strict cultural and religious rules forces the young Puppy into the fixed identity of the racial Other at school, perceived with fellow Asians as "pariahs for being explicit wogs" (45), and also triggers the process of alienation,

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14. The concept of identity performance is based on Judith Butler's theory of performativity introduced in *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004).

15. Albertazzi, p. 169.

both from his culture and his family. Repelled by a mother who “looked like an animal” (34) and an “old-world recidivist” (36) sister, ashamed by his own failure to stand by his naive brother, Puppy’s connection with his family is reduced to the financial help he occasionally asks for: “She knew the cash was the only reason I was there. I couldn’t look her in the face” (38). When Puppy moves to London to become a journalist, his perpetual movement between spaces and locations begins: first by commuting between Southall and East London, then, having set up a temporary second home in Hackney, which proves to be equally downtrodden and static, by criss-crossing the metropolis. Puppy is fleeing both from his roots and the stasis and dullness of the suburbs; he longs for the mobility and anonymity of the city, where he could “lose himself in a crowd” and enjoy “feverish delights.”<sup>16</sup> There are two propelling forces for his purposeless wanderings: the pursuit of pleasure and his desire for Sarupa. Puppy exploits his exotic otherness, makes the necessary connections, uses and abuses people to achieve his goals: he starts a relationship with the model Sophie to get closer to Sarupa and to enjoy the comfort and wealth offered by the company of the upper-middle class. Setting up makeshift homes and relationships of convenience, Puppy is gradually uprooting himself and purposely choosing to be a failure, the opposite of all his mother’s hopes and “immigrant zeal” (8).

Uprooted and unbelonging, Puppy finds pleasure in a life without constraints and a self in fluidity, contesting his imposed fixed identity; he abandons his roots and resorts to tourism in which “everyday obligations are suspended or inverted.”<sup>17</sup> His is a deliberate choice of non-attachment and nonconformity: he is living in a city but not inhabiting it, assimilating to society but avoiding full integration, refusing a fixed identity but applying mimicry<sup>18</sup> to fit in, moving from one location to another but never staying for long. The main destinations of his short journeys are places of entertainment and the beds of various women, including a prostitute, making him a “pleasure tripper”<sup>19</sup> (a one-day traveller who covers a relatively short distance for the sake of pleasure or entertainment), and at the same time an observer of multicultural space and its inhabitants. Such subject positions do evoke certain aspects of tourism and may further explain Puppy’s self-identification as a tourist.

Puppy’s peregrinations in London, his strolling frequented streets and places, visiting places of entertainment, as well as his ‘couch-hopping’ display typical tourist behaviour. His individual version of tourism, however, is also characterised by directionless wandering and following routine paths between various locations – his rented

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16. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 20.

17. Urry, p. 10.

18. On Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of mimicry see his *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

19. On Wall’s term of the pleasure tripper see Cohen, p. 25.

flat in Hackney, Sophie's apartment in Holland Park, his friend Luca's house in Belgravia, his family home in Southall – which suggest a kind of “local migration.” In her analysis of the British Asian novels of the 1980s, Susheila Nasta claims that the local migrations they portray “seek to explore new ‘routes’ for maintaining and domesticating the ‘other within.’”<sup>20</sup> Taking advantage of his visible otherness, Puppy selects “those elements of his parents’ religion and culture which fit conveniently into his own Westernised lifestyle while simply abandoning other, less convenient ones”<sup>21</sup> in favour of a more sophisticated urban look. Owing to this mimicry in terms of clothing and front, Puppy can adopt an insider status in the city, as opposed to the outsidership of the tourist. Wherever he goes, he observes multicultural London and its inhabitants, providing adept descriptions of architecture and interior design, as well as the native inhabitant's detailed accounts of the people and places: “deserted council houses” (114) and abominable poor white people in Hackney, upper class women in Primrose Hill with “genes refined by generations of monied men marrying attractive women” (157) or “the usual Soho crowd: homos, tourists and theatregoers” (104). Puppy's description of the Japanese tourists with their dyed hair and quality clothes is both valid and sarcastic, highlighting the differences between them and the Indian diaspora:

The Japanese are obsessed with Western culture . . . and never seem out of place in London, 12,000 miles from home. Indians, even when born here, are rarely so at ease. The West jars with them, and they cocoon themselves with religion, arranged marriages and extended families. The Japanese have an osmotic character. . . Indians are less permeable. (104–5)

The very fact that Puppy can provide these pieces of information suggests that he is not a tourist in the ordinary sense of an outsider, a temporary visitor, someone who has to use a Baedeker or a guide to get about. Puppy is a resident of London and clearly knows the place and its inhabitants inside out. Thus, while in the countryside his tourism evokes an association with Robert Chi's notion of “the tourist as ethnographic agent,”<sup>22</sup> in the city he is more of a tourist guide than a tourist, or an anthropologist describing a well-known world, or an “informant,” James Clifford's anthropological concept referring to individuals who are “routinely made to speak for ‘cultural’ knowledge . . . have their own ‘ethnographic’ proclivities and interesting histories of travel,” who are “insiders and outsiders,” who “first appear as na-

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20. Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths, Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 181.

21. Nünies, p. 136.

22. Ellen Dengel-Janic, “‘East is East and West is West’: A Reading of Nirpal Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006),” in *Multi-ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts*, eds. Lars Eckstein *et al.* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 341–354, p. 345.

tives,” then as “travellers,” but are in fact “specific mixtures of the two”<sup>23</sup> – that is, they are anything but tourists. Consequently, though he designates himself as a tourist, what Puppy does is tourism only in a very limited or partial sense – the tourism of the pleasure-seeker. Otherwise, Puppy uses tourism as a mask, as a metaphor of his sense of alienation and outsider status in the eyes of society. Moreover, his self-positioning as a tourist, as a mere observer is, according to Nunius, “intended to validate the evaluation of all other [social and ethnic] groups since – according to his own statements – he is the only one in a position to comment adequately on them because he is not truly involved with any community.”<sup>24</sup>

Puppy’s strolls in the streets of the metropolis are those of an alienated, solitary loafer, who enjoys both the pleasures of the city and the decadency of his lifestyle. During his walks, he observes people and buildings, and accompanies his observations with sarcastic remarks and, in Nunius’s view, “essentialising, stereotypical associations,”<sup>25</sup> which he later records in his memoirs. Throughout the novel, Puppy keeps mentioning his walks and observations: “I prowled around Victoria” (10), “I looked out of the window and watched people walk in and out of a shop across the street” (70), “I walked up the street and around a few corners. I came across a small Bangladeshi tea house and decided to have some lunch. . . . I watched the artisans and fashionistas of Brick Lane walking past outside” (96). Puppy’s comments are those of the detached observer and “the hidden man” – the latter referring to what Walter Benjamin calls the “Dialectic of flânerie,” a phenomenon when “on one side, the man feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man.”<sup>26</sup>

Most of the time Puppy remains unobserved, having managed to blend in by applying mimicry in terms of his clothing, locations and company of wealthy friends, and also because he strives for the anonymity of the crowds offered by the metropolis. As an observer, Puppy loathes being observed, particularly because of the biased comments and perceptions concerning his identity:

I stopped at a pub en route [to Victoria]. It had a mock-Tudor facade, laced with ivy; inside it was dark and sparsely furnished. I walked to the bar and waited to be served. A pack of beer-bellied white men stood in a loose circle nearby; they stopped mid-conversation to throw me a collective, un-

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23. Clifford, p. 19.

24. Nunius, p. 112.

25. Nunius, p. 111.

26. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), p. 420.

welcome stare. Someone mumbled something, probably about me. I avoided their gaze and ordered a beer. (10–11)

Interestingly, while Puppy is perceived as the racial Other, his manners – uttering such “elegances” as “please” and “no thank you” – eventually win over the locals and he temporarily becomes a member of their community, ceasing to be the object of their gaze: “Their smiles beamed ‘what a nice boy’. I smiled back at their cracked, powder-dry white faces” (11). Similarly to what is described in this scene, although Puppy walks or sits among people most of the time, converses with them and occasionally even returns their looks or smiles, he does not mingle with them but keeps a certain distance; he remains unattached, inaccessible and irrelevant in the city: “Several million people were out there, ploughing several million furrows. Barely a handful knew or cared anything about me” (168).

Despite his inability to attach or belong, Puppy, as opposed to tourists, is at home in the city, which suggests a more likely association of his character with another form of movement in urban space: *flânerie*. The figure of the *flâneur* was originally used in connection with nineteenth-century Paris, most famously by Walter Benjamin in his analysis of Charles Baudelaire, but has since made its way into postmodern theories as well.<sup>27</sup> The nineteenth-century *flâneur* was a gentleman strolling the Parisian streets in a leisurely way (often with a turtle for an elegant and slow pace), providing “a poetic vision of the public places and spaces of Paris”<sup>28</sup> as a detached observer. Baudelaire’s *flâneur*-poet “is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically”<sup>29</sup> and his anonymity is “a play of masks”<sup>30</sup> in the crowd. Based on Baudelaire, Benjamin’s *flâneur* is an estranged, solitary stroller experiencing urban space as a sensational phenomenon; he is a product of modern life, an unobserved observer, an all-seeing representative of the modern gaze and . . . his invisibility amid the crowd.”<sup>31</sup> Benjamin also emphasises the joyful idleness of the *flâneur*: “Basic to *flânerie* . . . is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor. The *flâneur*, as is well known, makes studies.”<sup>32</sup> I suggest that Puppy’s character is a *flâneur* in a Baudelairean and Benjaminian sense, manifested in his habit of strolling and observing, in an anonymity achieved by wearing masks in the crowd, and in the productive idleness of enjoying and studying the city.

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27. See Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

28. Tester, p. 1.

29. Baudelaire, p. 399.

30. Baudelaire, p. 400.

31. Carlo Salzani, *Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin in Figures of Actuality* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 47.

32. Benjamin, p. 453.

Nonetheless, certain differences may be detected between Benjamin's and Puppy's respective flâneur-figures: for the Benjaminian flâneur, the arcades served as the primary space for observation; Puppy, on the other hand, haunts public spaces of entertainment where he can observe but be unobserved, hiding behind his sunglasses and the masks of role-play. The Benjaminian flâneur was a literary creature and a modern man; Puppy as an aspiring writer lacks the inspiration and creativity to write a novel – though being an aesthete, obsessed with physical beauty, does link him with the late-nineteenth-century flâneur. Furthermore, with all his anxieties, alienation and detachment, Puppy is what Vytautas Kavolis calls a postmodern man, characterized by a “decentralized personality.”<sup>33</sup> For him “the self is experienced in the expanding peripheries, or at the vanishing horizons” and “all elements of behaviour have the same rights” so that “personality must become . . . disorganized and asystemic.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Puppy's first person narration posits him as an observer and commentator on the postmodern conditions of metropolitan life. Hence, he may be termed a postmodern flâneur, “who turns away from his own culture, and instead seeks access to upper class lifestyle”<sup>35</sup> and who is just as much enjoying life in the city as he is despising it, due to his own wrong choices concerning pleasures. The relation of choice and joy is also emphasised by Zygmunt Baumann, whose postmodern flâneur is a man of choices, who may happen on “the secret of city happiness,” which consists in “knowing how to enhance the adventure brought about by that under-determination of one's own destination and itinerary.”<sup>36</sup> This under-determination can eventually lead to pleasure and freedom, for “the experience of estrangement is lived through as pleasurable.”<sup>37</sup>

Puppy condenses many of the features of both the modern and the postmodern flâneur, and these features, I argue, correlate with some attributes of the tourist, thus creating a multiple identity at the intersection of migrancy, flânerie and tourism. Urry suggests a similar link between the figures of the flâneur and the postmodern tourist; he highlights the Benjaminian flâneur's anonymity and ability to “travel, to arrive, to gaze, to move on” and acknowledges him as “a forerunner of the twentieth-century

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33. Vytautas Kavolis, “Post-modern Man: Psychocultural Responses to Social Trends,” *Social Problems* 17 (1970) 435–448, p. 438.

34. Kavolis, pp. 438–9.

35. Dengel-Janic, p. 347.

36. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), p. 127.

37. Heinz Paetzold, “Rethinking Key Concepts of Modern Urban Culture: *Flânerie* and the City as Theatre,” in *Senses and the City: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Urban Senses*, eds. Madalina Diaconu et al. (Vienna and Berlin: Münster Verlag, 2011), 33–47, p. 38.

tourist.”<sup>38</sup> Bauman, by the same token, emphasizes the tourist’s aestheticising gaze: “The tourist’s world is fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria.”<sup>39</sup> [original emphasis] By romanticising the metropolis and its sensational phenomenon, the nineteenth-century flâneur also becomes an aesthete in his own right, and thus shares the tourist’s aestheticising gaze as well. However, the identities of tourists and flâneurs do not, cannot merge entirely, as the two terms display a considerable semantic tension. The flâneur’s trajectories are made in spaces that he knows well, and within which he seeks for adventure by exposing himself to the romance and randomness of metropolitan life; the tourist, on the other hand, visits unfamiliar places, and his adventures are frequently predetermined and guided, and therefore inauthentic. The flâneur as a hidden man remains anonymous in his observations; the tourist is strongly visible and identifiable by various physical markers, such as his camera or a map in his hand. For the flâneur observing is a direct physical experience; the tourist, however, may gaze at places indirectly, through frames e.g. the lens of the camera or the window of the tour-bus. Puppy’s observations are mainly conducted through frames: a windscreen and a pair of expensive sunglasses as he is driving across London, or the windows of his flat in Hackney and of various bars and restaurants. Interestingly, even when he is not observing people and places through windows, Puppy is still watching “life” through frames, gazing at David Attenborough “narrating a documentary series on life in the Antarctica” (156) or at scantily-clad women in music videos accompanying the experience with smoking drugs. Puppy uses drugs frequently throughout the novel, mostly at places of entertainment; as he says: “I can’t do clubs anymore. . . Not unless I’m loaded” (111). Numbing his senses with drugs makes him even more alienated from what he sees; by veiling the observed scenes with the blurred visions of drug trips, he is obscuring the view through the frame until it seems distant and unoriginal, thus detaching him entirely from the physical experience.

Puppy’s observations through various frames and his pursuit of pleasure trigger further associations with tourism, and particularly with the concept of post-tourism. The emergence of post-tourism is a result of a postmodern trend in tourism and is discussed by several theoreticians excessively (Maxine Feifer, 1985; Urry, 1990; Rojek; 1993; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Cohen, 2004). Post-tourism transforms the “processes by which the gaze is produced and consumed”<sup>40</sup> and is mainly characterised by the debasement of originality and seeking pleasure in inauthentic, superficial experiences. In Maxine Feifer’s interpretation the post-tourist may gaze upon places indirectly, i.e.

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38. Urry, p. 138.

39. Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1996), 18–36, p. 30.

