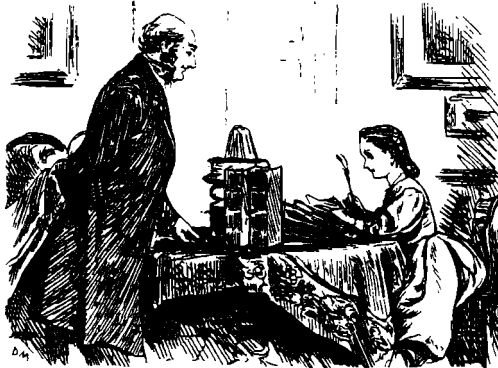


# Connotations

*A Journal for Critical Debate*



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# *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate*

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## The False Domesticity of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*

LISA HOPKINS

One of the most memorable moments in Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness* comes in scene xiii, just before the climactic moment when the trusting Master Frankford will discover his wife Anne and his guest Wendoll locked in their adulterous embrace. For the space of ten lines, action is suspended for an extraordinary descriptive passage, as the apprehensive Frankford soliloquizes:

This is the key that opes my outward gate;  
This is the hall door; this my withdrawing chamber.  
But this, that door that's bawd unto my shame,  
Fountain and spring of all my bleeding thoughts,  
Where the most hallowed order and true knot  
Of nuptial sanctity hath been profaned.  
It leads to my polluted bed-chamber,  
Once my terrestrial heaven, now my earth's hell,  
The place where sins in all their ripeness dwell.  
But I forget myself; now to my gate.<sup>1</sup>

This passage, which serves no narrative purpose, is apparently included for two main reasons: it creates suspense, and it helps to develop atmosphere. In the broad daylight of an afternoon performance at an open-air theatre,<sup>2</sup> it was obviously necessary to introduce linguistic references to establish the location and feeling of a night-time scene, but Frankford's lines also do more than this. He had already told us that "now my watch's hand points upon twelve, / And it is dead midnight" (xiii.5-6); what he now adds is a strong sense of the physicality of the house.<sup>3</sup> It is powerfully established as both symbolic and literal location, as the repeated images of penetration and the actual journey both culminate in the violated space of the bedchamber.

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debhopkins00412.htm>>.

Such a strong sense of concrete location points directly to one of the chief fascinations of domestic tragedy: the voyeuristic attraction which comes from the sensation that we are witnessing the actual living space of a real family group. The appeal is in many ways the same as that which comes from peering through undrawn curtains into a lighted room, or that offered by fourth-wall drama or fly-on-the-wall documentaries; and as with documentaries or actual living-rooms, in the vast majority of domestic tragedies the compulsion to peer is strengthened by the knowledge that they represent real events. Behind *Arden of Faversham*, behind *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, lies genuine human suffering, imparting to them the fascination and vicarious involvement generated in our own age by the emotional dramas of the magazine problem page or the real-life crime programme.

Along with the added prurience bestowed by the knowledge that we are watching true stories, however, the domestic tragedies' origin in authentic events adds another dimension: they all partake of something of the incoherence and shapelessness which characterise most people's experience of life. Sharing to some extent some of the inconsequentiality of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, they are full of tiny details which obscure the clarity of the narrative line and resist the thematisation to which literary texts are normally so susceptible. There is, for instance, the obvious difficulty caused to the anonymous author of *Arden of Faversham* by his attempts to incorporate into his play the details of Arden's confrontation with Dick Reede, gleaned from a footnote in Holinshed,<sup>4</sup> and also the interpretative crux which this creates for critics of the play. Reliance on Holinshed can cause difficulties in other genres too, as when Shakespeare makes Richard III despatch the Bishop of Ely for strawberries or Buckingham enter in rotten armour (not to mention the infamous complexities of Lady Macbeth's children), but the problems caused by such direct transcription of circumstantial detail are both more pronounced and more obvious in domestic tragedies.

*A Woman Killed with Kindness*, however, is set apart from other products of the genre by the fact that the story on which it was based was entirely invented by Heywood. Paradoxically, though, it nevertheless retains much of the air of specificity and of redundancy of detail which habitually characterises domestic tragedy and other modes of "realistic"

writing.<sup>5</sup> We are told, for instance, that it is in York Castle that Sir Charles Mountford is imprisoned, and Susan's requests for financial assistance are rebuffed by not only one but three named kinsmen, as well as by a tenant; moreover, we are told not only of Frankford's progress through the house but also of other apparently minor domestic details such as the playing of cards and the goings-on in the servants' hall. The resultant effect is to create both an atmosphere of domesticity and also the traditional genre markers of domestic tragedy; but both are, in fact, an illusion.

Although the details we are given in the play may appear superficially to resemble the random information which is the residue of direct transcription from sources, anything but the most cursory of readings will clearly detect that they are actually the most carefully selected and shaped: art masquerades as life, and what may initially appear to be a quasi-Chekhovian surplus of information about characters which resists overt thematisation is revealed as in fact thoroughly subservient to the play's overriding moral message. This double effect—of apparently minor details which are in fact invested with great thematic, emotional and symbolic significance—is exemplified in the very first exchange of the play:

SIR FRANCIS

Some music there! None lead the bride a dance?

SIR CHARLES

Yes, would she dance *The Shaking of the Sheets.*'

But that's the dance her husband means to lead her.

(i.1-3)

"*The Shaking of the Sheets*" was a popular tune; its use as the setting of a ballad would, additionally, make it suitable for a rustic style of dancing, rather than for the more complicated steps found in courtly circles. The reference to this specific dance serves, therefore, clearly to locate both the characters and the play itself firmly in the humble world of domestic tragedy, rather than in the grander milieu frequented by Aristotle's tragic hero. It also, however, has obvious thematic significance both in its applicability to a wedding—with its bawdy connotations of sexual consummation—and its original reference, in the context of the song, to dying, which will indeed be the ultimate end to which Anne's husband will lead her.



Other details prove similarly resonant and thematisable. The emblematic appropriateness of the lute, broken by Anne after her exile from her husband's house, is obvious enough;<sup>6</sup> and the apparently complex history of Susan's dealings with her kinsfolk when she is pleading for money to redeem her brother from prison can in fact be seen as modelled not so much on the inchoateness of real life as on the similar, morally patterned sequence of rejections in *Everyman*. Other events resonantly echo each other, as when Frankford and Sir Charles both kill, Sir Francis and his sister both undergo a moral redemption, and Nick's apparently causeless dislike of Wendoll on sight foreshadows Sir Francis' falling in love at first sight. A similar symmetry aligns the main plot and the sub-plot: in both, a house figures largely, and is also intimately associated with the body of a woman—Frankford's house provides the images of penetration appropriate to Anne's adulterous coupling with Wendoll, while Sir Charles' decision to offer Susan to his enemy Acton is partially forced on him by his reluctance to sell the house which is all that remains to him of his patrimony. In both plots, moreover, a career of sin is abruptly arrested by its unexpected encounter with a grand gesture, as Acton finds himself deflected from his pursuit of vengeance and Anne from her adulterous passion by the supererogatory "kindness" of Sir Charles' offer of his sister and Frankford's of forgiveness; and in both plots the key to the resolution of events resides in the question of female chastity.

Even one of the most apparently arbitrary of all the play's details can be read as significant. The choice of a northern setting, indicated by the confinement of Sir Charles in York Castle, may initially appear to be random, but it is also possible to read the play in terms of the specific connotations which the north of England would have had for a contemporary audience. The area was prominent in early Jacobean consciousness primarily for its continuing adherence to the "Old Religion," Catholicism, and its associated tendency to recalcitrance and rebellion: its tenacity in refusing to embrace the tenets of the Reformation had led to a series of politico-religious disturbances such as the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Rising of the Northern Earls, and it continued profoundly resistant to social or religious change. In most domestic tragedy, the setting is predetermined by the actual locality in

which the historical crime took place; here, the area near York has been deliberately selected. Although Catholicism is never mentioned in the play, the 1991 Royal Shakespeare Company production at The Other Place did much to bring out its potential applicability for readings of the play. Liberally sprinkled with crucifixes, genuflections, characters crossing themselves and chanting, Katie Mitchell's interpretation situated Anne's self-starvation firmly in the context of Catholic ideology about the female body and the question of the relative superiority of words and deeds in the process of repentance and redemption, so that unusual attention was directed to an examination of the precise nature of the play's title quality, "kindness," and the ways in which this well-intentioned attitude interacts with a fallible world. The production served to show that as well as adding an element of local colour, the play's northern location may also function as another site of specific meaning.

Another aspect of the play which might initially appear to be an attempt to mimic life, but which on closer inspection is revealed as a deliberate product of art, is the activities of the servants. On one level, Nick can be seen as functioning as a kind of chorus, voicing a normative reaction but remaining emotionally distanced and largely unaffected by the outcome of events; and this presence of a choral element not only serves to guide audience reaction but also functions as another genre marker to differentiate this play from the humbler forms of domestic drama by aligning it with the far more culturally privileged classical tragedies from which the role of the chorus was originally derived. In Scene ii, however, Nick plays another role. It is he who is appointed arbiter of the dispute about dance, but his judgement is immediately overruled, just as Frankford's authority over his wife and guest is flouted; and when a dance finally is chosen, the stage direction says, oddly, that "NICK, *dancing, speaks stately and scurvily, the rest after the country fashion*" (54, s.d.). "Stately and scurvily," whatever its primary meaning may originally have been, clearly functions as an invitation to read this scene as a direct comment on class relations, a theme which is further emphasised when the servants' failure to agree on a choice of dance is echoed by the gentry's disagreement over the card game. Thus what appears to be little more than a catalogue of country dances, not susceptible of any thematising interpretation, functions as a comment on the fact that the gentry classes' superior wealth and education

modifies only the form, and not the substance, of their behaviour, just as the behaviour of the lower classes in *The Cherry Orchard* offers a similarly ironic commentary on the doings of their "betters."

The card game scene, however, does more than echo the dance one. It is perhaps another comment on the relationship between thematisation and cultural privilege that whereas the servants' recreations have apparently arbitrary and meaningless names, those of the gentry are overtly significant: Noddy, Double Ruff, Knove Out of Doors, Saint, New Cut, all are obviously appropriate to the characters for whom they are proposed. The symmetry apparent in these two episodes thus performs a twofold function: it reflects badly on the upper echelons of the play's society, by serving to reveal them as no better than their social and financial inferiors, and it also points up a related issue—the traditional difference in classification between domestic tragedy, the rude, episodic, unshaped story of ordinary people, the stuff of journalistic ephemera, which was, moreover, very often centred on the domestic world and amorous passions so closely associated with women, and classical tragedy, the Aristotelian fall of the hero, moralised, shaped by irony, fate and art, and redolent with thematic and symbolic significance.

Heywood's insistent use of detail seems, then, to serve a double purpose. On the one hand, it simulates the air of authenticity which serves to invest domestic tragedy with so large a part of its appeal; on the other, the fact that his details are both artificial and, even more importantly, obviously thematically significant serves in fact to elevate the play to a status grander, more "literary," than that of traditional domestic tragedy. It has none of the journalistic, ad hoc air which has led to so many other examples of the genre failing to survive; the kind of reading processes which it requires are substantially the same as those called for by tragedies such as *Hamlet* or *Othello*, which have, notoriously, been traditionally interpreted as dealing with concerns universally applicable. By fictionalising reality, Heywood has not only made the genre more up-market, but has also highlighted the processes by which he has done so, and has drawn our attention to the complex interactions between individual stories and the politically and aesthetically weighted genre markers which frame them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. Brian Scobie (London: Black, 1985) xiii.8-17. All quotations from the play are taken from this edition.

<sup>2</sup>The play was probably acted at the Red Bull. See Scobie 65, note on xiii.18.

<sup>3</sup>For the importance of houses in the play, see for instance Michel Grivelet, *Thomas Heywood et le drame domestique élisabéthain* (Paris: Didier, 1957) 212, and Scobie, Introd. xv-xvi.

<sup>4</sup>For the *Arden* author's reliance on Holinshed and for his handling of the Reede episode, see Keith Sturgess, ed., *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) Introd. 21 and 24.

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the concept of "descriptive residue," see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1975) 193.

<sup>6</sup>See Cecile W. Cary, "'Go Breake This Lute': Music in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *RenD* ns 2 (1969): 123-47.

## "A very Antony": Patterns of Antonomasia in Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

DONALD CHENEY

When Dr Johnson complained that Shakespeare's punning was "the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it," he at once expressed his own century's reaction against paronomasia and demonstrated the futility—and perhaps the half-heartedness—of this reaction, as seen in the fact that he could not resist expressing himself expansively and wittily, even while inveighing against wit. It would seem that the joys of paronomasia are all but irresistible.

Without going into Johnson's quibble on "fatal" here,<sup>2</sup> I would like to call attention to a more elementary kind of word play in his remark, one that I believe Shakespeare explored throughout his career and that he treated most definitively, perhaps, in *Antony and Cleopatra*. This is the figure of antonomasia, which the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines as follows: "1. The substitution of a title or epithet for a proper name, as in calling a king 'His Majesty.' 2. The substitution of a personal name for a common noun to designate a member of a group or class, as in calling a libertine 'a Don Juan.'"<sup>3</sup> It is the disjunction between name and epithet, proper noun and common noun, that is the crucial element in this definition. For example, in the eighth book of his *Institutes*,<sup>4</sup> Quintilian observes that some writers refuse to consider an epithet a trope at all, since it involves no change; but he states that although an epithet may not always be a trope, "if it is separated from the word to which it belongs, it has a significance of its own and forms an *antonomasia*" (VIII.vi.40-43). He recognizes a crucial turning in the use of epithet, at the point of its separation from the person or thing being characterized. I would suggest that this antonomastic gap, so to speak, is fundamental to the more obviously interesting examples of Shakespearean onomastics. At its most elementary and obvious, dramatic

irony may note a disjunction between a king and his "majesty," or perhaps in Antony's funeral oration between Brutus' actions and his characterization as "an honorable man." Furthermore, we see Brutus driven to live up to his republican ancestor's name, to be another Junius Brutus, and fearing that Julius Caesar may *become* a Caesar if he is not killed first. Here we also find antonomasia affected by ironies of temporal perspective: a protagonist is swayed by an awareness of earlier stories, while the spectator is similarly affected by knowing that this drama, too, is now one of those earlier stories, and that the *omen* in the *nomen* has by now long since been realized. Cressida is always a Cressida, Pandarus a pander; to see them pledging to be otherwise is to be made aware of the web of language in which they are caught—so to speak a "fatal antonomasia."

Still, it must be admitted that epithets are not in themselves particularly exciting rhetorical figures. Quintilian rather condescendingly remarks that "Poets employ [the epithet] with special frequency and freedom, since for them it is sufficient that the epithet should suit the word to which it is applied . . . we shall not blame them if they speak of 'white teeth' or 'liquid wine,'" but rhetoricians, Quintilian's own audience, need to make sure that an epithet "adds something to the meaning," and moreover that it is used sparingly. "The nature of this form of embellishment," he remarks, "is such that while style is bare and inelegant without any epithets at all, it is overloaded when a large number is employed. For then it becomes long-winded and cumbrous."

Quintilian here takes for granted that names are prior to their epithets, as are nouns to those adjectives that are deigned to suit them, dress them, decorate them. This makes sense in the context of the *Institutio Oratoria*, which is concerned with pleading specific causes on behalf of specified clients; but in everyday life the identity of a person or issue is not invariably a given. Typically, an infant's first word (in perfect Latin) bridges the gap between a perceived functional property and a proper noun; it is both antonomasia and synecdoche: *mamma*. Similarly, the spectator at a Shakespearean play derives a sense of verisimilitude from the very fact that here too there is no "without-book Prologue"; that we must work toward a partial and tentative sense of who is talking about what.

As an example of antonomastic uncertainty at its most prolonged and stimulating, we might best look at a comedy—where there is no protagonist named in the play's title as a sign of someone to watch for—and at a comedy which flaunts its inconclusiveness, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Not typically, the first scene opens with a crowned figure:

Navarre shall be the wonder of the world;  
Our court shall be a little academe,  
Still and contemplative in living art.

(1.1.12-14)<sup>5</sup>

We learn from this blank-verse sonnet that this is "Navarre"—both the person and the place. The setting of this scene will have made clear as well that this is the "court" of Navarre only in the sense that these men are Navarre's courtiers, assembled in the temporarily clement outdoors: "The roof of this court is too high to be yours," the Princess will tell Navarre at the beginning of Act 2 when he welcomes her to his "court." And the artificiality of his three-year project is further suggested by characterizing the academy as "still and contemplative in living art"—suggested all the more clearly if we understand this line as a cryptic, rhetorically strained way of saying that they will be constantly ("still") contemplating the art of living. The academy, like the court, hovers in status between human activity and institutional stasis; and we suspect that if the changing seasons do not drive the court back indoors, to *the* court, boredom will. "Mere necessity" does in fact intervene—both reasons of state and the human affections.

What is clear from the opening lines of this and other plays is that Shakespeare would have us see that he is making a virtue of the need to identify and locate his characters, by questioning the literal truth or referentiality of verbal structures. When, as here, his plays are most playful, most balletic, masquelike, the pressures of fact are most elusive. The "Navarre" of *Love's Labour's Lost*, as place, surely recalls or evokes the geographical Navarre in southern France; and the informed reader or spectator may recognize allusions to a specific project attributed to Henri de Navarre, later King Henri IV, just as Berowne, Dumaine, and Longaville may be recognized as names of real people variously associated with the historical Henri. But the play wears its allusions

lightly, teasingly, elusively. Navarre is never given a Christian name in the play's dialogue, but his identification as "Ferdinand" in the printed scene directions suggests a further authorial attempt to avoid any unambiguous, unequivocal identification with Henri. The masquing and casual circulation of "favours" and love poems enact tentative and noncommittal courtships which are finally seen as more or less self-conscious pastimes to mask the long day's dying of the French king. Only at the very end of the play, with Marcade's news of the king's death, is there any sense of urgency to the courtship, and a United Kingdom of Navarre and Aquitaine—perhaps even of France and Navarre—is no longer an academic question.

What aborts the courtship ritual in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and sets the play apart from the other romantic comedies, is the abrupt awareness of breached decorum that follows on Marcade's arrival. It has been clear from the earliest scenes, from Boyet's talk with the Princess about embassies and dowries, that the question of marriage is in the air, and apparently on the French king's mind, from the outset. But this is suppressed at the end, for the term of a year's grieving and abstinence—a project that takes the place of Navarre's academe, now not in defiance of *tempus edax*, perhaps, so much as in recognition of it.

However shapely the play is on its own terms, with this return to a proposal for penitential preparation and study—and however effective it has proved in modern productions, where its joking seems reason enough for the comedy—it has also proved notoriously attractive to critics who have found it filled with cryptic allusions to the Elizabethan court. In terms of the antonomastic crises I am discussing, I would briefly join those critics, by suggesting that the version of *Love's Labour's Lost* that has come down to us, "Newly corrected and augmented" and presented before the aging queen at Christmas of 1597 or 1598, may have had a particular piquancy in view of Elizabeth's own resistance to her courtiers' marriages. Games of courtship that could be no more than "merriment," "bombast and . . . lining to the time," as the Princess puts it, were the order of the day; while the marriages that would give substance and continuity to the noble houses of England had to be deferred to some future, post-Elizabethan day. Navarre's name, and the Bourbon dynasty he will found, are here subject to deferral; this is not



yet the "Burbon" whom Arthur will rescue in Spenser's 1596 *Faerie Queene*, while chiding him for abandoning the shield of his reformed faith. And yet, his readiness here to yield to "mere necessity" suggests that he can plausibly become that Henri, and so casts another foreboding cloud on this sunniest of comedies.

I have started with a quite basic, primitive instance of Shakespeare's use of floating indicators of identity. The pleasures of allusion in *Love's Labour's Lost* seem to me quite indistinguishable from the play's refusal to identify fully its characters or, indeed, its subject. We cannot say that the play is or is not "about" the Elizabethan succession or the earlier marriage question (although Alençon's name is mentioned in passing, at 2.1.61), or about Henri IV—or about Chapman or Raleigh for that matter. In its choreographing of a whole catalogue of Elizabethan dreams—of learning, power, patronage, royal marriages and royal deaths—it provides both fantasy and guilty awakening. The gap between the generalized titles of such transgressive figures as Pedant or Princely Wooer, and their proper names, is the space in which such fantasy can take place, with the reader's uncertain recognition left forever undenied and unconfirmed.

Shakespeare's other plays work to close that gap. To give two or three examples of plays in which the names of characters give conflicting omens which are variously fulfilled at various stages in the action, we might start with the example of Orlando in *As You Like It*, who recalls the distraught and enamoured Orlando of Boiardo's and Ariosto's poems, most notably perhaps when he is most fully in the throes of papering and carving trees with testimonials to his love: "Run, run Orlando, carve on every tree / The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she" (3.2.9-10)—and who puts on the guise of an Orlando *furioso* when he needlessly storms Duke Senior's picnic with drawn sword. Furthermore, the fact that his father, Sir Rowland de Boys, gave his youngest rather than his eldest son a name that was an anagram of his own may suggest a sentimental favoritism that flies in the face of that "courtesy of nations" which recognizes primogeniture, and so may partly account for the eldest brother's envy. When Orlando, driven by "the spirit of my father, which I think is within me," eventually flees into the wood accompanied by Adam, we may sense that he is taking part in a fortunate catastrophe

that will both regenerate his fortunes and affirm his name, as another Roland of the Wood. And if as *readers* of the play we know that his elder brother—never named in the dialogue—is an Oliver, the name of the original Roland's best friend, we may expect that in the Edenic forest of Arden, where Duke Senior and his companions "live like the old Robin Hood of England . . . and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world," this sibling rivalry too will be resolved, and the visitors to Arden will eventually become "all Olivers and Rolands"—to cite a phrase used by Alençon in *The First Part of Henry VI* (1.2.30) to describe England in its finest hours under Edward III. Indeed, the reader might ask why a Sir Rowland should name his first son Oliver and his youngest son Orlando, if not in an effort to bequeath, antonomastically, comradely identities that counterpoise the predictable Oedipal and sibling hostilities. Read with some of this awareness of intertextual allusions and of a cumulative generalizing force associated with names, the play shows the beneficent will of a dead father to be pervasively operative throughout. The sermons in stones that Duke Senior derives from his banished state are finally, then, a re-membering of a father's will, a patriarchal order, first rehearsed in the opening words of the play.

We might note, too, that "Arden," like "Navarre" earlier, is an amalgam of possible identities, recalling both the French Ardenne and the Arden of Warwickshire. A reader of Ariosto might also think of the "Ardenna woods" in canto 42 of the *Orlando furioso*, where Rinaldo is rescued from a monstrous figure of Jealousy and drinks from a fountain that purges him of his own jealous passion for Angelica. In the play's final scene, therefore, the setting is an Arden in Ariosto's sense as well.<sup>6</sup>

In his wholesale reworking of the characters and plot of Lodge's *Rosalynde*, Shakespeare makes a number of choices to which we may reasonably try to attribute some such intended meanings as I have suggested. It is harder to speak of significant naming and typing of characters in a play like *King Lear* where he did not diverge so obviously from his sources. Yet I think it is also possible to say something of the antonomastic aspects of Lear's three daughters. The junction of "woman" and "rule" in the names of Goneril and Regan summons up an image of the monstrous regiment which their passionate and destructive behavior abundantly exemplifies. A contrast with Cordelia in this regard

is both necessary and much more problematic. The "heart"—*cor, cordis*—that is conspicuously present in her name may allude to her appeal as baby of the household, something that is as apparent in Lear's case as in Sir Rowland's (though in the latter instance, more explicit in Lodge than in Shakespeare).<sup>7</sup> That Shakespeare has chosen a form of her name that first appears in Spenser may doubtless be explained by its easier adaptability to the rhythms of blank verse (where "Goneril" always carries a stress on her "ill"). I would also suggest that "Cordelia" recalls "Cordelion," Richard the Lion-Hearted, whose epithet (similarly spelled albeit pronounced with differing stress) is repeatedly used antonomastically in the opening scenes of *King John*, with reference to the bastard son of Richard, whom the play treats sympathetically as the worthiest—dramatically the most plausible—of Richard's survivors.

That Cordelia's name may suggest a feminine Cordelion seems congruent with versions of her story which make her a wise and worthy successor to Lear on the British throne. In both Holinshed and Spenser,<sup>8</sup> Lear goes to France and appeals to Cordelia and her husband, the French king Aganippus, who levies an army that Lear and Cordelia bring to England, where they triumph and Lear is restored to the throne, ruling for two years before dying and leaving the kingdom to Cordelia, who then rules for another five years before the sons of Goneril and Regan rebel and put her in prison where she kills herself (by hanging, in Spenser). Shakespeare's version of the story is both abridged and—I would suggest—censored. Though Lear must die since it is his tragedy, Shakespeare's killing-off of Cordelia has puzzled and troubled generations of readers. Edmund's order that she be hanged and made to seem a suicide, however effective it may be as a means of giving the tragedy a sense of sweeping and bleakly inclusive mortality, also has the effect of recalling the original story and at the same time rendering moot any question of the legitimacy or effectiveness of a British queen who is married to a king of France. The Cordelia of Spenser and Holinshed is dangerously close to figuring an Elizabeth who has gone ahead with the French marriage; and at the end, when their Cordelia survives her husband and is apparently childless, she is not so far from figuring a nightmare version of an Elizabeth without a James to unite her divided kingdom.

Shakespeare's Cordelia similarly returns to England with a French army, but not one that is led by Lear. The very lines in 4.3 (in the Quarto), which seem tactfully to be making the point that the King of France has been called home suddenly—so that this may seem less threateningly like a foreign invasion—go on at once to establish that the Marshall of France has been left in charge of the troops. Since the other side is led by the virtuous Albany, Shakespeare's audience must have felt that this was dubious battle indeed, in its political implications: for the movement toward Dover that promises resolution of the tragedy offers no hope of a viable candidate for the throne, as is clear from the confused concluding dialogue among Kent, Edgar, and Albany. Considered solely as an English history play (which is admittedly a secondary aspect of this tragedy at best), *Lear* stands in quite precise contrast to the action of *King John*, where the dubious and troublesome reign of John is succeeded by the accession of his lineal heir, Henry III, loyally supported by the Bastard whose upbeat and patriotic final lines are echoed dispiritedly at the end of Lear's tragedy. The Bastard proposes a decorous but swift transition to the new regime:

O, let us pay the time but needful woe,  
 . . . This England never did, nor never shall,  
 Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror . . . .

(5.7.110-13)

The spirit of post-Armada confidence is far from the exhausted sense of Time's victory that concludes *Lear*, when Edgar (Albany, in the Quarto text) says, "The weight of this sad time we must obey, . . . we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long." To recognize the degree to which Cordelia is, and yet is not finally able to be, a Cordelion—for all her outspokenness and unshakeable loyalties—is to see more clearly, I think, that the play makes Lear's story into the tragedy of a king who has no sons, in a world where bastards are treated as bastards and behave like bastards, and where—equally reactively—women are either vicious or frail, self-destructive or simply destroyed. Any hint of the miraculous exception that was Elizabeth is missing from this King James version of the story.

The paradoxes of naming and characterizing that have been discussed thus far lie almost wholly in the judgment of the reader or spectator. We see a stage property like a crown, hear a name or place associated with its bearer, perceive language or gestures that may recall earlier texts, and gradually form an increasingly rich and complex understanding of what we find. The arguing amongst ourselves over the plausibility and importance of such observations is a large part of our daily business as interpreters of literature. But we are not alone in trying to interpret character and action in Shakespearean drama; many of the figures on stage are up to much the same thing. This is especially true in the Roman plays, where Shakespeare could find the making and bridging of what I call antonomastic gaps, throughout his sources. Roman names, for instance, are richly suggestive and frequently burdened with historical overlay. Caius Martius, surnamed Coriolanus, "the Coriolan," for the city he has conquered. Julius Caesar—is he a Caesar yet? Most intriguingly, perhaps, Junius Brutus, whose "brutishness" was a calculated response to his "juniority" in the savage family of Tarquins, and whose strategy for survival is re-enacted by a Hamlet or a Prince Hal and fatally misunderstood by a Marcus Brutus. Writers like Valerius Maximus, Livy, and above all Plutarch, who try to arrange the stories of exemplary Romans into coherent narratives, further afforded the playwright far more in the way of interpretation than was usually available in his other sources. Finally, and most importantly, the almost wholly public world of Shakespeare's Rome, the world of political self-presentation, pleading of causes, and what would today be called spin control, constituted a setting where (as on the Shakespearean stage itself) all reality was verbal and gestural at heart and subject to revision.

I suggested earlier that the figure of antonomasia is seen at its most pervasive and complex in *Antony and Cleopatra*; and indeed the opening scene of the play introduces the protagonists in terms of contradictory epithets which suggest how paradoxical and futile it must be to comprehend such fluid and self-characterizing individuals. The play's title has already given us the names of the people we are looking for (as the titles of comedies do not), and in a sense the audience already knows Antony—an Antony—from *Julius Caesar*; furthermore, there are two choric figures on stage, Philo and Demetrius, who perform the

conventional presentational rôle of a Prologue. What they are presenting, however, is an Antony who is not himself:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's  
 O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,  
 That o'er the files and musters of the war  
 Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn  
 The office and devotion of their view  
 Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,  
 Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst  
 The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,  
 And is become the bellows and the fan  
 To cool a gypsy's lust. (1.1.1-10)

Philo's complaint is framed by appeals to the Graeco-Roman virtue of moderation in all things: Antony's folly o'erflows the measure, his heart reneges all temper, refuses to be constrained. Yet, the Roman and Antonine values that Philo seems to treasure are hardly themselves moderate. Antony—the authentic and good Antony—has always been excessive and larger than life. In battle his goodly eyes have glowed like plated Mars and his captain's heart is praised for reneging all temper, for bursting buckles in the just cause of a "great fight." It is the unworthiness of Antony's object now that makes Philo believe that this Antony is a figure of culpable excess; in fact, he has always overflowed the measure in everything he did. When Cleopatra says that her "oblivion is a very Antony" (1.3.90), she may be characterizing him as the epitome of forgetfulness and indifference, as the scene's recollection of Aeneas leaving Dido would imply; but we can also take it as identifying Antony as a figure of excess and epitome itself, Antony as *antonomasia*.

To say that Antony's heart "is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy's lust" makes sense most simply if we understand that lust can be cooled only by stoking its flames to the point that it is consumed orgasmically. Antony's oversized, buckle-bursting lungs are employed in the service of an indefatigable gypsy. That Philo says the heart has become the bellows *and* the fan may be no more than a hendiadys, a rhetorical embellishment on a "fanning bellows" (remember the "still and contemplative" in Navarre's opening speech), but it may also suggest a fundamental uncertainty, from a Roman viewpoint, whether it is

Antony's virility or his effeminacy that they are witnessing. When Philo is interrupted by the entry of "Antony, Cleopatra, her Ladies, the Train, with eunuchs fanning her," it is an open question, I think, whether Antony is seen as the "bellows" or the "fan" in this first view of him in Egypt: as cock of the walk and sole possessor of this queen, or as part of her feminized entourage. Philo is quite certain that it is the latter:

Take but good note, and you shall see in him  
The triple pillar of the world transform'd  
Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.

But there is an inflated grandiloquence in calling Antony "the triple pillar of the world" when by this is meant that he is one of the Triumvirs. The intrinsic, effective power of a triumvir is problematic indeed, and as we soon see, one of these thirds of the world, Lepidus, is both impotent and rather silly. And the wrangling, teasing, jesting that Antony and Cleopatra indulge in as we take note of them is too complex a playing at folly for us to be able to say that either one of them *is* simply a fool or a strumpet as Philo intends those epithets.

Attempts to compose glosses to this play are fraught with peril, for the simple reason that frequently we cannot know just what people are saying to each other, only list sets of possibilities. For example, Cleopatra remarks: "I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony will be himself"; to which Antony responds: "But stir'd by Cleopatra" (1.1.42-43). The Arden editor would take *but* in the exceptive sense of *unless*: Cleopatra says she will go along with Antony's claim that his love for her is infinite, and Fulvia of no importance, since Antony is determined to play the lover; Antony replies that he will do so unless she goes on trying to anger him. Dr Johnson seems to have taken the exchange as even more of a plot summary: Antony is going to come to his senses—be himself in Philo's Roman sense—unless Cleopatra continues to distract him.<sup>9</sup> I would suggest that *seeming* a fool is set against being unselfconsciously one's exaggerated self and so being a fool, literally an idiot in its Greek sense of apartness; to this Antony replies, then, that being himself means being stirred by Cleopatra, for she has made and continues making him what he is. But there is neither the need nor the possibility, probably, to gloss

dialogue of this speed and reactivity. What the audience perceives is predominantly a repartee of amorous challenges, in a public display where Philo, Demetrius, and we are trying in vain to take note of remarks whose private import lies tantalizingly beneath the intelligible and paraphrasable surface. With poignant irony, the scene concludes with Antony's proposal that

. . . all alone,  
To-night we'll wander through the streets and note  
The qualities of people. Come, my queen,  
Last night you did desire it.

But they leave the stage, as the scene direction notes, "with the Train"; these lovers never have their privacy, or the luxury of being spectators, of "noting" the qualities of others and subjecting them to antonomastic characterization. At the outset, Cleopatra seems to realize more clearly than Antony that this is an inescapable condition of being a public figure.

Left on stage, the Romans draw their own conclusions about what they have seen:

*Dem.* Is Caesar with Antonius priz'd so slight?  
*Phi.* Sir, sometimes when he is not Antony,  
He comes too short of that great property  
Which still should go with Antony.

Again, the claim that this is a deficient or diminished Antony who is not himself flies in the face of the evidence, for we have seen a magniloquent and arguably a magnificent Antony, albeit one who values someone and something other than Caesar. "Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike / Feeds beast as man . . ." The fact that our Antony is not so clearly the diminished Antony these Romans see contributes to our continuing curiosity as to whether there may be a wisdom in the folly or "dotage" attributed to him. We should also observe that when Demetrius concludes, "I am full sorry / That he approves the common liar, who / Thus speaks of him at Rome," there is an ironic circularity to the remark. What was falsely or ignorantly said in Rome is "approved"—made true or plausible—by Antony's subsequent behavior. In fact, by the same token Antony has just approved what Philo, the



presenter of this introductory play-within-the-play, had earlier affirmed about Antony's great-heartedness. The "common liar" expresses the official historical view of Antony that is already being written before the fact, and this first scene gives us a view of an Antony caught in the antonomastic trap mentioned earlier. As surely as Cressida was already *a* Cressida when her story was being enacted on a London stage, Antony is already the Antony of a history written by the Caesar whose victory over him will enable the *pax Augusta*. When we first see this Caesar in the fourth scene, he is predictably trying on a characterization of Antony as "A man who is th' abstract of all faults / That all men follow"—as the quintessence of antonomastic generalization, and as a perfect scapegoat.

What, we may ask, are the "properties" that first identify Antony and Cleopatra to the spectator? The unusually detailed scene directions suggest that the play relied on spectacle in its own day, as in the eunuchs' fans. Modern productions have often shown an Antony whose dress or features recall a flamboyant contemporary general or politician; and the actual or apparent age of an Antony will affect the weight given the term "dotage" in the first line of the play, for this is in some measure a play about middle-aged lovers, and Antony is like Othello *a senex*. One may also take hints from Shakespeare's sources. Dover Wilson suggested that Antony be shown wearing a lion skin,<sup>10</sup> on the basis of Plutarch's remark that

it had been a speche of old time, that the familie of the Antonii were descended from one Anton, the sonne of Hercules, whereof the familie tooke name. This opinion did Antonius seeke to confirme in all his doings: not onely resembling him in the likeness of his bodye . . . but also in the wearing of his garments.<sup>11</sup>

Such an initial visual antonomasia, identifying Antony with his mythical ancestor, would enhance the effectiveness of later allusions to Hercules, for instance in 4.3.16-17 where the soldiers hear music under the stage which they take to be "the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd, / now leav[ing] him," or Antony's remark in 4.12.43 that "The shirt of Nessus is upon me," as well as the more casual reference to him by Cleopatra in 1.3 as "this Herculean Roman." Furthermore, the audience will recall

the figure of Hercules and Omphale here, or later when they hear Cleopatra in 2.5 describe the time "I drunk him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan." By the same token, Philo's description of Antony's eyes glowing like plated Mars leads us, like Mardian, to "think / What Venus did with Mars." The popular Renaissance figures of the relation between making war and making love are seen everywhere in the play. That Antony's servant is named Eros affords opportunities for suggesting that Antony is armed or disarmed by Love, both figuratively and in allusion to the role of Cupid in illustrations or descriptions of the Mars-Venus union.

Yet another mythological model for Antony is seen in Plutarch's remark that although he claimed descent from Hercules, his life showed his principal devotion to be to Bacchus. In fact, in Plutarch it is the uncanny sound of a Bacchic celebration that the soldiers hear, and it is "thought that it was the god [Bacchus] unto whom Antonius bare singular devotion to counterfeate and resemble him, that did foresake them" (308). Although Shakespeare changes this to the departure of Hercules as regards this specific incident, I believe he does develop an awareness of Antony's double identity, as modelling himself on those two antique figures whom Spenser links in the opening lines of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, as "inspired with heroicke heat" and bringing civilization to the East and West respectively. The dream of combining East and West is invested in the figure of Antony, who for all his contradictions—reveler and warrior, a Roman with an Asiatic style, with a dual allegiance to Amor and Roma—evokes the fantasy of an Emperor Antony that Cleopatra describes to Dolabella: "His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm / Crested the world . . ."

The more fully to present this duplex Antony, Shakespeare replaces the choric Philo and Demetrius with the more sympathetic and nuanced voice of Enobarbus. In this he takes a minor figure from Plutarch's account, notable only for his death by fever after leaving Antony, "as though . . . he repented" (298), and makes him Antony's chief friend and advisor. Somewhat similarly, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare found a figure in his sources with the common Venetian name of Marcuccio—little Mark, after the region's patron saint—and by changing a vowel turned him into Mercutio whose mercurial temperament and cynical

realism make him a comparable interpreter of and to Romeo during the first part of the play. Here the historical Domitius Ahenobarbus<sup>12</sup>—brazen or red bearded—becomes Shakespeare's Enobarbus, his name combining the attributes of Bacchus and Hercules, wine-bibbing (*oeno-*) and manly valor (*-barbus*). When we first meet this Wine-beard in Egypt he is calling for wine and predicting that "Mine, and most of our fortunes to-night, shall be—drunk to bed." When we first see him in Rome, in 2.2, he is telling Lepidus (the doubtless clean-shaven, "smooth" or "polished" Lepidus), "By Jupiter, / Were I the wearer of Antonio's beard, / I would not shave't today." When this keeper of Antony's two properties betrays his master, as he decides to do at the end of Act 3—"I will seek / Some way to leave him"—it marks the disintegration, "dislimning" of Antony himself. The man who had hoped to earn "a place i' the story" (3.13.46) finds that it is that of "a master-leaver and a fugitive" (4.9.22).

I have suggested that the Roman thoughts of *Antony and Cleopatra* try to comprehend the world by naming, characterizing, describing it by means of epithets that I call antonomastic in that they replace a complex and mutable person or issue with a static and necessarily inadequate verbal formula. A full discussion of the play's antonomasia would be as long as a discussion of the play itself; so I shall conclude with two final examples of antonomasia in the Egyptian manner, epithets that deny, as it were, the making of epithets.

Determined to cheat Caesar of a Roman triumph in which she would have to watch "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore" (a scene, of course, that we are watching at this very moment and that echoes Philo's earlier judgment), Cleopatra applies the asp:

Come, thou mortal wretch,  
With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate  
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,  
Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,  
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass  
Unpolicied! (5.2.302-07)

The richness of this carefully contrived scene, designed to show Cleopatra in all her regal splendor, is heightened by language in which paradox reverberates. The Gordian knot of life, both intrinsic and intricate, must now be severed by an act of violence. The worm is at once Cleopatra's final lover, discharging after a furious fit, and the fruitful product of that love, the baby at her breast "that sucks the nurse asleep." Great Caesar is not Caesar Augustus here, at this moment, but an "ass unpolicied"—saddled with an epithet in which the defeat of Caesar's policies is paronomastically underscored by the fact that the *name* of the asp now literally occludes Caesar's, with the privative prefix, *un-*, itself embedded within its name, *ass un-p-olicied*. This triumphant renaming of Caesar, heavily ironized by the fact that it is imagined by the dying Cleopatra as both unhearable and unspeakable, a phrase to be conveyed by means of the speaking picture of her dead body, is echoed by Charmian, as she closes her mistress' eyes and straightens her crown:

Now boast thee, Death, in thy possession lies  
A lass unparallel'd.

Here too the asp and its power to undo are at the heart of the epithet, and the earlier phrase is now enhanced by an implicit play on "lass" and "alas." Sadly, the incomparable Cleopatra is possessed by death; but happily she is now finally no longer queen but a private "lass," free of the stately body that awaits Caesar's anticlimactic entry a few lines later. The time is past for the drawing of parallels or epithets, and we are left with that spectacle that I earlier suggested as the primal antonomastic moment at the opening of the play, when the audience is presented with a crowned figure on stage and waits for it to stand and unfold itself.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this essay was read at a conference on Paronomasia at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, July 1992. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Inge Leimberg and the other organizers and participants in this conference for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup>See M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (1957; London: Methuen 1966) ch. 1, "The Fatal Cleopatra."

