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Textual Surprises (I)

Other ARTICLES and RESPONSES

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Robinson Crusoe, 'The Other' and the Poetics of Surprise[1]

DAVID FISHELOV

Textual Surprise: Some Basic Observations

I would like to present a few interesting and surprising episodes of encounter between Robinson Crusoe and 'the other' in Defoe's story. While discussing these episodes, I will also suggest some principles and possibilities characterizing the poetics of surprise in literature in general and in narrative fiction in particular. The element of surprise in Defoe's novel should of course not astonish us, because the very title promises surprising elements: *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner etc*.[2] Some of these promised surprises occur, as can be expected of a story of adventures, on the level of the action, the plot. Others, however, may occur on a deeper, conceptual and ideological level. Note that these two types are not mutually exclusive—the latter may be due to an outer event, but the surprising effect goes far beyond questions typical of 'surprising adventures.'

Before analyzing these episodes, a few clarifications of the notion of surprise are in order. It is useful, first, to place surprise in the multi-faceted and dynamic spectrum of textual effects stemming from the temporal nature of the literary text. In his systematic discussion of different strategies for unfolding narrative information, Sternberg proposes some useful distinctions: *Curiosity* is evoked wherever a relevant piece of information of the story's chronological past (or 'exposition') is felt to be missing by the reader (e.g. the 'Whodunit' of a classical detective story); *suspense* occurs when the reader desires to know a piece of information belonging to the story's chronological future (e.g. will Polyphemos devour Odysseus; will King Kong de-

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vour the young woman?). Both of these effects rely on the perceptibility of the missing and desired information at a specific point in the reading process; the reader senses that in order to construe a coherent story, an information *gap* is to be filled in, and this missing piece is either part of the past or the future of the reconstructed chronological sequence of events, i.e. of the story's *fabula* (vs. its *sujet*).[3] But there are cases where the gap is not felt to be missing by the reader and he/she realizes that it was there only *in retrospect*; in such cases the reader experiences a *surprise* (e.g. we are surprised when the narrator tells us that a Martian opened the door, because we were not told earlier that the fictive world is inhabited with extra-terrestrial creatures). Note that the information of such 'retrospective gaps' belongs to the story's past. Thus, by using two criteria—(1) does the missing relevant information belong to the past or to the future of the story line, and (2) is the missing information felt to be missing by the reader—Sternberg is able to distinguish elegantly between three major textual effects—curiosity, suspense and surprise:

> [the difference] between curiosity and suspense relates to the chronological direction of the missing and desired information (narrative past versus future); while that between curiosity and surprise relates to the perceptibility of the process of gapping and gap-filling. With "curiosity gaps," the reader is at once alerted to the deformation of antecedents; with "surprise gaps," in contrast, his awareness of the gap's very existence and/or relevance and/or true significance is retrospective, being delayed to the point of closure rather than heightened at the point of opening.[4]

Let us now elaborate a bit on the nature of the 'retrospective' surprising effect. First, it is important to note that it is a relational concept, i.e., someone is surprised only with reference to a specific set of expectations. Given one set of expectations, a textual unit (an event or a semantic unit or a word or even a sound) may be integrated in the text continuum as a 'natural,' 'expected' consequence, but in another context will be labeled 'a surprise.' Note also that in order to be perceived as a surprise, it is not sufficient for this textual unit simply not to follow from the set of established expectations. It should stand in contrast to what are regarded as the essential characteristics of the

previously established frame. If we know a character in a novel to be a villain, it is expected of him to perform evil acts. If the novelist decides to describe this villain in a domestic situation, it does not necessarily mean that we will be surprised, because this does not contradict the essential traits of the character. If, however, this villain suddenly performs an act of charity, it will be a surprise, because charitable acts are not compatible with being 'a villain.'

The more strongly an organizing principle has been established in a text, and the stronger the clash between what we perceive to be its essential elements and the ensuing textual unit, the stronger will be the effect of surprise. Thus, the concept of textual surprise is, first, a relational one: no element or pattern in and of itself is 'surprising.' We may be surprised if at the beginning of what seems to be a realistic novel, an animal starts to talk—because at that point we assume that the fictive world is organized according to realistic, life-like principles. But if another animal responds to the first talking animal, our sense of surprise will lessen, we will start looking for a generic framework that can accommodate such events (e.g. a fairy tale or a fantastic story), and our set of expectations will consequently change. To take this argument a step further, in some cases of fantastic tales—rare perhaps but still significant—the occurrence of 'normal,' 'life-like' events may be perceived as surprising. [5]

In a complementary manner, there is no specific element or pattern that necessarily blocks the surprising effect. Repetition may be considered a serious candidate for serving as an "anti-surprise" pattern. And indeed repetitions usually increase our sense of the known, the familiar and hence decrease the possibility of surprise. Still, even repetitions are not guarantors against the surprising effect, especially when they occur in places where sheer continuity is expected, where sheer continuity is expected, where sheer continuity is expected ….

In addition to its relational nature, the surprising effect is of course gradated. One can speak of degrees of surprise: moving from a 'zero degree' (the occurrence of an expected element, entailed by the previous text), to a moderate surprise and ending up with an utter surprise or 'a shock.'

From its relational and gradated nature, it is clear that textual surprise can be manifested in innumerable ways, depending on the chosen genre: an adventure story full of dramatic turns in the plot (e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*), a detective story that surprises us in the disclosure of the specific identity of the murderer (e.g. Agatha Christie's classical stories), a lyrical novella ending with an unexpected psychological epiphany experienced by the major character (e.g. Joyce's "The Dead"), avant-garde literature attempting to *épater la bourgeoisie* by deviating from established aesthetic norms (e.g. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*).

The surprising effect may occur in different layers of the literary text: sound patterns, semantics, character, plot, implied ideology. In short lyrical poems, surprises may occur on the sound level as a clash between the prosodic pattern that has been established up to that point in the text continuum, and a specific sound. If in the first quatrain of a sonnet we detect a rhyming scheme of a-b-b-a, we will expect the next quatrain to have another a-b-b-a. If, however, we encounter c-d-d-c, this may not conform to our initial expectation, but will not be a great surprise—because it still conforms, on a higher level of abstraction, to the rhyming scheme of an Italian sonnet. But if we find in the second quatrain a scheme of c-d-c-d, we will be a bit taken aback—because this rhyming scheme is associated with the Shakespearean sonnet. Or, to take a stronger example, if throughout the first eleven lines of a poem we have a recurring rhyming scheme of a-b-a-b etc., we would be surprised if the twelfth line did not conclude with b rhyme.[6] The reader may also be surprised on the level of meter (e.g. iambic pentameter suddenly changing into a dactylic line) or on that of the expressive import of sounds (e.g. expressive 'soft' sounds replaced by 'hard' ones).[7] Figurative language in poetry may also be a rich source of surprises: e.g. the unexpected juxtaposition of two incongruent semantic fields, 'yoked by violence together' in the conceits of the metaphysical poets and in a great part of modernist poetry.[8]

There is, however, one significant difference between texts that construct a fictive world with life-like characters and events, and texts that do not, like many short lyrical poems, vis-à-vis the surprising effect. Whereas in lyrical poems surprises, as a rule, occur only on the level of the reader's response (in his/her attempt to integrate prosodic and semantic units), in a work of fiction the surprising effect may occur on two levels, that of the reader's response, and also that of the fictive world: it is not only the reader who may be surprised, but very often a character is caught by surprise. The ubiquity of surprise in the world of the novel has been lucidly described by Sternberg, using *Pride and Prejudice* as an example:

> Surprise, a related symptom of lack of information or mistaken conception, is […] one of the key-phenomena in the novel, just as the word "surprise" (with its synonyms) is one of its key-words. Characters are surprised on almost every page, sometimes owing to their peculiar deficiencies and sometimes in the company of others (not excluding the reader), sometimes more and sometimes less justifiably, sometimes by trivial and sometimes by momentous discoveries, the latter simultaneously evoking deeper feelings as well, such as joy, alarm, or regret.[9]

It is important to note that the two levels of surprise—reader's and character's responses—do not necessarily overlap. There are cases where a character is surprised while the reader is not, because he/she already possesses the relevant information that the character lacks. When My Man Friday witnesses for the first time in his life the use of a gun by Crusoe, during the scene of his rescue, he is shocked: "that which astonish'd him most, was to know how I had kill'd the other Indian so far off, so pointing to him, he made Signs to me to let him go to him, so I bad him go, as well as I could; when he came to him, he stood like one amaz'd" (148). The reader, who of course knows how a gun works, is, unlike Friday, neither astonished nor amazed.

There are cases where both character and reader are surprised. Perhaps the most dramatic such moment in *Robinson Crusoe* occurs when Crusoe discovers a footprint on his uninhabited island:

> It happen'd one Day about Noon going towards my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand: I stood like one Thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an Apparition. (112)

The reader may not share the depth of Crusoe's shock, but he/she, like the character, is certainly utterly surprised and shares the need for finding a plausible explanation for the mysterious phenomenon. For Crusoe the effect of surprise quickly turns into deep anxiety. He tells us that it is difficult to describe "how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in, how many wild Ideas were found every Moment in my Fancy, and what strange unaccountable Whimsies came into my Thoughts by the Way" (112). At one point his turbulent mind fancies it

> must be the Devil; and Reason joyn'd in with me upon this Supposition: For how should any other Thing in human Shape come into the Place? Where was the Vessel that brought them? What Marks was there of any other Footsteps! And how was it possible a Man should come there? (112)

When Crusoe ruminates about the possibility that the Devil is responsible for the footprint, the reader—adhering to realistic principles of explanation and less emotionally involved in the situation—distances him/her self from Crusoe. Still, despite the frenzy that overcomes Crusoe's mind at that point, it is interesting to note how he still follows the rational logic of hypothesis formation in "gap filling," debating various pros and cons for corroborating a feasible explanation of the strange phenomenon. This logic may point to an interesting dynamics characterizing the effect of surprise. In encountering an unexpected element, we—both reader and character—try to form an ad-hoc explanation that will turn the unexpected into the expected; we attempt to eliminate the element of surprise, by constructing, "retrospectively," a coherent (preferably causal) chain of events—into which the surprising element can be integrated. When we succeed in this construction activity, the surprising element ceases (in retrospect) to be surprising. The moment we understand that the footprint was formed by a savage during a visit to the island, its existence is no

longer a mystery. Here one can see the close link between the effects of surprise and curiosity: the surprising effect immediately activates our sense of curiosity, directing our attention to missing relevant information from the narrative past that may account for the present unexplained phenomenon. In that respect, one may describe surprise as a 'retroactive curiosity.'

In the footprint episode both reader and character are surprised (and consequently their curiosity is aroused), and this is not a rare case in the novel. When Crusoe (the character) is surprised, chances are that the reader shares his surprise. It is useful in this context to be reminded of the distinction between Crusoe-the-character and Crusoe-the-narrator. Whereas the former can be surprised, the latter cannot; as a narrator he is privileged, by definition, in possessing all the relevant information of his story from the very first page and hence cannot be surprised by anything he relates. Defoe made Crusoe-the-narrator decide, however, in the greatest part of the book to limit the information he unfolds to the scope of information possessed by Crusoe-the-character.[10] This narratorial decision is the major source for creating surprising effects for the reader. Had Crusoe-the-narrator chosen to give us the relevant information he already possesses, events would no longer be experienced as surprising (e.g. the footprint episode).

We have seen a case where the character's surprise coincides with the reader's surprise, and where the character's surprise is not shared by the reader. What about a case where something happens that surprises the reader, but not the character? Such cases are harder to find in *Robinson Crusoe*, and those that can be found are less dramatic and more subtle than those discussed so far. Still, there are situations where Crusoe does something that surprises the reader to some degree, with no indication that he himself experienced any such effect. When Crusoe and Xury are rescued, the generous Portuguese captain of the rescuing ship offers to buy from Crusoe his boat, and in addition, "he offer'd me also 60 Pieces of Eight more for my Boy *Xury*" (26). Crusoe's immediate reaction is to reject the captain's offer: "I was

very loath to sell the poor Boy's Liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own" (26). Hearing Crusoe's objection, the captain offers a "Medium" (i.e. a compromise): "he would give the Boy an Obligation to set him free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian" (26). At this point, all of Crusoe's noble thoughts of upholding Xury's liberty evaporate and he takes the offer. I would like to argue that at this point, the reader may be a little surprised at witnessing Crusoe's quick change of mind, but Crusoe himself does not experience any such surprise. There is no indication that Crusoe sensed any discrepancy between his initial reaction and his final decision. Later on, when Crusoe settles in Brazil, he expresses a regret for selling Xury: "and now I found more than before, I had done wrong in parting with my Boy *Xury*" (27), but the reasons for his regrets are by no means moral, but rather practical and economical; Crusoe, together with his neighbor and partner "planted some Tobacco, and made each of us a large Piece of Ground ready for planting Canes in the Year to come; but we both wanted Help" (27). Note that this is not the only time when Crusoe has a sudden change of mind after expressing some high thoughts. The most famous case occurs when, after his rhetoric on the uselessness of the money he found on the shipwreck, calling it "Drug," he adds: "However, upon Second Thoughts, I took it away" (43). In this case it is possible to imagine that Crusoe himself experiences a small surprise (he is surprised by his own change of mind), indicated in the use of "However." But it seems that the reader's surprise is much greater. And Defoe stands behind Crusoe's back, with an ironic smile, inviting us to ponder on his character's true motivations.

The fact that there is no automatic or necessary correspondence between reader's and character's surprise is a rich source of aesthetic and rhetorical effects.[11] When a character is surprised, but not the reader (e.g. we know more than Friday does about guns), it is a typical case of what is usually referred to as dramatic irony.[12] When the narrator limits his/her scope of knowledge to that of a character, so that both reader and character are surprised, it goes with the establishment

of close reader-character relations, often enhancing the reader's identification with the character, although it may also be a source of subtle irony towards that character. In fact, such a mixture of identification and subtle irony can often be found in *Robinson Crusoe*.[13] And, as we saw in the case where Crusoe decides to sell Xury, a narrator could create a momentarily puzzling effect that may lead to an ironic critique of his character.[14]

Two Surprising Encounters with 'The Other'

So far, I have outlined some general principles concerning the notion of surprise. Before discussing some further interesting possibilities of the surprising effect, let us turn to two episodes in *Robinson Crusoe* involving the presence of 'the other.' The encounter with "my Man Friday" of course plays a central and important role in the book. But this famous encounter is not the first one where Crusoe meets and cooperates with 'the other.' Throughout the novel, the inhabitants of non-European lands represent for Crusoe a personal existential threat as well as a symbolic threat to Western civilization. Not only does he fear the encounter with savages, but also that he himself would become in his solitude "a meer Savage" (95). The extreme threat is epitomized in the image of the cannibal. This fearsome figure has deep literary roots: the story of Polyphemos in Homer's *Odyssey* establishes a close link between cannibalism and inhospitable, uncivilized attitudes towards foreign visitors.

My first episode is taken from the early stages of the book, before Crusoe lands on 'his' famous uninhabited island. A brief reminder: The voyage that brought Crusoe to the island where he spent twenty-eight years was not his first one. In fact, Crusoe is a serial traveler, and in all these travels he follows a distinct pattern. It begins with an adventurous impulse to leave the middle class English environment, to set sail and look for fortune and adventure. Then he faces some kind of catastrophe (created by nature or man) that forces him to

repent his Devil-propelled impulse. His remorse, however, has a very short life span. The moment he recuperates from the catastrophe, he starts planning the next round.

In one of his first voyages out of England, Crusoe is captured by pirates and sold as a slave to the Moors. After two years in captivity, he succeeds in escaping on a small boat and sails near the African shoreline, accompanied by Xury, a Moorish boy (a short prelude to his relationship with Friday). They have to go on shore for water and food, but they are constantly fearful of a twofold danger: wild beasts and savages. First, they see "vast great Creatures […] of many sorts […] and they made such hideous Howlings and Yellings, that I never indeed heard the like" (20). The idea of going on shore at night is dismissed because they are afraid of becoming the food of such creatures. The alternative—going on shore in daylight—seems as menacing, "for to have fallen into the Hands of any of the Savages, had been as bad as to have fallen into the Hands of Lyons and Tygers" (20). When they discuss the possibility of going on shore to fetch water, Xury suggests, as a faithful servant, that he, and not Crusoe, would go. Crusoe asks why he would do that and Xury's answer is— "*If wild Mans come, they eat me, you go wey*" (20).

Finally, after they have exhausted their supplies, the moment of truth of an actual encounter with the savages approaches. But just before this meeting takes place, Crusoe describes a frightening encounter with a lion. In one of their landings on shore to get some water, they perceive "a dreadful Monster" (22). It is a sleeping lion, and they decide to kill him. Crusoe takes aim, shoots at the lion, but does not kill him immediately. The injured beast "gave the most hideous Roar that ever I heard." Only after a second and a third shot does the lion die. When they first perceive the lion, Crusoe suggests that Xury kill him and the latter's first reaction is "*Me kill! he eat me at one Mouth*" (22). This encounter with the lion undoubtedly evokes afresh the characters', and our, apprehensions about the coming encounter with the savages.

When they perceive the land to be inhabited, the first thing Crusoe notes is that the men on the shore "were quite Black and Stark-naked" (23). The stage is set for the realization of their worst nightmares. At this point, both Crusoe and Xury share similar fears. So they keep at a distance and start to communicate with the savages by signs. And here, lo and behold, the savages seem to respond with good will and even bring "Pieces of dry Flesh and some Corn" (23) to the beach. Now Crusoe and Xury are caught between their deeply entrenched fears and their urgent need to fetch the provisions. And another surprise: Crusoe and Xury are not the only frightened people around: "I was not for venturing on Shore to them, and they were as much afraid of us" (23). And there comes yet another surprise. The way-out of the standoff is offered by the savages: "they took a safe way for us all, for they brought it to the Shore and laid it down, and went and stood a great way off till we fetch'd it on Board, and then came close to us again" (23).

Crusoe's greatest fears are exposed in a subtly ironic light: instead of devouring them, these black, stark-naked savages give them food; instead of eating them alive, they provide them with aliments. And, while doing so, the savages even show tact and inventiveness by finding the way to supply the goods without making direct contact. Both the characters and the reader are surprised by the savages' benevolent and virtuous conduct. Does this make Crusoe re-consider his prejudices concerning savage people? Well, not necessarily. It does, however, make *us* aware of such prejudices permeating Western culture. Note that the surprising effect that the two characters (Crusoe and Xury) and the reader experience occurs on the outer level of the plot but evokes unexpected questions (about racial and cultural prejudices) on a deeper, ideological level.

The other episode I would like to focus on takes place on Crusoe's uninhabited island, with 'his' man Friday. Crusoe's attitude towards Friday is fundamentally instrumental. During the dramatic scene of Friday's rescue from the hands (and mouths!) of his enemies, Crusoe is torn between fear and hope. The argument that seems to tip the

scale is his need for a servant: "It came now very warmly upon my Thoughts, and indeed irresistibly [sic], that now was my Time to get me a Servant, and perhaps a Companion, or Assistant" (146). Note how the word "companion" is hidden between the other two nouns—servant and assistant—and is qualified by the hesitant "perhaps."

After Crusoe has been teaching Friday a basic English vocabulary, necessary for communicating to him the Master's needs so that Friday may duly perform his duties, he moves to a different layer of instruction. Crusoe decides to play the role of a missionary and to instruct Friday in "the Knowledge of the true God" (156). First, he explains to him the notion of an almighty God, and Friday seems to be able to grasp this notion, perhaps because there are some striking similarities between Christian practices and beliefs and those of the savages. The unexpected analogy created between the savages' 'ridiculous' and 'primitive' beliefs and practices and those of 'elevated' and 'true' Christianity, notably the Catholic Church, has clear satirical implications. In both religious systems, for example, there is a cast of priests who are in charge of relations with divinity and use unintelligible prayers to promote their social hegemony.

While Friday is capable of grasping the concept of God, he experiences some difficulties in understanding the concept of the Devil: "I found it was not so easie to imprint right Notions in his Mind about the Devil, as it was about the Being of a God" (157). When describing to Friday the enmity between God and the Devil, and how the latter uses his skill "to defeat the good Designs of Providence, and to ruine the Kingdom of Christ in the World," Crusoe is interrupted by a question from Friday, and the following dialogue ensues:

> but you say, God is so strong, so great, is he not much strong, much might as the Devil? Yes, yes, says I, *Friday*, God is stronger than the Devil, God is above the Devil, and therefore we pray to God to tread him down under our Feet, and enable us to resist his Temptations and quench his fiery Darts. (157-58)

So far, Crusoe seems to be perfectly capable of responding to Friday's query by using his received ideas. But Friday is not satisfied

with these common beliefs and asks: "*if God much strong, much might as the Devil, why God no kill the Devil, so make him no more do wicked?*" (158).

This simple but troubling question seems to take Crusoe off balance, and he comments that he "was strangely surpriz'd" (158) by it. Note how Crusoe echoes here the phrase from the book's title "Strange [and] Surprizing Adventures." At this point, Crusoe's behavior takes some comical turns. First, he tries to find excuses for his inability to come up with a convincing answer: "and after all, tho' I was now an old Man, yet I was but a young Doctor, and ill enough quallified for a Casuist, or a Solver of Difficulties" (158). Then he retreats to the oldest trick in the world for gaining time:[15] "And at first I could not tell what to say, so I pretended not to hear him, and ask'd him what he said?" (158). Crusoe's trick however does not work. Friday "was too earnest for an Answer to forget his Question; so that he repeated it in the very same broken Words, as above" (158).

Friday's funny broken language does not conceal the seriousness of his deep theological doubt. Every religion that postulates the existence of an almighty and benevolent God *and* of a Devil has to struggle with Friday's question (as the book of Job has already shown[16]). And, to the best of my knowledge, there is still no simple and satisfying answer to that question.

After elaborating a few more important aspects of Christian doctrine—Judgment Day, Repentance and Pardon—Crusoe despairs of conveying to Friday the true faith. Instead of pursuing the dialogue, he simply withdraws, using the excuse of having important errands to do: "I therefore diverted the present Discourse between me and my Man, rising up hastily, as upon some sudden Occasion of going out; then sending him for something a good way off" (158). The amateurish Christian "Doctor" facing some difficult and bewildering questions has opted for the easy way out. And this embarrassment is caused by Friday, a savage, an ex-cannibal who does not even speak English correctly.

Note that Defoe himself may hold the specific Christian beliefs that Crusoe propounds to Friday. But at the same time, he makes us aware

that these beliefs are not necessarily based on nature or reason. And, what is even more striking, Crusoe's enormous surprise as he faces Friday's questions shows him, and the reader, that the light of reason can be found in the heart of darkness; that to be born black and raised in a cannibal society does not make one a beast-like creature. In some ways, such a savage, equipped with reason and an innocent eye, can call into question some of the deepest beliefs of Western civilization.

Defoe, unlike Rousseau for instance, does not reject Western civilization as fundamentally corrupt.[17] As we may recall, Robinson Crusoe's story is, among other things, a eulogy of civilization, especially its technical aspects. At the same time Defoe foreshadows some aspects of post-colonial critique of Euro-centric prejudices and perceptions of the world.

Further Observations on the Poetics of Surprise

Before concluding, and in light of the episodes discussed above, I would like to propose another important distinction in the poetics of surprise. In addition to the two general characteristics outlined at the beginning of this article—its relational and graduated nature—the surprising effect may be part of two overall different rhetorical and cognitive schemes. On the one hand, it may be a part of a general structure that reaffirms stability, creating a temporary de-stabilizing effect that ultimately serves a harmonizing structure. The footprint episode may illustrate this possibility: the utter surprise evoked by the unexplained phenomenon is later replaced by a satisfactory explanation. This type is also evident in many endings of the older school of detective stories: the specific answer to the question of "Whodunit" may at first startle us; the writer has planted many false clues throughout the story, diverting our attention from the real suspect, so that when the unexpected solution is proposed by the detective (in the classic collective scene of potential suspects) it creates a momentarily surprising effect. But after the initial surprise, and when we follow the

detective's perceptive reasoning, we re-construct the chain of events, sifting the true clues, and achieve a sense of a consistent and coherent chain of events. The first destabilizing, surprising effect is substituted by a sense of stable satisfaction. In that respect, a typical detective or mystery story may be viewed as an elaborated version of the "simple form" of the riddle.[18]

There are, however, other cases—both in real life situations and in literary texts—where a surprising effect is not necessarily 'smoothed out' in a larger coherent structure. A surprising metaphor or simile that juxtaposes totally different semantic fields may be an example of a 'continuing' surprising effect. Encountering such novel metaphors, we are, first, surprised; then we start looking for 'explanations' to mitigate the destabilizing effect, but even after we have found some such explanations the sense of puzzlement does not disappear. It keeps on tantalizing us, making us rethink and reshuffle the stable semantic categories we usually work with.[19]

Further, sometimes a literary work may be structured as a detective story, unfolding its plot towards the solving of a mystery, and still, the answer to the question "Whodunit" does not leave us sitting comfortably in our armchair. In fact, this may be the case with 'the first detective story'—Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The dénouement serves only as a temporary point of stability, opening up further tantalizing questions. Some relate to the plot-level (e.g. how could someone as smart as Oedipus not suspect the answer before), and others are of a more general nature (e.g. does this story tells us something profound about "The Family Romance"—as Freud thought). In fact, what makes *Oedipus* such a masterpiece is its ability to build a tight structure of a mystery story, of a riddle-solving story, but at the same time, to open questions that stay with us long after the outer plot mystery has been solved.[20]

A similar case can be presented for Defoe's classic. What makes *Robinson Crusoe* such a fascinating and thought-provoking work, a true literary masterpiece, is its ability to create plot-based effects of curiosity, suspense and, above all, surprise. But, at the same time, some of

the plot-based surprises do not serve an overall stabilizing effect. Rather, they evoke serious moral, ideological and theological issues—what is the difference between nature and culture or between civilized and uncivilized societies, what are Providence's ways with man—that keep resonating in our mind long after we have finished reading the book.

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NOTES

[1]I would like to thank the participants of the 8th International *Connotations* Symposium on Textual Surprises for their encouraging and useful suggestions; special thanks to Burkhard Niederhoff, whose critical comments on my paper and throughout the symposium helped me shape my ideas on the topic.

[2]All quotations are taken from: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel, A Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994). After each quotation I give the page number in this edition.

[3]See Meir Sternberg, "Retardatory Structure, Narrative Interest and the Detective Story," *Hasifrut/Literature* 18-19 (1974): 164-80 [in Hebrew]; "Temporal Ordering, Modes of Expositional Distribution, and Three Models of Rhetorical Control in the Narrative Text," *PTL* 1 (1976): 295-316; and his book length study, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

[4]Sternberg, *Expositional Modes* 244. For more discussions of the relations between the 'natural' order of events and the order of presentation in the text continuum, see Menakhem Perry, "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of the Text Creates its Meanings (with an analysis of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily')," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 35-64, 311-61; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983; London: Methuen, 1989) 119-29.

[5]In her paper given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium, "Unsurprises in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books," Angelika Zirker has nicely demonstrated how Alice has got so used to surprising events that it is the encounter of a 'normal' event that becomes surprising. See below, 19-37.

[6]Some subtle examples of poetic surprises on the level of the rhyming scheme were presented by Frank Kearful in his paper "Form as Surprise in Poetry" given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium. For astute observations on how poetic structures create different effects of integration or disintegration, see the classic study by Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*: *A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968).

[7]For the term 'expressive sounds' in poetry—as part of the large spectrum of possible relations between sound and meaning, see Benjamin Harshav, "Do Sounds Have Meanings: On the Problem of Expressive Sound Patterns in Poetry," *Poetics Today* 22 (2001): 253-59.

[8]It was of course Samuel Johnson who rebuked the metaphysical poets for their bold usage of imagery, claiming that in their poetry "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." See "Abraham Cowley," *The Great Critics*, ed. J. H. Smith and E. W. Parks (New York: Norton, 1967) 461. For further discussion of bold similes and metaphors, and the different ways poets mitigate the surprising effect, see my "Poetic and Non-Poetic Simile: Structure, Semantics and Rhetoric," *Poetics Today* 14 (1993): 1-23, especially 14-21; and my book *Like a Rainfall: Studies and Essays in Poetic Simile* (Jerusalem: The Magnes P, 1996) [in Hebrew], especially 26-38.

[9]Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* 142.

[10]In Defoe's novel the narrator is also the main character in the story. But from a functional point of view, namely creating the effect of surprise, it is not important whether the narrator is a character in the story or not (a *homodiegetic* or a *heterodiegetic* narrator in Genette's terms). In order to achieve surprise (on the reader's part), the narrator (*homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic* alike) has to limit to a certain extent the scope of unfolded information or to keep at least some of his/her 'cards' close to chest. For Genette's typology of narrators, see his *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 185-210; see also Rimmon-Kenan 94-103.

[11]All these observations can be applied, *mutatis mutandis* to drama—where instead of a reader we have an audience.

[12]See, for example, the definition of the term "Dramatic irony" as part of the entry "Irony" in M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 91-92; see also the definition of "Dramatic Irony" as part of the entry "Irony" in T. V. F Brogan, ed., *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 148.

[13]For creating a delicate and dynamic balance between identification and subtle irony vis-à-vis a character in Jane Austen's novels, see Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*, especially 156-58.

[14]Theoretically, situations where the reader is surprised but not the character, may serve a different rhetorical effect (e.g. make us realize the limits of our own knowledge and/or values vis-à-vis a character), but I think an ironic critique of the moral and/or epistemological makeup of the character is a more "standard" effect in such cases.

[15]A trick I suspect each of us has used at least once when facing a difficult question from an intelligent student.

[16]Crusoe does not refer here to the book of Job, but it is definitely part of the religious background of the work, and indeed towards the end, there is an explicit reference to it: "I might well say, now indeed, That the latter End of Job was better than the Beginning" (205).

[17]Rousseau, we may remember, proposes in his *Emile* that the first book a young person should read for his natural education is not Aristotle, Pliny or Buffon, but rather *Robinson Crusoe* (quoted in the Norton Critical edition of *Robinson Crusoe* 262).

[18]See André Jolles's discussion of the "Devinette" in his *Formes Simples* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) 103-19 (the original German *Einfache Formen* was published in 1930).

[19]The two different types of surprises—the one that integrates into a 'closed,' coherent, non-surprising conclusion and the other that maintains an 'open,' unstable, ongoing process—may be related to two kinds of cognitive processes and, as Reuven Tsur has suggested, to two "styles" of implied criticism: one that looks for an overall integrating interpretation, and one that is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts"—Keats's description of "negative capacity," quoted by Tsur in *Towards a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1992) 471.

[20]My attention to the possibility that solving the outer-mystery may still evoke deeper issues was sharpened during the discussion of Teresa Gibert's paper given at the 8th *Connotations* Symposium, "Kate Chopin's Fiction: The Surprise Ending of 'Desirée's Baby'"—where an initial sense of solving the mystery of the characters' racial background is replaced by deeper questions about their psychology and motivations. See below, 38-67.

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"Alice was not surprised": (Un)Surprises in Lewis Carroll's *Alice*-Books

ANGELIKA ZIRKER

Surprises are connected with the idea of the unexpected.[1] Yet, even at the very beginning of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, we find that Alice often is not surprised although things happen that might be regarded as 'unexpected.' It is, for example, not surprising to Alice "when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes [runs] close by her" (16) and when he speaks.[2] Only after further reflection "it occur[s] to her that she ought to have wondered at this," and she is surprised that then she was not surprised, yet, "at the time it all seemed quite natural" (10) to her. Her *spontaneous* reaction to the talking rabbit is that of a child in whose imagination speaking animals exist and to whom they are familiar from the world of fairy tales and beast fables. Accordingly, the rabbit who says to himself "I shall be too late!" (9), to her understanding, is quite 'natural': the imagined world of stories is a natural one for the child. It is only when a new and unknown element in this world crops up, e.g. when "[…] the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on […]" (10), that Alice becomes curious and follows him for she has "never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it" (10).

Hence, the question whether something is surprising or 'unsurprising' in the *Alice*-books seems to depend on whether it is natural or not.[3] However, as is already obvious in the first lines of *Wonderland*, Alice's understanding of what is natural seems to be peculiar, for most of us would most probably wonder at a talking rabbit. The question therefore is what is surprising to her and what is not.

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debzirker01413.htm>.

The Confusion of Expectations

Alice's being surprised and her being unsurprised may well go together. Even in the first chapter this is the case. She is not so very much surprised at falling down the rabbit-hole, and even while falling, she tries to be as rational as possible and reflects upon all kinds of questions, e.g. "what Latitude or Longitude" she has "got to" (11), whether "cats eat bats" (11) and so forth; nor is she surprised at "suddenly" (12) finding a little table in the hall, which has not been there before; then "on the second time round, she [comes] upon a low curtain she [has] not noticed before" (12). The adverb "suddenly" and the 'sudden' discovery of things do not lead to Alice's surprise, for she is simply "delight[ed]" (12) at finding the table and the key. Their sudden appearance presumably does not surprise her as she knows that fairy tales, as a rule, deal with "events that would be impossible in the real world" and that "[t]hey often include magical happenings."[4] The sudden appearance of a table belongs to the realm of "magical happenings" and is a quality inherent in the genre of fairy tales; hence it is not surprising, even more so as she very soon realizes that she is "in the middle of one!" (33). Although she realizes that, when she "used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened" (33), she also states that it was only her fancy that made her think so. Events in Wonderland thus confirm her innate tendency to accept spontaneously the most unexpected things.

Consequently, it does not surprise Alice to find a bottle with the label "Drink Me." She follows the instruction, and, after having drunk from the bottle and shrunk in size, she finds some cake, labelled "Eat Me":

> She ate a little bit, and said anxiously to herself "Which way? Which way?", holding her hand on the top of her head to feel which way it was growing; and she was quite surprised to find that she remained the same size. To be sure, this is what generally happens when one eats cake; but Alice had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way. (15)

The corresponding labels—"Drink me" and "Eat me"—make her think that a change in her bodily size will occur after drinking or eating. She obviously follows the rules of analogy, and of cause and effect which, at first, do not seem to work in the underground world. The nature of surprises is inverted: as she turns the enigmatic order into a systematic one, she is surprised that nothing happens.[5]

That her life seems to go on in a "dull and stupid" manner is a disappointment. Alice thus "set[s] to work" and eats the whole cake.[6] She is all the more surprised when eventually something happens. The whole situation has a paradoxical note: first, Alice starts to eat, thinking that something will happen, according to the rules of analogy. Then, as nothing happens, she nonetheless eats the cake but is then surprised that something happens, which implies that meanwhile she must have expected nothing to happen. Yet if this is the case, why bother to eat the cake? If this is not the case, i.e. she was sure something would happen, why is she surprised? It seems as if the very notion of surprise becomes a rather doubtful one.

Having finished the cake, she "open[s] out like the largest telescope that ever was!" (16). Her being overwhelmed is expressed by her exclamation and the subsequent comment: "'Curiouser and curiouser!' cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English)" (16). Thus, she is now surprised at what happens although she had earlier anticipated exactly this would occur. She expected—and moreover wanted—to grow, but, as it now happens, she is surprised at it; she is actually so much surprised that she forgets "how to speak good English." Yet, what happens, after all, follows a relation of condition, or of laws: without first shutting up like a telescope, she would not be able to open out like one; if she does not shrink first, there is no need to grow. Hence, she no longer knows what to expect, as the events do not in the first place follow rules she knows or is able to infer. Her surprise stems from Carroll's adding a note of unexpectedness to the expected—or yet a note of expectedness to the unexpected.

As has been stated by John Fisher, "'curious' is Alice's repeated response to the endless successions of weird escapades and eccentrics

[sic] he [Carroll] produces on her behalf" (12). Moreover, she is surprised at her own reaction, i.e. at her being surprised—"'Oh dear, what nonsense I'm talking!'" (17)—and even aware of her surprise as she finds that she is being nonsensical.

Knowledge and Surprise

The change in size and her awareness that she talks nonsense make Alice think she has been changed into someone else, and consequently she wants to find out who she is.[7] In this situation, she tries to rely on her knowledge in order to reassure herself—she fears she has been changed for Mabel who "knows such a very little" (18) while Alice knows "all sorts of things" (18). She therefore tries to think of the things she once learnt and used to know—most probably learnt by heart, which is why they actually should come quite 'naturally' when being recalled—and starts with the multiplication table. Yet, as it turns out, she cannot rely on this knowledge as her skills, both mathematical, "[…] four times five is twelve," and geographical, "London is the capital of Paris" (19), seem to have left her.

Her last recourse is poetry, which is why she tries to repeat "How doth the little—" but "the words did not come the same as they used to" (19), 'used to' indicating a sense of habit and routine. Whenever she tries this during the course of her adventure, she forgets the 'correct' texts and modifies the poems by turning them into parodies that are both unexpected and surprising.

Watts's "How doth the little—", i.e. "Against Idleness and Mischief" from his *Divine Songs for Children* (1715), thus becomes:

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

How skilfully she builds her cell!
How neat she spreads the wax!
And labours hard to store it well
With the sweet food she makes.[8]

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws!

We can see that Carroll keeps the syntactic structure and even many of the words, at least nearly all the verse beginnings, but then uses these words in new contexts: in "improve his shining tail," the verb 'to improve' implies that the pouring of water on the crocodile's scales serves an aesthetic end, namely to enhance the crocodile's beauty; conversely, "Improve each shining hour" means being profitable and avoiding any waste of time, as the gathering of honey means hard work and not the satisfaction of one's own (physical) needs.[9] Moreover, the highly didactic content of Watts's poem is turned into a parody by transforming the image of the busy bee into that of a (lazy and hungry) crocodile.[10] The pattern of rational moralism with a *causa finalis*, namely moral improvement, on which Watts's poems are based, is changed here. Thus, the image of the busy bee, a faded metaphor of diligence and industriousness, is turned into the quite unusual image of a crocodile that minds his own looks. In the *Wonderland* world that is suffused with the child's imagination, moral principles are replaced with aesthetic values, which is why Alice can no longer remember the didactic poem.[11] She can no longer be sure of her 'rational' knowledge and abilities as her spontaneity has come to the fore. At the same time, the crocodile's natural behaviour is stressed, for crocodiles *are* ravenous and like to eat "little fishes."

Codes of Interaction

After her encounter with the White Rabbit, Alice expects him to be surprised. "'He took me for his housemaid,' she said to herself as she ran. 'How surprised he'll be when he finds out who I am!'" (31). However, he does not find out who she is and, consequently, is not surprised.[12] What is more, even Alice does not any longer act as she initially thinks she will; she at first emphasises that she does not "go […] messages for a rabbit" (31), but then she enters his house, and when she finds a bottle there, she drinks from it. The difference from the earlier finding of a bottle is that this one is not labelled. Maybe this is the reason for her growing instead of shrinking as in the previous

case. From her earlier experience, she "know[s] something interesting is sure to happen" (32)—which, in this case, is her filling the whole house.

When the Rabbit finds her arm in the window, his first reaction is to shriek, but very soon he composes himself. Although he is surprised at finding an arm in his window, he is determined not to show his astonishment and simply says: "An arm, you goose! Who ever saw one that size? […] go and take it away!" (35). This behaviour stems from his aristocratic background; he is called "yer honour" (34) by Pat, the gardener, which is the denomination given to an "'honourable personality': Formerly (and still in rustic speech) given to any person of rank or quality."[13] He is—or plays the role of—a gentleman who, as such, is not surprised and shocked but tries to stay cool no matter what happens. This code of behaviour is very much in line with the Horacian thought of *nil admirari*—which is applied to the English gentleman.[14] Accordingly, the White Rabbit does not run away or is scared but just tries to get rid of whatever there is, namely of Alice.

In the end, the Rabbit and his friends produce some pebbles, and then it is Alice who is surprised "that the pebbles were all turning into little cakes as they lay on the floor, and a bright idea came into her head" (37). Again she proceeds to think in analogies. When she first drank from the labelled bottle in the hall, she shrank, and then she ate the (likewise labelled) cake to grow again. Now she first drank something (from an unlabelled bottle!), and, in conclusion, the "bright idea" which comes to her mind is that the result of eating the cakes this time must be her shrinking. The rabbit, for his part, plays the role of the perfect aristocrat and gentleman who acts most discreetly in order to solve the problem without giving it too much further attention.

When Alice leaves the house, the animals waiting outside make "a rush" (37) at her, and she runs away as quickly as she can. This shows that the interaction with the creatures she meets is almost always rather strange to Alice. One reason is that she expects to be treated amiably and politely but very soon learns that this is not necessarily

the case. One need only think of the Mad Tea-Party or when she is threatened with being beheaded in the queen's croquet-ground.

The "Garden of Live Flowers" is one further instance of Alice's being treated unkindly; the Rose, for example, remarks: "Said I to myself, 'Her face has got *some* sense in it, though it's not a clever one!'" (139). The speaking rose evokes and pokes fun at the Victorian idea of the language or even 'poetry' of flowers, "where every flower, herb, and tree had a distinct 'sentiment' or 'emblematic meaning' attached to it," i.e. flowers were "associated with human feelings or properties."[15] Alice meets flowers that usually have attributes ascribed to them which differ utterly from their actual behaviour; and although she tries to react to this behaviour with politeness—she speaks in "a soothing tone" (140) and "choos[es] [not] to notice" (140) some of the remarks—Alice is particularly surprised at the violet's behaviour, for the violet usually counts as a symbol of humility and modesty.[16] Carroll seems to take the notion of a language of flowers quite literally here, as the violet proves to be neither modest nor shy but violent—and what else can she do, for she only needs an 'n' to be so. He parodies the idea that flowers "convey hidden meanings and secret messages";[17] the flowers Alice encounters are mostly blunt and very direct in what they say.