40. Urry, p. 101.

he or she “sees *named* scenes through a *frame*”<sup>41</sup> [original emphasis]: a windscreen, the television or video. Furthermore, for the post-tourist “tourism is . . . a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience.”<sup>42</sup> According to Urry, the post-tourist “delights in the multitude of games that can be played,” is “above all self-conscious, ‘cool’ and role-distanced” and for him “[p]leasure hence comes to be anticipated and experienced in different ways than before”<sup>43</sup> or, as Feifer puts it, “he wants to behold . . . something just different, because he’s bored.”<sup>44</sup>

Puppy’s constant need for diversity and entertainment may be associated not only with post-tourism but also with decadent aestheticism – the intellectual enjoyment of pleasure itself, elevating the pleasure of an unusual pursuit above its sensual experience, above sensual rapture – and thus with the culture of *fin de siècle*. Throughout the novel Puppy uses the word “beautiful” on almost every page, applying it to everything from people to buildings and antique furniture light-mindedly and generously, thus acknowledging beauty, piling it on and then depriving it of its meaning. It is only in the countryside where Puppy takes a chance at looking behind the facade of beauty and embraces its emotional aspects as well, letting Stan, the dog, and Sarupa close to him. Back in the city and after years of living intensely, Puppy’s hunger for pleasure and satisfaction can no longer be easily satisfied; he is becoming increasingly blighted and disinterested: “Smoking dope hadn’t been fun in years, but I smoked it anyway: what else was there to do?” (156) These elements of Puppy’s pursuit of pleasure may suggest a reading of his character as a decadent post-tourist or *fin-de-siècle* tourist, who is both addicted to pleasure-seeking and repelled by it.

Puppy’s affection for Sarupa is equally controversial; it is a permanent source of joy and pain, an elementary lust and – especially in the countryside, where he enjoys their mutual trust – a desperate desire for a spiritual bond, a longing for belonging to someone. Although Puppy still despises his traditional upbringing, learning about the initial struggles, hard work and consequent social rise of Sarupa’s family makes him feel more comfortable with and proud of his origins, realising his own responsibility for being unhappy: “I belonged to a remarkable people; this made me proud. My own failings were an anomaly entirely of my own making. If I’d lived by the ethos of my race, my life would’ve been different, so much better” (151). Eventually, however, the feeling of guilt and spending the weekend with Sarupa’s wasted upper-class friends make Puppy resume being ashamed of his roots, manifested in his hybrid accents and his incongruousness:

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41. Urry, p. 100.

42. Urry, p. 100.

43. Urry, pp. 100–101.

44. Maxine Feifer, *Going Places: The Ways of the Tourist from Imperial Rome to the Present Day* (New York: Stein, 1985), p. 269.

I'd never heard my voice objectively before. . . It was an absurd jumble of accents: cockney enunciation and occasional West Indian inflection overlaid a quiet drone from the Punjab. . . I was taken aback by how particular I was, how rooted in time and place: everything about me came from the Punjab suburb of West London. I felt embarrassed. I realised how outlandish my presence here was. Everyone else belonged to a milieu of metropolitan wealth, their differences in colour subsumed within a shared order of money. Their lives were firmly aligned. Mine was experiencing just a glancing encounter with theirs, before I ricocheted back to oblivion. (189)

When Sarupa refuses to continue their relationship, Puppy feels "raw, so abject" (181), trapped by a hedonistic lifestyle and a self-induced sense of failure. Although non-attachment, failure and fin-de-siècle decadency were his own deliberate and conscious choices to live by, at the bottom of his heart Puppy never ceased to long for genuine happiness, which he hoped to receive from and by Sarupa and which he feels she eventually deprived him of, thus reloading his postmodern spleen and bitterness:

Nothing I've ever wanted has come true; I was tired of being let down. I was tired of my own lingering, lifelong sense of incompleteness. I'm a man of few talents; the one skill I have is the acceptance of disappointment. Nonetheless, I lay there feeling drained and beaten. I hadn't wanted much from life: love, safety, a sense of belonging to somewhere or someone. Instead, I had nothing. I listened to the people around me laughing and joking with one another: was everyone happy, or was everything a shroud, hiding one's mediocrity and sadness? (162)

This realisation is accompanied by an unexpected opportunity for change: on what seems to be a whim, Puppy steals the money his friend Rory entrusts him with and flees abroad. As he is touring the big European cities, guided solely by "urban habits and a knowledge of Europe based upon its football teams" (7), he finally feels liberated and calm, yet after a while also "penniless and indifferent" (8). Travelling with the purpose of sightseeing and recreation, Puppy ceases to be a flâneur; he gradually frees himself of hedonistic desires and uproots himself as a Londoner: "London had been my home for almost thirty years; I'd known nowhere else. She was the gorgeous, faithless old whore that bore me; she'd never shown me any love, but had shown me the world and its workings. For that much, I was grateful" (240). Consequently, in contrast with his hitherto superficial, mask-like tourism, he becomes a real tourist, who chooses his destinations, sets on a journey and gazes at unfamiliar sights. On the other hand, his "tourist phase" does not last long, and his wanderings gradually assume the attributes of a journey or quest: from tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller.

### 3 From Flâneur to Tourist to Traveller

Throughout the novel, Puppy (ex)changes locations and standpoints frequently and with ease, he deploys a range of subject positions for his gaze: the social commentator and the tabloid journalist, the informant and the detached observer, the tourist and the tour guide. In the case of Southall, Hackney or Hoxton, he provides an insider's commentary on the everyday reality of immigrants and the white underclass, reflecting on his own experiences and memories as well. In wealthy neighbourhoods, he remains an outsider, an unobserved observer, although he wishes to be mistaken for a millionaire, "a young dot-com wizard, or an ad-agency creative" (222), which he hopes to achieve by resorting to mimicry with his clothing (e.g. Burberry shades, Tag Hauer watch) and his location (e.g. Holland Park). Puppy's roles as a journalist, future entrepreneur, or tourist are all cases of identity performance: putting on masks and thus employing chosen subjectivities as a compensation for not being able or not wanting to identify with any political, ethnic or cultural identity. On the other hand, such identity performances may be perceived as light-hearted games, playful try-outs of various subjectivities, and possible aspects of a fluid identity.

It is by the end of the novel that the fluidity of Puppy's identity becomes most apparent: the epilogue takes us to Egypt, the latest destination of his tour, where he is pictured as a relaxed, more spiritual and self-identical man, doing yoga at the centre where he helps out, thus turning from a tourist into a tourist-migrant (tourist migrants being "people who had originally arrived in their host-country as tourists, but decided to stay on, work and sometimes even to settle there."<sup>45</sup>) Having spent months "flitting around Italy and then Spain, waiting tables . . . labouring in fields and building sites" (242) and occasionally living off rich women, Puppy finally finds peace in yoga, which helps him realise the value of his mother's love and generates a genuine desire to reconnect with his roots by visiting India: "I want to see the Punjab and the village my mother left. . . I want to arrive in Delhi, knowing that this time I will kiss the tarmac, like my mother did, with tears falling from my eyes" (245). His words suggest that he definitely does not want to visit India as a tourist, but as an immigrant returning to his parents' roots, a location offering a possible sense of belonging.

According to Nunius, Puppy "finally seems to succeed in recovering his 'true self'";<sup>46</sup> a "true self" as such, though, does not exist. Although Puppy seems to claim that "a satisfying identity and sense of one's 'real' self may only be found in the cultural background of one's ancestors and that 'authenticity' may only be achieved via a return to one's roots,"<sup>47</sup> I consider this stance as merely another stop in the life of an

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45. Cohen, p. 26.

46. Nunius, p. 136.

47. Nunius, p. 137.

individual on the move, a place of transit for a mobile subject with a fluid identity. In my view, Puppy's is a physical and mental journey transforming him from alienated flâneur to tourist, from tourist to traveller. As he needs money for his visit, he plans to return to London – this way, his journey as a tourist proves to be a round trip, which takes him back to the point of departure, only to depart again to further destinations.

After the years-long identity performance of a tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller, but his international travels eventually point back to a tourist identity. As Cohen suggests, “the traveller [should] be viewed as ‘temporary’, and hence as a tourist, as long as he still possesses a permanent home to which he returns periodically or to which he intends to return eventually, even if he stays away for many years.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Puppy may also be interpreted as a traveller who “does not belong anywhere,”<sup>49</sup> or a free spirit who cannot be readily defined, restrained or hedged in, and thus I argue that his tourism also intersects and merges with a certain kind of nomadism. His wandering around the world resembles those of nomads in an ethnographic sense, who follow routine paths and only settle temporarily, and whose “identity is distinct from that of the rest of the society,”<sup>50</sup> which they maintain by systematic travelling.

Although, as Nunius asserts, Puppy essentialises individual ethnic and social groups by portraying them as homogeneous units and “apparently endorses the idea that a ‘preconfigured identity’ exists,”<sup>51</sup> his mental and physical trajectories, as well as the multiple roles and identities he displays point to the postmodern notion of the fluid, fragmentary, and unstable quality of identity. Puppy's constant spatial mobility; gazing and moving from one location, from one pleasurable inauthentic experience to another; and his continuous mental movement, changing subject positions and performing identities according to his locations, yet never being able to “evade his condition of outsider”<sup>52</sup> suggest an immigrant subjectivity at the intersection of tourism, flânerie and nomadism, a subjectivity which is both postmodern and uniquely British Asian, and as such it contributes to a better understanding of a multiracial Britain and of what Hanif Kureishi calls “a new way of being British.”<sup>53</sup>

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48. Cohen, p. 25.

49. Albertazzi, p. 169.

50. David J. Phillips, *Peoples on the Move: Introducing the Nomads of the World* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001) p. 13.

51. Nunius, p. 113.

52. Feifer, p. 271.

53. Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber, 1986), p. 18.

# From Fake Lit to the Value of Real Nightingales

## An Interview with Nick Groom

Nick Groom, Professor of English at the University of Exeter, counts among the most prominent representatives of Chatterton scholars today, with a broader outlook on high and popular culture since the 1700s down to our day. He is married with two children and seems to burst with creative energy. As he is always on the – real and virtual – move, this interview, conducted via Skype on 27 June 2012, tries to trace his former achievements as well as his current and future projects.

*What led you to Chatterton in the first place?*

I first encountered Chatterton when I was reading John Keats back in school. It was a combination of reading Keats and how he dedicates *Endymion* to Chatterton and also encountering the Henry Wallis picture in the Tate Gallery, this iconic image of Chatterton dead on his bed, which as you know is really the writer George Meredith. So I soon became aware that Chatterton was a significant figure and yet it was impossible actually to find works by Chatterton in the school library. In fact, I eventually discovered just a few lines in a book of quotations, and that was as far as it got. And so I went to university, and with the resources at the university library, I was able to learn more about the actual works that Chatterton had produced himself. And there was Donald Taylor's collection,<sup>1</sup> which remains a landmark, a magisterial edition, which then completely opened up the possibility of writing about Chatterton, so I wrote an undergraduate essay on him, and when I moved into doing graduate work, I realized that despite Taylor's edition, there was an absolute dearth of serious critical attention to him. For my doctoral work, I worked on Thomas Percy's *Reliques* of the English and British ballad tradition. I remember discussing the choice of Percy with my supervisor Roger Lonsdale, who is a great scholar of 18th-century poetry, and the idea was that a good grounding in Thomas Percy, an account of English literary history from the 1760s created the ideal context for looking at Chatterton subsequently. So I did write a chapter on Chatterton although that didn't appear in the eventual book on Percy but found its way into the collection of Chatterton essays I worked on after that. So my interest in Chatterton seems to have been long and abiding; on the other hand, it actually re-

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1. Donald S. Taylor & Benjamin B. Hoover, ed., *The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton: A Bicentenary Edition*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

quired a series of steps to get there and after I'd done the book of essays on Chatterton, I was in an ideal position to focus on him and his work much more acutely, and that was of course when *The Forger's Shadow* was written.

*To come to Chatterton via Keats seems a really universal thing, as it were. . .*

Well, I think Keats is key in the reception of Thomas Chatterton. But of course Keats's own reception is problematic because he himself has a posterity, he has a sort of posthumous reception which is much more significant than his reception during his lifetime, so there are interesting parallels there. It is very suggestive that reading Keats should entail reading Chatterton. Of course it makes it quite difficult to read Chatterton *without* Keats and without that whole way to mortality, I think, but that, you know, perhaps is just inevitable.

*Actually, that raises another question. Keats and several other Romantics would often refer to Chatterton. Would you care to catalogue such allusions?*

Certainly Coleridge, for one, was obsessed by Chatterton. His monody on Chatterton is something that was I think his first serious published poem that he worked on and reworked throughout his life. Coleridge was actually married in St Mary Redcliffe and as he stood at the altar with his wife-to-be, he couldn't help but think of Chatterton. And you can certainly find Chatterton all over Coleridge, in poems such as the "Nightingale," for example, which has a series of definitive references to Chatterton.

There are Wordsworth's famous lines on Chatterton "the marvellous boy"; they're directed to Coleridge, so you end up having this composite figure, I suppose, so in the same way that I was suggesting that you can't read Chatterton without the Keatsian lens, that's also going on in the way that Wordsworth writes about Chatterton in connection with his relationship with Coleridge, so he actually creates a sort of stratum that goes through the literary or writerly personalities, or in the inspirational figures of many of these writers. So Chatterton literally haunts Coleridge, he comes down to Coleridge as a daemonic figure.

He seems to be there in De Quincey, who doesn't write directly about Chatterton but is clearly devoted to Chatterton's writing, De Quincey's flight to London itself being an imitation of Chatterton's own move from Bristol to London and again it doesn't require much critical acuity to see Chatterton appearing at various points in De Quincey's writings. And he's there in Shelley as well. So he's certainly with the canonical Romantics, and with the less canonical writers, too, John Clare, for example. Clare clearly read Chatterton very closely and picked out his natural history images. In fact, Clare emphasizes that Chatterton was not writing about flowers in a metaphorical way but in a very literal way as somebody who had gone out into the meadows and was writing about his actual experiences. And then of course there's Blake, who is another clear example, in a direct engagement with Chatterton.

There's a contested critical heritage as well. You see this for example in Robert Southey's work on Chatterton, as an editor of Chatterton. He seems to go through a series of mood swings and eventually he decides that the whole answer is, well, that Chatterton was just mad. And that solves and dissolves all Robert Southey's problems. [*Laughs.*] It's about containment: that Southey would probably want to nail him down and sustain his madness, and that explains everything. Ironically, of course, Southey then had his own psychological problems. One wonders to what degree he was just using Chatterton as a way of reflecting on his own mental state. I think that the excitement and the challenge in Chatterton is not to pin him down, for him to remain fugitive, elusive, a quality in which there isn't a centre. It's sort of spreading in all sorts of ways that actually challenges our whole hierarchical way of critical and cultural thinking.

After many years, it's still surprising to me that despite this very significant reception by several generations of poets and writers and painters and artists as well, there hasn't been serious critical attention paid to Chatterton, nowhere near what one would expect and what he really deserves. And the reason for that is twofold: the suicide myth and the question of forgery.

*You have mentioned Donald Taylor's edition, while in terms of the Chatterton biography, its equal probably is M. W. H. Meyerstein's Life of Chatterton.<sup>2</sup>*

But again, that was published in 1930 and hasn't been superseded since, as far as I'm concerned. One can certainly enhance it but the biographies of Chatterton that have come since then haven't really represented Chatterton in a psychologically believable way.