<sup>3</sup>New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

<sup>4</sup>Ed. and trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1920).

<sup>5</sup>All Shakespeare quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

<sup>6</sup>That Arden was the family name of Shakespeare's mother may suggest a further psychological dimension to the initial contrast with the patriarchal tyrannies at court.

<sup>7</sup>Professor Leimberg has pointed out that Cordelia's name may also suggest the musical chord, actualized in the therapeutic "soft music" of 4.7, and perhaps the "cord" that hangs her and may be shown still around her neck in the final scene, and, moreover, the *ordeal* implied in the name Cordelia.

<sup>8</sup>See the Arden edition of *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1985) Appendices 2 and 3 (220-24).

<sup>9</sup>For both readings, see the Arden edition of M. R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1954) 7.

<sup>10</sup>The New Shakespeare *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1950) xxv.

<sup>11</sup>North's Plutarch (1579), in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: RKP, 1964) 5: 257.

<sup>12</sup>Although this Domitius is a minor figure in Plutarch's life of Antony, he is described at the end of the story as the ancestor of the Ahenobarbus whose name was changed to Nero Germanicus. Plutarch concludes: "This Nero was Emperour in our time, and slue his owne mother, and had almost destroyed the Empire of Rome, through his madness and wicked life, being the fift Emperour of Rome after Antonius" (318). As with his treatment of the Lear story, Shakespeare suppresses a historical dimension (obviously unsuited to the unities of drama, even in this play which stretches them to the limit) of which his audience may have been aware.

## Competing Discourses in *The Winter's Tale*

DAVID LAIRD

In a recent article, Stephen Orgel makes a case for textual incomprehensibility.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that earlier editors were mistaken when they worried obscure passages into sense. He fastens on several notoriously difficult passages in *The Winter's Tale* and tells us not to bother—the passages were probably as incomprehensible in 1611 as they are to a modern audience. The argument is an intriguing one and I recall it here by way of introducing questions raised and variously answered in recent criticism about how and at what level a particular text invites interpretation, the effort, that is, to realize or resist whatever play of signification may be lurking in the wings.

The essay has a distinctive postmodern flavor. It views with suspicion any project that would reduce the Shakespearean text to a pattern of meaning, to some general conceptual scheme. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, Orgel argues not so much for the deferral as for the denial of meaning, for the deliberate blurring of features which might sustain what he calls a common sense interpretation. To the question of what a speech by Polixenes might have conveyed to a Jacobean audience, his answer is: "Pretty much what it conveys to us: vagueness and confusion" (437). Such a determinate underscoring of the indeterminate seems consistent with postmodernist practice as does the general tenor of the essay which hints at what Frederic Jameson describes as blank parody or pastiche.<sup>2</sup> The drift of Orgel's irony favors a cool and essentially reassuring approach to the textual riddles and uncertainties so troubling to earlier editors. To the extent that Orgel is in earnest about trying to ease the burden of intelligibility, he registers an important difference between modern and postmodern critical practice, the former identified with a determined effort to work through obscurities, textual and otherwise,

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/deblaird00412.htm>>.

to some sort of unifying or comprehensive story or explanation rather in the fashion of scholars who, as he complains, were prepared to emend, substitute, or even arbitrarily select from among a range of possibilities so as to make sense of a text. The quest for intelligibility and the assumption that traditional modes of thought provide the groundwork for such an enterprise are less likely to figure in postmodernist projects. Jean François Lyotard links postmodernism to a certain incredulity or skepticism about totalizing or overreaching interpretive schemes or meta-narratives.<sup>3</sup> Others are no less incredulous about more modest or circumscribed attempts to decode meanings. As M. H. Begnal puts it, "since ambiguity and uncertainty undermine all hope of social discourse, all narratives or fictions are undercut by the indeterminate nature of language that remains tainted and equivocal . . ." <sup>4</sup> In its most sweeping and insistent formulation, the argument takes on a dubious, even nonsensical circularity.

This radical appeal to the indeterminacy of language and even Orgel's more restrained endorsement of textual incomprehensibility, his determinate underscoring of the indeterminate, will doubtless comfort skeptics among us prepared to protest the reduction of any text to an essentialist "truth" or totalizing interpretive scheme. But such challenges to the interpretive process seem to me imperiled by an overreaching not unlike that against which they protest, their force more rhetorical than substantive. There is, perhaps, as much blindness as insight in dismissing out of hand the claim that a literary work might register and channel meanings within a particular community and thus meet the requirements of social discourse and intelligibility at levels of meaning less insistently univocal or conclusive than those upon which recent critics, Orgel among them, have focused their dissent.

My purpose here is to ask where we might look for clues to what are admittedly partial and conflicted meanings, to whatever supplementary values or emphases a particular text, in this case, *The Winter's Tale*, manages to impart on this side of meaninglessness and indeterminacy. Prominent among such clues is the deliberate, tell-tale use of opposing or alternative discourses not only to locate characters and to fuel conflict or competition among them, but also to link up with a world beyond the fictional one, with issues and attitudes, conventions of utterance and

behavior, sited in and reflecting upon the larger culture. Competing discourses release meanings that outrun the fictional space in which the play exists. Such relational or contingent valuations are not apt to surface in the heavy weather of linguistic indeterminacy. They are not likely to emerge in a critical practice that disregards the historical specificities upon which local meanings depend.<sup>5</sup> To reckon with the competition and how it works in relation to other currents and issues within and beyond the play, I propose to identify the several vocabularies and discursive strategies and to track their destination or valuation according to their capacity to capture or distort, enliven or direct some sense of what is at issue in the emerging action. The focus is not so much on the discourse of agency as it is on the agency of discourse, on those discursive determinations that underlie or secure the interplay of character and event. If, in effect, one mode of discourse is deconstructed, others are entertained, even validated. There is an attempt to show how language works in a public space, how it variously enables and constrains. As regards *The Winter's Tale*, chief among the cited and, paradoxically, anonymous discourses are those bearing the marks of gender, class, and what Foucault refers to as the emergent power of the modern state.<sup>6</sup>

To control language, to exercise the power to name, categorize, and classify is an essential weapon in the arsenal of monarchy and the modern state no less than it was, for instance, of republican or imperial Rome. Leontes' ill-conceived defense of his sovereignty and rule is in no small measure a linguistic one. He enlists a discourse that is exclusionary and preemptive, meant to silence contrary or subversive voices. Ambiguity and duplicity tend to put an absolutist monarchy and the institutions of its government at risk. Leontes wants to banish whatever threatens the stability of language.<sup>7</sup>

That threat arises initially in Hermione's voicing of a discourse where meanings are multiple, ambiguous, and shadowed by an implicit recognition of what W. K. Wimsatt terms "the polysemous nature of verbal discourse."<sup>8</sup> Hermione speaks a discursive skepticism that measures the distance between words and things. Her agility and wit draw attention to the contingent nature of linguistic representation, to what Jonathan Goldberg refers to as the problem of "putting into



language what has occurred." "Language," he writes, when it is most accurate unspeaks itself."<sup>9</sup> Hermione's discursive practice, at least in its initial phase, undertakes to "unspeak" the linguistic "absolutism" Leontes is determined to uphold.

Resistance arises as well from linguistic practices grounded in class and occupation. Some critics fasten upon elements of Paulina's performance that identify her as a stereotypical shrew character, but her characterization draws as well upon the vocabulary and skills that a more nearly contemporary audience would have associated with the therapeutic or the healing arts. Her dealings with Leontes replicate the interventions prescribed for the treatment of delusion in the medical literature of the period. When Leontes calls her "a mankind witch," he targets behavior he deems cruel, unnatural, virago-like, a crossing of gender lines (II.iii.67).<sup>10</sup> His annoyance springs as well from Paulina's defiant, uncompromising insistence on an occupational or institutional standing outside the sphere of his control. Her declaration that she will act as his "physician" assumes sufficient disciplinary and rhetorical force to enable her to stand up to, even to defy, the king's authority (II.iii.54).

The linguistic practices of Autolycus and Perdita's foster brother, while less directly confrontational, are, in the main, no less subversive to that authority. Autolycus' shape-shifting, multi-tongued, entrepreneurial spirit mocks a reliance on a fixed correspondence between words and things. But it is Perdita's foster brother who finally and quite unexpectedly stumbles into a speech that levels classes and generations and seems to dispel forever the notion that the discourse of power can silence opposing voices or fortify itself against a conspiring relativity of things.

\* \* \*

In Act I, scene ii, Leontes, having failed to persuade Polixenes to extend his visit, asks Hermione to intercede. She responds by urging Leontes to assure their visitor that all is well at home: "say this to him, / He's beat from his best ward" (I.ii.32-33). It matters, perhaps, that her first speech should end with the pun on *ward/word*. "Ward" is used in fencing to signify a defensive or protective position. In that sense, Hermione is advising Leontes to draw Polixenes from his announced position, out

of his ward. The move would also win him from the "word," persuade him, that is, to go back on his word, to re-word or revise. It may point as well to Polixenes' wardship of his son to whom Hermione refers in the next lines. She then speaks directly to Polixenes, grounding her appeal in an authority that is merely personal and indifferent to the rigidities of positions previously defined and vows exchanged: "You put me off with limber vows; but I, / Though you would seek t'unsphere the stars with oaths, / Should yet say, 'Sir, no going'" (I.ii.47-49). Her good-natured, bantering tone creates a sense of intimacy and familiar, easy confidence: "Verily, / You shall not go; a lady's Verily's / As potent as a lord's" (I.ii.50-51). Her language displays extraordinary agility, a defiant, teasing playfulness that blurs or reverses established or prescriptive relationships. In the circle of openness and freedom which her performance describes, oaths uttered in earnest can be recovered or forgiven, obligations momentarily set aside, images of youth renewed, and even rivalries turned to harmonious, hospitable exchange. Hermione practices a kind of illocutionary legerdemain, the effect of which is to win Polixenes and enrage Leontes.

Hermione's "a lady's Verily's / As potent as a lord's" is a clever, gently chiding, multi-layered remark. On the one hand, it mocks Polixenes' earlier use of "verily," drawing attention to the word as precisely that, a word, a conventional marker used to dress up or intensify an utterance. In answer to Hermione's request that he extend his visit, Polixenes has just said: "I may not, verily" (I.ii.45).<sup>11</sup> We recall that Archidamus had used the word to underline his claim to unmediated speech.<sup>12</sup> Hermione catches up the word to emphasize its rhetorical function, thus dispelling whatever persuasive advantage Polixenes might hope to gain. A lady, she reminds him, can speak the word as well as a lord, with equal potency or justification, the word understood to be the common property of a linguistic community. Her claim seems plausible enough; in the grammar of discourse one person's "verily" works as well as another's. There is the implication that the word itself is no guarantor of the truth, no proof that the predicate to which it belongs does in fact correspond to conditions or relationships existing on the non-linguistic side of things. But that Hermione is saying something more as well becomes increasingly clear as the exchange

continues. Her "verily" may be taken to designate metonymically the substance or content of a particular truth claim and, if we take that to be the case, then Hermione suggests that there are competing or rival truths which must be understood in terms of sexual or social difference. When Polixenes vows that he will take one course of action, Hermione holds out the possibility that she can persuade him to another, that her truth is as likely to prevail as his. In a male-dominated society such as the one the play represents, it is, of course, a singularly daring assertion and all the more so when her opponent in the debate is a monarch at the locus of power. In any event, Polixenes is persuaded to renege on his vow and Hermione shows herself to be as good as her word; in this instance, a lady's verily does prove as potent as a lord's. She wins the first round or, at least, there is reason to think so until Leontes intervenes. The balance of power suddenly shifts. Hermione's acknowledgment of rival truths and the confident, easy way in which she has imposed her will upon another infuriates Leontes. He proceeds to construct and then enforce his own reductive, unambiguous version of events.

Events dispute Hermione's belief in the potency of her truth and do so disastrously when she is declared an "adulteress" and sentenced to prison, when Polixenes is named an accomplice and his life put at risk. Her situation brings home the conditionalities and eventualities by which she is constrained, the measure of her captivity and subjection. The discursive freedom to which she had earlier appealed, her wit and spontaneity, her willingness to entertain rival hypotheses, are in sharp contrast to the exactitude and finality which Leontes labors to impose, what, for his part, becomes an obsessive, anxious effort to preserve the integrity of language and thereby to strengthen his hold on an elusive, threatening reality, to stabilize and control the shifting social and political relationships by which he imagines himself threatened.<sup>13</sup>

The particular trait or humor of Leontes' character is a jealousy so sweeping and obsessive that it blurs perception and poisons understanding. A good deal of critical discussion has centered on this aspect of character, whether it is adequately motivated or simply one among the numerous givens the play asks us to accept, a necessary condition of plot or conventional feature of character portrayal. It has not been

sufficiently stressed that Leontes' jealous rage is provoked at least in part by verbal play, by Hermione's facility with language and the autonomy it implies. Leontes reacts to an assault upon the stability of language as if it were an assault on social and political identities and institutions as well. Confronted with an alternative, even a rebellious, discourse, he recognizes the peril and marshals his forces. Imagery stresses the stormy climate of a world suddenly changed, made fluid, murky, dissolving in ceaseless, shifting motion: "I am angling now," "My wife is slippery," "I have drunk, and seen the spider." The bawdy puns, the extravagant, reckless metaphors give forceful, alarming expression to a pathogeny that threatens to possess both consciousness and kingdom, private and public worlds. Leontes is determined to dispel by whatever power he commands the shadows that have so suddenly engulfed him. When Camillo warns against the dangers of "diseased opinion," Leontes lashes out in anger and contempt: "Make that thy question, and go rot!" (I.ii.324). To give over to doubt or interrogation, not to act decisively, is to become a "hovering temporizer that / Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil, / Inclining to them both" (I.ii.302-04). To comply with the rules that normally season and constrain both thought and language, that is, to acknowledge the possibility that words cheat, that things are both lost and found in re-presentation, is to surrender to the forces of instability and change, to "Remain a pinch'd thing; yea, a very trick / For them to play at will" (II.i.51-52).

Charles Frey suggests that Leontes is obsessed by "an almost metaphysical mistrust of reality."<sup>14</sup> It should perhaps be added that the aspect of reality which inspires his mistrust is the indeterminacy of things, their shifting shapes and meanings which he is resolved to fix and stabilize: "Nor night, nor day, no rest: it is but weakness / To bear the matter thus: mere weakness" (II.iii.1-2). Unwilling to tolerate verbal or perceptual ambiguities, he is determined to impose a meaning on events which is unequivocal, decisive, and in which deception can find no foothold. To that end, he is prepared to invoke an absolute authority that muzzles opposition and plumes itself in claims of "natural goodness" (II.i.164).<sup>15</sup> In a world of words, he is the chief artificer and enforcer, accountable to nothing beyond himself and the dictates of his now rancorous passion.

The movement of the play and its emerging web of ironies scale and measure Leontes' world of privileged knowledge and authority; they show it to be stubbornly wrong-headed, thoughtsick, and ill-conceived—indeed, it can be said that he is “mock'd with art.” But for those within reach of his still sovereign power, it remains a grimly menacing, kindening, wasting world as well.

If

The cause were not in being,—part o' th' cause,  
 She th' adultress: for the harlot king  
 Is quite beyond mine arm, out of the blank  
 And level of my brain: plot-proof: but she  
 I can hook to me: say that she were gone,  
 Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest  
 Might come to me again. (II.iii.2-9)

On the offensive, Leontes turns to a language of combat, ships grappling in battle, engines of war and violence. Human relationships are expressed through images of retribution, enforced punishment, and death, Leontes struggling to maintain his embattled position against imagined hostilities. He creates a world of jealousies which members of his court must take for truth or be denied both place and personhood:

Our prerogative

Calls not your counsels, but our natural goodness  
 Imparts this; which if you, or stupefied,  
 Or seeming so, in skill, cannot or will not  
 Relish a truth, like us, inform yourselves  
 We need no more of your advice: the matter,  
 The loss, the gain, the ord'ring on 't, is all  
 Properly ours. (II.i.163-70)

His suspicions, he argues, must be grounded in actuality—to mistrust the signs as he perceives them is to find the world unknowable. No longer a question of partial error, of misperceiving or misnaming, it is for Leontes a matter of the existence of fixed relationships and the meanings which flow from them, the denial of which would yield up the world to chaos and confusion. If, Leontes argues, his judgment

should prove wrong, if he should be misled about the world and all that's in it, then the world counts for nothing.

. . . is this nothing?

Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing,  
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,  
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,  
If this be nothing. (I.ii.292-96)

Such a destructive conclusion is, in a sense, inconceivable, literally unthinkable, and counter-hypothetical beyond the realm of possibility. Its invocation confirms its necessary opposite, an intelligible world where reason and the authority of the sovereign serve as reliable guides, both working together to uphold the rules and standards by which truth is pursued and judgments made. On precisely this point, James I had declared that where there is no king, nothing is unlawful, that *rex est lex*: "No King being, nothing is unlawfull to none."<sup>16</sup> Later in the century Thomas Hobbes warned against the clouded judgments of ordinary men who embrace not justice but

a false and empty shadow instead of it. . . . Since therefore such opinions are clouds . . . , the question whether any future action will prove just or unjust, good or ill, is to be demanded of none but those to whome the supreme hath committed the interpretation of his laws.<sup>17</sup>

Leontes does not falter in the performance of his judicial office. He is determined to uphold the integrity of political and legal discourse. To that end, he would nail down meanings, make them determinate, unequivocal. What is unruly, shifting, or duplicitous in language must be suppressed in favor of speech that is decisive, direct, and unambiguous. His over-riding concern is to affirm both the order of language and the language of order. His absolutist vocabulary bends the evidence to its own validation and thereby checks a threatening indeterminacy or namelessness. He rules by the word and the word must be law. Like the Stuart monarch, he clings to the illusion that language might effect a change in reality.

In a series of pronouncements, Leontes stipulates precisely what is at issue: order against chaos, fixity and stability against disruption and decay. In Act II, for example, he declines to use a word that names Hermione's position at court for the reason that to do so would be to corrupt the word, and thereby put at risk the authority of language, "the mannerly distinguishment" that keeps a nameless barbarism in check:

O thou thing—  
Which I'll not call a creature of thy place,  
Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,  
Should a like language use to all degrees,  
And mannerly distinguishment leave out  
Betwixt the prince and beggar. I have said  
She's an adultriss. . . . (II.i.82-88)

The king's determined effort to match language to event fails to do justice to either. Interpretive conclusions reached by other characters contradict those voiced by the king. His attempt to establish the nature of his son's illness is a case in point. His erroneous diagnosis, his misreading of the signs, is no sooner concluded than Paulina arrives to confront the king and his affliction: "I / Do come with words as medicinal as true / . . . to purge him of that humour / That presses him from sleep" (II.iii.36-39). Some—including Leontes who calls Paulina "a mankind witch . . . a most intelligencing bawd"—have viewed her ministrations as betraying a shrewishness of character, but it should not be overlooked that the chiding she delivers, the various therapies she undertakes, are sanctioned in the medical literature of the period.<sup>18</sup> Her skillful diagnosis and treatment contrast with the king's incompetence in the earlier endeavor and thus constitute still another instance where the king's claim to a superior knowledge is countermined by the performance of a character vested in an opposing, in this case, an institutional discourse and authority.

But Leontes is ill-prepared to countenance such opposition. He takes the view that if he should be deceived in his reading of signs, then it is reason that fails and there is no foundation left for the meanings which language articulates, for progress from the sensible world to an intelligible one:

No: if I mistake  
 In those foundations which I build upon,  
 The centre is not big enough to bear  
 A school-boy's top. (II.i.100-03)

Increasingly the vocabulary narrows, becomes more reductive and insistent. Hermione is brought to trial and Leontes casts himself as prosecutor and judge. Hermione confesses her bewilderment before the fiction that power imposes,<sup>19</sup> a verbal ordering of events that remains entirely foreign to her.

You speak a language that I understand not:  
 My life stands in the level of your dreams,  
 Which I'll lay down. (III.ii.80-82)

She acknowledges the king's authority even as she protests the illusion that holds her hostage. Earlier she had succeeded in reversing Polixenes' decision to leave Sicilia. Now she can find no room in which to maneuver. The name conferred does, in effect, determine and arrest. She is sentenced to the sentence in an unanswerable display of both linguistic and judicial tyranny. Her only recourse is to appeal the judgment of the court: "Apollo be my judge" (III.ii.116).

The arrogance of power is no less on display in the scene in which Leontes is told of the Oracle's pronouncement that Hermione is innocent and "the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found" (III.ii.134-36). It is, of course, ironic that, having tried to stamp out ambiguity and the play of multiple meanings, he should now be hit with speech that is riddling and paradoxical. The mode of discourse is that which James had likened, appropriately enough, to "the old Oracles of the Pagan Gods" and warned against as "rent asunder in contrary senses."<sup>20</sup> Leontes is not persuaded; the prophecy that "the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found," with the enigma of its conditional element and even, perhaps, the play of meanings associated with the word "heir," is beyond his capacity to decipher.<sup>21</sup> He rejects the speech as "mere falsehood" and orders the trial to proceed.



Persons and conditions are subject to the name Leontes gives them, but most of all it is the namer's name and what it signifies that the trial brings into question. As Edmund Morgan puts it with awesome understatement:

the rules of the game . . . were simple: the first was that God's lieutenant could do no wrong; the second was that everyone else (including everyone who sat in Parliament), was a mere subject. Acknowledged subjection to a faultless authority would seem to leave little room for political maneuvering. But divinity, when assumed by mortals (or imposed upon them) can prove more constricting than subjection.<sup>22</sup>

Leontes' "faultless authority" is, of course, freighted with constrictions. It presupposes a belief in the constitutive nature of language, the power of language to call the world to order. The pronouncement of the Oracle and the shattering finality of Mamillius' death rebuke that authority and lay bare its vulnerabilities. Leontes feared he would become a pinched thing, a very trick for others to play at will. Events fulfill his worst fears. He must endure the dissolution of the social and political identity in terms of which he had earlier understood and defended his performance. Roused at last from the dream of majesty, he confronts the suddenly indissociable consequences of an action against which Hermione had earlier protested.

. . . if I shall be condemn'd  
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else  
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you  
'Tis rigour and not law. (III.ii.111-14)<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, Leontes pronounces sentence against himself. In the theater of kingship, the player-king is found guilty and sentenced to a "shame perpetual."<sup>24</sup>

Thus far we have followed Leontes' attempts to order what lies beyond the reach of his control. He has sought to impose meaning, to centralize and unify, to bring the world to order. And now the failed strategies and the havoc he has wrought are distanced by another mood and climate. The hinge which permits this turning is provided by the figure of Time whose speech to the audience in Act IV claims authority over

however much of time is left in and beyond the realm of fiction. It is, of course, the dramatist's apology for leaping forward some sixteen years. In that aspect, it reminds us of our subjection to the power of the dramatist, who, godlike, sets the pace and intervals of time's progress through the play and might yet manage to draw the rabbit of comedy from his tangled web of dark suspicion, anxiety, and loss. We are reminded of where we are just as we had been moments before by the bear's pursuit of Antigonus. The presence of the bear must give us pause. Similarly, Time acting as chorus or presenter and the rhymed couplets in which his message is encased declare themselves as theatrical convention. We locate ourselves in the theater, in a world of "infinite doings" and dissemblings, of play and possibility, and in the presence of what we are told is an awesome power that can "o'erthrow law, and . . . plant and o'erwhelm custom" (IV.i.8-9).

A crucial, if unwitting, agent of this sea change is Autolycus. It is perhaps significant that Simon Forman, recounting a performance of the play in the spring of 1611, should have singled him out for attention. We leave the den of the lion only to find ourselves in the lair of the wolf. Autolycus maintains his authority by stealth, giving and taking fortunes, picking pockets, and trading in tall tales. As pick pocket and peddler, he makes the shepherds prove sheep for his shearing. He wears many disguises and speaks in various tongues. For him, language is duplicitous and he thrives on duplicity, able to impose meanings without being bound by them. Like Leontes, he rules by the word but in an altogether different register. He usurps language and murders the king's English. He is never sentenced to the sentence, never at a loss for words, because for him as for another corrupter of words "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit—how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!" (*Twelfth Night* III.i.11-13). Leontes would strangle ambiguity and the play of multiple meanings; Autolycus would be strangled but for the loopholes they afford. In the exercise of his linguistic legerdemain, he offers a lopsided, inverted, fun-house mirror image of Leontes' ill-fated effort to sustain his mastery through quite another mode of discourse, a reflection which their animal designations would seem to support.

Disclosures of various kinds abound in the remaining scenes of the play—the final one occurring in Act V, when Paulina summons the court to view the sculpted image of the late queen. That Hermione should suffer this transformation into the condition of statuehood, a “dying” into art, is, of course, richly suggestive. Among other things, it represents the culmination of a movement initiated by Leontes and carried forward with the complicity of Paulina; it is paradigmatic of the strategy by which Leontes had previously used linguistic forms to address and curb the flux of things, to stay their restless motion. Now that strategy is recalled only to be rebuked again when representation gives way to an unmediated actuality, the idea suddenly de-reified, the fixed and seemingly lifeless sign incarnate in a living, speaking presence. The transformation thus accomplished suggests a release into a field of possible meanings and relationships which the discourse of domination had failed to reckon with.

My project has been to suggest that the play carries forward a searching interrogation of the linguistic and ideological structures according to which characters endeavor to “know” the world, to fix and stabilize the rush of events within a political society. One consequence of that interrogation is the exposure of the perceptual or moral blind-side of some historically sited institutional formations and, especially, an absolutism that is both linguistic and political. The line of argument holds that language must ground itself in the *long durée* of communal practice where words work by custom and usage, where meanings remain associative, freighted with ambiguities, contingent, and provisional. Such undercutting of linguistic “absolutism” and especially the assumption of a fixed and certain relationship between words and things would seem to dispute Stephen Greenblatt’s thesis that subversive doubts are silenced in “the English form of absolutist theatricality” and the triumphant celebration of monarchical power.<sup>25</sup> The instruction Leontes receives is by no means celebratory of absolute power, but, instead, limits that power by restricting the language by which it is projected to less conceptualized, more pragmatic, mundane functions.

A less rigid and enforcing discourse prevails in the concluding scenes: the signs of power are erased by powerful signs and subjects are endowed with personhood: “there was speech in their dumbness,

language in their very gesture" (V.ii.12-13). This alternative, even consensual, discourse allows for what Richard Rorty calls "the contingency of language."<sup>26</sup> Words and gestures impart a certain openness and suggestivity; they serve to express interests earlier neglected or foreclosed. The effect is to remind us of the communicative possibilities of language without implying that its constructions, narrative or conceptual, are valid in some timeless or universal fashion. It points to something quite different, to the communicative efficacy of linguistic gesture and to the performative possibilities of language. A postmodernist argument, in a sense, but one that stays on this side of incomprehensibility.

In a final gesture, Leontes holds out his hand to Paulina asking that she

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely  
Each one demand, and answer to his part  
Perform'd in this wide gap of time, since first  
We were dissever'd. (V.iii.152-55)

Voices once raised in anger or dissent are muted or refined, the first person "we," earlier the sign of royal privilege and singular authority, is transformed into the sign of a collectivity, present and familial. There is a joining of hands and motion toward a place where each is free to question and to answer, where, significantly, language is released from absolutist or solipsistic deployment, restored to its discursive function, where monologue gives way to dialogue, where kingship and prerogative fade like old photographs in the stronger light of kinship renewed, and where, beyond the artifice of pomp and majesty, beyond the rigidities of traditional power relationships, a portion of the play's healing power finds breathing room and time enough for its fulfillment. It is Perdita's foster brother who assures us that these relational changes have indeed occurred and he does so in a riddling speech that shows him wise enough to play the Clown, the only title the play text gives him. His mode of discourse seems an especially telling one if the task at hand is to give linguistic representation to what has transpired in the course of the play's "doings."

... the king's son took me by the hand, and called me brother; and then the two kings called my father brother; and then the prince, my brother, and the princess, my sister, called my father father; and so we wept; and there was the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed. (V.ii.140-45)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"The Poetics of Incomprehensibility," *SQ* 42 (1991): 431-37.—I would like to thank Charles Beckwith, Paul Zall, and the editors of *Connotations* for their helpful comments and support at various stages in the preparation of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>*Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 17.

<sup>3</sup>*The Post-Modern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 66.

<sup>4</sup>*Choice* 29 (1992): 744.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Frey's caution against reducing the formal complexity of *The Winter's Tale*, the teeming and sometimes discordant particularities of character, incident, and tone, to some totalizing pattern of explanation or argument, has not dissuaded critics from accentuating the play's embeddedness in a larger contemporaneity, its ideological and political content (*Shakespeare's Vast Romance: A Study of The Winter's Tale* [Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1980]). Stuart Kurland, for example, links Leontes' court to the court of James I, arguing that Shakespeare's agenda includes instructing the monarch on the role of good counsel in the exercise of monarchical authority ("We need no more of your advice": Political Realism in *The Winter's Tale*," *SEL* 31 [1991]: 365-79). Michael Bristol believes that the play has more to do with Jacobean economic theories and controversies than with court politics ("In Search of the Bear: Spatiotemporal Form and the Heterogeneity of Economies in *The Winter's Tale*," *SQ* 42 [1991]: 145-67). Two recent essays on *The Winter's Tale* offer a philosophically informed and sensitive treatment of how words work in the production of meanings and values. Maurice Hunt draws on speech act theory to identify the consensual contexts upon which communication depends and shows what can happen when those contexts are violated or ignored. He is concerned to show how communication goes wrong and how Shakespeare's "linguistic dramaturgy" manages to transcend ordinary modes of communication (*Shakespeare's Romance of the Word* [Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1990] 103-04). William Morse argues that, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare sets out to subvert "a dominant absolutist ideology centered in the court" ("Metacriticism and Materiality: The Case of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*," *ELH* 58 [1991]: 283). He contends that the play "strikingly dramatizes the poverty and shrunkenness of the emergent discourse of modernism," a discourse with which the institution of monarchy is allied and by means of which it seeks to rule (298).

<sup>6</sup>Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 93.

<sup>7</sup>James I expressed similar concern over the stability of legal and civil discourse. In his inaugural speech to Parliament in March of 1604 (o. s. 1603), he assured his subjects he was prepared to assume responsibility for his own language, making of it an instrument of accurate, clear representation and banishing such diseases as duplicity and ambiguity (*The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain [New York: Russell and Russell, 1965] 280):

. . . it becommeth a King, in my opinion, to use no other Eloquence then plainnesse and sinceritie. By plainnesse I meane, that his Speeches should be so cleare and voyd of all ambiguitie, that they may not be throwne, nor rent asunder in contrary sences like the old Oracles of the Pagan Gods. And by sinceritie, I understand that uprightnesse and honestie which ought to be in a Kings whole Speeches and actions: That as farre as a King is in Honour erected above any of his Subjects, so farre should he strive in sincerities to be above them all, and that his tongue should be ever the trew Messenger of his heart: and this sort of Eloquence may you ever assuredly looke for at my hands.

<sup>8</sup>*The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (New York: Noonday, 1958) 268-69.

<sup>9</sup>*James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1983) 238. Goldberg provides an illuminating, searching account of links between Jacobean theater and the political culture, emphasizing representational strategies employed by royal actors on the stage of history as well the "refigurations" through which they are presented or otherwise made to make their presence felt in the theater of the period. Of immediate concern to this paper is the claim Goldberg makes in the context of his judicious, seasoned analysis of *Measure for Measure* that "by representing representation, Shakespeare contributes to the discourse of his society and to its most pressing questions about prerogative, power, and authority" (239).

<sup>10</sup>*The Winter's Tale*, ed. J. J. P. Pafford, Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1953). Citations from Shakespeare's works follow the Arden Edition.

<sup>11</sup>Of the fourteen occurrences of "verily" cited in the Shakespeare Concordance, seven come from *The Winter's Tale*. Five of the seven occur in the scene discussed above.

<sup>12</sup>It is noteworthy that in Archidamus' brief appearance in the first scene of the play he should attempt to answer the language question even as he raises it in his innocent assertion of linguistic transparency, the capacity of language to provide an exact translation of non-linguistic phenomena. He boasts of his ability to speak candidly and without mediation or embellishment: "in the freedom of my knowledge" (I.i.11). He rejects elaborate compliment in favor of plainness and honesty: "I speak as my understanding instructs me, and as mine honesty puts it to utterance" (I.i.19-20). This endorsement of plain speech and truth-telling and the assumption on which it rests that language can get things straight, can fulfill its task as a medium of "honest" representation, are made to seem the more remarkable when, in short order, the play recalls other, less benign uses of language, including those by which tyrannical power is exercised and justice denied. No sooner has Archidamus voiced his resolve to speak truth and made a glancing reference to the unspeakable comfort afforded by Sicilia's young prince Mamillius than he leaves

the stage never to be heard from again. A proponent of linguistic clarity is ushered off stage even with the entry of Leontes, prefiguring, perhaps, other losses including the death of Mamillius, the "gallant child" who, as Archidamus says, "physics the subject." See Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972) 223, for a discussion of another aspect of the exchange between Camillo and Archidamus and for an instance of what Felperin terms "oracular language," a distinctive feature of which is its ability to generate meanings of which the speaker may be unaware but which are nonetheless reflective of "the romantic nature of the play" and impart a sense that, miraculously, all may be well in the end. Such deployment contrasts sharply with the harsh, foreboding quality of Leontes' speeches.

<sup>13</sup>Howard Felperin, "'Tongue-tied our queen?' The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985) 10, finds that the ambiguities and innuendoes of Hermione's language invite not only Leontes' suspicions but the critic's as well. He believes her bantering, witty dialogue is sufficient cause to doubt her integrity. My approach turns not so much on how we might construe Hermione's relationship with Polixenes, but rather on the distinctiveness of her language in relation to other rhetorics or types of discourse, the combined presence of which thematizes linguistic practice in relation to power and raises issues including those of patriarchy and order and, by contrast, political subversion and dissent.

<sup>14</sup>Frey 78.

<sup>15</sup>James I similarly boasted that, though it was within his power to govern as he saw fit, he was inclined by his own good nature to take counsel where it pleased him to do so, "not bound thereto but of his own good will and for good example" (*The Political Works* 310; for a discussion of James's speech to Commons in the spring of 1610, from which the passage comes, see David Laird, "'A curious way of torturing': Language and Ideological Transformation in *A King and No King*," *Themes in Drama*, vol. 12 [Cambridge: CUP, 1990] 113-14). In another speech to Commons, James warned its members not to abuse his good nature by presuming to "meddle with the maine points of Gouernment; that is my craft . . . ; to meddle with that, were to lesson me" and, he continued, "I must not be taught my Office" (315). Fortunately, he said, he was a good king, of which God be thanked, he had given ample proof (310).

<sup>16</sup>*The Political Works* 66. For an insightful review of the current controversy surrounding the question of Stuart absolutism and the ancient constitution, see J. P. Sommerville, "James I and the Divine Right of Kings: English Politics and Continental Theory," *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 56-58.

<sup>17</sup>Preface to Hobbes's translation of his *De Cive*, quoted from *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (New York: Doubleday, 1972) 98.

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 2.2.6.2, pp. 110-11, where readers are advised that if "fair promises, good words, gentle persuasions" are of no avail, then it becomes necessary to handle the patient "more roughly, to threaten and to chide." Thomas Willis believed that "the madman must be so handled both by the physician, and also by the servants that are prudent, that he may be in some manner kept in, either by warnings, chiding, or punishments inflicted on him, to his duty, or his behavior, or manners" (*De anima brutorum*, quoted in Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and*

*Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* [Cambridge: CUP, 1981] 196). Paulina may be alluding to her role as one proficient in the healing arts when she tells Leontes, irritated by the "noise" occasioned by her visit, that she brings "No noise, my lord; but needful conference / About some gossips for your highness" (II.iii.40-41). A note in the Arden edition informs us that "gossips" are sponsors at a baptism, godparents. Since Paulina carries in her arms a new-born child, it seems likely that her remark points to the christening she hopes Leontes will allow. In a more general sense, the word is used to designate individuals able to promote spiritual and physical well-being and, thus, the passage may include a glancing reference to the service Paulina herself is prepared to offer.

<sup>19</sup>Stephen Greenblatt remarks that "one of the highest achievements of power is to impose fictions upon the world." *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 141.

<sup>20</sup>*The Political Works* 280.

<sup>21</sup>Felperin, "'Tongue-tied our queen?'" (8), takes the contrary view, arguing that the Oracle is relatively unambiguous and must be clear even to Leontes. David M. Bergeron, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1985), on the other hand, shares this author's view that "Leontes misreads, misinterprets the message. The Apollonian oracle, both clear and cryptic (italics mine), retrospective and prophetic, judges the past—finding Hermione, Camillo, and Polixenes all blameless and Leontes guilty—and opens a riddlike future: '... the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found'" (162-63).

<sup>22</sup>*Inventing the People* (New York: Norton, 1988) 21.

<sup>23</sup>That Hermione sets rigour against law in binary opposition must be counted as a departure from normal usage. The more frequently expressed relationship was a complementary one as in the commonplace expression "rigour of the law." The variation is especially noteworthy because it occurs in one of the few passages that comes almost word for word from Shakespeare's source, Greene's *Pandosto, or the Triumph of Time*. There it is the omniscient narrator who tells the reader that if Hermione "were condemned without any further proof it was rigour and not law."

<sup>24</sup>Christopher Hill recalls that Raleigh had concluded his *History of the World* with an acknowledgment of Death's power to humble the proud and punish the insolent: "O eloquent, just and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only cast out out of the world and despised" (*The History of the World* [1810], vol. 6, 370, quoted by Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1965] 224). Hill adds the question: "Did no one apply those words to the first two Stuarts, whom none could advise and whom all the world flattered? What none had dared, the men of 1649 did; and called in Death the Leveller to cast kingship out of the world." In the scene we are considering, Death the Leveller strikes down the presumption of a linguistic and political absolutism, leaving the kingdom bereft of an heir and transforming the king into a grieving parent, subject to the tyranny of loss, to a life of penance and remorse.

<sup>25</sup>"Invisible bullets," *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 65.

<sup>26</sup>*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989) 25.



# Liberty, Corruption and Seduction in the Republican Imagination

TARA FITZPATRICK

## I

In the fall of 1787, as the Constitutional Convention completed its work, Philadelphia's *Columbian Magazine* published a two-part "original novel, founded upon recent facts," as part of its editorial commitment to encourage "the advancement of knowledge and virtue" in the new nation. The political nature of this "original novel," *Amelia, or the Faithless Briton*, was first suggested by its placement in the magazine alongside domestic and foreign political commentary.<sup>1</sup> Lest anyone be surprised by the inclusion of a serialized tale of seduction, betrayal and revenge in a national magazine that had, a month earlier, published the first draft of the federal Constitution, it should be noted that the Constitution itself faced an anecdote entitled "Love and Constancy"—a parable insisting that "conjugal fidelity" was necessary for preserving liberty.<sup>2</sup> In any event, the opening paragraphs of *Amelia* explicitly announce the political intentions of the story:

The revolutions of government, and the subversions of empire, which have swelled the theme of national historians, have, likewise, in every age, furnished anecdote to the biographer, and incident to the novelist. The objects of policy or ambition are generally, indeed, accomplished at the expense of private ease and prosperity; while the triumph of arms . . . serves to announce some recent calamity—the waste of property, or the fall of families.

Thus the great events of the late war, which produced the separation of the British empire, and established the sovereignty of America, were chequered with scenes of private sorrow, and the success of the contending forces was alternately fatal to the peace and order of domestic life.<sup>3</sup>

The domestic tragedy that follows this preface is a fairly representative version of the seduction tales so popular among late eighteenth-century readers, though with certain significant variations that suggest the particular work this text sought to accomplish among republican American readers.<sup>4</sup> Widowed patriarch Horatio Blyfield, a successful New York merchant, finds himself forced by the Revolutionary conflict to retire from his commercial activities and take refuge on Long Island with his daughter Amelia, while his son Honorius goes off to join the patriot cause. Some months later, Horatio rescues Doliscus, a wounded British officer, and nurses him back to health with the assistance of young Amelia. Doliscus woos Amelia, asks if she will “consent to sacrifice a sentiment of delicacy, to ensure a life of happiness” (679), and convinces her to “marry” him in secret because, he claims, he is betrothed to a titled British woman and dares not publicly defy the wishes of his own noble British family. Only the death of his father will rescue him from these filial constraints and then, he promises, he will acknowledge Amelia as his true wife. The marriage, conveniently enough, is conducted not by an actual minister but by one of Doliscus’ army comrades disguised as a minister. Soon thereafter—but not soon enough—Doliscus returns to the city and to the command of the British troops. Amelia quickly realizes that she has been deceived by this aristocratic British treachery and, just as quickly, realizes that she is pregnant with the child of her seducer. At this juncture of the story we find the first digression from the seduction formula inherited from Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) and the novels that followed it.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than wasting away of heartache or pleading with Doliscus to return to her, American Amelia resolves “publicly to vindicate her honour and assert her rights” (680). She follows her seducer to the presumed font of corruption, London, and there confronts Doliscus, who admits that their marriage was “a rural masquerade,” but refuses “to be thus duped or controlled. I have a sense of pity,” he continues, “for your indiscretion, but none for your passion” (681). Realizing that Doliscus will not recognize her rights as his wife, Amelia permits herself to be removed to a servant’s hotel, where she prematurely gives birth to a baby who dies, leaving Amelia to contemplate ending her own misery with a dose of laudanum. All the while, however, she rejects

any complicity in her own ruin; though she has been “deluded into error” she is “free from guilt; I have been solicitous to preserve my innocence and honour; but am exposed to infamy and shame” (682). Her seducer had at no point extracted her knowing consent; Doliscus had deceived her into making a contract by which he himself had never intended to abide.