This also goes for the daisies. They make fun of Alice when she does not know the 'meaning' of the tree's boughs, and "[w]hen one speaks, they all begin together" (139) and produce a terrible noise. Their behaviour even makes Alice say, though in a whisper that is opposed to their "shouting together": "If you don't hold your tongues, I'll pick you!" (139). This refers to the proverb "Fresh as a daisy":[18] fresh flowers are those that have been picked. However, Alice finds herself in *Looking-Glass* country, which means behind a mirror where everything is reversed;[19] therefore, the daisies run the risk of being picked because they are literally fresh, namely cheeky.[20]

The (Playful) Treatment of Language: Taking Things Literally

It is this playing with language that is noteworthy when it comes to surprises in the *Alice*-books:

> […] Alice carefully released the brush, and did her best to get the hair into order. "Come, you look rather better now!" she said, after altering most of the pins. "But really you should have a lady's maid!"
>
> "I'm sure I'll take you with pleasure!" the Queen said. "Two pence a week, and jam every other day."
>
> Alice couldn't help laughing, as she said "I don't want you to hire me—and I don't care for jam."
>
> "It's very good jam," said the Queen.
>
> "Well, I don't want any to-day, at any rate."
>
> "You couldn't have it if you did want it," the Queen said. "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam to-day."
>
> "It *must* come sometimes to 'jam to-day,'" Alice objected.
>
> "No, it ca'n't," said the Queen. "It's jam every other day: to-day isn't any other day, you know."
>
> "I don't understand you," said Alice. "It's dreadfully confusing!"
>
> "That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first—"
>
> "Living backwards!" Alice repeated *in great astonishment*. "I never heard of such a thing!"
>
> "—but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."
>
> "I'm sure mine only works one way," Alice remarked. "I ca'n't remember things before they happen."
>
> "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.
>
> (174-75; my emphasis)

The dialogue starts off quite normally, with Alice suggesting that the Queen have a maid help her. But it very soon turns out to be more or less nonsensical, when the Queen offers Alice the job in question and, as a salary, "Two pence a week, and jam every other day." What we understand here is: One day she will get jam, the next day she will not, the day after that, jam again, and so forth. By the redefinition of quite conventional phrases and remarks the conversation is given a "sudden and unexpected direction."[21] Carroll may even refer to working conditions of servants in questioning the conventional sense of,

e.g., "giv[ing] them an afternoon out every other Sunday"[22] and allowing them "every Monday morning a certain amount of sugar, tea, and butter for their private use."[23]

"Jam every other day" unexpectedly means "jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never to-day." Alice objects to this—"It *must* come sometimes to 'jam to-day'" (175)—yet the Queen has, from her perspective, a very logical answer to offer: "It's jam every other day: to-day isn't any *other* day." By taking the meaning of a conventional phrase literally,[24] she turns Alice's understanding of a world based on fixed definitions as well as logical connections and causalities upside down, and leaves her puzzled.

The—linguistically—familiar thereby becomes surprising. The Queen, furthermore, being unable or unwilling to give up her own kind of logic, offers an explanation that is actually not enlightening at all; there is no connection between the jam offer and the notion of living backwards, as "jam every other day" works in both directions, forwards and backwards. But she gives Alice the feeling that she simply lacks the understanding of "living backwards" and therefore cannot really judge.[25] What adds even more to the apparent nonsense here is that the Queen tries to convince Alice, who does not "care for jam," of its quality, and then tells her that she cannot get it anyway.

This scene has been called "one of the famous paradoxes connected with time"[26] in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Yet, as Gardner notes in his revised edition of *The Annotated Alice*, there proves to be sense behind the apparent nonsense, namely a rule from Latin grammar:

> […] I completely missed the way Carroll plays on the Latin word *iam* (*i* and *j* are interchangeable in classical Latin), which means "now." The word *iam* is used in the past and future tenses, but in the present tense the word for "now" is *nunc*. I received more letters about this than about any other oversight, mostly from Latin teachers. They tell me that the Queen's remark is often used in class as a mnemonic for recalling the proper usage of the word.[27]

Carroll introduces a rule of Latin grammar in disguise, which suddenly and surprisingly fills the apparent nonsense in this dialogue with sense.

Nonsense based on rules or particular 'laws' can also be detected in the notion of "living backwards," which refers to Looking-Glass-logic where everything is turned around and inverted. Alice, very shortly after the quoted dialogue, faces a surprising situation when the White Queen shouts that her finger is bleeding although she hasn't "pricked it *yet* […] but […] soon shall" (176). However, the Queen cannot be surprised as she experiences everything in a reversed order.[28] This means that living backwards is connected with being unsurprised, an experience that even Alice, though unconsciously, has already had in the Tweedledum and Tweedledee chapter, only that she cannot transfer it to this new situation.

The (Playful) Treatment of Language: Nursery Rhymes

When she meets the Tweedle-brothers, Alice at first is surprised—"she came upon two fat little men, so suddenly that she could not help starting back" (158)—but very soon recognizes them. By recognising them, their appearance becomes somewhat 'natural' to her, which is furthermore indicated by the transition from the preceding chapter to the Tweedle-chapter, for Alice is feeling sure that "the two little fat men [she meets] must be [/] […] Tweedledum and Tweedledee" (158-59). In *The Annotated Alice*, Martin Gardner points out that "Carroll clearly intended this last clause and title of the next chapter to be a rhymed couplet" (188). Alice can recognize and, in a way, also 'remember' them because of her knowledge of the nursery rhyme, which can likewise be seen as a form of 'living backwards,' as she knows the outcome of the interaction between them even before it starts. Thus, surprise is impossible in this case, or it is a surprise of the kind which, as a child's fascination with nursery rhymes shows, goes together with what is reassuringly familiar. Alice anticipates and foresees what is to come and can "hardly help saying" (160) the nursery rhyme out loud:

Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle;
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.

Just then flew down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar-barrel;
Which frightened both the heroes so,
They quite forgot their quarrel. (160)

The nursery rhyme is used as a surprising unsurprise, as it predicts the further action in this chapter. This implies that the action is not based on causal principles or chance, as we generally know it from the world we live in, but on a new set of rules which relies on the (il)logic of a nursery rhyme. Before things follow their given course, i.e. before the Tweedles agree "to have a battle,"[29] the action is put off by the initial conversation between Alice and the Tweedle-brothers, and by the insertion of the "The Walrus and the Carpenter" poem. But that the course of events will turn out to be just like we expect it to be is already alluded to at the beginning when Alice introduces herself to the Tweedles:

> Alice did not like shaking hands with either of them first, for fear of hurting the other one's feelings; so, as the best way out of the difficulty, she took hold of both hands at once: the next moment they were dancing round in a ring. This seemed quite natural (she remembered afterwards), and *she was not even surprised* to hear music playing: it seemed to come from the tree under which they were dancing, and it was done (as well as she could make it out) by the branches rubbing one across the other, like fiddles and fiddlesticks. (160-61; my emphasis)

"She was not even surprised to hear music playing" because everything which happens seems natural to her. The connection between something that appears natural and the fact that she is not surprised could not be more direct. This scene can be interpreted as an allusion to the origin of this nursery rhyme, as, according to *The Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes*, it goes back to a rivalry between Haendel and Bononcini.[30] Alice's not being surprised here is certainly linked to her not

being surprised in general, as so many "queer things [are] happening" (58).[31] Even that the music is "done" by a tree does not seem to surprise her at all.[32]

A few lines further down, we learn that it is "Here we go round the mulberry bush" (161) that they are singing.[33] Their dancing round in a ring "seemed quite natural," as there are three of them dancing and singing, making up a trio, a [tri:-ou] that is a "tree"-"o" (Note the 'O' standing for the "ring" in which they are dancing), for the music is done by the tree. "Here we go round the mulberry bush" furthermore is a ring-dance composed in six-eight time, which means arithmetically, not rhythmically speaking, three-four time. Each stanza of the song has 16 bars;[34] Tweedledum and Tweedledee are "very soon out of breath. 'Four times round is enough for one dance,'" (161) they say and stop dancing. So their dance is arithmetically correct: they stop it after the first stanza, as three people are dancing four rounds of a six-eight time, i.e. it seems to take them four bars to get round once. This calculation is a further explanation of Alice's not being surprised by the dance, as everything is actually quite natural.

Alice's generally being "unsurprised" furthermore explains her not being afraid of the brothers' battle after the rattle has been broken. She is not afraid of "the most serious thing that can possibly happen to one in a battle—to get one's head cut off" (170) because she knows that there is no danger. After she has helped them to get dressed, she only hopes for the crow to come, "I wish the monstrous crow would come!" (171), and shortly afterwards it actually comes and more or less ends the chapter. It is, in this context, all the more striking that even Tweedledee and Tweedledum seem to expect it, as they shout "It's the crow!" (171). The use of the definite article not only indicates that they know they are living (in) a nursery rhyme but is also due to the notion of repetition, which is inherent in nursery rhymes: they are always the same, and the same events are repeated again and again, just as the rhymes are repeated for, and by, children and learned by heart,[35] which is why for Alice, the child, they are something that comes naturally.

The notion of surprise hence has very much to do with the mind of the child and the child's perception of the world. Things that, to an adult, may seem very surprising—e.g. a rabbit that runs by and talks—are familiar to a child and therefore unsurprising. Alice is mostly surprised at herself when she does not recall things or when something does not seem natural, i.e. when something occurs that is not part of the world she is accustomed to, including the world of fairy tales, nursery rhymes and beast fables. In *Alice*, Carroll shows that being surprised and not being surprised are not mutually exclusive states but easily go together. Maybe this is, at least partly, an explanation for the ongoing popularity of the *Alice*-books: they enable us to perceive these fantastic worlds through the eyes of the child and allow us to react with both surprise and unsurprise at the most fantastic things and occurrences.

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NOTES

[1]Cf. *OED*, "surprise" 2.a.: "The (or an) act of coming upon one unexpectedly"; 2.b.: "to astonish by unexpectedness"; 3.a. "an unexpected occurrence or event; anything unexpected or astonishing."

[2]All references are to the edition of the *Alice* books by Roger Lancelyn Green.

[3]In his *Symbolic Logic*, Carroll himself defines a surprise as something that does not come as a matter of course, i.e. is not natural (xv).

[4]*The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* 177. What is more, things such as magical rings, tables, carpets etc. are requisites that belong to the world of fairy tales; cf. Lüthi 429. Todorov also states that fairy tales usually do not lead to surprise: "[…] en fait, le conte de fées n'est qu'une des variétés du merveilleux et les événements surnaturels n'y provoquent aucune surprise: ni le sommeil de cent ans, ni le loup qui parle, ni les dons magiques des fées […]. Ce qui distingue le conte de fées est une certaine écriture, non le statut du surnaturel"; Todorov 59.—That Carroll made use of the genre has, e.g., been stated by Michael Irwin: "Another kind of twentieth-century reading […] would see the *Alice* books as deriving from a variety of external influences and pressures. Two such influences might be the fairy-tale tradition […] or nursery-rhymes […]" (123). Besides, in

1867, George MacDonald wrote the fairy tale "The Golden Key"; not to mention the fairy tale by Grimm with the same title ("The Golden Key"—"Der goldene Schlüssel," 629-30).—The adverb 'suddenly' is rather frequently used in fairy tales, especially when something new is introduced (mostly something that has a sort of magical quality); cf. Andersen, "The Nightingale": "*Suddenly* the loveliest song could be heard" (129; my emphasis); and also Grimm, e.g. "Der Räuberbräutigam" ["The Robber-Bridegroom"]: "*Plötzlich* rief eine Stimme […] die […] von einem Vogel kam" (191; my emphasis), and "Märchen von einem, der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen" ["The Story of a Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear"]: "[…] da schrie's *plötzlich* aus der Ecke" (38; my emphasis). The link particularly to the latter seems interesting as Alice is decidedly different from the hero of this fairy tale. It is chiefly her curiosity that distinguishes her from him: he leaves his home to "learn fear" whereas she is lead by her curiosity and by the wish to overcome the boredom inspired by her sister's book that has "no pictures or conversations" (9).

[5]I want to thank Matthias Bauer for this and many other most helpful suggestions.

[6]It seems interesting—or even astonishing?—that she regards eating the cake as "work," which implies that to her understanding she follows a certain task she has to fulfil.

[7]"[…] I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?'" (18).

[8]Quoted from *Annotated Alice* 24.

[9]"Improve" is here used in the sense of "to employ to advantage, […] to make use of, use, employ"; cf. *OED*, "improve" II.2.

[10]Carroll seems to follow Harold Skimpole here, who in Dickens' *Bleak House* does not "at all see why the busy Bee should be proposed as a model to him" (106).—To emphasise the contrast between the original and Alice's version, "Carroll has chosen the lazy, slow-moving crocodile as a creature far removed from the rapid-flying, ever-busy bee," as Gardner points out (24).

[11]A similar thing happens when, in "Advice from a Caterpillar," she wants to repeat Southey's "You are old, Father William." While the original is highly didactic and about an "Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them," the version in *Alice* is turned into a highly derogative parody which ridicules Southey's didacticism and contains elements of cruelty and insult. It is no longer the gentle old man who gives good advice to his son, but rather a vicious old man who mocks everything that is of value. Besides, Carroll shows once more that we find ourselves in a different world: the old man is standing on his head. Lothar Černy interprets this as symbolic of the whole circumstances in *Wonderland* (and in *Looking-Glass*-country): "Das Präfix ‚anti' kennzeichnet in der Tat die Verhältnisse im Wunderland. Es herrscht das Gegenteil von Sympathie und beinahe das Gegenteil jeder Erwartung"; Černy 300.

[12]It is interesting to compare this scene with its original version, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. There, Alice does not expect the Rabbit to be or do anything, as she is frightened of him and "[runs] off at once, without saying a word, in the direction which the Rabbit had pointed out" and soon arrives at his house; *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* n.p.—That the Rabbit should choose the name Mary-Ann for Alice may well serve as a hint that Carroll was interested in the conditions of servants, as the "Christian names of these girls [maids] are of the order considered suitable to their station in life; Ann, Emma, […], *Mary Anne*"; C. S. Peel 148 (my emphasis). Cf. note 22.

[13]*OED*, "honour" 4.b.—Pat must be a servant; note also his pronunciation of 'arm': "He pronounced it 'arrum'" (35) which is an indication of his lower social status.

[14]This is, for example, expressed in Charles Reade's novel *Peg Woffington* (later transformed into the comedy *Masks and Faces* by Reade and Tom Taylor): "The *nil admirari* of the fine gentlemen deserted him, and he gazed open-mouthed, like the veriest chaw-bacon" (Ch. VII, n.p.).

[15]Haass 241.—The connection of flowers with "human properties and feelings" (Haass 248) seems to have been a common view in the nineteenth century (Haass in this context refers to Ruskin, who associated flowers with girls or women, as well as to the German painter Runge, who thought that every flower had a "human character"; 244 and 248). The flowers in *Through the Looking-Glass* are not only given human attributes or patterns of behaviour but they actually treat Alice like little girls tend to treat a new girl that enters their group: they are mistrustful, wary, and cautious. "Flowers, first of all, are girls. Their beauty, their beauty's brevity, their vulnerability to males who wish to pluck them—these features and others have made flowers, in many cultures, symbolic of maidens […]" (Ferber, "Flower" 74-77, 74). Hence, the perspective is turned around, and everything is described from the flowers' point of view, which is why the Red Queen is called "another flower" (140).

[16]Ferber, "Violet": "[…] the timidity, humility, and neglect of the violet […] because 'it is so shy.' *Humble* and *timide* are frequent epithets of the violet in French poetry" (223-25, 224); see also Seaton "violet—humility" (47); and Todd who, even in the heading to the entry "Violet," refers to the notions of "Faithfulness" and "Modesty" and goes on: "Timorous or retiring girls are frequently called 'shrinking violets'" (71).

[17]Haass 242.

[18]*ODEP* "Fresh as a daisy": "1857 G. Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life 'Janet's Repentance' ch. 7" (287).

[19]For reversals in *Through the Looking-Glass* see *The Annotated Alice* 147-51n5.

[20]I want to thank Inge Leimberg for pointing out this surprising interpretation of the passage as well as for other most helpful suggestions.

[21]Strong 306.

[22]Boucherett n.p.—Unfortunately, it was apparently not common to have contracts with servants during Carroll's lifetime (at least not at Christ Church, which would have been the nearest source of inspiration for him in this matter), but there existed certain written guides as to the remuneration of domestic servants, their duties and their treatment in general, for example *Cassells Household Guide* (c. 1880s), or *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861). *Cassells Household Guide*, e.g., meticulously describes the duties of a lady's maid; 1: 363-64, and 2: 13-14.

[23]*Cassells Household Guide* 1: 135.—Even if Alice was given something extra—e.g. jam—the payment for a lady's maid would have been ridiculously low. Two pence a week would amount to around nine shillings a year, which would not even be half a pound. Yet, a lady's maid in the 1850s to 1870s, depending on the family she was employed with, would earn between sixteen and twenty pounds a year; cf. Horn, Appendix A, 184-85. However, it was usual to give maids something extra, e.g. tea or sugar, for good conduct; cf. Horn 128.

[24]It is here the Queen and not Alice, in fact it is hardly ever Alice, who is being literal, and therefore I tend to disagree with the opinion expressed in Virginia Woolf's essay on "Lewis Carroll": "To become a child is to be very literal; to find everything so strange that nothing is surprising. […] It is to see the world upside down […]. Only Lewis Carroll has shown us the world upside down as a child sees it, and has made us laugh as children laugh, irresponsibly"; Woolf 255. It is not the child who is literal here; Alice is only being literal at the end of *Wonderland*, when she exclaims "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (109).

[25]This "living backwards" might be understood as an allusion to the concept of anamnesis, i.e. to remember things before they actually happen.—It is interesting that the strange definition of "Jam every other day" does not seem to surprise but only confuse Alice, while she is 'astonished' at the notion of "living backwards," i.e. that an element of surprise is apparently introduced here. For the link between astonishment and surprise see note 1.

[26]Holmes 148.

[27]*The Annotated Alice* 206n3. As a matter of fact, 'nunc' in the sense of the English 'now' cannot be used with reference to the past or the future but, in these cases, has to be replaced by 'iam'; yet this does not explicitly mean that the use of 'iam' is wrong when referring to the present: "Now. Nunc is 'at the present moment,' or 'as things are now.' It cannot be used of the past. 'Caesar was now tired of war' is: iam Caesarem belli taedebat. […] Iam can be used also of the future: quid hoc rei sit. Iam inteleges, 'you will soon be aware of the meaning of this.'" (*Bradley's Arnold: Latin Prose Companion* 184). Considering this, namely that 'nunc' refers only to the present, "jam every other day" would work as a mnemonic. I would like to thank Prof. Jürgen Leonhardt and his team for their help in this matter.—We remember Alice's reference to her brother's Latin grammar in *Wonderland*, where she starts to decline 'mouse': "A mouse—of a mouse—to a mouse—a mouse—O mouse!" (21). In the article "In Search of Alice's Brother's Latin Grammer," Selwyn Goodacre states that this must have been *The Comic*

Latin Grammer, published in 1840, and where only one noun is declined in full, namely 'musa.' Goodacre thinks that Alice may have mistaken this as the Latin word for 'mouse." See *The Comic Latin Grammar: A New and Facetious Introduction to the Latin Tongue*: "Musa musæ, / The Gods were at tea, / Musæ musam, / Eating raspberry jam, / […]" (29). Carroll owned a first edition.

[28]In *Wonderland* a comparable logic can be detected in the court scene: "Sentence first—verdict afterwards" (108).

[29]Actually, this is also an example of "living backwards," and, at the same time, a parody of Romantic poetics. The notion of verse resulting from experience is reversed. In the case of all the nursery rhymes in the *Alice* books, poetry comes first, experience follows. A similar thought can be found in Oscar Wilde's "The Decay of Lying," where life imitates art: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates life" (982).

[30]Opie 501-02. The original verse goes back to John Byrom, who published it in his *Poems* in 1773. The last line goes as follows: "Strange all this Difference should be/ 'Twixt Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee."—"The words seem originally to have signified a contrast between low and high pitched musical sounds, but Byrom uses them to indicate that, in the view of many, there was no discernible difference in talent or achievement between the composers"; Lockwood 56.

[31]Cf. Batchelor (189) on the nature of this "out of the wayness," i.e. things and events that are "queer" and "out-of-the-way" as Alice puts it.

[32]The image of the tree that is able to 'do' music hints at the expressed wish by trees to do music in George Herbert's poem "Providence": "Trees would be tuning on their native lute / To thy renown" (ll. 10-11); *The Temple* 228. —Thanks to the complete edition of Carroll's diaries we know that Carroll possessed an edition of and read Herbert's poems: "Sent *Tasso*, *Herbert* etc. to be bound" (January 26, 1856); *Diaries* 2: 28. With the image of the "fiddle," i.e. the violin, Carroll even alludes to a string instrument (cf. Herbert's "lute").

[33]Carroll seems to have known this song from J. O. Halliwell's *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales*, published 1849 and in a reversed edition in 1860. It actually is an old children's Game Rhyme for a ring-dance; cf. Green, "Explanatory Notes" 271.

[34]Cf. "Here we go round the mulberry-bush"; Woodgate 76-77.

[35]We find a similar use and function of nursery rhymes in *Through the Looking-Glass* in the case of "Humpty-Dumpty" and of "The Lion and the Unicorn," namely to anticipate the further course of action.

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Textual, Contextual and Critical Surprises in "Désirée's Baby"[1]

TERESA GIBERT

Elements of surprise play a crucial role in "Désirée's Baby," a short story which was widely acclaimed upon publication in 1893, has often been anthologized and remained extremely popular over the years, while the rest of Kate Chopin's work went out of print and was virtually unavailable.[2] A major reason which may account for the sustained and almost unanimous praise received by this particular short story lies in what H. Porter Abbott claims is one of the keys to the success of all narratives of any length: the author's ability to build up "chains of suspense and surprise which keep us in a fluctuating state of impatience, wonderment, and partial gratification" (53). What is unusual in the case of "Désirée's Baby," and therefore deserves close critical analysis, is the number and the intensity of the surprises that provoke astonishment in the highly condensed prose of a text of only 2,152 words, culminating with a stunning final twist which catches all readers unaware.

Although it is almost impossible to summarize the plot of "Désirée's Baby" in a satisfactory way, because the richness of this concise text is based on the accumulation of significant details, it could be defined as the story of Désirée (a beautiful foundling raised by the rich Valmondés on their Louisiana plantation) who marries Armand Aubigny (the wealthy Creole slave-owning master of L'Abri), and is rejected by him when their baby boy shows physical features of black ancestry, supposedly inherited from his mother, but actually derived from his paternal grandmother. The textual surprises in this brief narrative are located at near intervals, because its action moves very fast. The chain of surprises is formed by the following events: (1) Monsieur Val-

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mondé's fortuitous discovery of a little girl asleep at the entrance of his estate, (2) Armand Aubigny's sudden infatuation with Désirée, eighteen years after her prodigious appearance at Valmondé, (3) Madame Valmondé's amazement at the sight of Armand and Désirée's infant son when she sees him again four weeks later, (4) Désirée's abrupt recognition of her baby's black traits, (5) Armand's vehement rejection of his wife and son, (6) Désirée's ultimate disappearance into the bayou carrying her baby, and (7) the totally unexpected final twist provided by a letter in which Armand's mother discloses her black ancestry.

Readers who have enjoyed the *textual surprises* provided by the aforementioned speedy sequence of acts and events may feel encouraged to reexamine this piece of fiction more carefully, placing it in its social and political context. When considering its historical background, such readers will come across some new *contextual surprises* that are offered by an encoded subtext which calls into question the surface meanings of the text itself. Finally, since this short story has been repeatedly analyzed in the light of various theoretical frameworks, even rather experienced readers are likely to be taken aback again and again by the divergent interpretations that reviewers and scholars have suggested through the years.[3] Learning about the different perspectives from which the text has been appraised over a century leads to various *critical surprises*. Indeed, when one is acquainted with the critical reception of "Désirée's Baby," one comes to the conclusion that studying this deceptively simple narrative may in fact become an intricate process, for not only does it allow the discovery of multiple possibilities of authorial meaning, but it also leaves room for the generation of multiple possibilities of significance on the part of each individual reader.[4]

The text of "Désirée's Baby" undermines readers' expectations of what the story will be like, and enhances the effect of surprises through the following rhetorical strategies:

1. creating suspense through foreshadowing devices, and by dropping subtle hints while avoiding obvious clues, playing with ambiguous statements and devising a dynamic system of informational gaps,
2. upsetting the established systems of meaning through an exploration of the theme of "appearance vs. reality,"
3. subverting the conventions of traditional local-color fiction,
4. combining the seemingly incompatible features of two juxtaposed frames of reference, that of the old fairytale with that of the modern realist short story, and
5. concluding with a sudden twist or ironic reversal which paradoxically resists easy narrative closure with the help of an unexpected open ending to the story.

1. Suspense

The foreshadowing devices used by Kate Chopin at the beginning of "Désirée's Baby" presage a sad, violent ending while not allowing readers to make direct inferences about it. For instance, at an early stage of the story, after giving an account of the speculations about the origin of the foundling who was eventually brought up by the Valmondés as if she had been their own child, the narrator concludes the third paragraph stating that Désirée "grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere,—the idol of Valmondé" (240).[5] This metaphor recalls the biblical idols or graven images crumbling from the pedestals where they had been erected by their adorers.[6] Near the end of the story, when Désirée is waiting for her husband's reaction to Madame Valmondé's note, the unfortunate young lady is explicitly portrayed by the narrator as if she were a statue: "She was like a stone image; silent, white, motionless" (243). At last, it becomes clear that turning Désirée into the recipient of Armand's immoderate desire leads to her destruction: the lot of the effigies is to be first converted into objects of divine adoration and subsequently demolished.

Likewise, the similes used in the first page to depict both Armand Aubigny's swift falling in love with Désirée and the gloomy atmosphere of his house are far from being merely decorative: they convey a sense of impending doom, and thus perform an important function in the tragic development of the story. In the fourth paragraph, Armand's intense feelings are described in destructive terms: he "fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot" (240), like all the Aubignys; his passion "swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles" (240). As for Armand's house, it is pictured as "a sad looking place" (241) which made Madame Valmondé shudder when she approached it, for its "roof came down steep and black like a cowl" (241) and the far-reaching branches of the solemn oaks which grew close to it "shadowed it like a pall" (241). Thanks to these ominous similes, readers get a glimpse of a setting appropriate for the terrible events that will ensue. However, not until the end can they realize that the French name of the sinister house, L'Abri, is ironical because it will turn out to be the opposite of a safe shelter for Désirée, whose name also becomes ironical when she ceases to be considered a prized possession and is marked as undesirable.

Apart from using metaphors and similes as foreshadowing devices, Chopin plays with her readers' expectations by creating some narrative ambiguities that are resolved at the end of the story, when its conclusion casts a light back on the episodes in which such ambiguities occurred. For example, in the first dialogue of the story, Madame Valmondé expresses her surprise at the sight of the baby, which she has not seen for four weeks. Madame Valmondé's amazement is explicitly acknowledged in the following terms: "'This is not the baby!' she exclaimed, in startled tones" (241). But the cause of her bewilderment remains unexplained at this stage, for the cheerful young mother does not interrogate Madame Valmondé about her ambiguous statement, which she simply accepts as an enthusiastic compliment on the growth of the infant. Désirée's unsuspicious reaction is summed up as follows: "'I knew you would be astonished,'

laughed Désirée, 'at the way he has grown'" (241). Without taking her eyes off the boy, Madame Valmondé takes him to the window that is lightest, scans him narrowly, and then looks as searchingly at the nurse, who keeps silent contemplating the fields. Madame Valmondé comments that the baby "has grown, has changed" (241) and asks Désirée about Armand's attitude. Désirée answers that Armand has become "the proudest father in the parish" (242), and emphasizes how delighted she is with her present situation as a wife, for her husband's behavior seems to have been positively affected by the birth of their son. The ambiguity of Madame Valmondé's two phrases "This is not the baby!" (241) and "Yes, the child has grown, has changed" (241) is finally resolved when we reread the story. Then, we are able to understand that she was surprised literally by *the way* the baby had grown rather than referring to *how much* he had grown, as both Désirée and most readers wrongly assume.

Chopin's foreshadowing techniques tend to disquiet her readers just as her hints arouse their curiosity, but she always takes care not to make her clues so obvious that her audience might lose interest by prematurely envisaging the answers to the questions posed throughout the story. For example, in the above-cited dialogue between Madame Valmondé and Désirée, the latter naïvely mentions two circumstances whose importance may be easily overlooked. Désirée tells her foster mother that Zandrine, the baby's "yellow" nurse, has cut the infant's nails. Since Kate Chopin's contemporary audience was familiar with the then current assumption that fingernails would clearly indicate people's black ancestry no matter how white they might look, most nineteenth-century readers would grasp the semiotic load of this detail.[7] When the race of the child becomes an issue, Désirée's casual remark can be fully understood. Madame Valmondé looks as searchingly at Zandrine because she thinks that, having cut the boy's fingernails, the nurse must have detected his racial origin.

In the same dialogue, Désirée also tells her foster mother that the baby cries in such a deafening way that "Armand heard him the other day as far away as La Blanche's cabin" (241). This is the first of the

three references to La Blanche which appear throughout the story, the other two being the observation that the slave is the mother of some quadroon boys on the plantation, and Armand's "cruel" comparison of Désirée with La Blanche when the former insists on the whiteness of her own skin. Retrospectively, the three references to La Blanche illuminate each other so that a new surprise arises from linking them together.[8] In the light of the other two allusions to La Blanche, Désirée's cursory remark can be interpreted as a subtle indication that Armand paid regular visits to the slave's quarters in order to have sexual intercourse with the mixed-blood woman, and that he had probably fathered her quadroons, one of whom was fanning the baby when Désirée discovered a resemblance that could have been not only racial, but also due to the fact that the two boys were half-brothers.[9]

The significance of these two pieces of information inadvertently given by the unsuspecting protagonist—Zandrine's cutting the baby's nails and Armand's visit to La Blanche—can only be tested once we finish reading the whole text and go back to the beginning in order to search for the clues that we feel we have missed. Furthermore, bearing in mind that every detail counts in this short story, there is an additional hint which proves that the conversation between Madame Valmondé and Désirée is far from being as trivial as it may sound, for it closes with a fearful premonition on the part of the protagonist. Although the narrator has been placing great emphasis on the young woman's initial happiness, Désirée herself expresses a certain anxiety at such bliss when she tells her foster mother at the end of their dialogue: "Oh, mamma, I'm so happy; it frightens me" (242). What seems to be a trite phrase at first glance eventually becomes a prophetic utterance, for Désirée's ultimate fall into despair would substantiate her own precocious intimation.

Kate Chopin manages to stir our pleasure when she purposely delays the resolution of uncertainties by means of a dynamic system of temporary informational gaps.[10] By withholding relevant information instead of offering it in chronological order within a linear sequence of events, she heightens suspense and enhances the effect of the sur-

prises experienced by her characters and her readers alike. For example, she prepares us to learn about Désirée's great surprise, but keeps us in a state of tension by postponing our knowledge of the kind of surprise it will turn out to be. Thus, the narrator begins by stating that Désirée "awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace" (242), "an air of mystery among the blacks; unexpected visits from far-off neighbors" (242), and "an awful change in her husband's manner" (242) made her "miserable enough to die" (242).

Then, we are told that one hot afternoon, when looking at her baby while it was being fanned by a quadroon boy, she was suddenly left aghast. The narrator does not reveal why her breath has been taken away, but concentrates instead on the effects of the shock:

> She looked from her child to the boy who stood beside him, and back again; over and over. "Ah!" It was a cry that she could not help; which she was not conscious of having uttered. The blood turned like ice in her veins, and a clammy moisture gathered upon her face. (242)

At this point we may wonder what is the impromptu discovery which Désirée has made by alternately looking at her own baby and at the quadroon child, but the narrator prefers to continue focusing our attention exclusively on her stupor: "She stayed motionless, with gaze riveted upon her child, and her face the picture of fright" (243). Once more, the narrator does not immediately satisfy the readers' desire to understand the reasons of such a startled reaction.

At last, the narrator explains that while Désirée is still paralyzed, Armand enters the room and she questions him about their baby. It is Armand's reply that finally discloses why Désirée is awestruck: "'It means,' he answered lightly, 'that the child is not white; it means that you are not white'" (243). And it is at this very moment that readers finally discover what the oddity is that everybody else had already noticed yet Désirée herself has ignored, and even now she is (and readers also are) still completely unable to comprehend. The question that must be tormenting her to the extreme, one that she cannot even

formulate using her own words is why she has given birth to a baby who looks so similar to the quadroon boy. This is the question that readers ask themselves, but will only be able to answer (albeit partially) at the end of the story. At this stage, they only get the feeling that the author has a bigger surprise in store for them, but are compelled to remain quite puzzled, anticipating enlightenment.

Apart from using metaphors and similes as foreshadowing devices, dropping subtle hints, playing with ambiguous statements uttered by her characters, and delaying the resolution of uncertainties, Kate Chopin manipulates her readers' expectations by means of a number of permanent informational gaps. Only at the end of the story do we realize that many crucial details have been entirely withheld from us.

After the opening sentence of a text that begins as if it were a straightforward fairytale, the third-person narrator presents us with two brief paragraphs told through the consciousness of Madame Valmondé, who becomes the focalizer of the introductory flashbacks. Madame Valmondé's fond memories of Désirée are then mingled with some fragmentary knowledge about Armand and his parents. Since readers are never provided with an accurate account of Armand's family background, the story ends without allowing them to fully and definitely fill in the narrative gaps that exist in this respect.

The area in which the author has chosen to play the most important trick of concealment, so as to enhance the striking effect of the final surprise, is the space occupied by Armand's mother. Early in the story, in the fourth paragraph, we are told that Armand's "father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there" (240). Two paragraphs below, the narrator adds some more information about Armand's mother when describing L'Abri: "It was a sad looking place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress, old Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it" (241). This last remark proves to be misleading, for at the end of the story we may suspect the ulterior reason why Madame Aubigny never became the mistress of L'Abri. According to the

Louisiana Civil Codes of 1808 and 1825, her marriage would have been illegal, and Armand would have been an illegitimate mixed-race child with no rights of inheritance.[11] At that time, white men who wanted to legally marry black women usually did so in Cuba or France, although such marriages were declared null and void in Louisiana. Taking into account this historical context, the most plausible motive for Madame Aubigny's not moving from France to Louisiana would have been her wish to avoid risking Armand's position as heir to his father's estate.

Apart from the two fleeting references to Madame Aubigny in paragraphs four and six, she is not mentioned again until the very last paragraph, which is a short excerpt from a letter she once addressed to her husband: "'But, above all,' she wrote, 'night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery'" (245). Thus, the story ends abruptly without letting us know when and where the letter was written, two data which would have shed light not only on the correspondents, but also on their son.

Given the minimal information concerning Madame Aubigny, readers may feel free to speculate about this character by asking various questions that arise from her enigmatic role in the story. For instance, they may wonder whether she had been a slave, or had just belonged "to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery" (245) without ever being in bondage herself; whether she was visibly black, or could easily pass for a white; whether she was a native of France or a French colony in Africa, or was born in America and later came to treat her adoptive country as her own;[12] whether Monsieur Aubigny, during his "easy-going and indulgent lifetime" (241), fell in love with one of his "yellow" slaves "the way all the Aubignys fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot" (240), and consequently, whether the couple was constrained to elope from Louisiana. Nor is it clear in what ways she thought that God had arranged her life and that of her husband so that Armand might not know about his own racial origin, or even

whether she had really died and was buried by her husband in Paris before he returned to America—perhaps she remained in France long enough to send the mysterious letter to her husband once he was back on his plantation. To the many questions that we are compelled to pose about Madame Aubigny throughout our reading-process no pat explicit answers are to be found in the text.

2. Appearance vs. Reality

Another important source of surprise in "Désirée's Baby" consists in Kate Chopin's disruption of conventional systems of meaning through the deliberate exploration of the theme of appearance vs. reality that exposes the extent to which prejudice may be delusive, since any quick turn in events might reverse situations. The key issue at stake is being labeled either black or white, a circumstance which was as significant for the characters of this short story set in antebellum Louisiana as it continued to be for Chopin's contemporary readers in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In a society that drew color lines and classified human beings according to predetermined constructions of race, being placed on one side or the other of the racial boundary was no light matter. As the "one-drop rule" required 100 per cent white ancestry, the public discovery of any black genealogy was essentially damaging for the future lives of the individuals who were 'passing.' Since other American writers of the Gilded Age were attracted by the topic of racial ambiguity, Chopin's first readers could hardly be surprised by her choice of such a fashionable theme. They must have been acquainted with narratives in which a baby who looks white at birth gradually displays black features. A minor character such as La Blanche, a white-looking female slave to whom her master pays visits in her cabin and who gives birth to quadroon children, must have seemed equally familiar. Nonetheless, readers must have been astonished by the sudden narrative switches concerning the racial identity of the two main characters of this particular story.

Désirée is initially seen as white, then for some time she is considered black until she is perceived as white again. Her predominant association with whiteness is symbolically reinforced by the circumstance that in the first scene she is wearing "soft white muslins and laces" (241), and in the last episode she is still clad in a "white garment" (244).[13] But she is chiefly categorized as white because of her physical appearance, which is vividly evoked when she is presented "listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders" (242). Later on, Désirée herself draws attention to her own bodily features when her husband tells her that she is not white: "'It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair,' seizing his wrist. 'Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand,' she laughed hysterically" (243). Moreover, in her last confrontation with Armand, the narrator describes her as being "silent, white, motionless" (243). Close to the end of the story, when Désirée leaves L'Abri for good, the narrator suggests her whiteness again by noting that "the stubble bruised her tender feet" (244) and that "her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes" (244).

In fact, the only reason that makes readers temporarily doubt Désirée's whiteness arises from "the girl's obscure origin" (241), a source of risk that Monsieur Valmondé conveniently warned the impassioned Armand about before the hasty wedding took place.[14] When the baby's black traits are discovered, Armand's paternity is not questioned, because adultery is ruled out by both the young wife's childlike innocence and her guileless perplexity at the turning point of the story, when she has to face the racial entanglement. As for Armand, in spite of his "dark, handsome face" (242), his aristocratic background prevents readers from suspecting that he will eventually be found to belong "to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery" (245). Therefore, at the climax of the story, the single alternative that seems to be left to explain the riddle of the baby's mixed racial heritage is its mother's status as a foundling, which implies her being

"nameless" (241), a connotation of blackness in antebellum American society. It is the final letter which reverses the racial identities of the two characters, for at the exact time when Armand turns out to be black his wife is presented as white again. Upon reflection, however, Désirée may not be wholly white in the terms established by the "one-drop rule" because at the end of the story we remain ignorant about her origin; the possibility that she might also have black ancestors cannot be completely dismissed.[15]

Throughout this short story, physiognomy and skin color are shown to be unreliable markers of racial identity, for visual evidence proves to be far from conclusive when it comes to establishing a clear duality in order to classify people as either black or white. In this sense, both Armand and Désirée have the potential to subvert racial categories by demonstrating the falsity of the black and white racial binary.[16] Nevertheless, as it has convincingly been argued, the disruption of meaning that takes place in "Désirée's Baby," where readers are pressed to admit their inability to unequivocally decipher racial signs, may be more subversive in a semiotic than in a political way.[17] The fact that numerous scholars have chosen "Désirée's Baby" to express diametrically opposed ideas about Chopin's construction of interracial marriage and miscegenation makes evident that her treatment of race issues in this particular story is unclear. Actually, this text, which has been labeled racist by some critics and anti-racist by others, may well illustrate the author's ambivalence in such matters.[18]

3. Subverting the Conventions of Local-Color Fiction

When "Désirée's Baby" first appeared, it was printed in an issue of the ladies' fashion magazine *Vogue* alongside "A Visit to Avoyelles" under the heading "Character Studies: The Father of Désirée's Baby—The Lover of Mentine." Written in 1892, the two stories were set in Louisiana and featured compliant wives, but they were antithetical in most other respects. Unlike its companion piece, "A Visit to

Avoyelles" had an uneventful plot and portrayed the picturesque life of stereotypical Cajun folk characters, sentimentally focusing on their emotions and using dialect speech.[19] Its theme, setting, style and complacent ending must have provided what late-nineteenth-century readers expected from a regionalist or local-color narrative printed in a periodical primarily targeted at a middle-class female audience. Accordingly, this story contributed to Chopin's reputation as a local-color writer in her own time, although it has recently been considered less typical of that literary movement than many other tales by the same author.[20] If the two stories are read immediately one after the other, the contrast between them is striking, since Chopin's quaint depiction of Cajun manners in "A Visit to Avoyelles" is not paralleled by a symmetrically optimistic representation of Creole mores in "Désirée's Baby." Actually, the Cajun story is not a replica of the Creole story, as the general title of "Character Studies" (which was probably added by the editor of *Vogue*) would lead one to believe. "A Visit to Avoyelles" broadly follows the conventions of local-color literature, whereas "Désirée's Baby" departs from them to a considerable extent. The deviation from the paradigmatic models of this popular genre presumably amazed Chopin's contemporaries much more than it may astonish us nowadays, because they approached the text with a set of generic expectations that we no longer share.