*It was also Meyerstein who made the point about substituting "imposture" for the term "forgery," which had been loaded with a good deal of negative connotations over the centuries. You, however, go back to "forgery"; what was your main motive in returning to this terminology?*

Well, I wanted to ask this question head on; I wanted to use the term "forgery" but not as a pejorative term. I wanted to use it in its other meanings, in terms of the forge, the blacksmith who actually makes and crafts something, and indeed the way that a poem, a work of literature can be crafted, so it involves a series of other compositional activities or standards. And there's also another side to this: it's a word that is very frequently used about national identities – nations are, so to speak, forged. I think it is often used quite unironically by historians in that sense, but by politicians as well. So it does have a positive edge to it. But there's another aspect in terms of national identity, usable in the context of a literary history that writers like Chatterton and Macpherson are exploring. They're also tied up quite closely with regional and national identities, so it's like a coin

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2. E. H. W. Meyerstein, *A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1930).

that has two faces: on the one hand there is the positive use of forgery, on the other, it has negative connotations as well. But I certainly wanted to distinguish forgery as a creative act, something that exists in certain areas of the arts, while not extending forgery into legal dealings or science or medicine, or anything like that.

Still I think it's important that we just think about forgery and how it functions within literature and how it tests boundaries of what we believe as readers, what we're prepared to accept, and how literary conventions work and how we read things like footnotes, prefaces, and appendices, all that supporting material. How we, I suppose, investigate unfamiliar calligraphy or orthography in terms of the spelling and so forth. So it does test us and tease us, and it challenges us as critics to judge works on whether they are any good or not, so it goes back to old questions of literary value, I think.

Certainly Chatterton is doing that. I think writers like Richardson were also doing it; there were many readers in the 18th century who read even *Clarissa* as if it were real, so this goes back even earlier. There is evidence, however shaky, that some people thought *Gulliver's Travels* was purporting to be an actual or real travel narrative. So we're reading a period in which there aren't clear distinctions between fiction and non-fiction. And Chatterton is someone who is exploring that, testing those boundaries. But he puts us on our mettle as readers; we are asked to judge his writing. And far too many readers say that it's forgery and therefore has no value. You know the fact is that he's playing with these conventions. He's extremely experimental and speculative, but he is also undermining the critical conventions that literary historians and scholars want to maintain. He's always crossing that boundary between the professional critic and the writer who's safely in their box, breaking out of those categories. He's troubling the whole institution of literature. That's one of the reasons why it's tempting to dismiss him in a footnote but not actually tackle what he's doing head on.

*In terms of using this special terminology, do you think words such as "imposture," "forgery," "fake," or "counterfeit" carry any fixed or permanent currency?*

I think it's very revealing when one looks at the history of these words and finds that they do shift and they're getting different sorts of associations, different resonances at different times. So I would certainly say that I would want to distinguish *forgery* as a potentially creative activity from *counterfeiting*, which strikes me as producing a facsimile of something else. Chatterton or Macpherson are forgers in the sense that they are composing new works, whereas counterfeiting would be a species of cheating – counterfeiting a bank note or a painting that already exists. It's a different sort of activity. You can still gather all this together with plagiarism and imposture as well and call it "fake lit," which I would like it to be called, if anybody will take that up.

I think it is quite revealing that imposture and performance become more significant after Chatterton. As Chatterton goes up to the muniment room in the church of St Mary

Redcliffe and tells people he has found stuff there, there's performance in what he's doing, which lies beyond simply writing *about* it. He is acting out the part of an antiquarian who's rummaging in these chests. That becomes more significant as we move towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, into the Romantic period. It goes along with an increasingly individualistic notion of identity, which we associate with the Romantics in any case, and the development of certain subjectivities, and so you do see more performed imposture, having characters like Princess Caraboo, for example, acting out the part of a semi-folkloric figure. In other words, people are internalizing the forgery and becoming different personas acting out different roles. It's interesting that Meyerstein identifies that happening earlier, in Chatterton, but I think it really blooms a generation or so later.

*Your etymological take on these terms is fascinating in The Forger's Shadow as well. Do you think this approach and the considerations mentioned so far are enough to assume your alignment with "uncanny" criticism, postmodernism, deconstruction, or all or any of these tendencies?*

I think that's a fair assumption. I certainly felt so when I was writing the preliminary essays that then got me in the way of planning *The Forger's Shadow*; there's an essay I just called "Thomas Chatterton Was a Forger,"<sup>3</sup> in which I was preparing certain ideas and I certainly found certain aspects of Continental theory very helpful for that. The Foucaultian idea of the author function, Derrida's "Signature Event Context,"<sup>4</sup> Barthes's work on the death of the author, Baudrillard, and also Deleuze. On the other hand, I was trying to avoid going down the psychoanalytical route too much because that's a form of medicalizing Chatterton's condition and I didn't want to see forgery as a symptom of some psychological disturbance; I wanted to treat it as literature. I felt that all of those theorists and critics were enabling me to find ways of talking about Chatterton that hadn't really been explored consistently. And it was also part of the international atmosphere at the time, that sort of fad into postmodernism, really.

I suppose the intellectual climate has changed a bit now and one of the reasons for the controversial reception of my book was that it did utilize quite a lot of that Continental theory to think about the value of literature. But ultimately what it's about is about the value of literature and I was very heartened by a review that was in the *TLS* that in the end tried to go back to a much more humanist position or thinking. It is Deleuze who maintains that there are ways of reconfiguring the human intellectual and artistic activities that don't lose the human aspect. That's important, you just flex those

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3. Nick Groom, "Thomas Chatterton Was a Forger," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 28 (1998) 276–291.

4. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), 1–23.

emotional muscles a bit further or engage in different sorts of exercises. And I think that's what I found the most interesting, really, that it was actually possible to get to a point using that thinking, there was a point at which I thought I was doing the writers a service, ultimately. But it is a very uncanny book and I was quite haunted by it while writing it. . . As if you go very deep into these realms, it can be quite unnerving to become defamiliarized from oneself and othered in peculiar ways. But that's good, you know, that's part of the excitement as well, part of the fun! You need to have an escape route, too, though.

*Your exchange with Terry Eagleton in the London Review of Books seems to be a case in point in that respect. How would you characterize your professional and/or personal, informal connection with this prominent reviewer of yours?*

Well, I like Terry Eagleton; when I was an undergraduate, he gave one of the first lectures I went to, an introduction to literary theory, was it? Yes. . . And you know I've encountered him since then at various points. One of the things I noticed among all the reviews (I'll come to Eagleton himself in a moment) was that they tended unconsciously to imitate how reviewers in the 18th and 19th centuries had responded to writers who *were* forgers. Now I was just writing *about* forgery, I wasn't presenting my work as anything else than a critical book. However, some of the critics at the time of Macpherson and Chatterton, Ireland or Wainwright, would try to say that these people were mad, or that they were criminal – using Foucaultian discourses of the law and medicine and psychology and so forth. They were trying to characterize forgery in those ways. Or they're saying that's absolutely wonderful, and so you get to Thomas Gray being 'ecstasié' with the infinite beauty of Macpherson's fragments and you get people being possessed like Coleridge was by Chatterton. So it either goes into the areas of extravagant praise, or it goes the other way and says that this person's mad or even criminal.

That was certainly a way you could characterize the contours of the reviews that *The Forger's Shadow* itself received. Some of the reviews are wonderful, and others were truly ghastly, and I was accused of evil sorts of things. Terry Eagleton's review was one of the most intelligent reviews of the book, but it also had elements of the other reviews. It showed an awareness of this complex although what troubled me most about it was his intentionally going for minute things like the acknowledgments page or the blurb and while Eagleton certainly got engaged with the arguments, at the same time, he seems to be representing it all as a sort of postmodernist extravagance. His attention to the most marginal details of the book, including the people that I thanked in the acknowledgments, seemed to me to be demented, frankly. And there are jokes in the book, too, in the index, for example. One of the jokes was that Eagleton clearly looked himself up in the index and when he got to the relevant page for the reference found that I couldn't re-

member which book of his I had quoted from. It was meant to be just a little sort of gag, really, but he took it all most seriously, I think.

*In addition to an overall reassessment of Chatterton and the Chatterton phenomenon, you have also targeted individual works in the Chatterton canon. An important philological point, for example, was your attack on Donald Taylor's decision to include the vitriolic lines "To Horace Walpole" among Chatterton's authentic works. Do you think there will be room for further similar disqualifications in the future?*

This, I suppose, is inevitably tied up with Chatterton's life. It's a huge challenge; you just can't separate the two. I gradually got interested in the whole question of Chatterton's death and the circumstances and the writings that led up to it. To go back to Meyerstein, he comes so close to challenging the suicide myth, but for whatever reasons, he doesn't actually take that particular step. And when you begin to investigate it, you realize that there have been a number of both critics and novelists who have actually challenged that particular version of the events. So I think the more that one investigates that – and I'm trying to do more work on it still and I think there is another level of research to be done here – the less it is premeditated suicide, which comes out of a number of bits of evidence in earlier works. So I certainly challenge the "Lines to Walpole" in the same way that you know one has to challenge the lines that John Dix "discovered," which were meant to be the suicide note.

Using ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online), it's possible to challenge various other items in the Chatterton canon, which has become slightly more stable since we've been able to use ECCO and just identify a few things he couldn't possibly have written, published before he was born, for instance. But any edition is going to be contingent, again, you have to draw the line somewhere. We now have stylometry, we have the electronic archives, and there is going to be an opportunity for further reassessment of the Chatterton canon, but it won't be a significant one. I think that although Taylor was working under very difficult circumstances, his scholarship is just amazingly perceptive and in the main he's right, but there are certain instances with which I'd disagree. But I'm also prepared to admit that that's because there's the bigger story behind it and that bigger story has to do with Chatterton's relationship with Rowley<sup>5</sup> and how he's imagining that, and also with the circumstances of his death. So I wouldn't want to pretend that my research is independent of those two big questions.

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5. Thomas Rowley was a fictitious 15th-century monk whose character Chatterton invented, attributing to him a number of literary works such as *Ælla*, a tragedy that is his most sustained "forgery," local topographical writings, as well as assumed translations from Latin.

*This whole issue about "Lines to Walpole" shows an interesting process. In *The Forger's Shadow*, you'd only hinted at the likelihood of this poem being a 19th-century forgery, while in a subsequent essay you argued beyond reasonable doubt that it cannot be Chatterton's. Through what stages did you arrive at this conclusion?*

Actually, one of the things, you see, is that I simply didn't have time to do it and it seemed to be a digression in *The Forger's Shadow* and it required a bit of investigative work to find out how this poem had emerged. I also didn't want to muddy *The Forger's Shadow*. We're talking about John Dix, and he would have been a complete red herring in that book. And I wanted, I suppose, to tantalize the reader slightly that this canon wasn't so stable as it might otherwise appear. But those lines are perpetually quoted, so I'd also think that it's important; if this is one of those poems by which the non-expert would recognize Chatterton, then that's what you attack because it is a central strut, if you like, in his critical reception. But I just needed a little more time to think about how the manuscript had purportedly travelled around and to describe all those things that are ridiculous simply in terms of the work itself and the way in which it got into Dix's hands. Also I've done some more work on Dix since then, I wanted to find out a bit more about him. And everything that Dix says has to be queried. He's one of the most unreliable commentators I've ever encountered, I think, somebody who would make an interesting case using psychological, no, psychiatric criticism because he fits even more than William Henry Ireland into the psychiatric definition of a fabulator or a fantasist. I have been talking to psychiatrists about this and it'd be quite an interesting project for someone to find similar case studies. Dix and Ireland both seem to me on the surface to be classic cases of confabulators, really.

*Do you find it difficult to revise your own position in light of newly emerging information, for instance? Have you ever been forced to take a conceptual U-turn?*

I think that one must always be prepared to develop one's own position and I certainly tend to see the use of Continental theory to be quite dated in *The Forger's Shadow*. It is a book of a certain period, I think. And yet it does still antagonize some people; there's been a big spat in the *Johnsonian Newsletter* focused on Thomas Curley, who's recently published a book on Macpherson's *Ossian*<sup>6</sup> and his relationship with Johnson. This was originally in consequence of an essay that he wrote and I responded to. So the latest exchange is a review<sup>7</sup> that was published last year in the *Johnsonian Newsletter* in which I

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6. Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).

7. The prehistory of the affair includes Thomas M. Curley, "Samuel Johnson and Truth: The First Systematic Detection of Literary Deception in James Macpherson's *Ossian*," *The Age of Johnson: A*

reviewed Thomas Curley's book, and one of the things that Curley's book reminded me of is that the battle's not won. I haven't succeeded yet, and neither has Fiona Stafford,<sup>8</sup> or Chattertonians like Susan Stewart or Margaret Russett or Debbie Lee.<sup>9</sup> Even though we would hope that the critical opinion is shifting, for many people everything stays the same.

It's surprising to me how many times I still have to make the case at conferences, for example, that it is too easy that problematic writers are still being dismissed, with Chatterton foremost among them, and despite the excellent work on Chatterton both before and after my book by other people. But you know one book doesn't change the opinions of the professionals of the literary critical world. And so there's still a long way to go and we're going to keep on fighting the battle. Although you know one's own thoughts might be shifting, you still go back to the old arguments. Despite having written the book and other essays since then and despite the fact that there's a good number of people who are developing thought in this area, who are investigating Chatterton and other writers, it's still surprising how mainstream critical opinion continues to parrot the old prejudices, really. So we've still got a long way to go, we've got to keep on flogging away at this.

*Actually that raises the question of cultural memory: however much you write about "To Horace Walpole" and its inauthenticity, for example, or other issues that would reevaluate the situation, do you think it can fully be deleted from cultural memory or will it always be a part of "Chatterton," even if not the right kind of Chatterton?*

I think that the problem is that it's so much part of the cultural heritage of Chatterton now that it's virtually impossible for some people to accept that there are these things in question. And that is because the whole development of the myth is one that speaks very powerfully to a certain type of Romantic or Post-Romantic identity. We haven't got over the Romantics yet. All Modernism was a minor digression from a huge Post-Romantic cultural juggernaut that just keeps on driving on and we're still in it, we're still really in Late Romanticism. It's very difficult to get out of it not least because everybody now

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*Scholarly Annual* 17 (2006): 119–96; Nick Groom, "Samuel Johnson and Truth: A Response to Curley," *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 17 (2006) 197–201.

8. Professor of 18th and 19th-century English literature at Oxford, with a keen interest in Macpherson, author of *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1988) and *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

9. Cf. Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Oxford: OUP, 1991); Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); Debbie Lee, *Romantic Liars: Obscure Women Who Became Impositors and Challenged an Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

who's got a computer and a broadband connection and one finger can become a commentator or, indeed, a poet or a writer and they're falling back on these extremely dated models of authorship or composition or inspiration, and rather than historicizing them they're thinking only of mad, unrecognized suicidal geniuses.

Unfortunately, one of the models for that is Chatterton, so no matter how much you challenge it, it's a cultural archetype which is perpetuated. It's a certain radical typology which keeps being renewed at the moment. So it's challenging not just that figure but the whole cultural context which seems to think there is something to be valued in a suicidal teenager. That to me is terrible and says ghastly things about our culture. We should instead be addressing that morbid love affair with young death, really. I think that's much more topical or relevant to consider the possibility of a teenager who goes to London and dies from an accidental drugs overdose. That speaks so much more powerfully to current concerns. . . not the fantasy of the unrecognized genius who kills himself in a fit of pride. We should not be celebrating things like that. This is an ethical issue as well and it has to be seen in a broader context. But you're right, the cultural memory has invaded it so deep that it keeps popping out all over the place. Lots of popular books are written by people who've never done any decent research, so I think they just go out to resell the easy old prejudices.