The story’s denouement, published in a second installment, is quickly told. Horatio arrives in time to save his daughter from a sin perhaps worse than seduction—suicide—and assures her that “the errors of our conduct may expose us to the scandal of the world, but it is guilt alone which can violate the inward tranquility of the mind.”<sup>6</sup> Her brother Honorius appears, having just been paroled from the British jail where he has been held as a prisoner of war, and arranges a duel with Doliscus to avenge Amelia’s honor. Doliscus, now remorseful, permits Honorius to win the duel, but not before arranging the safe passage of the Blyfield family back to America. Doliscus’ dying words seem to confirm Thomas Paine’s prophecy in *Common Sense*: “Your country will afford you an asylum and protect you from the consequences of my [read: British] fate” (880). Despite the efforts of her father and brother, however, Amelia descends into madness and dies. Honorius returns to America only to sacrifice his own life in the battle for independence, leaving Horatio alone to console himself that “whatever may be the sufferings of virtue HERE, its portion must be happiness HEREAFTER” (880).

In *Amelia*, then, we find many of the elements of the eighteenth-century figure of virtue seduced and abandoned, complete with a motherless and guileless heroine, a treacherous aristocratic seducer, a brother who vies with the seducer for his sister’s honor, and a father who finally proves impotent to protect his children from deception and ruin.<sup>7</sup> But this familiar formula requires further scrutiny if we are to identify the particular political and philosophical implications it held for American readers in the 1780s. *Amelia* depicts the corrupt British officer first shamed and then vanquished by the ravished American and her family’s insistent assertion of her honor and her *rights*. Vindication comes, however, only at the cost of much American sacrifice—both of innocence (however unwittingly) and blood. *Amelia* closes with dual sacrifices, with the deaths of brother and sister in the name of family honor and moral

right. Honorius, as his name of course suggests, follows the classical republican model of manly sacrifice on the field of national honor. Amelia surrenders her reason and then life itself as the price of her innocent but imprudent fall into public infamy. Denied her *rights* as a wife, she has been deprived of her only means of restoring the legitimacy of her consent, not to seduction but, instead, to a republican marriage. Though Amelia's sphere of republican action remains confined to marriage, she refuses to assent to an Englishman's representation of her position. Amelia sacrifices her life rather than accede to the sacrifice of her liberty—figured here not as her independence but as her right to consent, to contract. In the terms of this story, at least, that right is equated with republican virtue for women as well as for men.<sup>8</sup>

With this example in mind, I wish to consider the particular resonance of the figure of seduction within the debates over the proper relations between liberty and authority that so consumed the new nation in the 1770s and 1780s. As several historians—among them Linda Kerber, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Cathy Davidson, and Ruth Bloch—have noted, the melodramatic novel of seduction served to dramatize the republican struggle between virtue and corruption in terms that were at once political and gendered.<sup>9</sup> Though classical republicanism had traditionally associated virtue with the manly exercise of political and martial action in the public realm, by the last decades of the eighteenth century, the virtue of women in their capacities as mothers and wives came to seem increasingly important to preserving the virtuous independence of America's citizens.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, representations of corruption, too, were both gendered and sexualized. Instead of classical republicanism's figure of the feminine principle of Fortuna ultimately corrupting the civic efforts of manly *virtu*, by the late eighteenth century, corruption was more often depicted through the Richardsonian convention of an innocent girl defiled and forsaken by a deceitful villain.<sup>11</sup> By choosing seduction as a prevailing metaphor for corruption, eighteenth-century writers not only *gendered* their images of virtue and corruption; they explicitly emphasized the *sexual* aspects of those images.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Even historians who have not been explicitly concerned with the gendered and sexualized nature of revolutionary rhetoric have noted the anxieties aroused by the republican specter of liberty seduced and corrupted by power, the charged sexual imagery with which political polemicists waged the struggle between virtue and corruption. In his classic discussion of the republican principles that inspired the American Revolution, Bernard Bailyn depicts the colonists' "compulsive" concerns regarding the antagonistic relations between power and liberty. Republican discourse portrayed power as aggressive, Bailyn argues; power was dangerous because of "its endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries." Surveying the rhetorical figures colonial writers deployed to represent power, Bailyn compiles a catalogue of highly charged images: Power has "an encroaching nature"; it is "restless, aspiring, and insatiable." "Everywhere it is threatening, pushing and grasping" its "natural prey, its necessary victim, . . . liberty." The sphere of power is "brutal, ceaselessly active, and heedless," while that of liberty is "delicate, passive, and sensitive." Finally, characterizing John Dickinson's description of Cromwell's abuses of power, Bailyn invokes the classic formula of eighteenth-century melodrama: "when [in Dickinson's words] 'brutal power' becomes 'an irresistible argument of boundless right,'" Bailyn concedes, "innocence and justice can only sigh and quietly submit."<sup>13</sup>

Though Bailyn does not amplify the relationship between such sexually charged language and the politics it supported, his own choice of descriptive metaphors is justified by the unmistakable—if largely unexamined—frequency with which radical propagandists in the Revolutionary period employed sexual imagery to represent political corruption.<sup>14</sup> For example, in 1764, Oxenbridge Thacher, a Bostonian lawyer and colleague of James Otis and John Adams, published *The Sentiments of a British American* to protest the enforcement provisions of the Sugar Act. Arguing that the duty on molasses would "destroy altogether the trade of the colonists," Thacher appealed to "the mere present self-interest of Great Britain" for repeal of the regulations. But it is his personification of Trade that will detain us here. "TRADE," Thacher wrote, "is a nice and delicate lady; she must be courted and

won by soft and fair addresses. She will not bear the rude hand of a ravisher. Penalties increased, heavy taxes laid on, the checks of oppression and violence removed; these things must drive her from her present abode."<sup>15</sup> Here, the ruin threatening the American colonies' economic and corporal integrity may be forestalled; indeed, Lady Trade is presented as capable of single-handedly fending off, or at least successfully fleeing, potential ravishers. Such confidence in the ability of feminine virtue (however metaphorically deployed) to withstand the mounting assaults directed against her would be less evident in the rhetoric of the 1770s and 1780s.

Of all the pamphleteers who were drawn to the image of seduction as the most resonant device for alerting the American public to the threats of British corruption, Thomas Paine was perhaps the most compulsive, to use Bailyn's term.<sup>16</sup> Seeking the most effective analogy with which to conclude his plea in *Common Sense* for the colonists' final separation from England, Paine asks, "can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give to prostitution its former innocence?" Impossible, he replies: "As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress as the continent forgive the murders of Britain."<sup>17</sup> Though here it would appear that the damage has already been done, the maiden's innocence irreparably lost, Paine's simile did not deter him from asserting, in an appendix to *Common Sense*, that "the domestic tranquillity of a nation depends greatly on the *chastity* of what might properly be called NATIONAL MANNERS."<sup>18</sup>

In the *Crisis* papers (1776-1783), Paine continued to rely on the apparently irresistible image of the nation as an imperiled maiden besieged by a villainous British seducer. *Crisis I* (1776) appeals for an American Joan of Arc to lead the nation from oppression: "Would that heaven might inspire some Jersey maid to spirit up her countrymen, and save her fair fellow sufferers from ravage and ravishment."<sup>19</sup> Tories are likened to fallen women in *Crisis III* (1777), because only "*avarice, down-right villainy, and lust of personal power*" could explain the Loyalists' opposition to independence:

Some secret defect or other is interwoven in the character of all those, be they men or women, who can look with patience on the brutality, luxury and debauchery of the British court. . . . A woman's virtue must sit very lightly

on her who can even hint a favorable sentiment in their [British] behalf. It is remarkable that the whole race of prostitutes in New York were Tories; and the schemes for supporting the Tory cause in this city . . . were concerted and carried on in common bawdy-houses, assisted by those who kept them.<sup>20</sup>

In this instance, the evils associated with seduction are no longer merely metaphorical; the moral and sexual characters of actual participants in the Revolutionary struggle were determined, in Paine's formulation, by their complicity in or resistance to literal acts of seduction. American women who collaborated with the British were, moreover, not simply victims of seduction. Rather, they had abandoned both the morality and the sexual passivity associated with feminine virtue, and had themselves fallen into professional debauchery.

Paine's thinking about the nature of seduction and its increasingly tangible consequences for the patriot grew more complex in *Crisis XI* (1782), which responded to Britain's purported efforts to disrupt the alliance between France and the United States by offering terms of settlement. The states, he insists, "are no more to be seduced from their alliance than their allegiance." Indeed, for the British to offer to repeal the Parliamentary acts that had provoked the colonial rebellion, after seven years of waging war against those former colonies, was, Paine argues, "a personal offense": "It is calling us villains: for no man asks the other to act the villain unless he believes him inclined to be one. No man attempts to seduce the truly honest woman. It is the supposed looseness of her mind that starts the thoughts of seduction, and he who offers it calls her a prostitute."<sup>21</sup> Despite the apparent instabilities of Paine's moral analogy (is the woman's "looseness" true or "supposed"? and how closely associated, in this economy of vice, are "looseness of mind" and looseness of body?), this is a revealing passage, indicating Paine's increasing concern with the complicity of the supposed victim in the schemes of her seducer. If no man would ever *try* to seduce a "truly honest woman"—that is, if no truly honest woman's character could ever be misread, even by an evil-minded seducer—what did it mean that Americans needed to be warned against the seductive truce Britain was apparently proffering? If American character was sufficiently virtuous, should not the new nation have been able to withstand and

even avert the temptations of a renewed dalliance with the mother country?

As Paine anticipated, once the Americans were victorious, they could no longer so persuasively blame British treachery for enticing America from the paths of virtue. What happened, then, to the figure of seduction in the 1780s, when the external menace of British tyranny had been vanquished and when, instead, American writers began to examine the soul of the new nation itself to account for the deterioration of virtue? We may begin to address this question by considering the use of seduction as the central emblem of corruption and disorder in what is generally deemed the first American novel, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789).<sup>22</sup>

### III

Appearing concurrently with the ratification of the new Constitution, *The Power of Sympathy* bears the subtitle, "The Triumph of Nature," and is dedicated to "the young ladies of Columbia." Brown announces the work as "Founded in Truth," and insists that it is "intended to represent the specious causes and to expose the fatal consequences of SEDUCTION, to inspire the female mind with a principle of self-complacency and to promote the economy of human life."<sup>23</sup> Circumscribing the central episodes of the novel, which is epistolary in form and fragmented in plot, are pleas for more adequate education of women's reason, so that they will not be captive to their illusions and desires. In a gesture that would become irresistible to sentimental novelists, otherwise incidental characters in *The Power of Sympathy* appear solely to debate the merits and dangers of women's novel-reading.<sup>24</sup> In one instance, an apparently authoritative patriarch concludes that:

A young lady who has imbibed her ideas of the world from desultory reading, and placed confidence in the virtue of others, will bring back disappointment when she expected gratitude. Unsuspicious of deceit, she is easily deceived—from the purity of her own thoughts, she trusts the faith of mankind until experience convinces her of error. She falls a sacrifice to her credulity, and her only consolation is the simplicity and goodness of her heart. (45)



Novels, then, do not corrupt the imagination of young women primarily by arousing their passions; rather, novels are dangerous because they deceive their readers about the true nature of society; most perilously, they provide a seductively idealized image of the true nature of men:

In books she finds recorded the faithfulness of friendship, the constancy of *true love*, and even that honesty is the best policy. . . . Thus she finds, when it is perhaps too late, that she has entertained wrong notions of human nature; that her friends are deceitful; that her lovers are false; and that men consult interest oftener than honesty. (45)

To the republican mind, all fiction relied on seduction: novels lured their credulous readers into a world of artifice, semblance, and pretense.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, despite the morally affecting occasions for sympathy such reading could provide, the private sentiments of pity, terror, and compassion aroused by even the most didactic fiction threatened to undermine the public spirit and civic virtue on which the republic relied, by inflaming the personal emotions and passions of the citizenry and distracting them from the public good.<sup>26</sup>

Asserting “the advantages of female education” as a defense against “the dangerous consequences of seduction” (29), Brown justifies the novel—generally associated with the heart and not the head—by rejecting the notion that women’s hearts can be sufficient guides to their conduct. Consistent with republican ideals of rational self-control, his novel’s initial emphasis on education and the dangers of its neglect seems to favor the conclusion that the reason, and not just the sympathies, had to be cultivated if young people—especially young women—were to learn to separate truth from illusion and so be capable of self-government.<sup>27</sup> Womanly sympathy alone, it appears, could not provide adequate protection against seductive reasoning; the power of sympathy, in fact, leads Brown’s characters away from prudence and, disastrously, toward the passions.<sup>28</sup>

But despite Brown’s avowedly didactic purposes in presenting his story, his plot acts to ironize and even subvert such conventional apologies for the novel. *The Power of Sympathy* is not mainly concerned with women’s education, nor is it clear that anyone’s better educated reason could have protected these characters from the fatal consequences

that the plot's myriad seductions unleash. In the main, this is a story about incest—or perhaps, about the consequences of trying *not* to commit incest. The central characters die not because they would rather perish than violate the taboo that forbids the marriage of siblings, but because their reason finally will not permit them to indulge the incestuous sympathies that draw them inexorably together.<sup>29</sup> In Brown's novel, authority and authenticity are the real concerns: the authority of fathers and their abandonment of its obligations; the authenticity not of treacherous seducers—as in the more formulaic *Amelia*—but of suitors who believe themselves possessed of republican and loving motives. This is a novel in which the laws of nature seem directly at odds with the conventions of society and, as Leslie Fiedler noted long ago, in which the whole eighteenth-century effort to wed the social and natural orders threatens to implode.<sup>30</sup>

The American Revolution, Jay Fliegelman and others have recently argued, was part of a larger attack on patriarchy, in which paternal authority in all its forms—familial, moral, religious, and political—was challenged and circumscribed, in the name of contractual agreements, self-government, and moral voluntarism.<sup>31</sup> *The Power of Sympathy* participates in anti-patriarchal politics by presenting a series of faithless fathers who are punished or abandoned by their offspring, but not before the fathers have committed an original and originating sin from which their children will never be liberated, except through death. The fatal effects of seduction in *The Power of Sympathy* are, as often as not, second-hand, ruining not just the woman who is seduced but the lives of her and her seducer's children. In the main plot of the novel, the suitor who turns out to be something other than he seems is not, after all, a treacherous villain but rather—and unbeknownst to himself—his beloved's brother. *The Power of Sympathy* requires a double unmasking: the father must be revealed as a seducer so that the lovers can be revealed to each other as brother and sister.

Brown clearly intends his sensational tale to convey a political lesson. At the outset of the novel, the hero and would-be seducer Harrington (a likely reference to the seventeenth-century political theorist James Harrington) discloses the reason he cannot marry his beloved, penniless Harriot: "I am not so much of a republican as formally to wed any

person of this [dependent] class. How laughable would my conduct appear . . . to be heard openly acknowledging for my bosom companion any daughter of the democratic empire of virtue" (34). Soon enough, however, Harriot's virtues deter Harrington from his treacherous course and he determines to marry her, despite her humble and orphaned origin. In a show of female independence comparable to Amelia's insistence on her conjugal rights, Harriot refuses to let "the crime of dependence . . . be expiated by the sacrifice of virtue" (36). Through his association with the virtuous Harriot, Harrington decides that he is an exponent of republican equality, an opponent of slavery, and an advocate of democratic institutions (58). In the manner that Jan Lewis has suggested was the ideal work of a republican wife, Harriot has "seduced her suitor" into accepting republican principles by employing, rather than denying, her sexual desirability—while withholding access to her body until a legitimate marriage may be contracted.<sup>32</sup> But in the complex moral universe imagined by Brown, the heroine's prudence is no match for the manifold and hidden powers of sympathy. The "fatal consequences of seduction" only seem to have been averted.

Though they championed moral equality, many American republicans worried about the social fluidity and instability implied by betrothals between lovers of such apparently disparate rank. As many commentators have noted, the seduction novel mirrored the crisis of character, station, and legitimacy posed by the commercial revolution that accompanied the eighteenth century's political revolutions. In the new world of credit and paper money, of manners and politeness, the possibilities for deception and disguise mounted, threatening the traditional republican values of virtuous authenticity and stable social relations.<sup>33</sup> Brown dramatizes this dilemma by exposing the source of the senior Harrington's misgivings about his son's attachment to a "daughter of the democratic empire of virtue."<sup>34</sup> The Hon. Mr. Harrington's objections trump the seduction novel's usual contrivance of paternal tyranny or class snobbery. "How shall we . . . account for the operation of sympathy?" Harrington, Sr. asks a confidant. "I fly to prevent incest" (102). To avert his son's wedding, the elder Harrington is forced to reveal his own youthful seduction of Maria, an impoverished woman who died leaving a daughter to be raised in the service of

relatives. It is, of course, this orphaned Harriot who has so attracted young Harrington's sympathy—but now the bonds of sympathy that mysteriously drew the two together are exposed for what they really are: the apparently natural affinity of siblings.<sup>35</sup>

The shock of this revelation fills Harrington and Harriot with "a horror of conflicting passions" (105). Harriot wrestles with the necessity of rejecting her lover simply because he is also her brother. She fears that she has criminally surrendered to passions that she should somehow have recognized as incestuous desire, but wonders, "shall we strive to oppose the *link of nature* that draws us together?" She pleads with her lover to return to her, to be "a friend, a protector, a brother . . . you shalt be unto me as a father" (112). In a "torment of fluctuating passion," Harriot concludes that prudence and virtue stand opposed to the demands of sympathy and "natural" desire: "The head and the heart are at variance; but when nature pleads, how feeble is the voice of reason? Yet, when reason is heard in her turn, how criminal appears every wish of my heart?" Finally, she urges Harrington "to arm yourself with every virtue which is capable of sustaining the heaviest calamity" (113), and dies of grief. Harrington ponders "the cause of my calamities. Why did my father love Maria—or rather, why did I love their Harriot? Curse on this tyrant custom that dooms such helpless children to oblivion or infamy!" (117). He asks to be buried alongside Harriot, under the epitaph, "Here lies Harrington and his Harriot—in their lives they loved, but were unhappy—in death they sleep undivided" (127), and shoots himself.

In this maelstrom of conflicting erotic and moral desires, the young couple's sense of "unmerited criminality" (111) is synecdochical for the effects of seduction throughout *The Power of Sympathy*. Seduction is an act for which women suffer not because of their actual desires but, instead, because of their passive vulnerability to the power of sympathy and the schemes of deceit. In this instance, however, *both* parties to the love affair have been deceived and it is their *father* who is really the seducer—because he is the deceiver—of both daughter and son. As the author of his children's ruin, Harrington, Sr. has trebled the possibilities of incestuous seduction: he has effectively seduced not just Maria but both their children. Finally, he is responsible for the deaths of Harriot

and Harrington, who decide that their love can never be consummated, except in "Heaven. There alone is happiness . . . there our love will not be a crime" (114). Seduction—the sin of the father, not the son—has rendered this republican marriage impossible.

The crime that *Amelia's* author could so readily—and so nostalgically, in 1789—consign to a now-vanquished British aristocrat had, in *The Power of Sympathy*, contaminated an American patriarch and ruined his family. Though Brown clearly represents the original sin of the father as a pre-revolutionary lapse (Harriot and Harrington are young adults in 1789), that act nonetheless spells the death of liberty for his post-revolutionary republican children, who are fatally entailed by his legacy of seduction. American virtue must fail if patriarchal ties to corruption can never be sundered—if corruption is both involuntary and hereditary.

In Brown's catalogue of vices, seduction is the most dangerous of all because it hides itself and "murders in the mask of love": "who knows / Where all thy consequences close? / With thee, SEDUCTION! are allied / HORROR, DESPAIR and SUICIDE" (70-71). More tellingly than the simpler tale of *Amelia*, *The Power of Sympathy* reveals the terrors seduction represented for the republican imagination. In Brown's "economy of human life," reason is deceived and virtue compromised not just as a *means* of seduction but as a *consequence* of seduction. Seduction is a vice that needs vigilant exposure not only because it is seductive in the expected sense, resting on flattery and false promises, but because it perpetrates and perpetuates even more dangerous deceptions. Confusing and confounding erotic and fraternal bonds, Brown's seductions direct a catastrophic blow to the very foundation of republican society: they falsely represent family relations. If the sexual order could be so easily—even unwittingly—undone, what fate awaited the social order it supported?

#### IV

If reason and the senses could be so readily misled—as sensationalist writers such as Charles Brockden Brown would demonstrate even more clearly than did William Hill Brown—then the epistemological foundations of a nation resting on the possibility of rational self-

government were at best, unstable; at worst, fraudulent.<sup>36</sup> But for William Hill Brown, even more crucial were the moral implications of the figure of seduction in his republican tragedy. As Gordon Wood has argued in his essay, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," the eighteenth century's confidence that human agency had a direct hand in the workings of the universe meant that disastrous consequences could not be dismissed as the accidental effects of otherwise good intentions.<sup>37</sup> Rather, Wood demonstrates, republican moralists insisted on an identity between causes and effects. Where there were evil consequences there must be, however benign the appearance of things, a malignant intent: a conspirator, a traitor, a deceiver. Although Wood is not primarily concerned with popular literature, his argument may be extended to account for the republican insistence on the efficacy of endlessly repeated cautionary tales of seduction and betrayal.

By this interpretation, only when individual virtue and agency were imaginatively replaced with more complex social processes that could transmute vicious intentions to virtuous ends would the image of the seducer be a less resonant image for the dangers besetting republican America.<sup>38</sup> This is not to suggest that this transformation was either sudden or monolithic. John Adams, for instance, was one of the last to relinquish the republican metaphor of virtue in distress. In a letter to William Cunningham in 1804, Adams complained that, "the awful spirit of Democracy is in great progress. It is a young rake who thinks himself handsome and well-made, and who has little faith in virtue. . . . Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa. The artful villain will pursue the innocent lovely girl to her ruin and her death."<sup>39</sup> Though republican concerns and language did not vanish from the political scene in the nineteenth century, the image of seduction, so potent in the late eighteenth century, began to appear less frequently after the 1790s, as changing views of moral agency and political power came to substitute essentially liberal metaphors of the competitive marketplace for the gendered and sexual imagery that had so permeated republican discourse.

To cite only one famous illustration of this transition, we might compare Hamilton's metaphors for political corruption in *Federalist Papers* 6 and 71 with Madison's renowned promotion, in Numbers 10 and 51,

of mechanisms that would supply "by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives."<sup>40</sup> In Number 6, Hamilton attributes the historical cause of hostilities among nations to the jealousy and greed of leaders who have indulged their "private passions" (especially for women), and who, "assuming the pretext of some public motive, have not scrupled to sacrifice the national tranquility to personal advantage or personal gratification." Similarly, Hamilton blames private intrigue for public calamity in Number 71, in which the people's adherence to the public good is perpetually undermined by "the wiles of parasites and sycophants, by the snares of the ambitious, the avaricious, . . . by the artifices of men who possess their confidence more than they deserve it." Here are all the vices of the seducer: lust, avarice, cynicism and, centrally, deceit.<sup>41</sup>

For Madison, of course, it was not treacherous leaders so much as self-interested and divisive factions that threatened the fabric of republican society. Madison's solutions—geographical expansion, checks and balances, filters on popular sovereignty—are not directed at unmasking vice or attacking the *causes* of conflicting passions and interests. Rather, they seek to "control" the "effects" of these conflicts by "supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives."<sup>42</sup> While images of seduction still animated Hamilton's rhetorical imagination, they were no longer compelling figures in Madison's prescriptions, which deliberately set out to shatter the identity of cause and effect on which the republican fear of seduction rested.

In the sentimental novels that followed this shift away from the power of seduction and toward the thorough-going domestication of virtue, popular heroines would more often follow the model of Richardson's virtuous *Pamela* than of his ruined *Clarissa* by successfully resisting the blandishments of treacherous seducers. Sentimental rhetoric after the 1790s reinscribed virtue itself as a condition not of political vigilance but of feminine piety and self-restraint, effectively severing the correlation between private motives and public morality that had been so crucial to eighteenth-century republicanism.<sup>43</sup> As Nina Baym and Michael Denning have argued, the domestic novels that proliferated in America in the nineteenth century rejected the republican model of seduction and betrayal, substituting instead sentimental parables of

innocent girls who foil myriad efforts to compromise their chastity.<sup>44</sup> No longer fallen women, nineteenth-century heroines in popular works ranging from Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) to Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Maria Susanna Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854), would win for their efforts the mixed blessings sentimentality accorded true women and angels of the house. Whatever the centrality of the domestic sphere for the cultivation of private morality in the nineteenth century, no longer would political liberty be figured as a virtuous maiden assailed by tyrannical power.

Popular fiction's retreat from the public arena, from the republican concern for civic action and the reciprocal obligations of public and private virtue, signaled a change that had far broader consequences than simply reconfiguring the sentimental plot. Tracing the transition from republicanism to liberalism, from the promotion of republican citizenship to the constitution of liberal nationalism, Michael Warner has identified the republican novel as one of the central agents responsible for changing the subject of American identity. Though novels like *The Power of Sympathy* sought to participate in political debate, their effectiveness as theaters of virtue relied on arousing the sympathies of readers engaged in the essentially private act of reading. Their readers' resulting identification with the novels' characters, Warner argues, produced an "imaginary participation in the public order," which, though a "precondition for modern nationalism . . . is anathema to pure republicanism." Thus, though women (as wives and mothers) would increasingly be included in the symbolic nationalism of the 1790s and afterward, the public of which they were now imaginatively members "no longer connoted civic action" in the republican sense.<sup>45</sup>

As we have seen, the republican reliance on the imagery of seduction and betrayal, the melodramatic representation of virtue assailed by corruption, extended beyond the novel and resonated throughout the political language of the Revolutionary period. This rhetoric produced more than an increasingly privatized and sentimental reading public. By both gendering and sexualizing virtue, and by so constantly invoking seduction as a metaphor for political corruption, republican advocates of civic action paradoxically encouraged an increasingly private, even personal, understanding of the nature of power and its abuses. Once



civic virtue was equated, however metaphorically, with sexual chastity, the transition from virtue as the public spiritedness of politically active citizens to virtue as a private, domestic, feminized, and largely apolitical concern became irresistible. In the end, one of the "fatal consequences of seduction" would be the nation's consignment of the "democratic empire of virtue" to the private domain of its daughters alone, while its sons established a republic in which empire, not virtue, would prevail.<sup>46</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For discussion of the *Columbian Magazine* and the genre of stories in which *Amelia* fits, see William J. Free, *The "Columbian Magazine" and American Literary Nationalism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968) 77-113, esp. 91-92; and Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The 'Fragment' as Genre in Early American Literature," *SSF* 18 (1981): 17-26. Lillie D. Loshe long ago suggested that *Amelia* may be considered the earliest American novel, antedating William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* by two years; see *The Early American Novel, 1789-1830* (1907; New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966) 61. The title of this "Amelia" was no doubt inspired by Henry Fielding's last novel, *Amelia* (1751). Though the plots of the two stories bear few specific resemblances, they do both concern the plights of women imperiled by seductive corrupters, and American audiences in the 1780s would have been familiar with Fielding's novel. See Fielding, *Amelia* (1751; London: Penguin, 1987) esp. Book Seven, 299-300 and Book Ten, 419; and Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: OUP, 1986) 114-15.

<sup>2</sup>*The Columbian Magazine: Or Monthly Miscellany* (Sept. 1787): 664-65.

<sup>3</sup>*The Columbian Magazine* (Oct. 1787): 677. All future page references to *Amelia* will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Like so many other literary organs of the early republic, *The Columbian Magazine* alternated between condemning the dangers of novel-reading—especially for young women—and incessantly publishing just such stories, some of which contained warnings against their own consumption. See, for instance, "Honoraria: Or the Mourner Comforted," *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Dec. 1792): 363-64, where the heroine ascribes to novel-reading her vulnerability to seduction: "Hitherto I had been a stranger to love; for my mind had not been affected by novels" (363). For a sampling of the cautionary tales of seduction (or of narrow escapes) published by *The Columbian Magazine* between 1788 and 1792, see also, "Ela;

or the Delusions of the Heart" (Sept.-Dec. 1788): 525-35, 592-602, 648-57, 706-11; "The History of Arabella; or the Unfortunate Couple" (Jan. 1790): 45-47; "The History of Melidor and Clarinda; or the Progress of Infidelity" (Nov. 1791): 321-23. Similar contradictory tendencies are evident, of course, in the great bestseller of the 1790s, Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Ann Douglas (1791; New York: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>On the Richardsonian model of seduction and betrayal, see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982) esp. 67-122; Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966) esp. 23-104; and Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982). Though the story of Clarissa Harlowe's seduction and ruin provided a formula that republican writers endlessly reproduced, the Richardsonian inheritance included an alternative model, as I will show in the conclusion of this essay. Richardson's *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) was at least as popular in America as was *Clarissa*. Unlike *Clarissa*, Pamela successfully resists her would-be seducer, ultimately reforming, marrying, and domesticating her aristocratic master, Mr. B. As we will see, this model became a more popular one for American authors in the nineteenth century, as the seduction melodrama was eclipsed by the sentimental, domestic novel. See Fliegelman 274n43 and, below, note 44.

<sup>6</sup>*Columbian Magazine* (supp., 1787): 877-78. Future references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>7</sup>On later adaptations of this formula, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Misprisioning *Pamela*; Representations of Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century America," *MQR* 26 (1987): 9-28, esp. 13-16, 21-26.

<sup>8</sup>On the possibilities and limitations of republican womanhood, see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980); Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (1987): 37-58; and Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *WMQ* 3rd ser. 44 (1987): 689-721.

<sup>9</sup>See Kerber 233-64; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America," *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 160-84; Davidson esp. 38-79, 110-50; and Bloch esp. 51-53.

<sup>10</sup>As men of the rising middle classes began to work outside the family household, and as new conceptions of the place of sentiment in moral education—drawn primarily from the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment—became popular in America, more importance was accorded to maternal influence and feminine sensibility. See Fliegelman esp. 9-35.

<sup>11</sup>On classical republican constructions of virtue, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975) and *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) esp. 37-50, 91-123; also Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolo Machiavelli* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984). For its relation to the gendered constructions of virtue during the American Revolution, see Bloch 37-47.

<sup>12</sup>On the politics and rhetoric of seduction, more generally, see Anna Clark, "The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture, 1748-1848," *The Progress of Romance:*

*The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford (London: RKP, 1986) 47-70; Dianne Hunter, ed., *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1989) esp. 73-85, 214-25.

<sup>13</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1967) 56-58. The Dickinson essay he cites is *An Essay on the Constitutional Power of Great-Britain over the Colonies in America* . . . (Philadelphia, 1774) 108. The conflation of images of forcible rape and persuasive seduction is a frequent rhetorical turn in eighteenth-century descriptions of seduction, at least from Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) onwards. While the effects of the woman's "seduction" in these images are invariably presented as violent and tragic, the different degrees of persuasion, coercion, and submission that are commonly understood to distinguish a seduction from a rape tend to be erased in the figurative language I am examining here. See Clark 56-57; Ellen Rooney, "Criticism and the Subject of Sexual Violence," *MLN* (1983): 1269-78; Christine Froula, "The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History," *Signs* 11 (1986): 621-44, esp. 626.

<sup>14</sup>For a sampling of political pamphlets employing such imagery, one might begin with the list Bailyn cites in his discussion of power and liberty (see 57n3, 58n4); also Shirley Samuels, "Infidelity and Contagion: The Rhetoric of Revolution," *EAL* 22 (1987): 183-91. There has been considerably more scholarship examining the significance of sexual imagery in the rhetoric and iconography of the French Revolution; see Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) esp. 124-52; Vivian Cameron, "Political Exposures: Sexuality and Caricature in the French Revolution"; and Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 90-130.

<sup>15</sup>Oxenbridge Thacher, *The Sentiments of a British American* (Boston, 1764), rpt. in Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1965) 484-98, esp. 496.

<sup>16</sup>On Paine's rhetoric, see Martin Roth, "Tom Paine and American Loneliness," *EAL* 22 (1987): 175-82.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 1 (New York: Citadel, 1945) 30.

<sup>18</sup>Paine, Appendix to *Common Sense* (1776), *The Complete Writings* 1: 40. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>19</sup>Paine, *The American Crisis* I (Dec. 23, 1776), *The Complete Writings* 1: 51.

<sup>20</sup>Paine, *The American Crisis* III (April 19, 1777), *The Complete Writings* 1: 90. Emphasis and capitalization in the original.

<sup>21</sup>Paine, *The American Crisis* XI (May 22, 1782), *The Complete Writings* 1: 209, 214.

<sup>22</sup>In this essay, I will use the New College and University Press edition of *The Power of Sympathy or The Triumph of Nature, Founded in Truth*, ed. William S. Osborne (Albany: New College and UP, 1970). Page references will be provided parenthetically in the text. On the publication history of the novel, see Davidson 83-109; Philip Young, "'First American Novel': *The Power of Sympathy* in Place," *Coll* 11 (1984): 115-24; and Richard Walser, "Boston's Reception of the First American Novel," *EAL* 17 (1982): 65-74.

<sup>23</sup>Dedication to the first edition of the novel, Jan. 1789, reprinted in Davidson 94.

<sup>24</sup>See Kerber 233-64; Davidson 38-54; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: OUP, 1987) 96-134; Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987) 47-72.

<sup>25</sup>Considering similar issues in Diderot's *La Religieuse* (1760), David Marshall has written that the novel "raises the possibility that the effects of sympathy might be disturbingly similar to the effects of seduction—indeed, that the Richardsonian novel of sensibility designed to move and touch its reader might be dangerous as well as deceptive." See *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1988) 86; see 84-104.

<sup>26</sup>See Kerber 243-46; also Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1990) 150-76.

<sup>27</sup>See Fliegelman 12-35; Bloch 49-50. Though Brown tends here to emphasize the importance of reason and the dangers to which the sympathies may lead, his analysis of the proper balance between reason and the sympathies is both inconsistent and ambiguous. As Fliegelman and Bloch have noted, the opposition often posed between ethical "rationalists" and "sentimentalists" may overstate the distances between the two positions, since both relied on affective ties and familial nurture for the cultivation of children's reason or moral sense. In *The Power of Sympathy*, neither reason nor the sympathies protect Brown's most virtuous characters from ruin. Thus, the rational or sentimental faculties Brown thought necessary to avert such disaster seem all the more enigmatic. Accidents of inheritance and fate are more significant in these characters' histories than is their exercise of rational or moral agency which, at best, is called upon to respond to circumstances not of the characters' own making. Furthermore, the often sensationalistic, even voyeuristic tone of Brown's narrative leads one to suspect that he is not entirely repelled by the passionate chaos unleashed by the sympathies. See note 30.

<sup>28</sup>In a roughly contemporary work, Adam Smith defined "sympathy" as "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever." *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; 6th ed., n.d.) 4; and David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 167-92.

<sup>29</sup>See *The Power of Sympathy* Letter L, 113.

<sup>30</sup>Fiedler 116-25. In a posthumously published work, Brown further undermines social convention in the name of "inclinations prompted by reason and nature"—inclinations that, in the words of the novel's "naturally" virtuous heroine, are now explicitly fused. In *Ira and Isabella: or The Natural Children. A Novel. Founded in Fiction* (Boston: Belcher and Armstrong, 1807), the protagonists are young lovers who are told, after they have married but before the marriage is consummated, that they are in fact brother and sister—illegitimate children of the same man. It turns out, finally, that Ira's father is, instead, the husband of the woman who has nursed both "fatherless" children; thus the two lovers are only husband and wife, not sympathetic siblings as well. In this instance, then, two wrongs do make a right—since both fathers philandered and then dissembled, the tragically incestuous consequences of *The Power of Sympathy* are avoided. As Ira's seduced and abandoned mother refuses to comply with the formulae of "novelists" who "presume it for the interest of morality to represent misfortune and death as the consequences of indiscretion," and instead, "notwithstanding her slip found the means to secure an honest,

industrious husband" (116-17), *Ira and Isabella* seems almost a parody of Brown's earlier novel.

<sup>31</sup>Fliegelman cites examples including the popularity of literary accounts of the "fortunate fall" in novels ranging from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748); the increasing emphasis on maternal persuasion over paternal coercion in the moral education of children; the emerging language of contract and self-sovereignty in law and politics; and even the shift from the patriarchal Jehovah of seventeenth-century Protestantism to the merciful, fraternal Christ of Unitarianism. See *Prodigals, passim*, and "Familial Politics, Seduction, and the Novel: The Anxious Agenda of an American Literary Culture," *The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York: New York UP, 1987) 331-54; also Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Meridian, 1977) 335-61; Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, "The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation," *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972): 167-306. There are intriguing parallels between Brown's eighteenth-century assignment to fathers of the originating sin of seduction and Freud's account of the origins of hysteria in female patients who either had been "seduced" (i.e., sexually abused) by their fathers or, in a later version, had fantasized about seducing their fathers. Freud famously argued that the repression of these experiences (or desires) led to hysterical symptoms in later life. On the changing meanings of seduction in Freud's accounts, see Martha Noel Evans, "Hysteria and the Seduction of Theory," *Seduction and Theory*, ed. Hunter, 73-85, esp. 82.

<sup>32</sup>Lewis 700-01.

<sup>33</sup>Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners," *Virtue, Commerce, and History* 37-50; Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue'" 164-72; Steven Watts, "Masks, Morals, and the Market: American Literature and Early Capitalist Culture, 1790-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (1986): 127-49, esp. 140-42. Brown himself despairs of the rise of fashion and the decline of more virtuous sentiments in *The Power of Sympathy* Letter XII (50-53).

<sup>34</sup>The fact that father and son share the same name—no first names are provided—does more than complicate a recapitulation of the plot. When we are first introduced to the younger Harrington, he too is plotting a seduction. Though Harriot's republican virtues save him from following his father's path, neither lover will escape the consequences of Harrington, Sr.'s earlier transgression.

<sup>35</sup>On the theme of sibling incest in eighteenth-century literature, see W. Daniel Wilson, "Science, Natural Law, and Unwitting Sibling Incest," *SECC* 13 (1984): 249-70; Anne Dalke, "Original Vice: The Political Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel," *EAL* 23 (1988): 188-201.

<sup>36</sup>Concern about the moral, epistemological, and hence the political bases of the new nation were especially pronounced during the years of the French Revolution, when particularly those allied with the Federalist Party, such as John Adams and Timothy Dwight, worried about the potential consequences of what they saw as the dangers of popular unreason. See Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1970) esp. 173-215; Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988) esp. 171-280; Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: 'A Revolution in Female Manners,'" *SECC* 11 (1982): 199-216; Samuels esp. 189-90.

On Charles Brockden Brown's contributions to these debates, see, for instance, the wreckage wrought by sensory and moral deception in *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926) and *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799; New York: Penguin, 1988); also Michael Davitt Bell, "The Double-Tongued Deceiver: Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," *EAL* 9 (1974): 143-63.

<sup>37</sup>Gordon Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *WMQ* 3rd ser. 39 (1982): 401-41. See also Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) 174-79.

<sup>38</sup>On this transition in political economy, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) esp. 100-13; and Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 163-99, esp. 194-98.

<sup>39</sup>The Adams quotation is from *Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams and the Late William Cunningham, Esq.* (Boston, 1823) 19, quoted in Fliegelman, *Prodigals* 237.

<sup>40</sup>[James Madison], "Number 51," *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor, 1961) 322.

<sup>41</sup>[Alexander Hamilton], "Number 6" and "Number 71," *Federalist* 54, 432. In Hamilton's imagination, women were not the innocent victims of seduction but instead corrupt collaborators: "The influence which the bigotry of one female, the petulancies of another, and the cabals of a third, had in the contemporary policies, ferments, and pacifications of a considerable part of Europe, are topics that have been too often descanted upon not to be generally known" ("Number 6," 55). For a somewhat different reading of Hamilton's political language, see Judith N. Shklar, "Alexander Hamilton and the Language of Political Science," *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 339-55. Shklar's comparison of Hamilton's interest in the behavior of voters—the "responses of individuals"—to Madison's concern with "the formation and interaction of interest groups" (345, 344) accords with my reading of the two, as does her emphasis on the importance of voting—deliberate individual participation in the political process—in Hamilton's political thought. Political failure was less a product of contending interests and forces than it was "the fault of the candidates and of those who misled or failed to present the issues properly to the voters" (347).

<sup>42</sup>[Madison], "Number 10" and "Number 51," *Federalist* 80, 322. Hirschman (29-30) notes the contrast between Hamilton's effort to set passion against passion "within the arena of a single soul" in Number 72 and Madison's concern, in Number 51, with opposing the ambition of one branch of government to that of another.