After *Vogue*'s publication, when "Désirée's Baby" was included in *Bayou Folk* the following year, readers must have noticed how it diverged from the majority of the stories collected in the volume regarding both form and content, for it was neither about the loyalty of blacks to whites, nor concluded by cheerfully emphasizing the benefits of altruism, the transforming power of affection, or the triumph of love. As Bernard Koloski pointed out in his 1999 Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie*, the joy expressed in the earlier tales tends to vanish, and other stories on the last pages of the 1894 book also have a gloomy atmosphere, but none has an ending as calamitous as "Désirée's Baby." The only story that comes close to it in pathos is the embedded narrative of "La Belle

Zoraïde," the bitter tale about an unfortunate mixed-race slave who takes to cuddling a bundle of rags after she is deceitfully told that her baby died during delivery. Poor Zoraïde falls into despair and madness to the point that, when her own child is returned to her, she rejects it because she prefers to go on clasping the bundle of rags, which she keeps into her old age, claiming that it is her baby. "La Belle Zoraïde" together with "Désirée's Baby" are the sole stories in *Bayou Folk* which are set in antebellum rather than in postbellum Louisiana, and the only two where adversity is not countered by a positive twist. Moreover, they are the only two stories in the collection which may be interpreted as vividly illustrating the destructive effects of racism and exposing the cruelty of slave-masters, rather than condoning a social order that promoted racial discrimination and supported a system that kept people in bondage. The horror underlying both short stories broke the standard pattern of so much fiction that idealized slavery in the context of a glorified South, effacing the violence which had played a central role in maintaining the "peculiar institution."[21] In this sense, "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" subverted the conventions of local-color fiction, a genre which Kate Chopin first absorbed and then transcended by transforming its design to suit her own purposes.[22]

In her first critical essay, written in the same year the collection of short fiction *Bayou Folk* was published, Kate Chopin expressed her impatience with the Western Association of Writers, deploring their "clinging to past and conventional standards" and their "singular ignorance of, or disregard for, the value of the highest art forms" (*Complete Works* 691). She attacked this group of writers of regionalist fiction for a provincialism that prevented them from perceiving "human existence in its subtle, complex, true meaning, stripped of the veil with which ethical and conventional standards have draped it" (691).[23] In her review of *Crumbling Idols*, a book by the local-colorist Hamlin Garland, Chopin reasserted her attitude toward the movement with the remark: "And, notwithstanding Mr. Garland's opinion to the contrary, social problems, social environments, local color and

the rest of it are not *of themselves* motives to insure the survival of a writer who employs them" (*Complete Works* 693). In a diary entry of the same year (May 12, 1894) Chopin wrote: "I have no objection to a commonplace theme if it be handled artistically or with originality" (*A Kate Chopin Miscellany* 90). With these words she praised George Washington Cable for his effective use of the theme of the "tragic mulatto" or the "tragic octoroon," while she disparaged her neighbor Mrs. Hull's rendering of it. Less than two years earlier, when writing "Désirée's Baby" in November 1892, Chopin herself had already tried to put into practice the theoretical principles she would later defend so articulately in her non-fiction writings. From her critical comments on local-color fiction it may be inferred that, when she wrote "Désirée's Baby," she sought to transcend the limits of the specific locale to which the then popular literary genre would have confined her writings, and to address more universal concerns.

Artistry and originality were the two main qualities Chopin strove for when she composed "Désirée's Baby," a narrative in which she innovatively dealt with the "commonplace theme" she would discuss afterwards. In accordance with her own beliefs about literature, Chopin here deliberately avoided the didacticism she had denigrated in the works of some of her fellow Southern writers. "Thou shalt not preach" was the eleventh commandment she tried to observe, much to the antipathy of recent critics who blame her for not condemning racial discrimination more explicitly.[24] Although her primary purpose may not have been to critique the social system of antebellum Louisiana, her story can be construed as a showcase of the catastrophic consequences of racism. It can be argued that, since Chopin undermined the "tragic mulatto" or "tragic octoroon" stereotype by alternately making Désirée and Armand conform to it, her audience should at least become aware of the difficulties (if not also of the dangers) of classifying people along color lines. First characterizing Armand as a gentleman full of genealogical pride and then suddenly revealing his secret black ancestry can be understood as a strategy to challenge a myth which Chopin herself had endorsed in her early

fiction writings, that of the Creole "purity of blood," an illusion based on the ingenuous notion that French descent guaranteed whiteness.[25] Whether the author intended to or not, in fact "Désirée's Baby" dismantled Chopin's previous consistent presentation of the Creole as a distinct ethnic category of indisputably white identity. Even though other elucidations of the text are possible, from a deconstructive critical perspective it can be argued that, while still making extensive use of the typical elements of local color, Chopin caused wonder by challenging a genre which nostalgically advocated the preservation of traditional models of gender and racial identity, and served the interests of hegemonic reactionary ideologies. Despite some dissenting voices, a substantial part of Chopin's present audience assumes that the sad conclusion of her story questions the conservative discourse of local-color fiction regarding the vulnerable position of both women and non-whites (and particularly that of non-white women) in American society.

4. Fairytale vs. Realist Short Story

In "Désirée's Baby" surprise arises also from the amazing juxtaposition of the two frames of reference which are combined in the story: that of the archetypal fairytale with that of the modern realist short story. The narrative begins with the well-known fairytale motif of the prodigious discovery of an infant who is lovingly brought up by a childless mother, thus creating the regular expectation that the foundling will turn out to be of high-class parentage, perhaps even a princess.[26] Therefore, readers are puzzled when doubts about Désirée's racial ancestry lead to her misery, and later on they become even more confused because the story ends without revealing her origins. Furthermore, most fairytales which feature a young beautiful heroine courted by a handsome aristocrat wind up reassuring readers with the certitude of a prosperous future life for the married couple. Even the fairytales in which childbirth disturbs the stability of a joyous matri-

mony usually end up with all kinds of difficulties overcome and every problem successfully solved, with the virtuous characters rightfully rewarded and the villains deservedly punished. But, in this case, readers are astonished once more when they are denied the conventional happy ending they may have expected. Again, the tragic ending of "Désirée's Baby" departs from that of a typical fairytale masterplot, since little hope is left for the innocent victims (Désirée and her baby) whereas the future of the wicked Armand remains undetermined.

Apart from introducing fairytale features, Kate Chopin also provides enough realistic elements to convey an accurate portrayal of the complex gender and race relations of the antebellum Louisiana society.[27] The sudden switch of the *proairetic code* of one archetypal narrative genre (that of the fairytale) to a completely different one (that of the realist short story) constitutes a main source of bewilderment.[28] In spite of the foreshadowing devices mentioned above, the first sentences of the text, written in the "charming" style which was unanimously praised by the early reviewers of *Bayou Folk*, prepare us to be entertained with a happily-ever-after tale intended for our mere delight, whereas the conclusion of the actual story abruptly forces us to confront genuine social problems and makes us gain new insights into human nature.[29]

5. The Surprise Ending

Kate Chopin finishes "Désirée's Baby" by astounding her audience with the unexpected outcome of two poignant scenes. In the first of them, Désirée shows Armand a short note she has received from Madame Valmondé in which her foster mother encourages her to go back to Valmondé with the baby, rather than reassuring her about her whiteness in the way she has expected. In anguish, Désirée asks her husband whether he wishes her to go away, and as he tells her twice that he wants her to leave, she bids him farewell while still hoping that he would call her back, but he keeps silent. Then, Désirée takes

the baby, and instead of returning to her former home where she would have been warmly welcomed by Madame Valmondé, she disappears "among the reeds and willows that [grow] thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she [does] not come back again" (244). Although this sentence could have provided a suitable ending to the story, on reaching it readers notice that the text is not finished yet, since four paragraphs are still left on the last page, separated by one extra linear space in some editions, and by a series of asterisks in others. At this point, what every reader wants to know for certain is what happens to Désirée and her baby. But, instead of disclosing the much-awaited details about the fate of the protagonist and her son, the last four short paragraphs shift our attention to Armand Aubigny, an unpredictable character whose mood changes have surprised us before and who will baffle us one more time.

In the final four paragraphs of the story, the narrator explains that, some weeks after Désirée's disappearance, Armand has his slaves light a great bonfire and throw everything that once belonged to his wife and their baby into the flames, including a bundle of letters "that Désirée had sent to him during the days of their espousal" (244), and that "back in the drawer from which he took them" (244) there was the remnant of one which "was not Désirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father" (244). The very last paragraph of the narrative is an excerpt from Madame Aubigny's letter, which contains an amazing revelation about Armand's racial heritage. Thus, the story ends making readers conclude that, after all, the baby's black features come from Armand himself rather than from Désirée.

The quality of this ending has been the subject of extensive dispute: some critics have praised it as a powerful epiphany, whereas others have deplored it for being a contrived, overdone, or artificial trick.[30] The final ironic reversal of "Désirée's Baby" is reminiscent of a technique employed by Guy de Maupassant, whom Chopin greatly admired and eight of whose short stories she translated from French into English.[31] Surprise endings in Maupassant's manner also appear in other works of fiction by Chopin, such as "A Rude Awakening,"

also included in the collection *Bayou Folk*. In this typical local-color short story, everyone believes that Lolotte is dead, but at last it is discovered that she had been rescued and hidden. In this case, the conclusive sudden ironic twist provides a happy ending which is at odds with the disheartening reversal that ends "Désirée's Baby."

Perhaps Chopin's best-known surprise ending is that of "The Story of an Hour" (1894), a short piece in which the author also constantly plays with her readers' expectations. In this story, Chopin first focuses our attention on the protagonist's, Mrs. Mallard's, running the risk of a heart attack once she learns the news about her husband's death in an accident. Then, when we are ready for a detailed description of the sad emotions she is likely to experience while mourning, we are confronted with an astonishing passage about the sense of relief and freedom enjoyed by the woman during the hour when she mistakenly thinks she is a widow. And it is precisely when Mrs. Mallard discovers that her husband is still alive (for he was far from where the accident had occurred), that she dies of a heart attack.

In the course of "The Story of an Hour," Kate Chopin confounds us several times and leaves us totally disconcerted at the end in a way that may be considered quite similar to that of "Désirée's Baby." However, there are important differences between the two stories not only concerning their surprise endings themselves but also regarding the surprise-generating mechanisms used by the author to create suspense throughout each of these texts. The basic difference between the surprise methods employed in the two short stories is that in "The Story of an Hour" Chopin stuns us basically by making her protagonist react in an unforeseen way, whereas in "Désirée's Baby" she carefully deploys much more complex techniques of suspense that cover a longer sequence of events. In "The Story of an Hour," the plot ends simply and straightforwardly, thus achieving narrative closure, for the mystery is resolved in the last stage: Mrs. Mallard is dead and her husband is alive. By contrast, "Désirée's Baby" is marked by an absence of narrative closure for two main reasons: 1. the fate of Désirée and the baby remains uncertain, and 2. the sudden discovery

about Armand's racial heritage, rather than clarifying the story altogether with a definitive explanation, further complicates the plot by opening up a range of possibilities of interpretation. After all, perhaps the most surprising aspect of "Désirée's Baby" is that a number of enigmas remain unraveled at the end of the story.

Apart from raising the question of its literary merit, the absence of narrative closure in "Désirée's Baby" has incited scholars to turn the ending into a genuine crux. They have provided so many diverging interpretations that we may anticipate new critical surprises every time we find a book or an article dealing with this topic. Over the years, the conflicting or even mutually exclusive hypotheses about authorial intent have been entangled with conjectures which reflect many possibilities of significance. Désirée's final disappearance into the bayou is somewhat ambiguous and leaves room for speculation about the indeterminacy of her fate. Although the vast majority of readers take her death for granted, and consequently refer either to her suicide or to her martyrdom, others still hope for her survival and that of her baby.[32] Once we accept the verisimilitude of her marvelous first appearance at the entrance of Valmondé when she was only a toddler, an equally mysterious reappearance of the young mother with her beloved son in any other site, far from the doomed plantation, cannot be ruled out. After all, Zandrine saw the distressed lady go into the bayou carrying her baby, and it seems unlikely that the nurse herself would not have tried to rescue the unfortunate creatures, or at least called for help. As a result, readers intent on saving Désirée at all costs—even at the risk of overreading—may feel satisfied if they imagine her either hidden in Valmondé under the protection of her foster mother, or else leading a new life in an entirely different milieu.

Regarding Armand, though most readers interpret the ending of the story as showing the villain suddenly discovering the news about his parentage, Chopin does not actually state that he is reading the old letter for the first time—an unlikely circumstance, taking into account that such a letter was kept in a drawer with Désirée's pre-nuptial correspondence. The text does not make it clear if Armand learns

about his racial heritage while burning Désirée's effects, or if he had previous knowledge of his mother's race either because he had had prior access to that letter or because he had childhood memories of Madame Aubigny's physical traits.[33] The fact that Chopin abstains from giving an account of Armand's reaction to the letter has encouraged readers to hazard guesses not only about his future but also about his past. For instance, Margaret D. Bauer argues that Armand Aubigny has been aware of his own black heritage all along and that his marriage to Désirée was part of an unsuccessful plan to have legitimate children that would pass for white, as he himself was passing. According to Bauer, one of the most outstanding features of this particular story, compared with other examples of "passing literature" (162), would lie in Armand's ability "to pass for over a century" because readers "continue failing to see Chopin's hints about Armand's race and therefore continue to be surprised by her final disclosure" (170). But the theory propounded by Margaret D. Bauer in 1996 has not been universally accepted, as Brewster E. Fitz's critical response, published in 2000, patently demonstrates.

No matter how hard we may look for evidence to support our personal assumptions about the text, "Désirée's Baby" still remains inconclusive in spite of its two surprise endings, because Chopin effectively utilizes both of them in order to resist easy narrative closure as an aesthetic strategy. Far from asserting her authority by allowing her audience to make unequivocal inferences from a writer-sanctioned ending, she declines her privileged position and refuses to answer many of the questions she has raised, thus breaking the *hermeneutic code* that would help us extract a predetermined fixed meaning.[34] Instead, she startles us once again by refraining from wholly unveiling the mystery. Thus, she prompts us to fill in the narrative gaps that remain at the end of our reading-process, and even lets us decide what destiny may await the protagonists of her breath-taking story.

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NOTES

[1]This article is a revised version of the paper "Resisting Conventional Narrative Closure in Kate Chopin's Fiction: The Surprise Ending of 'Désirée's Baby'" which was presented at the 8th International *Connotations* Symposium held at Universitätskolleg Bommerholz, 24-28 July 2005. I express my gratitude to all the participants for their questions and suggestions in the lively ensuing debate, which enabled me to restructure and expand this contribution. Additionally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Connotations* for their thought-provoking criticism and careful editing. My sincere thanks also to the tutors and students enrolled in the American Literature course I teach at the UNED, because their long discussions of "Désirée's Baby" in the past five years have helped me understand in what ways and to what extent many different readers—and not only literary critics—may be surprised by this short story.

[2]"Désirée's Baby" was written on 24 November 1892. In his edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, the Norwegian scholar Per Seyersted indicates that, when the short story was first published in *Vogue* (14 Jan. 1893), the magazine version was titled "The Father of Désirée's Baby" (1013). "Désirée's Baby" was included in Chopin's first collection of stories, *Bayou Folk*, a volume published in 1894 and reissued in 1895, 1906, and 1911. In *Kate Chopin*, Emily Toth observes: "Reviewers of *Bayou Folk*, *Vogue* noted, were 'nearly unanimous in singling out "Désirée's Baby," one of the *Vogue* series, as the most original and the strongest story of the collection which, as a whole, they enthusiastically praised'" (290).

[3]Among the scholars who have analyzed "Désirée's Baby" in detail are the following: Arner, Bauer, Elfenbein (117-31), Erickson, Ewell (66-72), Fitz, Foy, Koloski (1996: 24-26), Papke (26-30), Peel, Schneider, Seyersted (186-88), Sollors (66-72), Toth (1981: 201-8 and 1999: 144-74), and Wolff. See also the critical essays published by Korb and Miner.

[4]As I have argued elsewhere, "Désirée's Baby" has generated a wide range of diverging opinions because it is a deceptively simple text which illustrates maximum implicitness due to the following reasons: the prominence of multiple weak implicatures in literary discourse, the verbal economy inherent in the short fiction genre, the social constrictions of Chopin's time, and both a conventional and personal preference for deliberately ambiguous modes of expression that favor hinting or suggesting through indirect statements rather than expounding through plain blunt speech (Gibert 73).

[5]All quotations from "Désirée's Baby" are from *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (240-45).

[6]Kate Chopin used the words *crumbling*, *demolition* and *destruction* relating them to *idols* in the first paragraph of her undated review "'Crumbling Idols' by Hamlin Garland," first published in *St. Louis Life* (13 Oct. 1894), rpt. *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (693-94).

[7]Werner Sollors remarks: "In the case of the fingernail motif, the inspection of the nails is expected in most instances to yield clues to a character's nonwhite

racial ancestry, however remote it may be and how white the person in question may look" (146).

[8]Anna Shannon Elfenbein conjectures that La Blanche was once in the same position as Désirée (129).

[9]Cynthia Griffin Wolff queries "what was Armand's errand in her cabin?" and infers that the little quadroon boy and Désirée's baby may be in fact half-brothers (38), an interpretation later shared by Bauer (171). Emily Toth also comes to the conclusion that "Armand appears to have a sexual relationship with La Blanche" (1981: 207). Brewster E. Fitz refers to "Armand's own possibly incestuous relationship with the yellow La Blanche" (87), having previously stated that, since it is not possible to know who is responsible for La Blanche's whiteness, one may set in motion "the infernal whirling of speculation" and wonder if she was an aunt of Armand, or his half-sister, or his sister, or Désirée's sister (85).

[10]See Sternberg (50 and 245), Rimmon-Kenan (128), and Toker (1-19).

[11]In her detailed analysis of "Désirée's Baby," Margaret D. Bauer draws attention to several studies on antebellum Louisiana law in order to consider the marriage of Armand's parents in its historical context.

[12]Critics have answered this question in various manners. For instance, Marcia Gaudet postulates that Armand's mother may have been a Louisiana mulatto (49), whereas Bernard Koloski presumes that her "black blood" came to her "from Africa by way of France, not the United States" (1996: 25).

[13]Robert D. Arner has demonstrated how two major image patterns support the racial themes in "Désirée's Baby": the contrast between light and shadow, and the opposition between God or Providence and Satan (142-44). He has also underlined that yellow is the third important color in the story, for it is not only the color of Armand's house, but also explicitly that of Zandrine and implicitly that of other racially-mixed people mentioned in the story, so that yellow is associated with the Aubigny estate (142). Emily Toth has observed that, "Like the angelic feminine figures of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, Désirée is constantly seen in white" (1981: 206).

[14]Kate Chopin, who polished her literary works much more than she ever cared to admit, wrote "obscure origin" rather than "unknown origin" for reasons that may not have been accidental.

[15]Among the critics who have suggested that Désirée might have black ancestors are Marcia Gaudet and Ellen Peel. The latter expands on the political implications of the possibility that "Désirée may not be wholly white" (233).

[16]The permanent narrative gap that remains in the text concerning race may also be interpreted as an exploration of the novelists' ethical or epistemological beliefs in the sense that Leona Toker suggested when she discussed the relationship between the aesthetic and the moral elements in other literary works (129 and 186).

[17]Ellen Peel uses "a combined semiotic and political approach" in her analysis of "Désirée's Baby" and contends that in this short story "the surprises are more

disruptive in a *semiotic* than a *political* sense; they endanger the system of *signification* more than the system of *domination*" (230).

[18]According to Peggy Skaggs, the story concludes "with an ironic reversal that demonstrates the irrationality of racism" (25). Nancy A. Walker believes that here as elsewhere, Chopin illustrates the disasters that racism can cause (8). Bernard Koloski considers "Désirée's Baby" to be "among the most powerful condemnations of racism in American literature" (1996: 26) and states this view in his "Introduction" to *Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie* (1999: xv). Suzanne D. Green notes that this tale calls into question Helen Taylor's notion that Chopin was "deeply racist" (Green 23, Taylor xiii). Among the critics who claim that "Désirée's Baby" reinforces racist definitions of blackness and whiteness is Werner Sollors, who forcefully rejects former interpretations that praise this short story for its progressive treatment of racial issues, and contends that its melodramatic closure leaves the reader "assured at the end that it is the evil, satanic character who is at fault; conveniently, he is also the one who definitely has the 'black blood'; by contrast, the one wrongly accused of blackness is perhaps really whitewhitewhite and innocent and good" (71). In my yet unpublished paper "Race Issues in Kate Chopin's Louisiana Short Fiction," I contend about Chopin's alleged racism: "If she were to be judged by present standards of political correctness, she would most likely be found guilty of sins of omission rather than commission. She was never explicitly racist, and arguably not racist at all."

[19]In her early Louisiana fiction, Chopin invariably presented Creoles and Cajuns as wholly white, and distinguished one ethnic group from the other in terms of class. No dialect is used in "Désirée's Baby," a story in which all non-English words are in standard French, including Zandrine's brief sentence.

[20]While acknowledging that "A Visit to Avoyelles" displays many standard features of local-color writing, Kaye Gibbons reckons that this story reveals progress in Chopin's movement away from local-color conventions, for it is less sentimental that many local-color works (xxxi-xxxii).

[21]Bauer sees "Désirée's Baby" "as Chopin's challenge to the postbellum plantation literature that idealized the Old South" (174).

[22]In her article "Kate Chopin and Literary Convention: 'Désirée's Baby,'" Emily Toth propounds the theory that Kate Chopin used certain literary conventions (e.g. the tragic octoroon) in order to attract her readers, and then went beyond such conventions to provide new insights. Elfenbein concludes that Chopin, together with George Washington Cable and Grace King, transformed some local-color stereotypes (in particular, the tragic octoroon) so as to challenge the prevailing ideology (ix). Likewise, Janet Goodwyn [Janet Beer] reads Chopin's fictions as "subversive documents" in which the apparently conventional surface meanings are undermined by processes of revelation that occur through her short stories (28). According to Sandra Gilbert, local color offered Chopin "both a mode and a manner that could mediate between the literary structures she had inherited and those she had begun" (16). Kate McCullough contends that "although Chopin had publicly positioned herself as a writer in relation to both Local Color and Realism, disclaiming the former and celebrating the latter, in her early work she concur-

rently exploited Local Color, using it to subvert the terms of middle-class models of womanhood, dismantling a monolithic image of America and American True Womanhood by representing various 'American' women whose identities are marked by a variety of ethnic, racial, regional, religious, and class identifications" (187).

[23]By analyzing the sketch "A Gentleman of Bayou Têche" in the light of Chopin's own critical writings, David Steiling convincingly demonstrates that the author's ambivalence toward the local-color school of American writing "goes deeper and is a reaction to the ethical and aesthetic problems of representing distinct ethnic and regional cultures" (197). According to Steiling, the sketch "shows that Kate Chopin could and did use the techniques of the local-color school to deconstruct and transcend the limitations of the genre" (200).

[24]When praising Maupassant's tales, Chopin wrote: "Some wise man has promulgated an eleventh commandment—'thou shalt not preach,' which interpreted means 'thou shalt not instruct thy neighbor.'" ("Confidences," *Complete Works* 702).

[25]In his Introduction to *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, Per Seyersted explains: "The Creoles were pure-blooded descendants of French and Spanish colonists" (22). Having analyzed Chopin's narrative construction of racial difference in her early fiction, Bonnie James Shaker maintains that "For Chopin, 'coloring locals' meant transforming non-Louisianians' general understanding of the Creole and Cajun as mixed-race people into 'purely' white folks" (xii) and notes that Chopin's later texts move away from her initial interest in whitening Creoles and Cajuns.

[26]In his essay "Fairytale Features in Kate Chopin's 'Désirée's Baby,'" Jon Erickson indicates that the virtually unmistakable fairytale features "are used in the story as a basis for its exploration of the theme of appearance versus reality" (57) and that such features complicate and enrich the basic realistic mode of the tale.

[27]Helen Taylor refers to "Chopin's strong identification with European, rather than American, realist writing" (157). Kate McCullough remarks that "Chopin was quite aware of the politics of Local Color—both the benefits and costs of being associated with it—and so chose to identify with Realism as a political strategy of self-authorization in the face of the threat of marginalization. At the same time, however, Chopin used both the conventions and the marginalized status of Local Color fiction as a cover: as a marginalized form it allowed Chopin to experiment with representations of American Womanhood, rejecting a kind of Northeastern Puritan tradition of non-representation of female sexuality and following Realism's move towards mimesis so as to dismantle models of True Womanhood as well as those of the Southern Lady" (190).

[28]In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes draws attention to the fact that readers bring to every narrative a set of narrative codes which are necessary to extract meaning from the text. In order to interpret Balzac's *Sarrasine*, Barthes employs five codes, which he calls *hermeneutic*, *semantic*, *proairetic*, *symbolic*, and *cultural* (also called *reference code*). The *proairetic code* is a major structuring principle that builds interest on the

part of the reader and thus creates suspense. It stems from the recognition that each action in a text can be linked to nameable sequences operating in the text as a whole. In other words, the *proairetic code* works at the level of expectations because it refers to the anticipation of the resolution of each action.

[29]Five early reviews of *Bayou Folk* have been reprinted by Alice Hall Petry in the volume *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin* (41-45).

[30]Among the critics who have praised the ending of the story, Fred Lewis Pattee claimed that it typified Chopin's talent for providing unusually strong conclusions (326-27). In *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories*, the first book-length work on Chopin, Father Daniel S. Rankin noted that "its superb final sentence is not a trick but an epiphany" (134). In 1937, Joseph J. Reilly commented that the closing sentence of "Désirée's Baby" "matches O. Henry's 'The Furnished Room' in the suddenness of its surprise and in the irony and the pathos of its devastating revelation" (73), and later qualified the conclusion of the story as "powerful" in *Of Books and Men* (135). When Per Seyersted discussed "Désirée's Baby" in *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, he expressed his dislike with the artificiality of its concluding quirk as follows: "The ending undeniably has intense dramatic value, but its artifice mars what is otherwise an excellent piece of writing" (122). In his Introduction to *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, Seyersted reaffirmed this opinion in the following words: "though the last sentence of such a story as 'Désirée's Baby' has a poignancy unsurpassed by Maupassant, it is nevertheless a trick ending" (31). Robert D. Arner disagreed with Seyersted and with other critics who had complained about the "contrived" ending of the story with the claim that Chopin was attempting to force on readers a conclusion she had not prepared them for, and argued that such a claim "rests on a too hasty reading of the story" (139). Cynthia Wolff explicitly contradicted Seyersted's disparagement of the ending of the story (36) and celebrated "the success of its conclusion" as follows: "The 'twist' is no mere writer's trick; rather, it is the natural consequence—one might say the necessary and inevitable concomitant—of life as Chopin construes it" (37). Although Barbara H. Solomon praised the story as a whole, she deplored that the ending was a bit overdone (xiv). Susan Wolstenholme said that the story is flawed because of its contrived conclusion (543). Barbara C. Ewell argued that the ending seems perfectly appropriate (69). According to Erickson, the story gains in complexity because of its second conclusion (57).

[31]Although in her lifetime Chopin only managed to sell the most conventional three, all of her eight translations of Maupassant's short stories have been made available by Thomas Bonner Jr. in *The Kate Chopin Companion*. Chopin acknowledged her debt to Maupassant in "Confidences" (*Complete Works* 700-05). Guy de Maupassant's influence on Kate Chopin has been studied by John R. Aherne and Richard Fusco. Among the various Maupassant's markings in Chopin's work, Bernard Koloski points to "a penchant for ironic endings" (1996: 6).

[32]Most readers conclude that Désirée and her baby die in the bayou. On this subject, see McMahan (34), Wolff (40-41), Koloski (1996: 25), Sollors (145) and Toth (1999: 145). Among the commentators who presume that Désirée has committed

suicide are Benfey (228), Erickson (63), Korb, Papke (55), and Taylor (50 and 166). Ellen Peel is more cautious when she states that "Désirée walks away, apparently to her death" (230) and even considers the implications that her survival would have in any evaluation of the story (233-34).

[33]Among the critics who assume that Armand discovers his black ancestry when he takes his mother's letter from the drawer in which he kept Désirée's correspondence are: Seyersted (122), Arner (140), Skaggs (25), Ewell (69), and Taylor (166). Thomas Bonner asserts that Armand left his mother "at the age of eight, not knowing that she was black" (9). On the other hand, Anna Shannon Elfenbein postulates that Armand "may vaguely remember his racially mixed mother" (126). Roslyn Reso Foy notices that "Armand was eight years old at the crucial turning point in his life when his mother died and he left Paris with his father," and concludes that his cruelty stemmed from his experiencing psychological confusion, because he "was certainly old enough to remember his mother, but circumstances have caused him to suppress his past" (222-23). Relying on psychological research about children's awareness of race, Margaret D. Bauer argues: "A mother of six children, Chopin would have probably realized the age her children were when they became aware of racial differences. Thus her including the detail that he was eight years old when his mother died was the means by which she intended her reader to realize, upon reflection, that Armand must have been aware of his mother's race" (166). Fusco notes how the ending leaves open the possibility that Armand may already have known of his mother's letter (152).

[34]According to Roland Barthes, the *hermeneutic code* sets up delays in the flow of the discourse, and refers to the questions which are raised by the elements that are not explained in a text, such as the *snare* (deliberate deception or evasion of the truth), the *equivocation* (the mixture in a single statement of truth and snare, that is, a statement that can be interpreted in two different ways), the *partial answer*, the *suspended answer*, and *jamming* (acknowledgement of the insolubility of the enigma, or apparent failure of the hermeneutic activity). See Richard Miller's translation of Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (19, 75-76 and 210).

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Textual Surprise in Pauline Smith's "The Sinner"

MYRTLE HOOPER

> Is there one of us that is without sin? Let him that would listen to the evil that is spoken of another acknowledge first the evil that is within himself, and who then will dare to listen? Who then will dare to speak? (*The Beadle* 171)

A sinner, in an ordinary understanding of the word, is an evildoer or a transgressor, a person who sins without repenting. Throughout Pauline Smith's writing, there is an interest in sin as a concept in the calvinistic world of the Afrikaners she depicts. In his introduction to Smith's first published short story collection, *The Little Karoo*, her critic and mentor Arnold Bennett describes her characters, "the colonists" as,

> simple, astute, stern, tenacious, obstinate, unsubduable, strongly prejudiced, with the most rigid standards of conduct—from which standards the human nature in them is continually falling away, with fantastic, terrific, tragic, or quaintly comic consequences. (10)

As Bennett indicates, these are people who subscribe to a strong moral code, and frequently depart from it, in action if not in conviction. This tension between codes of conduct and compliance with them is a recurrent theme in Smith's fiction, and one that enables her to give life to her fictional world and to offer her readers critical perspectives upon it. It also creates space for surprise: surprise for characters and surprise for readers.

Surprise, in an ordinary understanding of this word, is something sudden or abrupt, a momentary and momentous experience rather than an enduring or developing state of mind. Wonder or marvelling

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are the more usual terms for such ongoing conditions or processes. I would argue, though, that surprise is a defining feature of the illumination, the enlightenment, the elucidation, the clarification that occurs in classical tragedy, bringing its hero to an understanding that he previously lacked. The moment of awareness may be sudden, it is true. Yet it is often preceded by subtle indications, suggestions and hints that set up strands of cognitive tension, networks of signs whose meaning can only emerge in a broader pattern. The ground is laid beforehand for resolution into a grasp of the whole, an integral and complete understanding. Perhaps it is stretching a theoretical point to lay claim to a concept such as 'anagnorisis' for a short story by a modern author. Yet the concept is not very far removed from what contemporary psychology refers to as an 'aha' experience, the "reaction accompanying the moment of insight in problem solving situations" (Chaplin 17); or from the moment of recognition that follows and resolves the tension of losing one's words, of tip-of-the-tongue interruptions of memory. In these instances surprise does not come out of the blue, but is prepared for, as it were, at a subconscious or subliminal level. It is almost as if understanding is silently developing all along but only becomes accessible when, for some reason, it is expressed, when it emerges into discursive awareness (Giddens 167).

Given Smith's thematic interest in sin, her choice of title for her story "The Sinner" is not surprising. What is remarkable is the suppleness and subtlety with which her fiction renders the humanity of her characters, these stubbornly insular relics of a rural past. Smith's craftsmanship is one reason I find myself disagreeing with the received reading that her work mythologises—and endorses—an ideology of Afrikaner-as-Israelite (Coetzee). In this story in particular we see a considered mastery of the dynamics of narrative engagement and narrative distance that enables her to play with our reading expectations, to nudge us by successive degrees into a state of surprise, of willingness to accommodate the unexpected and to humour the twisting turning developments and disclosures of her plot. Smith is a consummate craftsman who holds her story in the palm of her hand,

progressively revealing layers of hidden relationship that recast and reconfigure the meaning of its action. To a large extent, this story is about the modulation of knowledge as the narrative progresses: knowing, that is, in tension with thinking, feeling, believing, remembering, hearing, suspecting, hoping. And, in a substantial sense, surprise has to do with knowing and not knowing things about oneself and about others. If one already knows, one can hardly be surprised.

In this essay, I wish to examine a particular feature of Smith's narrative method that is epistemologically loaded: her use of names and naming. A consideration of naming is relevant to the notion of surprise because practices of naming are indicative of the ways in which people respond to and interact with their environment and with each other. By means of naming, people ascribe meanings to other people, to things, to events and processes; rendering them stable and predictable, managing the threats, the uncertainties, the surprises they might otherwise harbour or let loose upon the world. To give a name is to classify, to contain, to control. Because of this, even though names can reflect knowledge of the world, they can also be a substitute for it. In general it is probably true to say that surprise reflects a shift from ignorance to knowledge. Yet when the 'knowledge' one has at the outset is in fact ignorance, is knowledge 'in name only,' then real surprises may ensue that shift what is ambivalent or ambiguous into something clear and certain, something genuine, valid, *bona fide*, something that Afrikaans people would call *aktueel*. And then, often, the taken-for-granted-power of names, too, gives way to more real awareness or insight or understanding.

Although other linguistic habits of Smith's are often quite marked—her use of transfer, for example, mimicking Afrikaans sentence structure in English, or modality that reflects possibilities, probabilities, consequences of actions, choices and decisions—it is especially characteristic that names are important in her work. Since naming always occurs in a cultural and linguistic context, the predominantly Afrikaans community of whom she writes provides her with narrative resources she would not have access to if she were writing only about

English people. In her novel *The Beadle*, for example, she renames topographic features so as to construct a narrative world that is socially and psychologically located and confined. She uses self-ascriptions as well as naming and non-naming by others to trace the emergence or development of identity. She draws on Afrikaans patterns of politeness to indicate relations of power between her characters, and to illuminate the interplay of formality and intimacy in core relationships. I will not here undertake a detailed onomastic study of the story, "The Sinner"; rather will I offer a broad overview in terms of the declarative, ascriptive and relational naming that occurs in it. My primary interest is in the naming of people, but I shall also give some consideration to the naming of places, and the naming of a condition several characters find themselves in: that is, "madness."

The first instance of naming occurs in the title. The "sinner" to whom it purports to refer is a man called Niklaas Dampers. Fifty-six years old, he is "a small, weak, religious man, with pale red-lidded eyes, arms that seemed too long for his body, and a heart that was full of bitterness and the fear of the Lord" (83). His Christian name is one that might align him either with St Nicholas, the holy man, or with Old Nick, the devil. The title of the story, as well as his introduction as first significant character, guides readers to respond to the second rather than the first of these alternatives. So too does the surname he is given. The Afrikaans word *dampers* translates as 'fumes' rising from a pipe being smoked. For a South African reader this is likely to trigger an association with the foremost smoker in our folklore tradition: Jan van Hunks whose smoking contest with the devil produced the 'tablecloth' that hovers perennially over Table Mountain. This association is rapidly reinforced when we learn that Niklaas is a "bijwoner" (a tenant farmer) whose job it is to "plant, weed, cut, dry, strip, dip, and twist" the tobacco of his landlord (86).

The religious frame of the story is first presented in a description of the church attire of the women of the community. It is then applied specifically to Niklaas in the narrative comment that, "for many years this weak, harsh, embittered man had feared the Lord and wor-

shipped Him. For many years he had believed that at the last the Lord would deal justly with such righteousness as his, and visit vengeance upon all such sinners as were most other men in the Platkops district" (85). It is clear from this ascription that at this point Niklaas does not conceive himself as a sinner, and distances himself from those he believes are. It is also clear that his beliefs are rigid, and are vested in a fixed way of seeing himself and others. It is all the more ironic, then, that Niklaas should be targeted for seduction by the stranger Koba Nooi; and that he should be rendered susceptible to her blandishments by a radical loss of faith brought about by the departure of his daughter. The surprise of his susceptibility is both paradoxical and appropriate: it is funny as well as fitting to see so self-righteous a man humbled by his own humanity.

Niklaas's eldest daughter Saartje is his favourite child, and the story begins at the point when she marries and leaves him and her family to live with her husband in another place. Critics of Smith have commented on the significant role of fathers in her work. An intriguing ramification here is the role of the absent daughter. The fact is that Niklaas's love for this child is strong enough to supplant his love for his wife and his other children, and to lead him to feel that God has betrayed and abandoned him.

> Niklaas had prayed that Saarjte might never leave him, and the Lord's strange answer to his prayer filled his mind with an unreasoning hatred of his ten remaining children and of his wife Toontje, (83)

we learn; and,

> no man, it seemed to Niklaas now, could be so merciless to another as God had been to him in taking Saartje to Philip dorp and leaving Toontje in Platkops. If the Lord now, by some miracle, had taken Toontje to Philip and left Saartje in Platkops how gladly would he have praised Him! But God was no longer his friend. (85)

Smith's choice of name for this daughter is unobtrusive; but those familiar with Genesis might remember Sarah as the beautiful wife

whom Abraham passed off as his sister to protect her from the predations of the king in their country of exile. A related blurring of family roles is evident here in Niklaas's devotion to his daughter that is intense enough to border on the incestuous. The fact that this leads to a renunciation of God as his "friend" is a distortion of the moral proprieties that gives weight to the story's labelling him "sinner." It also lays the ground for revelations that occur during the course of the story and at its end, however, which recast the relations of husband and wife, and of father and daughter, in emphatically unexpected ways.

Niklaas's wife's name, Toontje, is a diminutive of Antonia. Although one might translate the Afrikaans word *toon* as 'toe,' the more likely connotation is that of 'tone,' because she is characterised as a "tall, patient, silent woman, who shared with none the secrets of her soul." A *toning*, furthermore, is a 'showing,' a 'making manifest.' As the story progresses, her character gains substance by the surfacing of truths from her past which she has, during their marriage, kept submerged. "God might know what Toontje hid in her heart, but in all their years of poverty together Niklaas had never fathomed it" (83). Her habitual 'tone' of patience and silence has become unendurable to her husband. If he had ever loved his wife, we learn, "he had long ago forgotten it," and "now that Saartje had left him his wife's patience and silence, and his own increasing hatred of her, became a torture which drove the bijwoner to the verge of madness" (84-85). His wife's patience is the more admirable to the reader because Niklaas's antipathy towards her is so intense and seemingly so arbitrary; and because she reacts with compassion and clemency to his subsequent abandonment of her, taking practical and effective measures to protect his name and his position. Ultimately it is her gesture of 'atonement' that makes it possible for him to return to her, and to his place in his home and his community, and to regain the senses he takes leave of when he succumbs to the impetuous desire that fills the space left by loss of faith.

This desire, and the fact that he acts on it, is named in this story (and elsewhere in Smith's writing), as "madness" (84). The form this madness takes, and the first major surprise the story presents its readers, is that of seduction. Niklaas's temptress is one Jacoba Nooi: "a stranger to the district […] a plump, unmarried woman of forty, with a round childish face, a tongue like a running sluice, and a gentle sing-song voice." She has an "air of great simplicity and innocence" that is belied rather than confirmed by the garb she wears: a gown of "sprigged cotton," and a hat "trimmed with ribbon." The norm for "all other women of her age in the bijwoning class" is a plain black dress and a black calico sunbonnet, and her flouting the dress code in this way "makes much talk" amongst them. So, too, does her hand-mirror, which is "rimmed with little shells and set with larger shells at the back" (84), and which she plays with "when her work is done," sitting outdoors and "flashing her mirror in the sun" (85). Such a mirror is an anomaly to the women of the district because they adhere to the strict calvinist code that condemns self-reflection as vanity, and vanity as sinful. She uses this mirror to entice Niklaas to her where she sits by the bank of the river, flashing reflected sunlight up "on to his face, on to his shirt sleeve, on to the bushes and stones that lay between them, and [drawing] him slowly, slowly, down the bank towards her" (88). Such actions by a woman of her age and status are astonishing to Niklaas who, unlike her, really is innocent. An astute reader, though, would pick up the fact that her surname, *Nooi*, in Afrikaans carries the nominal meaning 'girlfriend' or 'sweetheart,' and the verbal meaning to 'invite' or 'entice' or 'beguile.'

The seduction of Niklaas is presented as an outcome of his grief at the loss of his daughter, and his rancour at his wife and God for it: "Niklaas […] was like a drunken man in his bewilderment. And because his heart was empty now of all sense of righteousness and sin, of all fear of justice and of vengeance, there swept into it a wild tumult of desire that was but another madness" (88-89). It is also presented as an aporia, a structural gap. His motivation is treated tacitly, so that we are invited neither to condone nor to engage with it. We receive no

details of the actual event. And this seduction is set off from the next movement of the story by a temporal gap of three weeks, and by the surprising revelations that transpire when his wife goes to visit his employer.