*What you are saying raises the question of virtual realities. In The Forger's Shadow you mention that visiting Bristol brings a veritable disappointment to the Chatterton scholar. On the other hand, certain websites offer a virtual tour of various literary figures' dwellings or notable sites of activity exceeding the information or even the mere added value of experience ensuing from visits to actual physical sites of memory. Do you think such virtual spaces may ultimately replace actual journeys and field trips in literary research as well?*

Well, a lot of my work at the moment is trying to do the complete opposite. While I think it's important to have those virtual environments, and that can be a huge value and benefit in terms of mapping cities and their associations and so forth, I think you've got to get out and engage with these places and think about the actual bricks and mortar of Chatterton's house or the architecture of St Mary Redcliffe and to see how badly it's been treated in the past. There's now a dual carriageway between the house in which Chatterton was born and St Mary Redcliffe Church. Now, to its benefit, the Bristol City Council are now addressing what to do with Chatterton's house. This is after years of neglect, I mean decades of neglect.

The statue that used to stand outside the church was taken down in the 1960s and it's been variously ill-treated but I believe it's actually now secure in a museum storeroom. I find it astonishing that a city like Bristol, which is the crucible of Romanticism, where Wordsworth and Coleridge met, doesn't do more to celebrate one of its most influential

writers. And this is something which really goes to the heart of the potential significance of a writer like Chatterton today. The area that he came from is still a socially deprived area of Bristol and, as I have been trying to point out in the Chatterton Society, he could really be speaking to those young disaffected teenagers who are dropping out of school and taking drugs but who nevertheless have the potential to be writers or musicians, or entrepreneurs for that matter.

So in other words there's a real social and political agenda we could develop here, to actually help people directly. But for that it is really important that we get literary studies out of the classroom, out of universities, and think about how they can help people in those circumstances on the ground. So while the virtual world is something where we can learn a lot about 18th-century Bristol, for example, or about the way that Chatterton is mapping or remapping the region, at the same time, we've got to do something about the actual place itself and about what it can give to future generations. I think that there can be a moral dimension to heritage tourism. It is one of the great things about literature that it can bring in people and therefore money to areas that might not have other things to offer, other reasons to visit. So it is keyed into sustainable communities. We ought to think about what we're doing in those contexts. So there's an important environmental aspect in its broadest terms.

*Aside from Chatterton, you also took an excursion to Shakespeare criticism. In *Introducing Shakespeare*,<sup>10</sup> you offer a lively and youthful presentation of "Will the Bard" and his reception over the centuries. Do you consider such a medium as a firm bridge between high and popular culture?*

Yes, definitely. But I don't see this that differently from my work done on Chatterton. It's looking at how the myths about Shakespeare emerged, how we deal with Shakespeare as a cultural phenomenon today. I mean Shakespeare is probably the most massive example of this as opposed to Chatterton's tiny niche example. I should also stress that I wasn't responsible for the images, which were negotiated quite tongue-in-cheek by the editor and the artist. But it is a book which I started writing thinking that I was going to be following a more cultural materialist line and say, well, you know, Shakespeare is popular just because he's been popular in the past. . . there are whole material cultural theories for that, such as the extensive printing and circulation of his work across the globe.

However, by the time I finished the book, I'd changed my mind completely. You see, Shakespeare is just *better* than anybody else and it was a very satisfying book to write because unwittingly it restored lots of my faith in the actual value of literature. And despite all of the arguments about Shakespeare being related to certain ideologies and printing practices and educational strategies and so forth, you just can't escape the fact

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10. Nick Groom & Piero, *Introducing Shakespeare: A Graphic Guide* (London: Icon, 2001).

that as a writer he is just in a different league, if not on a different planet, to anybody else. Thank God we've got him, really! It's not just because of cultural mechanics that he keeps being reinvented; it's because the works are bottomless, you can't end up categorizing them as having like a single line. So yes, it was a refreshing book to write and I absolutely love teaching Shakespeare. I think he's a fantastic and thrilling writer. You know there's always something. . . there's always something new and refreshing there.

*Do you think Shakespeare ever borrowed anything from Thomas Rowley's Ælla, for example?*

O, of course he did! [*Laughs.*]

*In writing *Introducing Shakespeare*, were there any particular advantages you capitalized on or were there any dangers in this different genre that you had to face?*

You mean because the book was pitched for a certain sort of audience?

Yes, *exactly.*

I'm not completely happy with the account that's given of theoretical positions at the end of the book; that was a result of simply having to edit it down to virtually nothing. But it's quite an ambitious book that tries to cover quite a lot in a short space and unfortunately I've had to simplify some quite complex ideas. The idea is that it ought to encourage readers to go and find out more for themselves. It's certainly a starting point and I wanted to demystify a lot of stuff as well, I wanted to make it more accessible and put it in a context.

I think my other regret about that book is that though it's been reissued, it could have benefited from being updated, really. Shakespeare scholarship is constantly on the move and the points about collaboration, for example, really have become a hot topic, with the possible collaboration of Middleton again with Shakespeare. And just after *Introducing Shakespeare* came out, there were a series of very important books about Shakespeare's acting company, too, so it would have been nice to have a second edition which could have had a few more pages about the company in light of that more recent research.

Also, as I was pointing out, and this goes back to fake lit, in another way, I now regularly get communications from people who think that Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare. There's a very energetic community out there of people who're promoting all sorts of other candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare. And I'm one of the people who have exposed themselves and said yes, these authors, these authorship controversies are just nonsense, really. You'd expect them to have reasonably thought about it as well. But no, it means that you get a lot of people invading you with their latest theories, which is

rather irksome. [Laughs.] It's another example of the fact that despite how much evidence you produce to the contrary, you're not dealing with people who can change their minds on this. It's deeply rooted in all sorts of other cultural prejudices, I think. So there's always going to be that lunatic fringe in Shakespeare Studies.

*You're not the only person who has this combined and very deep-going interest in Shakespeare and Chatterton. From the fictional side, there are Neil Gaiman or Peter Ackroyd, of course. . .*

Absolutely, yes.

*I wonder if you could relate your work to theirs in terms of fiction, non-fiction, or any other context.*

Well, I'm flattered that you should mention me in the same sentence. . . I'm a huge admirer of Peter Ackroyd's work, certainly, and I think that he's an extremely interesting and energetic thinker.<sup>11</sup> As far as Neil Gaiman goes, again he's out there as someone that is really testing boundaries, a real experimenter – I mean always inviting you to look what he's doing next, really. . . I feel embarrassed that I should compare myself seriously to those people. It'd be presumptuous of me to do so. . .

*Well, I understand. On another note, I gather that you're still working on some further Chatterton essays right now. What else are you dealing with?*

I'm about to start an essay on reassessing the idea of authenticity in poetry in the 18th century, so that'll be my latest comment on that. I've got a couple of other essays that I was commissioned to do, all of them, I'm ashamed to say, late, but that's because we've just had the new baby and I'm now Director of Education on the Cornwall Campus. But I've got the proofs for a book about the Gothic arriving in a couple of weeks.<sup>12</sup> It will be out in autumn this year; Oxford University Press are running a series called "very short introductions"; mine is a very short introduction to the Gothic and its unique selling point is that it looks at the Gothic throughout history, so it starts with the sack of Rome (410 AD) and the barbarian tribes and it ends with contemporary Goth culture today. And so along the way it takes into account political theory, architecture, medievalism – Chatterton himself is enshrined in the book – and it takes in the Gothic novel, Gothic film, as well as music. It's trying to fit a lot into a short book, so it's an essay, really, which looks at whether it's possible to trace the history of that particular world and associations

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11. Incidentally, Peter Ackroyd wrote the foreword to Nick Groom, ed., *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), the essay collection mentioned earlier on.

12. Nick Groom, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

through the past fifteen hundred years or so. I really enjoyed writing that, so I'd like to expand the work into a broader project.

And then next year I've got a book coming out, a cultural history of the seasons.<sup>13</sup> This is following up on a book about the Union Jack, which came out some six years ago.<sup>14</sup> On the face of it, it looks a bit of a digression. I mean why should I turn from Thomas Chatterton towards writing about the national flag of the United Kingdom? Well, it's because of the point that we were talking about earlier, that relationship between authenticity and national identity. That means you can mobilize the same critical and interpretive strategies whether you're looking at the reception of a poet like Chatterton or, indeed, like Shakespeare, or whether you're looking at the way that a particular symbol such as the Union Jack has been adopted. So that's the actual connection between various myths of national identity, concerned with reinventions of history.

That was a book about the union and about the national regional identities. But that has gone off to the direction of thinking about the environment more and thinking about what those identities mean in Post-Devolution United Kingdom, also in the context of the economic recession. That has encouraged this work to link the literature to the environment more securely; that's why I was talking about Chatterton's houses within the sense of this wider project. And so the book about the seasons will be trying to argue that the seasons aren't simply a meteorological or an agricultural way of organizing time and activities, but they're cultural, and when we actually look at them as a cultural product, we discover all sorts of things about them and, most importantly, we realize what we're in danger of losing not just from climate change but also from the homogenization of farming practices and global markets, villages and towns and high streets throughout the country. Now I don't know whether this is the case in Hungary as well, but this galloping globalization I think is something which is eroding identity in *every way* and it's, well, destroying the traditional meeting places, the festivals and forums of expression, locally specific particular identities.

The book about the seasons will be an attempt to draw attention to that, so it's a polemic, really, an attempt to try to get people to realize that there are huge cultural dimensions to the environmental issues that we're currently facing. In other words, it's not *just* via scientists that we should be dealing with this, it's also people who think about literature and culture that have a major part to play in this. I don't know whether you've read Tim Morton's book, *Ecology without Nature*,<sup>15</sup> which is quite an influential post-ecocritical book that came out a few years ago; my project's also a response to that, but

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13. Nick Groom, *The Seasons: An Elegy for the Passing of the Year* (London: Atlantic, 2013).

14. Nick Groom, *The Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag* (London: Atlantic, 2007).

15. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007).

it's taking a much more neo-pragmatic position on thinking about the way that culture and the environment interact together.

And to go back to what I was saying about John Clare at the beginning, it's the same reason that John Clare likes Chatterton. John Clare likes Chatterton because he knows the right names for the flowers, he's gone out and inspected these, he's not treating them as a metaphor. I think that culture is becoming increasingly metaphorical. To go back to Keats, where we started: his readers all know the nightingale ode, but how many of them have ever heard a nightingale or could recognize a nightingale or distinguish a nightingale from a blackbird? And are we in danger of making literature into an abstract which doesn't actually connect with what it's like to listen to a nightingale? And whether we should actually be conserving nightingales, with their habitats, when farming practices threaten their existence. Well, there's another question: whether *Keats* knew what a nightingale sounded like. . . or is it already a metaphor for Keats?

*Or the scent of the eglantine. . .*

Yes, well, that's absolutely right. And the nightingale is also very prominent in Coleridge as well. The essay that I did on Chatterton and Coleridge in the southwest was partly about how Coleridge tried to resist the cultural associations of the nightingale, but then he'd realize that all he could do was to reinvent them, so that it is already a bird of culture, even though it also is a feathered creature that flies around and sings.

*And that famous anti-Miltonic line, "In nature there is nothing melancholy"?*

Precisely. And so you know I think that these questions about the relationship of metaphor to culture and to the environment are really ones that one should start addressing more profoundly. It's also about authenticity in a way. I'm interested in making sure that our understandings of poetry are rooted in direct rather than indirect experience. It's possible that the virtual environments you were talking about earlier could be a way into that. About ten years ago I wrote an essay on the Aeolian harp, but I have never published it because you need to be able to listen to an Aeolian harp as part of the essay. And so, without it, it simply risks making it abstract again.

So I'm quite interested in those digital technologies which could allow us to read accompanied by a soundtrack. And I don't just mean reading online and then clicking on a little icon, but that the soundtrack is much more embedded in the text, in the reading experience. So this paper seems to remain a lecture which I really enjoy giving because you can play things and talk over them, talk about them. The last time that I gave it, I actually had a dulcimer player with me who played the dulcimer as part of the lecture, which was again something you can't publish. That has to be about the live performance as well, something *to do*.

*You have listed many very different areas of activity in your life. At the end of this interview, do you think you could highlight one major thread that ties them all together?*

I keep coming back to the same questions and perspectives. On the face of it, you know, from Chatterton to Shakespeare, to national identity, to the environment, my themes seem to be very diverse, but on the other hand, they pose questions that concern authenticity and I think that's really the root of the work that I've been doing since my thesis and my doctoral research on Thomas Percy and how the national ballad tradition is being either researched or invented, depending on how you think about it. Or the current stuff about the Gothic, really, is testing what is real. And it's not just a forensic reality, it's about value. It's all about the value of literature and culture.

### Appendix: Two Chatterton Poems

These two excerpts show the two main sides of Chatterton's poetic output. The first is an extract from Chatterton's fake-medieval verse drama *Ælla*, whose line "Comme, wythe acorne-coppe & thorne" John Keats would famously recite to himself. The glosses are Chatterton's own. The second poem is from Chatterton's last creative period. Both works are reprinted from Taylor & Hoover (pp. 210–212 and 590–593, respectively).

#### **"O! synge unto mie roundelaie"**

O! synge untoe mie roundelaie,  
O! droppe the brynne teare wythe mee,  
Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,  
Lycke a reynynge\* ryver bee;  
    Mie love ys dedde,  
    Gon to hys death-bedde,  
    Al under the wyllowe tree.

Swote hys tyngue as the throstles note,  
Quycke ynn daunce as thoughte canne bee,  
Defte hys taboure, codgelle stote,  
O! hee lyes bie the wyllowe tree:  
    Mie love ys dedde,  
    Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,  
    Alle underre the wyllowe tree.

Blacke hys cryne† as the wyntere nyghte,  
Whyte hys rode‡ as the sommer snowe,  
Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,  
Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe;  
    Mie love ys dedde,  
    Gon to hys deathe-bedde,  
    Al under the wyllowe tree.

Harke! the ravenne flappes hys wynges,  
In the briered delle belowe;  
Harke! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,  
To the nyghte-mares as heie goe;  
    Mie love ys dedde,  
    Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,  
    Al under the wyllowe tree.

\* running † hair ‡ complexion.



INTERVIEW WITH NICK GROOM

'Twas in the dead of night at Chalma's feast,  
The tribe of Alra slept around the priest.  
He spoke; as evening thunder bursting near,  
His horrid accents broke upon the ear;  
Attend Alraddas, with your sacred priest!  
This day the sun is rising in the east;  
The sun, which shall illumine all the earth,  
Now, now is rising in a mortal birth.  
He vanish'd like a vapor of the night,  
And sunk away in a faint blaze of light.  
Swift from the branches of the holy oak,  
Horror, confusion, fear, and torment broke:  
And still when Midnight trims her mazy lamp,  
They take their way thro' Tiber's watry

swamp.