<sup>43</sup>Bloch 56-58. To the extent that, by the nineteenth century, virtue did not simply signify female chastity and instead was used to characterize masculine endeavor, it came to mean men's success in the marketplace, ideally as successful entrepreneurs or independent artisans. See Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," in *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism* 196; and Scan Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: OUP, 1984) ch. 2.

<sup>44</sup>See Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 25-30; Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime*

*Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987) 94-97, 190-91; also Martha Vicinus, "'Helpless and Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama," *NLH* 13 (1981): 127-43.

<sup>45</sup>Warner, *Letters of the Republic* 150, 172-74. Warner ascribes these changes to the evolving meanings of "publication" and the nature of the subject constituted by the developing culture of print in the early republic.

<sup>46</sup>I would like to thank Ruth Bloch, Thomas Ferraro, Linda Kerber, Joan Landes, David Myers, and Rosemarie Zagari for their advice and encouragement. Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the December 1990 meeting of the American Historical Association and at the Women's Studies colloquium at Sarah Lawrence College, and I am grateful to the audiences at both sessions for their suggestions.

## “Novels are . . . the most dangerous kind of reading”:<sup>1</sup> Metafictional Discourse in Early American Literature

JÜRGEN WOLTER

I would like to point out in this paper<sup>2</sup> (though not the first to do so) that metafictional self-reflexiveness is not restricted to postmodern literature. If we define metafiction as a self-conscious narrative, as “fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative . . . identity,”<sup>3</sup> then initial stages of such a discourse can be found much earlier. In English literature *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1769) is most frequently quoted as prototype, though, of course, it is preceded by Clarissa’s comments on her own epistolary self-expression as well as the omniscient, but self-conscious narrator in Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. The earliest *American* texts frequently mentioned in this connection are the romances of Hawthorne and especially Melville.<sup>4</sup> I want to argue that even some texts by Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving are told by self-conscious narrators who reflect upon the fictional status of their narratives and provide comments on the relationship between fact and fiction. Therefore it seems tempting to regard them in the light of metafictional discourse. This, again, brings into play the social, philosophical and ideological contexts conducive to metafictional writing. Critics have emphasized that narrative self-reflexiveness is caused by a sense of crisis, as it is proclaimed in such works as John Barth’s “The Literature of Exhaustion”<sup>5</sup> or Ronald Sukenick’s “The Death of the Novel.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the metafictional discourse about the unstable relationship between reality and fiction is coincidental with a discourse about human perception. Consequently, if I want to read some early American texts as self-conscious narratives which arise out of the epistemological crisis of their age, I will first have to outline the cultural matrix of these texts.

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Prospective writers of fiction in America faced severe difficulties until far into the nineteenth century. They not only had to fight the deep-seated prejudice that the cultural products of Europe were decidedly preferable, but, what is even more important in this context, they also had to face strong critical opposition to any product of the imagination. Imagination I here define as the creative mental "faculty by means of which we explore the order of possibility."<sup>7</sup> Joseph Addison gives a good illustration of this power of the imagination: "by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature."<sup>8</sup> In the moralizing critical debate of eighteenth-century America the imagination was stigmatized as a non-conformist and potentially dangerous mental power because it was considered to be capable of producing images without direct reference to reality. The fictional text, being a manifestation of the latently subversive imagination, was held to be a threat both to Puritan morality and to the main tenets of the age of Enlightenment.

There were, of course, various reasons for this deep-seated mistrust of the imagination and the concomitant opposition to its textual products, especially novels.<sup>9</sup> Since I have to be brief here, I would like to select the two outstanding ones: the female reading public and the strong influence of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy.

Firstly, novels were predominantly read by women, whose social experience was primarily restricted to the house; men were afraid that such works of the imagination might give women a false idea about reality (perhaps even about their not very heroic or chivalrous husbands or lovers).<sup>10</sup> John Winthrop, to quote one of the earliest examples, wrote in his journal in 1645:

Mr Hopkins, the governor of Hartford upon Connecticut, came to Boston, and brought his wife with him, . . . who was fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years, by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books. . . . if she had attended her household affairs and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, . . . she had kept her wits and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her.<sup>11</sup>

The controversy, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, between male writers, who in an almost endless sequence of articles about "female education" argued against any kind of fiction, and women who were voracious readers of novels was a struggle for the preservation of a hierarchy transmitted through Puritan (and "puritanic") dogma. It was not only clergymen who warned women against the reading of fiction, but also educators, lawyers, and politicians, in short, men who were active in the restructuring of American society in an era of political re-orientation. When he outlined a "plan of female education," Thomas Jefferson, for instance, wrote:

A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion prevalent for novels . . . . When this poison infects the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. . . . The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.

However, he granted that in the case of *some* novels the reading might be salutary:

This mash of trash . . . is not without some distinction; some few modelling their narratives, although fictitious, on the incidents of real life, have been able to make them interesting and useful vehicles of a sound morality.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, novel reading was permitted if it helped forming the minds of female readers along the lines of a morality defined by men. In such a cultural climate the reading of fiction was a kind of rebellion against, and escape from, a highly restrictive society. One is reminded of Addison's prisoner in the passage quoted above. Wallace Stevens once described the imagination as "the power of the mind over the possibilities of things" or as "the liberty of the mind,"<sup>13</sup> and women of the eighteenth century were eager to use this liberty. Accordingly John Davis, in his novel *The Wanderings of William* (1801), calls upon his female reader:

Avail yourself of the moment that offers to indulge in the perusal of this book. Take it, read it; there is nothing to fear. Your governess is gone out, and your mama is not yet risen.<sup>14</sup>

The aversion of critics to potentially subversive novels was, of course, not a typically American phenomenon. The English opposition to the novel has been analyzed and documented extensively.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the parallels between the situation in England and America, the hostility to fiction was apparently much more widespread and lasted much longer in the United States, and the social motivations seem to have been slightly different, too. Richard Altick's analysis of the situation of the English common reader,<sup>16</sup> for instance, suggests that in England it was rather a class issue, less, as in America, a gender issue. He concludes that English critics of novel reading feared that the lower classes would encounter a new and better life (in the novels) and thus grow dissatisfied with their existence in poverty and privation. In England, as in America, however, quite a number of critics voiced the opinion that novel reading was a threat to the social order.

A second and equally important reason for the anti-fiction climate in early America was the Scottish school of Common Sense philosophy, which was widely taught at American colleges.<sup>17</sup> It can be seen as an eighteenth-century conservative reaction to the revolutionary discoveries of natural sciences since the Renaissance, which not only shattered the concept of a hierarchically ordered universe, but seemed to prove, moreover, that knowledge was not stable but constantly to be revised by new findings. The possibility of a profound relativity of human knowledge and judgment gave rise, paradoxically enough, to an empiricist epistemology which argued in favor of a certainty of human perception and knowledge; it maintained that "the testimonies of the senses [were] true" and that they required "no outside, additional evidence."<sup>18</sup> According to the Scottish philosophers an experience of a merely possible or imaginary kind is to be suspected because in these cases our perceptions are distorted by the intervention of our imagination. Such a mistrust of the imagination led to a rejection of any of its products, first and foremost the novel. This was a target worth the joint efforts of both the empirical and the puritanical type of critic. They argued that novels were socially and morally destructive because they tended to render a picture of the world more perfect than it actually was and thus novel-reading would lead to dissatisfaction with everyday reality, i.e. with God's creation. Consequently they recommended rather

the reading of histories, biographies, or diaries. The generally conservative intellectuals at the orthodox churches and colleges in America eagerly adopted the arguments of the Scottish philosophy represented by such men as Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, James Beattie, and Thomas Brown, because here they believed to have found a rational and philosophically consistent affirmation of their orthodoxy.

That the Common Sense epistemology was widespread among intellectuals and literary critics in America and that most American writers of fiction regarded it as a serious limitation is testified by many essays and prefaces. A graphic example can be found at the beginning of William Cullen Bryant's short story "A Pennsylvanian Legend" (1825), where he asks:

Is the world to become altogether philosophical and rational? Are we to believe nothing that we cannot account for from natural causes? . . . There are people who have found out that to imagine any other modes of being than those of which our experience tells us, is extremely ridiculous. Alas! we shall soon learn to believe that the material world is the only world, and that the things which are the objects of our external senses are the only things which have an existence. Recollect, gentlemen, that you may carry your philosophy too far.<sup>19</sup>

The reaction of early American writers to the condemnation of fiction was, by and large, twofold. Firstly, most authors tried to appease anti-fiction critics by downgrading the creative work of the imagination and emphasizing the educational utility of their narratives. They framed their novels with apologetic prefaces or didactic footnotes, called them histories, added authenticating evidence, or inserted moralizing passages. In some novels the moralizing was so obtrusive that Amelia Parr in Hannah Foster's *The Boarding School* (1798) prefers English novels because "[an] American novel is such a moral, sentimental thing, that it is enough to give any body the vapours to read one."<sup>20</sup> The moral pragmatism in fiction turned self-destructive when some novels stressed the dangers of reading novels. This had become such a mannerism by the end of the eighteenth century that Hugh Henry Brackenridge mocked it by calling his *Modern Chivalry* (1792) "a book without thought, or the smallest degree of sense"; he thought his novel "useful" because it would give his readers "something to read without the trouble of thinking."<sup>21</sup>

Washington Irving similarly debunked the moralizing tendency of the period when he assured his readers in the preface to *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) that every story contained a "sound moral" which, however, he had hidden extremely well, "but the reader will be sure to find it out in the end."<sup>22</sup> Mark Twain, sixty years later, could still burlesque this tradition: in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) he threatens: "persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished."<sup>23</sup>

Some novelists, however, preferred a more subtle strategy. In their works the discourse about the problems of writing fiction in spite of anti-fictional criticism is no longer confined to prefaces, epilogues, or footnotes, but has become an integral part of the fictional text itself. In these novels the narrator stresses the creative faculties of the imagination and consciously blurs the borders between fact and fiction. In some instances a character is introduced who holds up the empiricist cause and asks the narrator for factual evidence; the narrator, however, flatly denies the validity of such a demand and either withdraws from the narrative pretending to have nothing to do with it or replies that he is emotionally too much involved to be objective. Thus, this kind of narrator is unreliable and evasive, because he is unwilling or unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. Rather he starts a discourse about the impossibility of such a distinction and the imaginative nature of a narrator's status.

One of the earliest narrators to involve the reader in such a metafictional discourse is Clara in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; Or The Transformation* (1798). The story tells the events in the Wieland family, where Carwin, a fiendish imitator of voices, drives Clara's brother Theodore into religious insanity. To prove his unconditional obedience to his God he kills his wife and four children as a sacrifice and finally commits suicide. Carwin's duplicity also plays havoc with Clara's emotional life and forestalls an amorous affair with her brother-in-law. In the end all the mysterious events find causal explanations (Carwin was the devil in disguise), but only after Clara has had a couple of nervous breakdowns. When, as the first person narrator and eyewitness of most of the events, she tries to record the occurrences, the emotional turmoil again seizes her. She finds it increasingly difficult to chronicle

the events, sometimes she even has to interrupt her writing to regain her emotional stability.

At the beginning of her narrative Clara is still a relatively objective, matter-of-fact historian, and she frequently emphasizes the factuality of her account, for, as she writes, "[if] my testimony were without corroborations, you would reject it as incredible" (6).<sup>24</sup> Gradually, however, she realizes "the difficulty of the task" (49) which she has undertaken because her subjective reactions to the events begin to interfere with her rational report: the historian and eyewitness doubts the accuracy of her own perception of reality, and she admits:

My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion; but if I live no longer, I will, at least, live to complete it. What but ambiguities, abruptnesses, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters? (147)

Historiography turns into psychography, history turns into his, or in this case, her story.<sup>25</sup> This seems a very modern concept and reminds us of Ronald Sukenick's definition of reality: "Reality is . . . our experience, and objectivity is . . . an illusion."<sup>26</sup> Brown not only wants "to shock the reader by successive revelations of the limits of rational knowledge,"<sup>27</sup> but he clearly questions the conception that history and autobiography are objective renderings of reality beyond the interference of a subjective imagination. His narrator's name, Clara, turns into a mocking comment on the seemingly reliable and objective narrators of the period who succumbed to the mistrust of the imagination and disguised their stories as histories. By demonstrating the unreliability of sense impressions and experience, the novel refutes the epistemology of empiricism current at that time. Clara, "the first case of an 'unreliable narrator' in American literature,"<sup>28</sup> learns in the process of her narrative that "ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws" (87). Even the rationalist Pleyel, Clara's brother-in-law, is deceived by his senses. Time and again Clara is in doubt about her interpretation of her sense impressions and she asks herself and the reader: "How was I to interpret this circumstance?" (99). Or: "Should I confide in the testimony of my ears?" (102). Clara's problem is an unstable relationship between signifier and signified; the discrepancy can only be resolved

within the individual frame of mind. Clara's often incorrect conjectures are countered by Theodore's and Carwin's interpretations (and partly misinterpretations) of the same events, so that the reader gets three different readings of the same "text." Paradoxically enough, Clara's unreliability as a narrator renders her account more authentic, because it proves her involvement in the events. It is only logical that she gradually forsakes her role as authenticating historian and is no longer interested in the question of truth, but only in the appropriateness of her conclusions and conjectures. Consequently, at the end of Carwin's account she concludes: "Such is his tale, concerning the truth of which I care not." (233)

What makes us think of *Wieland* in terms of metafiction is, of course, not the epistemological scepticism, i.e. the subjectivist premise "that the appearances of things vary according to the perceiver," nor the ensuing "suspension of judgement about the true nature of external reality,"<sup>29</sup> but it is the consequence of this "systematic questioning of some fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment"<sup>30</sup> for the status of the narrator. Time and again Clara directly addresses the reader and self-consciously comments on the difficulties of her narrative task, which are twofold: firstly, language is deficient in expressing what she wants to communicate; she speaks of "the imperfection of my language" (148) and forbears from telling some scenes because "my narrative would be imperfect" (157). Secondly, she has to create a coherent narrative in a context of fragmentation which includes the world that seemed so familiar as well as her mental sanity. This fragmentation is reflected in the structural discontinuity of the novel: sometimes she has to bridle her narrative creativity, for instance when she interrupts herself: "But the task I have set myself let me perform with steadiness" (21), or she comes to a halt in order to regain her "composure" (49): "I have taken a few turns in my chamber, and have gathered strength enough to proceed. Yet have I not projected a task beyond my power to execute?" (49) But she is determined to fulfill her appointed task: "though I may at times pause and hesitate, I will not be finally diverted from it." (49) Clara's narrative indecision results from the eighteenth-century opposition of fiction and history, for she is torn between writing her story and writing history, she is aware that as soon as she starts to draw

conclusions from the facts, she starts to write fiction. She reaches the climax of her self-reflexive, metafictional discourse when she states: "my existence will terminate with my tale" (221). If turned around (my tale will terminate with my existence) the sentence would express the narrative design of history (when the historiographer dies, he cannot continue with his history); however, in Clara's case, the narrator's life ends with the tale, i.e. the narrator, Clara, is part of the narrative make-up; she is determined: "I will die, but then only when my tale is at an end" (228), i.e. the narrator can define his/her own date of extinction. Clara's identity is twofold: she is the eyewitness of factual events and the narrator of fiction. Therefore she states: "I stand aside . . . from myself" (222). As the narrator of the novel Clara indeed dies at the end, "and now my repose is coming—my work is done" (233), but she survives as a narrator of history, and so in the last chapter, after her recovery from her nervous breakdowns, she gathers the minor plots of the preceding tale and gives brief historical round-ups. This narrative inconsistency has generally been criticized. However, in my context, the change from a subjective narrative point of view to an omniscient narrator within a work of fiction may not be a flaw, but highly significant; it could perhaps be compared to Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* where, as critics have pointed out, the objective conclusion mocks the "customary demand for a conventional novel."<sup>31</sup> Both texts implicitly argue against a too simple epistemology and in their structure reflect this narrative evasiveness.

The novel's thesis that history and fiction are much closer to each other than contemporary critics would concede is also propounded by Brown's essay "The Difference between History and Romance" (1800), where he writes:

The observer . . . who carefully watches, and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur, may claim the appellation of historian. He who adorns these appearances with cause and effect . . . performs a different part. He is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore, a romancer.<sup>32</sup>

Brown's objective is to increase the esteem of the novel in the eyes of disparaging critics of fiction by defining the novel as an interpretation



of facts, i.e. as a kind of historical writing more valuable than history because the novel gives causalities and motivations.<sup>33</sup> What makes *Wieland* an early form of metafiction is its amalgamation of fact and fiction in the very sensibility of the narrator and its articulation of this discourse on the level of narration.

Looking for parallels in early American fiction one immediately thinks of some tales by Washington Irving where the self-conscious narrator refuses to testify to the truth of the mysterious events in the narrative. Rather than prove their actuality, the narrator refers to the testimony of others from whom he has heard about the events or he assumes the attitude of an editor who may even withdraw from his fiction and build up an ironic distance to it, if the events narrated are in extreme conflict with the collective consensus of experience.

Rip Van Winkle's story about his twenty-year-long sleep is a perfect example. One afternoon Rip, a negligent loafer in a Dutch settlement, turns his back on his irascible and wrangling wife and goes hunting in the Catskill Mountains. When, after a twenty-year absence, he finally returns to his native village, now governed by post-revolutionary Yankee republicanism, he tells the incredible story that in the mountains he met and frolicked with the legendary Hendrick Hudson and his men, and, overpowered by their drink, fell into a long sleep. Every time he tells his story, he is observed "to vary on some points" (783).<sup>34</sup> Gradually a definite version develops and becomes part of the local lore; if some locals express incredulity, they only pretend "to doubt the reality" (784) of Rip's story, since it has been corroborated by the local historian. The final version is then written down by Diedrich Knickerbocker, who goes so far as to provide a note again testifying to the authenticity of the story: not only has he talked with Rip Van Winkle himself, but he has even seen "a certificate on the subject taken before a country justice and signed with a cross in the justice's own hand writing" (784). The note concludes: "The story therefore is beyond the possibility of doubt." (784) However, this ironic debunking of the common-sense approach of his contemporary critics was not enough for Washington Irving. He makes Knickerbocker's story as well as the appended note parts of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and frames them with an introductory biographical note on Knickerbocker as well as with a postscript. The biographical note

maintains that the tale was posthumously found among Knickerbocker's papers and that it is beyond the possibility of doubt because Knickerbocker's previously published *History of New York* also proved to be a work of "scrupulous accuracy" and "unquestionable authority" (767). The postscript prints "travelling notes from a memorandum book of Mr. Knickerbocker" (784) which show Rip's story to be related to ancient Indian legends. That the problem of "truth" is the real theme of the story is also highlighted by the ambiguous epigraph taken from William Cartwright's play *The Ordinary* (1651): "Truth is a thing that ever I will keep / Unto thylke day in which I creep into / My sepulchre—" (769). Thus, Irving's story is constructed from a variety of texts which use different narrative perspectives: an introductory biographical note on Knickerbocker by Crayon, a poetic epigraph from Cartwright, Rip's story as recorded by Knickerbocker, Knickerbocker's corroborating note, introduced and edited by Crayon, and Crayon's postscript, which contains an Indian legend as recorded in Knickerbocker's "memorandum book" (784). (Unfortunately, in most anthologies only Rip's story is reprinted, not the additional texts that in the context of this paper make this story so interesting.) The perspectives of these textual components are those of the collective narrators of Indian folklore, Rip as the childishly naive eye-witness and narrator of incredible events, Knickerbocker as the authenticating and compiling anthropologist, and Crayon as the editor and ironic commentator. This multiplicity of genres and narrators foreshadows the complexity of narrative technique in some twentieth-century texts. On every one of the three personalized levels of the narrative the key issue is the relationship between fact and fiction, i.e. the epistemology of the common-sense school: those narrators whose texts were recommended to readers of early America because of their direct reference to reality, namely the historian (Knickerbocker) and the biographer and eyewitness (Rip) are here discredited because of their epistemological naiveté and their superficial credulity. In this way Irving clearly mocks those contemporary critics who demanded that literary texts had to be founded on facts. He involves his readers in a metafictional discourse about the fictional momentum of historiography and argues that even a historian cannot but use his imagination when he starts to work on the historical facts.<sup>35</sup> Demands for authenticity

as made by Knickerbocker, as well as Irving's contemporary critics, are downright ridiculous. As the gradual acceptance of Rip's essentially unbelievable story by the villagers shows, truth is not defined normatively and *a priori*, but performatively, i.e. as a discursive process toward consensus which eventually makes it part of the "collective consciousness."<sup>36</sup>

In the postscript to "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" this metafictional discourse about the legitimization of fiction is renewed: the story is told at a meeting "at which were present many of [the] sagest and most illustrious burghers."<sup>37</sup> Among these, one might presume, are the representatives of common-sense criticism, "who never laugh but upon good grounds—when they have reason and the law on their side." One of them asks "what was the moral of the story, and what it went to prove" (1087). When he is given a rather unsatisfactory answer, he expresses his doubts concerning the factuality of the events, whereupon the storyteller admits: "I don't believe one half of it myself" (1088). The replies render the common-sense questions of the critic completely irrelevant. The issue of authenticity is inappropriate in the case of story-telling, Irving maintains. His literary alter ego Geoffrey Crayon makes the same point in the introduction to *Tales of a Traveller* when he, as a self-conscious narrator, confesses: ". . . when I attempt to draw forth a fact, I cannot determine whether I have read, heard, or dreamt it; and I am always at a loss to know how much to believe of my own stories."<sup>38</sup> Here already Irving ridicules the kind of unimaginative reader who would later read Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860) as a travel guide to Rome and Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) as a guide to the biology of the whale and the New England whale industry.

Brown and Irving were among the first American writers to pave the way toward twentieth-century metafictional narrative. Their self-reflective narrators "do not imitate the world, [they] construct versions of it"; they have realized that "[there] is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only constructing."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, they involve the reader in a discourse about the fictionalization of reality. They refuse to define the line between reality and imagination and evasively leave the question of truth open for the reader to decide. The narrative center is no longer occupied by an organizing, detached, omniscient, and reliable narrator, but, in

*Wieland*, by a self-consciously uncertain fabulist who uses the freedom of her creative imagination or, in "Rip Van Winkle," by a narrator who wears the mask of an editor and who leaves it to the reader to construct a reading of the several texts he has collected. The aim is not the instruction of the reader according to the social and critical norms, but antinomian disorientation of the reader and the deconstruction of the myths of contemporary criticism. In the texts I have analyzed, the writing of fiction turns into playing with the concept of fiction, turns into a playful discourse about truth. Of course, there is still a big difference between, for example, John Barth and Washington Irving, but nonetheless, the reader of the different texts that make up "Rip Van Winkle" is almost as much lost in the funhouse of fictional multiplicity as the reader of Barth's work. And there are other striking similarities. The following analysis of the situation of the postmodern writer by Ronald Sukenick in "The Death of the Novel" could equally well characterize Irving's situation in early nineteenth-century America as manifested in "Rip Van Winkle":

The contemporary writer—the writer who is acutely in touch with the life of which he is part—is forced to start from scratch: Reality doesn't exist [on his return, Rip, Irving's alter ego,<sup>40</sup> finds everything changed, metamorphosed, and strange], time doesn't exist [Rip's afternoon nap lasts twenty years], personality doesn't exist [Rip "doubted his own identity" (781); and he complains: "I'm not myself. —I'm somebody else . . . and every thing's changed—and I'm changed—and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (781)]. God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot [Rip changes some points of his story whenever he tells it, and even the historian and anthropologist Knickerbocker does not know what happened], and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version [the guarantee Knickerbocker offers is unacceptable, as Crayon makes clear]. . . . Reality is, simply, our experience, and objectivity is, of course, an illusion.<sup>41</sup>

This is what Brown and Irving, and later Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and others wanted to communicate through some of their writings in a climate dominated by, as James Fenimore Cooper termed it, "that despot—common sense."<sup>42</sup> Thus, female readers and some imaginative writers in early America seem to have had a common goal: for them reading and writing were subversive acts of liberation from this despot

who tried (but failed) to convince the American reading public that novels were the most dangerous kind of reading.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hannah Foster, *The Boarding School; Or, Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils* (Boston, 1798) 18.

<sup>2</sup>This article is the revised version of a paper presented at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in May 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1980) 1.

<sup>4</sup>See Bernd Engler, *Fiktion und Wirklichkeit: Zur narrativen Vermittlung erkenntnis-skeptischer Positionen bei Hawthorne und Melville* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1991), Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), Dennis Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fiction of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1989), Christiane Paul, *Die Antizipation der amerikanischen Postmoderne im Romanwerk H. Melvilles* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner, 1988). Important studies on the history of metafiction are: Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975), and esp. Michael D. Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1980), and Daniel Green, "Metafiction and Romance," *SAF* 19 (1991): 229-42. See also Christian Berthold, *Fiktion und Vieldeutigkeit: Zur Entstehung moderner Kulturtechniken des Lesens im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), Wayne C. Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*," *PMLA* 67 (1952): 163-85, Werner Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst: Theorie und Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt auf englischem illusionsstörendem Erzählen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion" [1967], *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: Putnam, 1984) 62-76.

<sup>6</sup>Ronald Sukenick, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial, 1969).

<sup>7</sup>Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1961) viii.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Addison, "Taste and the Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Spectator* (June 21, 1712) rpt. in *Critical Essays from The Spectator by Joseph Addison*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 176.

<sup>9</sup>For the sake of brevity I always use the term novel to denote all forms of narrative fiction.

<sup>10</sup>The author of "Character and Effects of Modern Novels" in *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia) 9 (Oct. 1792): 225, warns: "Novels not only

pollute the imaginations of young women, but also give them false ideas of life, which too often make them act improperly. . . . They read of characters which never existed, and never can exist."

<sup>11</sup>The *Journal of John Winthrop*, entry for April 13, 1645, quoted in *Anthology of American Literature*, 2 vols., ed. George McMichael, 2nd ed., vol. 1: *Colonial Through Romantic* (New York: Macmillan, 1980) 70. In the Philadelphia journal *The Eye*, 1.4 (28 Jan. 1808): 42, an anonymous writer maintains: "To novels may be attributed the ignorance of our females." In *The Stranger* (Albany) 1.12 (20 Nov. 1813): 162, a writer who identifies himself as "A Married Man" complains: "experience has proved that a wife who is fond of literature is seldom a good cook."

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Nathaniel Burwell, March 14, 1818, rpt. in *Crusade Against Innocence: Thomas Jefferson on Education*, ed. Gordon C. Lee (New York: Teachers College P, 1961) 153, 154.

<sup>13</sup>Wallace Stevens, "Imagination as Value" [1948] in: *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Random House, [1980]) 136, 138.

<sup>14</sup>John Davis, *The Wanderings of William* (Philadelphia, 1801) "Dedication."

<sup>15</sup>E.g. John T. Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830* (New York: King's Crown P, 1943).

<sup>16</sup>Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957).

<sup>17</sup>For a detailed study of the influence of this philosophy in America see Martin. See also: Selwyn A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (1960, rpt. Westport: Greenwood, 1977), and Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750-1835* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1975). A useful survey is also provided by William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835* (1936, rpt. New York: Barnes, 1961), esp. "Sources in Scottish Philosophy, Aesthetics and Culture" 27-58. For an analysis of the Scottish philosophy see Torngny T. Segerstedt, *The Problem of Knowledge in Scottish Philosophy* (Lund: Gleerup, 1935).

<sup>18</sup>Martin 14.

<sup>19</sup>William Cullen Bryant, "A Pennsylvanian Legend," *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine* 2 (Dec. 1825): 49.

<sup>20</sup>Foster 156-57.

<sup>21</sup>Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Lewis Leary (New Haven: College and University P, 1965) 26-27.

<sup>22</sup>Washington Irving, *Representative Selections*, ed. Henry A. Pochmann (New York: American Book Company, 1934) 206.

<sup>23</sup>Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Scully Bradley et al., Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1977) 2.

<sup>24</sup>Quotations from *Wieland* are from the bicentennial edition (Kent: Kent State UP, 1977).

<sup>25</sup>See Klaus Martens, *Die antinomische Imagination: Studien zu einer amerikanischen literarischen Tradition* (Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville) (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986) 51: "Indem . . . der fiktive Erzähler zugleich littérateur wird, wird die Fiktionalität des Textes herausgestellt und ein mimetischer Anspruch des Textes auf Realitätsnähe . . . nicht mehr erhoben."

<sup>26</sup>Sukenick 41.

<sup>27</sup>Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 113.

<sup>28</sup>Roland Hagenbüchle, "American Literature and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis in Epistemology: The Example of Charles Brockden Brown," *EAL* 23 (1988): 121-51, 133.

<sup>29</sup>Eve Tavor, *Scepticism, Society and the 18th-Century Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1987) 225.

<sup>30</sup>Donald A. Ringe, *Charles Brockden Brown* (New York: Twayne, 1966) 42.

<sup>31</sup>John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), excerpts rpt. in William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994) 392.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Brockden Brown, "The Difference between History and Romance," rpt. in Brown, *Literary Essays and Reviews*, ed. Alfred Weber (Frankfurt: Lang, 1992) 83. See also: Wolfgang Schäfer, *Charles Brockden Brown als Literaturkritiker* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1991) 97-101.

<sup>33</sup>A few decades later Ralph Waldo Emerson similarly emphasized the value of the imagination for our understanding of the world: "The imagination may be defined to be, the use which the Reason makes of the material world." *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1: *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971) 31. Hagenbüchle 138 summarizes Brown's point: "Fiction assumes a value of its own and thus appears as the only means of creating significance in a world empty of substance."

<sup>34</sup>Quotations from "Rip Van Winkle" are from Washington Irving, *History, Tales, and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton, Library of America (New York: Viking, 1983).

<sup>35</sup>This had already been his point in *A History of New York*, which "ridicules the possibility of acquiring certain or reliable knowledge." William L. Hedges, *Washington Irving: An American Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1965) 72.

<sup>36</sup>Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 113.

<sup>37</sup>Quotations from "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are from Washington Irving, *History, Tales, and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton, Library of America (New York: Viking, 1983).

<sup>38</sup>Irving, *Representative Selections* 207.

<sup>39</sup>Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1975) 7.

<sup>40</sup>For the parallels between Rip and Washington Irving see Rubin-Dorsky 110 ff.

<sup>41</sup>Sukenick 41. Similarly, William L. Hedges, "The Knickerbocker History as Knickerbocker's 'History,'" *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving*, ed. Stanley Brodwin (Westport: Greenwood, 1986) 153-66, 164, sees Irving's *A History of New York* as "a very modern text" because of its "flirtation with the irrational." The continuity from the American romance to postmodern literature is analyzed by Bell.

<sup>42</sup>James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans*, ed. Robert E. Spiller, 2 vols. (New York: Ungar, 1963) 2: 114.

## Subjected People: Towards a Grammar for the Underclass in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry

JONATHAN AUSUBEL

Robert B. Shaw hints that many questions besides biography vex Bishop studies, calling the bulk of the discussion about her work "tentative" because of its newness.<sup>1</sup> Shaw points to a persistent problem in Bishop criticism: like biography, many other clichéd modes of discourse tend to dominate discussion of the poetry and in turn shape our reading of it. While Harold Bloom iterates a typical Bishop lineage,<sup>2</sup> David Kalstone insists on not only biographical exegesis but on Bishop's famous "eye" as well.<sup>3</sup> Kalstone notices other features in Bishop's work: her sense of scale and her meticulous grammar (16, 17); other critics pay token attention to these elements, subordinating them, like Kalstone, to common critical stances. Lois Cucullu, in her precise reading, posits a questioning eye / I and seems restricted by her feminist reading because gender is frequently absent from the poetry.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, while many feminist readings of Bishop elide significant factors in their bind to gender, many other readings are blinded by the eye. Rather than reading the poetry with a view towards the eye / I and gender positioning, this paper will broadly examine structures of domination and submission in Bishop's poetry. A look at her use of grammatical subjects and objects and passive voice and then at her use of passive-voice subjection and objectification shows a persistent social subtext emerging from her arrangement of people and things in her poems that extends well beyond gender. Frequently, the servants (the objects) are children although women and minorities appear in that position too. By examining "First Death in Nova Scotia," "Cootchie," "A Norther—Key West," "Squatter's Children," "In the Waiting Room," "A Miracle for Breakfast" and "Sestina,"<sup>5</sup> I will show how the cycle of domination extends in Bishop's work from childhood to adulthood on both personal and societal levels.

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"First Death in Nova Scotia" is written entirely in the past tense, with a young narrator recounting the circumstances of an even younger cousin's death. The poem is characterized by frequent shifts in grammatical subject which reveal Bishop's great attention to dominant and submissive positioning. The poem begins, oddly, with Arthur's aunt: "In the cold, cold parlor / my mother laid out Arthur." Dead, Arthur is not an agent to the narrator, but is arranged, an object, "beneath the chromographs" of royalty. In contradiction to the title, neither death nor the dead is the subject. In fact, Arthur receives scant direct attention, appearing as only one of ten unique subjects. Rather than eulogy to remember the dead, Bishop delivers funeral rites, performed on the dead. The narrator quickly shifts attention to the loon, "shot and stuffed by Uncle / Arthur, Arthur's father" and placed, like Arthur, "Below [the royalty] on the table." The narrator does not discuss her dead cousin directly, nor does she allow us to forget him—as repetition of his name assures.<sup>6</sup> His positional equivalence to the loon extends as the transition to the second stanza is marked by a confusion of object and then subject:

Since Uncle Arthur fired  
a bullet into him,  
he hadn't said a word.  
He kept his own counsel  
on his white, frozen lake,  
the marble-topped table.

The conflation of the loon and Arthur is deliberate, heightened by Bishop's choice of an inappropriate idiom: the loon "hadn't said a word"; indeed, how alike are the loon and Arthur, each laid out on its table, objects of the taxidermist's and undertaker's art. Grammatically, Arthur hasn't acted. In the narrator's perception, he is identified through metonymy and metaphor with objects—the chromographs and the loon—and so Bishop solidifies his position in the world of objects. The third stanza continues Arthur's inertness: the narrator is commanded to "say good-bye / to [her] little cousin Arthur" and is given a flower "to put *in* Arthur's hand" (emphasis added). In both instances, Arthur is clearly the indirect object. Further, we note here that like Arthur and like the loon "shot and stuffed by Uncle," the narrator is now acted upon:

she "was lifted up and given" a flower. Arthur and the narrator occupy the same spatial and metaphorical position as the loon. Yet, raised to this level, the narrator still has difficulty focusing on little, dead Arthur where she had not had trouble scrutinizing the loon: the flower is not for Arthur, but "to put in Arthur's hand." The evasion of the "Arthur" as subject continues when Arthur's coffin becomes a white cake eyed by the loon. This evasion heightens the distance between the narrator and her cousin, "dispassions" the event.<sup>7</sup>

Lest the reader forget Arthur entirely, though, he finally becomes the subject: "Arthur was very small. / He was all white, like a doll / that hadn't been painted yet." As soon as the narrator has fixed on Arthur as subject, he is again objectified, an unfinished doll: "Jack Frost had dropped the brush / and left him white, forever." The royalty, we find, "invited Arthur to be / the smallest page at court"; perhaps it will be Arthur's job to wrap up the royal feet. Even when Arthur is finally seen clearly ("clutching his tiny lily, / with his eyes shut up so tight"), he is cast in the role of a stranded attendant—a page who cannot attend court because the snow prevents him.

Prevented by the ocean from attending her master, Cootchie is absent in her death and is unrelated to the narrator. Characterized by the same subject shifts as "First Death," "Cootchie" contains eight unique grammatical subjects, most of which move. Where Arthur was a doll, Cootchie is presented in life, eating her dinner over the sink. Both fluidity of verb tense<sup>8</sup> and placement of Cootchie solidly in the subject position (her name is title, first word and first grammatical subject) enable the shift from the stillness of "First Death" to the motion of "Cootchie." As in "First Death," the other subjects help us discover the scene. The lighthouse and the sea become part of her churning, "white" sea death as the chromographs and loon have become part of Arthur's glacial death. However, Cootchie's position as subject counterpoints her subjection. She is from the poem's first line "Miss Lula's servant":

Her life was spent  
in caring for Miss Lula, who is deaf,  
eating her dinner off the kitchen sink  
while Lula ate hers off the kitchen table.

Her position was clear. With the opening of the second stanza, the narrator provides a different perspective on Cootchie's subjection:

Tonight the moonlight will alleviate  
 the melting of the pink wax roses  
 planted in tin cans filled with sand  
 placed in a line to mark Miss Lula's losses. . . .

The roses will melt, not fade; they stand not in direct tribute to Cootchie, but mark the impact of her death on Lula, to whom Cootchie was subjected. Cootchie is absent and so never becomes the object Arthur has become; she is instead dissolved in the sea-change, perhaps as quickly forgotten by Lula as the wax roses are melted.

Latent in these details is a paradox: Cootchie's funeral marks Lula's loss. Indeed, Lula is helpless without a servant: there is no one to care for her, no one to "shout and make her understand." We can even link the artificial roses planted in sand and tin to the loss of Cootchie's fecundity. Like the lighthouse, Cootchie did things "for someone else." In the poem, the machine discovers the servant's grave and understands "all as trivial." To describe the sea, Bishop chose "desperate," pointing to frantic, violent and great motion, suggesting both the storm's danger and the tumult Cootchie's death has brought about in Lula's life. The etymological kinship of "desperate" with "despair" suggests a dearth of despair for the lost servant, a detail manifest in Cootchie's "artificial" funeral with its wax roses. Where the young narrator offered Arthur a fresh lily, the sea "will proffer wave after wave" and Lula will presumably replace her dead servant with another—"wave after wave." The crucial difference between the circumstances of Arthur's death and of Cootchie's has less to do with gender and race than with simple presence or absence. Arthur was viewed (or avoided) and placed as an object because he was present; Cootchie's absence puts her firmly out of the control of society. Her drowning seems related to Elizabeth's "sensation of falling off / the round, turning world / into cold, blue-black space" in "In the Waiting Room." Where Elizabeth is able to stop from falling but unable to impose her separation, Cootchie has had exactly the opposite success. The cost, of course, has been her life, a solution which Arthur's example shows not fully effective.

The bonds of subjection of both child and adult come out more clearly, however, when Bishop focuses on the world of children. Many of the children occupy a similar position to Arthur; although alive, children are generally cast in the role of the unwitting or unable servant (somewhat like Cootchie), either to their parents, to forces they do not understand or to both. In most cases, the children are acted upon; they invariably replace one mantle of servitude with another. "A Norther—Key West" illustrates this neatly. In the poem, Hannibal's and Herbert's mother, Mizpah Oates, "brings out the ancient winter coats" to protect her sons from a storm. Paradoxically, in asserting her control over the children, mother Oates at least partially relinquishes her grip on them. The coats were "once worn by an immense white child"; the "careful" mother protects her children from the storm by dressing them in the hand-me-downs of the dominant race. Under the storm, driven wild by his mother's obtuseness and practically smothered by the enormous coat, Hannibal cries, an act which itself expresses a lack of control. The narrator links the donning of the coat with "worldliness"; the term is, of course, meant as a negative, for both physically and socially, the dominance the coat asserts (on Hannibal, at least) paralyzes the child.

Helplessness is juxtaposed with the *joi de vivre* of the "Squatter's Children." Theirs is a powerless bliss for they are oblivious to their position. Indeed, the title of the poem defines its subject as without rights even before naming the children. Under the control of parents without title to land, the children are diminutive, "specklike." Set in an expansive landscape, the children are initially only elements in the scene:

On the unbreathing sides of hills  
 . . . .  
 The sun's suspended eye  
 blinks casually, and then they wade  
 gigantic waves of light and shade.

The conspicuous iambic meter at the end of this passage rhythmically illustrates the children's joy, suggesting their runs and jumps, their frolic out of doors. To strengthen the disparity in sizes, "A dancing yellow spot, a pup, / attends them." "Spot" and "pup" both express smallness which itself is emphasized by Bishop's word play. Like the tiny children

(Isn't a speck smaller than a spot?), the dog is dwarfed by the storm that approaches. Although the children's play is fraught with difficulty ("The ground is hard"; the mattock, which "the two of them can scarcely lift," has "a broken haft"), they seem undaunted: the mattock "drops and clangs. Their laughter spreads / effulgence in the thunderheads."

The children's happy obliviousness to the oncoming storm is not shared by the narrator, who observes that "their little, soluble, / unwarrantable ark" is answered by senseless rolls of thunder. The "ark" signifies the inefficacy of the puppy's bark and the children's laughter to stop the storm in addition to their lack of protection from the storm.<sup>9</sup> It is one thing to be weak and unsheltered, another to know it. Moreover, the thunderous "echolalia" is echoed by their mother's voice, which "keeps calling them to come in." The juxtaposition of storm and mother's voice suggests a number of things: the children have a choice of submitting to the storm or submitting to mother; further, she can offer little protection from the forces to which the children are subjected and so is herself diminished. By and large, the poem conveys lack of control through diction and perspective rather than through the passive voice of "First Death." Nevertheless, the ends are similar. We find in the narrator's address to the children that the storm has affected them, albeit not as seriously as it could have: they are "wet and beguiled," but (unlike Cootchie) have survived. Nevertheless, the narrator offers a strong, if veiled, admonition: today, the children play "among / the mansions [they] may choose"; as squatters, the children are not allowed to enter mansions. Moreover, only "soggy documents retain / [their] rights in rooms of falling rain." "Soggy" papers are halfway destroyed. The "falling rain" will hit the ground and run off or be absorbed, the rights disappearing in either instance. We see that in "Squatter's Children," as in "A Norther—Key West," both of which involve children negotiating storms, the children's control is frustrated at every turn: ignorant of danger or happy in the face of it, the children understand the situation no more than they control it.