The landowner whom Niklaas serves as *bijwoner* is a "hard master, whose one passion, even now when men said that he was dying, was the tobacco he grew on his various lands throughout the Platkops district. Any bijwoner who did not plant, weed, cut, dry, strip, dip, and twist to please him, he dismissed without pity, and all men knew it" (86). He is referred to in the narrative frequently by formal full name, "Andries van Reenen," or by title and surname, "Mijnheer van Reenen," or, when addressed by Niklaas's wife, by title only, "Mijnheer," which emphasises, as does the narrative's term "master," the considerable class difference between them. The name *van Reenen* would translate, loosely, as 'of rain,' and is not, I think, particularly suggestive. What is arresting is the moment of interaction at which terms of address shift from formal deference to intimate parity.

Toontje goes to see him on his farm, which lies "an hour by foot from Platkops dorp," in order to intercede with him on her husband's behalf. When she tells him that Niklaas has abandoned her, his home, his family and his livelihood for Koba Nooi, the following conversation ensues:

> "Niklaas? In the Kombuis!" cried his master, incredulous. And he added in a sudden blaze of anger, "May his soul burn in hell and Koba's also."
>
> "Mijnheer," said the bijwoner's wife in her quiet level voice, "may God forgive him in his madness, but is it for Mijnheer and me to judge him?"
>
> (90-91)

Initially the narrative focus of this conversation is on Niklaas: it is his location that is remarked on, and the two conversing about him are named in terms of him, as his master and his wife. The old man's incredulity and anger stem in part from his passion for his tobacco and Niklaas's betrayal of his contract in going to work for the Hollander. But Niklaas's incursion into the Kombuis carries a greater symbolic weight than this: it is a trespass that the old man finds pre-

posterous. The reasons for this become clearer in due course. Toontje's characteristic patience and silence are identified again in the tag, "in her quiet level voice," and in the fact that she does not react to the old man's outburst. Added to these qualities of hers here is that of resolve: she meets his judgement, "May his soul burn in hell," with an intercession, "[m]ay God forgive him," and a challenge, "is it for Mijnheer and me to judge him?" Her response is arresting for several reasons: one, that she recasts his judgement as a wish for mercy; two, that she switches from modal, "may," to stative "is"; three, that her question is clearly rhetorical in expecting a negative answer; four, that she questions not only his judgement but also his right and his fitness to make it; and five, that she couples herself with him in this moral inquisition. In doing so, she shifts from direct, second-person address ("Mijnheer") to indirect third-person address ("is it for Mijnheer and me to judge"), in line with the politeness requirements of conversation in Afrikaans.

The old man's reaction is angry and insulting, and does not, at first, register the force of her question. As the conversation proceeds, however, her persistence rekindles his memories of the past, and the connection between them is revealed:

> "Fool," thundered the old man, "are you then also mad?"
>
> And Toontje answered: "Mijnheer knows that once I was mad. Mijnheer knows how my madness ended. Did Mijnheer never himself go up to the Kombuis? Or is it that he has perhaps forgotten?"
>
> "Toontje!" cried the old man, his mind moving, slow and bewildered, from his tobacco to the past. "Toontje!"
>
> "Andries!"
>
> For a moment their eyes met, and in that moment the secret which Toontje hid in her heart and Niklaas had never fathomed, lay bared between them.
>
> (91)

Smith prepares carefully for this moment of revelation. For one thing, there is a subtle but definite play of power between them. The old man initially dismisses what Toontje says with a pejorative "Fool," and a hectoring rhetorical question of his own, "are you then also mad?" She responds with quiet assurance, repeating insistently the

phrase, "Mijnheer knows." As well as being an assertion, this is a call on him to bring back into his mind what he knows but has forgotten or suppressed. Similarly, her next two questions are rhetorical but are expressly designed to nudge his memory. The reflexive emphasis of "Did Mijnheer never himself […]" in particular links his actions in the past with those of Niklaas in the present, and hence insists on the moral equivalence of their conduct. Her continued use of polite indirect address ("he") is then suddenly interrupted when the old man remembers and addresses her for the first time by name. She responds likewise, and this shift in naming marks a moment of intense intimacy. Shortlived as it is, it brings the two into par, and explains why he then responds to her request for help.

This second major surprise of the story works by accretion and accumulation of earlier details whose significance shifts into focus at this point. There have been hints before now of a past connection between the two: "Not for many years had Toontje visited the farm, and not once *since* her marriage had she spoken with her master alone" (89), we are told, and, "In her youth in the Kombuis this tall patient woman, so quiet in her speech, so controlled in all her movements, had been free and beautiful *to him* as a roe-buck in the mountains" (90; my emphasis). It is only in retrospect, though, that the implication of these details becomes clear, when the dramatic shift to intimate address confirms that they have indeed had a relationship, and that the consequences of this relationship have shaped their lives in marked ways. This is clinched by what transpires in the rest of their conversation: in Toontje's question, "Have I not served Mijnheer for more than Niklaas's five-and-twenty years?"; in his wondering reproach, "is this all that you will have of me […]. You that once lived for me in the Kombuis?" (92); and in his anger at her complicity with her husband's ill-treatment of her:

> "And to save your husband Niklaas you ask me this," he cried. "A fool that could leave his tobacco and you for Koba Nooi?"
>
> "Mijnheer! Mijnheer!" answered Toontje, "did I not marry the fool to save the master?"

> Again, the old man's mind went slowly back to the past. "God forgive me that and many other things," he said. (92-93)

Here, too, we see Smith's craftsmanship at work. The values of the old man are revealed in his plainspoken insult for Niklaas, "fool," but also in the order of precedence of, respectively, "his tobacco and you." Toontje's agitation is reflected in her emphatic repetition of his title, but her question turns his insult back upon him, binding "the fool" and "the master" implacably together. What emerges is that the marriage of Toontje and Niklaas was a consequence of the relationship between Toontje and Andries, and it is likely that Saartje is her lover's child and not her husband's. This exculpates Niklaas of his evidently incestuous obsession with his daughter, but incriminates Toontje in duping him as well as cuckolding him. It also contextualises Toontje's efforts to protect her husband from the likely consequences of his moral dereliction; because she has done the same for her lover in the past.

The encounter between Toontje and Andries van Reenen concludes when he agrees not only to allow her and her son to process the tobacco crop, but also to say, "that he himself has sent Niklaas up to the Kombuis, to see how the Hollander works his tobacco" (92). This creates a safe space for Niklaas's aberration to play itself out without substantial damage to his name, or to the dignity of his wife and family. Toontje goes to the morning-market to give to a waggoner there a bundle of clothing she has made up for her husband, and to explain his absence "to those that stood by her" (93). The bundle contains a letter she has written him. The letter is marked by the narrative in two ways: firstly by the fact that it takes "great labour" for her to write it; and then by the fact that in the middle of the night she has got up to add "a single sentence." The "labour" arises, we infer, from the emotional load of the communication as well as from the fact that she and her husband are barely literate. The "single sentence" proves crucial, in due course, to the resolution of the relationship between them.

But we do not immediately discover what Toontje writes to her husband because the third movement of the story begins at this point. One of the key aspects of Smith's narrative method is management of time and temporal relations. In important ways the surprises of the text arise from the reactivation of a hidden and forgotten past, which works in unexpected and powerful ways to reconfigure the present. As readers we are by now privy to the core experiences of both husband and wife. We have had the textual surprises; we know everything. But questions remain that are centred on Niklaas: How much knowledge will he get? How will this change him? How can he be reintegrated back into community? The deferral of answers to these questions is, in a sense, a reiteration of Niklaas's ignorance of his wife's past, of the silence and secrets she has maintained about herself. Although Toontje has done all she can to resolve the situation at home, Niklaas does not read her letter for some time, and this delay intensifies his surprise and enhances its redemptive power when he does so.

Another significant aspect of Smith's narrative method is spatialisation, that is the marking of different places and of the movements of characters amongst them. The Kombuis, we have seen, carries a strong symbolic significance. We know that Toontje's father was, in the past, a bijwoner of van Reenen, "on lands that he once had owned and afterwards sold, in the Kombuis," and we know that van Reenen agrees to maintain the deception that he has sent Niklaas up to the valley to learn from the Hollander. The Kombuis is designated in the narrative as "that most beautiful and most isolated of all the valleys among the Zwartkop foothills" (93). The name *Kombuis* translates in English as 'kitchen,' and as such represents a gendered space, associated with the preparation of food, and with home and family. Here, in the distant past, van Reenen visited Toontje, and so it is also signified as the site of desire, and the locus of sexual relationship. Set at some distance from the "world" of Platkops (98), it is a private space, a place of retreat from the public sphere. It is associated with Toontje's youth, with her freedom and beauty, with an intact idyll in which she

"once lived for [him]." Thus it carries enduring memories both for her and for van Reenen.

The fact that Niklaas goes "up to the Kombuis" is therefore a narrative reiteration. But the experience he has of the Kombuis is a tawdry business compared to the romantic, elegaic past of Toontje and van Reenen. He lives "in a mud-walled, one-roomed hut with Koba Nooi and [works] for his new master the Hollander" (94). As Niklaas's "madness" subsides he comes to recognise several things: that Koba, "this plump, pleasant, and rather greedy woman, with her gentle chatter and her little giggle, was as secret as his own wife Toontje" (94); that he has been brought to the Kombuis and not escaped to it; that he has been seduced because "in all the Kombuis valley [no man] knew more about Platkops tobacco" than he does (95); that, once his services have been secured, the interest he holds for Koba rapidly wanes; and that his role, now that he is there, is "to please the Hollander" (96). The Hollander is the only figure in the story who is not named, but rather referred to by nationality. He is singled out in other respects as well: he is a foreigner, he is "young and ambitious," he has "built a small factory in the valley," and he works tobacco in ways that are "new and strange to Niklaas." And yet the verb "please" connects the power relations between Niklaas and the Hollander with those between Niklaas and his previous employer, so that if he fails now to "please the Hollander" he is as much at risk of dismissal as he was before.

It is true of this story, and others of Smith's, that women initiate the action and men respond to it. Niklaas was introduced first as a "small, weak, religious man" and we see evidence of these qualities now. Yet the unpleasant surprises he has had bring him greater knowledge of Koba Nooi and of himself, and their effect is evident in the way he names and renames himself. Unlike his wife, Koba is neither patient nor tolerant, and she confronts him with the consequences of his likely eviction with clearsighted brutality: "If the Hollander says to you 'Go!' where will you go? To your daughter Saartje or your wife Toontje? Say for me now, which will it be?" (96). Filled with "the new

anxiety" which her questions arouse, Niklaas's conscience regains "possession" of his soul, and "he who had once counted himself among the elect now knew himself to be among the damned" (97). He sees himself "for ever a prisoner in the Kombuis, a sinner who had sold himself to Koba Nooi and the Devil" (97). The equation of Koba and the Devil is a counterpoint to the association of his wife and God, and his self-ascription, "prisoner," marks a shift from seeing "most *other* men in the Platkops district" as sinners (my emphasis). He is a "prisoner" in the Kombuis because he has abandoned his previous life and because he assumes his dereliction is public knowledge. Burdened by his sense of his sin, he broods over the likely fate of his wife and children at the hands of his "hard and pitiless old master" who must, he is convinced, have turned them off his lands. "So, he thought, was his sin, and their shame, published to all the world in Platkops dorp" (98). But then one day, "in a drifting, aimless misery of remorse and indecision," Niklaas wanders over to the Hollander's "gay blue wooden house" and sees the Hollander sit beside Koba on the step and put his arm around her. When he sees her press her face against the Hollander's and hold the mirror before them he turns and flees; freed, by what he witnesses, from his position as "Koba's prisoner" (98).

The *denouement* comes when he arrives at the crossroads and is confronted with three choices of direction: north to Philip dorp, where his daughter now lives; south to Platkops, to his wife and family; or east to the Malgas district, which is unknown to him. This spatialisation, too, has symbolic significance. Although in her stories Smith follows the geography of the region, she renames places. The actual town of Oudtshoorn she calls *Platkops,* which translates, literally, as "flat heads" though *kops* is short for *kopjes*, or mesas. *Philip dorp* gives a man's name to Calitzdorp, the place where Niklaas's daughter has gone. More significant, though, is the renaming of Prince Albert as Malgas: "The Malgas district, in the Great Karoo, was dry and waterless, and no tobacco was grown there. All his life he had lived in tobacco lands, but now to Malgas he must go, and live how and where

he could" (100). The prefix *mal* invokes a whole range of negative qualities and conditions—malice, malevolence, *male fides*— as well as the Afrikaans adjective *mal* that translates as 'mad.'

The term "madness" is one Smith uses throughout her fiction, as a label for sexual deviation from the strict moral code adhered to by this calvinist community. Unlike 'sin,' it is a contrastive term that names a transient state. Hence Toontje says of her husband's abandonment of her that "a madness has come upon him"; and responds to van Reenen's vituperative, "Fool […] are you then also mad?" with the qualifications, "once I was mad," and "my madness ended" (91). Because of this transience, Toontje's interaction with van Reenen in the present is just a reprise—there is no serious possibility that it will bring them back together. Hence she also insists, referring to Niklaas, that "Mijnheer knows such a madness will not last." Transient as it may be, the potential consequences of madness are farreaching, however, as Niklaas recognises when he envisages his family turned off their land, his children adopted "into the homes of others, as the children of poor whites were sometimes adopted, and Toontje herself in the house of strangers" (92).

It is interesting that, although Koba Nooi clearly transgresses the calvinist code, the term "madness" is never applied to her. As Niklaas comes to recognise, her chatter and giggle conceal secrets as deep as his wife's, and her ingenuous flirtatiousness disguises strategic intentions that are Machiavellian in scope. Her dismissal of his concerns is cruel, and so clearcut that he couples her, in his mind, with the Devil. Yet Koba is not deemed mad. It is as if she functions quite outside the moral code of the community, and hence is exempt from its strictures. It is true that she is identified first as a stranger to the district, and her leaving it for the Kombuis without any prospect of return suggests the peripatetic nature of her existence, in sharp contrast to that of Niklaas and his family who are deeply rooted in their place. Indeed, she is neither spatially nor temporally located. Where Niklaas is "burdened *always* by a sense of his sin," Koba Nooi, it seems, is out of time. "No regrets for the past, no fears for the future," we learn, "had *ever* trou-

bled Koba, and she would not, to oblige the weak and repentant Niklaas, allow them to trouble her *now*" (97; my emphasis).

Niklaas, however, is held remorselessly in the grip of time and space. The crossroads at which he finds himself represent a point of despair. Resting by the wayside he contemplates the loss of his home and family, "and through his soul there swept a desolation such as he had never before endured." The "madness" of his desire has by now left him, and the moment is marked by a degree of humility that is registered in biblical terms. The veld around him is gay with flowers, and a bright crimson cluster reminds him of the burning bush "out of which the Lord had once spoken to Moses. But the Lord never now spoke to His people, and who was he, a sinner from the Kombuis, that the Lord should speak to him?" (101). With this last naming of himself, he is rescued from his invidious choice of direction by a slip of paper that flutters out of his bag on to the ground—his wife's letter so painstakingly inscribed. Reading its contents brings to him the final surprise of the story, as he learns of the arrangements she has made, of van Reenen's deception on his behalf, and of her expectation of his return. Since as readers we have witnessed the encounter between her and Andries van Reenen, the content of the letter does not surprise us. A touching detail, though, is her emphasis of his fatherhood, "This I will tell to our daughter Saartje, for surely, Niklaas, when your madness leaves you, you will come again to our children and me" (101).

What is most crucial, though, is the sentence she has added to the letter late in the night: "God forgive me, Niklaas, if I should judge you, for there is not one of us that has not sinned". The effect of this disclosure on him is gradual but profound: "Many, many times did Niklaas read this letter before its meaning became clear to him, and then it was as if in pity and forgiveness God Himself had spoken" (102). His association of Toontje with God has occurred at various points in the story, and here it marks his spiritual reintegration as well as the redemption of their marriage. Her patience reaches him now not as tacit reproach, but as generosity, as *caritas*. It also marks Toontje's renunciation of silence as habitual mode of relating to her

husband: having acknowledged to van Reenen the past relationship between them, she now acknowledges it also to her husband, and in so doing adopts with him the identity of sinner.

The story concludes thus, with Niklaas on his way back to his wife in Platkops dorp, eyes "made redder than ever with tears" (102). This comparative phrase takes us back to the start of the story, which thus serves as a point of reference for the changes that have taken place and the tensions that have been resolved: his "bitterness and fear of the Lord" have been replaced by a sense of God's "pity and forgiveness"; his hatred of his wife has given way to gratitude and appreciation; where before she was "silent" she now has "spoken"; and the "secrets of her soul" have been revealed.

In several respects the story is a surprising one. In the first place, its characters are successively surprised by the actions of those around them. Niklaas is surprised when God doesn't do what He is supposed to; when his daughter leaves him; when Koba Nooi seduces him; when he discovers he has been duped into assisting the Hollander; when Koba Nooi betrays him; and when Toontje reveals truths from the past and invites him back. Andries van Reenen is surprised when Toontje defends her husband and calls in credit on his behalf; when she reminds him of their relationship in the past. For the characters surprise is revelation and disclosure of what lies beneath.

In the second place, we as readers are surprised by several unexpected features of the plot: Smith's objective treatment of God; the pattern of sin and redemption that plays itself out upon a righteous stupid unattractive man, reversing the relation he presumed to exist between "the elect" and "the damned"; this man's seemingly arbitrary alienation from his wife and his corresponding obsession with his daughter; Koba Nooi's transgressions of a powerfully conservative moral code; her choice of Niklaas as object of seduction; her entanglement with the Hollander; Toontje's willingness and ability to cover up her husband's straying from the community; her confrontation with Andries van Reenen and the revelation of past relationship; her

confession to her husband; and the forgiveness and restitution with which the story ends.

And in the third place, the surprises of the text are cumulative, subliminal. Smith sneaks up on us by inserting echoes and patterns we do not at first notice. The word "flash," for example, is used, unsurprisingly, of Koba's mirror—but also of the old man's anger, which "in a flash" blazes up afresh when Toontje mentions the Hollander's tobacco. The word "bewilder," too, is used of both van Reenen and Niklaas: the old man's mind moves "slow and bewildered, from his tobacco to the past" (91); Niklaas is "like a drunken man in his bewilderment" (88-89) when he sees his face in Koba's mirror; and Koba's talk, in the hut in the Kombuis, is "often now as bewildering to him as was her mirror" (94). Situations are repeated: Toontje's visit to her ex-lover finds him seated on the *stoep*; Koba's seduction of the Hollander proceeds on the steps of his *stoep*. Personal qualities are reinscribed: Koba is as secret as Toontje, and her talk hides as much as does Toontje's silence, even though she is associated with the Devil, not with God. And Smith manages, on occasion, to encapsulate whole insights, whole gestalts of meaning, in a single phrase or sentence, such as, "You that once lived for me in the Kombuis," or, "Did I not marry the fool to save the master?"

Nevertheless, in describing the text as surprising, I would suggest that it is only as surprising as we readers allow it to be. By extension, this has to do with how seriously we take it and its characters. Poor, rural, backward as they may be, their stature and grandeur comes from Smith's treatment of them: her respect for them; the estimation in which she holds them; the "regulated love" that enjoins Arnold Bennett to speak of her "strange, austere, tender, and ruthless talent" (13). Niklaas may be "a small, weak, religious man, with pale red-lidded eyes [and] arms that seemed too long for his body," but the grave regard with which he is treated in the story might remind us, if we let it, of Lear's "unaccommodated man," his "poor, bare, forked animal" (3.4.105-06). And the role that surprise plays in illuminating, enlightening, elucidating and clarifying the lives of the characters and

the world of *The Little Karoo* is reminiscent of the understanding that comes to the tragic heroes of classical drama. Smith's stance in relation to her characters confers on us readers an ethical responsibility: to be receptive; to recognise ourselves in her creatures; to register the implications of their actions, their relations, their insights for ourselves. And it confers an aesthetic responsibility: to let her word work[1] on us, to receive and respond to its surprises in a state of 'negative capability,' to treat her stories with the seriousness they request. Only through such seriousness can we be sufficiently surprised. Only through such surprise can our own real knowledge grow.

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NOTE

[1]The phrase is from John Donne's "The Expiration."

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"These things astonish me beyond words": Wordplay in William Carlos Williams's Poetry

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—and I? […] whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue![1]

A poem is a capsule where we wrap up our punishable secrets.[2]

Wordplay, in terms of its reception, may be immediately obvious (because the reader expects it, or because it is clearly foregrounded as such in the text), or it may show its iridescent nature only on rereading, maybe with the help of additional information, in a moment of revelation. This revelation of something that is unsuspected qualifies in turn as a surprise. Unlike surprises in the real world, textual surprises are almost always pleasant, in that they tend to provoke an immediate, refreshing, almost somatic reaction; a moment of exhilaration, of discovery. So, when William Carlos Williams died in 1963, Denise Levertov wrote approvingly of his poetry: "One is forever coming across something new on pages one thought one had known long since."[3] Critical understanding of Williams's work has explored many insightful directions since then, but there is still something new to come across. Although especially the early popular image of Williams as a poet of ingenuous simplicity has been modified in recent decades,[4] his recurring and systematic use of intricate and multivocal signification in the form of wordplay, mostly in puns, has, to my knowledge, not been documented so far.[5]

There seem to be three main reasons for critical insensitivity to puns and other kinds of wordplay in Williams's work: (1) the suspicion that puns are, at best, a form of silly jokes, and, at worst, narcissistic, immature fabrications and vehicles of "pseudo-logic";[6] (2) the persistent notion of Williams as a poet whose passion is of the blood, not of the

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inkpot;[7] and (3) Williams's own complete refusal to discuss openly and directly the role of puns in his many statements about his writing. This last observation probably plays the greatest role in explaining the critical lacuna, and it may be considered puzzling that Williams should have been silent about an aspect of his work that, as I shall argue, he used consciously and with great care. Although he returned repeatedly to metapoetical reflections in his essays, prefaces, reviews, and in hybrid texts such as *Spring and All*, *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, or *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*,[8] he kept all evidence of his fondness for puns (and other wordplay) implicit and circumstantial. In fact, the single unequivocal statement about his liking for puns that I have been able to identify comes not from him, but from his wife, who, after his death, explained to an interviewer: "His titles were his own, not epigraphs—they are creative titles and he liked punning. *Make Light of It* had two meanings—to take lightly—and to give light on the subject."[9] Why Williams himself should have been so secretive is a question that cannot be answered within the scope of this essay. What can be done, however, is to present a number of examples illustrating his method.

Although the linguistic and rhetorical systemization of puns is a complex issue, punning itself is an elemental and universal form of wordplay. Florence Williams expected her interviewer to know how puns work, and most speakers of English have an intuitive understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the polysemy of puns or other kinds of wordplay poses, on reflection, fundamental and highly intricate questions about the nature of language and text. About a decade ago, punning, paronomasia and related wordplay were discussed in the pages of *Connotations* in great and interesting detail.[10] However, for current purposes (i.e. to argue that Williams used wordplay at all), Derek Attridge's functional definition of the pun should suffice: "Two similar sounding but distinct signifiers are brought together, and the surface relationship between them invested with meaning through the inventiveness and rhetorical skill of the writer."[11] The following interpretations are intended to give a first

impression of the "inventiveness and rhetorical skill" that Williams exhibited.[12]

* * *

Williams's puns testify to his exceptional gift for language and to his repeatedly stated dedication to the "word." His linguistic resources range from the specialist language of biology, through music, to the influence of other languages. At the same time, wordplay is for him not just 'play,' but a way of investigating the nature of experience and of poetic expression. Thus my first example, the poem "The R R Bums," introduces a pun that is both a commentary on the way the poet perceives the world, i.e. literally and metaphorically 'sees' it, and also a self-referential reflexion on poetical traditions. Although "The R R Bums" is from a later period of Williams's writing, I would like to start with it because it is so typical in its deliberate, but not immediately obvious wordplay.[13] It is a one-stanza, haiku-like poem about the homeless:

The R R Bums

Their most prized possession—
their liberty—
Hands behind a coat
shiny green. Tall, the eyes
downcast—
Sunlight through a clutter of
wet clouds, lush weeds—
The oriole!
Hungry as an oriole.

This poem combines a strong visual sensation with an echo of a Romantic idealization of poverty. In spite of the fact that the "R R Bums," the homeless, are generally considered the most vulnerable members of society, their lives on the road and their absolute poverty seem to be presented as a form of absolute freedom. The comparison to an oriole might rest on the fact that the bird is migratory, but the

reason why Williams preferred "oriole" over, say, another 'transient' bird is due neither to coincidence, nor to ornithology, but to the word's phonetic features. As a homophone with 'aureole,' "oriole" serves as a pun and a semantic pivot in the poem.

The term 'pivot,' in connection with puns, is a metaphor that can be readily grasped via analogy: it is a string of sounds to which two meanings with two different functions are connected. But 'pivot' is also a technical term for a kind of Japanese pun, "occurring when a word with two meanings is used only once as a sort of pivot on which two wheels turn. In this case, the first part of the poetical phrase has no logical end, and the latter part no logical beginning. […] An example of what might be termed pivot-puns."[14] It is not impossible, it is not even unlikely, that Williams knew about this poetical device—after all, his friend and one-time mentor Ezra Pound was familiar with Japanese poetry.

In "The R R Bums," the pivot-pun is the central poetical device. It is important to realize that this is a pun that works only when the poem is read out aloud. By *hearing* the poem, without the printed version in front of us, we can directly identify the first "oriole" as 'aureole,' coming as it does just after the line "sunlight through a clutter of wet clouds." 'Aureole' is related to light, it is a "radiance surrounding the head or the whole figure in a representation of a sacred personage" or "any encircling ring of light or color; a halo."[15] The poem gives a number of further clues that help to integrate the association with an aureole, suggesting an awesome, lofty resplendence. The wanderers together make a regal impression: one of them has his hands behind his coat, is tall and walks with downcast eyes, as if he were pondering over some important decision. The coat is not just green but "shiny green" (no matter if this is the result of year-long use) and he is surrounded by rich, "lush" vegetation. The climax of this association with luxury is reached when "sunlight through a clutter of wet clouds" creates an unexpected light effect.

With the final simile "Hungry as an oriole" the poet makes clear that "the oriole" in the preceding line is a pivot-pun, now to be under-

stood as designating the migrating bird. He thus introduces a critical comment on his earlier, aesthetisized description: the reminder that a depiction of the homeless, however right in its respectfulness of human dignity in certain aspects, cannot and should not ignore the actual and depressing reality of poverty. Even the punctuation marks help to emphasize the progression of the poem from an idealized statement towards a sudden anti-climax, bringing in hunger as an oppressive fact: whereas the first mention of "oriole," in the sense of an 'aureole,' is accentuated with an exclamation mark, the second "oriole," the hungry bird, is followed by a deflating full-stop. Finally, Williams's awareness of the word 'aureole' and its wide implications for perception in general and poetical statements in particular is confirmed when he writes appreciatively about Marianne Moore that she succeeded in "removing the aureoles that have been pasted about [words]."[16]

Williams's knowledge of Spanish, which he learned from his mother, may have been a significant factor for the way he realizes the potential of the homophone 'aureole'/'oriole.' The name "oriole" not only goes back to the Latin 'aurum,' like 'aureole,' but bears an even closer, because orthographic, resemblance to the Spanish for gold, 'oro.' The intuitive multilingualism on which Williams could draw is an obvious and rich resource for his writing, as we can see in the way he realizes the potential of the homophone. For such a writer the connection between the words was not something learned at school, but direct and intuitive. Further, multilingualism provided Williams with access to much more than a source of pivot puns: it provided him with a conscious feel for the 'opacity' and arbitrariness of language, and, consequently the opportunity to exploit, in a free, almost anarchic way, the mappings between his various languages, from 'macaronic' puns which make use of these mappings directly, to creative (mis)readings based on genuine or serendipitous formal coincidences.

In fact such a deliberate misreading of etymology serves as the conceptual starting point for four poems with the title "Pastoral," written between 1914 and 1917.[17] Two of these are well-known and have been

frequently anthologized. The others have only been easily accessible since the publication of the *Collected Poems* in 1986.[18] It is important to mention this detail of publication history because it is only when we look at the group of four poems *together* that we realize that the title "Pastoral" is a play on words, introducing the faulty, but in this case expressive, etymological breakdown of "pastoral" into 'past oral,' i.e. 'beyond speech' or 'beyond what is being said.' Reading the four texts *together* we observe a poet-persona trying to come to terms with the challenges of his art, with all four poems containing a key sentence or phrase relating to the problem of communication: "No one / will believe this / of vast import to the nation,"[19] or "If I say I have heard voices / who will believe me,"[20] or "Hear me / You who listen without malice."[21] The third "Pastoral" also addresses the problem of how individual experience can be translated into the common coin of language, when the persona concludes with "These things / astonish me beyond words."

Pastoral

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarrelling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.
        Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than

that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
        These things
astonish me beyond words. [22]

Most interpretations of this poem discuss the (sub-)urbanization of the lyrical genre of the pastoral. The influence of the Precisionist movement and its "myth of America as a potential industrial arcadia" was, according to Peter Schmidt and other critics before him, responsible for Williams's attempt to revive a pastoral tradition in literature.[23] Importantly, this generally agreed upon reading is in no way contradicted by the identification of the wordplay. The polysemy emphasizes an additional theme, one that can be found in all four pastorals (also in the two not set in a recognizable suburbia): a poetological reflection on experience and the ability of the speaker (poet) to express himself empathically and authentically.

The speaker reports his observations about sparrows, people, an old man and a minister, but ends with the line "These things astonish me beyond words." The persona's final comment expresses surprise: for him, the seemingly simple scenes, and in particular the contrast between them, have a complexity that leaves him astonished and speechless. But, using the title and the last line of the poem as a circular framing device, he paradoxically succeeds in making his speechlessness articulate with the help of a playful parallelism: "beyond words" is an echo of "Pastoral" in the title. Independent evidence for the emphasis on a metapoetical theme is the allusion in the first lines, to an observation by John Keats: "If a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel."[24] Keats, who was one of Williams's favorite poets,[25] would develop this into his famous concept of 'negative capability': "that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[26] When a poetic voice concludes that something astonishes him "beyond words," then one might legitimately conclude that he has stopped reaching "irritably" after ultimate control through "fact and reason."

The irony is that the admission of inarticulacy is framed within the flamboyant interpretation of "Pastoral" as 'past-oral.' By implication, that which is 'past-oral' is 'beyond words' for a poet; especially for one as interested in the spoken word as Williams. The semantic potential of this wordplay together with its connection to the rest of the poem enhance both the message and the formal aesthetic of the text. Here, as in his other "Pastoral" poems, Williams expresses his concern about the possibility, and precarious success, of his efforts to use language to share his thoughts and emotions with other people. There seems to be only one way out of the predicament: to use language in an *ingenious*, individually and skillfully coded manner, since the option of speaking candidly, "ingenuously," as the sparrows do, is not available to him or to other human beings ("we"). Thus the discrepancy between the conventional values of society and other values, together with the persona's doubts and his reluctance to pass judgment, can only be articulated indirectly; i.e. not via the referential, but rather the performative and imaginative possibilities of language. Since wordplay can be taken as "illustration[s] of the inherent instability of language and the power of uncodified linguistic relations to produce meaning"[27] it is a natural tool for Williams's purposes. In his "Pastoral[s]" Williams documents in the very act of stepping around them the 'limitations' of language, using wordplay both to mediate and, self-referentially, to 'perform' a strongly felt truth about words and about his role as a poet.

Self-referentiality, i.e. the thematizing and problematizing of the signifying function of language, is a central compositional element in modernist texts.[28] The following example from *Sour Grapes* (1921) demonstrates further the workings of the principle in Williams's writing. The words "flight" and "tempered" in "To Waken an Old Lady" have an immediate referential function, but as soon as they are perceived as words with several, simultaneous meanings, self-referentiality becomes equally important:

> Old age is
> a flight of small

cheeping birds
skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.
Gaining and failing
they are buffeted
by a dark wind—
But what?
On harsh weedstalks
the flock has rested,
the snow
is covered with broken
seedhusks
and the wind tempered
by a shrill
piping of plenty.[29]

The poem has often been classified as biographical, as an "attempt by Williams to cheer up his mother," and much that we know about Williams's life indisputably supports this reading.[30] Such an interpretation relies, nevertheless, more on certain assumptions about Williams's personality as a healing doctor-son than on the poem itself, which is, after all, not about the complex act of 'cheering up,' but, as the title states, about 'waking up' an old lady, an action most often accomplished simply by the application of noise.

And it is worth paying attention to the 'noise' in the poem. If we do, we notice the veritable crescendo in the birds' singing from "cheeping" to "shrill piping of plenty." 'Crescendo' applies directly to a second, not immediately obvious level of meaning in the poem which rests mainly on two key terms at the beginning and at the end of the text: on "flight" and on "tempered," which, besides their references to the action rendered in the poem, also relate to musical concepts.

Taking Williams at his word that any good poem reads just as well from the end as from the beginning,[31] I would like to begin with the noteworthy term "tempered," since it is the most clearly metaphorical expression in the text. The phrase "wind tempered / by a shrill / piping of plenty" cannot be understood in any straightforward way since the singing of birds cannot have any soothing influence on the

movements of the air. However, noting the musical associations of "flight" as a 'fuga' or 'fugue,' the word "tempered" takes on a special, i.e. musical significance. The "tempering" of a keyboard instrument (first clavichords and harpsichords, later organs) refers to the particular tuning of the notes of an octave; something highly influential for the development of musical composition.[32] Williams's familiarity with Bach is documented, and thus he surely knew the series of preludes and fugues called *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*, in English, *The Well Tempered Clavier*.[33] The link of "tempered" to an organ-performance can even accommodate additional meanings of the words "wind" (air as used for sounding a musical instrument) and "piping" (pipes being the tubes by which the sounds are produced in an organ).

A "flight" is a 'fugue,' a word of Latin origin, designating a "polyphonic composition based upon one, two, or more themes, which are enunciated by several voices or parts in turn, subjected to contrapuntal treatment, and gradually built up into a complex form having somewhat distinct divisions or stages of development and a marked climax at the end."[34] Almost all parts of this concise definition can be related to Williams's "To Waken an Old Lady," especially with regard to structural similarities. Besides the climax at the end of the poem, there is the "Gaining" and the "failing" of the birds, which are posited against each other like themes in a contrapuntal composition. On a different level of interpretation,[35] even the visual impression of the small bodies, black against the white-grayish winter sky and landscape, evokes musical notation, while the movement of the flock compares well to the dynamic of music.

If we focus on the semantic layering and diversity of the words, we come to an appreciation of the poem that goes beyond the realization of the mimetic and the impressionistic. The poem not only refers to old age, winter and small birds, but also reveals itself to be a self-referential 'Etude,' not musical but textual, and using skillful word-play to effect a "many-voiced," i.e. polyphonic verbal composition.[36] A use of the words 'fugue' and 'pun' in another context provides further evidence that Williams was playing more than one tune when

he wrote "To Waken an Old Lady." In *Kora in Hell*, at around the time of the composition of "To Waken an Old Lady," he wrote: "—and I? must dance with the wind, make my own snow flakes, whistle a contra*pun*tal melody to my own fugue!" (34; emphasis mine). The thematic and, even more, the structural connections with the poem are striking: Williams finds here a spirited, almost impish image of his role as a poet, which, besides, also makes his awareness of musical terminology explicit for us. The fact that in old age, in his long poem *Paterson*, he returns to the concept (although in a completely different mood) shows the continued importance of poetic polyphony:

> We know nothing and can know nothing
> but
> the dance, to dance to a measure
> contrapuntally,
> Satirically, the tragic foot.[37]

Randall Jarrell spoke of "To Waken an Old Lady" in positive terms as an "unimaginably delicate" poem, without, however, remarking on the sophisticated use of words and imagery.[38] Another of Jarrell's remarks shows that the general notion of Williams as a "straightforward" poet was so dominant that even when the critic discovered rhetorical or linguistic complexity in Williams's work he felt the need to connect it with an apparently more sophisticated influence: "[H]e has learned—partly from Pound, I imagine—to use Latin abstractions or generalizations with firm and sensuous ease."[39]

It is telling that since Jarrell cannot overlook the important role of vocabulary of supposedly Latin origin in Williams's writing, he sees the finesse partly as an influence of Ezra Pound. However, if we drop the assumption that Williams is an artless poet, and also remember his multilingual background, there is no need to be surprised; rather we begin to purposefully look out for further examples, e.g. in the poem from *Spring and All*, which later became anthologized under the title "The Rose." Here we encounter a specialist (biological/anatomical) usage played against the more conventional meaning:

> The rose is obsolete
> but each petal ends in
> an edge, the double facet
> cementing the grooved
> columns of air—The edge
> cuts without cutting
> meets—nothing—renews
> itself in metal or porcelain—[40]

The word of interest here is "obsolete," which in general modern usage is understood to mean 'not used anymore' or 'worn out.' In anatomy, however, the word means "Indistinct; not clearly or sharply marked; very imperfectly developed, hardly perceptible;"[41] a usage that was probably more familiar to Williams the physician than to non-specialists. The question is, can this second meaning be introduced into a relevant relation with the other, more common meaning *and* with the poem as a whole?

As in the case of the "Pastoral[s]," attention to the original context of the poem reveals how "obsolete" can be read as a pun. Most published readings of the first line— "The rose is obsolete"—have emphasized the anti-symbolic message of modernism: poets should not anymore use worn-out, clichéd symbols, such as 'rose' for 'love' or 'beloved.'[42] This is a thoroughly convincing reading. But Williams's poem is more complex, especially if we take into account that this is an ekphrastic text, referring to a particular rose in a particular picture. In the prose passage preceding this poem in *Spring and All*, Williams makes clear that he has a specific work by a Cubist artist in mind when writing about "The rose": "such a picture as that of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is important as marking more clearly than any I have seen what the modern trend is."[43] Williams refers to a *papier collé* of Gris's, which shows a bunch of roses in a vase on a table.[44] Gris's work plays with different materials and perspectives, and, in characteristic Cubist manner, the rose as such is blended into the background of wallpaper and tablecloth: it is, as a rose, "obsolete," i.e. "not clearly or sharply marked." The importance of this other meaning of "obsolete" becomes obvious when we look at the

second line, where the "but" at the beginning ("but each petal ends in / an edge") now also makes additional sense. Although the *papier collé* is no conventional, clear-cut pictorial representation of the rose as a whole, the individual petals are well defined and their outlines can be traced. The use of the word "obsolete" encapsulates Williams's interest in the concrete *detail*, as opposed to the pictorial and symbolic *convention*.

That a poem is a "capsule" is an idea taken directly from Williams himself, although he qualified the notion: "A poem is a capsule where we wrap up our punishable secrets."[45] There is something uncomfortable about this definition with its allusions to sin, shame, punishment. The definition is characterized by conflicting impulses: the desire to be heard and understood as opposed to the fear and the shame of being 'found out.' This mixture of artistic revelation and personal shame presents the critic with an embarrassing combination as she deliberately pries into "punishable secrets." Nevertheless, Williams gives us a clue and thus invites us to do just that: a "*pun*-ishable secret" is something that might be hidden in a pun. The semantic situation is similar to Edgar Allan Poe's famous purloined letter: although fully exposed to the eye, it is not readily perceived and can only be detected by another method than our everyday approach to communication, with its heavy reliance on context and conventional expectations. The comparison to Poe's "Purloined Letter" is, incidentally, doubly apt, since 'purloined' itself can be seen as a macaronic pun: whereas today 'purloined' means 'stolen,' in the original French word (and earlier English usage, the *OED*'s latest example is from 1660) it also means 'concealed.'

How a "punishable secret" can be artfully "wrapped up" in a poem-capsule is illustrated by "Prelude to Winter" (1944):

> The moth under the eaves
> with wings like
> the bark of a tree, lies
> symmetrically still—

And love is a curious
soft-winged thing
unmoving under the eaves
when the leaves fall.[46]

At first sight, Williams appears here as a loving observer of nature. He describes the *sujet* of this poem, a moth, with the intense concentration of an expert on the natural world. The symmetry of the moth is perfectly echoed by the symmetrical structure of the poem, but also by the symmetrical nature of true love.

Although the balance of the composition is reason enough to appreciate this poem, there is a further level of signification, which impresses the reader by its complexity *and* its perfect ease of expression. Williams once said of James Joyce: "He forces me, before I can follow him, to separate the words from the printed page, to take them up into a world where the imagination is at play,"[47] and this is exactly what the reader has to do with the words of "Prelude to Winter." Before we can follow Williams, we must "separate the words from the printed page" and "take them up into a world where the imagination is at play." This play of the words eventually leads to an arresting formation made up of "curious," "eaves," and "fall": the concept of *eavesdropping*.

An 'eavesdropper' stands within the 'eavesdrop' of a house in order to listen to secrets. Such a person is "curious" in the sense of 'inquisitive.' In Williams's poem, a first reading of "curious" rather implies the meaning 'strange' (in "love is a curious / soft-winged thing"); it is only after the connection to eavesdropping that we realize the relevance of inquisitiveness. These two denotations, however, are not the only possibilities. According to the *OED*, the persona's description of love in this poem could also be, among other things, 'accurate' or 'artistic' or 'subtle' or 'elaborate.' What remains astonishing is that all these meanings can be accommodated, and that in spite of this proliferation of signification the poem still invites a coherent reading.