On Tiber's banks, close rank'd, a warring  
train,  
Stretch'd to the distant edge of Galca's plain;  
So when arriv'd at Gaigra's highest steep,  
We view the wide expansion of the deep;  
See in the gilding of her wat'ry robe,  
The quick declension of the circling globe;  
From the blue sea a chain of mountains rise,  
Blended at once with water and with skies:  
Beyond our sight, in vast extension curl'd,  
The check of waves, the guardians of the

world.

Strong were the warriors, as the ghost of  
Cawn,  
Who threw the hill of archers to the lawn:  
When the soft earth at his appearance fled;  
And rising billows play'd around his head:  
When a strong tempest rising from the main,  
Dash'd the full clouds, unbroken on the plain.  
Nicou, immortal in the sacred song,  
Held the red sword of war, and led the strong;

From his own tribe the sable warriors came,  
Well try'd in battle, and well known in fame.  
Nicou, descended from the god of war,  
Who liv'd coeval with the morning star:  
Narada was his name; who cannot tell,  
How all the world through great Narada fell?  
Vichon, the god who rul'd above the skies,  
Look'd on Narada, but with envious eyes:  
The warrior dar'd him, ridicul'd his might,  
Bent his white bow, and summon'd him to  
fight.

Vichon disdainful bade his lightnings fly,  
And scatter'd burning arrows in the sky;  
Threw down a star the armour of his feet,  
To burn the air with supernat'ral heat;  
Bid a loud tempest roar beneath the ground;  
Lifted the sea, and all the earth was drown'd.  
Narada still escap'd; a sacred tree  
Lifted him up, and bore him thro' the sea.  
The waters still ascending fierce and high,  
He tower'd into the chambers of the sky:  
There Vichon sat; his armor on his bed,  
He thought Narada with the mighty dead.  
Before his seat the heav'nly warrior stands,  
The lightning quiv'ring in his yellow hands:  
The god astonish'd dropt; hurl'd from the  
shore,

He drop'd to torments and to rise no more.  
Headlong he falls; 'tis his own arms compel,  
Condemn'd in ever-burning fires to dwell.  
From this Narada, mighty Nicou sprung;  
The mighty Nicou, furious, wild, and young:  
Who led th'embattled archers to the field,  
And bore a thunderbolt upon his shield:  
That shield his glorious father died to gain,  
When the white warriors fled along the plain:



## **Marginalia and Marginal Figures in the Romantic Age**

Alex Watson, *Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012)

Simon P. Hull, *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine: Metropolitan Muse* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010)

The two books under review are in many ways comparable. The authors of both represent a younger generation among the students of the romantic era. Both of them practice a scholarship that is historically grounded and is interested in the material aspects of literary production. Hence, both studies have been published in Pickering & Chatto's *The History of the Book* series (where "the book" metonymically stands for all tangible conveyors of culture, including journalism). Both of them are interested in the rethinking of the canon, and neither of them sees the "greater romantic lyric" as the only possible candidate for its single centre. Both are interested in romantic prose writing. However, while Watson investigates how marginalia reflect or reject contemporary thinking about the margins of the British Empire,

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The views expressed in the book reviews do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors of *The AnaChronisT*.

Hull looks at its very centre, albeit from the perspective of a self-consciously marginal figure, Charles Lamb's *Elia*.

Alex Watson's *Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page* is an important book, because it is the first book-length attempt at investigating romantic authors' practices of annotation. As the title indicates, the innovative approach is connected to post-colonial studies. Watson argues that the way marginal texts (footnotes and endnotes mostly) are used reveals a lot about attitudes concerning centre and margin in the growing empire.

The first chapter gives a short but very fascinating overview of the development of what Watson calls the "subtle cultural anxiety about the potentially encroaching effects of paratexts" (13), which he sees as a neglected factor in the emergence of the Romantic concept of the work of art as an organic whole (poems, according to John Keats, "should do without any comment," 29). The eighteenth century saw many objections to annotation. From theology ("the word of God," said Berkeley "should not need a comment," 16) to the debate between Ancients and Moderns, in which Pope compared the presence of commentaries in texts by Shakespeare or Milton to "'Hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms' preserved in amber" (17). Thus, a distinction came to be made between the "pedant," who simply collects information (and transforms it into footnotes), and the critic of sensibility, who directs the readers' attention to "beau-

ties and blemishes” in a given text. At the same time, the eighteenth century sees a rising interest in the potentials in annotation, on the one hand for purposes of Scriblerian parody and satire, as in “A Tale of a Tub” or the *Dunciad Variorum*, and on the other, for using real footnotes in experimental ways (Watson quotes a few of what Winston Churchill referred to as “Gibbon’s naughty footnotes,” 24).

The second chapter deals with “struggles for authorial ownership and interpretative hegemony” (32) as witnessed by marginalia. An extreme example of this is provided by William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786), a novel originally written in French, and then translated into English and provided with a commentary by clergyman and schoolmaster Samuel Henley. Henley took his task so seriously that he not only provided many more footnotes than was thought necessary by Beckford, but actually published the English edition without any mention of the fact that he was not the author. A more subtle, and better known, example is the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, where the notes not only conduct a dialogue with the readers, but also a more private conversation and contest between the contributors over the meaning of the texts. Watson chooses the example of Thomas James Mathias’s notes for *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794–7) as an example of a romantic poet using his comments to ensure that his poem takes part in rich public interactions with the wider world.

The very informative discussion, however, made me feel – not for the last time – that the line of argument could have taken exactly the opposite direction as well. The fact that direct political attack can (only) take the form of a footnote might also reveal anxiety about romantic poetry’s ability to enter the public arena.

It is in chapter 3 that Watson finally finds his true subject: the similarities and differences between political and textual marginalisation. The chapter includes analyses of Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), with special attention to the footnotes, of course, which “manifest their authors’ dual marginality as Irish women writers” (49). Indeed, Watson posits a recognisable late eighteenth century feminine tradition of marginalia, exemplified by works such as Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* or “Beachy Head,” Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Charlotte Brooke’s *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. The similarities are not immediately noticeable. While, according to Watson, the significance of Smith’s notes is that she “demonstrated her mastery” of “hitherto male-dominated discourses” (51), Wollstonecraft’s are seen as “provocatively unscholarly,” the first demonstrating anxiety about women’s place in public discourse, the second its opposite. What makes them all feminine, though, is that they use the margins to “put forward emotional pleas” (57). *Castle Rackrent*

is unique because it breaks with this tradition, which also puts Edgeworth on the imperial side of the question: her notes associate native Irish customs with backwardness and barbarity. Owenson, however, uses the antiquarian learning gathered in the notes to *The Wild Irish Girl* “as evidence of a distinctive Irish national identity” (65), and thus as possible “foundation for the nation’s future” (64); in effect, she constructs “an anti-colonial archive” (68). By focusing on what the English reader is ignorant of, the notes to both novels, although to differing degrees, undermine the coloniser’s sense of superiority.

Watson interprets Robert Southey’s commentary accompanying *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) as the opposite of an “anti-colonial archive”; he calls it “an imperial collection,” which is based on “the practice of extracting objects from their original context, and resituating them in the hermetic – ‘useless’ – world of the collection” (73). That this text should receive such a detailed interpretation is perhaps going to be surprising to some people; some of us might even snigger that it is no wonder that Watson does not focus on the centred text, but he still establishes certain interesting parallels between the frenzied collecting zeal of the Empire and Southey’s “miser-like love of accumulation” (73, the poet’s own words). The British attempt was to establish London as the centre not just of finance and power, but also of knowledge, thus marginalising the colonised lands in a cultural sense as well.

Southey is also a good example of how notes begin to live a life of their own. He insisted that his “notes will be too numerous and too entertaining to print at the bottom of the page,” which enables us to imagine a type of reader (maybe not even too rare a species) who actually is more interested in the notes than in the poem itself. Watson relies on Edward Said’s insight that Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt (1798), a military campaign where the army was accompanied by 165 scientists, artists and other intellectuals, created a very strong precedent for an association between imperial expansion and intellectual progress. Watson argues that while Southey very much shares and even propagates this “progressive” view of imperialism, his fascination for the supernatural in *Thalaba* makes it difficult to assimilate him to the “Enlightened” view. Moreover, not even in the notes, where one would normally expect it, does the rationalisation of the superstitious elements take place. Room is left for the possibility, in other words, that Southey is more open to non-Western ways of thinking than he is usually given credit for, maybe in this poem “truth is dependent on social circumstances” (95). Watson makes a similar statement about *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), where India appears as a “disturbing and fascinating alterity” (98). It remains a question, however, whether delight in the wildly exotic really amounts to openness towards “alterity.” In certain parts the mixture of eastern and western

in the poem struck me as simply silly (“Allah, thy will be done” (I.7) and the rest of it). Nevertheless, Watson is surely right to stress the importance of Southey’s poems in founding a recognisable tradition of narrative poetry in the romantic period, which includes works by Thomas More, Felicia Hemans, Lord Byron, and P.B. Shelley, many of which share the fascination with the eastern and the exotic.

Chapter 5 turns to Scotland, and its two best-known authors: Robert Burns and Walter Scott, who both “translate Scots and Gaelic dialect terms, collect, display and remake materials from Celtic and Pictish folk traditions, and gather and interpret anthropological information about Highland and Lowland communities” (101), and thus “in their annotation, Burns and Scott created archives of history, culture and tradition from which a Scottish identity could be formed” (103). Watson emphasises that “to be a Scots poet” for Burns, as much as for previous authors like Robert Ferguson or Allan Ramsay, was “to live a bilingual existence, on the margins between Scotland and England” (105). But exactly because of the complexity of the cultural interchange that their work achieves, it is far from obvious whether the archival work embodied in the annotation actually “decentres the English metropolitan reader, confronting them with their lack of cultural competence in an alien environment” (106), or rather decreases and domesticates the otherness of that environment. Nevertheless,

Watson is surely right to elaborate on the importance of Burns’s writing in the Scottish dialect as opposed to the distinguished tradition of scholars (such as Adam Smith, David Hume or Hugh Blair), who simply eliminated Scots (Although here as well some reflection on differences of genre and the possibilities of linguistic experimentation would have been beneficial to the argument). Ultimately, Burns’ annotations are seen as deconstructing the English-Scottish dichotomy on which the negative discrimination of the latter could otherwise rest.

Walter Scott’s historical novels, however, effect a union (almost *the* Union) by “distancing the reader from . . . diversity, presenting cultural differences as evidence of past conflicts that have been superseded by the civilising effect of national centralization and modern manners” (108). It is only on the margins that Scott gives voice to the trauma that accompanies the history of integration. From the first, Scott’s strategy is to record (already in his ballad collection and early poetry) the brutality of the past, and to enable the reader to sense the advance that has been made since then. As most of the violent acts are connected to the fight against English supremacy, however, the very bases of British rule are represented as blood-stained. Scott appears as an ethnographer in the footnotes, elaborating on the wider cultural significance of what might otherwise be seen as mere *couleur locale*.

Having examined the contradictory strategies of the two most famous Scottish writers of Romanticism, Watson turns to Lord Byron, whom he calls, with dazzling overstatement, “their fellow Scotsman” (116). In this last chapter the analysis centres on Byron’s and John Cam Hobhouse’s imperfectly collaborative annotations to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1811–16). Although the post-colonial perspective does not at first seem to be as clearly relevant as in the case of the Scottish writers, general problems related to imperialism are at stake here as well; most famously in the case of Byron’s objection to the transfer of the Parthenon sculptures to London. Byron’s footnotes contain much information about the places Childe Harold visits, and by insisting on the immediacy and authenticity of his first-hand experience, he allows his readers to see through the widespread ideological accounts of these colonised cultures, and thus “to comprehend the world from the perspective of the margins” (124). Hobhouse wrote the notes to Canto IV, and Watson offers a very interesting reading of the text as a result of a complex, uneasy cooperation between the two friends, in which the footnotes provide the crucial context for placing the Byron of this Canto in the line of republican Italian poet-heroes. He does not, however, make a very strong case for either of the two actually thinking of this as creative cooperation, or for the work ever having been read in that way in its history of reception, or indeed

examine how many people actually worked their way through the ocean of Hobhouse’s annotation. Watson uses this final example as a summary of many of the themes of his book, and indeed Watson’s reader will by this point be ready to share in the pleasures of the de-centred text that delights in heterogeneity and non-hierarchical variety.

I have found the Conclusion (“Romantic Marginality and Beyond”) to be the least satisfying part of the book. Most of the short chapter is taken up by a seemingly ad-hoc list of works from J. F. Cooper to David Foster Wallace, in which notes are also used in creative ways, and to which some of the insights of the book seem to be applicable. I would, however, have wished for a chapter that meditates on how far we can generalise from the case studies in the volume. By this point, we have seen that annotations can complicate the meaning of a text in innumerable ways, we have seen them caught up in widely different ideologies, we have seen them as sociable and as satirical, playful and (pseudo-)scholarly. Is there a way in which a taxonomy can be drawn up? Are there any deductions to be made as to the conditions of possibility in which a set of marginalia assumes significance in one way or another? What factors influence the process? Watson mostly examines the annotations in the works of more-or-less solitary authors (or in some cases of duos), but surely facts of publishing and formatting, as well as of recep-

tion, are also significant. "I have opted to focus on how authors use annotation, rather than what these practices reveal about the nature of reading in the period" (2) Watson claims in "his Introduction," but it is debatable how far the two can be separated. He, for instance, regularly makes assumptions about how the dialogue between centred text and marginalia influences the reader, typically without offering empirical evidence of this actually manifesting itself in reception history. Contemporary reviews are regularly cited at the beginnings of analyses, but not much is made of them to this effect.

Another problem with the "Conclusion" is that reading through the list of texts from different periods, we become uncertain how far this project is historically specific at all. Surely, if the context in which the texts are examined is the troubled relationships between colonial centre and the peripheries, then it has to preserve a high level of historic specificity (since those relationships were themselves unstable). Nevertheless, given that Watson's interpretations are relatively easily divested from the contexts of the histories of reading, cultures of publication, reviewing, one gets the sense that what we are faced with are deconstructions of the centre-margin dichotomy, and rather brilliant ones at that.

So while I agree with Tom Williams, who in a *TLS* review celebrates the book as groundbreaking,<sup>1</sup> I believe that if the study of romantic marginality wishes to

become a well-established field in present day romantic scholarship, it needs to reflect more on its methodologies, and needs to engage more with studies of readers' marginalia (especially those of H. J. Jackson),<sup>2</sup> and, in general, move away from the examination of the solitary author to the social scene of writing. In this Watson's work, which certainly succeeds in directing attention to the margins, will be fundamental. It makes us understand that there is more to the footnote than what Anthony Graft called the Cartesian tradition of clarity and distinctness.<sup>3</sup>

Simon P. Hull's *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine* argues for a reconsideration of the *Elia*-essays that takes into consideration their specifically metropolitan character, and their position in what Hull calls "periodical text," two subjects against which traditional romantic scholarship tended to be biased.<sup>4</sup> Although Hull often refers, in a very broad sense, to the "periodical text," it is the work of Lamb's great prose-writing colleagues (William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Thomas de Quincey and to a lesser extent Pierce Egan) that provides the backdrop for the analysis. By this, Hull also counters the commonplace objection that *Elia* writing equals escapism. As Felicity James argues in her review of the book, Hull goes beyond existing scholarship on Romantic magazine culture, by focusing on the development and the complexity of the *Elia* character.<sup>5</sup> He also places the traditionally marginal genre of the essay at

the very heart of the literary scene. The complex argument is that while Elia is part and parcel of the commercial world of the *London Magazine*, the essays also cunningly educate the middle-class reader “to see beyond the material and the empirical” (15).