Dianna Henning asserts that the loss and separation she sees permeating Bishop's poetry about childhood are subverted by the fact that the screams and cries in the poetry never consume the narrator, child or world.<sup>10</sup> While it is clearly true that screams in Bishop's poetry

do not consume the world of the poem, Henning, I feel, misses the essential reason; because Bishop positions children in passive roles, no action of theirs is capable of dominating. Rather than asserting self control by suppressing the screams and cries, Bishop asserts an utter lack of efficacy because screams and cries do not dominate by making the screamer/crier the center of attention. Bishop's clearest treatment of this idea is found in "In the Waiting Room," which immediately places the narrator in a passive position "in the dentist's waiting room," sitting and waiting for her aunt. Like the children in "First Death" and "A Norther," Elizabeth is attendant on an adult. To entertain herself and to avoid contact with the others in the waiting room, Elizabeth reads *National Geographic*. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan has observed that in the pictures she mentions, the young narrator finds only victims and objects.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the victims here are apparent: the "dead man slung on a pole" is called "Long Pig," recalling the loon on the parlor table, objectified like little Arthur; the

Babies with pointed heads  
wound round and round with string;  
[and] black, naked women with necks  
wound round and round with wire  
like the necks of light bulbs

are designed like objects, as Arthur was "laid out" and Hannibal dressed. We may also note here that the second and fourth lines above echo each other: as Bishop used iambs to amplify sense in "Squatter's Children," here she emphasizes the extent of domination ("wound round and round" in great coils) and, perhaps, the cycle of dominance ("round and round," mothers and children). Brogan's fine but brief exegesis of "In the Waiting Room" focuses on its representation of the "violated human condition" and observes that Bishop parallels the narrator and aunt with the children and women in *National Geographic* (44). As the children and women in the magazine are connected by the coils placed on them, so Elizabeth finds herself connected to Aunt Consuelo by "an *oh!* of pain." Paradoxically, identification with others occasions a frenetic search for definition which seems to heighten the tenor of otherness, nearly to "a cry of pain that could have / got loud or worse." Henning correctly

understands "In the Waiting Room" as an instance of a child's sudden and frightening sense of self; she proceeds to argue that the only "grounding [for Elizabeth is] to be found in language itself" (70-1). Contrarily, Helen Vendler has observed that many of Bishop's poems take a sinister view of the efficacy of language (826). Bearing both critics in mind, we see that Elizabeth's sudden sense of self is terrifying precisely because it occasions grounding, highlighting for the young narrator the enormity of the company in which she finds herself. The trap Elizabeth falls into, to quote Groucho Marx, is that she does not wish to be a member of any club that would have her. Aunt Consuelo is "a foolish, timid woman." The poem insists on Elizabeth's distance from others: the waiting room is "full of grown up people," the magazine shows dead men and grotesque babies and women whose breasts are "horrifying." Elizabeth is able to maintain her distance as long as she has reading material; she hears and makes a cry of pain immediately after she has "looked at the cover: / the yellow margins, the date." But the "oh!" of pain, itself a transcultural signifier, was uttered alike by the young narrator, Aunt Consuelo and the babies with pointed heads.

Unlike "First Death," which is told in the first person but contains only one first person pronoun, "In the Waiting Room" is full of I's, me's and my's. This way of speaking emphasizes the dichotomy of self and other and counters the connection expressed by "oh!" In fact, the second stanza is marked by a shift from third person (Consuelo) to first ("it was *me*: / my voice, in my mouth"). Nevertheless, Elizabeth cannot maintain her distance: the stanza shifts to equation and conflation of persons: "I was my foolish aunt, / I—we—were falling, falling, / our eyes" fixed on the magazine. Elizabeth's reflex to combat the horror of her society makes her thought reflexive: "I said to myself: three days / and you'll be seven years old." The integration with others occasions the assertion of self ("I," "myself," "you" referring to herself in the second person)

. . . to stop  
the sensation of falling off  
the round, turning world  
into cold, blue-black space.

This is the very space where Cootchie "went / below the surface of the coral-reef" and by which separation imposed. The vastness of this space frightens the young narrator and "oh!" it exists in the Worcester night: Elizabeth will never again be able to keep herself completely separate from her Aunt and society at large.

Elizabeth has at least glimpsed her relation to society unlike the "Squatter's Children," Hannibal and the young narrator of "First Death." Because she is "too shy," Elizabeth is unable to look the grown ups in the face. Even after her realization, she finds she "couldn't look any higher" than their knees, clothing and hands. Thus, she casts herself in a similar light: as she sees others piecemeal or as objects, so others will see her as "arctics and overcoats," "shadowy gray knees," "boots, hands, the family voice" and "awful hanging breasts." Elizabeth's understanding of her status threatens to objectify, even disfigure, her. Attending her Aunt and looking at others from below, she tries to keep the grown ups at a distance; she fails and understands that they and she are "just one" and yet she cannot accept the company she finds herself thrust into. Subjection is self defeating either because its propagators are subject to others' shipwrecks (like Lula—"who will shout and make her understand?") or because its propagators end up loathing themselves (like Elizabeth—"How had I come to be here, / like them . . . ?"). Brogan reads the perversion of lyric voice as illustrative of Bishop's acute awareness of the political and social realms (31 and *passim*). Indeed, the features we have been examining primarily in Bishop's handling of children easily extend to the larger realms; Bishop conveys ideas about other subjected groups by the same grammatical, physical and figurative positioning, as is most evident in "Cootchie." In another social context, a Bishop narrator negotiates an attempt to free herself from the cycle of servitude and passivity. "A Miracle for Breakfast," written during the Great Depression, portrays its subjection as those "waiting for coffee and the charitable crumb" served from a balcony are immediately in subordinate positions socially and physically; they attend from below like serfs to "kings of old." But the dichotomy of other and self reverses the one that appeared in "In the Waiting Room." Here, the individual dominates the group. Like Elizabeth attending her aunt, the narrator of "A Miracle" and her peers wait for



the man on the balcony (for an hour). Indeed, the man is the center of attention and the most frequent grammatical subject, curious facts given that "man" is not one of the line-ending words in the sestina. Even structurally, the last words of each line are dominated by the man and the poem's action hinges on his ability to provide a miracle.<sup>12</sup>

Coffee and "the charitable" crumb initially constitute the miracle. In the first stanza, the food for the hungry "was going to be served from a certain balcony, / . . . like a miracle." Certainty marks the miracle<sup>13</sup> and puts an edge on the beggars' appetites;

It was so cold we hoped that the coffee  
would be very hot, seeing that the sun  
was not going to warm us; and that the crumb  
would be a loaf each, buttered, by a miracle.

The huddled mass suddenly desires a greater miracle. Coffee and a crumb are not enough to sustain these hungry. The servant amplifies the difference between those who wait and the man on the balcony, who looks "over our heads toward the river" as attention fixes on his food for the poor, "one lone cup of coffee / and one roll." Indeed, each individual receives far less: "Each man received one rather hard crumb, / . . . / and, in a cup, one drop of the coffee." Without buttered loaves and thirsty for very hot coffee, the majority of the beggars leave; the man has been unable to provide a miracle today and the disenfranchised remain abject.

Critics cite "A Miracle For Breakfast" in discussing Bishop's resemblance to Wallace Stevens.<sup>14</sup> Like Stevens' characters, Bishop's narrator tries to make a miracle when one is not provided. Imaginatively, the "beautiful villa" she sees "with one eye close to the crumb" represents an attempt to replace a non-miracle (a crumb, not a loaf) with greater satisfaction—a house of her own. Where the man on the balcony cannot provide a miracle, the narrator tries to find one made for her by nature itself, to build, if only for a moment, her own balcony: the villa, she says, was constructed for her "through ages, by insects, birds, and the river." However, nature's bounteous villa would in fact have to be rather paltry to fit into a crumb. Moreover, the narrator makes clear that "it was not a miracle" but an imagining. To clarify the futility

of the flight which sets nature's bounty in the narrator's service, the poem returns with a stark reminder of true social position: "We licked up the crumb and swallowed the coffee." Desperate for even "one rather hard crumb" and "one drop of coffee," the narrator knows that there has been no miracle. Neither God nor nature has sufficiently provided for those in soup lines. The poor have only their imagination on which to depend. Yet, even if the fruits of imagination are dazzling ("My crumb / my mansion"), even if they constitute a miraculous sestina, the poem is finally neither nourishing to the body nor capable of building a real balcony for the narrator, of effecting change in social relationships. Like Elizabeth, who leaves the waiting room with Aunt Consuelo, the narrator of "A Miracle" is finally in the company of those she would leave behind: where "We licked up the crumb," "Every day, in the sun, / at breakfast time I sit on *my* balcony / with my feet up, and drink gallons of coffee" (emphasis added). Dianna Henning reads the inability to change existing relations as a "passive consent to life" and emphasizes Bishop's propensity for understatement "—as though such a matter-of-fact acceptance endowed one with more power or released one from remorse" (72).

Although written about "One Art," Henning's words apply equally well to "A Miracle" and to "Sestina," a poem of quiet acquiescence that neither empowers nor releases, in which the ritualization of action and of poetic form can, at best, prevent decline. The scene is of domestic security from September rain and hunger, a considerable improvement from the situation of "A Miracle." The cost of the security, however, is that everything becomes tears<sup>15</sup> amid the autumnal decline the poem so clearly evidences. Episodic from the start, the "action" of the poem is confined and quiet, even desperate. As the rain falls at dusk,

the old grandmother  
sits in the kitchen with the child  
beside the Little Marvel Stove,  
reading the jokes from the almanac,  
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

The cause of her sadness is and remains unclear. That she does not want to cry in front of the child seems more certain. Whether the old

grandmother laughs and talks with the child or alone, she cannot hope to cry on the child's shoulder. A great distance separates the two human actors of "Sestina" despite the small sphere of action; unlike the beggars in "A Miracle," neither grandmother nor child has a peer in "Sestina." The grandmother feels the gap most acutely:

She thinks that her equinoctial tears  
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house  
were both foretold by the almanac,  
but only known to a grandmother.

While the almanac may offer a horoscope and weather table, it cannot know the truth of its predictions and cannot shed tears. As if to accentuate her pain, the kettle "sings." To further hide her tears,

She cuts some bread and says to the child,

*It's time for tea now;* but the child  
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears  
dance like mad on the hot black stove,  
the way the rain must dance on the house.

The adversative conjunction "but" expresses a lack of coordination of effort; as the grandmother had perhaps laughed and talked with herself, so the child is lost in the imaginative world of the narrator of "A Miracle" and ignores the grandmother.

The narrative abruptly cuts to after tea time: the "old" grandmother tidies up and the almanac hovers like a bird above grandmother and child. The thrice-old grandmother "shivers and says she thinks the house / feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove." The stove is fixed at the center of the house-universe, providing warmth and food; however, the adult and child move around it like planets whose orbits do not cross. The grandmother's words are again non-communicative and she stokes the fire herself. Echoing the grandmother's "*It's time for tea,*"

*It was to be,* says the Marvel stove.  
*I know what I know,* says the almanac.  
With crayons the child draws a rigid house  
and a winding pathway. Then the child

puts in a man with buttons like tears  
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

Now the grandmother is excluded from the circle of forecast and knowledge; the very item to which she had contrasted her knowledge replaces her. Whether the "It" of "*It was to be*" equals growing chilly and putting more wood in the stove, whether "it" is the grandmother's sadness or whether "it" is both, seems moot. Resignation marks the statements of both stove and almanac. Counter to the cryptic pronouncements, the child steps in as maker, drawing a house, populating it with the poem's only man and displaying the work for the grandmother. Again, Bishop introduces a "but" which expresses a lack of coordination because of the apparent narrative cut: the grandmother is busying herself as "little moons fall down like tears" from the almanac. It seems that the almanac has responded to the child's drawing where the grandmother's response has been omitted. Further, the almanac's response promises renewal:

*Time to plant tears*, says the almanac.  
The grandmother sings to the marvellous stove  
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

The tears it speaks of planting are perhaps tears for a future generation, the generation of the grandchild. The renewal it promises is rather a repetition of the present cycle as the little moons fall unseen, hidden like the grandmother's tears. As the narrator of "First Death" could not fix on little, dead Arthur, the grandmother sings to the stove, not to the child. The cycle of stagnation remains in tact. It may be unnecessary to point out that the thrice-old grandmother lacks both spouse and children, but this situation amplifies the distance between grandmother and grandchild as they fail to communicate directly. Moreover, the almanac becomes the most powerful agent in the poem, displacing the people entirely: it helps to ease the grandmother's pain even as it accurately predicts the pain; it asserts its cryptic knowledge and waters the child's garden with its own tears. The almanac alone from among the six, seven-fold repetitions posits renewal—"Time to plant tears"—even if renewal brings new sorrow. For certainly there appears no escape from

the tears and the waning of life in "Sestina"; rather the child makes another drawing the grandmother will not look at and Bishop completes another poem in which avenues out of powerlessness themselves remain "inscrutable."

Although the meticulous grammatical positioning in "First Death" and in "Cootchie" is less prominent in the other poems I have examined, the theme of subjection and domination remains central throughout. To assert, as Cucullu, that Bishop's narrative viewpoint is "a seditious act against patriarchal discourse and the locus of the female subject within it" (249) is perhaps too specific; ungendered narrators abound in Bishop's poetry. We see that imagination is the main defense for the subjected: the narrator of "A Miracle," the child in "Sestina" and the others all attempt escape through it. However, Bishop's grammar does not allow their escape and they remain at the power of absent others—the man on the balcony and (perhaps) the absent head of household in "Sestina." Whether or not the act of writing constituted empowerment for Bishop herself is moot: the characters she has left us remain subjected.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert B. Shaw, "Elizabeth Bishop and the Critics," *Poetry* [Modern Poetry Association] 161 (October 1992): 34-45. See 36.

<sup>2</sup>See *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art*, ed. Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil Estess (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1983) ix. Here Bloom links Bishop's poetics to Emerson, Dickinson, Stevens and Moore.

<sup>3</sup>David Kalstone, "Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Memory, Questions of Travel," *Five Temperaments* (New York: OUP, 1977) *passim*. Kalstone notes that Bishop's eye was already a critical commonplace in 1977. He writes, "We need to know what is seen" (13) and so places his whole essay under the control of the eye anyway.

<sup>4</sup>See Lois Cucullu, "Trompe l'Oeil: Elizabeth Bishop's Radical 'I,'" *TSL* 30 (1988): 246-71.

<sup>5</sup>Quotations are taken from *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991).

<sup>6</sup>Here as in several other poems I discuss, the narrator's gender is never mentioned. Out of deference to Bishop, I will employ feminine pronouns when referring to the narrator.

<sup>7</sup>Helen Vendler, in "The Poems of Elizabeth Bishop," *CI* 13 (1987): 825-38, sees this feature as a recurrent motif in Bishop's work, calling it Bishop's "cold capacity for detachment" (837).

<sup>8</sup>The poem moves from the factual (present tense) to the past to the future, thus closing on the potential for and promise of action.

<sup>9</sup>For an interesting account of Bishop's word-play in other poems, see Eleanor Cook, "From Etymology to Paronomasia: Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Others," *Connotations* 2 (1992): 34-51.

<sup>10</sup>Dianna Henning, "Shards of Childhood Memory," *Pembroke Magazine* 22 (1990): 68-76. See especially 68 and 73.

<sup>11</sup>Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, "Elizabeth Bishop: Perversity as Voice," *AmerP* 7.2 (1990): 31-49. Brogan makes this observation on p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>The man's dominance has obvious implications for any reading of gender in Bishop's poetry; however, the absence of gender in the narrator (see note 6) along with the fact that the first person plural also denotes disenfranchised men make a strictly gendered reading unwieldy.

<sup>13</sup>The verb form indicates this, as do the specificity of the balcony and the attendance of the dispossessed.

<sup>14</sup>To note but two of many, Henning and Brogan make extended comparisons between the two writers. See also Bloom (n2 above) and Cook (n9 above).

<sup>15</sup>Initially, the old grandmother's tears are tears. The child watches tears of water dancing on the stove. Next, the tea is tears, then the buttons and moons. See also Henning 75.

## Derek Walcott's Don Juans

D. L. MACDONALD

*Di sasso ha il core,  
O cor non ha!*

—Lorenzo da Ponte

### I. The Nobody of Nowhere<sup>1</sup>

In 1974, the Royal Shakespeare Company commissioned Derek Walcott to adapt *El Burlador de Sevilla* (1616?), the original Don Juan play by Tirso de Molina. The resulting play, *The Joker of Seville*, was given its premiere by Walcott's own company, the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, in November 1974. Budget cuts in the metropolis left the RSC unable to produce it (Chamberlin 158).

As John Thieme has shown, Walcott's play is emphatically a Caribbean one, incorporating a number of elements from the folk culture of Trinidad and subjecting Tirso to the process of Creolization that helped to create that culture (63-9). Perhaps the most striking of the changes discussed by Thieme occurs in Walcott's handling of Tirso's second scene. In the original, Don Juan is sailing from Naples to Seville when he is shipwrecked on the coast of Spain, near Tarragona. There he seduces Tisbea, a young fisherwoman. In Walcott's version, Don Juan crosses the Atlantic on a slave ship and is shipwrecked in New Tarragon. His servant Catalinion, who rescues him, is a Moorish slave. Tisbea is "*a fishergirl of mixed blood*" (34). While Don Juan is in the bushes completing his conquest of Tisbea, Catalinion distracts her friends with the story of how Don Juan conquered him.

Another striking change, one which Thieme does not discuss but which turns out to be relevant to those he does, is first obvious in Walcott's

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handling of the first scene. When Isabella realizes that the man she has just made love to is not her lover Octavio, she asks him who he is. Tirso's Don Juan replies: "I am a man without a name" (235); Walcott's says: "I'm nobody, that's all you know; / my name is Nobody, or you're dead!" (14). The allusion to Homer is almost as violent as the death threat. Odysseus tells Polyphemus the Cyclops that his name is Nobody; then, when Polyphemus has been blinded, he cries out that Nobody has hurt him, and so the other Cyclopes refuse to help him. Thus Don Juan identifies his seduction of Isabella with the blinding of Polyphemus by Odysseus (who uses a phallic beam of olive wood); in an equally sinister trope, he identifies Isabella's sexual desire with the Cyclops's cannibalism.

Tirso himself alludes to Homer several times, notably in a long speech in praise of Lisbon by Don Gonzalo (whom Don Juan will later kill and whose statue will finally take Don Juan to hell): he mentions that it was originally called Ulyssibona, after Ulysses/Odysseus (255). Walcott drastically cuts the speech and even more drastically undercuts the praise: his Gonzalo remarks that Lisbon, the city named after the man who said he was Nobody, is a Nobody of a city compared to Seville (27).

The motif recurs throughout the play, gradually becoming more and more prominent (seven of some twenty-three occurrences, nearly a third of them, are in the last tenth of the play [142-51]), and accumulating greater and greater meaning. As often happens, Don Juan's joke turns out to be a way of telling the truth. When Tisbea, his second victim, asks him who he is, Don Juan replies: "Nobody. A shipwrecked prince. A poet" (39). At first this seems less significant than his joke on Isabella.<sup>2</sup> When Tisbea expects him to marry her, however, he tells her:

Marry a man, Tisbea; I am a  
force, a principle, the rest  
are husbands, fathers, sons; I'm none  
of these. (48)

Insofar as a man's identity is based on his relationships—on his being a husband, father, or son—then Don Juan, who repeatedly violates the loyalties that relationships depend on, is not a man. He does lay claim



to another kind of identity, as "a / force, a principle." When his father upbraids him for his behaviour, however, he denies even this kind of identity:

Well, why defend my character  
 against those who think they know it?  
 What defense has any mirror  
 against hate, except to show it  
 as self-hate? I am their image,  
 a question that has no answer.  
 They smile, I smile. They rage, I rage.  
 I feel nothing. (66; cf. *Han* 57)

What begins as a refusal to defend his character ends as an admission that he has no character. Even his sexual escapades, which are what make the others rage, may be mere mimicry, or acting out: Octavio confesses that he dreams of doing what Don Juan does (131; cf. *Thieme* 71).

When Don Gonzalo, the father of his third victim, attacks him, he disclaims even the most rudimentary kind of identity, the will to live: "Lives! You want mine! Nothing! A leaf / whirled in generations of leaves!" (84). He does defend himself, and kill his assailant, but his defense is only a mirror-image of the attack. When Gonzalo comes back from the dead to take him to hell, Don Juan welcomes him:

You see here a man born empty,  
 with a heart as heavy as yours;  
 there's no Hell you could offer me,  
 sir, that's equal to its horrors. (144-45)

The joke, finally, is on the Joker.

It is common enough for authors to present Don Juan as "a being without internality," in *Kristeva's* phrase (197). *Byron's* virtually featureless hero is only the clearest example. In *Walcott's* play, however, Don Juan is not the only character whose name is Nobody. Just before telling *Tisbea* that he is nobody, he asks her who she is; she replies modestly: "Me? Oh, I ent nobody, sir. *Tisbea*. A poor fishergirl" (39). As in the case of Don Juan himself, this characterization, or non-

characterization, accumulates meaning as the play proceeds. After he abandons Tisbea, she drowns herself; in the last scene, her ghost appears to him:

I am nobody; Tisbea, sir,  
 forgotten as the face that looks  
 long at itself in quiet water,  
 water forgets. I am condemned  
 to mirrors now that multiply  
 my useless beauty to no end. (143)

Like Don Juan himself, Tisbea is now a mere image, a being without internality. She can multiply herself in mirrors but will never bear children: Don Juan's sexuality breeds only death.<sup>3</sup>

Arguing that his third victim, Ana, Gonzalo's daughter, is not worth fighting over, Don Juan refers to the vagina as "the second grave / no more than an indifferent slit / to take another stiff" (81). Elaine Savory Fido has drawn attention to the misogyny of the passage, which is obvious enough, but I think she is wrong to suppose that Walcott endorses it (112). Instead, he suggests that Don Juan's disgust at the vagina, his sense of it as a grave, is essentially a reflection of his self-disgust, his sense of the phallus as a corpse.

Not only Don Juan and his victims, but also their avengers—practically all the other characters—are nobodies. After all, he does describe himself as their mirror image. When he manages to throw the blame for the seduction of Isabella onto her lover Octavio, his uncle Don Pedro advises Octavio to conceal his identity: "Octavio's nobody now" (22). When Tisbea's lover Anfriso follows Don Juan across the Atlantic to avenge her, Don Juan asks him who he is. "Nobody," he replies. Don Juan, after killing him, agrees (70). When Gonzalo tries to avenge his daughter, the chorus warns him: "*Better watch yourself, old man, / nobody can beat Don Juan*" (83). It is precisely nobody—the statue of the dead Gonzalo—who does finally beat him. After his death, the chorus cynically concludes that "nobody killed him," since "Statues can't move," and since "there's no Hell" there was nowhere to send him (148). Just as the seducer and his victims are identified in annihilation, so are the

seducer and the avenger. So, finally, are the victims and the avenger: "How silent all his women were! / All statues, like his murderer" (150).

The figure of Odysseus appears frequently in Walcott's poetry, often in the guise of Nobody. When the hero of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) announces his intention of returning like an Odysseus to his African kingdom, his friend reminds him: "You black, ugly, poor, so you worse than nothing. You like me. . . . Man together two of us is minus one" (237). Shabine, the Odysseus of "The Schooner *Flight*," introduces himself:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,  
I had a sound colonial education,  
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,  
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (*Kingdom 4*; cf. Dove 63-64)

The traveller in "The Arkansas Testament" (1987) discovers that he is "still nothing. A cipher / in its bubbling black zeros" (116).<sup>4</sup> The motif appears in *Omeros* (1990) in the ingenious form of a series of references to the Cyclops that lack any corresponding reference to his attacker, so that Odysseus is silently elided into Nobody (e.g., 13, 46, 51-52, 102, 201, 299); it appears more powerfully in the suggestion that Hector, the descendant of African slaves, returns to Africa after his death: that he becomes an Odysseus by becoming nothing (232-33). In Walcott's dramatization of *The Odyssey*, which the RSC did manage to stage in 1992, the motif is appropriately prominent (Hamner 104-05, 106). Odysseus's trick is expanded into an elaborate vaudeville routine (64-65, 68, 71-72). The hero resumes the name of Nobody when he returns to Ithaca disguised as a beggar (121, 126). As in *Omeros*, the motif is associated with death. A sailor warns Odysseus: "Until he enters his own grave, sir, no man is safe."<sup>5</sup> Odysseus replies: "Then call me 'No-man'" (41). On his visit to the underworld, Tiresias shows him an "alphabet of souls, Ajax to Zeus." The weary Odysseus predicts that he will join them: "This 'O' will be nothing that is Odysseus" (92).<sup>6</sup>

An outer nothingness mirrors the inner one, just as the emptiness of Don Juan's victims mirrors his own (Walcott does retain an old-fashioned tendency, which I will discuss below, to identify women with

landscapes). "Air," a poem written a few years before *The Joker of Seville*, begins with a quotation from *The Bow of Ulysses* by J. A. Froude and ends with a complaint about the West Indian landscape: "there is too much nothing here" (*Gulf* 69-70). The explorer-speaker of "Koenig of the River," a poem written a few years later, announces: "I, Koenig, am a ghost, / ghost-king of rivers." Then he asks the river what it wants to be called: "The river said nothing" (*Kingdom* 43-44). The river's reply would please Shabine, who declares at the end of "The Schooner Flight": "I wanted nothing after that day" (*Kingdom* 19). The wandering poet of *Midsummer* (1984) feels like a bored automaton (20); when he tries to shave, he sees himself, as Don Juan does, as both a mirror image and a corpse:

My double, tired of morning, closes the door  
of the motel bathroom; then, wiping the steamed mirror,  
refuses to acknowledge me staring back at him.  
With the softest grunt, he stretches my throat for the function  
of scraping it clean, his dispassionate care  
like a barber's lathering a corpse. . . . (21)

Outside, "The hills have no echoes" (17); "the air is empty. . . the lit stage is empty" (23); "the cloud waits in emptiness for the apostles" (32); "noon jerks toward its rigid, inert center" (39). A Caribbean island may be a paradise, but "Paradise is life repeated spectrally, / an empty chair echoing the emptiness" (31; cf. Dove 74). The Africa that Hector returns to in *Omeros* is one that precedes the slave trade, one that no longer exists, a nowhere (cf. Terada 26). When Odysseus arrives at Polyphemus's island, he finds "an infinite, empty wharf," marked everywhere with the sign of the Cyclops, a "giant eye." A Philosopher warns him: "A man becomes nothing at that Zero's bidding" (60-61).

Walcott's preoccupation with the void should not be confused with existentialism, which he has dismissed, in "The Muse of History," as "simply the myth of the noble savage gone baroque" (6). The Sartre he is interested in is the Sartre who wrote the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (cf. *Dream* 211, 277). The West Indian landscape is empty because it has been emptied, by genocide and imported disease. The people who have subsequently repopulated it have been emptied too.

As Rita Dove puts it, "The Middle Passage obliterated family ties, tribal connections, and the religious and communal rites that give sense to natural law. West Indian history is a how-to manual for the brutal destruction of whole races' systems for sustaining memory" (56). The slave trade destroyed all the social foundations of identity that Walcott's Don Juan rejects. As Walcott himself puts it, "what was . . . brought in the seeded entrails of the slave was a new nothing" ("Muse" 4). The reference to the "seeded entrails" of the slaves identifies the crimes of the slave traders with the sexual depredations of a Don Juan: the slaves have been anally raped, and the "new nothing" is the fruit of this monstrous conception.

Edward Chamberlin has shown (31-32, 44, 163, 165; cf. Hamner 104-05) that Walcott's use of the motif of nothingness is a response to V. S. Naipaul, who, in *The Middle Passage* (1962), an account of a return visit to the West Indies, concluded: "The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29). Walcott's conclusion is very different.

His Don Juan, back from New Tarragon, complains:

The New World that I saw  
wasn't Eden. Eden was dead,  
or worse, it had been converted  
to modesty. No Indian goes  
naked there; they're all dressed to kill  
while the incense-wreathed volcanoes  
hallow genocide. Eden was hell.  
Men, earth, disembowelled for gold  
to crust the Holy Spanish Cross. (61)

What he has seen, however, is essentially what he has done—indeed, it is what he has been sent there to do. Earlier, the King of Castile has described him as

a young and supple-tempered blade, . . .  
now on that rigorous crusade  
in our dominions overseas  
which God our Heavenly Father's given,

to bring the New World to our knees  
 for a new earth, and a new heaven,  
 to kiss this cross, the sword of Christ. (29)

Don Juan accomplishes his mission on a woman's body, much as Columbus, in *Midsummer*, accomplishes his on a feminized landscape: "the white-breasted Niña and Pinta and Santa Maria / bring the phalli of lances penetrating a jungle / whose vines spread apart to a parrot's primal scream" (58). Don Juan is the right man for the job: he spreads around him the nothingness within him—the nothingness which, he has argued, is only a reflection of that of the chivalry of Spain. Like Polyphemus, he is a zero who turns people into nothings.

It is hard to see this desolate conquistador as a folk hero, as John Thieme does (69-71). It is true that Tirso's title is usually translated as *The Trickster of Seville* and that the trickster is a popular type of West Indian folk hero (Thieme 64); but Walcott's Don Juan is precisely a joker, not a trickster: a wild card that can imitate any of the other cards but has no identity of its own. His frequent claims to represent "a / force, a principle," seem as hollow as his promises to women. As he tells the statue, they are both projections of the desires of others: "I'm as much a vision as / you are. We both don't exist" (142).

Thieme is right to emphasize that the play ends not with Don Juan's damnation but with a new dawn and the promise of a resurrection (71-72). The promise, however, is ambiguous. The resurrection could be that of Don Juan himself, in the form of his victims, who, in the self-hatred he has inflicted on them, will mimic him just as he mimics the self-hatred of the chivalrous society that destroys him. He warns against this prospect, whose mechanism he has every reason to understand:

These slaves assert their heritage,  
 but they despise their origins,  
 so they dress up in the image  
 of courtiers, and bow to a prince,  
 playing at dukes and duchesses.  
 A sad joke, but a sadder lust  
 to curse their masters while they dress  
 like those who grind them in the dust. (91-92)

But the resurrection could also be that of the victims themselves, as themselves, somebodies at last. For Walcott is insistent that the double annihilation embodied in his *Don Juan* and perpetrated in his *West Indies* "must be seen as the beginning, not the end of our history" ("*Muse*" 6).<sup>7</sup> In a memoir of his work with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, he describes what this beginning might be like:

What would deliver [the descendant of slaves] from servitude was the forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, one which finally settled on its own mode of inflection, and which began to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folk-songs and fables. . . . (*Dream* 17)

*The Joker of Seville* suggests this new beginning (on the cultural level) through its exuberant celebration of Trinidadian music, dance, and sports like stick-fighting, and articulates it (on the personal level) through Isabella, who has been doubly victimized, once by *Don Juan* and once by a society that locks her up in a convent for losing her virginity to him:

My agony had made life new  
and endless as the unhindered  
sky when it is a seamless blue. (113; cf. Thieme 70)

One might wonder whether Isabella's skies will remain so cloudless, just as one might wonder whether a whole society can find a new beginning in the experience of genocide and slavery. Walcott himself describes as naive the belief with which he began his work in theatre, that "If there was nothing, there was everything to be made" (*Dream* 4). But the alternative is Naipaul's despair.

## II. The Stone Don in the Opera

Just as Walcott weaves Homeric allusions into his Tirsonian tragedy, he weaves Tirsonian allusions into his Homeric verse novel. The intertextuality of *Omeros* is essentially an extension of the Creolization

of *The Joker of Seville*, but it is so complex that it recalls a remark he made in 1897: “. . . I may have not wanted to be a poet but an anthology, which I don't mind, because I enjoy so many voices that my own is irritating. So what you ask, what leads me from line to line, I *hope*, is any poet who is inhabiting the next letter” (Montenegro 211; see also Walcott, *Dream* 4).

Walcott's remark, if not the very title of his poem, might seem an adequate response to the scolding of Sidney Burris: “Commentators on *Omeros*, then, will understandably busy themselves in tracking down the Homeric parallels in Walcott's poem—after Joyce, there are many practiced hands waiting in the wings—but this seems a particularly ill-fated approach because part of the poem's task, its attempt to recreate the original authenticity of Walcott's Caribbean culture, lies in its deliberate deflation of analogy” (560). But Burris's remark also requires a political answer. One of the legacies of colonial imperialism, Edward Said has argued, is a tendency, on the part both of former colonizers and of former colonial subjects, to think in terms of “reified polarities,” us versus them (41). In trying to restrict Walcott to “the original authenticity of [his] Caribbean culture,” Burris perpetuates those polarities; Walcott, however, is a post-colonial writer who tries to go beyond them by appropriating from European culture what suits his needs rather than simply rejecting it wholesale (Said 30-31). As Walcott puts it, the post-colonial project “did not mean the jettisoning of ‘culture’ but, by the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new” (*Dream* 17).

Walcott's “Homeric parallels” are not, of course, simple or servile imitations, any more than Joyce's are. One of the ways in which Walcott asserts his independence from his Homeric material (as Joyce does) is precisely by the “deliberate deflation of analogy”; another way is by combining it (as Joyce does) with other material, such as allusions to Tirso. Rei Terada describes the effect of such an intertextual strategy: “Difference from one predecessor simultaneously suggests mimicry of another. . . . Connections tend to be confusingly overdetermined” (187). Even more confusingly, the overdetermination works both ways. Just as a single detail in the poem might have more than one source, so a single source might be represented in the poem in more than one way.



As a result, it has become something of a critical commonplace to declare oneself incapable of doing justice to *Omeros* as a whole (e.g., Figueroa 193, 206, 207-08; Livingstone 132; Terada 185); even examining the ways it uses the Don Juan myth (a much smaller and simpler matter than the Homeric one) is a daunting task.

The globe-trotting narrator of *Omeros* is an Odysseus (see 14, 187, 269, 282, 291), as are a number of the other characters; but he is also a Don Juan. When he first enters the poem, he is making love with a Greek woman, who teaches him the modern Greek pronunciation of Homer's name that he will take for his title. What marks this love scene as specifically Don Juanesque rather than as more generally erotic is its spectator, a statue, in fact a marble bust of Omeros himself: "I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as / cold as its marble"; as she undresses for him, he tells Omeros, he feels "that another cold bust, not hers, but yours / saw this with stone almonds for eyes . . ." (14-15). That the woman herself should be associated so insistently with the statue begins to suggest the complexity of Walcott's intertextuality.

That she should be so insistently described as cold suggests (as does her announcement, in the middle of their lovemaking, that she wants to go back to Greece) that the poet is not a very successful lover. One of Walcott's "deliberate deflation[s] of analogy" has been a common feature of the Don Juan myth since Byron, if not since Mozart: ironizing the figure of the irresistible seducer. Later in the poem, a Circean lover turns the poet into a swine (154-55), apparently because she considers him a chauvinist pig. Later still, the poet laments his "abandonment in the war of love" (171). It is not clear how many abandonments the poet has experienced; his very vagueness suggests that they have been numerous. Eventually he finds himself as emptied out as the Joker of Seville (who describes himself to Tisbea as a poet [*Joker* 39]):

All I had gotten I deserved, I now saw this,

and though I had self-contempt for my own deep pain,  
I lay drained in bed, like the same dry carapace  
I had made of others, till my turn came again.

He concludes: "the love I was good at seemed to have been only / the love of my craft and nature" (*Omeros* 241). He has exploited the others, his lovers, drained them to dry carapaces for the sake of his art.

This sexual self-accusation recalls a political one. Returning (like Odysseus) to his island home, the poet wonders whether he has exploited it, like his lovers, for the sake of his art:

Didn't I want the poor  
to stay in the same light so that I could transfix  
them in amber, the afterglow of an empire,

preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks  
to that blue bus-stop? Didn't I prefer a road  
from which tracks climbed into the thickening syntax

of colonial travellers, the measured prose I read  
as a schoolboy? (227; cf. *Dream* 3-4, 14-15, 19)

This particular parallel (between the poet's exploitations of his women and of his home) is an example of a general tendency in Walcott's poetry, a tendency at which I have glanced in his earlier work but which becomes particularly prominent, and particularly problematic, in *Omeros*: the tendency to associate women with landscapes. The identification of the vagina with the grave, to which Fido objects, is actually another example of the same tendency, since a grave is part of the landscape.<sup>8</sup> The poetic-mythological topos of woman-as-landscape is problematic because it belongs both to a sexism as old as Judeo-Christianity and also to a more recent, imperialist tradition: as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, the (typically male) European traveller on the imperial frontier typically thinks of himself as an Adam in a garden which is itself his Eve (57, 168, 176, 193, 213, 217-18).

This topos affects the portrayal of virtually every woman in the poem, and it is crucial in integrating the allusions to Odysseus, who travels from land to land, with those to Don Juan, who travels from woman to woman. All we know, for example, about Antigone,<sup>9</sup> the woman who teaches the poet how to say "Omeros," is that she can speak Greek, that she looks "Asian" (presumably Levantine), that she is homesick for Greece, and that her frothy underwear makes the poet think of her

as an island: "the surf printed its lace in patterns / on the shore of her neck, then the lowering shallows / of silk swirled at her ankles, like surf without noise" (14). When, in a nightmare that forms the visionary climax of the poem, the poet meets Omeros and tells him about Antigone, the first thing Omeros wants to know is what city she came from (284).

The topos is most pronounced in the treatment of Helen, the poem's central female character, the cause of the estrangement of the friends Achille and Hector, as her classical counterpart was the cause of the war between Greece and Troy. At one point or another, most of the other characters recall pointedly that the island of St. Lucia was itself once called Helen. As she washes and dresses for a "blockorama," Achille, her lover, reflects bitterly:

She was selling herself like the island, without  
any pain, and the village did not seem to care

that it was dying in its change, the way it whored  
away a simple life. . . . (111)

Achille is jealous, of course—so brutally jealous that he will, ironically, drive her into the arms of Hector. Hector, however, makes the same association. He used to be a fisherman, like Achille; now he has a more lucrative job as a taxi-driver in Castries, the capital, but he is not sure that the change has been for the better:

Castries was corrupting him with its roaring life,  
its littered market, with too many transport vans  
competing. Castries had been his common-law wife

who, like Helen, he had longed for from a distance,  
and now he had both. . . . (231)

When, after Hector's death (in a taxi crash), Helen returns to Achille, he not only thinks of her womb as Hector's grave (she is carrying Hector's child)<sup>10</sup> but adds: "There, in miniature, / the world was globed like a fruit" (275). Usually Achille's topographical associations are much more specific: he considers moving to another part of the island, "But

he found no cove he liked as much as his own / village, . . . no bay parted its mouth // like Helen under him . . ." (301).

Philoctete, the crippled friend of Achille and Hector, regrets the falling-out between them much as he regrets the social divisions caused by an election campaign; he is thinking of both when he asks himself:

Why couldn't they love the place, same way, together,  
the way he always loved her, even with his sore?  
Love Helen like a wife in good and bad weather,

in sickness and health, its beauty in being poor? (108)

Dennis Plunkett, the lower-class English pig farmer whose attempt to write a military history of the island (complete with Homeric parallels) is a kind of internal parody of *Omeros* itself, somehow feels that he owes his project to Helen's "desolate beauty," which is "so like her island's" (30; see also 64, 93, 96). His Irish wife, Maud (who is herself identified with Ireland [303]), thinks as she watches Helen walk:

Those lissome calves,  
that waist swayed like a palm was her island's weather,

its clouded impulses of doing things by halves,  
lowering her voice to match its muttering waves,  
the deep sigh of night that came from its starlit leaves. (123)

Walcott deploys these associations with some subtlety. When characters close to Helen, like Achille, Hector, and Philoctete, compare her to the island, they at least tend to do so in social and political terms, making her into an example of historical trends affecting all the islanders; the Plunketts, more distant observers, tend to naturalize or aestheticize her. Walcott also draws attention to Maud's racist assumptions about the islanders' laziness (their "clouded impulses of doing things by halves"), and to Plunkett's urge to mystify British and French responsibility for the fighting over the island by assigning it to the island itself (much as Homer might be said to mystify the causes of the Trojan war by blaming it on his Helen):<sup>11</sup> "Helen needed a history. . . . / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war" (30). The Battle of the Saints

(1762), the particular conflict Plunkett has most in mind, was of course precisely "theirs," Britain's and France's, not St. Lucia's.