The key to the 'secret' of the poem and thus the explanation of how all these meanings can be reconciled, lies in an intertextual reference

to a poem by Robert Frost from his first collection of poems, *A Boy's Will* (1913).[48] There, in the last stanza of "My Butterfly," we read:

> I found that wing broken today!
> For thou art dead, I said,
> And the strange birds say.
> I found it with the withered leaves
> Under the eaves.[49]

The echoes are apparent: not just thematically (a dead butterfly vs. an unmoving moth, the onset of winter, curious vs. strange, etc.) but especially in the rhyme "leaves"/"eaves." Williams's "Prelude to Winter" obviously responds to Robert Frost (who was an ingenious punster himself). Paul Mariani reports that Williams was keen to meet Frost, and was disappointed when this interest did not seem reciprocated.[50] From Williams's published correspondence it becomes clear that by 1944, the year he wrote "Prelude to Winter," he had come to the conclusion that Frost did not appreciate his poetry:

> I remember that Robert Frost once offered to exchange books with me. I was delighted and said that as soon as I had received his book which he promised to send me the next day, I'd send him one of mine. I never received another word from him. So that was a pleasure missed. Later I discovered that he thought very little of me and what I was about.[51]

Eventually, Frost's artistic rejection—a form of unrequited love—was to turn into bitterness on Williams's side.[52]

Although Williams's pride was hurt by Frost's rebuff, he seems nevertheless to have continued to appreciate his poetry; after all, quotation is the greatest compliment a poet can pay. But where Frost's butterfly wing is "broken," Williams's much less splendid moth lies with intact wings under the eaves. Still, unmoving, but alive, enduring, waiting for the end of the period of frost—or Frost, and if not literally for his death, then for the end of Robert Frost's dominance in American poetry. Williams's identification with the moth instead of with the butterfly is reminiscent of a similar sentiment expressed in

the poem "The Pink Locust," where he compares himself with the tenacious locust in his garden and comes to the conclusion:

I am not,
I know
in the galaxy of poets
a rose
but *who*, among the rest,
will deny me
my place.[53]

* * *

Maybe Williams saw his wish for lasting fame and influence as a "punishable secret" in that it was a vain and selfish longing. Maybe he astonished and surprised himself about his conflicting desires. But while he did not openly discuss punning in his metapoetical texts, some of his remarks are implicit commentaries on the role and significance of pun or wordplay; above all, he insisted on the importance of the "word":

> The province of letters is that realm of the intelligence in which words and their configurations are real and all ideas and facts with which they deal are secondary. It is the complement of all other realms of the intelligence which use language as secondary to the reality of their own materials—such as science, philosophy, history, religion, the legislative field.[54]

Williams uses a slightly lopsided, but all the more telling, dichotomy in his definition: "real" vs. "secondary." Words and configurations are "real" in the sense that they are the primary and immediate material for his compositions, just as marble is the material for a sculptor, or notes and rhythms for a composer. He also talked about words as "keys to unlock the mind,"[55] using an image of liberation that is reminiscent of a much earlier characterization of puns by Jonathan Swift: "Puns are like so many Torch-Lights in the Head that give the Soul a very distinct View of those Images, which she before seem'd to groap after, as if she had been imprison'd in a Dungeon."[56] Williams, too, thinks that writers, especially modern writers, will feel

liberated if they use words as independent units: "Poetry is made of (just) words, like the anatomy books, the books of philosophy—only it is words used with a broader sweep of understanding, a better knowledge of their capabilities, a greater accuracy—words raised to their highest power."[57] Any kind of wordplay relies on such an understanding of language. Poets are, in consequence, men who are "skilled in the use of words."[58]

For Williams, wordplay does not just foreground the ambiguous nature of language, or function as a gratuitous demonstration of wit and linguistic potency: it gives him strategic control over his text, control which allows also for surprises. Further, punning is a concise method of signification: a single string of sounds simultaneously evokes several different meanings—what other method could be more economical than this multiple referentiality? The economy of a pun can thus also be related to Williams's famous statement: "A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant."[59] Whereas this quotation is often used to illustrate the importance of composition in Williams's work,[60] it is just as expressive of the ideal of verbal economy, which is defined by the elimination of redundancy. Why use two words if one will do?

Although Williams insisted repeatedly that he was a truly modern writer, only interested in the "New," his work tells us that one of his most important influences was Shakespeare. Considering the examples I have documented, I think Williams's admiration for Shakespeare was also due to the latter's virtuosity in punning. Again, Williams does not mention this explicitly, but his description of Shakespeare's poetic method is phrased in terms of oblique references and covert meanings—thus praising the principles of his own poetical play with words: "Be the Shakespeare of your own day, write well, skilfully, covertly, deceitfully, with every faculty under a hood or blanket concealed from public view, write of that which is nearest to the skin (to hell with the heart!) but write well."[61] In the light of Williams's poems, this idiosyncratic interpretation of punishable secrets

leads to a revised understanding of his writing. Similarly, when Kenneth Burke describes the role of imagination in his friend's poetry as both "expressive and secretive,"[62] he should be taken quite literally. Punning was for Williams a passion right at the center of his poetical universe: a way of exposing himself and his thoughts while, at the same time, being able to surprise his unexpecting readers both with "punishable secrets" and "contrapuntal melodies."

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NOTES

[1]William Carlos Williams, *Kora in Hell* (1918), *Imaginations,* ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970) 34.—Beside the editorial board of *Connotations*, in particular Inge Leimberg and Matthias Bauer, I would like to thank Winfried Herget, Julia Kuhn, Seàn Matthews, Su Fang Ng, and Tatjana von Prittwitz for their helpful comments on my essay.

[2]William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1967) 343.

[3]Denise Levertov, "Obituary," *The Nation* 16 Mar. 1963, *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 353.

[4]The great number of studies which have contributed to the interpretation of Williams's oeuvre makes it impossible to give a complete overview. Some seminal works are (in chronological order): Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969); Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (Cambridge: CUP, 1971); Joseph Riddel, *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974); Peter Schmidt, *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1988).

[5]In criticism about Williams there is the occasional mention of a pun; it is not made clear, however, that we are dealing with a poetical *method* rather than an *accidental* phenomenon. Peter Halter comments on a pun in "The Plot of Flowers": "This pun, which was first noticed by Breslin, ["wholly dark" as "holy dark"] seems at first farfetched, but on second thought one realizes that it is completely in accordance with Williams's insistence on the importance of the life-sustaining ground." See Peter Halter, *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 92. The other pun that has been remarked upon is the play on "Pater" and "son" in Joseph Riddel's *The Inverted Bell* 283.

[6]Fowler's *Modern English Usage* exemplifies such an attitude: "Now that we regard puns merely as exercises in jocularity, and a pretty debased form even of that, we are apt to be jarred by the readiness of Shakespeare's characters to make them at what seem to us most unsuitable moments" (437). See H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage,* 2nd ed. rev. Sir Ernest Gowers (Oxford: OUP, 1965). William Empson thought the pun to be effeminate: "many of us could wish the Bard [Shakespeare] had been more manly in his literary habits." See *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 110-11.

[7]The characterization is Wallace Stevens's: "His [Williams's] passion for the anti-poetic is a blood passion and not a passion of the inkpot. The anti-poetic is his spirit's cure. He needs it as a naked man needs shelter or as an animal needs salt." See "Williams," Preface to the *Collected Poems* (1934), Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous,* ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 213. This and related impressions are summarized by Christopher MacGowan, editor of the *Collected Poems* volumes: "For some critics, in addition, a key refrain in *Paterson*, 'no ideas but in things' points up the lack of intellectual content in Williams's poetry." Christopher MacGowan, "William Carlos Williams," *The Columbia History of American Poetry*, ed. Jay Parini (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 416.

[8]I tend to share John Hollander's opinion about Williams as a theoretician: "Such a subtle practitioner can nevertheless, outside his poems, […] descend into the rhetorical uneasiness and crankiness of the autodidact, to obfuscation at best, and nonsense at worst." Hollander speaks here about problems of prosody, not wordplay, but his remarks show that Williams was not reluctant to discuss theoretical issues, even if he had not had the time (or ability) to present them convincingly. Thus, his reticence on punning is even more surprising. See John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975) 5.

[9]Edith Heal, "Further Conversations with Flossie," *William Carlos Williams Newsletter* 3.1 (1977): 1-7; 2.

[10]See Eleanor Cook, "From Etymology to Paronomasia: Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Others," *Connotations* 2.1 (1992): 34-51, and responses to her article in vols. 2 and 3 of *Connotations*.

[11]Derek Attridge, "Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History,* ed. Derek Attridge et al. (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 183-211; 193. General discussions of puns can be found in Walter Redfern, *The Pun* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) and *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Paul Hammond and Patrick Hughes comment on a number of theories dealing with puns and their frequently inconsistent systematizations. See their *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures* (London: W. H. Allen, 1978). For insightful analyses and more details on the history of the pun in English see 1-16.

[12]The examples that I present here are taken from a monograph on William Carlos Williams's use of wordplay that I am currently in the process of writing.

[13]According to the *Collected Poems* (abbreviated *CP*), several versions exist; the latest from 1950. William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems*, vol. 2, ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1988) 230 and 484.

[14]*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., CD-ROM, s.v. "pivot" *n.* 3.b., quotation from B. H. Chamberlain (1877). Pound used the technique in his famous haiku "In a Station of the Metro" consciously: "The one image in the poem is a form of super-position; that is to say it is one idea set on top of another" ("Vorticism," *Fortnightly Review* 1 Sept. 1914). Redfern also makes use of the analogy: "The key-movement of the pun is pivotal. The second meaning of a word or phrase rotates around the first one. Or branches off from it; puns are switch words, like points-men at a junction" (23).

[15]*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "aureole."

[16]William Carlos Williams, "Marianne Moore," *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1954) 121-31; 128.

[17]William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems,* vol. 1, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986) 45-47, 64-65, 70-71, 96-97; the poem on pp. 42-43 is an earlier version of the third "Pastoral."

[18]For the distortive effect of anthologies on the perception of Williams's poetics see Neil Easterbrook, "'Somehow Disturbed at the Core': Words and Things in William Carlos Williams,'' *South Central Review* 11.3 (1994): 25-44; 27.

[19]*CP* 1: 65.

[20]*CP* 1: 96.

[21]*CP* 1: 45.

[22]*CP* 1: 70-71.

[23]Schmidt 11. In Chapter 1 (11-47) of his study, "Some Versions of Modernist Pastoral," Schmidt synthesizes current knowledge about the Precisionist movement's influence on Williams.

[24]Keats to Benjamin Bailey, 22 Nov 1817. See *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: CUP, 1958) 186.

[25]Peter Schmidt has given the most exhaustive summary of Keats's influence on Williams.

[26]Keats to his brothers George and Thomas, 21 or 27 Dec 1817; see *The Letters of John Keats* 193.—Like Williams, Keats loved punning, as Christopher Ricks summarizes: "Keats's mind, so alertly prefigurative, was especially liable to puns and to portmanteaux, often of course quite premeditatedly: his letters are full of conscious effects of which Lewis Carroll or James Joyce would have been proud." *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: OUP, 1974) 69.

[27]Jonathan Culler, "The Call of the Phoneme," *On Puns* 1-16; 3.

[28]See Detlev Gohrbandt, *Self-Referentiality in 20th-Century British and American Poetry* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1996).

[29]*CP* 1: 152-53.

[30]This is a reading by Zhaoming Quian in *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 138. Paul Mariani, *A New World Naked* (New York: Norton, 1990) 184, and Charles Doyle, *William Carlos Williams and the American Poem* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 26 also emphasize the biographical background.

[31]Williams identifies this method in an unpublished essay "What is the Use of Poetry?" as a touchstone of excellence: "This is a principle we can utilize to our profit in estimating the quality of any piece of writing: by reading it backward." Unpublished, undated MS in the Lockwood Memorial Library, University of New York, Buffalo; quoted in Dijkstra 63.

[32]See Charles Rosen, *Piano Notes* (New York: The Free Press, 2002) 229-30.

[33]Williams mentions Bach in his *Autobiography* (110) and refers to his knowledge of fugues explicitly in *Kora in Hell*: "—and I? must dance with the wind, make my own snow flakes, whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue!" (34). More about this quotation later.

[34]*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "fugue." See also Eberhard Thiel, *Sachwörterbuch der Musik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977) 459.

[35]Williams said once: "Damn the bastards who say you can't mix auditory and visual standards in poetry. […] Those are the questions that set up all academic controversies. The trouble with them is that they aren't real questions at all, they are merely evidence of lack of definition in the terms." See *William Carlos Williams and James Laughlin: Selected Letters,* ed. Hugh Witemeyer (New York: Norton, 1989) 47.

[36]Some readers of Williams, in particular Bram Dijkstra and Peter Schmidt, have pointed to a high-modernist structural concept, which they also call "polyphonic." Their interpretation of polyphony, however, is not in musical terms since polyphony in music presupposes simultaneity. Rather, their usage of the term is more literally, like Bakhtin's, referring to "many voices" not necessarily sounding together. In "To Waken an Old Lady," and as a principle of punning in general, "polyphony" is not the sequential appearance of different voices. See Dijkstra 68-75, and Schmidt 48-89.

[37]*Paterson*, rev ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992) 236.

[38]Randall Jarrell in his "Introduction" to Williams's *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1949) xix.

[39]Randall Jarrell, "The Poetry of W. C. Williams," *Perspectives* 1.1 (1952): 165-168; 166.

[40]*CP* 1: 195.

[41]*OED*, 2nd ed., CD-ROM.

[42]See, e.g., Schmidt 70-71, Halter 74-79, and Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981) 141-42.

[43]*Imaginations* 107.

[44]Bram Dijkstra reproduces this papier collé as plate XXI. Christopher MacGowan questions him on the certainty that this picture was the starting point for Williams's poem, but I think that the recognition of the double function of the word "obsolete" supports Dijkstra's hypthesis that Gris's must be the picture that Willliams had in mind. See Christopher J. MacGowan, *William Carlos Williams' Early Poetry: The Visual Arts Background* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984).

[45]*Autobiography* 343.

[46]*CP* 2: 90-91.

[47]"Comment," *Selected Essays* 27-29; 28.

[48]I am indebted to Lutz Struckmeier, without whose interest in Frost I would not have noticed the parallel.

[49]Robert Frost, *Collected Poems, Prose, & Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995) 37.

[50]Mariani 452-53.

[51]Letter to Marianne Moore from Nov. 7, 1944, *Selected Letters* ed. and intr. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell, 1957) 231-33; 231.

[52]Williams wrote to Robert Lowell: "I spoke at Bread Loaf this week. Robert Frost who lices on the premises did NOT come to hear me" (*Selected Letters* 303). Williams's disappointment turned into bitter indignation, as apparent from his choice of words and typographical emphasis.

[53]*CP* 2: 301.

[54]*The Embodiment of Knowledge* (New York: New Directions, 1974) 19-20.

[55]"The Poem as a Field of Action," *Selected Essays* 280-91; 282.

[56]Tom Pun-Sibi (Jonathan Swift), *The Art of Punning; Or The Flower of Languages; In Seventy-Nine Rules: For the Farther Improvement of Conversation and Help of Memory* (London, 1719), quoted in Hammond, *Upon the Pun* 56.

[57]*Embodiment of Knowledge* 143.

[58]*Embodiment of Knowledge* 37.

[59]*CP* 2: 54. Characteristically, the first part of this quotation is much better known than the second part, thus emphasizing the mechanical/technical aspect of poetry rather than the poetical aspect of machinery; the latter aspect only coming across when the quotation is considered in its full length.

[60]See, for example, Paul Mariani's interpretation: "[…] words rinsed clean of their tired associative meanings and set clashing and clanging like the parts of a machine one against the other" (201). I think Mariani's reading is characterized by a negative notion of machines that Williams would not have shared.

[61]"A Letter," *Selected Essays* 237-40; 239.

[62]Kenneth Burke, "William Carlos Williams 1883-1963," *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968) 282-91; 282.

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Tender Is *What* Night?
Surprises in the Growth of Fitzgerald's Fourth Novel

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1925-1934: The nine-year span over which F. Scott Fitzgerald labored at *Tender Is the Night* balances uneasily at October 1929, which marked a turning point in many lives and fortunes. Fitzgerald's golden decade, one could say, ran from early October 1919, with the fixing of the World Series, through late October 1929, with the collapse of the stock market, when the brilliant world of Gatsby and the Jazz Age was dead and an austere new world emerged that was altogether different for everybody. Fitzgerald's personal life also suffered painful changes, mostly having to do with his wife Zelda's worsening mental condition, so that his work was beset by pressures and perplexities that he was not suited to handle.[1]

Tender Is the Night is a bold departure for Fitzgerald: it is set almost entirely in Europe, the central character is a practicing psychiatrist (one of the earliest in literature), and the glamour for which Fitzgerald is famous works as a functional part of the story, strictly subservient as an ironic counterpoint to the ugliness and emptiness of the lives of the characters.

The novel teems with surprises. A quick scan, facilitated by the computer, reveals that some form of "surprise" appears at least fifteen times, applied to various characters in various situations, as though a limitation—vanity, stupidity, derangement, impairment, drunkenness, immaturity, depravity, senility—prevented people from being ready for what may happen. Even when characters are capable of foresight, however, some events are so improbable as to seem miraculous, so that nobody sees them coming.

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debharmon01413.htm>.

Let me examine different sorts of surprise attending *Tender Is the Night*. At a low level, we can note the pervasive presence of surprise in all the characters, twice reaching the extreme of "vast surprise." ("Actually he was one of those for whom the sensual world does not exist, and faced with a concrete fact he brought to it a vast surprise." "[T]hey skirted a lost streak of wind with the hotel growing in size at each spiral, until with a vast surprise they were there, on top of the sunshine").[2] We can also remark the extrinsic historical surprise in the fate of a novel that started out with newspaper accounts of a crazed girl named Dorothy Ellingson who killed her mother and turned into *The Boy Who Killed His Mother* but wound up with *A Girl Raped By Her Father;* and, at a higher level of irony, the intrinsic surprise when that father, banished from the girl's life, shows up, supposedly near death and repentant, and then abruptly disappears (in language drawn from biblical accounts of miraculous healing).

The 1934 version of *Tender Is the Night* did not satisfy Fitzgerald, and he tinkered with the material over the remaining six years of his life, producing a different structure for much the same material that was published posthumously. Most readers prefer the earlier version, partly because it is the one that presents a stronger plot that begins *in medias res* and withholds much that can be later discovered or revealed as a surprise. For example, the revelation of Devereux Warren's confession of sex with his daughter originally comes in chapter 3 of Book II on page 129 of 315, about two fifths of the way through; in the later version, it comes in chapter 3 of Book I on page 18 of 334, only about one twentieth of the way.[3]

That aspect of the novel seems to be the key. Dick and Nicole were brought together by her mental condition, traceable to the trauma of what seems to be a single sexual encounter with her father (that is, according to his account, which says baldly that "then all at once we were lovers" so that any rape involved may have been only statutory). Many other pairings in the book seem to parallel or echo the primal violation. Dick begins as Nicole's psychiatrist, that is, in some ways, *in loco parentis*, and he fails to avoid the transference that leads to her

loving him and his returning the love, *in loco amantis*, with them marrying and having two children. The teen-aged movie star Rosemary Hoyt, whose big hit is called *Daddy's Girl*, falls for Dick, who is twice her age and technically old enough to be her father, and they begin an affair.

We may surmise here that incest itself is schizophrenic, or at least that it exhibits two antithetical sides. On the one hand, it is quite natural, happening all the time among lower animals and, according to Freud, constituting everybody's earliest sexual attraction. For complex reasons, we usually progress beyond this infantile stage to mature relations, but a vestige or residue is always somewhere there: a powerful attraction to the opposite-sex parent and a concomitant fear of the same-sex parent. On the other hand, this natural impulse is for most cultures regulated by strong taboos. Freud argues that we have totems and taboos for the purpose of curbing the primal impulse to get rid of the same-sex parent and possess the opposite-sex parent.

Another binary operation of incest is as a spring for literary plots, sometimes working with ideal economy, sometimes destroying everything calamitously. Of what Coleridge called "the three most perfect plots ever planned"[4]—*Oedipus Tyrannus, The Alchemist,* and *Tom Jones*—one involves *the* archetypal incest story and another involves the possibility of incest (between Tom and Mrs. Waters at Upton), later dispelled. When Fitzgerald was at work, many were aware of Ernest Jones's article "The Oedipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive," published in 1910, nine years before T. S. Eliot's analysis of the artistic failure of *Hamlet* on much the same grounds.

As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes in *Structural Anthropology*, Oedipus's two sins can be seen as opposite corners of a diagram: he, so to speak, *under*-loves his same-sex parent and *over*-loves his opposite-sex parent.[5] Furthermore, as Anthony Burgess's *MF* suggests, both sins are connected to Oedipus's possession of knowledge that permits him to solve a riddle; but the price of knowledge, in a Faustian bargain, is

mortal sin.[6] (Or the price of achievement, in a Promethean bargain, is everlasting torment.)

The stuff of great tragedy also persists as the stuff of farce: the situation in *Hamlet*, marriage with deceased brother's wife, is transformed into a joke in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*: "He shall prick that annual blister, / Marriage with deceased wife's sister"[7] (which evidently vexed the English parliament until about 1950), all the way to the bemused questions asked by the mobster Paul Vitti (played by Robert De Niro) in *Analyze This*: "Have you *seen* my mother?"

If I were to write the history of luck, I would probably say that all readers are lucky to have Aristotle, who was lucky to have Sophocles, who was lucky to have Oedipus, who, after a promising start, had no luck at all. Aristotle's paradigmatic analysis of the archetypal tragic plot is as convincing today as it was more than 2000 years ago, despite the ostensibly primitive psychology on which it depends. The perfection of Sophocles' plot is a matter of artistic management, but it also involves certain elements that incest makes possible, especially a pervasive doubling. In an incest plot, certain characters have multiple functions, such as sibling-lover or parent-lover, and this multiplicity leads into contradictions and paradoxes (think of Mary's being called *figlia del tuo figlio*—"daughter of your own son").[8] The working out of the plot typically involves a resolution of such contradictions, so that one element is liquidated or eliminated, with tragic or comic results. But the multiplicity also introduces a pervasive instability and ambiguity that can shake a plot to pieces, along with the characters involved in it.

For a while, *Tender Is the Night* plays the doubling game very well. The alliterative weirdness of the name Dick Diver brings in farcical notes of incongruity. Both "dick" and "diver" can have sexual meanings, and "diver" also means "pickpocket," as in Jenny Diver in *The Beggar's Opera*. Suspicious of the outlandish name for a serious character, I did an informal Internet search and found that there are six authentic Richard Divers in the United States and even two Dick Divers outright. "Diver" echoes the first name of Nicole's father,

Devereux. Dick's and Nicole's names begin with such a rhyming syllable that one friend can conflate them into "Dicole." Tommy Barban's last name is reduplicative, and his whole name seems to echo that of the Tom Buchanan who plays a roughly similar role of antagonist in *The Great Gatsby*. The line from Keats that furnishes the title involves a sort of palindrome: from *t-n* in "Tender" to *n-t* in "Night." One should probably not make too much of such matters, but it is worth noting that Nabokov's Van Veen and Humbert Humbert are involved in incestuous or quasi-incestuous relations. A passage in *Finnegans Wake* has to do with a quintessential girl who is "dadad's lottiest daughterpearl and brooder's cissiest auntybride"[9]—which suggests Lot's incest with his two daughters and the incest between the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde in Wagner, often marked by alliterative couplings of *Bruder* and *Braut*. At one point in *Tender Is the Night*, Nicole says of a song lyric "Thank y' father-r," which Dick doesn't like, "Oh, play it! […] Am I going through the rest of life flinching at the word 'father'?"[10] That in turn adumbrates a moment in *Chinatown* when Evelyn Mulwray, played by Fay Dunaway, stutters "my fa-father." In an exercise in gratuitous doubling, the sequel to *Chinatown* is called *The Two Jakes*, the second Jake being married to Catherine, the daughter of Evelyn and her father, Noah Cross, with the never-resolved possibility that Catherine was also abused by her father-grandfather.)

I believe that, if Fitzgerald had left the novel alone, it would have survived better and gained even more admiring readers; Hemingway changed his mind about it after Fitzgerald's death and said that "the best book he ever wrote, I think, is still 'Tender is the Night' [...]. Wonderful atmosphere and magical descriptions […]."[11] But the problem must have haunted Fitzgerald. The original opening, centered on Rosemary's perspective, is brilliant: "On the pleasant shore of the French Riviera, about half-way between Marseilles and the Italian border, stands a large, proud, rose-colored hotel." The present tense is immediate and vivid, the postponement of the subject until the end of the sentence generates suspense, and the "rose-

colored" is particularly charged: the girl's name is "Rosemary," and "rose-colored," alone or in such combinations as "rose-colored glasses" and "rose-colored spectacles," has long connoted unrealistic optimism of outlook. (The earliest citation in the *OED* is from 1854.) The revised text begins in the past tense with much less of a charge: "In the spring of 1917, when Doctor Richard Diver first arrived in Zürich, he was twenty-six years old, a fine age for a man, indeed the very acme of bachelorhood." In the original version, the reader sees the Divers first as anonymous figures on a beach: "Her face was hard and lovely and pitiful. Her eyes met Rosemary's but did not see her. Beyond her was a fine man in a jockey cap and red-striped tights […]."[12] Such a glimpse—a woman like a mask of tragedy, a man like an acrobat—tells much more than the "Case History" of the later version, in which suspense and surprise are sacrificed to chronology.

Something else may have caused Fitzgerald trouble. Big-hearted, he seems to have been constitutionally incapable of letting a wicked character remain wicked. In a manner unique among novelists, he lets characters be themselves and he gives them the benefit of the doubt. He also persistently gives them the lighting effects of beatitude. I was led into this stretch of consideration by accidentally seeing a cigarette machine in a European hotel lobby, with one brand name that reminded me of a passage in Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*, which is roughly contemporaneous with *Tender Is the Night* and also concerns Americans in Europe. In Italy the Dodsworths encounter "the Noisy Pair," who complain about everything, including their inability to "buy Lucky Strike cigarettes or George Washington coffee in this doggone Wop town […]."[13] It occurred to me that Fitzgerald never picks on his characters in such a way, even when it is pretty obvious that they are no better than Lewis's pair. Nor would Fitzgerald ever do what Hemingway does in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and dwell on what the author knows that a character does not know: "[…] he did not know the Somali proverb that says a brave man is always frightened three times by a lion; when he first sees his track, when he first hears him roar, and when he first confronts

him."[14] To my recollection, the only occasion when a Fitzgerald character does not know something comes in *The Love of the Last Tycoon* when a black man tells Stahr that he never goes to movies because "There's no profit"; instead, he reads Emerson. The man soon goes away, "unaware that he had rocked an industry."[15]

Rather than parading any such moral or intellectual superiority, Fitzgerald is engagingly modest. In this detail or that, a character is elevated to the level of myth. Gatsby, we are told in the diction of the Gospel of Luke, "was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's Business, the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty."[16] Although Meyer Wolfshiem is a clown and a crook, when he leaves Gatsby and Nick he "raised his hand in a sort of benediction,"[17] a memorable phrase that may have stimulated the "kind of valediction" applied to a departing character in the second section of Eliot's "Little Gidding." And, as noted above, Devereux Warren's sudden recovery from an ostensibly mortal illness is summarized in the language of the Gospel of John: "craziest thing has happened down here—the old boy took up his bed and walked."[18]

Elements of surprise persist in both versions of *Tender Is the Night*, but they are more surprising in the original. There, the design looks more like the perspective of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, both of which feature a charismatic man who does not himself read or write and is described by a bureaucratic first-person narrator with a measure of personal interest in the story (Nick Carraway and Celia Brady). With *Tender Is the Night* designed as though from Rosemary's point of view, we have something like that structure, although the narrator remains omniscient. The revised version removes the interest of that perspective of innocence.

Neither version makes clear how good and worthy Dick is, and a reader needs to know whether a piece of fortune is good or bad, deserved or undeserved. Dick seems to be a good son, a stellar student, and a resourceful host, but we never get an idea of how he stacks up as a psychiatrist. Instead, we get the title of a projected book

("*An Attempt at a Uniform and Pragmatic Classification of the Neuroses and Psychoses, Based on an Examination of Fifteen Hundred Pre-Krapaelin and Post-Krapaelin Cases as they would be Diagnosed in the Terminology of the Different Contemporary Schools*—and another sonorous paragraph—*Together with a Chronology of Such Subdivisions of Opinion as Have Arisen Independently*")[19] and his reflection that "This title would look monumental in German," with, indeed, a footnote providing a translation: "*Ein Versuch die Neurosen und Psychosen gleichmässig und pragmatisch zu klassifizieren auf Grund der Untersuchung von funfzehn hundert pre-Krapaelin und post-Krapaelin Fallen wie sie diagnostiziert sein wurden in der Terminologie von den verschiedenen Schulen der Gegenwart, zusammen mit einer Chronologie solcher Subdivisionen der Meinung welche unabhangig entstanden sind*" [sic]. To me, he looks like a shallow windbag, who may know the name of Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926) but cannot spell it (possibly Fitzgerald's problem more than Diver's). Besides, for all his sophistication, he is a ninny. When Rosemary passionately says, "Take me," Dick asks, "Take you where?"[20] (He must have read chapter 8 of *The Great Gatsby*, in which Gatsby "took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously—eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand."[21])

It may be that the first version was too close to Fitzgerald's own life for him to judge it as art. Nicole is patently based on Zelda (who was very disturbed and got worse as his work on the novel continued) and on Sara Murphy, a wealthy American woman married to a wealthy American man living in a villa in the south of France (the book is dedicated to Gerald and Sara Murphy). Clearly, Nicole is a character in her own right, but she is given some of Zelda's symptoms, background, and appearance. Zelda was outraged by the tracing of Nicole's troubles to incest, since Zelda had never undergone anything remotely like that. It may be that, in the revision, Fitzgerald was trying to subdue the effect of the incest by removing the suspense that makes the reader wait for such a dramatic revelation. For whatever reason, Fitzgerald cannot make ends meet, and the novel fizzles

limply to its end, as though to say, 'This is what happens when fathers get involved with daughters and psychiatrists get involved with patients. Obey the rules and stay within boundaries.' Fitzgerald seems to have been unable to invest the story with a sense of evil of the sort that underlies the greatest tragedy.[22]

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NOTES

[1]See Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 2nd rev. ed. (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2002).

[2]Since editions of both versions abound, I shall document important passages by the date, book, and chapter only. *1934*: I, 10; *1951*: II, 11; *1934*: II, 8; *1951*: I, 8. Incidentally, the phrase "On top of the sunlight" is the last line of the last poem, "A Winter Daybreak above Vence," in James Wright, *Above the River: The Complete Poems* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1990) 376.

[3]*Tender Is the Night* (New York: Scribner's, 1934); *Tender Is the Night: A Romance*, rev. ed., ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Scribner's, 1951).

[4]*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 14 (*Table Talk* II), ed. Carl Woodring (London: Routledge, 1990) 295 (from 5 July 1834).

[5]Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967) 213-30.

[6]Anthony Burgess, *MF* (New York: Knopf, 1971) passim.

[7]*The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, ed. Ian Bradley (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 407.

[8]See Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Paradiso XXXIII, 1.

[9]James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939) 561.

[10]*1934*: III, 7; *1951*: V, 8.

[11]T*he Sons of Maxwell Perkins: Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Their Editor*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004) 316.

[12]Bk. I, ch. 1.

[13]Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth* (New York: Harcourt, 1929) 218 (ch. 21).

[14]*The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner's, 1987) 11.

[15]*The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 93.

[16]*The Great Gatsby* (Oxford: OUP, 1998) 79.

[17]*The Great Gatsby* 58.

[18]*1934*: III, 2; *1951*: V, 2.

[19]*1934* and *1951*: I, 8.

[20]*1934*: I, 15; *1951*: III, 3.

[21]*The Great Gatsby* 118.

[22]A number of elements in *Tender Is the Night* reappear in later works: a mentally disturbed woman, an ostensibly relaxing beach setting, and the fleeting unreality of film all matter in Bergman's film *Persona* (1963), and one might notice that the disturbance first strikes the woman—an actress—during a performance of *Elektra*. Father-daughter incest is a part of Calder Willingham's *Eternal Fire* and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream*—among the very poor or the very rich. A most intriguing and surprising possibility is that Edith Wharton could have read *Tender Is the Night* (she lived until 1937). We know that she met Fitzgerald and had some correspondence with him, chiefly about *The Great Gatsby*, which she admired (although she did not admire Fitzgerald himself). I mention this because, possibly as late as 1935, she had drafted a vivid scene of a story called "Beatrice Palmato," concerning a woman seduced by her father, who is wealthy and powerful, like Devereux Warren. See Gloria C. Erlich, *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992).

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The Mystery of Vladimir Nabokov's Sources: Some New Ideas on *Lolita's* Intertextual Links

ALEXANDER M. LUXEMBURG

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* has been extensively analyzed. Despite the amount of critical attention devoted to it, however, *Lolita* remains one of those works that still provoke textual surprises. No matter how often the professional reader has studied it or how attentive he may have been, he is bound to generate new ideas and find some new textual mysteries there. This includes the mystery of Nabokov's sources. In his introduction to the English translation of *The Gift*, Nabokov states that the novel's protagonist is not Zina, but Russian literature. Following the author's lead, it is reasonable to claim that the protagonist of *Lolita* is neither the narrator Humbert Humbert, nor the nymphet, but world literature as a whole. No wonder that many mysteries of Vladimir Nabokov's sources remain to be solved. This article may be considered as an attempt to go somewhat further in tracing another possible source of *Lolita*.

It is well known that *Lolita* is an extremely complicated text containing numerous cases of wordplay, literary allusions, parodies and cross references. Naïve readers may erroneously regard it as an erotic best-seller, less naïve readers may treat it as a parody of erotic literature, but competent readers are bound to appreciate it as an elaborate, ludic text that invites them to decipher it. A well-known Nabokovian, Alfred Appel, Jr., has justly stated: "As with Joyce and Melville, the reader of *Lolita* attempts to arrive at some sense of its overall 'meaning,' while at the same time having to struggle with the difficulties posed by the recondite materials and rich elaborate verbal textures" (xi). In publishing *The Annotated Lolita* in 1970 (rev. ed. 1991), A. Appel Jr. provided all Nabokov scholars with a sort of manual to the novel.

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debluxemburg01413.htm>.

As he states, "[t]he main purpose of this edition is to solve [various] local problems and to show how they contribute to the total design of the novel" (xi).

Although *The Annotated Lolita* has helped to explain many mysteries of the text, it is by no means comprehensive, especially when it comes to the question of Nabokov's sources. In addition to Appel's findings, some of them have been identified by Carl Proffer, Alexander Dolinin et al.; still others remain unclear.

Important evidence testifying to the fact that it is too early for Nabokovians to treat the problem of *Lolita*'s intertextual links as settled is the recent discussion about the origin of Nabokov's nymphet's name Lolita which was started by Michael Maar's publications in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in March 2004.

The nymphet's name is introduced in the very first lines of the novel:

> Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-li-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.
>
> She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.
>
> Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did.

The most evident precursor is hinted at in the next lines:

> In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. *In a princedom by the sea*. (9; my emphasis)

It is clear that Nabokov alludes to "Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allan Poe:

> It was many and many a year ago,
> *In a kingdom by the sea*,
> That a maiden there lived whom you may know
> By the name of Annabel Lee. (957; my emphasis)

Numerous intertextual references in Nabokov's *Lolita* to Poe and his ballad have been singled out and long since commented on. In the

Playboy interview (later reprinted in *Strong Opinions)*, when asked how Lolita's name occurred to him, Nabokov replied:

> For my nymphet I needed a diminutive with a lyrical lilt to it. One of the most limpid and luminous letters is "L". The suffix "-ita" has a lot of Latin tenderness, and this I required too. Hence: Lolita. However, it should not be pronounced as […] most Americans pronounce it: Low-lee-ta, with a heavy, clammy "L" and a long "o". No, the first syllable should be as in "lollipop", the "L" liquid and delicate, the "lee" not too sharp. Spaniards and Italians pronounce it, of course, with exactly the necessary note of archness and caress. Another consideration was the welcome murmur of its source name, the fountain name: those roses and tears in "Dolores". My little girl's heart-rendering fate had to be taken into account together with the cuteness and limpidity. Dolores also provided her with another plainer, more familiar and infantile diminutive: Dolly, which went nicely with the surname "Haze", where Irish mists blend with a German bunny—I mean a small German hare [i.e. = *Hase*]. (25)

Of relevance here is that Nabokov indicates the link of Lolita's name with the "source name" Dolores, but does not comment on the origin of both. We are led to assume that their appearance in Nabokov's masterpiece is due to chance only.

In Appel's "Notes" we find some ideas concerning the diminutive "Lola" and the source name "Dolores." About "*Lola*" he writes: "in addition to being a diminutive of 'Dolores,' it is the name of the young cabaret entertainer who enchants the middle-aged professor in the German film, *The Blue Angel* (1930), directed by Josef von Sternberg" (332). Appel quotes Nabokov as saying that he never saw the film and doubted that he had the association in mind. But the critic fails to mention that Nabokov always denied the knowledge of books, films and authors he or his works were compared with. He also fails to mention the fact that von Sternberg's film is based on Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*. But it is significant that Appel points out the fact that Marlene Dietrich, who played the role of Lola, is mentioned in the novel; i.e. Lolita's mother is described by Humbert Humbert as having "features of a type that may be defined as a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich" (37).

An explanation of Lolita's full name "*Dolores*" is proposed by Appel as well. He states: "*Dolores*: derived from the Latin, *dolor*; sorrow, pain […]. Traditionally an allusion to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, and the Seven Sorrows concerning the life of Jesus." The critic adds that "H. H. observes a church, 'Mission Dolores,' and takes advantage of the ready-made pun; 'good title for book'" (332). Appel refers to Carl Proffer's *Keys to Lolita* where a poem by Swinburne is named as the original source of the character's name. "Lo [Proffer writes] has some actual namesakes among the demonic ladies of literature too. The most important literary echo of her real name, Dolores Haze, is from Algernon Swinburne's 'Dolores'—subtitled *Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*: thereby paralleling Humbert's various puns on Dolores (dolorous darling, dumps and dolors, *adolori*, etc.)" (28-29). While Proffer's and Appel's findings have helped to shape the reader's understanding of the intertextual links with dozens of preceding texts within *Lolita*, Michael Maar has shown that *Lolita* is one of those novels that will not stop supplying us with textual surprises. The first of Maar's publications in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* explaining the origin of the title name and some plot elements of the novel was the article "Was wusste Nabokov?" ["What did Nabokov know?"] published on March 19, 2004. Its message sounds like this: there is a story entitled "Lolita" by the minor German writer and journalist Heinz von Lichberg, which was published in 1916 in his collection of short stories *Die verfluchte Gioconda*. This collection has never been reissued and is extremely rare now. Not only does the sexually attractive girl child in both texts possess the same name, but Lichberg's story is in some respects close to Nabokov's masterpiece. Maar compares the plot elements and insists on their similarity. The results of the critic's research appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* as well and produced a minor sensation among prominent Nabokovians. A week later, on March 26, 2004, there appeared another article by the same critic, "Der Mann, der 'Lolita' erfand" ["The man who invented 'Lolita'"], which contained more detailed informa-

tion about von Lichberg's life story. A day later, on March 27, *F.A.Z.* reprinted von Lichberg's "Lolita."

And finally, on April 29, 2004 the same paper published one more polemical piece by Michael Maar, "Lolitas spanische Freundin: Noch einmal zu Nabokov" ["Lolita's Spanish Friend: Nabokov Once More"], where he answered those sceptics who doubted the validity of his hypothesis and made an attempt to formulate it with greater accuracy. Eight main coincidences between Nabokov's novel and von Lichberg's *Lolita* are stated there:

1. In both of them the characters have the same name which is used as the title.
2. The girl in both cases is an adolescent (Lichberg characterizes her as "blutjung").
3. She is a daughter of the landlord (in Lichberg's short story) and of the landlady (in Nabokov's novel) whose house is located by the seaside (in the first case) or near a lake (in the second one).
4. In both cases the girl child seduces the narrator, and he falls in love with her finally.
5. Both Lichberg's and Nabokov's Lolitas die by the end of the narration, and the theme of the enchanted past becomes dominant.
6. There is a grotesque murder scene in the final part of each text.
7. Nabokov's Lolita dies in childbirth, and in Lichberg's short story Lolita's mother Lola is killed after the heroine is born; by the end of Lichberg's story we witness the girl child's mysterious death.
8. The narrators of both texts are left heartbroken, but the tragic loss of their love objects makes them true poets.[1]

Michael Maar is right in saying that these are classical plot elements. What is important, according to him, is not each concrete case of coincidence, but the combination of so many coincidences.

There are also some other features of the two texts that support Maar's ideas. Both texts contain noticeable fairy tale elements (in Lichberg's case reminiscent of Hoffmann, in Nabokov's case of com-

posite origin). In both cases, the action is dreamlike, and its reality may be questioned. Lichberg's Lolita is presented as no less demonic than Nabokov's nymphet. The Walzer twins in Lichberg's *Lolita* are reminiscent of Nabokov's play *The Waltz Invention* (Waltz being the protagonist's name).

Maar's discovery was positively received by the German press. The majority of those who reproduced his arguments and commented upon them sounded convinced that Nabokov must have come across von Lichberg's story and that it should be regarded as one of his secret and masked sources. A very characteristic conclusion is drawn by Thomas Steinfeld in his article "Watson, übernehmen Sie! Vladimir Nabokov, Michael Maar und die doppelte Lolita" ["Watson, Take Over! Vladimir Nabokov, Michael Maar, and the Two Lolitas"], published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, who insists: "Es ist schlicht wahrscheinlich, dass Vladimir Nabokov die Erzählung 'Die Verfluchte Gioconda' von Heinz von Lichberg im Berliner Exil gelesen hatte—falls es nicht andere, noch unbekannte Dinge gibt, die diese Parallelen irgendwo, an anderer, womöglich noch entlegenerer Stelle zusammenführen."[2]

Despite this positive reception, Maar's version has also been strongly criticized by some members of the Nabokov community. Most of their objections have been collected and summarized in Germany by Dieter E. Zimmer whose role in promoting Nabokov studies in this country is undeniable. Zimmer's arguments (they may be found in the Internet Nabokov Forum *Nabokov-L)* follow two principle lines. In the first place, he finds it most unlikely that Nabokov would have come across Lichberg's *Lolita*. Secondly, he insists that the differences between the texts are much more significant than the similarities, although the arguments cited earlier seem to weaken this objection.