The first chapter argues that “an Elian mode of metropolitanism emerges in response to the ‘anxious’ image dramatised by the Cockney dispute” (20). In Hull’s usage, the very word “Cockneyism” refers to the “professional anxiety” (22) caused by the (not complete) anonymity and the commercial and collaborative nature of writing for magazines. Hull quotes a variety of contemporary periodical writers (but especially Hazlitt) who display this anxiety by self-criticism, saying that “the only way for the genre” of the embattled periodical essay “to redeem any literary credibility is for it to attack itself” (26). Another option, I think is to tap into the perfectly respectable eighteenth century traditions of essay writing. In a book that claims, in the very first sentence, to be “about the essay” (1) I would have expected more about this. Hull could, I think, have made more of Hazlitt’s lecture “On the Periodical Essayists” (from a course delivered in the winter of 1818/1819) and his *Edinburg Review* essay, “The Periodical Press” (1823) with the rather well-known rhapsody, “let Reviews flourish – let Magazines increase and multiply – let the Daily and Weekly Newspapers live for ever!”;<sup>6</sup> in neither case are the signs of anxiety

immediately visible. Hull’s point about Elia is a very important one, however. Lamb becomes a successful writer partly by his ability to turn weakness into strength: to create a character that is forever elusive, layered and detached, even from himself. Elia is also distanced from the intense critical debates of the time, and achieves a certain amount of ideological neutrality.

The re-education of the readers, moving them away from the rigid, insensitive criticism exemplified by the Cockney controversy takes the form of “manoeuvring” their “judgmental tendencies into corrective self-reflection” (40), often by exposing himself to such criticism (“Poor Relations,” or “The Convalescent” could, Hull suggests, be read along these lines). The harsh opinions expressed in “Imperfect Sympathies” are defended as expositions of the inevitable bias and partiality of any act of critical judgement. Through their very arbitrariness, they stand as a plea for toning down such attacks, typical amongst other things of the name-calling that resulted in the labels by which we still identify different versions of romanticism (Jacobin, Lake, Cockney). Against such finger pointing, “Elia adopts a playful, suggestive, never-naming style” (50).

The second chapter examines the Elia essays in the context of that most talked-about figure of metropolitanism, the flâneur. Coleridge’s “This Lime Tree Bower my Prison,” a poem that builds upon the contrast between enclosure and

free movement (and to which Lamb objected), and also the beggar poems of Wordsworth are read as articulating a “liberalist association of vagrancy with freedom” (58). Beggars are also present in the essays, in fact, Elia at one point claims that the beggar is “the only free man in the universe” (58). Nevertheless, this freedom is tied to being fixed, immobile, crippled, a fate that in many ways the lame figure of the essayist, chained by everyday office routine, also shares. Rural liberty is out of the question here. The most important claim of this book is put forward in this context. These acts of self-limitation so often classify the Elian model as a lesser, incomplete Romanticism.<sup>7</sup> The motivation for this has, of course, been largely biographical: the well-known tragedies of the Lamb family as well as the personal responsibilities of Charles have typically been seen as impediments in the way of his becoming a great romantic author. Hull, who rarely resorts to biographical explanations, claims that if we see metropolitan Romanticism as not lesser, simply different, then we can see Lamb’s art of essay as complete and altogether glorious.

Hull offers a reading of “Witches and other Night-Fears” (1821) as an example of how Elia’s self-imposed limitedness emerges as power. The very list of what Elia is incapable of (vision, dreaming, transforming the experience of terror and of the sublime into art) actually defines a different and original poetics. “The familiar, domesticated city in which Elia’s place as a prose writer is

established” (77) is set in opposition to the more poetical but less substantial, less solid visions of De Quincey’s “dream cities” as well as to “Wordsworth’s fantastic city in Book II of *The Excursion*” (76). I find the brief comparison with the fellow-metropolitan, Leigh Hunt very much worth pursuing further, yet I am also reminded that Elia’s “ultimately knowable city” (82) is a tiny fragment of the actual metropolis, of which “the absence of all forms of pedestrianism” (80) in the essays is surely an indication. Nevertheless, I find the idea that the spatially limited Elia transforms urban ambulation into a form of writing (reflecting what Hull calls an “epistemological ramble,” 82) quite brilliant.

The third chapter focuses on the essays that describe Elia’s vacations away from London. Once again, Hull sees Lamb as going further than Hazlitt, whose “On Going a Journey” presents relief “from the intense sociability of life in the metropolis” (105). For Hazlitt, the meaning of rural liberty is dependent on the metropolis, but in the Elia essays not even Hazlitt’s temporary relief is allowed. In “Mackery End, in Hertfordshire” (1821) even though Bridget’s “regressive” (107) ruralising is painted in endearing tones, Elia does not experience such a holiday-long “return to nature.” The dilapidated country-house, the very seat of the Gothic, here represents “a distorted image of the familiar, a staple feature of the essay” (108). Further, this distortion is constantly connected to dreams, from which “Elia

awakes into the stable domestic reality of his London home" (113): waking up from the rural dream is clearly presented as liberation. Not "in great City pent," not him! The city and the metropolitan writer appropriate the country, not the other way round.

Chapter 4 examines the description of the urban poor and especially the beggars in the context of the debates surrounding the Poor Law, and the activity of the London Society for the Suppression of Mendicity. Here, for once, Lamb appears to occupy a similar position to those of his poetic contemporaries, Blake and Wordsworth. In his analysis Hull produces the most powerful case I am familiar with for reading essays such as "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers" or "a Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis" not as heartlessly aestheticising treatments of the darkest aspect of metropolitan life, but as engaging with this central debate of the age, although in a characteristically roundabout way.

Like Wordsworth, Elia is concerned that systematic attempts to eradicate mendicancy only destroy the fabric of a community, but he disagrees in that for him urban life is not the threat, but the very network of personal connections that is threatened by the reformists. Lamb knew Blake's *Songs* (including the two "Chimney Sweepers") and shared their revulsion from the psychology of "pity" as patronising and impersonal. In Hull's reading, Lamb avoids the sentimentality of pity "through an appropriation of Hogarth's carnivalesque style to a

celebration of supposedly low, plebeian life" (134). He shows chimney-sweepers or beggars not as helpless objects of pity, but in situations of power. The unexpected laughter of the sweep represents a moment when the world turns upside down; like the traditional coronation of the Cockney king and queen; the urban poor are shown as dominant, bursting with *joie de vivre*.

The last chapter focuses on the theatrical world of the essays, and the role that Elia most likes to play on the great stage of the metropolis, that of the fool. Hull points out how, after the distinctly anti-theatrical views expressed in Lamb's vastly influential early paper "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1811), the Elia essays embody a distinctly theatrical practice. (Although I think he should have talked about the Elian "On the Artificial Comedy" as well, where the concept of comic theatre is more immediately relevant). The early essay on Shakespeare suggests that while reading is a creative, interpretative process, watching dramatic spectacles is not. The Elia essays presuppose a reader who moves about London with the detachment of a theatregoer, but they try to seduce him or her into actively looking at specific sights or individuals and engaging in acts of attention and even charity. Thus, Hull argues, Lamb, unlike Hazlitt, Hunt or Coleridge, moves beyond his early anti-theatrical stance to embrace a readerly theatricality. Clowning too, as a role, is based largely on Lamb's beloved comic performers (like Munden). Keep-

ing a safe distance from actual madness, this allows for the creation of a second self, an elusive identity to be acted out in front of the metropolitan reader.

The book closes with a suggested reconsideration of the identity of the author, not as a lonely figure involved in heroic struggle against precursors (à la Bloom), but as a figure of urban sociability, the artist of language that is seen as by its nature, dialogical. In this context, Lamb emerges as neither marginal, nor minor, but as a *par excellence* author.

**Bálint Gárdos**

#### Notes

1. Accessed 2 November 2012 <[http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/reviews/other\\_categories/article1157920.ece](http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/reviews/other_categories/article1157920.ece)>.

2. H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), and especially his *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

3. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 190–222.

4. Unaccountably, he makes no reference to Gerald Monsman's *Charles Lamb's as the London Magazine's "Elia"* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003), which reprints some of the magazine texts and offers insights into the ways in which Lamb changed them for the collected edition.

5. Felicity James, [untitled review], *The Byron Journal*, 38.2 (2010) 192–193.

6. P. P. Howe, ed., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*. 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930–4). Vol. 16, p. 220.

7. Most importantly in the late Thomas McFarland's influential *Romantic Cruxes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

## The Quest of the West – Heroes of Transformation

Peter Whitfield, *Travel: A Literary History* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2011)

It is a much-needed break from discourse oriented literary considerations to let such books as Whitfield's *Travel* have a considerable intellectual impact. Finely illustrated and bound, it is an adventure narrative, a natural history, an overview of the roving Western mind, and an account of 4500 years' narratives of geographical movement from within the Mediterranean, Europe, and America. Travel literature as a genre, as the author points out, is in constant formation, open to theory but also exact in its historical and cultural relevance. The author manages to balance his work between academia and artful entertainment, without bias or didactic message but with quantities of wondrous diversity categorized into neat stages of a suggestive larger scope. The historically sequential chapters lead from religious deliverance through political tyranny to global ecology. The style of the book is light and elegant, simple and clear. Whitfield evokes much more than he claims, a vision beyond correct listing and cataloguing, where different genres and disciplines merge to reconnect semiotic elements. His cases of travel writers are linked not simply through the common genre and chronology, but through a single aspect: how travel writing relates to human conditioning. The

author proves authoritative in evaluating works and tendencies, a sharp-sighted enough critic to see the essence of different genres, eras and figures of travel literature. Whitfield's book, neither too scientific nor too artistic, succeeds in evoking new perspectives from an existentialist point of view, perspectives on identity, culture, psychological drive, and the reflective capacity. Both encyclopaedic and narrative, it is an introduction to travel literature studies and a springboard for further comparative research, and also a read for the wider public. Due to the work's specific relevance to the Anglo-Saxon literary world, it is first and foremost an essential supplement to any area of English literature. The traveller's point of view is both a sum and a challenge of prevailing cultural phenomena in the stationary world.

On the periphery of academia, in a shifting phase of its paradigm, travel writing is a vast and growing field of much diversity and contradiction. Its current tendency is mainly the processing of materials. Specific areas of research increase by the day. Conferences, regular venues abound, monographs and reviews are published almost weekly. General overviews of the genre are also appearing, and in their line what Whitfield represents is that golden mean between critical steadiness and the verve of receptivity to travel's associations, maintaining its romance and charm. The discipline now includes an immeasurable field including tourist

journals, scientific exploration, sociological and political aspects of migration such as exile or immigration and anthropological field-work, not to mention military documentation or the legal culture of travel. Literature based on the theme of journeying must be distinguished from these. The criteria for travel and literature are to be mapped contemporarily, as it is done with less academic rigour but more invaluable insight and perspective by Whitfield. Through his efforts it is made clear that the reality of the story is beside the point: whether the narrator relates the truth or a poetic construct is indifferent. The essence of the genre is the transformation of the subject, both the travelling and the reading subject. It is more than general cultural exchange, which effects but does not necessarily transform the subjective psyche. Therefore the abundance of related contemporary discourses such as displacement, globalism, hybridity, mobility, translation, gender or liminality offer themselves to brace travel literature with the necessary theoretical conditioning. Whitfield emphatically invites such considerations but the distance of the book from theory is maintained – it is thus capable of gaining perspective over millennia of consciousness.

Since there is no "single transcendent principle valid for all travel texts" (x),<sup>1</sup> the essence of the genre is transformation itself: it is discourses of transgression that are brought into view by Whitfield's implications. Travel litera-

ture as a self-reflective genre is closely related to questions of identity, and points to the morphing of Western man, beyond his Westernness. A hero's journey, travelling is an allegory of life as movement, as transformation. But it is more directly the allegory of Western restlessness to become one's self in a removed, foreign context. "The writer plays a double part, as both spectator and actor" (x), and thus the interim is established. The Interzone, the liminal field of the traveller is identical to that of the writer. Through this wormhole all other liminal genres come into play within travel writing, and it becomes a clearly structured rite of passage both in its original reality and in its narrative translation.<sup>2</sup>

Practically, "human history without travel is unthinkable" (vii), and indeed Whitfield makes an initial summary of geographical movement in documented human history in the *Preface*: "First, humanity overspread the earth through the process of migration, forming communities and cultures that flourished for long periods in isolation from each other. Then later, through exploration and resettlement, this isolation was broken down, and the movement began towards the one world which we now inhabit" (vii). In this sense, movement seems as an inevitable and necessary part of life in general. But the "reintegration of mankind" has been brought about by the ceaseless conquests, explorations by the West. Despite Edward Said's deconstructive proposal that the

concept of the West is an ideological fiction and a political enterprise,<sup>3</sup> there undoubtedly is a literary phenomenon which can be labelled as "the quest of the West." The psychological, philosophical reasons for Western restlessness are not specified, but the fact speaks for itself that "the literature of international travel is predominantly European" (viii). Whitfield's Eurocentric perspective "tries to identify successive paradigms of [its own] travel and travel literature: we have the literature of exploration, conquest, pilgrimage, science, commerce, romanticism, adventure, imperialism, and so on" (viii). The full view of the progression of eras, however, projects a larger, more general conclusion: "literature becomes . . . an agent, in the gradual reintegration of mankind; it becomes a form of discourse through which one civilisation thinks about another, and about itself" (viii). The following sketch of the book directs attention to the most progressive representatives and developments of travel writing, using the most important general tendencies and backward approaches only as backdrop.

The ancient world provides the pure prehistory for the book, mythology depicting life as an ordeal, a challenge. Three monolithic narratives reflect the major aspects of Western travel writing. Gilgamesh, the father of all travellers, is a supreme knight-errant, a demigod seeking metaphysics in immortality. He is on a direct existential quest, probing the question of existential transforma-

tion. His is the archetypal story of the Fall into the human condition. A divergence from this most archaic trace, the Exodus of the Old Testament is the travel narrative of collective, tribal identity, transformation, and fate: religious and political deliverance into freedom in a new life projected by divine promise. As a counterpoint the Odyssey is a human adventure story of individual challenges and ways of overcoming. The hero's journey consists of a series of liminal events and critical situations of "encounter with the alien" (3). The consequential Classical literature is where the foundation of Western empires of dominance is grounded. Herodotus already reports the clash of cultures with a "hint of contempt" (6). Growing xenophobia motivates the genre from here on, paired with a sense of cultural superiority over all others. This ancient hubris reaches its classical summit in Alexander the Great's imperialistic story. The Romans continued to develop the genre in a "mastery of themselves and their forces" (10).