Walcott also, however, allows his narrator to indulge in the same kind of thinking. In the poet's first encounter with Helen, he naturalizes her heavily, comparing her at length to a panther (36-37). When he is sure that he will never see her again, he thinks of her as "my island lost in the haze" (222). (He also allows her to remain an almost completely opaque character [Terada 190], and the two glimpses he does allow into her consciousness are not encouraging: in the first, his penetration of her consciousness is associated with a stab wound [115]; in the second, with sexual penetration [152-53]. Even on the level of focalization, the poet is identified with Don Juan—and sexuality is identified with violence, as in the first scene of *The Joker of Seville*.) When he laments his "abandonment in the war of love" in the United States, he compares his loss to the Sioux's loss of their land, grieving over "a land that was lost, a woman who was gone" (175); but presumably his woman was not forcibly removed by the Seventh Cavalry.

The poem does sometimes question the identification of woman and landscape. The Arawak name for St. Lucia was Iounalao, "Where the iguana is found" (4); and late in the poem, an iguana which seems, as Terada points out (195), to resent the choice of Helen rather than itself as a symbol of the island, sarcastically recalls Achille's identification of her with the world: "'Were both hemispheres the split breadfruit of / her African ass . . . ?'" (312). Overall, however, the poem seems to endorse the association. In a passage that announces itself as a kind of moral ("this is what this island has meant to you, / why my bust spoke"), Omeros offers the poet an entirely non-problematic identification of the person and the geographical: "'as the sea moves round an island // that appears to be moving, love moves round the heart'" (291).

The Omeros who makes this pronouncement is not, however, himself an unproblematic figure. He is a statue, constantly and mysteriously changing from marble (or plaster) to ebony and back again (279-81; cf. 313). He is, as his first appearance suggests, the statue from the myth of Don Juan (among other things); the poet has already spoken of "immortal statues inviting [him] to die" (183), and, in his nightmare,

"the blind guide" leads him to hell "with a locked marble hand" like the Commendatore leading Don Giovanni offstage at the end of the opera (289).

Throughout the poem, statues are insistently associated with money and power, especially imperial power; the poem's most succinct statement of the meaning of sculpture is that "power / and art [are] the same" (205).<sup>12</sup> Just as insistently, however, the poem undercuts this power, in a repeated gesture which may suggest that the moral pronouncement of the marble/ebony Omeros is an appropriate target for some of Burris's "deliberate deflation." The very statue that proclaims the identity of power and art is decaying, displaying "some Caesar's eaten nose." As Achille rows home from a fishing trip prolonged by a visionary encounter with the slave trade, the poet declares: "an uplifted oar is stronger than marble / Caesar's arresting palm" (159). Prominent among the statues inviting the poet to die is again "glaring insomniac Caesar, for whom death / by marble resolved the conspirator's crisis" (183). When the poet encounters a statue, apparently of some conquistador, on the wharf at Lisbon, he is pleased to observe that nature has treated it with disrespect: its "green-bronze / cloak [is] flecked with white droppings" (192; cf. 204). When he encounters the statues of parliamentarians at Westminster, he topples them in imagination by choosing to look at their reflections inverted in the Thames (196). In the American South, he observes that the legacy of slavery is destroying the public art, "corrupting the blue-veined marble with its disease" (206). On his own visit to the metropolis, Plunkett notices "the ailing / statues of lions" (251); back home in St. Lucia, after the death of his wife, he has a vision of the decline of empire, in which "The statues close their eyes" (262).

In this version of the story, Don Juan, despite his lack of success with women, repeatedly triumphs over the statue. Even in his nightmare, when he thinks that Omeros is taking him to hell, the poet affirms "my own language, the one for which I had died, // . . . not the marble tongue of the bust I sat beside" (287). The two figures, however, tend to be identified. The relics of imperial power in Lisbon are compared to "the stone Don in the opera," not to the stone Commendatore;<sup>13</sup> and as he looks up at the conquistador's statue, the poet draws the same

parallel between sexual and imperial aggression that Walcott suggests in *The Joker of Seville*: "We had no such erections / above our colonial wharves, our erogenous zones / were not drawn to power" (192).<sup>14</sup> Even at the poem's tenderest and apparently least political moments, the lover can turn into the statue.<sup>15</sup> On Long Island Sound, the poet appeals to the (male) reader to recall his first, hesitant adolescent lovemaking, "your palm like a statue's on / your girlfriend's knee" (169). When the heartbroken Plunkett lies down beside the dead Maud, they are like "statues on a stone tomb" (261). He immediately sees his vision of the empire declining and the statues closing their eyes. Omeros's wistful questions about Antigone reveal to the poet that even this impressive marble/ebony vision is another disappointed lover (284).

The identification of Don Juan with the statue implicates the poet (who is, like Walcott himself, part English)<sup>16</sup> in the crimes of empire. So do the poet's identification with Don Juan (a figure of imperial exploitation in *Omeros* as well as in *The Joker of Seville*); his own confessions of exploitation; and, all too convincingly, his use of the topos of woman as landscape. One of the effects of this self-implication is to save the poem from the "rhetoric of blame" that Said sees as characteristic of the reified polarities of imperialism and its aftermath (18). *Omeros* is, in many ways, a very angry poem; but it insists on tempering accusation with self-accusation.

Don Juan's triumph over the statue, then, is a triumph over himself; the poet's nightmarish confrontation with Omeros is a confrontation with himself (Terada 209). Appropriately, the climax of the nightmare is a self-confrontation, one which echoes the poet's earlier self-accusation. Omeros takes the poet to hell—the volcanic springs of Soufrière. There they see "the Pool of Speculation," full of the

... souls who had sold out their race, the ancient forge

of bubbling lead erupted with speculators  
whose heads gurgled in the lava of the Malebolge  
mumbling deals as they rose. These were the traitors

who, in elected office, saw the land as views  
for hotels and elevated into waiters  
the sons of others, while their own learnt something else. (289)<sup>17</sup>

Since these souls have been damned for the political and economic equivalent of the poetic exploitation of which the poet has already accused himself, they try to drag him down to join them. Then Omeros and the poet come to the pit of the poets. The poet feels himself falling into it; "then Omeros gripped / my hand in enclosing marble. . . ." At the same moment, "a fist of ice" grips his other hand: it is the fist of his own damned soul, which also tries to drag him down with it, repeating the accusation of exploitation:

"You tried to render  
their lives as you could, but that is never enough;  
now in the sulphur's stench ask yourself this question,

whether a love of poverty helped you  
to use other eyes, like those of that sightless stone?" (293-94)

The soul's accusation identifies the poet with the statue, as a symbol of imperial exploitation: his "love of poverty" has given him the stony eyes, blind to human misery, which prefer "the poor / to stay in the same light so that [he] could transfix / them in amber, the afterglow of an empire" (227). The soul's gesture identifies itself with the statue as an avenger, dragging Don Juan down to hell. Omeros's saving grip is stronger, and the poet is saved (Figuerola 205). He wakes up.

The point (to put it reductively) seems to be that self-accusation is itself a healing act (in this it differs from the self-hate of *The Joker of Seville*, presumably because it is a self-conscious insight rather than a compulsive repetition); Omeros is a figure both of condemnation and of redemption, both a white statue and a black one; the poet escapes from hell because his soul sinks into it (cf. Terada 207-08). Earlier in the vision, Omeros and the poet have taken turns singing the praises of St. Lucia; the poet's song ends: "'a volcano, stinking with sulphur, / has made it a healing place'" (287). The hell of Soufrière is really purgatorial, not infernal. Its stench of sulphur recalls the sulphurous bath in which Philoctete's wound is finally healed, and similar imagery of healing dominates the end of the poem (see 246-48, 282, 296, 309, 318-19, 323). This healing is meant, I think, to be limited. After all, self-accusation, or even a more general process of self-confrontation or self-realization,



can only go so far in healing the wounds inflicted by history. Despite its much greater length and scope, *Omeros* is finally a more modest work than *The Joker of Seville*. By the end of the poem, Achille, Helen, Philoctete, Plunkett, and the poet have found some measure of personal peace, but the larger issues Walcott has raised remain unresolved. In the very last lines, Achille finishes the day's fishing and goes home to Helen: "When he left the beach the sea was still going on" (325).

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of Part I was presented at the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast Conference, University of Washington, Seattle, 6 November 1993. My thanks are due to the participants (fit audience though few) for their questions and comments.

<sup>2</sup>Although an aristocrat, Don Juan is not a prince. Walcott may be alluding (like Eliot in *The Waste Land* [192, 257]), to the shipwreck of Ferdinand, in *The Tempest*. Ferdinand, however, is a more benign figure than Don Juan, if only because the island on which he finds himself has already been colonized by Prospero.

<sup>3</sup>"[U]seless beauty" may be an allusion to the sonnets in which Shakespeare urges the young man to his "beauty's use," procreation (2.9), and warns him that his "unused beauty" will be buried with him (4.13).

<sup>4</sup>Walcott may be alluding to *As You Like It* (3.2.274-77). Such allusions come easily to a poet with "a mind drenched in Elizabethan literature" (Walcott, *Dream* 11).

<sup>5</sup>Walcott is weaving the end of *Oedipus Rex* into his complex texture of allusions: "let none / Presume on his good fortune until he find / Life, at his death, a memory without pain" (Sophocles 78).

<sup>6</sup>Perhaps an allusion to a more hopeful cipher, "this wooden O," in the Prologue to *Henry V* (13).

<sup>7</sup>Shakespeare's "wooden O" is also the site of a new imaginative beginning, the yet-unattempted flights of his "Muse of fire" (*Henry V*, Pro. 1).

<sup>8</sup>The identification recurs in *Omeros*, though in an elegaic rather than a contemptuous tone: "The sail of her bellying stomach seemed to him / to bear not only the curved child sailing in her / but Hector's mound" (275); and, neutrally, in *The Odyssey*: "The grave we all come from was hidden by a bush" (74). The passage from *Omeros* alludes to Titania's description of how she and her votaress would laugh "to see the sails conceive / And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind," and how the pregnant votaress would imitate them. The Shakespearean passage even anticipates Walcott's deathliness, since the votaress dies giving birth (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.123-37; see Han 17, 54-55).

<sup>9</sup>The allusion to a classical example of female heroism may function as a balance against the morally ambiguous behaviour of Walcott's (and Homer's) Helen.

<sup>10</sup>Helen is not certain of the paternity of her child (34), but the poem seems to modulate towards assuming that it is Hector's, perhaps to grant Hector a measure of immortality.

<sup>11</sup>When, in the poet's nightmare, Omeros sees the masts of the ships assembled for the Battle of the Saints, he staunchly sticks to his version of the story: "This is like Troy / all over. This forest gathering for a face!" (288). In *The Odyssey*, however, Helen insists: "The whole thing was not over me but some sea-tax" (31).

<sup>12</sup>This dictum may be a parody of the famous aphorism from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

<sup>13</sup>Walcott's reference is precise. In Mozart's opera, unlike Tirso's play, the Commendatore is always referred to as the Commendatore (or as Anna's father), never as Don Gonzalo.

<sup>14</sup>In "What the Twilight Says" (1970), however, Walcott confesses to a desire for such potent erections: "There was only one noble ruin in the [West Indian] archipelago: Christophe's massive citadel at La Ferrière [in Haïti]. It was a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach God's height. It was the summit of the slave's emergence from bondage. . . . To put it plainer, it was something we could look up to" (*Dream* 14).

<sup>15</sup>So, as we have seen, can his beloved/victim (see also 219, 313). So (to do justice to the full multivalency of the symbol) can male victims of power, as when Odysseus's overworked and rebellious crew "stare like statues" at him (202).

<sup>16</sup>Omeros's vacillation between marble and ebony may suggest (among other things) the poet's mixed racial and cultural heritage.

<sup>17</sup>Another of Walcott's mythical analogues, of course, is Vergil leading Dante through the Inferno (Figueroa 204, Terada 206). "Malebolge" ("Evil Pouches") is the second-lowest circle of hell, the region of the fraudulent (Dante 18.1n.).

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## Imagining Voices in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*: A Discussion of Recent Studies Concerning Edmund Spenser's Dialogue

JOHN M. BREEN

Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 14 April, 1598.<sup>1</sup> Permission to publish was not granted and the *View* was first published in 1633, edited by Sir James Ware. He edited out material that he considered may reflect pejoratively on Spenser, observing in his preface, "although it sufficiently testifieth his learning and deepe judgement, yet we may wish that in some passages it had bin tempered with more moderation."<sup>2</sup> Implicit to Ware's comment is an association between the views expressed by the fictive characters, Irenius and Eudoxus, and Edmund Spenser. Ware is an early representative of an interpretative community which disregards the generic complexity of the *View* and insists upon positioning Spenser as Irenius, the fictive figure that promotes an uncompromising political solution to England's apparently intractable problems in Ireland.<sup>3</sup> This critical approach to the *View* is reductive as it is inattentive to the author's poetic strategies and the text's generic complexity. I am not suggesting that the political contexts for reading the *View* should be disallowed, but that there is a case for a more complex consideration of the relationships between Renaissance aesthetics and politics.<sup>4</sup> Although I consider Spenser as author of this text, Jean R. Brink in a recent and substantial contribution to *Spenser Studies* questions the authority of attributing the *View* to Spenser.<sup>5</sup> This further undermines the critical practice that automatically assumes that the voices of the *View* are not fictive, but that they provide a direct access to Spenser's views on Ireland. I will argue that dialogue as text is always fictive (that is polysemous) for it registers and modulates voices other than that of the author: as well as an author's adoption of fictive personas, the text

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will inevitably correspond with voices in other texts. It is my intention to provide a review of the various generic approaches which the *View* has engendered and to reappraise the *View's* aesthetic contexts. I will argue that the imagined voices created by Spenser are not deferred to with the appropriate critical respect.

## I

Spenser's *View* has been variously read as autobiography and as a "policy paper."<sup>6</sup> In the half century spanning these polarised readings the *View* has largely been neglected as a subject of critical analysis. Stephen Greenblatt and David Norbrook have both provided radical readings of the *View* that have sought to site the text politically. Greenblatt, situating the text within a colonial context, argues that "the colonial violence inflicted upon the Irish is at the same time the force that fashions the identity of the English"; Norbrook argues that "the 'View . . .' is almost unique amongst Elizabethan political treatises in advocating, not a mere defence and consolidation of the status quo, but radical innovation, a conscious and ruthless process of social transformation," elevating Spenser's status by focusing on his transformative role.<sup>7</sup> However, both Greenblatt and Norbrook pay little regard to Spenser's historiography or his role as poet.<sup>8</sup> Even with the caveats concerning methodological approach, which are to the fore in contemporary critical theory, both critics deploy interpretative strategies that are untenable. Greenblatt claims that Spenser advocates violence when this is an argument given to Ireinius, and Norbrook's subsequent claim that "Spenser and his allies were increasingly bitter because they believed their views were censored and misrepresented by conservative courtiers" is speculative.<sup>9</sup> Norbrook provides no textual evidence to support such categorical claims. These are versions of old historicism: untenable positions are held based on denying Spenser's historical contexts or by invoking, without evidence, a historical context.

Virginia Cox has provided the following salient and sensitive definition that outlines the genre's complexity:

The oral exchange depicted in a dialogue acts as a kind of fictional shadow to the literary transaction between the reader and the text, conveying at least some of the same information, with a similar intent. The relation between the two may be distanced by irony or intimate to the point of symbiosis. But the parallel between them remains: each word, each argument in a written dialogue is simultaneously part of a fictional conversation and an actual literary exchange.<sup>10</sup>

Cox refuses to simplify the role of the speakers: the authentic voice of the author oscillates between absence and presence for the voice of the dramatic character is never wholly conterminous with the voice of the author. Thomas Healy seems to demonstrate an appreciation of the *View's* generic complexity when he calls it "a piece of writing which does not purport to be a fiction . . . yet which uses the generic and rhetorical conventions of literary writing."<sup>11</sup> However, his subsequent comment that Irenius "is Spenser" undermines Healy's new historicist attitude towards Renaissance literature and places him in company with Raymond Jenkins who is categorical: "Irenaeus is not merely Spenser's mouthpiece but . . . he is Spenser and the 'Veue' therefore becomes an autobiographical account of several of the poet's Irish experiences."<sup>12</sup> To read the *View* as autobiography is to marginalise the dynamic relationship between Irenius and Eudoxus and the double-voiced discourse that shifts from authority to subversion: the text promotes Elizabeth's legitimate authority to govern Ireland, but it implicitly questions the political strategies applied by Elizabeth's government.

The new-historicist critics whose readings I have discussed provide a reductive approach that is similarly evident in the work of traditional historians. Ciaran Brady is intent on foregrounding the *View's* ambivalence between "opposing moral and political imperatives":

Far from being a clear and rational statement of some dominant political theory, or of some prevalent ideological disposition, the *View* is riddled with ambiguity. It has defeated all attempts to identify it as a contribution to English political thought concerning Ireland because it is itself a symptom of a profound crisis in the English experience of that country.<sup>13</sup>

According to Brady there is a dilemma between the moral and the political embedded in the text. Although he locates the *View's* ambiguity

as emerging out of Renaissance culture, he appears to be unaware that he may be projecting his reading of "crisis" on to the text. Brady's provocative reading of the *View* is itself ambiguous as it shifts between the intellectually insightful ("Its subtly occlusive polemic, moreover, renders it entirely unsuitable for use, as so many historians have used it, as a cache of interesting descriptions and observations concerning the state of Ireland") and the intellectually naive ("Hitherto Spenser had sought merely to inspire his world, but now the point was to change it").<sup>14</sup> Hostile to Nicholas Canny's opinion that the *View* was a kind of consensus report for the dissatisfied New English, Brady claims that it is an "ethical defence of brutality."<sup>15</sup> The root of Brady's analysis is that "cultural trauma" was the "necessary precondition to all social and political reform"; he emphasises Spenser's need to promote intellectual and moral argument so that killing would be justified in terms of the "highest humanist discourse"—as if Spenser was anxious about the reception of his ideas and, more pertinently, that Spenser was Irenius.<sup>16</sup> Brady concludes that the *View* is incoherent, unsatisfactory and fails as a "contribution to English political thought concerning Ireland." Spenser, as geographically border-line and symbolically central, deploys both the voices of the poet-historical and historiographer in his characters Irenius and Eudoxus. The paradox of self-promotion and self-effacement that emerges from Spenser's position, and is a typical Spenserian poetic strategy (see especially "The Shepherd's Calendar"), seems to have escaped Brady.

In contrast to Brady's concern with "crisis," Canny promotes a pragmatic reading:

Spenser's *View*, composed in 1596, has long been accepted as a fundamental contribution to the theory of colonization, but it has not been adequately appreciated as a political text because commentators have at once exaggerated and diminished its originality . . . . When Spenser's *View* is analysed in this fashion it immediately becomes evident that it was a tract designed to serve the interests of those engaged upon the conquest and colonization of Ireland at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

There is little "immediately evident" in the *View* and Canny seems to be positioning himself perilously close to Renwick who saw the *View*

as "a political document of practical and immediate intention."<sup>18</sup> In the same way that Eudoxus would like to see the Irish reduced to civility, so too would Canny like to see the *View* reduced to coherency. This is revealing of Canny's methodology. Commenting on the differences between historians and literary critics, he has argued that "the most striking difference is that literary scholars devote almost exclusive attention to the text itself and seek to ascertain the author's meaning from the drift of argument and, when that fails them, from the form of the texts. Historians also devote attention to the text but they always reach beyond it for other evidence which will assist them in determining the purpose of the author."<sup>19</sup> This insistence upon distinguishing between methodologies of historians and literary critics is no longer tenable and is indicative of Canny's insistence upon classification, evident in his certainty in his treatment of the *View*.

Canny's argument is grounded in colonisation and politics; conversely, Brendan Bradshaw's argument is grounded in making Spenser coherent by reference to "Protestant moral theology."<sup>20</sup> Bradshaw emphasises that the text belongs to the genre of religious reform literature, that Spenser's *View* finds its "intellectual source in his Protestant world-view."<sup>21</sup> This ignores the broader influences and concerns of the Renaissance poet, which become apparent when one considers the aesthetic form of the *View*.

Greenblatt, Norbrook, Healy and Canny focus on the political, Brady and Bradshaw on the moral and the ethical. This lack of sensitivity to the contexts of the moment of cultural production, which is a failure to investigate aesthetic form, produces political readings that separate art from politics. According to Louis Montrose this is a dubious practice:

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the separation of "Literature" and "Art" from explicitly didactic and political discourses or from such disciplines as history or moral and natural philosophy was as yet incipient.<sup>22</sup>

The generic category of the *View* incorporates both art and politics: it can be read as both cultural icon and colonialist text, pronounced in the way it, in part, imitates the representational mode of Tudor Cartography.<sup>23</sup> It is a reformist text and thus dynamic, and it is a



staging of the self by Spenser, made coherent by keeping the political and the artistic simultaneously in focus. Having indicated that the *View* is generically diffuse and fashioned for aesthetic as well as material ends, I now intend to reorientate Spenser's *View*, by placing it in the context of Renaissance dialogue and historiography.

## II

The dialogue between Spenser's Irenius and Eudoxus is designed to complicate the authorial responsibility for what is spoken. Similarly, More in *Utopia* (1516) and Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly* (1511) deploy speech in the guise of another figure, the rhetorical trope *prosopopeia*. Dialogue is a standard humanist formal device deployed to disguise the speaking voice, what George Puttenham names as the "Aporia, or the Doubtfull," and this allows a speaker to articulate a number of different perspectives without aligning himself to any of them; thus, authorial responsibility is ambiguous.<sup>24</sup> The author's voice is always refracted through that of a fictive polyvalent speaker. The difficulty encountered in reading the genre of the *View* is itself a response to the generic complexity of dialogue.

In *Utopia*, the shifting presence of the author (who is vicariously present as narrator, Hythloday and Morus), provokes Erasmus, I would argue, to suggest that the *Utopia* exhibits "some inequality in the style."<sup>25</sup> Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly* similarly revels in the generic complexity of dialogue. When Erasmus claims that it is "Folly who speaks," the responsibility for the seditious voice becomes ambiguous.<sup>26</sup> The indeterminacy of the speaking voice is exploited by Erasmus who delights in the opportunity to deploy a free voice (*liber-vox*) during Folly's critique. Spenser similarly demonstrates a playful delight in the perception that readers outside the dialogue, beyond the boundaries of the text, are being addressed:

*Eudoxus*: Is it possible, take heed what yow say, *Irenius*:

*Irenius*: To yow onelye *Eudoxus*: I doe tell yt. (117)

*Irenius*: I will vnto yow *Eudoxus*: In privitie discover the drifte of my purpose  
I meane (as I tould yow) and doe well hope hereby both to settle an eternall  
peace in that Countrie. (181)

For Spenser, as for More and Erasmus, the author oscillates between engagement and disassociation. There is no opportunity for the critic to categorically define *Irenius* as Spenser.

Patricia Coughlan claims that Spenser chose a genre with such “strong classical and humanist associations of civility and urbane philosophical reflection” so as to promote the sense of learning and to demonstrate the efficacy of argument.<sup>27</sup> This could be substantiated by *Irenius*’ claim that “learninge hath that wonderfull power of yt self that yt can soften and temper the most stearne and salvage nature” (205).<sup>28</sup> Coughlan is sensitive to the aesthetic tradition in which Spenser wrote, arguing

for a fuller awareness of the fictive mode of existence of the *View*, and against the treatment of it as an expository document, viewing Spenser’s, and by implication all writing, as simultaneously textual and political, fictive and discursive, and of refusing any disjunction between the realms of symbolic representation and social practice.<sup>29</sup>

Coughlan’s refusal to reductively classify Spenser’s *View* invites a broader consideration of the text’s aesthetic as well as political contexts. Similar to Coughlan, Renwick in his edition of the *View* also points towards the classical tradition of dialogue:

It was convenient for his purpose, and well understood among men trained on Cicero. Spenser was a man of letters, and would adopt it as naturally as he adopted pastoral and epic. (239)

This is a promising beginning; unfortunately, Renwick fails to provide any analysis and is, if anything, opaque in his interpretation. Coughlan directs us towards Spenser’s sustained references to Lucian, a classical writer who used dialogue to humorous effect, a writer who “merges the dialogue form with more frankly fictive genres, such as the imaginary or otherworld journey, and the description of the ideal state.”<sup>30</sup> The Lucian text that Coughlan claims is structural to Spenser’s *View* is the

*Toxaris* and she adds that "Erasmus and Thomas More both practised their Greek and their literary skills in making Latin versions of it" (64). Although Lucian is an influential figure, Renaissance commentators on poetics also shaped Spenser's *View*.

The poet's capacity to invent commonwealths, as depicted in More's *Utopia*, is a characteristic of the age. Thomas Lodge argued in his *Defense of Poetry* (1579) that "the framing of common welthes, and defence therof, proceedeth from poets."<sup>31</sup> In the *View* we find that Eudoxus praises Irenius for "that perfect establishment and newe common wealth which ye haue Conceyved" (156). Both Irenius and Eudoxus bear traces of Spenser's voice as they map out a geographical and intellectual landscape; Spenser is the authority removed from the text as Erasmus was in *The Praise of Folly* and More in *Utopia*. Sidney, who stressed the poet's inventive capacity, provides us with penetrating insight into Spenser's methodology. Sidney claims that Plato was a poet because of his deployment of "Dialogues":

And truly even Plato whosoever well considereth shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were Philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most of Poetry: for all standeth upon dialogues wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters, that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them.<sup>32</sup>

Sidney suggests that dialogue is an indeterminate genre as to feign a speaker is a poetic strategy that belongs to discourses other than the poetical. The play of voice styles and tones, and thus the significance of the content, is misread if Spenser is categorically determined as Irenius. Cox's observation that "dialogue is simultaneously part of a fictional conversation and an actual literary exchange" should always be kept in focus.

The relationship between content and aesthetic form is, in part, historically determined. Eudoxus functions as a representative of Spenser's intended audience, primarily the Elizabethan government whom Irenius is intent on persuading that English policy towards Ireland needs changing. Thomas Wilson in the "Epistle" to his *Arte of Rhetorique* (1560) comments on the ability of rhetoric to negotiate political advantage and declares that the pleasures of language can even outdo in impact

the effect achieved by violence: "For if the worthinesse of Eloquence maie mooue vs, what worthier thing can there bee, then with a word to winne Cities and whole Countries? If profite maie perswade, what greater gaine can we haue, then without bloudshed achiue to a Conquest?"<sup>33</sup> This debate about the aesthetic (humanist persuasion) and the material (martial strength), which in part foregrounds the tension between the rhetorical and the empirical, has implications for Spenser's historiography.

### III

Frank Covington surveyed Spenser's use of Irish history in the *View* and concluded that Spenser's sources were eclectic. Further,

We find that he employs Irish history in the *View* in three ways, more exactly, in connection with three divisions of his discussion: as explanation of existing conditions in Ireland, as justification for English policies in Ireland, and as support for his own theories.<sup>34</sup>

To explain, to justify and to persuade—these considerations inform Spenser's use of Irish history and his deployment of dialogue. What emerges from Covington's survey is insight into Spenser methodology. Covington claims that Spenser used more than one authority in a single passage by conflating stories; he also argues that Spenser was "careless," "misread," "relied on memory" and was "uncritical." This criticism may be valid for a contemporary historian but it ignores Spenser's role as a poet-historical who is inventive as he "faineth" a commonwealth. Michael O'Connell calls the *View* a "fusion of legend and history, fact and fiction."<sup>35</sup> Wyman Herendeen argues that

At the end of the sixteenth century, poets (historical or otherwise) had to reconcile Tudor myth to the generic requirements of history, and in the process had to make specific decisions about genre, and larger ones about the nature of poetry and writing.<sup>36</sup>

Spenser's attitude towards Tudor myth may be revealing. David Lee Miller observes that in the *View* Spenser demonstrated a sceptical attitude towards Tudor myth, specifically that concerning the tale of Brutus, that "Spenser practised a historiography that was modern for its time."<sup>37</sup> In the *View* Irenius appears to cast doubt upon the authenticity of the story concerning Britain's mythic origins:

our wayne Englyshemen doe in the tale of Brutus, whome they devise to haue firste conquered and inhabited this lande, it beeinge as impossible to prove that ther euer was anie suche Brutus of Albanye, as it is, that ther anie suche Gathelus of Spaine. (261)<sup>38</sup>

However, it would be rash to suggest that, based on Irenius' comment, Spenser did not believe in the Brutus myth's romantic and nationalistic import. Spenser belonged to a historiographical school governed by poetry, not empiricism, and described his meaning in *The Faerie Queene* as "clowdily enwrapped in Allegorical deuises."<sup>39</sup>

Spenser's strategy of arbitrarily sliding between the roles of historiographer and poet historical, his methodological double-voice, is grounded in Renaissance poetics. This I intend to demonstrate by, principally, reference to Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) and George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). When Spenser in his letter to Raleigh concerning *The Faerie Queene* writes of the "Poet historical," he is assigning a role of historian, of chronicler, to the poet.<sup>40</sup> This is not to be confused with the historiographer who is not a poet:

For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the midst, euen where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the thinges forepaste, and diuining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all.

This distinction between "Historiographer" and "Poet historical" is a commonplace in Elizabethan poetics. The "Poet historical" is perceived as possessing a superior status; he is according to Sidney, "monarch" and according to Spenser aspires to a "kingdome of oure owne

Language"; thus, the "historiographer" is portrayed as an empiricist and the "Poet historical" as a rhetorician.<sup>41</sup>

Puttenham claims that for the "Poesie historical" (39) there are histories of "three sortes: wholly true and wholly false, and a third holding part of either" (41). Puttenham eschews the truth category of feigned examples, as does Sidney who argues that "for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (123). For Sidney the poet is the bearer of the "fore-conceit," the "*Idea*" (101). A consequence of this is that the poet has the responsibility to give form to the abstract—to imagine and to invent so that narrative becomes the "imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention" (124). History is remembered by a process of "Mimesis":

a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speake metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight. (101)

The role of the poet as "representing" and "counterfeiting" arising from the poet's role as "imitator" is similarly endorsed by Puttenham—"both a maker and a counterfaior" (3). Spenser adopts voices that are different in tone and character to that of the (empirical) historiographer.

#### IV

It is naive and methodologically flawed to treat the opinions expressed by Irenius and Eudoxus as simply belonging to Edmund Spenser. I have argued for placing Spenser's *View* in the context of Renaissance dialogue and historiography so as to demonstrate the generic complexity of the *View*. My critique of the various writers on the *View*, with notable exceptions, demonstrates a failure to read the *View* within its generic as well as political contexts. I accept that the choice of genre is a political event, but this choice can only be adequately appreciated by situating the *View* among the multiple forms of writing which circulated within the Renaissance. The imaginary voices which Edmund Spenser created are overlooked by critics who imagine that they hear Spenser's voice,

loud and clear, whilst Spenser's "I" elides (is never fully present) as he scans his intellectual landscape and projects his symbolically central aesthetic vision.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All references are from W. L. Renwick's edition of *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), hereafter referred to as the *View*. The *View*, argues Renwick, was probably written by 1596 (224).

<sup>2</sup>*The Historie of Ireland* (Dublin, 1633; STC 25067a).

<sup>3</sup>For a full bibliography on Spenser and Ireland see Willy Maley, "Spenser and Ireland: A Select Bibliography," *SSt* 9 (1988): 227-42. For an account of how the *View* was received in the seventeenth century see Willy Maley, "How Milton and some contemporaries read Spenser's *View*," *Representing Ireland*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 191-208.

<sup>4</sup>For a recent consideration of the political character of the *View*, see A. D. Hadfield, "The Course of Justice: Spenser, Ireland and Political Discourse," *SN* 65 (1993): 187-96, and "Spenser, Ireland, and Sixteenth-Century Political Theory," *MLR* 89 (1994): 1-18.

<sup>5</sup>"Constructing the *View of the Present State of Ireland*," *SSt* 11 (1994): 203-28.

<sup>6</sup>Raymond Jenkins, "Spenser with Lord Grey in Ireland," *PMLA* 52 (1937): 338-53; Clark Hulse, "Spenser, Bacon, and the Myth of Power," *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 315-46.

<sup>7</sup>Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 87-88; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1984) 155.

<sup>8</sup>For a recent account of British historiography in the early modern period and its relationship to Spenser's *View*, see A. D. Hadfield, "Briton and Scythian: Tudor representations of Irish origins," *Irish Historical Studies* 28 (1993): 390-408.

<sup>9</sup>Norbrook 15.

<sup>10</sup>*The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary Dialogue in its Social and Political Contexts, Castiglione to Galileo* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 7. See also on dialogue, Katherine Wilson, *Incomplete Fictions: The Formation of English Renaissance Dialogue* (Washington, DC: Catholic UP, 1985).

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Healy, *New Latitudes: Theory and English Renaissance Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992) 84. Healy's comment on "literary writings" is a tautology. According to Raymond Williams, in the Renaissance *literature* referred to "a condition of reading," for "in its modern form the concept of 'literature' did not emerge earlier

than the eighteenth century and was not fully developed until the nineteenth century" (*Marxism and Literature* [Oxford: OUP, 1977] 46).

<sup>12</sup>Healy 8; Jenkins 2.

<sup>13</sup>Ciaran Brady, "Spenser's Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s," *Past and Present* 111 (1986): 33.

<sup>14</sup>Brady 49, 47.

<sup>15</sup>Canny had claimed that the *View* was "a consensus report of the ruthless and frightened New English," "Edmund Spenser and the Development of an Anglo-Irish Identity," *YES* 13 (1983): 1.

<sup>16</sup>Brady 18, 30, 38.

<sup>17</sup>Canny 1-2.

<sup>18</sup>The historiography of Renwick's edition of the *View* has been criticised at length by Roland M. Smith, "Spenser, Holinshed, and *The Leabhar Gabhála*," *JEGP* 43 (1944): 390-401. Smith maintains that this edition is "inadequate and misleading in many respects, [and] is perhaps least satisfactory in its remarks upon Spenser's sources . . . Renwick's notes, which frequently hinder the reader instead of helping him, are woefully lacking in documentation. His references to Buchanan are to the 1582 edition; those to Camden's *Brittania* are unfortunately to Holinshed's English translation of 1610, when Spenser had been dead for more than ten years! . . . Similar editorial defects appear on almost every page of Renwick's commentary" (391).

<sup>19</sup>Nicholas Canny, "Introduction: Spenser and the Reform of Ireland," *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Patricia Coughlan (Cork: Cork UP, 1989) 10.

<sup>20</sup>Brendan Bradshaw, "The Elizabethans and the Irish: A Muddled Model," *Studies* 70 (1981): 242.

<sup>21</sup>Brendan Bradshaw, "Edmund Spenser on Justice and Mercy," *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, ed. Tom Dunne (Cork: Cork UP, 1987) 78.

<sup>22</sup>Louis Montrose, "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History," *ELR* 15 (1986): 12.

<sup>23</sup>See John Breen, "The Empirical Eye: Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*," *The Irish Review* (forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup>*The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: CUP, 1936) 226.

<sup>25</sup>Cited in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965) xv.

<sup>26</sup>*The Praise of Folly*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 1.

<sup>27</sup>Patricia Coughlan, "Some Secret Scourge which Shall by Her come unto England": Ireland and Incivility in Spenser," *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Patricia Coughlan (Cork: Cork UP, 1989) 47.

<sup>28</sup>This is an echo of Eudoxus' earlier allusion to Ovid: "Emollit mores nec sinit esse feros" (53), [learning] softens manners, nor suffers them to be wild.

<sup>29</sup>Coughlan 71.

<sup>30</sup>Coughlan 65. Lucian is, according to Cox, "the most unequivocally fictitious" writer of dialogue (10); also John Manning argues for Spenser's familiarity with Lucian's *Amores* by reference to the *Faerie Queene* IV.x.40.3-6 ("Spenser and Lucian," *N&Q* 34 [1987]: 201-02).



<sup>31</sup>G. Gregory Smith, ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904) 1: 77.

<sup>32</sup>Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1965) 97. Hereafter *An Apology*. All quotations from *An Apology* are from this edition.

<sup>33</sup>G. H. Mair, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909) A.ij.

<sup>34</sup>Frank F. Covington, Jr., "Spenser's Use of Irish History in *The Veue of the Present State of Ireland*," *Texas Studies* 37 (1924): 25.

<sup>35</sup>Michael O'Connell, "History and the Poet's Golden World: The Epic Catalogues in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELR* 4 (1974): 258.

<sup>36</sup>Wyman H. Herendeen, "Wanton Discourse and the Engines of Time: William Camden—Historian among Poets—Historical," *Renaissance Rereadings: Intertext and Context*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Anne J. Cruz, and Wendy A. Furman (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988) 144.

<sup>37</sup>*The Poems Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 197.

<sup>38</sup>Renwick includes this passage in the commentary to his edition, prefaced by the following remarks: "The MS in the Public Record Office (*S.P.Tr.* 202. pt. 4.58) contains a version of the historical disquisition varying so considerably from that found in the other texts that I append it here" (258).

<sup>39</sup>For an insightful account of Spenser's deployment of secrecy see Richard Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 3: "Secrecy circulates through and traverses nearly all of Spenser's texts, and it provides the deep structure of those texts."

<sup>40</sup>"A letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke [*The Faerie Queene*]," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1980) 738. Raleigh's letter is dated 23 January, 1589. It is appended to the first edition of the *Faerie Queene* (1590) and included in the second edition (1596) which added Books IV-VI.

<sup>41</sup>This quotation, which reads in full, "For why, a Gods name, may not we, as else the Greekes, haue the kingdome of oure owne Language," is from a Spenser letter to Gabriel Harvey reprinted in G. Gregory Smith, 1: 99. Richard Helgerson provides a stimulating analysis of the multiple interpretations which can be attached to this comment in *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 19-62.

## A Response to Debra Fried\*

JUDITH DUNDAS

Debra Fried has nicely supplemented what I said in my article. As a matter of fact, I have since explored a little more fully the idea that in *The Temple* Herbert followed the old "etymological" rule that words related in sound must be related in meaning.<sup>1</sup> The very fact that this relationship is often obscured, especially in Herbert's poetry, sets up a subliminal echo that moves the reader to contemplate a mystery or paradox. This is why Aristotle links puns and metaphors as both having an element of riddle,<sup>2</sup> which in turn incites the reader or listener to an act of learning. I not for a moment imagine that Herbert adhered strictly to a mystical theory of language, but, as Debra Fried points out, poets have always posited the notion that there is wisdom in the sounds of words quite apart from their ordinary denotative meaning. Rhyme and reason can go their separate ways, as nursery rhymes remind us, but in a poem like "The Rose," Herbert seems to set rhyme above reason. In his case, the pleasures of pattern are validated by the pleasure of a perceived higher meaning: "A verse may find him that a sermon flies, / And turn delight into a sacrifice."<sup>3</sup> There is something equivocal in this linking of words that share a syllable, like a visible demonstration that one thing may turn into another—a linguistic anamorphosis.

In exploring the subject of Sidney's puns in more detail,<sup>4</sup> I have found that in his secular writings he makes use of the same fiction that Herbert does: that paronomastic relationships constitute a pattern of significance and can therefore serve to represent the truth of human experience. It is not only the contrarities of love that may be encompassed in this

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\*Reference: Debra Fried, "A Response to Judith Dundas, 'Paronomasia in the Quip Modest,'" *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 115-17.

quasi-oxymoronic way but the whole human condition in which apparent opposites are joined at a level too deep for analysis. Instead of producing an idle "jingle of words," as Sidney's use of syllabic repetition has been called,<sup>5</sup> the *Arcadia* demonstrates the union of rhetorical elegance and experiential truth. To give one example that will suggest a similarity to Herbert's practice, a sentence that appears in one of the singing matches of the *Arcadia* says: "The heart well set doth never *shun* confession." The words "shun" and "confession" point to an opposition of meaning, but a possible resolution is indicated in the echo of a syllable. That is to say, "The heart well set" bows to the necessity implied by the verbal repetition. The verbal pattern, indeed, suggests no less than an act of conversion, secular though the context is.

It is apparent that Sidney's statements are couched in terms compatible with the humanistic tradition of rational argument. His echo poem (sung by Philisides in the *Old Arcadia*), like Herbert's "Heaven," uses the figure of Echo as a teller of truth, but Sidney keeps his eye on the good life in this world. It is only in the translations of the Psalms that he moves into the anagogical use of *paronomasia*. In the *Arcadia*, as in *Astrophil and Stella*, one word answers another in the humanly ethical sphere, with little reference to the greater riddle of the spiritual life.

Debra Fried asks, "How can one reason in a world where 'raise' sounds just like 'raze'?" Perhaps the answer lies in the wit that is so much wiser than discursive reason. These poets delight in paradox, "the Wondrer," as Puttenham calls it,<sup>6</sup> that gives a double perspective. *Paronomasia* equivocates in order to suggest the truly "univocal" meaning, like the "grass" and "grace" of Herbert's poem "Grace." But even if the figure is not necessarily religious in its nicknaming, it represents, in its more serious use, a counter-intelligence designed to find out and bring to light the unacknowledged other half of our experience.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Judith Dundas, "George Herbert and Divine Paronomasia," forthcoming in *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Richard Todd, and Alasdair Macdonald (Amsterdam: VU University P, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>*The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932) 3.11, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>"The Church-porch" 5-6.