Along with Zimmer many other renowned members of the Nabokov Society were also dismissive of Mr. Maar's find, including Alexander Dolinin. In his message for the Nabokov Internet forum (*Nabokov-L*) he calls Maar's case "shaky" and puts forward the opinion

that "what Mr. Maar should have done is to have written a two-page note for *The Nabokovian*, presenting his minor discovery as an addition to a rather long list of various Lolitas and Lolas that preceded Nabokov's novel, and to be satisfied with Nabokov scholars' congratulations."

The discussion of the relevance of Mr. Maar's discovery for Nabokov studies demonstrated the existence of a wide-spread misunderstanding of the problem. For neither plagiarism nor the comparison of the artistic merits of Nabokov's masterpiece with second-rate or even third-rate fiction is the point. What really matters is the artist's ability to transform mediocre literary material into a lexical and semantic magic carpet. To appreciate this phenomenon, an investigation of intertextual links that are not necessarily evident is required.

The same Alexander Dolinin, while criticizing Michael Maar in his *Nabokov-L* message, justly states: "As for the ways Nabokov's genius worked, I would be the last one to ignore his attention to third-, fourth- and fifth-rate literature." The critic quotes an earlier article of his own as follows:

> Nabokov was keenly interested not only in major, accepted authors he deemed unworthy of their reputation and strove to dethrone, but also in third-rate literature proper, without any pretensions to greatness in such popular, paraliterary or marginal genres as detective story, thriller, sensational novel, fantasy, humoristic writings and even soft pornography. Texts belonging to these genres usually have a very short life-span; after a while their individual characteristics are obliterated from the readers' memory; they merge with their peers, dissolving into an anonymous mass, not unlike folklore, of standard plots, situations, characters, stylistic clichés. It is from this anonymous mass of forgotten texts that Nabokov preferred to draw ideas for his works because a lucky catch in the sea of bad literature could be transformed beyond recognition and interwoven into a new context without participating in intertextual dialogue.

It is difficult to accept Dolinin's last point. The intertextual dialogue may remain undetected if we do not know the pretext used by the master. But this does not necessarily rule out a dialogue with such a "forgotten text." One of this article's aims is to indicate that there may

be many more instances of intertextual dialogue in the Nabokovian *Lolita* with little known texts of accepted authors as well.

Whereas Maar seems to have found a clue, explaining the origin of the nymphet's name Lolita, the origin of her full name *Dolores* remains unclear. The Swinburne version by Carl R. Proffer and Alfred Appel, while suggestive, seems at least incomplete. It may thus be presumed that some potentially interesting and important novelistic sources remain undetected. One such novel that may have stirred up Nabokov's imagination and influenced his choice of the character's full name Dolores and which has not yet been commented upon by scholars is H. G. Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* (1938). This novel is not a very well-known Wellsian text and is probably read only by some Wells scholars today. In fact, it has never been popular. Nevertheless, the temptation to look at it in a Nabokovian context is very strong.

There seem to be no references, no allusions to H. G. Wells in *Lolita*, but this fact should not discourage scholars. Nabokov is notorious for hiding those intertextual sources that are of crucial importance for his texts. Even more important is the fact that H. G. Wells was always among Nabokov's favourite British authors. One of H. G. Wells's novels is even placed on Sebastian Knight's bookshelf with the rest of his favorite fiction alongside *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Madame Bovary*, *Le Temps Retrouvé*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Ulysses* in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (35).

It is very instructive to turn to Brian Boyd's biography in search for data. Boyd mentions in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* that in late January and early February 1914 H. G. Wells visited Russia and was invited to dinner at the Nabokovs'. Wells's translator Zinaida Vengerov was one of the guests, too. This meeting must have affected Nabokov greatly if for no other reason than that it led to intense interest in Wells the author. Boyd adds: "That winter Nabokov read avidly the Wells books in his father's library, and the future creator of *Ada*'s Antiterra would never lose his high esteem for Wells as a craftsman of romance" (178).

Speaking about the formation of Nabokov's literary tastes at the age of twelve, Boyd mentions that at that age he first read *Crime and Punishment* and thought it "a wonderfully powerful and exciting book." Boyd states that this is not the Nabokov we know, as he was later to disparage Dostoevsky's writing frequently. But more important is what follows: "But at about this time he also read H. G. Wells's *The Passionate Friends*." Asked at the age of seventy-seven to name a neglected masterpiece, he chose this book—which he had not read for more than six decades—and cited one detail. At a moment of deep distress the hero, just to do *something*, points out the white covers on the furniture, and explains casually to someone else: "'Because of the flies.' The poetry of the unsaid, the drama of the unsayable." Boyd comments: "What Nabokov did not recall is that this is the *only* intensely artistic detail in a book weighed down by sociological speculation of a kind that as an experienced reader he could not stomach" (91).

Boyd's judgment seems somewhat harsh—the more so as Nabokov's praise of Wells's novel dates from 1977, half a year before his death. It should be noted that *The Passionate Friends* is today no less rarely read than *Apropos of Dolores*. It is sensible to quote another well-known Nabokovian whose observations confirm Nabokov's reverence of H. G. Wells. Vladimir Alexandrov, while discussing the writer's attitude to mimicry in nature in his book *Nabokov's Otherworld*, mentions in a note Jonathan Sisson's Ph.D. thesis *Cosmic Syncronization and other Worlds in the Work of Vladimir Nabokov* (1979), which points out a resemblance between Nabokov's ideas about mimicry and "the apparent conflict between Darwinian natural selection and the sense of beauty" and the eponymous protagonist in Wells's novel *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story* (1909) (252-53). In another note Alexandrov adds that Sisson has analyzed suggestive parallels between Nabokov and H. G. Wells, "aspects of whose legacy Nabokov is known to have admired" (251).

As regards the relevance of H. G. Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* to Nabokov's *Lolita*, it may be observed that both novels are first-person

narrations. Steven Wilback, the narrator, presents a reconstruction of the complicated story of his marriage with the eccentric, quarrelsome and foolish Dolores. The seven chapters of the novel focus on the final crisis of their relationship and cover a two-month period—from August 2 till October 2, 1934. Chapter 3 contains a flashback, informing the reader about the circumstances of the narrator's acquaintance with the eponymous protagonist Dolores and the thirteen years of their married coexistence.

Of course, the search for traces of intertextual links must not obscure the fact that interrelated texts do not necessarily coincide in all their thematic, stylistic or other aspects. We must concede that Nabokov's *Lolita* and Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* are basically quite autonomous. Nonetheless, there are some elements of plot, narration and ideas in Wells's novel that are surprisingly similar to those in *Lolita* and may be regarded as proofs of Nabokov's acquaintance with it.

The following singles out the peculiarities of Wells's novel which support the hypothesis that it may have been one of the previously unknown sources of Nabokov's *Lolita*.

1. *The protagonist's name is* Dolores, *and it is used as the novel's title*. There seems to be no other English novel preceeding *Lolita*'s publication whose heroine is called Dolores. Taken separately, this fact does not prove anything. But when combined with the others it gains certain significance.

2. *Both novels are first-person narratives by writers who are creating a novel before the readers' eyes*. The novel about his relations with Dolores Haze (Lolita) is supposed to become Humbert Humbert's main artistic achievement. Nabokovians remember well Humbert's illuminating statement in the final chapter: "The following decision I make with all the legal impact and support of a signed testament: I wish this memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive" (308-09). By this time the reader must have already grasped that Lolita is not alive any more.

The narrator in H. G. Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* is a publisher whose main interests are also predominantly literary. He is likewise writing

a memoir (or a diary) about his relations with Dolores, and this memoir is structured and characterized as a novel. Chapter 2 begins with the narrator's statement that he intends to change the style of this story because his views have changed. In the first paragraph of chapter 3 he recommends those readers who do not approve of the book in progress to choose another one or to try writing a text of their own. He insists that he is too preoccupied with his own emotions to consider the possible reactions of the reader. In the last section of chapter 4 the narrator informs us that he has stopped writing because of a dramatic change in the situation. Chapter 5 starts with a shocking piece of news: Dolores is dead. This statement is followed by a flashback reconstructing the scene which preceded her death. Her death is treated as a symbolic event within the novel's context; besides, it motivates the creative impulse influencing the narrator's decision to produce his text.

3. *The narration in both cases displays noticeable metafictional characteristics*. The narrators make digressions in order to comment upon their techniques and intentions.

4. *In both novels the initial impulse starting the marital crisis appears through the accusation that the husband seems to be involved in an incestuous love affair—either with his wife's daughter (*Lolita*) or his own daughter from a previous marriage (*Apropos of Dolores*)*. Charlotte learns about Humbert's infatuation after having read his diary (we learn this from Humbert's description of their dispute preceding Charlotte's death in a fatal accident), and Dolores in Wells's novel imagines the narrator to be in love with his daughter Letitia, tears her photograph to pieces and accuses her husband of incest in the course of their last dispute. Wells's Dolores is (from the typological point of view) akin to Nabokov's Charlotte (not Dolores Haze).

5. *The circumstances surrounding the revelation of secrets held by the narrators are strikingly similar*. Charlotte insists that Humbert should unlock the drawer where he keeps his diary. Humbert refuses, but takes additional precautions after his wife's departure.

> I checked the hiding place of the key: rather self-consciously it lay under the old expensive safety razor I had used before she bought me a much better and cheaper one. Was it a perfect hiding place—there, under that razor, in the groove of its velvet-lined case? […] Remarkable how difficult it is to conceal things—especially when one's wife keeps monkeying with the furniture. (93)

Later, Charlotte quotes his unsparing words from the diary: "The Haze woman […] the big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mama" etc. (95).

In *Apropos of Dolores*, the narrator, while working at his diary (section 20 of chapter 4), suddenly notices some changes on his desk. Something is evidently missing. It turns out to be his daughter Letitia's photograph. He also finds that it is torn in pieces. The narrator immediately realizes that Dolores, who could never understand why he spent so much time there, has searched his study. He finds it probable that Dolores may have seen the manuscript that he never left unlocked. He grimly suspects that his wife may have read his very unsparing judgments of her.

6. *The idea of killing the hateful wife is present in both texts*. Humbert imagines how he might get rid of Dolores Haze's mother in the waters of Hourglass Lake:

> I might come up for a mouthful of air while still holding her down and then would dive again as many times as would be necessary. And only when the curtain came down on her for good, would I permit myself to yell for help. And when some twenty minutes later the two puppets steadily growing arrived in a rowboat, one half newly painted, poor Mrs. Humbert Humbert, the victim of a cramp or coronary occlusion, or both, would be standing on her head in the inky ooze, some thirty feet below the smiling surface of Hourglass Lake. (87)

Somewhat later, preparing for Lolita's visit from school, Humbert experiments with sleeping pills in order to possess the means "of putting two creatures to sleep so thoroughly that neither sound nor touch should rouse them." He sums up the results of his efforts: "Throughout most of July I had been experimenting with various

sleeping powders, trying them out on Charlotte, a great taker of pills. The last dose I had given her […] had knocked her out for four solid hours" (94).

In Wells's novel, Dolores, after having rudely denounced her narrator husband, asks him to give her magical, marvelous sleeping pills—semondyl. The next morning her dead body is found. Analyzing his actions during their quarrel, the narrator cannot say for certain whether he really supplied Dolores with two pills only or helped her with the whole tube. It turns out that he has really had fantasies for a long time about getting rid of Dolores forever, though he is not sure whether his subconscious intentions have been realized. His suspicions are partly confirmed by the fact that he had woken up next morning confident that Dolores was no longer alive. Besides, he is positive of his wife's inability to commit suicide. On the other hand, the narrator admits his innate inability to invent circumstantial evidence against himself.

7. *The narration in both novels is mockingly presented as the hearings of a case in court*. Humbert regularly addresses the judge and the members of the jury, e.g.:

> Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. (9)

> Exhibit number two is a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with a golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left-hand corner. (40)

> Gentlemen of the jury! I cannot swear that certain motions, pertaining to the business in hand—if I may coin an expression—had not drifted across my mind before. (69)

> […] and I wept. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I wept. (103)

> Gentlewomen of the jury! Bear with me! Allow me to take just a tiny bit of your precious time! (123)

> I did my best, your Honor, to tackle the problem of boys. (185)

In *Apropos of Dolores*, the narration is constantly presented as *a legal case of Steven Wilback versus Dolores***.** This idea is introduced in the initial lines of chapter 3. The narrator declares that Dolores has been concocting a real bill of indictment against him for some years (chapter 3, section 2). Later on he also tries to compile a bill of indictment against Dolores, but he finds it a technically difficult task, because the only witness he can find is he himself (chapter 3, section 6). The narrator is in turns Dolores's councilor, his own councilor and the judge (chapter 3, section 12). Chapter 5 begins with the narrator's confession that he is unable to finish the hearings in his case versus Dolores, the only reason being Dolores's death. And in the last paragraph of the novel he pleads that the court passes a mild sentence in his case versus Dolores, considering the fact that both sides are guilty.

8. *We witness the phenomenon of theatralization*. Both narrators comment upon the actions of the main characters as if they were actors, participating in a performance and playing specific roles.

* * *

Nabokov has always resisted the facile identification of "influences" in his writing. To a certain degree this is apt because he was too outstanding a writer just to imitate texts of his forerunners and contemporaries. Alfred Appel was right in pointing out that what Jorge Luis Borges says of Pierre Menard, author of *Quixote*, surely holds for Vladimir Nabokov, the author of *Lolita*: he "has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading" (lxvii). Nevertheless, this magical novel is based on the intertextual play with certain literary sources that is subordinated to a consistent authorial strategy. Some of these sources are self-evident, some have been singled out and commented upon by Proffer, Appel and others.

But it should be stressed that in Nabokov's case (as in the case of the majority of other distinguished writers) we come across another category of sources as well. He may often have read or looked through either some ordinary texts by now forgotten minor writers or works which (although written by prominent literary figures) have not

become part of the canon, and these works may have given him important artistic impulses. The detection of such non-evident sources gives a scholar a valid ground for experiencing textual surprises. Michael Maar's findings concerning von Lichberg's *Lolita* are a recent example of the kind. A comparison of Nabokov's novel with H. G. Wells's *Apropos of Dolores* is another one, as it offers further surprising insights into the complex issue of Vladimir Nabokov's use of potential sources.

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NOTES

[1]Maar's argument has now been expanded and translated into English in *The Two Lolitas*.

[2]["It is quite probable that Vladimir Nabokov had read the story 'The Accursed Gioconda' by Heinz von Lichberg during his exile in Berlin—unless these parallels can be explained by other, more remote sources which have yet to be discovered."]

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John Lanchester's *The Debt to Pleasure*: An Aesthetics of Textual Surprise[1]

MAIK GOTH

1. Introduction: A Taste of Surprise

"This is not a conventional cookbook":[2] such a statement at the beginning of a novel surely takes the reader by surprise. John Lanchester's 1996 debut *The Debt to Pleasure*,[3] in which he marries the cookbook to the literary confession, is, indeed, full of textual surprises. Purportedly written by the erudite and immoral Tarquin Winot, the sophisticated culinary guide through the four seasons develops into a murder manual that turns its unwitting readers into accomplices of more than one murder. While the revelation of Tarquin Winot's murderous insanity surely makes for the most important single surprise, many other surprises depend on stylistic and rhetorical strategies, and on intricate interrelations between literary and sensory perceptions. After giving a taste of the textual surprises Lanchester's novel has in store, this paper will show how Winot uses surprises to activate reader participation. Subsequently, the element of surprise in the murder plot will be discussed. This will be supplemented by an analysis of stylistic surprises which involve the reader in a subtle literary game. In a final step, it will be argued that the dynamics of the unexpected depends on the aestheticism that informs the novel.

The Debt to Pleasure is arranged in four chapters corresponding to the four seasons, starting with the winter menu and ending with various autumnal recipes.[4] These chapters are preceded by a theoretical essay ("Preface, Acknowledgement and a Note on Structure," 1-5), which highlights the seemingly authentic nature of the cookbook as well as the narcissist sophistication of its fictional *mâitre*, Tarquin

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debgoth01413.htm>.

Winot. Whereas the former is borne out by the accuracy of the ensuing menus and recipes, the latter comes to the fore in innumerable digressions: he lectures on the cultural history of the peach, the manifold variations of stew, and the philosophical implications of cheese. Thus, the novel turns from a simple cross-breed of two genres into a surprising array of what Winot calls "gastro-historico-psycho-autobiographico-anthropico-philosophic lucubrations" (224).[5] At the same time, the reader is acquainted with Tarquin Winot's life and personal relations. Among the latter are his parents, a businessman and an actress; his brother Bartholomew, a famous modern artist; Etienne, a French exchange student tutoring the brothers in his native tongue; Mitthaug, the Norwegian family cook; and Mary-Theresa, their Irish maid; additionally, we are introduced to Jean-Luc and Pierre, Winot's Provençal neighbours, who have a penchant for shooting birds; Mrs Willoughby, an Englishwoman with an affinity towards French cuisine and life; and, most importantly, to Laura Tavistock, who becomes his collaborator, and Hugh, her Welsh husband. Except for the Provençal twins, everybody on this list is dead by the end of the novel. Tarquin Winot figures as an unreliable narrator who brings the fine art of murder to perfection. Since he dictates and edits his text as he follows Laura and Hugh Tavistock on their honeymoon from Portsmouth to Provence, the book additionally turns out to be a "masked travelogue," complete with explanations of travel routes and sights.[6] Tarquin's account of the journey thus makes up what Genette defines as the "first narrative" of the novel, in which the reflections, menus, and flashbacks are embedded.[7]

Lanchester's breaking down of the boundaries between fictional and non-fictional traditions does, indeed, smack of the postmodernist craze to create distinctly 'novel' species of narrative fiction.[8] But Tarquin Winot, his fictional narrator, does not only take advantage of the plenitude of text types to indulge in a constant play with the reader.[9] He also generates friction between the various levels of his narrative. This sense of playing for surprises already surfaces in Winot's foreword, in which he expounds the various aspects of his work. After

explaining the structure of his cookbook, Tarquin Winot enumerates everything a "menu can embody":

> […] [The menu] can be a way of knowledge, a path, an inspiration, a Tao, an ordering, a shaping, a manifestation, a talisman, an injunction, a memory, a fantasy, a consolation, an allusion, an illusion, an evasion, an assertion, a seduction, a prayer, a summoning, an incantation murmured under the breath as the torchlights sink lower and the forest looms taller and the wolves howl louder and the fire prepares for its submission to the encroaching dark.
>
> I'm not sure that this would be *my* choice for a honeymoon hotel. The gulls outside my window are louder than motorcycles.
>
> Tarquin Winot
> *Hotel Splendide, Portsmouth*
>
> (4-5)

In this passage, Winot poses as an aesthete who shows off his love of and devotion to food. He first dazzles the reader with an almost infinite asyndetic enumeration in which he celebrates culinary matters as the acme of human culture and sophistication. When claiming that the menu is also an invocation designed to ward off the impending danger of the oncoming darkness, the catalogue loses its staccato-like quality; here, the slow-moving polysyndetic enumeration in the subclause complements the sombre mood of the chronographia. By this time, the narrator has sufficiently taken his readers in with his erudition and novelistic talent, so that he can deal his textual surprise and startle the reader out of his poetic ruminations with a reference to the actual setting of the narrative. As the eerie twilight mood is disrupted by the reality of the honeymoon hotel, the mellifluous syntax is suddenly replaced by cynical statements. This unexpected clashing of styles creates a surprise that draws attention to the pronounced difference between two levels of narration, the disembodied 'ivory tower philosophising' on the one hand, and travelogue deixis on the other. This change of 'sound' is made manifest by the birds' noise, an impression that is further emphasised by a simile whose noisy vehicle, strikingly placed at the end, gives a cacophonous ring to the short paragraph.

At the very end of the passage under scrutiny, Lanchester has Winot sign his preface and add the name of his place of abode, the Hotel Splendide in Portsmouth. But this 'actuality,' seemingly authenticated by Winot's adding name and address, is mere bogus, since he has previously pointed out that he has "falsified one or two proper names and place names" (3); and, as we learn much later, even his own name is a fraud: in commemoration of the villain in Shakespeare's *The Rape of the Lucrece*, he changed his Christian name from Rodney to Tarquin, so that his name fits his nature (193). As a result, what looks like the intrusion of the actual world turns out to be a fiction once the reader closes the hermeneutic circle. The display of strategies, at once narrative, and meta-literary, prepares the reader to be on the lookout for ever new surprises in *The Debt to Pleasure*.[10]

2. Surprise and Reader Address

The most immediately striking examples of surprise are the instances of reader address which enable Winot to subvert the traditional rapport between the reader and the writer of a cookbook. Usually, the author of the cookbook dons the robe of the trustworthy and reliable teacher and instructor, while the reader assumes the role of a novice who must observe and put into practice his master's every word. Tarquin gives a teasing example of such mastery in his recipe of Irish stew:

> […] Layer the ingredients as follows: layer hard potatoes; layer onions; layer lamb; layer soft potatoes; layer onions; layer lamb; repeat as necessary and finish with a thick layer of all remaining potatoes. Sprinkle each layer with salt and herbs. You will, of course, not be able to do that if you have been following this recipe without reading it through in advance. Let that be a lesson to you. Add cold water down the interstices of meat and vegetable […]. (24)

What a surprise for the reading home cook: Winot has led his clueless readers by the nose by temporarily de*laying* the important infor-

mation that each *layer* must be spiced separately before the next one is prepared. The didactic surprise that results from this deceptive strategy is given further emphasis by the abrupt change from standard cookbook instructions to sharp-tongued reader address. Thus, surprises are incidents whose success in temporarily outwitting the reader rests firmly on premeditation and strategic placement. Since Winot's face-to-face rebuke harks back to an earlier passage in which he ridiculed his English Provençal neighbour Mrs Willoughby for reading cookbooks like novels (2),[11] we suddenly realise that he has induced us to make a similar mistake when reading the novel as a cookbook. This kind of interactive reprimand, which also betrays Winot's blasé attitude towards his readership, of course smacks of many of the narrative manoeuvres in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. As in the direct reader address in *Shandy*, picking on the reader presupposes his active presence. In consequence, the surprise is based on the dichotomy existing between the realm of the fictional cookbook and the reality of the reader who knows that he is reading fiction. Such dynamics result in a duality of readerly roles: Winot plays with the (fictional) involvement of the implied home cook, while Lanchester makes sport of the intellectual presence of his readership.

Reader address is never static, or of one kind. It can take the covered form of an unwarranted lexicon abbreviation, when Winot refers to the Romantic idea of genius, and adds a "q. v." (45). Since this is short for Latin *quod vide*, this formula is a veiled command that orders the reader to actively go through the book to find out what Winot has to say about genius (especially his own). But this is not the only time one has to be on the *qui vive*, for later in the novel Winot gives his readers an essay question after quoting Keats's dictum that "A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory" by simply adding the familiar imperative "Discuss" (111). This kind of interactive language game is given a further Shandyistic turn when Winot goes to seek the poisonous mushrooms with which he eventually kills Laura and Hugh Tavistock. After describing his entrance into the wood, he addresses the reader directly: "Please imagine here a passage which evokes the

comparative experiences of mushroom hunting all over Europe, with many new metaphors and interesting facts" (215). Winot transfers the act of imagination to the reader, enumerating all the ingredients necessary to make the result sound like any of Winot's own rhetorical flourishes. Thus, this exhortation is not exclusively designed to poke fun at the methodology informing the more stylistically challenging cookbooks;[12] more importantly, it turns out to have a self-reflexive, meta-literary dimension that raises the reader's awareness of Winot's own stylistic whims through sudden recognition. The surprising instances of reader address, which mark the novel as a specimen of metafiction,[13] stir the reader out of his (self-imposed) tranquillity, and raise his level of attention so that he perceives and experiences more clearly Winot's more subtle surprises.

3. Surprise, Murder, and Experience

Sudden address is one strategy to involve the reader in the dynamics of surprise; hints insinuating that there lurks a different truth beneath the surface of the autobiographical cookbook are another. This is especially so since the novel presents both a thriller plot and a murder mystery.[14] The former is chiefly connected to the travelogue, for Winot does not undertake his journey to the Provence in late summer without a reason. When closing the account of his experiences on the cross-channel ferry from Portsmouth to St-Malo (34-35) he describes his own physical appearance, pointing out that he wears dark glasses and a new deerstalker. This is already rather conspicuous; but when he claims that he wants "to take a stretch around the promenade and inhale deep draughts of sea air through the slight tickle of my false moustache" (35), it becomes apparent that he is wearing a disguise to follow a young couple on their honeymoon. In the course of this pursuit, he changes cars and wigs to conceal his identity, and follows the instructions given in his copy of the *Mossad Manual of Surveillance Techniques*. The reader is thus made witness to Winot's adroit observa-

tion, a circumstance that is further stressed by an unexpected use of pronouns when he refers to the newly-weds as "[o]ur young couple" (103). In this instance we are suddenly made aware of Winot's conscious turning us into accomplices of his designs, which eventually culminate in a culinary murder. The success of this plot depends on a surprise meeting on the market of Apt, a planned recognition scene that works even for us, because the newly-weds turn out to be none other than Laura Tavistock and her husband Hugh.[15] The thriller plot now merges with the murder mystery, which in turn joins the cookbook, as Tarquin Winot prepares an omelette containing poisonous mushrooms (the notorious *Amanita phalloides*), which he offers to his victims right before our eyes: "'Melt the butter over high heat and wait for the foam to subside. Keep the pan hot, and add the filling when the centre is beginning to coagulate. Eat, eat'" (220-21). This outline, albeit sketchy, gives good evidence for Durham's verdict that the ultimate success of the novel lies in its "conflat[ing] the cookbook and the murder mystery," especially in establishing an aesthetics that "turn[s] murder […] into a culinary art."[16]

The discovery that Winot is a serial murderer (who is also about to ambush his next prey) is surely the most significant single surprise in *The Debt to Pleasure*. It is, however, also the most difficult to localise. For it depends on the individual reader when he starts making sense of the clues dropped in the novel, and when his suspicion becomes certainty. In consequence, Tarquin Winot invites his readers to a literary game of hide-and-seek that sets them the task to decipher the hints placed in the narrative. When he draws an analogy between precognition and art, emphasising "the accumulating effect of hints, glimpses and the gradual accretion of that sense of foreboding which also goes by the name 'meaning'" (92), he makes explicit the overall design of the novel and offers a key to unlock its chief mystery. The main surprise in the murder plot thus does not come as an unexpected explosion; as seen above, Tarquin Winot's hints are miniature surprises that reveal only a little of the truth behind the semblance at a time—until the attentive reader has accumulated enough material to

solve the mystery himself. To the novelist, creating a puzzle and asking his readership to piece it together, is a risky business, as the all-too-astute reader might make his deductions at a fairly early stage of the novel (and find that it is not much of a surprise at all).[17]

In order to show how different kinds of surprise inform the murder plot I will deal with the fate of one single victim, Mitthaug, the Norwegian family cook, who supposedly died an accidental death when being run over by a District Line train at Parsons Green station. The two very different surprises he falls victim to make him a case in point, since they shed light on Winot's devotion to food, and murder. The first of these is recounted in a section on "Vegetables and Saladings," which is part of the summer menu, in a digression instigated by general reflections on the tomato. After explaining the etymology of the term "from the Nahautl *tomatl*" (133), and its uncanny resemblance to the human hearts which members of this ancient culture "saw ripped out at the daily human sacrifice" (133), he criticises the generally bad and flavourless quality of the tomato before illustrating the pleasures a ripe specimen can evoke:

> I will never forget the expression on Mitthaug's face the first time (during an ordinary roadside picnic luncheon on a family expedition to Agen one August) he ate a fully ripe tomato—the expression of surprise and near-sensual shock was, even to my child's eyes, undisguisedly sexual. (133)

Mitthaug's surprise in this short narrative passage is one of unexpected, intense taste. The full impact of his experiencing true flavour is represented by the hendiadys "surprise and near-sensual shock," because the latter term expresses the physical intensity of the surprise. The incident characterises surprise as an unprecedented sensation that turns innocence into experience. The sexual delight it triggers is so overwhelming that Mitthaug cannot help but reveal it through his facial expression. The mimic incident, in turn, also surprises young Tarquin. Although he partakes of Mitthaug's emotions only visually, i.e. at one remove from the 'real thing,' he nevertheless perceives the surprise together with the Norwegian cook. The passage thus offers

an explanation as to why Winot is so fully devoted to culinary matters: he associates surprise with the revelatory nature of sensory, especially culinary, experience.[18] In the wider context in which Winot embeds his recollection, Mitthaug's pleasurable experience is contaminated by the vivid depiction of violence and human sacrifice which immediately precedes it, and which turns the red vegetable into the throbbing heart of a human victim. This thematic overlapping associates Mitthaug's sensual experience with the surprise of his own death.

As with so many other of his victims, Tarquin leaves his readers in the dark as to the real circumstances of Mitthaug's death for quite a while. Although his passing on is referred to every now and then, Winot sidesteps crucial information,[19] until—at last—the secret is out. The cook's death occurred when Tarquin was still a child: "It seems that Mitthaug simply stepped forward and lost his footing at precisely the wrong moment, just as the train was hurtling into the station" (165). The passage raises suspicion, because the verb "seems" impairs the probability of an accident. The reader's misgivings are further stirred by the adverb "precisely" and the temporal sub-clause "just as." Thus, Winot gives a rather striking hint at the exactitude of timing, which counter-runs the notion of chance. However, the inquest held to clarify the exact circumstances of Mitthaug's death ends with an open verdict, and the general feeling that the Norwegian might have committed suicide. As usual, Winot places the relevant and revelatory pieces of information in inconspicuous syntactical units, such as sub-clauses, or parentheses.[20] Here, he resorts to the latter:

> […] (The coroner rejected out of hand the 'evidence' of a plainly hysterical woman who claimed to have seen me administering a well-timed shove to Mitthaug's back just as the train arrived on the platform.) […] (166)

Although the narrator does his best to impair the witness's credibility, the reference to "a well-timed shove" connects surprisingly with the account above. Yet, it takes Winot another forty pages to relate the whole truth of Mitthaug's death. The revealing statement is made

when Tarquin tells Laura about the events leading to hapless Etienne's death. According to him, the French exchange student died after being stung by a bee; for some unknown reason the syringe did not contain the life-saving antidote he needed, but useless liquid. Tarquin is then addressed by his collaborator:

> "Were you close to any of the servants?"
>
> As she spoke I momentarily saw Mitthaug's face as he lay on the rails before the onrushing train. He was looking up at me with an expression of surprise so pure that it would in another context have been comic. (200)

The recollection of Mitthaug's death, which is thematically linked to the bee sting incident, is the deadly counterpart of the culinary surprise discussed above. This time, the surprise lies in Mitthaug's realisation of young Tarquin's criminal energy and of his own impending death. Thus, Mitthaug's facial expression shows a sudden recognition that contradicts his pre-conceived image of the young boy's innocence.

Like the tomato episode, the event establishes a brief bond between culprit and victim; they are connected by a momentary look. This visual contact communicates the experience from Mitthaug to Tarquin, so that they perceive or experience this moment together. If one bears this in mind, Tarquin's reference to the purity of Mitthaug's facial expression emphasises the cook's sheer astonishment resulting from a mutually experienced moment of truth: the veil of appearances, the façade of fake humanity, is lifted to allow a momentary glimpse of the real. In the context of such mutual revelation, Laura Tavistock's initial question acquires an unexpected ambivalence, so that the term "close" can be used in both a physical and a psychological sense: physical, because Tarquin had to be physically close to push Mitthaug in front of the train; and psychological, because their eyes connect to share a surprising revelation. As recounted in a previous passage, this momentary glimpse also sheds light on the realities of last things, for it teaches Mitthaug and Winot to disbelieve "in the reality of life after death" (93).[21] To Winot, the event thus brings about

an awareness of the "pressing presentness and thisness of life" (93) and an awakening of his sensualist persuasion. The two surprises Mitthaug experiences explain why Winot has acquired a taste for inflicting surprises on others, both the pleasant and unpleasant surprises of taste and death.

4. Surprise and the Stylistics of Sense

As we have seen in Mitthaug's experience with the ripe tomato, instances of surprise can be connected to the senses. One could in fact argue that Lanchester deliberately appeals to his readers' sensory experience to establish a discourse between the text and different kinds of perception (e.g. taste, sound, or vision). In the following section, I will therefore analyse the repertoire of stylistic surprises to show how this cross-sensual discourse is effected.

A critical survey of Tarquin Winot's stylistic repertoire best starts with a brief analysis of his—and many a metafictionist's—favourite: the catalogue. The following example is taken from the Kerneval episode, where Tarquin Winot stops for a grilled lemon sole in a local hotel. As he minutely observes the clouds passing by, he remembers how his mother used to point out cloud shapes at him: "Look, a horse. Look, an antelope. A cantaloupe. A *loup garou*. A *loup de mer*. A *sale voyeur*. A *hypocrite lecteur*" (100). What starts as an inconspicuous list of cloud shapes changes into a surprising cascade of seemingly unrelated items, from horse to antelope to melon to were-wolf to wolf-fish to dirty voyeur and to hypocritical reader; this discontinuity is further emphasised by the sudden shift from recounted narrative to the narrator's own free association. A closer look at the passage, of course, reveals that the individual terms are predominantly connected via sound, with "-aloup" linking the first set of terms, and "mer/-eur" (an imperfect rhyme) yoking together the second. The *loup de mer* is of central importance, here; since it has phonetic similarities with both sounds, it establishes a link between the terms preceding and succeed-

ing it. The last two items in the catalogue—*sale voyeur* and *hypocrite lecteur*—are arguably the most significant and surprising, since they are entirely unrelated to the forms of clouds. As they comment on Tarquin Winot's character and on the role of the reader, they reflect the overall dynamics of the novel discussed in previous sections of this article. The 'dirty voyeur,' for example, can apply to the first-person narrator, who is currently spying on the newly-weds. As he, however, turns his readers into witnesses of his crimes, the epithet also possibly refers to them. This is even more so with the term "*hypocrite lecteur*," which can be interpreted as a veiled accusation of the reader who witnesses (and maybe morally condemns) Winot's heinous crimes but watches him go about his business pleasurably. The catalogue thus seems to end with a covert reader address, but it also contains an intertextual surprise, because the phrase is taken from "Au lecteur," the introductory poem to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal.* The poem, which deals with the sinfulness of the human being and the pervasiveness of *ennui*, ends with an emphatic address to the reader, famously quoted by Eliot at the end of the first section of *The Waste Land*: "Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat [i.e. *ennui*], /—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (ll. 39-40).[22] In these lines, Baudelaire marks the reader as his kin, who suffers from the same sinfulness and boredom as the poet. The final segment in the catalogue therefore renders the connection between author and reader more profound, and points to Winot's affinity to French poetry and the concepts of aestheticism.

The stylistic surprises evoked by onomatopoeia, neologism, and pun also play with the sound and meaning of words, a circumstance that can be accounted for by the partly oral narrative mode of the novel. A telling example of onomatopoeia occurs when Winot converses with Laura and comments on his brother's sculpturing work:

> "I suppose he was usually too busy to cook."
>
> "Tink tink tink tink tink tink tonk tonk tonk. His chisel was never far from hand." (110)

The unwarranted breaking of conversational decorum reduces the act of artistic creation to a cacophonous profanity, especially since the iterative act of chiselling is represented through extended repetition. Hence, the textual surprise briefly reveals Tarquin's attitude to his brother and his art, although his derision of Bartholomew's artistic efforts is mitigated by an immediate return to conversational conventions.

His neologisms serve a similarly humorous function. Coinages such as "tequilathon" (124), a word that combines tequila and marathon, and "our Gallic frenemy" (143), a paradox that combines friend and enemy, are portmonteau terms that telescope two meanings in one word. As self-conscious narrator, Winot is well aware of his linguistic inventions, as the following passage shows, which—in passing—also calls into question the notion of character: "For instance, 'Mary-Theresa' and 'Mitthaug' are close approximations rather than mean and mere identicalities. (Does that word exist? It does now)" (3).

However, new terms can also signify more than meets the eye. Tarquin's reminiscing that Etienne, the French exchange student, "was quick to see a streak of genius in me and encouraged me a lot in my quiddity, in my me-ness" (199), contains a double-bottomed language game. At first glance, "me-ness" is synonymous with egotism, created by joining a personal pronoun with a standard suffix. If, however, one takes into consideration that the same passage blends into an account of Etienne's death caused by Winot's murderous designs, the statement takes on a second meaning: since it is directly linked to the murder plot, it renders Winot's real nature ambivalent. This interpretation also has its effect on the term "me-ness," which thus shows a revealing homophonous resemblance to 'mean-ness.' Lanchester brings about a surprising, silent revelation by yoking together two different figures of speech in one single term.

Surprises of this sort are quite subtle. In consequence, Winot uses puns that are not merely designed to raise a smile, since they can also strike a more serious note. When discussing the cultural relevance of death for Brittany,[23] he draws the analogy between the "skeleton

figure of the Breton *Ankou*" and "the image of death in Mexico (figure of colour, of a comparable pre-Christian harshness and of carnival—*carne vale*, farewell to flesh […])" (93). Although these anthropological reflections evoke a sense of morbidity, they still appear to be of a detached, or abstract kind. However, they become uncannily concrete when he returns to his narrative: "I hoisted the car on to a scraggly grass verge and walked the last few hundred yards towards the *enclos paroissial* of Kerneval" (93). Tarquin Winot deals another punch line, here, by introducing a town whose name is homophonous with the term carnival. This linguistic manoeuvre makes death a garish and concrete presence in this episode of the narrative, especially in conjunction with the architectural "church-statue-ossuary combination" of the *enclos*. The surprising pun in this passage is therefore not only showcasing creative wit; more importantly, it draws attention to Winot's deadly designs and foreshadows the Tavistocks' joint death.

A book obsessed with food does, of course, also feature play on words such as "taste" and "digest." Yet the following instance shows that trite examples can still be re-contextualised to cause surprise. Here, Winot comments on some newly received information about the honeymooners: "I digested the information with the help of a fruity young calvados" (117). As already purported, using the term "digest" to describe a mental process is no novelty. The surprise in this passage lies in the liquid presence of the *digestif*, whose fruity *bouquet* helps blend and conflate intellectual and gastric acts, a method that almost turns the passage into a zeugma and additionally helps bring to life what is usually taken to be a dead metaphor.

Winot's playing meaningful games with the sound and significance of words thus activates the reader's sensory awareness. His use of synaesthesia, however, opens up a more profound interdependency between the sensory and the literary.[24] When Winot rails against the poor quality of sauces, ketchups, and yeast extracts, he points out that they are "often loud in colour and comparably unsubtle in taste" (107). Attributing sound to colour is, of course, a standard example of synaesthesia that can be found in any glossary of rhetorical terms; but

what makes the passage rather startling is the link between the visual and the tasty (or rather, untasty) by means of analogy. The yoking together of colour and taste brings about a double transference of sensual experience, which is especially significant because it can be interpreted as the perfect (and perfectly horrible) match between culinary form and content. Such multi-layered items of synaesthesia can also take the form of a self-reflexive hotel critique, as in the following passage: "The room's bad oil paintings synaesthetically mimicked the slight rankness of the stale coffee, served in those pretentiously unpretentious big French bowls" (121-22). By explicitly conflating the look of a painting with the smell of bad coffee, Winot judges the merits of art and food at a time. He thus does not merely establish a parallel between these two realms; since synaesthesia always works both ways, it renders distinctions between any artwork and any item of food unclear.

Therefore, it stands to reason that culinary experiences can be communicated to the addressee of the novel by a literary representation of food that takes into account some of its defining sensory aspects, such as taste, smell, touch, or vision. The author's synaesthetic reference to the "tangy physicality and pleasure" of garlic (176), for instance, makes food tangible, and thus increases its 'experienceability.' If one takes this kind of 'synaesthetic mimicry' one step further, one could claim that it actually informs the descriptions of meals and food in the entire work. Hence, I would like to redefine the term synaesthesia, which derives from Greek "συναισθάνομαι" and translates into 'perceiving together,' for the present purpose, and to make it also applicable to those descriptions that try to involve the narratee's senses. The etymological quibble is not too far fetched, since in Ancient Greek the *deponens medium* can mean 'to perceive something together with someone' when used with a dative object ("τινί"). This precept turns the rhetorical phenomenon into a narrative metaphor that makes narrator and reader experience sensory perception, the fiction of taste, together via their joint acts of imagination. When Tarquin Winot thus observes that, in the winter menu, "[t]he tastebuds should be titillated,

flirted with, provoked" (13), the remark has a strong sensual, even sexual undertone that is analogous to the reader's experiencing the novel and its cuisine in the manifold descriptions of food and cooking.

Many of the surprises that make words palatable are intended to raise strange sensations about otherwise familiar tastes. Take, for instance, Tarquin Winot's explications in "*A Luncheon on the Theme of Curry*" (104), which contains a catalogue of different spices; one of them is the "evocatively Middle Eastern coriander (its Greek etymology, from *koris*, commemorating the fact that it smells identical to the humble bedbug)" (106). What starts as an inconspicuous passage celebrating the exotic origin of a well-known spice ends with a rather unpleasant textual surprise that, in turn, brings about a change in the reader's appreciation of coriander. Linguistic ruminations thus pave the way to the evocation of insect and odour, which the reader's imagination then processes into a new taste experience. It should, however, be noted that Winot does send us up the garden path, here. True, the weed and the unripe seeds of coriander emit the rather nasty smell in question; the ripe seeds, however, have a sweet and spicy aroma and a sweet and mild taste, before acquiring a somewhat biting flavour. Taste surprises can thus be tainted by the unreliable narrator's penchant for deception.