The Christian era presents the "pilgrimage narrative . . . greatly expanded" (16) in religious tourism, and tinted with "political and racial hatreds" (21), marking the "Crusade as a form of colonisation" (21). Lured further by the East, the genre of travel writing proper emerges with Marco Polo: "the experience itself is centre stage" (26), the experience of a first person. Polo's stories, though superficial in observation, "excited the envy of Europe, and thus created the

essential conditions for the Age of Discovery" (29). A parallel tendency is Mandeville's "intellectual tease" (30): the "search for novelty, for what is alien" (32). The fourteenth century external gaze was, however, disrupted by attempts to internalise movement. A primal instance of Christian mysticism surfacing in travel appears in Petrarch's *Ascent of Mount Ventoux*, inspired by Augustine's warning for travellers to consider themselves. Dante's *Divine Comedy* as an inner journey stands out from the centuries as "a vision of the entire universe, but the development of that vision is presented as a real, personal experience, a real journey involving purification through suffering and awakening. It clearly takes us back to the archetypal paradigm of travel . . . as we move through space . . . we are transformed" (38).

The Age of Discovery was defined by rationalisation of the fear of the other: primarily by branding non-Europeans and non-Christians as inferior. This unfortunate self-delusion stigmatized European and Christian attitudes for four hundred years to come. The ideals of "discovering," "taking possession" (39) were boosted by the apparent success of Columbus's "grandiose claim" (43). Whitfield suggests "mystery and confusion within his mind" (47), and reflects that conquistadors like all conquerors "cannot interpret what they see" (47), amply proven by their travel writings. The scientific Western mind then listed and categorised unfamiliar phe-

nomena revealed by the conquests, concluding great factual collections such as Hakluyt's. The political cause that was served by these catalogues grew even greater in fervour, but "travel was now . . . an intellectual force" (63).

Rationalisation was continued by seventeenth century non-conquerors "observing and reporting" (79) ceaselessly. One movement of opposition to this disenchantment of the world was satire. Another way of interpretation was an integrating, spiritual stance, for example the Jesuit Matteo Ricci's revelation, "who sensed that the only way to understand China was to cease to treat it as a foreign land, and become part of it. This is the great gateway of imagination through which the traveller must pass – to recognise that there is no foreign land, for he is the foreigner" (120). Shakespeare's late work, the last romances illustrate the transformative effect of journeys "as first ordeals then turning points, causing the destruction of the character's old life, and offering the first stage of regeneration into a new" (124). Bunyan's removed goal of the Celestial City is the driving force behind *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Eighteenth century travelling for knowledge broadens the geographical horizon, but also enlarges cultural complacency and hubris. The Pacific still "a realm of mystery" (127), further diversification of movement and knowledge are manifest in travel writing. The age of Reason confirms Western identities through intellectual means, but the

intellect has also produced its own critique in moral philosophy as well as in literature. The fictional travels of Defoe, Swift and others claim to reveal more "truth about humanity" (176) than rational accounts of real journeys. Voltaire prefers to "travel in the mind" (178), disillusionment being the cause of his internalisation.

*Candide's* escapism gains popular momentum and desperation in the "Romantic age when the purpose of foreign travel was not to confirm one's existing identity, but to take one outside it" (179). The American empire-building era coincided with the birth of many new and democratic disciplines of enquiry such as biology, anthropology, linguistics, archaeology and mountaineering. Scholars and archaeologists begin to find evidence not only of racial and cultural equality but of the other's possible superiority in occupied cultures like India. Artefacts, however, still go to the British Museum. On the other hand, new forms of otherness appear in nineteenth century travel writing such as nature. The "mystical conviction that the life of nature . . . was reality" (206) brought new life to literature in the works of John Muir, and Thoreau and Emerson's transcendental group, whose ideal was a radical turn of the attention to "adventuring at home." Walden is an "inverted travel book" (206), where transcendence is gained through nature. Another reinterpretation of the travel concept was the critique of Twain, Stevenson and others, and the indirect

critique of Edward Lear's surrealistic travel journals. Melville's vision of the human struggle was placed into the wilderness of the sea, outside not only of social but elemental context. Verne and Loti promoted "human power and nature's magnificence" (239). Kipling's depths depict the "savagery released when the veneer of civilisation breaks down" (240). Joseph Conrad is a turning point in travel literature: he "introduced travel as metaphor of shifting identity" (240), and the method of dissecting the self. His heroes are men placed in extremis riddled with inner conflicts, outside the confines of civilisation: he founds the modern theme of struggling to overcome fear, alienation, crisis and self-doubt.

By the turn of the century, an old paradigm was indeed over. Robert Louis Stevenson's dictum "There is no foreign land; it is the traveller only who is foreign" (243) echoes mystical interpretations of the Middle Ages on a popular level. There has been a "paradigm shift in travel writing in the past hundred years . . . travel has something vital to teach us, and writers must undergo some form of personal transformation" (243). Much migration of writers going on, much searching. "Where is the transcendent knowledge in our hearts, uniting sun and darkness, day and night, spirit and senses?" asks D.H. Lawrence (253). The escapism of Durrell, Van der Post transcending the travel genre in his visionary, philosophical travel books, Paul Theroux's satirical spontaneity, all

glorify the benefits of travel for their transforming effect. Feminism on the other hand is a merciless critic, "exposing the mentality of male power underlying much travel writing" to "free the idea of exploration and endurance from some of its historical burdens" (274). Bruce Chatwin takes travel writing to being a postmodern collage. In his revolutionary approach he breaks down conventions lacking context and psychological depth. And besides all this formal experimentation, there is still room for serious, informative, compassionate objectivity in the contemporary genre. Kerouac's *On the Road* was a decisive road novel for the second half of the century, sending generations on the road. He portrayed travelling as a quest in the mythological sense. Bowles's characters face the annihilating force of the sky in North Africa, and either die, or redefine themselves in the foreign context. Despite the artless tourist invasion of the world, "yet another aspect of consumerism" (viii), most recently environmental writers have put down a new cornerstone, extending the role of travel literature. Peter Matthiessen's work is presented as the culmination of moral and environmental travel, "indebted to the 'deep ecology' of the existential philosophers such as Heidegger. . . . 'The secret of the mountains is that the mountains simply exist . . . they have no meaning, they are meaning'" (281). In today's travel literature the force of change proves to be both actual and theoretical, both personal and collective,

geographical and psychological, natural and civilisational.

In a *Postscript* entitled *Re-imagining the World*, Whitfield draws the conclusion that the new paradigm necessitates redefinition of our Western identity after an age of dislocation and dissolution, and millennia of historicalisation/externalisation. It is not the task of this book, but the task of future travel literature to express these new meanings, these new contents of the geographically defined self. Whitfield claims that what everyone is seeking in travel is freedom “to move . . . out of non-being into being” (283). The existential weight of travel literature calls for the urgency of serious considerations in the genre. “Travel is a genre in which matters of ultimate spiritual importance can be discussed” (281), and “the worthwhile travel writer has to keep alive the idea of the inner journey, the transforming experience” (x). And so with this realization, “the genre has come full circle from the era when it was the servant of conquest and domination, political or cultural” (281). The book takes a small but important role in the redefinition of a genre, summarising the past of travel writing, and highlighting the progressive representatives of the Western psyche, heroes and narrators of transformation.

**Zsuzsanna Váradi-Kalmár**

#### Notes

1. Peter Whitfield is the author of more than a dozen works of history, literary criticism and poetry, including *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (1994),

*The History of English Poetry* (2009), *The History of Science* (2010), *A Universe of Books: Readings in World Literature*. This book has been reviewed by *The Oxford Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Australian* (in March-April 2012).

2. The roots of liminal, transgressive theories are to be found in Van Gennep and Turner’s anthropology of prehistoric rituals. Theories of otherness such as Lévinas’s also designate the barrier of the self to be overcome.

3. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage & Random House, 1979).

## **(What) Does It Really Mean?**

Kathleen Dubs and Janka Kaščáková, eds., *Does It Really Mean That? Interpreting the Literary Ambiguous* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2011)

Ambiguity is a phenomenon very old and also very broad. It can merit and reward literary interpretation but, perhaps for the same reason, has also the dangerous potential to result in bland analysis and windy (or missing) conclusions. To organize a collection of essays around this ironically Janus-faced phenomenon can be tricky: is the theme of ambiguity narrow enough to organize the essays into an at least loosely coherent collection; if not, is it interesting/relevant enough to offer new insights to the writer and interest to the reader? Especially when the audience of this book is obviously not the common reader of literature

but the educated scholar of today's academic (literary) discourse. In a time and era where the mindframe of the audience is that of the post-post-modern reader where ambiguity is not merely present but rather omnipotent. Where not only meaning but communication too are essentially destabilized, what novelty and innovation can the interpretation of ambiguity still offer us? My expectations are quite vague, even after reading the editorial introduction.

In the first part of the collection there are essays touching upon ambiguity in connection with works of Medieval Literature. Kathleen Dubs, the late collaborator of *The AnaChronisT* and co-editor of the volume, investigates the ambiguous role of Harry Bailly, the Host of Chaucer's *Canterbury pilgrims*: is he a "nouveau literary critic" of Chaucer or a representation of contemporary literary tastes? As an alternative conclusion, Dubs proposes that Chaucer might not have been trying "to educate his audience about interpretation, but about form" – where entertainment is not simply a means to an end independent of meaning, but "a valuable vehicle worthy of attention" (55). Whether Chaucer was trying to say something about the *value* of form remains an unanswered question; especially since, as Dubs also remarks, *The Canterbury Tales* is unfinished in terms of the original design. "Thus if Harry Bailly is Chaucer's nouveau literary critic, it is regrettable that we will never know which tale he would have chosen" (56).

In the same section, "Medieval Literature," Éva Zsák explores in detail the manifold interpretation that the role of the Holy Cross in Christ's Passion allows in old English poetry. Meanwhile, dominant patterns in the essay as well as the ones highlighted in poetry are perhaps better characterized by diversity and transition of roles than by ambiguity. Tamás Karáth's essay, the last in this section, focuses on the 15th-century *Book of Margery Kempe*, the first acknowledged autobiography in English literature. Placing the *Book* in the larger context of medieval East Anglian spiritual writing, the *Book of Showings* by Julian of Norwich, and other East Anglian dramatic texts, Karáth shows how medieval devotional writing uses ambiguity on the level of rhetoric and dismisses it on the level of meaning. The roots of medieval ambiguity in interpretation originate in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* where Diomedes recognizes a decisive attribute of the human stance: "our truths, beliefs and explanations are constructed on conscious axiomatic decisions" (22). One of the basic divisions of our axiomatic systems is in turn the careful separation of good and evil – as it has always been a major concern of post-lapsarian humanity, Karáth states. Since in late medieval thinking ambiguity practically equalled evil deception, it is interesting to see how attitudes to ambiguity still remained ambiguous. Describing the inquisitory investigation of Margery Kempe's visions, the *Book* problematizes the dichotomy of literal

and metaphorical meaning – which Margery refuses to reduce to mere ambiguity. Instead, “she is persistent in leading her contenders from distrust of images to an appreciation of images, in which the literal and metaphorical senses almost coincide – without ambiguities” (33).

János V. Barcsák, in one of the theoretical essays of the collection, also takes the axiomatic nature of our thinking as the starting point of his discussion. However, whereas in medieval times ambiguity was a rather undesirable and disturbing phenomenon, Barcsák argues that it is in fact the only movement of thinking that allows for referentiality to reality. The German philosopher Gödel’s Formally Undecidable Propositions theory of numerical systems implies that the very fact that every system is based on axioms deprives them fundamentally of a true referent in reality. The only chance for the system to refer outside itself lies exactly in its undecidable propositions, i.e. in paradox (like “This statement is a lie”), which does not belong either to the true or to the false statements within the system and thus manages to transcend the limits and refer outside it. In contrast with systems in science or mathematics, literature openly recognizes that it not only reflects reality but produces its own references; in fact, the very recognition of autonomous force is where art really begins. This conscious self-referentiality, hand in hand with the liberating formula of paradox (the ulti-

mate form of ambiguity), compels literature always to assert the truth about its relation to reality, and is also the reason why “the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox” (Brooks quoted 200).

The autonomy of literature and art and the uncanny side of ambiguity mentioned in Karáth’s essay directly connect Tamás Bényei’s piece about the ambiguities of the picture of Dorian Gray and Anna Kérchy’s essay about the experience of reading *Alice in Wonderland*. The picture of Dorian Gray in Wilde’s novel problematizes the ambiguity of artistic image and blurs the boundaries between art, artist, object of art and reality. This general crisis centrally evolves in the novel around the phenomenon of *beauty*. As Bényei points out “beauty in and of itself causes a profound disturbance in the art/life dichotomy, if for no other reason than because it appears in both spheres.” What are the boundaries between art and artist; where does his art begin and where does his life end? Is beauty the manifestation of some inner content or “a phenomenally unintelligible entity” that hides no deeper meaning? These questions that Wilde’s text proposes can be seen as early examples of the modernist questioning of the continuity between seeing and knowing (Jacobs qtd. 68).

Anna Kérchy’s essay similarly brings up existential questions in connection with ambiguity. Only, it is now the other side of the artistic process: perception.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is not simply ambiguous but comes close to nonsense. Kérchy shows the curious interplay between the two typical readerly attitudes: the paralyzed compulsion of making sense of non-sense and the playful ability simply to enjoy non-sense. She wishes "to show how the pleasure of the playfully polyphonic text results precisely because it invites us to fall into nonsense, to drift aimlessly from 'hypermeanings' of overinterpretation to 'pure' textual joys of 'meaninglessness' and back" (105). It is, however, interesting to see – as the argument unfolds – how much we bear and to what extent we can enjoy ambiguity. Kérchy's contemplation of ambiguity through Lewis Carroll's text asks some of the most interesting and compelling questions in the collection. How much do we need to make sense of and understand, no matter what? Where does ambiguity become more disturbing than magical?

The hybridity and permeability of identities that ambiguity can bring about is perhaps best illustrated in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Ambiguity is now absolutely dominant on every level: Katarína Labudová shows how generic hybridity supports both the bodily and the mental hybridity of characters. As fictional epitomes of such hybridity: cyborgs (in parts naturally, in other parts technologically constructed beings) take a central position in both novels. She shows that

Carter and Atwood's fictions "undermine the borders between reality and fiction, as well as natural and artificial, to create new forms of identities, sexuality and bodies" (149). Not only for the two authors but for their characters too, ambiguity is the primary tool to invent their own histories and social fiction. The conclusions of the two novels are accordingly open-ended. Unfortunately the essay is also without conclusion (or consequence): while it often states the obvious it leaves important questions unanswered or not even posed. Even if the two novels are "open ended" they do have some suggestions - or at least they should have for a critic (other than just being "open-ended"); if not, then in what sense is a critical essay different from the mere detailed restatement of a novel?

Labudová's analysis is followed by another piece related to feminism by Angelika Reichmann about the (female) Gothic elements of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* – the closing essay of the "British Literature" section of the book. Reichman demonstrates that the seemingly realistic fiction and male literary tradition are subverted by traditional narrative elements of male and female Gothic, showing a quite ambiguous relationship of the author (Lessing) with these traditions.