<sup>4</sup>"A Light and Illuding form': Sidney's Use of Puns," paper read at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Toronto, October 27-29, 1994.

<sup>5</sup>J. W. H. Atkins, "Elizabethan Prose Fiction," *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, vol. 3 (Cambridge: CUP, 1930) 354.

<sup>6</sup>George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: CUP, 1936) 226.

Tom Jones and the "Clare-obscure":  
A Response to Andrew Varney, Bernard Harrison,  
and Lothar Černý\*

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*Connotations* 3.2 sees an intriguing juxtaposition of two articles. In one, Bernard Harrison suggests that a major merit of Fielding's *Tom Jones* is that it takes issue with a commonplace eighteenth-century opposition between "Principle and Appetite" (154), and so counters a pervasive philosophical culture of systems of fixed, dualistic "conceptual oppositions" (161)—Good/Evil, Reason/Passion, and so on—in favour of a more flexible, dynamic and challenging moral universe. In crucial episodes "appetite wields the sceptre of Principle, passion turns out to lie at the heart of goodness" (162). Readers are encouraged to revise their mental maps in the light of Fielding's radical course in moral orienteering, with the novel's ironies, paradoxes and deceptions stimulating them to be "sufficiently intelligent and candid" (168) to recognize that their habitual cultural assumptions are under review. Harrison uses this argument to attempt a partial rehabilitation of Wolfgang Iser's readings of Fielding. This seems curious, in that Iser's readings are distinguished by an inveterate reliance on dualistic forms, whether this be the "polarity" of the two elements of Abraham Adam's name, the "two negative poles" of Adam's behaviour versus that of the world, "two sides of a contrast"<sup>1</sup> in Book V, chapter i, Fielding's disquisition on his

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\*Reference: Lothar Černý, "Reader Participation and Rationalism in Fielding's *Tom Jones*," *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 137-62; Brean S. Hammond, "'Mind the Gap': A Comment on Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 72-78; Andrew Varney, "Brightness and Beauty, Taste and Relish: Advertising and Vindicating Eighteenth-Century Novels," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 133-46; Bernard Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks in Fielding: A Response to Černý, Hammond, and Hudson," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 147-72; Lothar Černý, "'But the poet . . . never affirmeth': A Reply to Bernard Harrison," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 312-17.

"new Vein" of "Contrast,"<sup>2</sup> or many others. "*Tertium non datur*," as Lothar Černy remarks laconically, "didacticism or vacant spaces" (2.2: 143). Iser's only third or modifying term is the imagination of the reader, which is why he seems to me incapable of conveying the sense of flexibility for which Harrison wants to argue.

But in the preceding article Andrew Varney describes the same period in wholly different terms. He brings forward an array of examples of early eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse, and of material prefatory to fictional and factual narratives, in order to show that such discourses negotiate freely between apparently opposed categories such as moral and appetitive, didactic and sensational, factual and romantic. Even Robert Hooke, Secretary to the Royal Society, is not above advertising Robert Knox's informative tome *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* (1681) in terms of the transporting "rapture of the reading experience" (136). Readers and writers of fiction collude knowingly in a sophisticated game in which the audience agrees to pretend to be persuaded by protestations of moral beauty which legitimate the more basic, tastier pleasures—savory and unsavory—of the texts. Varney caps his argument by noting how Fielding "sardonically unpicks" this "collaborative tissue" (143) woven by previous readers and writers, by reworking the metaphor of taste in the first chapter of *Tom Jones*, where the reader's appetite for the story and the subject is made to sound almost as voracious as, later, does that gross appetite "commonly called Love" (1: 270).

Harrison's Fielding wants to teach, to present a case. Varney's is a bully, and wants the reader to share his own rather scathing attitudes. One wishes to rework dualisms creatively, the other to satirize others' casual or hypocritical manipulations of such dualisms. And unlike Harrison's good reader of the novel, Varney's is merely "complicit and ductile" (145), like Ian Bell's account of John Preston's "deferential, remarkably passive" reader, who is intelligent only insofar as he or she is alert to the sense that they will be "led by the nose"<sup>3</sup> through the novel's shifting codes and systems, towards whatever gap, stumbling-block or ha-ha, or up whatever garden path the author has in mind. "To reject irony is uncool, and to miss it is worse" (145). One wonders what Iser, whose readings of Fielding's higher ironies are often, to quote Brean Hammond, "touchingly naïve" (3.1: 72), would have to say to this.

Two different Fieldings, two different visions of the eighteenth century. The editors of *Connotations* 3.2 were clearly trying to turn the number into an imaginative fiction by creating an Iserian "gap" between the two articles and inviting readers to transform the resulting metatext into an "aesthetic object" by filling in the gap with their own version of the unwritten truth that might lie between. Or perhaps, as Imlac says, "inconsistencies cannot both be right, but . . . may both be true,"<sup>4</sup> especially where a mind as unusual as Fielding's is concerned.

There are two preliminary questions. How can both these visions of the nature of eighteenth-century thought be true? And how can Fielding subscribe to or embody both of them? As regards the first, one might point out that Harrison's description of Fielding's method is reminiscent of Cassirer's initial description of Enlightenment thought in general, at the start of *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*:

[it] again and again breaks through the rigid barriers of system and tries, especially among its greatest minds, to escape this strict systematic discipline.<sup>5</sup>

This hint might be taken further: suffice it to say that Harrison's account of the wider eighteenth century may be contestable beyond a certain point. Varney's scenario, if pushed further, would yield a two-fold conclusion; firstly, that early eighteenth-century advertisers and readers of fiction were pre-empting some aspects of this intellectual revolution by practising and favouring discourses that negotiated subtly between categories which were, to culturally normative moral thought, dualistically opposed; and secondly, that Fielding had reservations about such free negotiations. All this may be true, although it is possible to scale down the first part of that conclusion, because Varney is dealing with a different kind of discourse. As far as reading of or attitude to *Tom Jones* is concerned, this turns out to be the main point of difference between the two positions.

Both Varney and Harrison assume that Fielding makes readers engage with patterns of thought inherited from some aspect of their cultural heritage. Harrison's assumption is that in *Tom Jones* such "fore-understandings" (163) derive mainly from the discourse of moral philosophy (Lothar Černý questions Fielding's rationalism from a similar

general premise in *Connotations* 2.2, while he makes clear in 3.3 that engagement with philosophical language does not make Fielding a moral philosopher). Varney's answer, though he does not argue the case through, would be that such patterns also derive from the separate but related discourses of aesthetics, taste, and competing attitudes to the nature and function of literature. These and moral philosophy are not mutually exclusive categories of discourse—literary criticism is moral criticism, in this period, and moral philosophy is also often social philosophy—but their emphases and characteristic modes of expression and tones of voice differ, and readers would have identified and listened to them in different ways. It would be useful, in dealing with the still vexed questions concerning Fielding and his readers, to have as full a sense as possible of what those readers would have felt to be the origins and areas of association of his fictional modes of address. There is also the possibility that the two cases above do not exhaust the options: Černý's assertion in 3.3 that Fielding is more like a *poet* than a philosopher is arresting, and will be worth pursuing.

The well at the bottom of which the truth is hiding is, I suspect, on the border between Varney's broader cultural plain and Černý/Harrison's loftier philosophical hills, with the water in it tending, as water should, to the lower level. To test this supposition, I wish briefly to re-examine Book V, chapter i of *Tom Jones*, which treats of the split between serious prefatory chapters and comic history in terms of darkness and its opposite, light, and which raises the question of the relations between philosophical and aesthetic discourses in a particularly striking way. It is also valuable because it deals explicitly with dualisms, day/night, comic/serious and light/darkness, and because it is one of the chapters relating to the question of the "sagacious reader" (XI.ix and elsewhere) which have emerged by consensus as cruxes in this debate. Properly so, as the sagacity or otherwise of the reader reflects on a historiographical level two of the central difficult abstractions of the novel as history, that "true Wisdom" of which Allworthy is said to be a "Pattern" (1: 282) and the dullness, "Darkness" (1: 214) and folly which are, or should be, its opposites. But there is the second preliminary point, to consider: does Fielding characteristically express himself in such a



way as to reflect both of the incompatible attitudes to conceptual categories suggested by Varney and Harrison, and if so how?

He does. A main feature of his mind is that when dealing with the languages of taste, criticism, aesthetics and literature he tends to think differently to the way he thinks when dealing with other matters, public, professional and documentary. This will have implications for the highly mixed discourse of *Tom Jones*, but it seems wise first to illustrate these differences with reference to Fielding more widely.

On the one hand, it is easy to find Fielding passing critical comments that seem to reflect caustically on some of Varney's earlier examples and hence tend to validate his approach to *Tom Jones*. The example of Robert Hooke, for instance, calls to mind Fielding's mordant procedure in Volume Two of the *Miscellanies*, where the "editor" tells us that the stationer who found the manuscript of the fabulous *Journey from This World to the Next* had offered it to, among others, the Royal Society, but that "they shook their heads, saying, there was nothing in it wonderful enough for them."<sup>6</sup> The most notable example of Fielding's taking issue with what he finds to be a dubious conflation of imaginative excitement and moralism in the reading of fiction is his incorporation, in Parson Tickletext's encomium of *Pamela* at the start of *Shamela*, of parts of the commendatory letters included in the first and second editions of Richardson's novel. Only very brief effusions from the ductile Tickletext are required in order to create the ironizing context:

"The Author hath reconciled the *pleasing* to the *proper*; the Thought is every where exactly clothed by the Expression; and becomes its Dress as *roundly* and as close as *Pamela* her Country Habit; or as *she doth her no Habit*, when modest Beauty seeks to hide itself, by casting off the Pride of Ornament, and displays itself without any Covering" . . .—Oh! I feel an Emotion even while I am relating this: Methinks I see *Pamela* at this Instant, with all the Pride of Ornament cast off.<sup>7</sup>

One would think from this that Fielding would systematically disdain making effects that relied on insouciant marriages of moralism and salacious enticement, but a reading of his pamphlet *The Female Husband; or, The Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, alias Mr. George Hamilton*, written as he was engaged on *Tom Jones*, would dispel such an idea. The

pamphlet records and dramatizes the sensational career, trial and punishment of the golddigging Methodist lesbian Mary Hamilton, who had managed a creative enough subversion of a supposedly fundamental dualism (man/woman) by marrying, bedding and acquiring the assets of more than a dozen "wives" under her alias. As Donald Thomas says, it is a classic of its kind, "praise of 'virtue and religion' mingled [in the introductory material] with promises of 'unnatural lusts' and 'vile amours' as the reader's reward to come . . . sexuality and sensationalism [combined] with moral finger-wagging."<sup>8</sup>

So the prefatory material to *Shamela* establishes ironic relations not merely with a Richardson text and its contemporary readership but also with another Fielding text and its readers. It is as though Fielding did not mind, in some circumstances, being a potential target for his own satire. And in prefatory material to other fiction he is not above engagement with figures of speech that deal in quasi-Tickettextian negotiations between the moral and the visual-nude: the "Dedication" to *Tom Jones* offers the opinion that fiction offers examples that are like pictures "in which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness, which *Plato* asserts there is in her naked Charms" (1:7).<sup>9</sup> *Plato* as moral teacher presumably trumps Tickettext, but the image as rendered still harks back to Varney's gallery of examples.

As well as these textual examples, which suggest a picture rather different from Varney's, some episodes in Fielding's career would tend to add weight to Harrison's argument about the way that *Tom Jones* revises the relationship between categories. Readers familiar with Fielding's life will recall his final major public achievement of ridding the London streets of violent gangs in four months in late 1753. This created, out of the blue, what is now known as Criminal Intelligence, and involved as radical a revision of the relationship between two more conceptually opposed categories—criminal/judicial—as did anything in his fiction. Having obtained the relatively small sum of £600 from the Privy Council, Fielding used the money to advertise and implement a policy of paying criminals to shop their colleagues, at the same time offering the informants freedom from prosecution as far as possible. That criminals and the judiciary might work together for their mutual benefit,

with the legal rewarding the illegal and so colluding in a morally green area and both taking on as a result the quality of mixed characters rather than the Good and the Bad, had never been considered. "As a method of enforcing law it was revolutionary."<sup>10</sup> Order is restored through the breaking of dualistic decorums: turning the world upside-down intellectually ameliorates it socially, turns it the right way up.

So there are two Fieldings, and if there were "gaps" in his fiction they might have something to do with a gap in him: a psychological or internalized version, perhaps, of the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination with its "internal contradictions and volatility,"<sup>11</sup> which is responding differently to different aspects of its conditioning historical ambience. In short, Fielding's attitude to the manipulation or reworking of oppositional categories tends to depend on the context. If the ends to be gained in the real world seem worthwhile, then the benefits of those ends may outweigh the tackiness that may be involved in the expression of the means. In *The Female Husband*, impressionable readers can be warned about the outrageous forms that duplicity can sometimes take; in the almost equally sensational pamphlet called *Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection and Punishment of Murder* (1752), a superstitious horror of being found out may be instilled into an audience that Fielding must have thought of as akin to the credulous Partridge in *Tom Jones*; the London streets may be cleared of systematic criminal terrorism. But where imaginative literature and its supporting discourses are concerned, the response is often more satirical, a more Augustan reaction to the perceived absurdities of a literary-moral world that must be imagined as already "topsy-turvy,"<sup>12</sup> where "whales now perch upon the sturdy oak"<sup>13</sup> and Pamela can be advertised by breathless clergymen as the naked image of virtue and a clear moral example. Here literary means and moral ends are almost identical, and it takes the sharper clarity of satire to make the point.

The corollary of this split for a reading of *Tom Jones*, which synthesizes many different modes—historic and romance, history and historiography, serious and comic, satiric and comic, aesthetic and actual—would be that there is no philosophical stability in the novel, but instead a restless manoeuvring between kinds of language and systems of value, the "constantly fluctuating activity" and "original intellectual force"<sup>14</sup> that

Cassirer talks of as characteristic of the best minds of the period. Rather than there being a moral case in *Tom Jones* which builds up "like Euclid,"<sup>15</sup> or rather than "Fielding, the poet" simply being "under no obligation to be philosophically consistent" (Černý 3.3: 317), there is a powerful Heraclitean flux of contexts and attitudes, an active process which affects and may actively constitute that case.

This can now be put to the test by looking at the example of Book V, chapter i, where Fielding opens his important "new Vein of Knowledge," which is "Contrast" (1: 212), by waiving his authorial "Privilege" of saying nothing at all (a privilege he very rarely exercises) and explaining to the reader why the comedy of the story is interspersed with such "*Serious*" (1: 213) prefatory essays.

Disdaining the small gesture, he first invokes the universe, "all the Works of the Creation," in which the contrasts and reverses of day and night, winter and summer, may generate "the Idea of all Beauty, as well natural as artificial." Referring to this solemn dualistic hyperbole as "too serious an Air," he then shifts the figure towards that of the brilliance of a jewel being set off by its setting, its "Foil," illustrated in turn by the beautiful woman who chooses a plain companion for public display. Women ("at *Bath* particularly") even contrive to be their own foils, by trying "to appear as ugly as possible in the Morning, in order to set off that Beauty which they intend to show you in the Evening" (1: 212). Everyone their own contrast: seen comically, the binary opposition dissolves, or is made ridiculous, by the kaleidoscope of frames of reference.

The metaphor then shifts again as Fielding accounts for the structural principles of the venerable form of the "English Pantomime" in terms of contrasts, in this case between comic ("*Duller*") and serious ("*Dullest*") elements (1: 214). Only the stygian gloom of the serious—mythical—parts of the entertainment could ever make the insipid English Harlequin, that dullest of brilliants, seem bright and funny. From this now well-shaded tour of light and dark the discussion returns, via Pope and a dig at Steele, the "late facetious Writer, who told the Public, that whenever he was dull, they might be assured there was a Design in it,"<sup>16</sup> to the present case. What is "*Serious*" is now what is dullest, darkest and most soporific. "In this Light then, or rather in this Darkness,

I would have the Reader to consider these initial Essays." Readers may sleep while the author is dull, except for those who have noticed that this author is dull in the same sense that darkness is light. The comedy of visual metaphor is then subtly extended into the next chapter, the subtitle of which promises "*some fine Touches of the Passion of Love, scarce visible to the naked Eye*" (1: 215). The dark-adapted eye of the somnolent reader must, it seems, be instantly exchanged for the trained and focused beam of the microscopic investigator. Poor readers, led not just by the nose but by the optics. No wonder some are dazzled.

Černý focuses on the antithesis of light and dark, and analyzes the chapter's absurd quality in terms of Fielding's supposed desire to burlesque Locke and "the rationalist method of antithesis. . . . What to the minds of rationalist critics appears as the brightness of reason turns out to be absolute nonsense when it has gone through the mill of Fielding's logic" (2.2: 147). Harrison demurs, apparently sensing no dislocation between a philosophical framework of ruptured oppositions and an aesthetic method based on retained contrasts, and opines that Fielding is not being ironic about his "new Vein," but boasting about his invention. And Iser, to whom as usual binary oppositions are powerful stimulants, notices that Fielding uses them in the early paragraphs, and provides an account in which "the text . . . only sets up two sides of a contrast."<sup>17</sup>

None of these readings seems wholly to the point, because the philosophical, logical and antithetical elements of the prose are clearly subordinate to others. These constitute a vividly metaphorical, witty medium, part of the function of which is to play with another area of the language of taste to which Varney points, the relation between literary qualities and the world of the senses in the form of light. It is mock-*Spectator chiaroscuro*, reflecting on the stater mode of Addison's well-known papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" (nos. 409 and 411-21), which express literary pleasures in terms of "Light and Colours" as well as Varney's taste and "Relish."<sup>18</sup> In these papers the great principle of imaginative pleasure is not blunt contrast—"what a rough and unsightly Sketch of Nature should we be entertained with, did all her Colouring disappear, and the several Distinctions of Light and Shade vanish?" (3: 546)—but the mind's power of "*comparing*" (3: 567) the works

of Nature with those of Art. In Fielding this modulation between "natural" and "artificial" beauty is carefully destroyed early on, the conceptual opposites coarsely lumped together in an overriding stylistic flourish in order that the rest of the chapter should carry the mock-assumption that all manifestations of "Contrast," on whatever level, are part of the same grand principle.

Some of the energies here are satirical, subtly mocking Addison's universalizing and new-philosophy solemnity—"when we survey the whole Earth at once, and the several Planets that lie within its Neighbourhood, we are filled with a pleasing Astonishment" (3: 575: once again the Royal-Society mentality ["survey"] and the mild aesthetic gasp ["Astonishment"] coalesce, with the genteel "Neighbourhood" making the solar system sound like a sort of cosmic Twickenham). But it is only the manner that comes within range, with the seediness of Fielding's later paragraphs pointing up the inappropriateness of Addison's mandarin tones for the more rumbustious social world of *Tom Jones*. The brutalizing of Addison's elegance implicit in the reduction of his structure of argument to simple contrast smacks of self-mockery, and of mockery of the reader who accepts the early hyperbole at face value. If anything, it all defers implicitly to Addison's superior, more flexible, form of argument. Then, when the chapter blows itself up at the end in the comic conflation of light and dark, the fun seems too tricky and good-natured to be at all satirical. The chapter bears out Harrison's thesis in that the apparent antithesis comic/serious has been remodelled, but it also bears out Varney's sense that Fielding often plays with aesthetic discourse for his own ends. The metaphorical nature of the passage has somehow extended to a figure that can bridge the gap between the two positions and the two Fieldings, critical and reconstitutive.

But sagacious readers have not really learnt anything about moral philosophy, nor about aesthetics or taste. Instead they have been made to pass through a highly specific and energetic process of figuration in which things at first appear philosophically clear and then become comically clouded. In other words the passage is performative at a much higher level than it is argumentative, and readers learn to the extent that they "see" this process by experiencing or sensing it, not by "seeing"

the point. It is not about *chiaroscuro*, it is *chiaroscuro*, and the method is not argumentative prose nor mock-aesthetic satire but poetic wit: Fielding is partly serious when he talks about comic epic-poems. This appears more clearly when we consider Fielding's source, for (naturally enough in performative *chiaroscuro*) the "new Vein" is in fact new in the same sense that darkness is dark. His whirling paragraphs are expanded from hints in the burlesque couplets near the start of Matthew Prior's *Alma, or The Progress of the Mind* (1718), as Dick replies to Mat's digression in praise of Butler's variety of effect with another brilliantly furbelowed reduction of *ut pictura poesis*:

As Masters in the *Clare-obscure*,  
 With various Light your Eyes allure . . .  
 Or as, again, your Courtly Dames,  
 (Whose Cloaths returning Birth-Day claims,)  
 By Arts improve the Stuffs they vary;  
 And Things are best, as most contrary . . .  
 So You, great Authors, have thought fit,  
 To make Digression temper Wit.<sup>19</sup>

Again there is a comic split between the case argued, the message about contraries, and the medium, the rapidity and variety of the similes. These digressive darts do not *temper* the heat of wit with the coolness of extended illustration (a single word gives yet another "contrary"), they embody and perform it, and so both express and destroy the argument-by-contraries in a "*Clare-obscure*" of their own. Mat appreciates this in his reply—this being a supposed dialogue, we have a trustworthy example of the proper response of the sagacious reader/auditor—

RICHARD, quoth MAT, these Words of Thine,  
 Speak something sly, and something fine.<sup>20</sup>

As with Fielding, the passage manages both to burlesque itself and to express a central value of the work at large; or at least it does if *Tom Jones* is, like *Alma*, a comic-metaphysical hymn to variety and relativity of perception. The good reader of the novel is, perhaps, the good reader of a certain kind of Augustan poetry.

In a less obtrusive form this shunting of the reader through metaphorical processes of shifting contexts, frames of reference, languages and attitudes is fundamental to *Tom Jones*, especially where the language of value, such as wisdom or sagacity, is concerned. In XI.ix, at the end of which readers are exhorted to use their "Sagacity" to uncover the mysterious authorial "Meaning" (2: 614), this apparently abstract value of sagacity has been coloured firstly by the discussion between the landlord of the inn and his wife, the landlord having been introduced as long ago as chapter ii as having the character, "among all his Neighbours, of being a very sagacious Fellow" (2: 576). This elegant conversation ("you are always so bloodily wise") ends with the landlord claiming to have talked Sophia into giving him money, which he has not, and with his wife joining in "the Applause of her Husband's Sagacity" (2: 611). They are a well-suited couple. There is then an effusion from the narrator-as-pseudo-aesthete on landscapes natural and artificial, and on those who ride through the former. This effusion contrasts "the ingenious" and responsive "Traveller" with the "sagacious Justice," who, together with the other "numerous Offspring of Wealth and Dulness" (2: 614), ride without attending to the view. From this the transition to the "Sagacity" of the reader is immediate; as in V.i, the good, ingenious reader is the one who senses and perhaps follows the process through novelistic interlude, supposedly serious digression, and direct address.

But the *tour de force* of these processes comes in VI.ii, iii and iv, which present the "wonderful Sagacity" (1: 274) of a gallery of characters, Squire Western and his sister Di, the wisest of the three countrymen pursuing the Wiltshire thief, and eventually Blifil, in order to shade and throw into relief the blunt definition of Allworthy as a "great . . . Pattern" of "true Wisdom" near the end of chapter iii. This quality is here defined as "Moderation . . . the surest Way to useful Wealth" (1: 282), the golden mean, control and reasonable indulgence of a variety of passions, but only five paragraphs later we hear that Blifil too has very "moderate" appetites. Wisdom or sagacity is very slowly and surreptitiously redefined by contact with different contexts until it approximates to the lesser prudence which is the cunning and perspicacity of Western as "Politician" (1: 272), Di Western as shrewd but inadequate observer of Sophia's one passion of love, the wisest but unreflecting countryman,



and the toadlike hypocrisy of Blifil. Everyone is wise: Allworthy's "Wisdom" is undercut as subversively by the narrator as it ever is by Blifil. The character in the episode who is closest to being a fool, according to Fielding's definition ("the Fool sacrifices all the rest [of the passions] to pall and satiate one") is Sophia, whose great passion is her love for Tom, which she cannot properly disguise; and Sophia's name, in Fielding's emblematic technique of naming, means moral wisdom. When the fools and knaves are "wise," it may be wise to be a fool.

This is the great benefit of considering the novel as a network of metaphorical relations of the kind suggested; it ironizes and energizes its emblematic systems, and invites the reader to consider the novel as a play of forces rather than a moral system *per se*. Put more simply, it forces the wit and the seriousness closer together. To take as a final example, Tom's appeal to the "Image" of Sophia's face in the mirror when Sophia asks him, in XVIII.xii, why she should believe him when he says he is sincere in his rather exorbitant professions of love, sincerity and constancy. Reading this as philosopher will yield Battestin's very beautiful point that the passage, like others, demands

to be read on more than one level: Sophy Western's image in the glass is the literalizing of the Platonic metaphor, the dramatization of Fielding's meaning in the broadly allegorical scheme of the novel. Ultimately, her true identity is ideal, an abstraction.<sup>21</sup>

One can hardly demur. At the same time, it is very lucky for Tom that his tactic can be interpreted with this degree of seriousness. His outrageously flattering rhetorical gesture is, to put it mildly, a brilliant way of blurring the issue and of converting defence into attack. Tom inadvertently manages a "*Clare-obscure*" of his own, and Sophia's reaction is a little like Mat's to Dick in its combination of admiration and suspicion, though she is less sure of her reading. Can he be serious in his conflation of the ideal and the actual, or is he being cunning and opportunistic with aesthetic language? (Has Fielding taught him his own two "personalities," as Nightingale teaches him to write duplicitous letters to temper his constitutional urge to tell the truth?) Sophia blushes, half smiles, forces herself to frown, but is eventually won over to the extent that she promises she will marry him one year later. Like Sophy,

the reader feels the pull of two readings, one philosophical and abstract, the other sceptical, dramatic and suspicious. These mirror or stand opposite to each other, creating a double mirror and a double metaphor: the sceptical reading would carry no force were the other context not also present. There is not necessarily a "gap"; there is, again, a performative process to be gone through which creates, marries and resolves contraries in the reading rather as Tom and Sophia are married in the history. But if there is a single reading, or just "two sides of a contrast," gaps there may well be.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1972; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 41, 48.

<sup>2</sup>All references are to the Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Fredson Bowers, introd. and commentary Martin C. Battestin, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

<sup>3</sup>Ian Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (London: Longman, 1994) 32, 94. Bell is reflecting on John Preston's *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1970).

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, in the Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vol. 16, ed. Gwin J. Kolb (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 33.

<sup>5</sup>Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951) 5. Cassirer has been appealed to already in this debate, but the use here mirrors that of Roger Pearson, who applies this quotation to the fictions of Voltaire in his *The Fables of Reason: A Study of Voltaire's Contes Philosophiques* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 33.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Fielding, *A Journey from This World to the Next*, in *Miscellanies*, ed. H. Amory, introd. B. A. Goldgar (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 2: 4.

<sup>7</sup>Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, 2nd ed. 1741, rpt. Augustan Reprint Society no. 57, introd. Ian Watt (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1956) xii.

<sup>8</sup>Donald Thomas, *Henry Fielding* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1990) 254, 255.

<sup>9</sup>This image, which is a slightly sensationalised version of a remark in *Phaedrus* 250D, is usually appealed to quite straightforwardly as an example of Fielding's Platonist-idealist leanings: see for example Martin Battestin, "Fielding's Definition

of Wisdom: Some Functions of Ambiguity and Emblem in *Tom Jones*," *ELH* 35 (1968): 188-217, esp. 204, and Černý (2.2: 155). But Plato was also a poet: one cannot help feeling that there is something other than idealist about the image that carries this supposedly abstract "Idea" into the world of sight. Fielding, of course, is fond of the commonplace of the naked charms of Virtue, and uses it straightforwardly elsewhere. Whether it is felt as such here depends on whether one is wearing Harrison-spectacles, Varney-spectacles, or both. The same can be said of many other verbal details; Fielding's initial introduction and advertisement of Allworthy as "replete with Benevolence" (I.43), for instance, acquires a curious tint if viewed through Varney's lenses. Is the narrator telling us that Allworthy has a relish for moral action and judgment, and that the prospect (this is a prospect-scene) of doing good deeds makes him feel satisfied? He certainly has a taste for haranguing, and a vigorous appetite for moral certainty.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas 372.

<sup>11</sup>Bell 49.

<sup>12</sup>Henry Fielding, *Pasquin, A Dramatick Satire on the Times*, ed. O. M. Brack, Jr., William Kupersmith and Curt A. Zimansky (Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1973) 49.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Pope, John Gay and John Arbuthnot, *Three Hours After Marriage, Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Simon Trussler (Oxford: OUP, 1969) 101.

<sup>14</sup>Cassirer ix, 13.

<sup>15</sup>Harrison 3.2: 172, quoting William Empson, "Tom Jones," *Kenyon Review* 20 (1958): 217-49. In Fielding's mind Euclid would not have been a compliment, given that "Conny Keyber" proudly proclaims, in the dedicatory letter to *Shamela*, that "it was Euclid who taught me to write" (*Shamela* xii).

<sup>16</sup>Fielding thoughtfully reminds the reader of the point of reference of the chapter by inserting a small joke at the expense of the co-author of the *Spectator*.

<sup>17</sup>Iser, *The Implied Reader* 48.

<sup>18</sup>*Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 3: 546, 538. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>19</sup>*Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959) 1: 485-86. These Augustan burlesques of arguments about "contrast" and light are tamed versions of Swift's notable exercise in demonic rather than simply false analogy in *A Tale of A Tub*, Section VIII: "The mind of Man . . . doth never stop, but naturally sallies out into both extrems of High and Low, of Good and Evil . . . Whether a Tincture of Malice in our Natures, makes us fond of furnishing every bright Idea with its Reverse; Or, whether Reason reflecting upon the Sum of Things, can, like the Sun, serve only to enlighten one half of the Globe, leaving the other Half, by Necessity, under Shade and Darkness; or, whether Fancy, flying up to the imagination of what is Highest and Best . . ." (*A Tale of A Tub* . . ., ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith [Oxford: Clarendon, 1958] 157-58). But Swift is doubtless reworking yet another example or examples.

<sup>20</sup>*Works of Matthew Prior* 1: 486.

<sup>21</sup>Battestin, "Fielding's Definition of Wisdom" 209.

## If Everything Else Fails, Read the Instructions: Further Echoes of the Reception-Theory Debate\*

LEONA TOKER

"O la! I ask your pardon, I fancy there is *hiatus in manuscriptis*."  
Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (VIII.iii.374)<sup>1</sup>

Though sixteen years have passed since the English publication of Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading*,<sup>2</sup> and the author has moved on from reception theory to the anthropology of literature, the issues raised in that book continue to stimulate literary-theoretical and critical studies, whether by way of direct influence or by way of disagreement ranging from philosophical divergences that sparked the exchange between Iser and Stanley Fish<sup>3</sup> to interpretive debates such as the one conducted on the pages of *Connotations*. Even in the latter debate, however, interpretive clashes seem to be a surface expression of varying ideological positions. In some cases it would therefore be impossible to request that the sides should consent to differ and yet sketch at least some common platform. The problem is aggravated by the lack of uniformity in the use of some of the key terms. Here I will not follow Locke's example of proposing that we all agree on what we mean by the words we employ but, instead, discuss a few given semantic asymmetries. I shall also use this occasion for making some interpretive and position statements of my own.

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\*Reference: Lothar Černý, "Reader Participation and Rationalism in Fielding's *Tom Jones*," *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 137-62; Brean S. Hammond, "Mind the Gap: A Comment on Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 72-78; Nicholas Hudson, "Fielding and the 'Sagacious Reader': A Response to Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 79-84; Bernard Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks in Fielding: A Response to Černý, Hammond and Hudson," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 147-72; Lothar Černý, "But the Poet . . . Never Affirmeth': A Reply to Bernard Harrison," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 312-17.

## I

Quite prominent among the causes for the lack of alignment between, in particular, the discourse of Lothar Černy and Wolfgang Iser as well as of Černy and Bernard Harrison is the difference in the meanings which the words “blanks,” “gaps,” and “vacancies” carry in Iser’s *The Act of Reading* and in other sources, such as Iser’s own earlier book *The Implied Reader*, studies in descriptive poetics, and, last but not least, the prefatory chapters of Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, a text repeatedly referred to in *The Act of Reading* and commented on by practically all the participants in the ongoing debate.

## 1. “Blanks”

In the meta-semantic network of *Tom Jones*, “blanks” is a synonym of “narrative compression”:<sup>4</sup> the word refers to stretches of represented time in which nothing relevant to the story is supposed to have taken place and which are, therefore, more or less completely denied textual space. “These are indeed to be considered as blanks in the grand lottery of time,” comments Fielding’s narrator, suggesting, through a play on homonymy, that it would be a self-defeating game to dwell on the years that have drawn blanks rather than prizes (II.i.88). This is not the sense in which the word “blanks” functions in Iser’s context. I shall attempt to redescribe his notion of “blanks” with the help of both his own language and narratological vocabulary.

In a version of speech-act theory, Iser presents the fictional text not as a sequence of constative sentences but as a sequence of *instructions* given to the reader: “fictional language provides instructions for the building of a situation and for the production of an imaginary object.”<sup>5</sup> Such instructions cannot be comprehensive. They delineate the contours of a referential field, but the field itself is a *blank* to be filled by the collaborative self-correcting projections of the reader. This is a view that parallels E. H. Gombrich’s scheme for activating the audience of visual arts: one needs the co-presence of blanks in which the viewer’s imagination can be exercised and of guidelines to direct and constrain

this exercise.<sup>6</sup> The blanks in critical question are not at all limited to the compression of the represented time, that is, to Fielding's metaphoric blank tickets in the lottery of time. That is made abundantly clear in *The Act of Reading*; but the matter is somewhat vague in *The Implied Reader*, where the remark that "The vacant spaces in the text . . . are offered to the reader as pauses in which to reflect"<sup>7</sup> immediately follows the quotation of the comment made by the narrator of *Tom Jones* on the function of narrative compression as giving the reader "an opportunity of employing that wonderful sagacity, of which he is master, by filling up these vacant spaces of time with his own conjectures" (III.i.121).

This somewhat unfortunate collocation of issues goes a long way towards justifying Lothar Černý's criticism of Iser for falling, as it were, "into the trap of Fielding's irony."<sup>8</sup> One must agree with Černý that the narrator's reference to the reader's "sagacity" here is ironical, and that the reader is not really expected to work out in his or her mind, in detail, those experiences of the characters which the author chooses to summarize or elide, even though the narrator claims to have given the reader sufficient guidelines for doing so (for this endeavor "we have taken care to qualify him in the preceding pages" III.i.121). Černý's post-Wittgensteinian remark that "The reader should not talk of what the author is silent about"<sup>9</sup> can be further supported by the fact that in his extended metaphor of the Guild-hall lottery Fielding applies the epithet "sagacious" to the reporters "who never trouble the public with the many blanks they dispose of" but make much ado about the prizes (II.i.88).

But if Iser does, indeed, fall into Fielding's trap, at least in *The Implied Reader*, this is no more than what is supposed to happen on the first reading of *Tom Jones*. Though a first-time reader of the novel can hardly be deemed to imagine the details of the events which the narrative elides, he/she is certainly made to feel competent to do so. Fielding's handling of scene and summary is precisely calculated to give us the impression that, having been shown how things work in the novel's world, we could easily imagine, if only we wished to do so, how its different characters would move when out of the limelight. Elsewhere, I have called this the impressions of our "synchronic competence" and compared it to Allworthy's presumptuous belief that he knows what Jenny Jones's evidence would be in the Partridge case had she been available as a

witness. The effect of this impression is a sense that the characters have a life, as it were, out of the limelight as well as on stage: thus the ground is laid for our eventual discovery that all kinds of things did happen off stage—though in ways that we could not possibly have imagined. In fact, the impression of synchronic competence is created only to be exploded and hence to give a salutary blow to the complacency of the “sagacious” reader.<sup>10</sup>

And yet the use of the word “sagacious” in the context of the lottery metaphor suggests that Fielding is not entirely ironic in his references to the “sagacious reader,” or else that his irony is double edged. The take-it-or-leave-it tone of the opening chapters of the novel signals that the feast laid out in its pages cannot accommodate every taste and that some of the customers, in particular the grave and the profane, may turn away from the book after the first chapter or two. This, in itself, is as effective a flattery of the remaining readers—the “sagacious,” and (as it were) discriminating and sophisticated ones—as that with which young Blifil disarms different segments of his audience when he presents his version of the incident with Sophia’s little bird in chapter 3 of Book IV. Here Square, Thwackum, and Allworthy himself are separate target audiences for separate segments of his monologue:<sup>11</sup> each listener is granted what he likes to hear, and the threshold of his attention to other matters is raised. I cannot resist the temptation to read this scene as a miniature model of an aspect of the novel’s rhetoric: indeed, it is not only on the first reading that we fall into the traps set for us by Fielding—even on a repeated reading, while the implied author seems to turn us into his co-conspirators, he may, by the same token, actually be diverting our attention from the whole extent of his subversiveness.

Consider, for instance, the remark that Fielding’s narrator makes when Mrs. Waters comes to visit Tom in prison: “Who this Mrs Waters was, the reader pretty well knows; what she was he must be perfectly satisfied” (XVII.ix.809). On the first reading, the first part of this sentence seems to do little more than identify Mrs Waters as Tom’s one-night-stand of Upton and the second part to hint at her easy morals (we may or may not notice that the former function is a somewhat unnecessary preamble to the explicit reminder of the Upton episode in the very next sentence). Obviously, on a repeated reading the sentence is construed

differently: “who” means “Jenny Jones” and “what” means “the fake mother”—by now we are, after all, in the secret. This flattering sense of being in on it, as well as the fact that the clause “what she was” can still be perceived as inviting an uncomplimentary label, are, in a sense, part of the female-rogue “cover story”<sup>12</sup> underneath which a “sagacious” reader (if I am here posing as one, it is still at my own peril) can discover that Fielding’s thoroughly sympathetic treatment of Jenny Jones is based on his bleak view of the predicament in which a gifted and intellectually avid young woman of the lower orders may find herself: Jenny’s sexual appetite may well be a displacement of her thwarted intellectual curiosity; and her fickleness is obviously motivated by a desire to compensate herself by a sense of power for the wounded vanity of her early days.<sup>13</sup> It would, of course, take a historical study of non-fictional sources to establish whether Fielding held such proto-feminist views prior to writing the novel or whether—more likely—he “discovered” them through his attempt to reconcile the demands for mystification with those of the “conservation of character” (VIII.i.366).

## 2. “Vacancies”

Whatever the words “vacant spaces” may have meant for the author of *The Implied Reader*, for the author of *The Act of Reading*, “vacancies” are thematically void standpoints from which the reader concentrates on the theme of a new textual segment: “Whenever a segment becomes a theme, the previous one must lose its thematic relevance and be turned into a marginal, thematically vacant position, which can be and usually is occupied by the reader, so that he may focus on the new thematic segment.”<sup>14</sup> In Iser’s phenomenological vocabulary, *blanks* are the “suspended connectability” of the text but not textual space *per se*, whereas *vacancies* are “nonthematic segments [of textual space—L.T.] within the referential field of the wandering viewpoint”; they “enable the reader to combine segments into a field by reciprocal modification.”<sup>15</sup> I understand this use of the word “vacancies” in the following tripartite way: (1) “vacancies” have contained instructions for the reader’s picturing of the fictional world, but the reader’s performance in



accordance with these instructions is a matter of the past by the time a new segment presents itself to his or her attention, changing the previous picture as the new one intertwines with it; (2) the picture that every new segment of the text relegates to the past is not perceptually vacant—on the contrary, whereas the incoming instructions are more or less discrete, the ones already carried out blend into a continuous image;<sup>16</sup> (3) what the memory of the past segment has been voided of is not the story but the theme—that is, if the new incoming instructions modify and transform the interpretation suggested by the earlier ones and not merely complement its field of reference or lend it further support. The transformation in question is the effect of what Iser calls “gaps.”

### 3. “Gaps”

In descriptive poetics one usually talks of informational gaps: the text suspends a piece of information without which the reader cannot complete a pattern of significances. In other words, this is not a matter of suspended connectability (“blanks”) between instructions given to the reader, but the felt absence of instructions as such,<sup>17</sup> an absence that disrupts the contours of the referential field. Descriptive poetics distinguishes between temporary and permanent gaps, between gaps that are registered as enigmas and surprise gaps of which the reader becomes aware only when they are filled. In all those cases it makes sense to discuss the location of such gaps (in the *fabula* or in the *sjuzhet*; in the center or the periphery of either) and their specific rhetorical effects in each particular text.<sup>18</sup> In his early work Iser likewise sometimes used the word “gaps” in this sense, but in *The Act of Reading*, the gaps he has in mind are located not in the text but between the text and the reader, or rather, as Bernard Harrison has put it, between the text “and the *noema* undergoing constitution in the reader’s mind.”<sup>19</sup> The word “gaps” thus functions as a synonym of “the fundamental asymmetry between the text and the reader,”<sup>20</sup> of thwarted expectations, contradictory impressions, diverging directions of ideation, obscurities, longueurs, and so on.