This kind of complexity increases when Winot interlaces the rhetoric of taste with that of sound to create a serial surprise. One such instance occurs halfway through the novel, where Tarquin Winot recounts one of his meetings with Laura Tavistock in a high-class Indian restaurant:

> I chose an agreeably crisp battered aubergine, a well-judged dab of cucumber *raita*, a poppadum.
>
> "When I was a kid I used to be scared of Indian restaurants because I thought you had to eat puppydogs," confided my companion.
>
> "I have only ever eaten dog once, in the course of an experimental and unrepeated visit to Macao. One had won rather spectacularly at roulette and wanted to commemorate the event with a meal to remember. One celebrated afterwards with a bottle of Krug and a puppy casserole. Not a success, overall—somehow both stringy and fatty […]."

> "I couldn't eat dog. I'd throw up."
> "*J'aime les sensations fortes*." (108)

The surprise here stems from the unexpected connection between the terms poppadum,[25] puppydogs, and puppy casserole. The link between the first two terms is that of linguistic association; the joint meal in the Indian restaurant evokes Laura's childhood memory of mistaking "poppadum" for "puppydog." Laura's innocent reinterpretation of the term poppadum is thus in character with her girlish concern for sweet young animals.[26]

Tarquin Winot, on the other hand, takes his companion's remembrance of things past literally, replying with the sophistication of the experienced sensualist. His immediate retort, "I have only eaten dog once," thus strikes his collaborator and his readers unawares and stands in marked contrast to Laura's innocence. But this is not the only disturbing moment in his reminiscences, for he does not refrain from providing an (un)pleasantly detailed account of his culinary adventure, the puppy casserole (served in Macao, thus triggering cultural stereotypes). Such food violates Western-European norms, a sense of immorality Winot increases through description. Whereas "stringy" describes the texture (and taste) of meat full of long thin pieces that are difficult to eat, "fatty" is applicable to taste, texture, look, and smell, which also conjures up the collocation 'puppy fat,' a double-bottomed joke that stresses his taste for especially young vegetables and meat.[27] Winot thus recreates the physicality of the dish through the use of synaesthetic terms. With this in mind, Laura's retort that eating dog would turn her stomach takes, as it were, the words right out of our mouths. Her open rebuke also induces Winot to comment explicitly on the attitude that informs his predilections; the French phrase "*les sensations fortes*" thus emphasises his need for strong physical sensations, which results in the desire for tasty surprises and meals to remember.

5. The Aesthetics of Textual Surprise

"*J'aime les sensations fortes*" (108): Tarquin Winot's quest for strange sensations bears an indisputable resemblance to the credo of *fin de siècle* decadence, a movement that developed out of aestheticism in the 1890s.[28] As a self-styled "scholar-artist" (140), he thus takes sides against realism, an artistic mode represented by his much-loathed, but highly successful brother Bartholomew,[29] and advocates the superiority of art over life.[30] His decadence sallies forth from his supercilious stance and honey-tongued writing style, and the myriads of exotic terms and French phrases; it is traceable in his weakness for post-Augustan Rome (note his comparing BBQ to the burning of Rome, as well as his imitating the murder of Claudius by using the same mushrooms for the newly-weds); it informs his refined taste and artistic approach to cooking; and it induces him to violate moral norms.[31] When he thus comments on dishes that logically combine two different tastes, purporting that "to the committed explorer of the senses, the first experience of any of them will have an impact comparable with an astronomer's discovery of a new planet" (77),[32] he chooses the aesthetic precepts postulated by Walter Pater in the conclusion to his seminal study on Renaissance art and poetry.[33] Pater famously advocates the supremacy of experience caused by strange or novel sensations. The sensual surprises evoked by, among others, "strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours"[34] stir the senses and break the aesthete's *ennui*, a sense of boredom Tarquin frequently experiences himself,[35] to cause a momentary, "quickened sense of life."[36] Since such worldly views are instigated by a heightened awareness of life's short span and the uncertainty of the hereafter, the only means to feel keenly, poignantly alive is to experience "as many [of these] pulsations as possible."[37] As these sensations can only be triggered by surprises that cause hitherto unknown experiences, the committed sensualist is on a constant quest for new sensual, but also artistic surprises.

Winot's own standards are, of course, decadent transmutations and subversions of Walter Pater's aestheticist manifesto.[38] His set of principles about beauty and art is so depraved that he deliberately exposes his senses to new experiences in order to try out their boundaries.[39] Such finding explains his experiencing "the thrilling sense of taint" (157) through the smelliness of eating offal, so that odour is the synaesthetic manifestation of an immoral act. He even goes so far as to conceive of murder as the chief object of aesthetic assessment, since he bewails the "loathsomely predictable murders, all of them motivated by either love (hate, jealousy) or money" (141).[40] The sheer number of new possibilities suggested by this decadent programme is inscribed into his surname: since it is homophonous with "why not?" his name is a rhetorical question that shrugs off moral inhibitions as irrelevant.[41] Winot's worldview, or, if one prefers, his vision, is expressed by the style and techniques he employs. The decadent aestheticism that underlies the novel is thus transformed into a multi-layered synaesthetic discourse that appeals to the reader's intellect and senses.[42] Winot conceives literature as a space of joint experience, which blends the literary with the culinary with the visual with the auditory to enhance the surprising "pulsations"[43] that help experience "the pressing presentness and thisness of life" (93). Hence, Winot resorts to the aesthetics of textual surprises to tickle his readers' senses and to settle his debt to pleasure.

The success of Winot's ephemeral aesthetic programme depends on the reader's active participation, because he is assigned a privileged role in Winot's artistic project: that of the collaborator. As collaborator, the reader is turned into the accomplice of the narrator's murderous designs, experiences sensual perception through extended synaesthesia, and becomes witness to his life-as-art project. The last of these three roles is of crucial importance to Winot, as he once confesses to his future victim Laura Tavistock: "The biographer, the anecdotalist here features as a collaborator, an essential (*the* essential) component in the transmission of the artwork to posterity, to its audience" (73). In the situational context of the discussion, he slyly asks Laura to col-

laborate; in the wider context, however, he wants his readers to be the witnesses to his life and works. As one can gather from the double murder in the final part of the novel, however, Winot's concept of collaboration has a sting in its tail. While he carries out the murder, he explains to the reader the minutiae of how the mushrooms' poison works, triumphantly concluding that "the body is forced *to collaborate* in the continuing process of poisoning itself" (223; emphasis added). The use of the verb "to collaborate" in this context is hardly coincidental, for Laura and her husband unwittingly *collaborate* with Winot in that they are made the subjects of another piece of murderous art, and will soon breathe their last.

The analysis advanced here becomes all the more plausible if one takes into account Winot's theory of murder, which he explicates in detail when relating the particulars of his brother's death to the Tavistocks as he is about to poison them (220-29). After purporting that the murderer and the artist are the culturally most significant figures of the twentieth century, he leaves no doubt as to who is entitled to play the leading role:

> The murderer, though, is better adapted to the reality and to the aesthetics of the modern world because instead of leaving a presence behind him—the achieved work, whether in the form of a painting or a book or a daubed signature—he leaves behind him something just as final and just as achieved: an absence. Where somebody used to be, now nobody is. (225)

Winot's critique of traditional art praises the artistic supremacy of murder, since it effects the annihilation of *both* the work of art (the murder) *and* its subject (the victim): hence, art and life blend to create an emptiness out of something that had existed.[44] Murder therefore inverses the traditional creative process which gives shape to something that was not. In turn, Winot's life-long art project turns full circle when killing Laura Tavistock and her husband: by annihilating the *sine qua non* of his eternal fame, the collaborator, he also annihilates himself. This interpretation can be brought to bear on the reader's tripartite role of collaborator: as an accomplice and witness he might

have been morally poisoned by Tarquin Winot's book, just as Dorian Gray was poisoned by the yellow book he received from Lord Wotton in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[45] But Winot develops the *fin de siècle* topos of the poisonous book one step further: as he gives the full recipe of the poisonous omelette, he invites the implied home cook to prepare the meal on his own, which he then can either consume himself or serve to others.[46] With this in mind, the concept of the poisonous book loses its metaphorical status. But this finding is also relevant for the discussion of extended synaesthesia, for the detailed descriptions of the omelette as well as of the poisoning process involve the narratee's senses just as much as previous culinary descriptions have done. As synaesthetic collaborator who experiences food through the medium of language, the (implied) reader therefore 'literally' eats of the same noxious meal served to the Tavistocks, disappears with the "murdered couple" (232) at the end of the book—and dies to become an absence.[47] This unexpected turn of events is the ultimate 'surprise' of Winot's cross-sensual discourse. Thus, John Lanchester's *The Debt to Pleasure* is a banquet for the reader's multiple senses in which the author does more than create a jilted sensualist and warm up decadent ideas spiced up with postmodern principles: he takes the analogy between consuming food and reading literature to a more advanced level, and attempts to establish an inextricable interdependency between reading and feasting.[48]

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NOTES

[1]This is the expanded version of a paper presented at the conference of the *Connotations* society at Dortmund and Bochum, 24-28 July 2005. I would like to express my gratitude to both Burkhard Niederhoff and Christiane Bimberg for organising the event. I also wish to thank the participants of the conference, whose remarks on the paper were insightful and encouraging. Thanks are also due to Burkhard Niederhoff, Murat Kayi, Stefan Erlei, and the anonymous *Connotations* reviewer for their generous advice and criticism. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[2]John Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure* (London: Picador, 1996) 1. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

[3]Since then, Lanchester has published two further novels, namely *Mr Phillips* (2000), the odyssey of a laid-off accountant in the London of the 1990s, and *Fragrant Harbour* (2002), a novel dealing with the fates of four people living in Hong Kong over the past seventy years.

[4]Winot explains the structure of his cookbook at the very beginning of the novel: "I have decided that, wherever possible, the primary vehicle for the transmission of my culinary reflections will be the menu. These menus shall be arranged seasonally. It seems to me that the menu lies close to the heart of the human impulse to order, to beauty, to pattern" (4).

[5]Winot states that the ultimate model for his literary project is Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarine's nineteenth-century "culino-philosophico-autobiographical" work *La Physiologie du Goût* (2).

[6]See Winot's extensive and self-reflexive comment on the structure of his work: "About the architecture of this book. Its organization is based on the times and places of its composition. In the late middle of summer I decided to take a short holiday and travel southwards through France, which is, as the reader will learn, my spiritual (and, for a portion of the year, actual) homeland. I resolved that I would jot down my thoughts on the subject of food as I went, taking my cue from the places and events around me as well as from my own memories, dreams, reflections, the whole simmering together, synergistically exchanging savours and essences like some ideal *daube*" (3-4).

[7]For the concept of "récit premier" see Genette 48. Cf. Durham 71-72 for similar comments.

[8]In the only article about *The Debt to Pleasure* to date, Carolyn A. Durham discusses its position in the literary trends of the 1990s.

[9]See Durham's repertoire of text types: "[…] the biography, the autobiography, the guidebook, the travelogue, the restaurant review, the historical commentary, the cultural ethnography, the aesthetic manifesto, the philosophical treatise, the personal confession, the mystery, the stand-up comedy routine, the judicial inquest, the lexicon, the reference book, the how-to manual, and, as the French say, *j'en passe*" (72). As Durham notes, Winot's erudite diction has by now taken her in to such an extent that she starts imitating his exuberant and learned catalogues as well as adding the occasional French phrase (Durham 80n3).

[10]Remarks that aim at disillusioning the reader are also used to elaborate on the more complex entrapments of narration, as this metaliterary passage shows: "As it happens, the little Breton town of Kerneval in which I was lunching (in which, if you are prepared to succumb for a moment to the always fashionable illusion of the historic present, I am lunching, though in fact I am dictating these words in a Lorient hotel room […])" (102).

[11]Winot loathes Mrs. Willoughby, since he perceives her as the opposite of everything he cherishes: "Mrs Willoughby was, in fact, a walking anthology of bad

taste, a serial offender against the higher orders of art and discrimination" (126). Durham quite rightly points out that she is "his feared double as much as his antithesis" (75).

[12]On the chatty style characteristic of cookbooks see Durham 75-76.

[13]See Imhof 245-67 for a thorough discussion of reader participation in metafiction.

[14]It should, however, be taken into consideration that Lanchester deliberately violates one of the whodunit's prime directives by turning a serial killer into the narrator of his novel. For it is *the* golden rule of detective fiction that the culprit should not be one of what Ulrich Suerbaum calls "Funktionspersonen," namely characters who fulfil the function of detective, first-person narrator, policeman, or physician, and who are therefore exempt from suspicion (Suerbaum 24). The classic exception to this rule is, of course, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

[15]Winot gleefully stages the encounter as a 'cliff hanger' at the end of the section on aïoli: "[…] the other occupants of the market [were] unreal to me, everything in the world a masquerade except me and her and my purposes, as I rose up before her and crisply announced: 'But my dears—how too, too unlikely!'" (186).

[16]Durham 77.

[17]The analysis of surprises advanced in this section so far recalls Winot's outline of a projected novel (210-12), in which everything is constantly shifting—characters, themes, places—while the style remains consistent. At one point, the readers will wonder whether they are reading a narrative at all, since "the essential mechanisms of propulsion, surprise, development would seem largely to be forgotten" (212). If applied to the novel in process, this outline would suggest that Winot's surprises on the plot level are more subtle and less explosive than traditional ones. Cf. Mars-Jones's critique of Winot's *mise en abyme*.

[18]At a different stage of the novel, Tarquin Winot emphasises the supremacy of food in a nice rhetorical question: "In terms of our inner lives, our *real* lives, what effect, after all, is had by the result of the battle of Waterloo compared with the question of whether or not to put Tabasco sauce on one's oysters?" (195).

[19]The narrative strategy Lanchester employs is thus reminiscent of Gérard Genette's concept of paralipsis. In a paralipsis, "the narrative does not skip over a moment of time, as in an ellipsis, but it *sidesteps* a given element"; the paralipsis is only later completed through an analepsis that solves the puzzle (Genette 52).

[20]Mars-Jones criticises this method as a "manipulative mannerism that becomes transparent" (24).

[21]The passage in question runs as follows: "[…] has anyone anywhere in the history of the world ever genuinely believed in the reality of life after death? When Mitthaug fell in front of his train at Parsons Green station, was he telling himself that there would be more where this came from? One suspects not" (93).

[22]"Reader, you know this monster delicate, / —Double-faced reader,—kinsman,—brother mine!" Text and translation are taken from Richardson's edition of Baudelaire's poetry.

[23]"Death, then, gives Brittany its cultural distinctiveness" (92).

[24]Synaesthesia (Greek "perceiving together") is a rhetorical device that describes "one kind of sensation in terms of another" (Abrams 315). In psychology, it signifies the experience of one sense (say, sound) through another (say, colour). Among others, Winot's extended discussion of the smell of spring, "that smell which is more a texture than an odour" (36-37), has a strong synaesthetic quality.

[25]Poppadum is a usually hot Indian bread cracker served as a starter.

[26]The phonetic resemblance between the two words causes an incident of paranomasia, or, to be more precise, a naïve asteïsmus, "a reply to earlier words used in a different sense" (Cuddon 757).

[27]Winot's predilection surfaces occasionally. After giving his recipe of Irish stew in the winter menu, for instance, Winot presents a learned catalogue of various kinds of stew; among others, he makes mention of the "*navarin* of young lamb and baby vegetables, with its sly rustic allusion to infanticide" (26).

[28]For an introduction to these developments see Johnson 47-49.

[29]Bartholomew, who is conceived as Tarquin's direct opposite and nemesis, is frequently ridiculed by his brother for his assumed realism (101, 158).

[30]See also Winot's remarks on the "aesthetic period" of his university days, when, inspired by Huysman, he served a black menu in a black room (100-02; cf. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, ch. 2).—Winot's set of tenets smacks of the ideas informing Oscar Wilde's dialogue *The Decay of Lying*, which could be used as a foil against which to read the novel. Vivian's view that "Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil" seems to be especially important in this context (*Complete Works* 983).

[31]He makes his dislike of moral art explicit when downgrading an ornamented altar in Kerneval church as a "hideous modern piece of sanctimonious-didactic embroidery" (96).

[32]Winot's remark suggests Brillat-Savarin's aphorism IX in his *Physiologie du Goût*: "La découverte d'un mets nouveau fait plus pour le bonheur du genre humain que la découverte d'une étoile" (Brillat-Savarin 1: 15; "The discovery of a new dish brings more happiness to humanity than the discovery of a star").

[33]Pater 233-38.

[34]Pater 237.

[35]"[…] in the course of a lifetime's engagement with any one of them [i.e. the arts] one goes through periods of boredom, *ennui*, *anomie*, *déjà vu*, it's-all-been-doneness" (77). Quite notably so, Winot culturally differentiates (English) boredom from (French) *ennui* ("Styles of self-satisfaction vary from country to country, just as to be bored is not the same thing as to suffer from *ennui*"; 43). See also Baudelaire's "Au lecteur," where the poet characterises *ennui* as the disease from which modern man is suffering (see also n22 above).

[36]Pater 238.

[37]Pater 238.

[38]Isobel Murray draws attention to the general misunderstanding of Pater's precepts, citing Oscar Wilde as the most important exponent of such miscarried aestheticism (*Dorian Gray* ix); see *Dorian Gray* 22 and 130-31 for Wilde's permutations of Pater's ideas, and Johnson 72-83 for an extended discussion of the two writers.

[39]Winot's decadent programme therefore recalls Brillat-Savarin's dictum that "les limites du plaisir ne sont encore ni connues ni posées" (Brillat-Savarin 2: 29; "the limits to pleasure are as yet neither known nor fixed"), which Winot ranks as his favourite (2). In a more literary context, however, Winot's search for new sensations also reads like a perverted version of Rimbaud's advocating "un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement* de *tous les sens*" for the poet who wants to become a seer (Rimbaud 251; "a long, vast and systematic *derangement* of *all senses*").

[40]The view that murder can be appreciated in artistic terms once moral judgement is suspended was first voiced in Thomas De Quincey's three-part satire "On Murder, Considered As One of the Fine Arts," where the anonymous narrator maintains that murder "may also be treated *æsthetically* […]—that is, in relation to good taste" (De Quincey 50).

[41]His name tallies well with Johnson's observation that "aestheticism diverges from a puritan ethic of rigid 'thou shalt nots'" (Johnson 22).

[42]The notion of extended synaesthesia is reminiscent of Rimbaud's postulating a new poetic language in his "Seer-Letters": "Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant" ["This language will go from soul to soul, including all, scents, sounds, colours, the thought that clings to another thought, and draws it on."] (Rimbaud 252). As synaesthesia is frequently used in nineteenth-century French literature (see, e.g., Baudelaire's "Correspondences," Rimbaud's "Voyelles," and Huysmans's *À Rebours*, ch. 5), it could be regarded as a crucial feature of French aestheticism. By resorting to this stylistic device, Winot shows his indebtedness to the traditions that exerted a formative, if misleading influence on the English decadence. For a comprehensive account of French influences on the English decadence see Lindner.

[43]The term is Pater's (*Renaissance* 238).

[44]The ideas articulated in the passage under discussion (on 220-29) are further developments of an earlier theory of "the aesthetics of absence, of omission," where Winot claims that the true artist is to be judged by "what he doesn't do" (69). That his views take a deadly turn is hinted at when Winot notes that his art is an "affair of farewells and absences" (95).

[45]Wilde, *Dorian Gray* 125-26 and 146-47.

[46]This supposition is underscored by the surprising cookbook rapport embedded in the conversation with the Tavistocks. The commands in the recipe are therefore also addressed to the reader.

[47]This view is corroborated by the closing lines of the novel: "I turned and walked back up to the house. By the time I got there the murdered couple had gone around the corner onto the main road, leaving behind them a slow cloud of settling dust" (232).—Durham also argues for the "death of the *reader*" by the hand of Tarquin Winot, who "metaphorically kills both us, his implied readers, and our diegetic representative within the text" (79).

[48]The phrase also features in Kalaga's article "Food for Thought: A Textual Feast," where the analogy between reading and feasting is discussed (somewhat inconclusively, one should add) in the literary theories of Roland Barthes, Stanley Fish, and Paul Ricoeur.—See Barakoska's article on Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* for a recent discussion of the analogy between consuming food and consuming literature.

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Emerson's Allusive Art: A Transcendental Angel in Miltonic Myrtle Beds

FRANCES M. MALPEZZI

Critics have long recognized the influence of John Milton on Ralph Waldo Emerson, and they have particularly noted that Emerson's "Uriel" owes its title character to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[1] Though Emerson's indebtedness to Milton in this poem is acknowledged, interpretations of "Uriel" do vary considerably. Charles Malloy argues the poem is an "allegory" suggesting "there are no lines in morals"; E. T. Helmick also reads the poem allegorically, but believes it expresses Emerson's theory of art; for Gay Wilson Knight the allegory of "Uriel" depicts "the furor caused by Emerson's 'Divinity School Address'"; while Kenneth Walter Cameron sees the poem as a "mythological or symbolic commentary on 'the progressive influence of the man of genius'"; and Richard Lee Francis asserts that the poem is a "mythological expression of the 'transparent eyeball,' of the poetic function in its prophetic dimension that unites heaven and earth."[2] As Kevin Van Anglen has observed, critics usually approach the poem either as an autobiographical expression of Emerson's "Divinity School Address" crisis or philosophically and aesthetically as "one of Emerson's most cogent poetic formulations of the doctrines of Transcendentalism, a virtual summary of his view of the mind and the role of the creative imagination."[3] In his own study, Van Anglen combines these approaches as he looks at the way Emerson "was participating in a long tradition of Unitarian Milton criticism."[4] Whatever their perspective, critics agree that Emerson's angel "with piercing eye" (l. 25) is the same as Milton's "sharpest sighted spirit of all in heaven" (*PL* III.691).[5] Van Anglen goes further in suggesting the Miltonic influence by demonstrating that the situations in both poems are

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debmalpezzi01413.htm>.

similar: "Uriel here [in Emerson's poem] does exactly what Milton's archangel does in Book III of *Paradise Lost*: he gives a true account of the nature of the universe in response to those who question him."[6] Still the full extent of Emerson's allusiveness in this poem has yet to be documented. Far more similarities exist than have been noted. Emerson's "Uriel" is a richly textured, allusive poem, embedded with Miltonic resonances. Emerson's appropriation of Milton extends beyond the title character and even the poem's situation. Clearly a sensitive reader of Milton, Emerson has deftly interwoven and enmeshed numerous allusions to his works, especially to *Paradise Lost*, within "Uriel."

Set in the "myrtle-beds" (l. 28) of Paradise in "the ancient periods" (l. 1) of the *ex*temporal, before "Time coined itself / Into calendar months and days" (ll. 3-4), Emerson's brief 56-line poem begins with the cosmic scope of the Miltonic epic. In taking us beyond calendrical and diurnal time, "Uriel" also calls to mind Milton's "On Time" with its distinction between the vain and evanescent world and the enduring realm of eternity. Not only is the Edenic locale notably Miltonic but the myrtle beds are as well. Milton places myrtle, the tree of Venus, in conjunction with the original lapse of the human pair. When Satan tempts Eve, he directs her: "Empress, the way is ready, and not long, / Beyond a row of myrtles" (*PL* IX.627-28). Moreover, in the dramatic scene that follows Seyd overhears the conversation between Uriel and the young deities. A poet, Seyd (or Saaidi) figures in other Emersonian poems, including "Saaidi" and "Fragments on the Poet and the Poetic Gift." Like the Epic Voice in *Paradise Lost*, Seyd has access to that beyond human ken. Just as Milton's poet-narrator was able to transcend the realm of earth and the temporal present to visit both the infernal and paradisial realms of the cosmic, so Seyd knows what occurs in the divine sphere before created time.

In the situation Seyd overhears "the young gods talking" (l. 8) about matters philosophical: "Laws of form, and metre just, / Orb, quintessence, and sunbeams, / What subsisteth, and what seems" (ll. 12-14). This philosophical pondering is similar to that of some of the lapsed

rebels in Book II of *Paradise Lost*. While Satan ventures on his great mission, the fallen angels occupy themselves by participating in athletic games, composing heroic poetry, and exploring their infernal world. One group, however, sits apart, engaging in philosophical discussion; they

> reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,
> And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
> Of good and evil much they argu'd then,
> Of happiness and final misery,
> Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,
> Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie. (II.558-65)

Although Emerson's young gods are still in Paradise, unlike their Miltonic counterparts, their cosmic speculation is judged to be as false and vain as the demonic philosophizing when Uriel pronounces his "sentiment divine":

> 'Line in nature is not found;
> Unit and universe are round;
> In vain produced, all rays return;
> Evil will bless, and ice will burn.' (ll. 21-24)

The clear-sighted Uriel, one of the seven archangels who serve as the eyes of God (*PL* III.650) and who is specifically the interpreter of God's will (*PL* III.656-58), finds a solution to the question the young deities pondered about the world. And he does so by asserting the circularity of nature.

Hugh H. Witemeyer in "'Line' and 'Round' in Emerson's 'Uriel'" has pointed out the significance of circles in the body of Emerson's writing.[7] Yet we must recognize that here too Emerson draws on *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Uriel, dwelling in "the Sun's bright circle" (*PL* IV.578) has an intuitive understanding of the circularity of the universe. This understanding is even keener, given that he witnessed the creative process. As he recounts that event he describes how Confusion heard the voice of God and light came out of darkness:

> Swift to thir several Quarters hastend then
> The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Aire, Fire,
> And this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n
> Flew upward, spirited with various forms,
> That *rowld orbicular*, and turned to Starrs
> Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;
> Each had his place appointed, each his course,
> The rest in *circuit* walles this Universe. (III.714-21; italics mine)

Both Milton's Uriel and Emerson's recognize the circle as God's emblem imprinted on his created universe. Unit and universe are round because they reflect the power of the divine creator.

The last line of Uriel's pronouncement, "'Evil will bless, and ice will burn,'" demonstrates the reliance on paradox that Hyatt H. Waggoner finds so prevalent in Emerson's poetry: "The tradition of paradox was ancient, it suited Emerson's purposes, and he was well acquainted with it as a way of writing."[8] Moreover, the paradoxical last line of his pronouncement is reminiscent of the many paradoxes of *Paradise Lost*. Certainly in Milton's infernal region, ice *does* burn: the exploring fallen angels find a "frozen Continent" of snow and ice (II.587) where "cold performs the effect of fire" (II.596). Uriel, in using the future tense "ice will burn" foretells the creation of the frozen yet fiery infernal region. So, too, his prediction that "Evil will bless" alludes to a concept reiterated throughout *Paradise Lost:* Good will come out of evil. Satan's efforts to pervert good are doomed to failure, he does not see "How all his malice served but to bring forth / Infinite goodness" (II.217-18).

In the next section of the poem, Uriel enters his post-lapsarian period. The remainder of the poem concerns the repercussions of Uriel's lapse both in relation to himself and to the other angels as Emerson depicts the fruit of his actions. The immediate effects occur in ll. 31-34:

> The balance-beam of Fate was bent;
> The bounds of good and ill were rent;
> Strong Hades could not keep his own,
> But all slid to confusion.

Not only is this a direct antithesis to the ordering and harmonizing that occurred in creation as described by Milton's Uriel, but there is a

definite parallel between this and the reaction which occurs both after the fall of Satan and that of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost.* After the fall of Satan and the rebel angels

> Hell heard th'unsufferable noise, Hell saw
> Heav'n ruining from Heav'n and would have fled
> Affrighted; but strict Fate had cast too deep
> Her dark foundations, and too fast had bound.
> Nine days they fell; confounded *Chaos* roard,
> And felt tenfold confusion in thir fall
> Through his wilde Anarchie, so huge a rout
> Incumberd him with ruin:
> (VI.867-74)

After Adam and Eve both eat of the fruit, disharmony also results:

> Earth tremble'd from her entrails, as again
> In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
> Skie lowr'd and muttering Thunder, som sad drops
> Wept at compleating of the mortal Sin
> Original; […]
> (IX.1000-04)

In all three cases confusion and disorder are prominent. The harmony that existed at creation is destroyed as Nature responds to these lapses and is affected by them.

In the third stanza, Emerson's poem turns to the effects of Uriel's pronouncement upon himself as "sad self-knowledge" falls on the beauty of Uriel. As E. T. Helmick notes, Uriel experiences a more "devastating effect" than the old gods: "it is withering to his beauty. This is an expression of the belief that the outward sign of beauty indicates inward virtue. Having lost the freshness of innocence, Uriel has begun the withering connected with the kind of old age Emerson called the Fall of Man. His knowledge has grown too bright not only for society, but for himself as well."[9] In both *Paradise Lost* and *A Masque*, Milton was concerned with the metamorphic power of one's actions. He often demonstrated ways both good and evil could leave visible marks on his characters or transform them significantly. In *A*

Masque good and evil have this metamorphic power. Bestialized by sin, Comus' followers have the heads of beasts. Their irrationality and intemperance transform the image of the divine in their countenance to "som brutish form of Woolf, or Bear, / Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat" (ll. 70-71). The Elder Brother also articulates the way the virtue of Chastity, on the other hand, enables one to ascend rather than descend the ladder of creation. In *Paradise Lost*, all the fallen were visibly marked by their lapse. When Satan addresses Beelzebub in hell, he remarks,

> But O how fall'n! how chang'd
> From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
> Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
> Myriads though bright: (I.84-87)

And Satan himself bears the marks of change. When he asks the angels Ithuriel and Zephon, "Know ye not mee" (IV.828), Zephon responds,

> Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,
> Or undiminisht brightness, to be known
> As when thou stoodst in Heav'n upright and pure;
> That Glorie then, when thou no more wast good,
> Departed from thee, and thou resembl'st now
> Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foule. (IV.835-40)

As the angelic beauty of Uriel is impacted after his pronouncement, Emerson clearly alludes to Milton's metaphoric use of visible form to mirror inward reality. Thought and action can mark and change the outward form of man or angel.

Uriel now voluntarily withdraws into a cloud. And one of two things is said to happen to him:

> Whether doomed to long gyration
> In the sea of generation,
> Or by knowledge grown too bright
> To hit the nerve of feebler sight. (ll. 39-42)

The sea of generation suggests a kind of Spenserian Garden of Adonis, that seminary of life and rebirth. Or it could simply refer to the created world. Uriel may be doomed to roam the earth for an unlimited and unspecified time. He may, like fallen humanity, be placed out of Paradise and forced to live as an exile in a fallen world. Or he may experience a diminishment or change in his focus. Witemeyer sees two options for Uriel:

> The fall of Uriel himself results from the "sad self-knowledge" that he has no true place in the community of angels. He must choose either a life of action (circular "gyration" in a Neoplatonic "sea of generation") or a life of pure contemplation in which his thought will have little effect.[10]

Both Pettigrew and Witemeyer have accurately noted that ll. 41-42 allude to Milton's *Il Penseroso*, ll. 13-14.[11] In moving from the realm of light to his cloudy abode, Uriel may have moved from being L'Allegro, a mirthful angel, to being the melancholy contemplative, Il Penseroso. As Witemeyer comments: "Like the cloistered scholar of Milton's ode, Uriel will become an invisible observer, devoted chiefly to solitary mental labor, if he chooses this alternative."[12]

The rest of the stanza concerns the repercussions of Uriel's act in relation to the other angels. Since Uriel's words pose a threat to their existence, they are unwilling to recognize the meaning of his statement. Yet the idea cannot be completely extinguished:

> Straightway, a forgetting wind
> Stole over the celestial kind,
> And their lips the secret kept,
> If in ashes the fire-seed slept. (ll. 43-46)

The term "fire-seed" is almost a kenning for Uriel's earlier pronouncement, perhaps prophesying the eventual fall of the young gods and suggesting the possibilities of the infernal region where ice will burn. While they choose to ignore the import of Uriel's words, to keep meaning concealed, they have not extinguished the significance of Uriel's pronouncement. Although the fire-seed sleeps in the ashes of

self-imposed forgetfulness, the flame of knowledge can be re-kindled, not unlike the phoenix rising from its ashes.

While the estimation of Frost's Job that "Uriel" is "the greatest western poem yet"[13] may be deemed hyperbole, one must acknowledge that the poem is allusively complex. Moreover, this very allusiveness is Miltonic. Milton's great works are layered with allusions to classical, scriptural, and contemporary works. Emerson's technique in "Uriel" bears witness to his sensitive reading of Milton and his desire to emulate that poet.

As Pettigrew has noted, Emerson's "life-long enthusiasm" for Milton's poetry and prose is evident in the "numerous comments, quotations, and allusions" in his *Journals*.[14] Given that Emerson knew *Lycidas* by heart (with the exception of a few lines) not because he had consciously memorized the poem but because he had read it so frequently,[15] is it any wonder that Emerson's poem about an angelic "lapse" (l. 5) would resonate with Miltonic overtones? Though choosing dramatically different poetic forms, Milton in *Paradise Lost* and Emerson in "Uriel" are both concerned with exploring prelapsarian and postlapsarian reality and dramatizing the moment change occurred. The demarcating experience in Milton's epic centers on choice: the choice made by the rebel angels as they refuse submission to the Son and quit their vow of loyalty; the choice made by the Edenic couple when they disobey their creator's sole command and eat of the forbidden fruit. With a ripple effect the choices made by the fallen angels and the fallen Adam and Eve continue to impact themselves and others. In "Uriel," however, the life-defining moment is not one of action but of utterance. Uriel does not act; rather, he speaks. In "low tones that decide" (l. 15), he utters his pronouncement. Though his poem is brief, Emerson, through his numerous allusions to Milton, is able to suggest both the personal ramifications and the cosmic reverberations of Uriel's expression of his "sentiment divine" (l. 19). Perhaps in focusing on utterance rather than action, Emerson not only reminds us that words can be as powerful as deeds but underscores yet another Miltonic pattern. Certainly throughout *Paradise Lost* we

are aware of the motif of the one voice speaking in contradistinction to the views and opinions of the many. Like Abdiel who would not "swerve from truth, or change his constant mind / Though single" (*PL* V.902-03), Uriel speaks out while seraphs frown and war-gods sternly shake their heads. And just as the pronouncements of Abdiel or Enoch or Noah alienated them from the conformist crowd, so Uriel feels the alienating repercussions of his statement. The "sad Self-knowledge" (l. 35) that shadows the beauty of Uriel is, perhaps, his recognition that his postlapsarian exclusion is necessary. Aware of the "shudder" that runs through the sky at his words (l. 26), Uriel withdraws "into his cloud" (l. 38). His self-imposed exile from the companionship of the other young deities in Paradise, of course, also bears some resemblance to the enforced exclusion of the rebel angels and the departure of Adam and Eve from Eden. His postlapsarian world differs from his prelapsarian as significantly as theirs. While the length of Milton's work enables him to expound extensively on the conditions both before and after the life-defining moment, Emerson's brief poem only suggests those aspects. We know that Uriel withdraws, but we also realize he is not silenced for his words continue to resound. As he depicts a defining moment in "Uriel," Emerson continually invokes Miltonic works, most notably *Paradise Lost*. In Miltonic myrtle beds, the transcendentalist poet found a powerful model for considering that instant when "The balance-beam of Fate was bent" (l. 31).

The allusiveness in "Uriel" should also suggest the need to evaluate the use of this technique in other poems by Emerson. In "Poetry and Imagination," he presented a capsulized statement of his poetic theory:

> In poetry we say we require the miracle. The bee flies among the flowers, and gets mint and marjoram, and generates a new product, which is not mint and marjoram, but honey; the chemist mixes hydrogen and oxygen to yield a new product, which is not these, but water; and the poet listens to conversation and beholds all objects in nature, to give back, not them, but a new and transcendent whole.[16]

For Emerson the poet is a miracle worker who through imagination transforms what he sees in nature—or what he reads—into a new finished product. Clearly this represents Emerson's method in "Uriel." Having sampled the mint and marjoram of the Miltonic garden, he produced the honey of his own poem. Certainly in "Uriel" there is scarce a line that does not echo Milton in some way. Emerson subsumed Miltonic language, characters, situations, and concepts in the creation of his own transcendental work. The extent of this allusiveness should encourage us to investigate this technique in other Emersonian works.

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NOTES

[1]For the general influence of Milton on Emerson see Richard C. Pettigrew, "Emerson and Milton," *American Literature* 3 (1931): 45-59; William M. Wynkoop, *Three Children of the Universe: Emerson's View of Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966); and K. P. Van Anglen, *The New England Milton: Literary Reception and Cultural Authority in the Early Republic* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1993). For Milton's influence on Emerson's "Uriel" see especially Richard Lee Francis, "Archangel in the Pleached Garden: Emerson's Poetry," *ELH* 33 (1966): 461-72; Kevin Van Anglen, "Emerson, Milton, and the Fall of Uriel," *ESQ* 30.3 (1984): 139-53.

[2]Charles Malloy, "The Poems of Emerson: 'Uriel,'" *Arena* 32 (September 1904): 278; E. T. Helmick, "Emerson's 'Uriel' as Poetic Theory," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1.1 (1969): 35-38, here 35; Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1981) 480; Francis 467; Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Coleridge and the Genesis of Emerson's 'Uriel,'" *Philological Quarterly* 30.2 (April 1951): 212-217, here 216.

[3]Van Anglen 139.

[4]Van Anglen 139.

[5]All quotes from Emerson's poetry and prose, unless otherwise indicated, will be from Brooks Atkinson's *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 1950). All quotes from Milton's works will be from Roy Flannagan's *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

[6]Van Anglen 148.

[7]Hugh H. Witemeyer, "'Line' and 'Round' in Emerson's 'Uriel,'" *PMLA* 82 (1967): 98-103.

[8]Hyatt H. Waggoner, *Emerson as Poet* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 71. Waggoner believes Emerson uses paradox because "he felt that 'his people' were few, that the mass of men were blind to the truths he was busy announcing and praising" (70). In other words, like Milton, Emerson was writing to an audience fit "though few" (*PL* VII.31).

[9]Helmick 37.

[10]Witemeyer 102.

[11]Witemeyer 102; Pettigrew 57. Pettigrew notes that, aside from these lines and the title character, "The poem does not, further than this, show any Miltonic influence" (57). While he argues for the influence of Milton on Emerson's prose he finds "few Miltonic echoes in Emerson's poetry itself" (56).

[12]Witemeyer 102.

[13]*The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959) 601.

[14]Pettigrew 45.

[15]Pettigrew 53.

[16]Perry Miller, ed., *The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957) 204.

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Some Remarks on "Parody, Paradox and Play in *The Importance of Being Earnest*"*

CHRISTOPHER S. NASSAAR

Niederhoff's article is interesting and reaches a significant conclusion, but it does challenge critical debate. I shall follow its own divisions in my response to it.

(1) Parody

The essay begins by stating that the "most obvious example of parody in Wilde's play is the anagnorisis that removes the obstacles standing in the way to wedded bliss for Jack and Gwendolen" (32). Perhaps, but to my mind the double identity of Jack and Algernon as a parody of Dorian Gray is even more obvious.

Niederhoff then moves on to discuss the scar which Odysseus received during his fight with a boar and which ultimately reveals his identity to his nurse Eurycleia, and ties it to the handbag that reveals Jack's identity in *The Importance of Being Earnest:* "Instead of identifying Jack by means of the bag, Miss Prism identifies the bag by means of the 'injury' that it received from a Gower Street omnibus—an injury that would appear to be a parodic allusion to the famous scar which shows Eurycleia whose feet she is washing" (34). To connect the two events without further and more cogent proof than just the scar and the injury does not seem convincing to me, nor does the following

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*Reference: Burkhard Niederhoff, "Parody, Paradox and Play in *The Importance of Being Earnest*," *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/04): 32-55.—Christopher S. Nassaar is the author of *The Importance of Being Earnest Revisited: A Novel* (Bognor Regis: Woodfield, 2005).

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debniederhoff01312.htm>.

statement in the next paragraph: "While the manuscript […] stands for literature, the baby represents life in its most pristine and natural form" (34). Prism's manuscript does *not* stand for literature in general, nor is the baby—as far as I can see—presented as a symbol of anything.

Niederhoff then goes on to discuss *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a parody of literary conventions, and here he is quite good. One should caution, though, that Wilde's target in the play is Victorianism as a whole, and that the parody of literary conventions is part of this larger frame. There is also a good deal of self-parody in *Earnest.* Niederhoff rightly argues that Jack's exchange with Miss Prism, in which Jack mistakenly assumes that she is his mother, is a parody of the fallen woman as seriously presented in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance* (35-36). I would add that the entire double-identity situation of Jack and Algernon reduces to nonsense the sinister double life of Dorian Gray, that Dr. Chasuble—especially in his repressed sexuality—is a parody of Jokanaan, that Algernon's engagement makes fun of the theme of determinism prominent in some of Wilde's earlier works, that Gwendolen and Cecily constitute a split personality, that Jack's misadventures as a baby parody not only the Victorian convention of the abused child but also Wilde's serious use of this convention in some of his earlier works, and so on. The result is that *Earnest* is at one level a self-parody, in which Wilde reduces not only Victorianism but his own earlier works to the level of nonsense.

The author ends by making a useful distinction between satiric parody and ludic parody. In the former, the author satirizes society while presenting a saner set of values. In the latter, however, there is no standpoint, no set of values to replace those that are being satirized. Niederhoff argues convincingly that Wilde's play is an excellent example of ludic parody.