The remaining three pieces of this section discuss different types of ambiguities used as narrative tools in contemporary British fiction, mostly in terms of Empson's classification. Milada

Franková opens her essay with the assertion that for one reason or the other, the post-modern likes and embraces ambiguity. Indeed it does. What might be a change of aspect in the use of ambiguity since ancient times is that the author or artist is given a more active role (intentionally or unintentionally) in creating ambiguity – as pointed out in Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Accordingly, the essay examines mostly from the authorial point of view six sets of contemporary novels relating to six types of ambiguity: a deliberate exercise in ambiguity (Michele Roberts' *Flesh and Blood*), interpretative ambiguity (Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*), experimental ambiguity (Jeanette Winterson's several novels), and ambiguity of irony (Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark) or ambiguity of perception (Jane Gardam). Franková's writing is a great exercise in the presentation of the literary ambiguous; however, as she also notes "any discussion on ambiguity is an endless task" (101). Nóra Séllei's article takes an alternative look on Virginia Woolf's two late novels *The Years* and *Between the Acts* as novels engaging politically and textually in the discourse of the Empire and the Nation. Séllei argues that on the metalevel of narration the text offers stances of criticism by creating an ambiguity in relation to the semiotic process of the making of history and exposing the artificiality of such concepts as nation and empire. (As she says, the text creates "an ambiguity in relation to the semiotic process of the

making of history, the nation and the empire by exposing their making, by revealing that they are artefacts.," 137.) Gabrielle Reuss tries to uncover the highly ambiguous message of April de Angelis's *Laughing Matter*. Reuss examines ambiguity in the play's meticulous historicity and its intertextual references to Shakespeare. As she argues, "The sense of the eighteenth century being our contemporary is enhanced by the presence of the Shakespeare cult and modern colloquial language, set against the ever loudmouthed environment of the theatre." (84.) Further, she raises the question of whether the play really is meant to be a laughing matter and whether it is a melodramatic or an ironic laugh that we utter at the end of the play. Although De Angelis' conclusion to the contradictory "laughing matter" is deciphered by Reuss as merely ambiguous, I think irony is deeply intertwined with ambiguity, if not synonymous with it in this case.

In the first piece of the third part, "American Literature," Ted Bailey discusses the ambiguities of mulatta identity and how black-authored mulatta texts explored and exploited the opportunities latent in mixed identity with an aim to bridge the gap over racial polarity and "to effect a material transformation in the world" (172). Bailey introduces and sketches a certain literary-conjurational strategy which, focusing on character identification, tries to "manage the character's identity so as to establish an oscillating correspondence . . . between

the reader and the figure's two racial personae" (176). This means that the text tries to achieve an optimal balance in the reader between complete identification and absolute distance as the respective poles. A *conjunctural catharsis* is the aim, which happens at an "aesthetic distance" when "the members of the audience become emotionally involved in the drama, but not to the point where they forget they are observers" (Scheff qtd. 172). Conjunction as opposed to complete identification is to be favoured on the basis of the sceptical contention regarding the role of empathy in literature. Baily quotes Saidiya Hartman, who states that " 'empathy is double-edged, for in making the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration' and hence 'empathy fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead' " (167). The only point in Baily's argumentation that leaves space for some inconvenient suppositions is the lack of further investigation into the already contended nature of *empathy*. What if someone identifies with the whiteness and also the blackness of a character but fails to identify with some other but similarly important feature of that character (for example an attribute of his/her temper or personality)? If this happens (and why would it not?), then conjunctural catharsis fails to take place because of "overdistancing" and, as a result, the strategy does not reach its goal. In other words, is it so obvious that people can only and exclusively

not-identify when divided by racial boundaries?

The other piece in the "American Literature" section explores the interpretation of time in Nabokov's *Ada* and Melville's *Pierre* simultaneously. The motif that Márta Pellérdi especially highlights is the incest between the main characters in both novels, which incestuous relationship as a theme is used by both authors to illustrate several ideas. The characters of *Pierre* and *Ada* are metaphorically grandchildren of the incestuous mythological creatures, Terra (Earth) and dark-blue Coelus (Sky). Heaven and Earth's incestuous marriage is metaphorically inherent in *Pierre* (the protagonist of *Pierre*), Van, and Ada (protagonists of *Ada*), and through symbolic parallels in all human beings: *Pierre*'s long-standing battle between Earth and Heaven, i.e. horological (terrestrial) and chronometrical (celestial) thinking is parallel to the unfolding entrapment between Free Will and Fate in *Ada* through the introduction of the "third co-ordinate," the other incestuous son of Terra: Cronos (Time).

The collection closes with a sort of self-reflexive note: a piece on the future of literary studies and on modern-day rhetorics; which both allow one to draw interesting conclusions. Anton Pokrivčák wonders what has become of literary studies, what are its chances of survival and what, in the end, is its function. That is an interesting and compelling question to ask, at least for us who are directly involved in it. After

reading this collection of literary essays I am not sure about the answer. I am sure about one thing though: we have to ask these questions more often. The essays are good craftwork – apart from some printing and grammatical/syntactic mistakes; however, many of them left me wanting a deeper insight or a more compelling problem-proposal, *Ambiguity* offers an endless range of opportunities for interpretation but as noted by the authors of the collection themselves, the investigation of ambiguity might be an endless task (talk?), which also means that the topic might be quite vague for an essay, and, especially, for a whole collection of essays. Pokrivčák is anxious to see cultural studies taking over literary studies, and he brings up “usefulness” as one of the main arguments of those who push cultural studies to the front. Although I definitely disagree with the notion of literature having to serve some purpose, I do think that literary studies have to have *some* effectiveness. According to Pokrivčák, among many possible answers to the question “what does literature communicate?” “in a post-relativistic and, hopefully, post-ideological literary criticism, the natural ones may be those which would re-connect the meaning of literary work to human universals.” More particularly, such an answer can be found in Dickinson’s poetry – “the sense of pleasure and beauty, which is also the sense of truth and knowledge, the enrichment of our being” (223).

The final essay of this book presents the rhetorical use of the ambiguous, in President Barack Obama’s speech as an example of a great contemporary rhetorician. Ann Dobyns analyzes how Obama uses the ambiguous in his speech on racial issues as a tool to unpack and negotiate differences and understand their complexity, and then eventually trigger ethical judgement as well as action in his audience. I think this is a perfect ending to this collection: at the end of the day, after a literary journey, ambiguity must come down to a better or worse, hopefully ethical “judgement about how to live in the world together” (241).

**Zsuzsanna Czifra**

## **Fantastic Liminality**

Sándor Klapcsik, *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2012)

There is an abundance of essays, studies and books on science fiction, fantasy and detective novels. The poststructuralist approach applied to analyze contemporary cultural phenomena, especially literature, is one of the favorites used to gain insight into the workings and mechanisms of present-day works of art, as well. Agatha Christie, Stanislav Lem, Neil Gaiman and Philip K. Dick are also among those popular writers whose works have been extensively interpreted and theorized about. Sándor Klapcsik’s

*Liminality in Fantastic Fiction* is breaking new ground when it synthesizes the three areas and scrutinizes the versatile works of these four authors from the perspective of liminality. The book “intends to serve as an introduction to liminality in postmodern culture and fantastic fiction” (5), but it achieves more: the enterprise of investigating liminality from the point of view of poststructuralism ventures into the depth of studying liminality and examining what kind of liminal positions open up in fantastic fiction (detective fiction, fantasy, and a selection of different subgenres of science fiction, for example cyberpunk or alternative histories).

Liminality is the axis around which the four chapters of the book rotate. Agatha Christie’s detective stories are dissected from the point of view of certain spatial and thematic forms of liminality that might appear covert at first sight. The chapter demonstrates that the detective is a liminal figure, who represents a constantly fluctuating movement between the margins and the center of the society, since cultural traditions and hierarchical binaries of social structures are of ambivalent nature. This ambivalence is enhanced by the rationality of the detective story, since the figure of the detective is the representative of Enlightenment rationalism, therefore any criminal case is a puzzle to be solved so that the original, pristine order of the world could be restored. Nevertheless, according to Klapcsik, Agatha Christie’s detective fiction hovers

around both this rationality and the irrationality of thematic and narrative deviations. Fantastic (Gothic) elements appear in *The Thirteen Problems*, “A Christmas Tragedy,” “The Bloodstained Pavement” or “The Idol House Astarte.” In those novels where the head of the family is murdered (*Crooked House*, *Ordeal by Innocence*), the transitional period is informed by a Bakhtinian carnivalesque, and the emergent, new social order is dependent on the detective’s successful investigation. The argument successfully proves that Christie’s detective fiction, similar to other detective stories, corresponds to Victor Turner’s oft-quoted theory on the temporary and re-constitutive characteristics of liminality. The liminal chaos of cultural, social and hierarchical positions is reinstated by actions taking place in liminal periods (the duration of the investigation) and usually in liminal spaces such as trains (*Murder on the Orient Express* or *4.50 from Paddington*). In addition, Christie’s detective novel is characterized by an abstract chronotope: the texts hinge on a never-changing, abstract space-time structure, since neither Miss Marple nor Poirot change in character throughout the span of Christie’s published stories. The liminality of narration is made apparent in narrative transgressions or “narrative games,” misleading focalization, and metafiction. Klapcsik aptly argues that Christie’s or her fictional writer-ego’s self-reflexive presence in the text (*The Body in the Library* or *The Murder of*

*Roger Ackroyd*) subvert the traditional thematic and narrative boundaries of detective fiction.

If the first chapter explores how conventional detective stories might resonate with fantastic themes of such genres as horror, fantasy and science fiction, the second chapter of the book examines Neil Gaiman's fiction mainly from the vantage points of generic, narrative and thematic liminality. Gaiman's texts are heavily laden with intertextual allusions and stylistic bricolage, therefore they provide an excellent ground for the argument to find evidence of how Gaiman's writings transgress generic, narrative and thematic boundaries and how they oscillate between various genres. In order to analyze these transgressions, the argument leans on the fantasy concepts of J.R.R. Tolkien and Tzvetan Todorov, among others. As the chapter finds these fantasy theories inadequate to describe the liminality in Gaiman's fiction, it turns to Linda Hutcheon's reading of irony and parody, Mieke Bal's studies of vision and Wolfgang Iser's reader response criticism. The analysis mainly focuses on Gaiman's short stories. *Anansi Boys*, *Neverwhere* and *The Graveyard Book* exemplify that plural narrative perspectives result in subjectivized narratives and estranged fantasy, liminal fantasy, where "the fantastic is no longer interpreted as a realm different and distant from consensus reality" (57). "Murder Mysteries," on the other hand, divert from the conventions of Farah Mendlesohn's concept

of portal-quest fantasy and the embedded narration technique characterizing Club stories, as the narrative crosses the ontological boundaries between the two different levels of narration. Therefore the argument maintains and underlines Brian McHale's frequently referenced notion of the ontological aspect of postmodern fiction. Klapcsik elucidates the consistent intertextuality in Gaiman's stories with Genette's – rather outdated – version of hypertextuality and draws the conclusion that the dependence of texts on one another is primarily based on imitation in the texts. This issue of imitation is justly raised – for example "Shoggoth's Old Peculiar" is a "pseudo-Lovecraftian text" that revisits Lovecraftian themes and style – but simulation, which would be a much more sufficient theory (regardless of whether it is based on Deleuze's or Baudrillard's version) is not put into motion here. In contrast to this, Iser's idea of the textual gaps filled in by the reader and Paul deMan's concept of self-reflexive irony (permanent parabasis) are outstandingly well used in showing that Gaiman's liminal fantasy "lays bare its own fictionalizing process and subverts its fictional, fantastic world" (58).

The third chapter proposes that Stanislaw Lem's fiction is a medley of science fiction and detective fiction elements, where the epistemological puzzles, among other things, provide a basis for the ontological aspects: Lem's novels subvert the limits of both science and science fiction, therefore they (especially

*Solaris*) need to be labeled as meta-science and meta-science-fiction, respectively. The argument also concentrates on a Lacanian version of mirroring, as the mirrored subject in the alien planets is reflected with “a difference, refraction, oscillation, a rupturing surprise” that is termed the *revenge* of the mirror. The logic of the chapter, similar to the other chapters of the book, follows a well-defined deconstructive trait informed by deMan’s (*Allegories of Reading*) and Nietzsche’s (*Human, All Too Human*) concepts of the reversal of cause and effect, where the cause is the result of the reconstruction of what happened after the event had an effect on the environment: this argument is used to illustrate how Lem’s fiction drifts towards a liminal space between detective fiction and science fiction. In the technologized environment, the detectives, Pirx or Ijon Tichy investigate cases involving malfunctioning robots, hiding aliens or androids. Although the chapter focuses on “the inability to judge whether one encounters the real or a simulated image, original or replica, Self and the Other” (118) most of the cutting-edge postmodern theories (mask-theory, simulation, virtuality, avatars) remain more or less inarticulated. The metaphoric nature of language, on the other hand, is expressed and assessed to a great extent, and it is convincingly argued that Lem’s works often self-reflexively parody (or mirror) themselves and the genre, therefore these stories might be taken to be satirical

science fiction parodies or self-parodies. As the chapter is founded on the argument that Lem’s works are the result of a linguistically conscious and self-reflexive effort, the question is raised whether the close-reading of these texts is hindered by the fact that Klapcsik reads them in translation.

The first three chapters designate a line leading to the probably best formulated and articulated fourth chapter on the interpretation of Philip K. Dick’s stories from the point of view of “urbanity, liminality, multiplicity” (121). After an impressive introduction into paraspace, cyberspace and spatial hybridity based on the notions of Homi Bhabha, Scott Bukatman and Elizabeth Grosz, the liminal spatiality of some of Dick’s novels is examined on the basis of the difference and oscillation between modernist planning and postmodernist play in urban architectural spaces. The book argues that the clear-cut modernist boundaries and pre-negotiated spaces based on centrality are replaced by de-centered, constantly changing, asymmetrical and unmappable space. “Postmodernism is constituted in cyberspace,” a quote from Paul Smethurst – via many other influential critics, for example Marshall McLuhan’s, Charles Jencks’s and the obligatory notions of Frederic Jameson – introduces virtuality by which the chapter argues that some of Dick’s stories (“The Commuter,” *Ubik*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, “The Minority Report”) are set in such places/spaces, in which

the conventional, modernist ways of moving around (corporeal journey) are coupled with the postmodern, digital space of speedy flows, flux, the oscillation of commutation. The subchapter on “cyberworlds and simulacra” studies the liminal and plural nature of cyber- and paraspaces of *A Maze of Death*, *Ubik*, “I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon,” or *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. Although the argument seems to mingle different notions of simulation, it manages to reveal how Dick’s multiple worlds resemble and anticipate the contemporary cyberspace of digital networks based on simulacra.

In sum, *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction* is a well-written, thoughtful and focused book rich in interpretations and

close readings of canonic texts written by the probably most important authors of the genre. Nevertheless, the advantages of concentrating on the notion of liminality in fantastic fiction from a poststructuralist point of view have their own drawbacks. Liminality is a term that has too many definitions; the concept have been assessed from countless different points of view, and as the “Preface” and the “Introduction” demonstrate, the term itself has become a liminal, transgressive, border-crossing, in-between, elusive concept that is very hard to put into motion and use for specific reading purposes.

**Gyuris Norbert**