The presence of such gaps is signaled by blanks of a special kind, those which occur when the connectability of the instructions for constituting the situation is problematic—that is, when the new instructions do not seem to be aligned with the previous ones. The “gap” (similar to the notion of “rupture” in the traditional *analyse de texte*) is in this case obviously a metaphor for a difference of position (mainly of an ethical position): to fill in such a gap means that the reader must modify or rethink his or her previous attitude, possibly also examine the assumptions underlying the abandoned expectations. Bernard Harrison proposes to replace this metaphor by that of hermeneutic stumbling blocks, obstacles that make us pause and adjust our course<sup>21</sup>—the blocks are given but it is we who skip or stumble. Both the model of gaps and that of stumbling blocks are metaphorical ways of thinking about textual stimuli for non-automatic modifications of the reader’s attitudes or trains of thought. Both gaps in the terrain (cf. Old Hell Shaft in Dickens’s *Hard Times*) and stumbling-blocks on the road (cf. the slapstick comedy in the picaresque-type chapters of Fielding’s novels) “obstruct the free passage of the reader’s habitual assumptions, bringing him up short in ways which confront him, if he is a sufficiently intelligent and candid reader, with a genuine and substantial challenge to his usual ways of thinking.”<sup>22</sup>

As far as I remember, gaps, in any sense of the word, are not referred to in the prefatory chapters of *Tom Jones*, but one reference does appear, trailing an unwonted hermeneutic significance, in the scene of Tom’s first encounter with Partridge. While giving Tom a shave, Partridge discovers a bit of a hermeneutic gap—Tom’s fresh head-wound: “Will you please have your temples — O la! I ask your pardon, I fancy there is *hiatus in manuscriptis*. I heard you was going to the wars: but I find it was a mistake,’ ‘Why do you conclude so?’ says Jones. ‘Sure, sir,’ answered the barber, ‘you are too wise a man to carry a broken head thither; for that would be carrying coals to Newcastle’” (VIII.iii.374). This is a comedy version of the reception model: the person who encounters a gap, a rupture, a stumbling block is, as it were, invited to change his mind (in this case, pretend to change his mind) about things. Here, however, Fielding presents an account of an interpersonal, dyadic communication,<sup>23</sup> in which the discoverer of the gap, unlike

the reader of the text, also tries to influence its possessor (here, dissuade him from going to the wars). However that may be, the "*hiatus in manuscriptis*" is a trace of the unbridgeable gap between the ethical attitudes of Jones and Northerton, the author of the gash in Jones's head. It is, in fact, not surprising that the epistemological disagreement about the gaps should lead to ethical issues.

## II

In his attempt to turn Iser's example from *Tom Jones* against Iser himself, and to show that not only the manner of filling gaps but the location of gaps in the first place may differ for different readers, Stanley Fish claims that one need not necessarily perceive a gap between (a) Fielding's presentation of Allworthy as a perfect person and (b) our eventual discovery that Allworthy is duped by Blifil: if there is a reader who believes that inability to suspect evil in others is part and parcel of being totally good, then for such a reader there is no gap between Allworthy's perfection and his gullibility. What Fish forgets is that Iser has forestalled him in discussing the ethical belief in question: "Allworthy trusts [Blifil], because perfection is simply incapable of conceiving a mere pretense of ideality."<sup>24</sup> However, Iser presents this not as the initial position of a certain type of reader, but as an intermediate stage in the process of ideation, a response to the opening of the gap (or the emergence of a stumbling block). The process must further reveal that since the results of Allworthy's acting "in character" are rather disastrous, some sort of discernment is apparently missing in Allworthy's perfection. This revision of the former belief in Allworthy's infallibility may then lead to several kinds of reconsideration of our initial attitude to his infallibility. For instance, we may wonder "why lack of discernment should be illustrated through a perfect man" and conclude that this choice signals Fielding's belief in the need for experience, along with disposition.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, Fish's believer in a Billy-Budd-type saintliness will easily skip over the initial stumbling block yet will hardly avoid stumbling over the block raised by the dire results of a totally virtuous man's legal<sup>26</sup> and private decisions. Whether such a reader will be ultimately convinced of the

need to appreciate the alterity of another instead of projecting his own virtues and perspectives on the environment, is, of course, another problem (the environment, in Fish's Berkeleyan/Rortean economy will not be a "given" in the first place; it will always remain a matter of construction in accordance with individual angles and frames of reference at the disposal of interpretive communities).

Iser's treatment of the basically ethical issue of the makings of the Great-Souled man is first and foremost epistemological. It is only in reference to the reader's seeking his own reflection in the fictional character that Iser notes that "a sense of discernment is useless without a moral foundation."<sup>27</sup> Though a non-denominational ethical attitude can be felt to pervade Iser's writing, moral philosophy is largely absent from his model approximation of the reading experience. Yet Iser's theory never claims to supply a comprehensive model of any novel's "repertoire." The essential openness of this theory is made obvious by the smoothness with which it can connect with other interdisciplinary perspectives—for instance, with Harrison's explanation of the way in which Fielding's treatment of Allworthy's gullibility undermines the Principle/Appetite dichotomy (which most of Fielding's contemporary readers would bring along to the text), the virtuous man's rejection of the life of the Appetites, in accordance with ideas based on this dichotomy, underlying his dangerous and basically unethical detachment from the life of his immediate community.<sup>28</sup>

Harrison's discussion of the implications of the Allworthy-Blifil case is of considerable intrinsic interest and considerably self-sufficient. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lothar Černý disbelieves—rightly, I think—that all Harrison does is "modify" Iser's theory of reading. However, the fact remains that, as far as reader-response theory is concerned, Harrison and Iser are in agreement on a number of key issues, even though they have arrived at their positions by different routes. In particular, both show that a literary text provides a testing ground not only for the systems of thought that are explicit parts of its repertoire and not only for the attitudes developed in the process of reading but also for the thought systems, including prejudices and dogmas as well as respectable philosophical stands, that make up the reader's intellectual luggage on his or her first experience of the specific text. Iser frequently

notes that the text provides a testing ground for ideas and usually finds them wanting.<sup>29</sup> Harrison claims that great literary texts subject the reader to dangerous kinds of knowledge, so that the contract between the reader and the text may involve the reader's accepting the risk of emerging from the journey through the novel with a new, a different kind of moral/intellectual commitment.<sup>30</sup> In his analysis of the Allworthy-Blifil example, Harrison, indeed, does not merely argue for Iser's view as against the closed system of Fish—he does both less and more, and not only because a theory cannot stand or fall owing to the relative success of an example. A literary example can partially illustrate but not bear out a theory, since, as noted above, a literary text is a testing ground rather than a tribunal for ideas,<sup>31</sup> a field which only partly overlaps with the theory which one superimposes on it. It is richer than the theory in some ways and poorer in others (less numerous); and it will necessarily indicate the insufficiencies of this theory while failing to do justice to its extensions. Notably, in *The Fictive and the Imaginary* Iser tends to dispense with examples altogether. (One may here consider the further fate of another example used by Iser in *The Implied Reader*, namely, Fielding's "camera-stopping"<sup>32</sup> account of Lady Booby's surprise at Joseph's insistence on his virtue in *Joseph Andrews*. Brean Hammond's illuminating annotations of this episode are quite self-sufficient and do not need the theoretical framework in which they are, as it were, called upon to support his dismissal of both Iser and Černý as a pair of liberal humanists—in a language not altogether unreminiscent of the bolshevik labeling of liberal intelligentsia<sup>33</sup>).

Lothar Černý rightly points to another item not included in Iser's model, namely the role of the text's engaging of the reader's emotional response. Though well aware of the relative weight of emotion in reader response, as well as, for instance, of Ingarden's interest in this subject, Iser does not, indeed, take up the study of emotive response any more than he does ethical theory. He has no obligation to do either. But here the point is even more complex than the reasonable limitations of the model. It is well known that modern literary theory and criticism are, in a great measure, diffident in matters of emotion. Emotion, indeed, is not only one of the most suspect constituents of reader response<sup>34</sup> but also one of the least historically stable ones: as the examples of

Richardson and even Dickens often suggest, what may have evoked intense sympathy and vicarious emotion in some of their contemporary readers is liable to provoke impatience and contempt in a present-day audience. The language of love, in particular, is subject to constant cultural change—Jane Austen does well to curtail the major scene at the end of *Emma*. It is a problem for the anthropology of literature whether the issue of “taste” and its changes can be an object of a fruitful historically oriented study or whether they should be treated as too unstable for study, as next worst, that is, to such irrelevant “noises” as the inevitable flagging of the individual reader’s attention, interruptions of the individual reading process, interference of movies and other media, and so on. In any case, for the purpose of achieving a degree of intersubjectivity in handling the problem of emotional response, literary criticism has still to evolve a new methodology. This challenge is, apparently, being faced in some contemporary literary schools, but the subject is beyond the scope of the present paper.

One of the numerous ways in which Iser’s more recent work, in particular *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, develops and modifies his earlier theoretical model is the awareness of the fact that different readers, or even the same reader at different moments of his or her life, may play a different game in their interactions with the text. From the standpoint of the anthropological approach to literature presented in *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Iser concedes a prominent place to the types of games played in the text (following Roger Caillois: agon, alea, mimicry, ilinx)<sup>35</sup> and allows for the possibility that the ludic spirit in which the reader addresses the play of the text may not belong to the type that predominates in that text. This widens the theoretical basis for accounting for the differences between individual concretizations of the text and also imposes further theoretical limits on the predictive power of any reader-response theory.

For all that has been said about the inevitable asymmetry between literary example and theory, it is well known that works of fiction or poetry often anticipate psychological, sociological, ethical, literary, and other theories developed in much later periods. There is, perhaps, something profoundly genuine about texts which one trusts to have done so. This may be equivalent to saying that what Iser calls the Imaginary

—the non-verbal substratum that needs the fictive for its articulation<sup>36</sup>—may have informed the language and imagery of such texts with potentialities to be approximated by second-degree fictionalization, that is, by critical selection, recombination, and a theoretical processing of literary material, in ways unavailable to culture-bound contemporary fictionalizing acts.<sup>37</sup>

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All the page references in the text of this article are to the Penguin 1985 edition of *The History of Tom Jones*, ed. R. P. C. Mutter.

<sup>2</sup>Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

<sup>3</sup>See Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 2-13; and Wolfgang Iser, "Talk Like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish," *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 82-87. See also "Interview" in Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 42-69.

<sup>4</sup>Alternative terms: acceleration, condensation; see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983) 52-56.

<sup>5</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 64.

<sup>6</sup>E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1962) 174.

<sup>7</sup>Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 51.

<sup>8</sup>Lothar Černy, "Reader Participation and Rationalism in Fielding's *Tom Jones*," *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 138.

<sup>9</sup>Černy 139.

<sup>10</sup>See Leona Toker, *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narratives* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993) 108-11.

<sup>11</sup>See Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Sussex UP, 1975) 28-39.

<sup>12</sup>I use this term in the sense given it by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in "Jane Austen's Cover Story," *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 146-83.

<sup>13</sup>This is argued in detail in my paper forthcoming in *Rereading Texts/Rethinking Critical Presuppositions: Essays in Honor of H. M. Daleski*.

<sup>14</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 198.

<sup>15</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 198.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. the discussion of the digital and analogue effects in Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 275.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. also Meir Sternberg's discussion of the lacunae that should be separated into "relevancies ('gaps') and irrelevancies ('blanks')." *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 236 ff.

<sup>18</sup>See Rimmon-Kenan 127-29.

<sup>19</sup>Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks in Fielding: A Response to Černý, Hammond and Hudson," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 150.

<sup>20</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 167.

<sup>21</sup>Nothing is new under the sun, though much is never remembered. It turns out that the meaning in which Professor Harrison uses the word "stumbling-blocks" is very similar to the meaning of this term in an English translation of Origen: "But if the usefulness of the law and the sequence and ease of the narrative were at first sight clearly discernible throughout, we should be unaware that there was anything beyond the obvious meaning for us to understand the scriptures. Consequently the Word of God has arranged for certain stumbling-blocks, as it were, as hindrances and impossibilities to be inserted in the midst of the law and the history, in order that we may not be completely drawn away by the sheer attractiveness of language . . ." (*On First Principles* 4.2.9, trans. and ed. G. W. Butterworth [New York: Harper and Row, 1966] 285). To my question whether he recollected this passage while writing his *Connotations* article Professor Harrison replied in the negative. If "*les beaux esprits se rencontrent*" in this manner, the truth value of their insights is given strong support.

<sup>22</sup>Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks" 168.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Iser, *The Act of Reading* 165-66.

<sup>24</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 120.

<sup>25</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 122.

<sup>26</sup>Fielding makes sure that even an uninitiated reader should become aware of Allworthy's incompetence as a Justice of Peace; for a reader who commands some knowledge of the rules of evidence this stratum of significance is particularly vast. The extent of Fielding's malfunctioning as a Justice is one of the issues (102-05) discussed by Eric Rothstein in "Virtues of Authority in *Tom Jones*," *ECent* 28 (1987): 99-126.

<sup>27</sup>Iser, *The Act of Reading* 123.

<sup>28</sup>See Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks" 154-65.

<sup>29</sup>See, for instance, Iser, *The Act of Reading* 72-79. One may note that while in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) Iser shows how Sterne closes a gap in John Locke's epistemology; in "Sterne and Sentimentalism" (*Commitment in Reflection: Essays in Literature and Moral Philosophy*, ed. L. Toker, New York: Garland, 1994), Harrison demonstrates Sterne's revision of ethical theories associated with Hume's system.

<sup>30</sup>See Bernard Harrison, *Inconvenient Fictions: Literature and the Limits of Theory* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 1-8.



<sup>31</sup>Taking recourse to Lothar Černý's favorite Sidney quotation, the poet, indeed, "nothing affirmeth"; see Černý, "'But the Poet . . . Never Affirmeth': A Reply to Bernard Harrison," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 312-17.

<sup>32</sup>This term comes from Robert Alter, *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1968) 194.

<sup>33</sup>See Brean S. Hammond, "Mind the Gap: A Comment on Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 72-78.

<sup>34</sup>Some of the reasons for this are presented in Nicholas Hudson's "Fielding and the 'Sagacious Reader': A Response to Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 79-83. Hudson goes on to point to the paradox of Fielding's having "deployed persuasive arts comparable to those of his villains" in order to "craft" a deeply idealistic work addressed to a cynical world (83). In "Fielding's Hierarchy of Dialogue: 'Meta-Response' and the Reader of *Tom Jones*," *PQ* 68 (1989): 177-94, Hudson shows, among other things, how the non-manipulative rhetoric of the novel's virtuous characters fails on almost every occasion (181-83).

<sup>35</sup>See Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary* 247-80.

<sup>36</sup>See Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary* 2-4.

<sup>37</sup>My thanks to H. M. Daleski and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan for very useful criticism of an earlier version of this article.

## More on "Christmas as Humbug: A Manuscript Poem by Letitia Elizabeth Landon ('L.E.L.')"\*

F. J. SYPHER

In the commentary on Landon's poem "Christmas," as published in *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94), it is stated that the poem "may perhaps have been published somewhere" as "suggested by the stanza-break marks in the left margin of the ms.—these would presumably have been noted for the use of a printer. But it is of course possible that the poem never appeared in print" (196-97). The bitter poem was indeed published: in *The Literary Gazette*, No. 782 (14 January 1832) 27-28. The date of publication confirms the inference, from internal evidence, that the poem was composed around Christmas 1831, as stated in the article.

The *Literary Gazette* text of "Christmas" was provided by Glenn T. Dibert-Himes (of the Department of English, University of Nebraska—Lincoln), to whom grateful thanks are due. He is preparing an edition of the writings of L.E.L., with texts and bibliographic information on every traceable manuscript and publication of hers, including periodical pieces, and including illustrations, where they occur. The edition will include many works that were never collected for republication in book form, so it will be welcomed by all who are interested in Landon's oeuvre.

A comparison of the *Literary Gazette* text of "Christmas" with the manuscript text shows relatively few verbal variations; although, I regret to say, three of the verbal differences from the text in *Connotations* reflect my own misreading of Landon's often-ambiguous

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\*Reference: F. J. Sypher, "Christmas as Humbug: A Manuscript Poem by Letitia Elizabeth Landon ('L.E.L.),' " *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 193-203.

handwriting (lines 3, 17, and 69); now those blunders can be corrected. Most people who have had occasion to deal with Landon's mss. can attest to the difficulty of reading her script. Laman Blanchard, in his *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, 2 vols. (London, 1841), recounts how, when she was a child, penmanship "was a source of extreme trouble to her," and a "kind old gentleman" gave her special instruction; but he soon gave up, saying that she was "a dab at pothooks" (1: 11-12; "dab" is school slang for an "expert," and the term "pothooks" refers to illegible handwriting).

Variations in punctuation between the versions are numerous, which is to be expected, since the ms., as noted in my original article, is very lightly punctuated. But most of those variations are not of particular significance for the meaning of the text; the exception is the placement of the quotation marks in lines 34-35 (see textual notes below). Now that the reference to the *Literary Gazette* text is available, the minor variations can be looked up by anyone interested in pursuing the comparison. The sparse punctuation in the ms. has a certain interest, as an example of how Landon—like many writers of her period—composed, leaving the punctuation to be taken care of by the publisher. I should have noted in my original comments, that in the ms. the stanzas appear with all four lines flush on the left margin (as I have seen in other mss. by Landon), but in arranging the printed version I inserted the indentations on the second and fourth lines of each stanza, following the customary editorial practice of the time; the text as printed in 1832 has similar indentations (this was another matter which the author, in effect, left to the publisher).

In the following notes, line references are to the text of "Christmas," from the manuscript, as printed in *Connotations*. The *Literary Gazette* text has the same number of lines (92 lines, divided into 23 four-line stanzas). In the following textual notes, readings from the *Connotations* text are followed by a square bracket, after which readings of the text from *The Literary Gazette* appear. Editorial comments are in italics, enclosed in square brackets. For the most part I have not noted variations in punctuation. Aside from mistakes in transcription, varia-

tions may be presumed to fall into one of the following categories: editorial alteration, author's alteration, typesetter's alteration or error.

[heading, lacking in ms.; present in Literary Gazette] ORIGINAL POETRY.

[title] Christmas.] CHRISTMAS.

[notation below title, not in ms.; present in Literary Gazette] Irregular Lines.  
[this implies that readers expected regular meter, and needed to be alerted if the lines varied from usual patterns; Landon's stanza form follows, with variations, a format familiar from many of the "Olney Hymns" of Cowper and from other English hymns; the fact that her anti-Christmas poem uses the metrical form of a hymn adds to its irony]

3 sang] sung [sung is probably the correct reading, by analogy to rung in the next line; OED (first edition) notes: "sung was the usual form of the pa. t. in the 17th and 18th cents. and is given by Smart in 1836 with the remark 'Sang . . . is less in use'. Recent usage, however, has mainly been in favour of sang" (this part of the dictionary dates from 1910-15)]

15 earth] Earth

17 world] crowd [crowd is correct; my reading of the manuscript was an error]

29 smothered] smother'd


34 On earth we must live as we can / "And] "On earth we must live as we can / And [the ironic tone of the poem is emphasized by the ms. reading, which implies that virtually everyone has to make moral compromises and rationalizations in order to survive]

51 stock] stack [ms. stock is the preferable reading, since stack merely repeats the sense of the word rick in the same line]

62 past] passed [but in line 27 past stands, as in ms.]

63 winter] winter's

65 North] north [the ms. contrasts the lower-case initial of the direction south with the upper-case initial of the geographic region North]

69 grille (*emended from the supposed gwille*) girdle [*girdle is the correct reading; cf. OED, s.v. girdle sb.3.c; I misread the letters because the dot for the i was placed over the first stroke of the letter d—the ms. looks like this: *]

71 slipt] slept [*ms. slipt seems preferable, since it allows for oversight as well as for falling asleep*]

77 Woe] Wo [*woe and wo were both current at the time; ms. reads woe also in line 88, where the first printed text again has wo; OED notes: "The spelling wo has been long prevalent in exclamatory use, and is still affected in poetry" (text from circa 1927)*]

86 winter time] winter-time

90 mirth!] mirth: [*the ms. has no punctuation here; I inserted the exclamation point to follow the exclamatory phrase Then out on . . .*]

92 earth.] earth! [*ms. has a period*]

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## Owen's strange "Meeting": A Note for Professor Muir\*

JON SILKIN

After Professor Muir's gentle note concerning me as a poet and co-editor of *Stand* what may I say but "thankyou"?

Then wherein lie our differences? It is, for instance, not that I don't love Owen's poetry, albeit critically, but that I believe I am trying to locate the conflicts in Owen's expressive responses as a poet.

I think many would now accept that Owen indeed "wrote something in Sassoon's style": the earlier version (and I believe the preferable one) of "The Dead-Beat" signals this, and, more importantly probably suggests that Sassoon, as both complex human being, and poet, provided the catalyst that enabled Owen to transpose the substance of his moral outrage, and pain at human suffering, which he expressed first in his letters, into his poetry (see my *Wilfred Owen: The War Poems*, 1994). Although there are prior sensitive registrations of this pain that, sadly, are not followed through in the poetry *post*-Sassoon. Owen's war poetry shows him to be working to a programme, the substance of which may, largely, be found in the last sentence of Sassoon's by now famous "Statement" which he used to signal his defection from the army, on moral grounds. So the programmatized energy which itself creates, or enables, the channel for his responses to the war would for me constitute one of Owen's modes. Or perhaps, it is a genre which enables a variety of modes.

Another one of these would be that of the cloying anodyne which is a constituent in "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (and several other war poems), and which perhaps more than anything re-inforces my sense

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\*Reference: Kenneth Muir, "Connotations of 'Strange Meeting,'" *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 26-36; Jon Silkin, "'Strange Meeting,' a Fragment? A Reply to Muir's 'Owen,'" *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 186-92; Kenneth Muir, "'Strange Meeting' Yet Again," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 318-20.

that "Anthem" advises a consortium of messages *contrary* to Owen's outrage and, yes, to take up an earlier disagreement, with Dominic Hibberd, contrary also to the true elegy.

Then there is, in Owen's composite poetry, a realistic strand which in general tends to produce his minor poems, such as "Inspection," "The Letter" and, operated on its own, "The Last Laugh." These derive stylistically more than programatically from Sassoon, and thus their energy-span is short, and the product limited. This was Sassoon's zone, and, contrary to received opinion, I believe he did this (forgive me, Professor Muir) "better" than Owen. "Counter-Attack" and "Repression of War Experience" are fine instances:

You're quiet and peaceful, summering safe at home;  
 You'd never think there was a bloody war on! . . .  
 O yes, you would . . . why, you can hear the guns.  
 Hark! Thud, thud, thud,—quite soft . . . they never cease—  
 Those whispering guns—O Christ . . . .

Yet another mode is Owen's capacity for reasoning-through the bitter contradictions (not paradoxes) which engage much of his intelligence (see "Exposure"). This may be seen in the pervasive problem typified in his adjoining the destructive and unnatural energies of combat with the natural growth and normal life of creatures and plants. This indeed is the underpinning of Owen's war poems (he really *is* a war poet) and the energy to which I refer is that of Owen's rational intelligence. This can be instanced in the even-handed registration of both the shame and the courage of soldiers:

With superhuman inhumanities,  
 Long-famous glories, immemorial shames—  
 ("Spring Offensive")

These last two energies are relevant here. One of them might approximately be called realism and the other, an intellectual wrestling with an intractable problem; ("And am I not myself a conscientious objector with a very seared conscience?" *Letter* [?16] May 1917, to his mother).

I've taken time to reach what may be the source of the disagreement between Professor Muir and myself, with respect to "Strange Meeting,"

and it is to do with the intersection of the energies of realism and intellectual argument in that work. Indeed one reason why the composition of the poem presented Owen with such difficulties (as the many Mss of the poem indicate) is that several energies and poetic approaches are confluent in it.

I hope I may count on Professor Muir's agreement that the dialogue in the poem is one of debate, and that it is (contrary to Douglas Kerr's *confused*, non-reading of the later portion of Owen's poem) a debate of some intellectual strength complete with Biblical reference and (self-aware) irony.

My final point, however, centres on the realism. Owen went to some lengths to establish, harmoniously, in the poem, elements of a war-darkened hell where the "encumbered" (kit-laden) sleepers lie, and "no guns thumped." The denial in "no guns" establishes a proximity of external, recognizable reality.

I have already argued that the German soldier is a real soldier in Owen's text, that is, right up to the last version, and I won't further tax Professor Muir's or anyone's patience on this; anyone interested may consult my note to the poem in my *Wilfred Owen* (above). Perhaps the argument might be deposed this way. A debate inside oneself provides no mutually exclusive grounds for denying the existence here of two real soldiers, as I think "German" suggests. Nor perhaps the reverse; a "realistic" reading of the poem accomodates also an internal psychological argument within oneself. Perhaps Owen's difficulties with the poem, in part reflect the difficulty of accomodating these two projections; but I would argue for not the sexual element some readers suggest may be present, but the physical component of war, and thus the otherness of the other soldier: "Of whose blood lies yet crimson on my shoulder where his head was—and where so lately yours was—I must not now write" (Letter 662, to his mother; 4th [or 5th] October 1918). The letter was written after the poem "Strange Meeting," but the letter reveals how strongly the physical (and sexual?) nature of experience imprinted itself on Owen's psyche. The letter, typically, is part of the way towards a poem in the making.



## Elizabeth Bishop and a Grammar for the Underclass? Response to Jonathan Ausubel's "Subjected People" in the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop\*

JACQUELINE VAUGHT BROGAN

When Elizabeth Bishop concludes her well-known poem, "At the Fishhouses," with the genuinely *re-markable* line that since "our knowledge is historical," it is also "flowing, and flown" (CP 66), she extends a venerable poetic tradition in which the poet, or at least the poet's perceptions, simultaneously sound two notes: one, critical—poised at one remove from social and/or natural constructs—and the other, transcendent or redemptive—that is, pointing toward the possibility of alternative future constructs, even if those constructs are only aesthetically conceived.<sup>1</sup> It is to the socially critical Bishop (as well as to the implicit possibility for social transformation or redemption which social criticism might open) that Jonathan Ausubel addresses himself in his article. One corollary of Ausubel's stance, at least as I read his essay (which is also implied by his use of the word "for" in the subtitle), is that it assumes on Bishop's part a commitment to writing socially activist verse or, at the very least, verse that repeatedly and intentionally exposes what he calls the "cycle of domination" from "childhood to adulthood," from "personal to societal levels" (83).

My calling attention to the assumption of political activism in Bishop's "grammar for the underclass" is especially critical to understanding both Bishop's poetry and her poetics. As Adrienne Rich has recently pointed out, just what is the nature of politically activist verse is open to debate, especially in this century, with ramifications that extend into Bishop's poetry itself.<sup>2</sup> While I concur with both Rich and Ausubel that Bishop's

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\*Reference: Jonathan Ausubel, "Subjected People: Towards a Grammar for the Underclass in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry," *Connotations* 4.1-2 (1994/95): 83-97.

poetry is far more political than has been traditionally conceived, I finally find the case for reading Bishop's grammatical structures in terms of sympathy for the "underclass" more socially-pointed than I think her corpus can bear. This is not to say that Bishop is *not* concerned with the "underclass" (variously described by Ausubel as referring to women, children, and people of minority races, as well as those of economic deprivation), nor even to say that it is not politically activist, at least in the way Rich brings to bear on contemporary poetry. I have, myself, organized a panel at a recent American Literature Association Conference entitled "The Radical Bishop," with the express purpose of bringing the subtly inscribed political concerns of her verse to light. It is quite to the point here, however, that as a member of that panel, Eric Cheyfitz convincingly argued that in comparison to the overtly activist verse of Brazilian poets with whom Bishop was quite familiar, Bishop's poetry seems at a far remove from socially concerned verse.<sup>3</sup> Rather than dismissing the social import of her poetry, what I am trying to suggest is that Bishop's poetry argues—to twist Emerson's famous line one turn—that we are all not only "jailed by consciousness" but jailed by language itself (and, of course, by the actual political structures that language inevitably gives rise to). It is a literal *con-scription* that, at least in Bishop's poetry, imprisons men as well as women, the wealthy as well as the poor, the "dominant" as well as the more obviously "subjected."

Put differently, I wish to ask in relation to Ausubel's provocative argument, if there were a "grammar for the underclass" in Bishop's verse, wouldn't it exclude or not speak for the supposedly dominant class? If, as Ausubel argues, Bishop employs such devices as prepositional phrases (as in the poem itself entitled "In the Waiting Room") in order to point to the literal objectification (as in the "objective case") of the victimized underclass, or co-ordinate conjunctions (as in his reading of certain words in "Sestina") to point to the lack of conjunctival equality, then Bishop's "grammar for the underclass" would not only describe what he calls the "cycle of domination" (largely a patriarchal construct in both Ausubel's argument and much of contemporary criticism) but demand a new grammatical construct—and potentially new social construct—which would give voice to those dominated. However, despite

the fact that Bishop's poetry *does* make us aware of the literal and figurative silence of those victimized in various cultural constructs, such an "either/or" sense of the dominant versus the suppressed does not fit Bishop's work at all. In fact, from the relatively early "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" to the late "Santarém" (the latter of which explicitly rejects "either/or" constructions such as "life/death, right/wrong" and "male/female" [CP 185]), Bishop makes it clear that the victimization she has in mind is equally applicable to men as well as women, to adults as well as children, to the wealthy as well as the economically deprived by virtue of the apparently inescapable and conscripting power of not merely consciousness (or self-consciousness) but of language itself. Such an ironically disquieting and universal effect of language seems to me to be precisely the point of Bishop's exquisitely self-referential line in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" which announces, "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and'" (CP 58).

In such a nearly inexplicable line, Bishop is not advocating an inversion of some Jakobsen sense of the primacy of metaphor (conceived on vertical lines) over metonymy (conceived on horizontal lines), but is rather describing the levelling effect of such linguistic play and constraints as being itself *metonymic* for a whole world of politically-realized *conscriptations*. It is precisely this sense of the seemingly inescapable power of linguistic *con-scriptation* that led me, in an article that Ausubel cites, to ask whether or not the obvious victimization of "women and babies" in the poem "In the Waiting Room" is not itself metonymic for a whole world at war—including men—and the various political and linguistic constructs that give rise to such instances of domination.<sup>4</sup> I am not here disavowing a certain feminist reading of Bishop's verse that I clearly wished to support in that article. I am clarifying that as I see it Bishop's feminist awareness and politics embraces *men as well as women*—or, in relation to Ausubel's essay—the dominant class as well as the underclass—precisely because of her awareness of unavoidable conscriptions of language itself. Such an awareness seems to me more nearly the import of Bishop's "grammar"—and poetics—than the socially-activist verse Ausubel's argument implies. The lack of the copulative "is" in the line just cited from "Over 2,000 Illustrations" is impor-

tant—and in this sense Ausubel is completely right: grammar proves critical in Bishop's verse. But the lack of the copulative, the word for "being," signals in that poem an ironically universal objectification, from the "squatting Arab" to the "Christian Empire" to the "dead Mexican" and "the English woman"—even "the Nativity" itself (CP 57-58). Elsewhere, as in "Roosters," the obviously macho and militaristic roosters, one of whom "lies in dung / with his dead wives" (CP 37), suffer a culturally inscribed fate as much as the supposedly "subjected." Bishop makes this point again and again—notably in the symbolic "weak mailed fist" of "Armadillo" (CP 104), in the dying soldier (as well as Micuçu) from "The Burglar of Babylon," in the soldier, the Jew, the sailor, the poet, all in "the house of Bedlam" ("Visit to St. Elizabeth's," a poem which deftly uses the repetition of a child's nursery rhyme to embody repeated abuse and victimization, including those of the supposedly dominant class as well as the obviously suppressed). In this regard, a letter written to May Swenson in 1971 proves quite revealing:

I don't like things compartmentalized like that [i.e., separating women's from men's literature]. . . . I like black & white, yellow & red, young & old, *rich & poor, and male & female*, all mixed up, socially—and see no reason for segregating them, for any reason at all, artistically, either [emphasis mine].<sup>5</sup>

To clarify my disagreement with Ausubel's premise in "Towards a Grammar for the Underclass," I wish to examine "Sestina," a poem which Ausubel himself examines at length toward the end of his essay. Put succinctly, Ausubel argues that "the child" (notably unnamed and ungendered) and, to some extent, the grandmother of the poem are rendered voiceless by the socio-economic constructs implied in the poem, but given voice by the poet herself. To some extent, such a reading of "Sestina" rings true. The child's and grandmother's pain are rendered as absolute and unending, governed by an "almanac" that inscribes such debilitating (although witty) clichés as "*I know what I know*" and "*It's time to plant tears.*" As he goes on to argue, the co-ordinate conjunction "but" in the poem (a word which for me *semantically* announces separation, not union) which appears between the grandmother and child points to extreme isolation between the two characters of the poem

rather than conjunction or communion of any sort. He then announces that the "child steps in as maker, drawing a house, populating it with the poem's only man and displaying the work for the grandmother" (95) who, he says, will not regard the work, thus completing yet "another poem in which avenues of powerlessness themselves remain 'in-scrutable'" (96).

Such a reading implies that the main paradigm of power, however inscrutable, lies along the axis of some empowered being (presumably that of the almanac *representing* the actual socio-economic power of the "only man" in the poem) versus the unempowered grandmother and child. However, there are at least four paradigms for the literal conscription at work in this poem—the almanac, the drawing, the people (grandmother, child, and absent man), and the poetic structure of the sestina itself, all inter-locking as it were. So overwhelming are these series of interlocutres that the "grammar" of "Sestina" becomes a series of *ligatures* effectively erasing the possibility of ethical obligation or religious consolation.<sup>6</sup>

Put briefly, the almanac, which utters various insidious clichés, is described as hovering over the grandmother and child in a "birdlike" manner. While Bishop may well have had in mind the overtly sexist prescriptions about male and female behavior that punctuate pages in the past century's almanac, the "bird-like" hovering of the almanac both recalls and then dismisses the authoritative presence of holy-spirit-as-dove conferring the scene below. The bird-like almanac is, in the poem, entirely secular, born of human and of linguistic constructs. While it may be tempting in our particular critical moment to regard such an image as an exposure on Bishop's part of the alignment of religious and economic constructs as being that of precisely patriarchal dominance, the other paradigms of the poem point to a more unsettling insight on the poet's part—that is, that we are *all* equally subjected by the language constructing and conscripting our world. In this sense, Ausubel's main title is far more accurate than the subtitle singling out the "underclass"—that is, Bishop's poetry suggests we are *all* "subjected people."

Thus, the child's drawing, far from being an instance of creative measure, serves by its very pre-dictability to remind us of the cultural (and linguistically-derived) codes informing its production:

With crayons the child draws a rigid house  
 and a winding pathway. Then the child  
 puts in a man with buttons like tears  
 and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

While the mark of the poet (however ironically) appears in the unusual simile of "buttons like tears," the "child" clearly does not partake of such creative originality. Despite the "winding" pathway—which seems to me quite predictable as well—the import of the drawing is on the rigidity—a rigidity which in fact impacts *all* the characters of the poem, including the man, as well as the form of the poem itself.

Which brings us to the characters of the poem. "The grandmother" is obviously dictated to by powers of dominance, and specifically gendered powers of dominance. Cooking at the stove, cutting bread, making tea, she seems to have little life beyond that which the house as female domain will support for her. So too "the child," who is specifically non-gendered—with the implication that whatever gendered constrictions may impose on "the grandmother" may equally apply, whether male or female, to "the child" learning the lesson of life and language from grandmother, almanac, or drawings alike. It is, I admit, not a difficult interpretive move to regard this man as being at the center of this picture (although the poem does not say that he is in the center of the drawing), thus representing the centered or dominant avenue of power, displacing and subjecting the grandmother and the child through socially-inherited "lines." However, if we are to look seriously at the grammar of the poem, what may be remarkable is that while "grandmother" and "child" are preceded by the *definite* article "the," the man in the poem is in fact inscribed by the *indefinite* article "a." Perhaps by introducing "a man," Bishop is in fact suggesting that any man serves as well as any other to represent the patriarchal line of dominance subjecting the grandmother and child. But I find the overall impact of the poem thus far to be suggesting that, like the absent aunt in the poem "In the Waiting Room," this indefinite man is precisely an empty cypher, a "zero," a "void," a mere "figure in some predetermined social text."<sup>7</sup>

To this extent, "Sestina" then emerges as a tour de force of poetic expression of universal oppression. A notoriously "rigid" poetic form,

in which from the first stanza, the end-position of every line is literally predicted, the sestina enacts the interlocution of its structure as erasing every personal presence in the poem. All—grandmother, child, and man—emerge as absences erased by the linguistic con-scriptions entrapping them in what is now perhaps *not* such an “inscrutable house.”<sup>8</sup> If, in fact, the repeated words of the sestina—“tea,” “stove,” “almanac,” “house,” “grandmother,” “child,” and “tears”—are mundanely normal, what they disturbingly suggest, through the rigid form of the poem, is how precisely normative such conscription as described in the poem is for everyone—whether male or female, adult or child, supposedly dominant or oppressed. This, I believe, is a more accurate move towards reading “a grammar” of Bishop’s poetry. In this regard, it is not without significance that the poem is written entirely in the present (and present perfect) tense, suggesting (quite ironically) that such absencing of personal or autonomous presence is an on-going consequence of cultural scripts predetermining our world.

I would like, however, to conclude with one aside—or rather two asides, one in appreciation of Jonathan Ausubel’s insights and the other in appreciation of Bishop’s craft itself. While I may have noted certain disagreements or, more accurately, qualifications about Ausubel’s interpretation of Bishop’s grammar, I am persuaded that he is absolutely right in calling attention to this largely neglected fact of her verse and in suggesting that her grammar has far more ethical import than has been imagined both in the earliest criticism, which called attention to her exquisite and realistic details, and subsequent criticism, which (including my own) has emphasized the feminist dynamics in her work. Bishop’s grammar—like her deft use of prosodic forms—bears much further enquiry. Second, as I noted above, the mark of the *poet*, as opposed to the subject of the poem, announces itself in “Sestina” with the unlikely simile of “buttons like tears.” This particular simile is only one of many in which Bishop transcends the historical scene she is critiquing, and only one of many grammatic forms with which she achieves such aesthetic, albeit momentary, transcendence. From the early “A Cold Spring,” where the fireflies (and then the evening stars) rise “exactly like the bubbles in champagne” (CP 56) to her posthumously-published “Sonnet,” where she escapes (both semantically and

structurally) the constructs which would bind her, we find in the carefully crafted grammar and form of Bishop's verse a clue for understanding how her poetry, so frequently grave in what it records, is also so full of a levity that makes it (and perhaps us) endure. In her hands, it becomes increasingly clear and true that all "our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown." If not politically activist, as such, her verse is aesthetically activist in ways that do impinge, as Ausubel rightly notes, on the political understanding of our world. As she says in a well-known poem, in lines that could well summarize the relation of her poetics to politics,

The world seldom changes,  
but the wet foot dangles  
until a bird arranges  
two notes at right angles. (CP 130)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this essay I shall use the abbreviation *CP* for *Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Adrienne Rich, "The Hermit's Scream," *PMLA* (October 1983): 1157-64. It is worth noting that in addition to such obviously political poets as June Jordan and Audre Lourde, Rich includes Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop in her discussion of what politically activist poetry means or can mean.

<sup>3</sup>The preceding is a summary of Eric Cheyfitz' talk for the panel, "The Radical Bishop," at the American Literature Association Conference, Baltimore, May 1993.

<sup>4</sup>In "Elizabeth Bishop: *Perversity* as Lyric Voice," *AmerP* 7.2 (1990): 31-49, I suggest that "Bishop manages to imply that the feminine experience [in 'In the Waiting Room'] may be equally metonymic and synecdochic for the whole violated human condition." In relation to her "Quai d'Orléans" I suggest in the same article that Bishop "at least implies that the prison of consciousness is metonymic for the cultural position of women. Or that the cultural conscription of women is metonymic for the conscription of all human consciousness." In a pointedly feminist essay, "The Moral of the Story: Naming the Thief in Elizabeth Bishop's 'Babylon,'" *Ellipsis* 1 (1991): 277-86, I have subsequently made it clear that such conscription, especially as it is realized in politically encoded terms, occurs by way of language.

<sup>5</sup>*Elizabeth Bishop: One Art*, ed. Robert Giroux (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984) 549.



<sup>6</sup>The etymological relation between "obligation," "religion," and "ligatures" of various sorts has been pointed out in several recent works by John Caputo.

<sup>7</sup>I am citing Lee Edelman, with whom I concur in reading both the aunt and the child in "In the Waiting Room" as empty cyphers rather than as autonomous beings: "The Geography of Gender: Elizabeth Bishop's 'In the Waiting Room,'" *ConL* 26 (1985): 196.

<sup>8</sup>While the preceding interpretation of "Sestina" (especially the sense that the "conscription" it inscribes is equally applicable to men as well as women and children) is mine, I am indebted to Marie Krumb for her insight into how the poem's prosodic structure re-enacts the highly sexist codes being inscribed by the overhanging almanac. See, for example, any number of Poor Richards' sayings (author, Benjamin Franklin) which became household words through *Poor Richards' Almanac* two centuries before: "After three days men grow weary of a wench, a guest, and rainy weather"; "Three things are men most likely to be cheated in, a horse, a wig, and a wife."