He also makes a very valuable point during his argument which can easily be developed into a separate essay. "In addition," he writes, "the play offers something like a parody of itself, with later scenes or speeches providing comic repetitions of earlier ones" (37). This is an

idea well worth exploring, especially since Wilde parodies his earlier works so heavily in *Earnest*.

(2) Paradox

This section is short, and perhaps rightly so, as paradox in *Earnest* has been discussed by many critics. The author points out that a paradox startles us by violating logic or common sense, but also challenges us to make sense of it.

(3) The Connection between Parody and Paradox

The Importance of Being Earnest is full of both parody and paradox, but what is the connection between them? While paradox maintains the exact opposite of received opinion, Niederhoff states, parody can exaggerate, debase or invert. When it inverts, parody overlaps with paradox, as for instance when Wilde takes an expression and replaces one of its words with its opposite.

His main point, though, comes later: "My final and most important argument for the connection between parody and paradox hinges on the concept of play. […] Wilde offers us a theory of paradox in which the concept of play figures prominently" (44-45). Here Niederhoff is excellent. He connects Wilde with Lord Henry's rhetoric, presenting them both as jugglers of ideas, but complex jugglers whose play includes seriousness as a *possibility*. This is a correct and valuable description of Wilde's method, for he leaves us constantly guessing if he is serious, and if yes, to what extent. He is forever playing not only with ideas but with the very concept of earnestness.

(4) Why is *The Importance of Being Earnest* Wilde's Masterpiece?

According to Niederhoff, who echoes other critics here, the reason for *Earnest*'s great success is the fusion of form and content. In his other

works, Wilde's wit clashed with a sober content, but not so in *Earnest.* This is undoubtedly true. In creating his never-never land of wit and nonsense, Wilde captured a mood, a state of mind, that no one before or after him has been able to capture so perfectly. As we enter this fabulous children's world for adults, form and content blend perfectly. One can even argue that Wilde's experimentation with literary forms was, at least in part, a lifelong search for the right form to house his matchless wit. In his last play, he finally found it.

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Another Response to "'Across the pale parabola of Joy': Wodehouse Parodist"*

LAURA MOONEYHAM WHITE

Leimberg's study of Wodehouse's gradual transformation from a writer with loose and tangential ties to realism into a writer with essentially no contact with realism at all is both entertaining and perceptive, full of details to delight the Wodehouse scholar. Using that worthy, Psmith, as an early example, she points out that while in *Psmith Journalist* (1912), real-world concerns such as Bowery violence and poverty intrude, by *Leave it to Psmith* (1923), having joined the world of Blandings, Psmith has "hardly a trace of real life left in him" (56).[1] Leimberg finds specific thus-unheralded moments of parody in early Wodehouse, and while not arguing directly that parody belongs to the less-developed narrative habits of the author, she does argue that extended parody of specific works falls out of Wodehouse's repertoire fairly early. She is right to do so; the question follows as to why Wodehouse drops the use of sustained parodies of particular works from his bag of tricks.

One key example Leimberg examines in some detail is his use of Tennyson's *Maud* in the 1919 *A Damsel in Distress*. Now this parodic source is a very odd one, and merits closer examination. Wodehouse certainly lends his authority to this exploration, as Leimberg notes, for the hero, George, makes an explicit connection between "his own position and that of the hero of Tennyson's *Maud*, a poem to which he has always been particularly addicted" (qtd. in Leimberg 61). But if

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*Reference: Inge Leimberg, "'Across the pale parabola of Joy': Wodehouse Parodist," *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/04): 56-76. See also Barbara C. Bowen, "A Response to '"Across the pale parabola of Joy": Wodehouse Parodist,'" *Connotations* 13.3 (2003/04): 271-73, and Inge Leimberg, "An Answer to Barbara C. Bowen," *Connotations* 13.3 (2003/04): 274-75.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg01312.htm>.

Maud is a "Tennysonian romance" (63), it bears emphasizing that Tennysonian romance of this sort has little in common with the romantic bilge Wodehouse makes fun of throughout his work, as in his evocations of that imaginary author of *Only a Factory Girl*, Rosie M. Banks. In fact, in its narrative, mood, and rhetoric, *Maud* is close to Jacobean tragedy: the speaker, an increasingly unhinged lover, has, by cruel chance, killed Maud's brother and the poem ends with his passing through a frenzy of madness into the certainty of self-sacrifice, joining the British forces in the Crimean War. Tennyson himself called the poem "a little *Hamlet*" (*Memoir* 1: 396), and the beginning of the poem renders a mood of terror and sexual sublimation of the darkest sort: "I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood, / Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath, / The red-ribb'd ridges drip with a silent horror of blood, / And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers Death" (198). The darkness of this work seems strikingly at odds with the Wodehouse world. A similar issue arises relative to the other major site of parody in *A Damsel in Distress*: Leimberg notes that Wodehouse is parodying Tennyson's "Mariana," going so far as to enact a Cockney child's rendition of the first famous lines of the poem: "Wiv blekest morss […] " (76), to deeply humorous effect. "Mariana," as we know, is no light romance, either—its Arthurian heroine bemoans her self-imposed seclusion and the fact that her lover, long-gone, never returns to her. The prosody is dense with dark images of decay and sexual loathing, while each stanza ends with a variant of the refrain: "She said, 'I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!'" (8).

The question arises: why are these two Tennyson works so prominently at issue as parodic sources in *A Damsel in Distress*? Moreover, can we extend our understanding of Wodehouse's development in terms of his use of parody by thinking further about these two Victorian chestnuts? Parody, after all, usually marks the original as open to critique. In fact, as parodists like Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll imply, not only is the original work open to ridicule, but also the entire worldview that made its utterance possible is risible. For exam-

ple, Carroll's "You Are Old, Father William" from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* parodies Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts," as it skewers the original work's sentimentality and didacticism. But Carroll's work also attacks the idea of didactic poetry more broadly, the idea that children are to be brought up on (and memorize) verse which inculcates, in this case, the virtue of restraint and self-control. "The Old Man's Comforts" implies, further, that old age is preferable to childhood, an Augustan perspective Carroll could never endorse, and thus Carroll's old man is remade into a child of sorts, an acrobatic performer of nonsense who balances eels on his nose for the fun of it.

So when Wodehouse invokes Tennyson's *Maud* and "Mariana," what are we to think? Wodehouse's later work seems blandly—joyfully—indifferent to the affective register of its source material. References to tragic and weighty material such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear* jostle with the rhetoric of advertising copy, W. A. Henley's adventures for boys, Conan Doyle, and lonely-hearts columnists. For instance, in the 1958 *Cocktail Time*, the first chapter references publishers' blurbs, Longfellow's "Excelsior," weather reports ("a lovely day, all blue skies and ridges of high pressure extending over the greater part of the United Kingdom south of the Shetland Isles" [7]), Carroll's Cheshire Cat, Browning's 'Pippa Passes," cheap detective fiction ("he was conscious of a nameless fear" [9]), horseracing ("ears pinned back" [9]), carnival barker slang ("every nut a hat" [10]), Restoration farce ("stap my vitals" [12]), big-game hunting ("tiger on skyline" [12]), Gen. Israel Putnam of Bunker Hill fame ("whites of his eyes" [12]), whaling ("there he spouts" [13]), advertising copy ("say it with thunderbolts" [13]), *Henry V*, *William Tell*, and *Paradise Lost*, among others. The references are so mixed together, so variable, and so dehistoricized, and they gush so thickly from one to the other, that most readers waste little time working out the provenance of the constituent elements of the stew and instead simply enjoy the flow.

However, in direct and extended parody, such as that which Leimberg describes, the reader cannot help but pay attention to the original, particularly if it is well-known as *Maud* or "Mariana." Wode-

house's aims are complex, I would suggest. First, he is participating in a game just underway in 1919: making fun of eminent Victorians (Lytton Strachey's vitriolic masterpiece was published, we remember, the year before, in 1918). Here, however, an eminent Victorian is mocked, not for hypocrisy or arrogance (these were the key moral failings Strachey exposed in the likes of Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon), but for writing poems marked by emotional excess, tragic self-involvement, and lurid sexuality. It is not, I think, that Wodehouse feels any particular antipathy to Tennyson's lyricism as such, for Leimberg follows in a long tradition of readers who are right to praise the loveliness of Tennyson's verse. Rather, in these two poems, lyricism is put to the service of decadence. Further, neither *Maud* nor "Mariana" can have a happy ending—emotional desolation rules out romantic resolution, and morbidity reigns. Wodehouse's habitual pairings of multiple happy couples are unthinkable in this affective terrain. Here we might return to the quotation from Wodehouse on his methods with which Leimberg begins her essay:

> I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right down into life and not caring a damn. (Qtd. in Leimberg 56)

Tennyson here is perhaps a surprising example of an author who "go[es] right down into life […] not caring a damn"; the judgment at least can be seen to fit in terms of *Maud* and "Mariana."

Wodehouse deplores this particular mode of Victorian despair, particularly erotic despair. In his plots, happy heterosexual romance must triumph. In *A Damsel in Distress*, Wodehouse will update the archaic patterns of romance. The "damsel" is not rescued from a tower, island or enchanted forest but instead leaps into our hero's taxi—the taxi being, of course, the consummate symbol of modernity's decadent deformations of romance, as is confirmed by its role in *The Waste Land* (1922): "[…] when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting / I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives […] "

(ll. 216-18). Wodehouse is willing to bring romance up-to-date in some senses, e.g., employing taxis, but he insists that romance have an affect peculiarly suited for his sort of fiction and stage plays: determinative and fated to win, yet shallow, relatively sexless, and carefree. *Maud* and "Mariana" provide exactly apposite exempla for Wodehouse's purposes.

Ultimately, I believe Wodehouse moved beyond sustained parody into his later habitual stew of parodic references because he must have been aware of the dangers inherent in specific parody: that the reader will become too aware of the affective force of the original. For instance, Wodehouse often quotes from *Hamlet*, but puts his quotations among so many other quotations from so many other sources, high and low, that the reader is in no danger of remembering the emotional and narrative impact of Shakespeare's tragedy. I cannot proffer definitively the number of times that Wodehouse makes use of the following lines from Act I, scene v:

> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
> Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
> Thy knotted and combined locks to part
> And each particular hair to stand on end,
> Like quills upon the fretful porpentine. (ll. 15-20)

However, readers of Wodehouse know that the "fretful porpentine" makes an appearance in almost every novel, usually to garnish the description of a character's shock at being put in one or another ridiculous scrape. How ungainly and inappropriate, then, it would be were readers to dwell on the scene from which the lines come, in which the Ghost of Hamlet's father explains his murder by his own brother and his wife's incestuous complicity. Quotations, Wodehouse came to learn, work best when they fly by unheralded, at great comic speed and height, and in flocks unnumbered.

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NOTE

[1]Psmith joins the pre-pig world of Blandings, for in this work Lord Emsworth is obsessed with roses, and the Empress of Blandings is but a gleam in his eye. Wodehouse aficionados no doubt would have welcomed a scene in which Psmith's beautifully white collars and cuffs meet the Empress's predeliction for munching any material close to hand.

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In Search of a City: Civilization, Humanism and English Gothic in *A Handful of Dust*[*]

MARTIN STANNARD

Edward Lobb's essay, "Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust*," raises interesting questions about Evelyn Waugh's intellectual history. Developing the 1980s work of Jerome Meckier,[1] Jeffrey Heath[2] and Terry Eagleton,[3] Dr Lobb suggests several *hommages* to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. "*A Handful of Dust*," Dr Lobb states, "is about the cost of idealism and the futility of nostalgia" (131). Along the way there is an argument about Waugh's rejection of humanism, his attitudes to Victorian Gothic and to Dickens, the opposition of town and country, the allusions to Malory, the concept of the City of God and the genre of the quest narrative. Ultimately the novel is read, quite reasonably, as "a burlesque of the questing-knight theme" that "provides sardonic versions of some of the incidents and characters in *The Waste Land*" (139).

Dr Lobb's essay, then, represents an intriguing amalgam of allusions to critical sources that assumes Waugh's engagement with *Heart of Darkness* and *The Waste Land*. In the poststructuralist, postmodern world the author and his opinions are dead, the text is an immaterial weave of signifiers, biographers are anathema, and it might be argued that Dr Lobb's kind of criticism is rather old-fashioned. On the other hand, it might be seen as an example of 'post-theory' writing or, indeed, as a product of new historicism. Taking it on its own terms, as an attempt to restore the cultural backdrop to, and intertextual allusions in, a major modernist novel, it makes good, if not entirely

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[*]Reference: Edward Lobb, "Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust*," *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 130-44.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/deblobb01312.htm>.

original, reading. But taking it on its own terms, taking, for instance, the assumptions about Waugh's reading as being based on 'fact,' we are also entitled to examine the biographical data and to ask whether these assumptions are valid.

There is no problem here with *The Waste Land*. The novel's title clearly alludes to it and there is an epigraph quoting from the poem. We know that Waugh was a close friend of Harold Acton at Oxford where the latter famously bellowed the poem through a megaphone at the 'hearties' on their way to rowing or rugby. Waugh produced a cartoon of his doing this, associated himself at that stage with Acton's set of homosexual aesthetes, and presented a sympathetic image of Anthony Blanche, complete with megaphone and Eliot, in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Although it is also true that Waugh never had any great feeling for poetry, and for modernist poetry in particular, there is no question that he knew *The Waste Land* well and that it had a considerable impact on him. This engagement with modernist writing led Waugh, through Acton, towards the Sitwells rather than to Pound or Joyce and, through his own studies in the history of art, to the theories of Roger Fry rather than to Picasso or Braque. It did not, however, lead him to Conrad. Had Waugh known Graham Greene at Oxford, this might have been the case. But he didn't and it wasn't.

In the first volume of my biography, I stated that "There is no evidence of Waugh's having read *Heart of Darkness*"[4] but, on reading Dr Lobb, and thinking that I might have missed something, I checked the sources again: the published letters and diaries, Donat Gallagher's *Essays, Articles and Reviews*.[5] Nothing. Then I went to Robert Murray Davis's catalogue of the Waugh archive at Texas[6] and to the comprehensive bibliography of Waugh's work.[7] In the catalogue I found three references to Conrad. The first in a 1961 letter to Jocelyn Brooke mentions that Waugh had once lived in the Bishopsbourne house where Conrad died (E10, p. 68). The second and third are related: a 1957 letter from John Lehmann asking Waugh to contribute to a Conrad symposium and Waugh's reply by return, declining on the grounds that he was not a devotee (F27, 306; E74, 302). In Davis's

Section I, "Marginalia," there is no record of Waugh's having annotated any of Conrad's books. Finally, I went to my own files of unpublished and unrecorded correspondence. Nothing. On the basis of this evidence at least, it would seem unlikely that Waugh had engaged with Conrad's writing.

Does this matter? To be fair to Dr Lobb, he does not argue that Waugh *liked* Conrad's work. Quite the reverse. "Waugh, the Catholic convert," we read, "could not endorse Conrad's vision of nothingness […]" (132-33). Nevertheless, the suggestion that Waugh was influenced by Conrad is everywhere implicit: "The surface parallels are obvious enough: a dangerous river journey, an encounter with a sinister, possibly mad European who tyrranises over [sic] the natives, and a revelation. It is the differences between the two narratives, however, which reveal Waugh's themes and the reasons for the allusions" (132). The suggestion here is that Waugh is in part carefully re-writing *Heart of Darkness* and that his "allusions" are essential to the intertextual play of *A Handful of Dust*. In fact, it is quite possible that Waugh had never read Conrad's novella. Extraordinary as this might seem, one has to remember that his reading in contemporary literature was far from comprehensive and that his eclectic approach is not unusual among working writers. He read the work of his friends—Harold Acton, John Betjeman, Robert Byron, Cyril Connolly, Henry Green, Graham Greene, Nancy Mitford, Anthony Powell etc.—and he read extensively among other authors to make money by reviewing. He read books on art history and architecture for pleasure. The rest of his time he spent writing, travelling or just enjoying himself. As a rule, he did not much care for reading. If he disliked authors, no matter how distinguished, he would not dutifully plough through them, let alone make allusions to their work. And he apparently disliked Conrad. He also for most of his career stayed away from Ford Madox Ford and Henry James, Greene's other two Masters, only coming round to James in his last decade as the solace of his declining years. As to Joyce and the other 'High Modernists,' Waugh, like Larkin, thought they indulged their neuroses in a kind of literary madness.

How, we might ask, could Waugh arrive at an aversion to Conrad's work without reading it? In responding to this, one must either concede that at some stage, perhaps at school, he had dipped into one or other of the books. But it is equally possible that he simply did not like the sound of them when he heard others debating their themes. Waugh would, of course, have got his *Heart of Darkness* pre-digested through *The Waste Land* and Eliot's poems generally. He would have known the plot-line, and he might have been parodying some of it in "The Man Who Liked Dickens," the short story he wrote in Brazil during February 1933.[8] Shortly afterwards he echoed it in a 1933 time-travel story, "Out of Depth,"[9] in which a forty-three-year-old American, Rip Van Winkle, born a Catholic, has become a fashionable agnostic and is transported to the primitive civilization of the twenty-fifth century. The source of *A Handful of Dust* was, Waugh said, his own "The Man Who Liked Dickens": "The idea came quite naturally from the experience of visiting [in British Guiana] a lonely settler [Mr Christie] of that kind and reflecting how easily he could hold me prisoner." After it was published: "the idea kept working in my mind. I wanted to discover how the prisoner got there, and eventually the thing grew into a study of other sorts of savage at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them." Thus the novel "began at the end,"[10] and so skilful was Waugh's literary carpentry that he managed to join the majority of the novel to the tale almost without alteration ("Henty" becomes "Tony Last"; "McMaster," "Todd"). The bulk of the story's original typescript is dovetailed into the MS, corresponding to the chapter "A Côté de Chez Todd" (an allusion to Proust, another author Waugh claimed not to have read).

There is no reference to Conrad here, then,—unless we see "Todd" (or 'Tod,' meaning 'death' in German) as a nod towards "Kurtz" ('kurz' meaning 'short' in German)—and none in Waugh's response to Henry Yorke's criticism of the "A Côté […]" chapter. Yorke felt that this section was "fantastic" and threw the credibility of the rest "out of proportion." Up to that point, he commented, the novel was "a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again

[…].” After it, we enter “phantasy with a ph […]. I was terrified that at the end you would let him die of fever which to my mind would have been false but what you did to him was far worse. It seemed manufactured and not real.”[11] Waugh replied: “You must remember that to me the savages come into the category of ‘people one has met and may at any moment meet again.’” He agreed that the Todd episode was “fantastic”: “But the Amazon stuff had to be there. The scheme was a Gothic man in the hands of savages—first Mrs. Beaver etc. then the real ones, finally the silver foxes at Hetton. All that quest for a city seems to me justifiable symbolism.”[12]

Presumably the “quest for a city” was intended to act as a parodic *leit-motif* echoing the Christian soul’s search for the city of God. This idea, and its relation to class-consciousness in Waugh’s fiction, has been brilliantly developed by Frank Kermode in an essay that Dr Lobb, rather oddly, does not cite.[13] Nevertheless, if we are in search of a source for the theme, in addition to the long history of Christian poetry and fiction, there is one much closer to hand than *Heart of Darkness* or, indeed, *The Waste Land*.

On 25 April 1925, Lieutenant-Colonel P. H. Fawett, D.S.O., had set off with his son and another young Englishman, Raleigh Rimmell, into the unexplored interior of the Matto Grosso. Fawcett, a war hero of legendary courage and endurance, was a character from *Boy’s Own* or the *Wide World Magazine* sprung to life, and his exploit captured the imagination of the British and American public. A Portuguese document from 1743 had come into his hands recording an expedition to the heart of the Central Plateau and the discovery of a lost city. Fawcett and his two companions were on a quest to find it—and disappeared without trace. The last dispatch from him was dated 30 May 1925. From that time until 1933 and beyond, the mystery obsessed the Press on both sides of the Atlantic. Apocryphal reports came back of sightings. Further expeditions were launched to discover the truth, one including Waugh’s distant friend, Peter Fleming (brother of Ian). Fleming sailed for Brazil in June 1932, six months before Waugh’s departure for British Guiana. Both were intending to

defray expenses by writing travel books and were thus in a sense in direct competition. Both were writing against the backdrop of Fawcett, about whom: "Enough legend has grown up […] to form a new and separate branch of folk-lore."[14]

Fleming wrote,

> I found myself committed to a venture for which Rider Haggard might have written the plot and Conrad designed the scenery. […]
> In 1927 the Colonel's fate offered a fascinating field for speculation. Was he alive? Was he the captive of an Indian tribe? Had he been made a god? Had he voluntarily renounced civilization in favour of the jungle? These and many other alternatives were debated hotly. They are still being debated today; before me lies an article from a Sunday newspaper of recent date, headed "Is Jack Fawcett Buddha?"[15]

It would seem clear from this that Fleming *had* read *Heart of Darkness* (he had achieved a First in English Literature at Oxford) and that he was ready to invoke Conrad as context for his own story. On the other hand, his record is light-hearted and anti-heroic. The privations, he says in the Foreword, were slight. The only thing his party discovered was an unknown tributary to a tributary of the Amazon. The temptation to vamp up the "Terrors of the Jungle," "all the paraphernalia of tropical mumbo jumbo,"[16] had been resisted.

When Fleming's *Brazilian Adventure* appeared in August 1933, Waugh reviewed it for the *Spectator*.[17] He found it, he said, "an arresting and absorbing book" and devoted his first paragraph to providing quotable eulogy. Waugh was sure, he said, that the book would secure "a very wide success." As the review progresses, however, it becomes clear that he finds the constant self-consciousness about not falling into the trap of romancing the jungle rather tiresome, and the second part about the return journey and Major Pingle far more engaging. Having returned in February, Waugh had put off writing his own travel book, *Ninety-Two Days* (1934),[18] for five months, partly because he had little or no enthusiasm for recording "a journey of the greatest misery,"[19] partly because he returned to even more misery—Ernest Oldmeadow, editor of the *Tablet*, had defamed *Black*

Mischief (1932) as a "disgrace to anybody professing the Catholic name,"[20] and the case for the annulment of Waugh's first marriage, in which he and his ex-wife had to appear, was coming before the ecclesiastical court—but also, perhaps, because he was soon faced by Fleming's account of a trek across similar territory, and one which would plainly become a best-seller. Fleming's expedition is recounted as a public-school romp with the sang-froid of a sceptical sahib uninmpressed by danger.

At twenty-four, Fleming had already lived in China and America, was an experienced huntsman and skier. In his prefatory photograph, he stands handsomely casual in open-necked shirt, one hand in his trouser pocket, and with a pipe gripped between the white teeth of a welcoming smile: a man's man but gentle. He had taken leave from his job as Literary Editor of the *Spectator* to search for Fawcett, was in the company of two other Old Etonians of equally pugnacious self-confidence and courage, and was in Brazil as *The Times*'s special correspondent. Waugh's journey was to nearby wilderness but could scarcely have been more different. It was an escape from depression (his offer of marriage to Teresa Jungman had just been refused) into further depression. Fleming was in congenial company; Waugh was alone. Fleming took keen interest in flora and fauna, had a gift for landscape description, and this book thrills with the *joie de vivre* of youth: wading up rivers through piranhas, sting ray and alligators, perched in a tree with a prairie fire raging round his feet, striking out across country in which the local Indians were terrified and against the advice of Pingle, their ostensible 'leader' who had himself turned back. Waugh's trip was more gloomy and penitential. Nothing much "happened" in either excursion but where to Fleming everything was "amusing," to Waugh very little was. The landscape passed him by as a dreary panorama of barbarism. Yet he had to make his living from writing and his attempts to write short travel pieces for *The Passing Show* in a 1933 series entitled "I Step Off the Map," had been unsuccessful. Fleming's boyish enthusiasm seems to grate. The display of

his public-school humour "expresses an attitude of mind that seriously cramps a work of literature."[21]

In short, Waugh felt much older than Fleming, although the age-gap between them was just five years, and deemed himself a more serious literary craftsman. "I Step Off the Map" had more than literal significance to Waugh, who was moving beyond the cartographical limits of Western humanism which produced Fleming's attitude of mind, and into which he was contentedly re-absorbed on his return. What attracts Waugh in *Brazilian Adventure* is the portrait of Pingle, the false leader who effectively leaves Fleming to die in the interior, having impounded his mail, money and revolver. Pingle is like a malicious and cowardly Captain Grimes from *Decline and Fall* (1928), or Youkoumian from *Black Mischief* (1932), a chimerical figure offering hope of security and authority, who is simultaneously insecure, egotistical, governed entirely by self-preservation in the material world. "Where is Pingle now?"[22] Waugh demands. And the answer is (metaphorically) everywhere apparent in his own writing. Pingle is ubiquitous as a totem of the failure of rationalism. Waugh, it seems, was intrigued by Pingle as the archetype of the con-man, just as he was intrigued by Jagger in "The Man Who Liked Dickens" ("Kakophilos" in the revised 1936 text), and the fraudulent magician not unlike Alastair Crowley in "Out of Depth" who transports Rip to the future wasteland. Waugh had met his own Fawcett in Christie, his own Pingle in Mr Bain and Dr Roth. Pingle, Bain and Roth, it seems, provided material for the creation of Dr Messinger in *A Handful of Dust*. The quest for the "sources" of that novel, then, might not lead us to Conrad but rather to a political Catholicism that sees the True Church as the only bulwark against chaos.

In *Ninety-Two Days* Waugh says:

> For myself and many better than me, there is a fascination in distant and barbarous places, and particularly in the borderlands of conflicting cultures and states of development, where ideas, uprooted from their traditions, become oddly changed in transplantation. It is there that I find the experience vivid enough to demand translation into literary form.[23]

This denotes a major difference between Waugh's writing and Fleming's. Where Fleming floats gaily through potential disaster on a raft of fashionable scepticism, what he encounters rarely throws into relief the parallel barbarities of his homeland. *Brazilian Adventure* is peppered with literary references but they are occasional decorations, showings-off. And in terms of developing a critique of the view from Western Eyes, Waugh is clearly closer to Conrad than to his contemporary. It might seem strange, then, that no mention of Conrad is made throughout *Ninety-Two Days* or *Remote People* (1931), Waugh's earlier travelogue detailing a visit to Africa, including a river journey on the Congo. But it is not strange. Waugh's cultural focus opposed Conrad's. Even if we suppose that Waugh *had* read *Heart of Darkness* at some stage (and, it must be admitted, there is one striking parallel in "Out of Depth," where Rip has his head measured with callipers), the fact of his refusing to acknowledge Conrad's work as an influence suggests an alternative interpretation to Dr Lobb's. Far from making *hommages* to Conrad, Waugh was rejecting him out of hand. Waugh's Congo journey was not one towards the heart of darkness and the fascination of the abominable. Rather it was an escape from cultural deprivation, an attempt to return to the security of Christian civilization, a critique of that aspect of his own culture which had abandoned the transcendental truths of Catholicism and settled for the absurdities of the material world alone or for half-baked mysticism.

In his public letter defending *Black Mischief* against Oldmeadow's attack, Waugh wrote:

> The story deals with the conflict of civilization, with all its attendant and deplorable ills, and barbarism. The plan of my book was to keep the darker aspect of barbarism continuously and unobtrusively present, a black and mischievous background against which the civilized and semi-civilized characters performed their parts […].[24]

This might be said to characterise the structure of all of Waugh's pre-war novels after *Decline and Fall*, and although an aspect of this can be related to Conrad's scenarios, the basic proposition is quite different.

Where Conrad leads us away from the delusions and hypocrisies of Christian civilization (the "whited sepulchre" of Brussels in *Heart of Darkness*, the necessary lie to the Intended), Waugh has an implicit alternative ideology that is not subject to epistemological collapse. He writes, as it were, Catholic novels by negative suggestion, describing the anarchy of a world attempting to maintain its sanity in ignorance, or in rejection, of the True Faith. Reality for Waugh is not the misty, shifting perspectives of Conrad's impressionist existentialism, or even Marlow's rivets (the attention to work as a salve to the agony of dissolution). It is the idea that the supernatural is the real—but only the supernatural as mediated by the Catholic Church. All other attempts to engage with the mystical (and here, as Dr Lobb suggests, Mme. Sosostris from *The Waste Land* was a crucial image) are lampooned: black magicians, fortune tellers, Moslems, Buddhists, Anglicans. The priest at the mission is the only one who can rescue Rip. Tony Last's watery Anglicanism cannot save him from madness and alienation. But by implication, it is possible to be saved, where in Conrad's fiction it is not.

Dr Lobb therefore draws our attention to the concept of "civilization": "[the] whole world is not civilized in the way Jock [Grant-Menzies] means, as Tony is about to discover, and 'civilization' in the twentieth century is an increasingly problematic term" (132). Indeed: and as "[t]his brings us to […] Conrad, whose dismantling of 'civilization' resonates through all twentieth-century literature" (132), it is worth pausing here to discuss Waugh's understanding of this term and its relation to the Gothic, humanism and Victorianism.

Shortly after his religious conversion in September 1930, Waugh wrote an article explaining his views on "civilization." "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," he wrote, "the choice before any educated European was between Christianity […] and […] a polite and highly attractive scepticism." No longer. It had taken two centuries, he says, for people to realise the "real nature of this loss of faith" and the situation was now similar to that in the early middle ages where the choice was "between Christianity and Chaos":

> Today we can see it on all sides as the active negation of all that Western culture has stood for. Civilization—and by this I do not mean talking cinemas and tinned food, nor even surgery and hygienic houses, but the whole moral and artistic organization of Europe—has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance. […] It is no longer possible, as it was in the time of Gibbon, to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis on which it rests. […] Christianity […] is in greater need of combative strength than it has been for centuries.[25]

Using this as the basis of his argument, he goes on to state that "Christianity exists in its most complete and vital form in the Roman Catholic Church."[26] Aesthetic and spiritual values, then, were linked in Waugh's mind and he was in the business of defending both through his defence of Catholicism, the essential focus for him of all these questions and the repository of transhistorical truths. Decline and fall were no longer the subject for jokes. "Civilization" had nothing to do with material 'progress.' Conrad's brand of "attractive scepticism" led simply to anarchy.

In analysing *A Handful of Dust*, Dr Lobb rightly draws attention to the imagery of Victorian Gothic architecture, seeing this as an ironical structural motif. Three sections of the novel are, after all, entitled "English Gothic." This Dr Lobb links to "the bankruptcy of what Waugh called 'humanism'—the system of social restraints and secular moral codes severed from the Judeo-Christian tradition which gave rise to them" (132-33). This is fair enough as a ball-park generalisation. The devil, however, lies in the detail: the definition of "Gothic" and of "humanism." If one is to use these terms regarding Waugh, one must also acknowledge that his understanding of them did not always tally with their generally accepted definition. The 'Gothic' and the 'humanist,' for instance, did not necessarily signify to him something negative just as the 'civilized' in contemporary liberal terms might not connote anything positive.

I have written at length about the Gothic motif in *A Handful of Dust*[27] and won't repeat the argument in detail. The important point is that Waugh admired medieval Gothic and the early Gothic Revival in

Britain; he despised post-Ruskin Gothic. In the MS of *A Handful of Dust*, the Guide Book description of Hetton Abbey was carefully revised. "Hetton Castle" has been altered to "Hetton Abbey," "the Castle" to "the house," and "fine paintings" to "good portraits." In other words, Waugh was playing down the original conception of the house as some kind of Brideshead, a focus of aesthetic value. More interesting, though, is a passage which appears in the MS but which was presumably cut at TS stage: "It was a huge building conceived in the late generation of the Gothic revival [sic] when the movement had lost its fantasy, and become structurally logical and stodgy" (MS 19). In a letter, Waugh referred to instructions to the "architect," i.e. the artist, who had drawn the frontispiece aerial view of Hetton. Waugh had asked him to design "the worst possible 1860"[28] and thought he had done an excellent job. We cannot simply assume, as Dr Lobb appears to, that "Victorian Gothic" in general was anathema to Waugh as "the synthetic revivalist style popularised by A. N. W. Pugin" (131). In fact, Waugh was a great admirer of Pugin. The point is that Pugin's original conception had been appropriated by the corporate dullardry of Victorian architects, and that Tony cannot tell the difference.

Similar distinctions are necessary when discussing Waugh's use of the word 'humanism.' In response to Oldmeadow's attacks (he abused *A Handful of Dust*, too), Waugh determined to present himself unequivocally as a Catholic apologist by next writing a biography of an English Jesuit martyr and donating the proceeds to Campion Hall, Oxford. *Edmund Campion* (1935) opens with a gruesome image of the shrunken Queen Elizabeth I on the point of death and then tracks back through her thoughts to Campion's story. He is described as a brilliant young Oxford tutor in the heyday of Elizabethan material expansion when the University was emerging from the middle ages "into the spacious, luminous world of Catholic humanism." This world was made possible by the international connections of the Catholic faith. In these terms, Erasmus and Sir Thomas More were both humanists and both remained Catholics. This humanism,

however, was qualitatively different from the humanism of the Protestant reformers, of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I. While the Church held "undisputed authority," it could tolerate "a little speculative fancy in her philosophers, a pagan exuberance of taste in her artists." Post-Reformation, however, it was "driven to defend the basis and essential structure of her faith." This is what the book is really about: that, thanks to Campion and his fellows, Catholicism has remained "something historically and continuously English, seeking to recover only what has been taken from it by theft […]."[29] And this is what *A Handful of Dust* is really about, although there is no mention of Catholicism in the novel beyond Tony's brief interlude with Thérèse on the boat to Brazil, an incident Waugh rather regretted including as sentimental.

How can this be, and what does all this have to do with 'English Gothic' and humanism? It can be because Waugh was presenting a negative image of a purely secular world, or, at least, a world whose sense of theology was diluted by the humanism of the Reformers. *A Handful of Dust* started out, he told Lady Mary Lygon, as a book about adultery.[30] As it progressed, that theme broadened and sexual adultery (as in *The Waste Land*) became emblematic of other kinds of cultural dilution and fragmentation: the demolition of grand houses in London to make way for service flats such as the one in which Brenda prosecutes her loveless affair with Beaver; Tony's (and the vicar's) compromised, effete Anglicanism; the death of John Andrew and Brenda's relief that it is her son rather than her lover who has been killed; Princess Abdul Akbar's offering her sexual services to cheer Tony up. Throughout, the essential moral and social fabric of pre-Reformation Catholicism is seen to have disintegrated, and this is symbolised by Tony's inability to distinguish between real Gothic, the artistic vitality of the early Gothic revival, and the fakery of Hetton. So when Waugh says in 1946 that *A Handful of Dust* "dealt entirely with behaviour. It was humanist and contained all I had to say about humanism,"[31] he uses the term 'humanism' in the post-Reformation sense of rationalism in a secular society.

It is in this light that he also interprets late Gothic revival and the works of Dickens. Waugh, as we now know, was an avid collector of Victorian furniture and subject paintings, thought British painting had been in terminal decline since Augustus Egg, and had no time for Picasso or abstraction. In the light of this, we might have expected him to admire the great Victorian novelists. But he didn't. He thought them cumbersome sentimentalists deluded by the ideology of Progress which in Britain had been tailored round the dummy of flexible (and thus feeble) Anglican theology. Victorianism thus becomes a complex trope in Waugh's writing. In 1932, he delivered a radio broadcast clearly aimed at his father, Arthur Waugh, a figure of Pickwickian geniality to his colleagues, editor of the Nonesuch edition of Dickens, and Managing Director of Chapman & Hall, Dickens's publishers. It was in a series "To an Unnamed Listener" to which Arthur contributed the following week with "To a Young Man." Waugh's was "To an Old Man":

> […] particularly I should like to ask you [i.e. 'an old man'] what it must have felt like to live in an age of Progress. But that is now a word that must be dismissed from our conversation before anything of real interest can be said. I daresay that this comes less easily to you than to me because belief in Progress—that is to say in a process of inarrestable, beneficial change, was an essential part of your education. You were told that man was a perfectible being already well set on the last phase of his ascent from ape to angel, that he would yearly become healthier, wealthier and wiser until, somewhere about the period we are now living, he would have attained a condition of unimpaired knowledge and dignity and habitual, ecstatic self-esteem.[32]

The argument against his father and Dickens, then, is an argument against Social Darwinism that seemed particularly absurd in the wake of the First World War and in the middle of the Depression. It is thus also an attack on the purely materialist construction of 'civilization.' But it is more than this. It is implicitly also an argument against the Reformation whose fragmentation of what Waugh saw as a sensibly coherent European culture had adulterated humankind's grasp on the supernatural as the real.

If we now return to the questions raised earlier, to the supposed influence of Conrad, the definitions of civilization, Gothic and of humanism, we might have a clearer perspective on the ideas that lay behind *A Handful of Dust*. One matter Dr Lobb deals with very well is what he terms the novel's "cultural amnesia" (141), and he goes on to quote a passage describing Jenny Abdul Akbar's London flat:

> The Princess's single room was furnished promiscuously and with truly Eastern disregard for the right properties of things; swords meant to adorn the state robes of a Moorish caid were swung from the picture rail; mats made for prayer were strewn on the divan; the carpet on the floor had been made in Bokhara as a wall covering; while over the dressing-table was draped a shawl made in Yokahama for sale to cruise-passengers; an octagonal table from Port Said held a Tibetan Buddha of pale soapstone; six ivory elephants from Bombay stood along the top of the radiator. Other cultures, too, were represented by a set of Lalique bottles and powder boxes, a phallic fetish from Senegal, a Dutch copper bowl, a waste-paper basket made of varnished aquatints, a golliwog presented at the gala dinner of a seaside hotel, a dozen or so framed photographs of the Princess, a garden scene ingeniously constructed in pieces of coloured wood, a radio set in fumed oak, Tudor style. In so small a room the effect was distracting. (131, qtd 141)

Dr Lobb's comment on this extract is perceptive: "In its mixing of sacred and secular, this scene echoes Part II of *The Waste Land*, in which 'sevenbranched candelabra' are used profanely to illuminate a woman's dressing-table (ll. 77-85); in its embrace of high and low from various cultures, the deracinated jumble of 'fragments […] shored against my ruins' looks back to the macaronic concluding lines of *The Waste Land* and forward to Tony's culturally and morally incoherent view of the City" (142). This makes perfectly good sense (setting aside the question of whether "fragments" can be "deracinated"). But it could have been so much more powerful an argument had closer attention been paid to the details of both texts.

A student once pointed out to me that Eliot's boudoir scene with its overblown decoration and sense of oppressive 'luxury' might not necessarily be describing the opulence of the Cleopatra figure. It might equally serve as the description of a brothel. She could be a

queen or a whore or both. Thus 'luxury' here becomes double-edged in the new and the old sense of the word. Indeed the whole section shivers with Eliot's sexual neurosis displaced by way of mock-heroic satire onto the socially dysfunctional. And the same might be said of Waugh's description which hinges, crucially, on that double-edged adverb "promiscuously."

Corrections to the MS suggest that he struggled with how to express his subject's libertinage, and in the following quotation, bracketed words represent deletions: "The Princess's single room was [heavy with perfume] [perfumed oriental promiscuity] furnished [with typically eastern] promiscuously […]."[33] From this it would seem that the original conception ("heavy with perfume") was even closer to Eliot's original. But it would also seem that, sensitive to Oldmeadow's accusations of licentiousness, Waugh was determined to avoid any hint of titillation. The resulting construction, however, is perfect, causing that crucial adverb to wobble etymologically and to suggest promiscuity both in sexual relations and in taste. The two discourses are related, interdependent. It is not simply that there is a jumble of high and low, sacred and profane. There is also an appeal to absolute aesthetic and moral standards, to "the right properties of things." The room is an assortment of contemporary popular art—the Lalique bottles (Art Deco), the garden scene of wooden mosaic (Edwardian English), the Tudor-style radio in fumed oak (an hilarious echo of the Edwardian fad for Tudor-style everything from suburban houses to new pubs to the notion of 'Elizabethanism' as essentially English)—with the detritus of the Princess's travels (the swords, shawls, mats, elephants, the Buddha). Everything is in its wrong place (the ivory elephants will crack on the radiator) and promiscuously distributed without discrimination. It is, like Tony's bedroom, a chaos of cultural signifiers but it is, also like Tony's room, the reflection of an infantile mind. And it is that sense of vulnerability which rescues the satire of both Waugh and Eliot from sneering. One might note that other Eliot reference to the "divan," recalling Tiresias's melancholy, empathetic overview of having "foresuffered" all that swims into his view

"[e]nacted on that same divan or bed."[34] Waugh's final euphemism is, again, precisely judged. To describe this scene as merely "distracting" is in one sense coyly comic, in another, tragic. Distraction—from the kind of intellectual suicide registered by the room, from the "right properties" of things aesthetic and moral, from the supernatural as the real—is what this mess signifies.

In Waugh's vision, as in Conrad's, the material is rendered phantasmagoric, and the phantasmagoric, real. But where Conrad, or rather Marlow, cannot distinguish between the lie and the truth, between the impression and the 'fact,' Waugh believes it to be imperative to do so. As Marlow approaches the heart of darkness, the Western certainties with which he began his expedition, melt; the very physicality of the world begins to disintegrate. In Waugh, Tony's nightmares in the jungle are both delusions and metaphors for the truth he could not face at home. In the famous hallucinatory scene quoted by Dr Lobb (136-37), the image of the Lost City dazzles our anti-hero with ramparts and battlements, music and something like a pageant. Dr Lobb's comment on this is, again, apposite: "This is a pretty, Pre-raphaelite dream—Hetton without problems, Camelot without adultery, the City of God without Doctrine, all imposed upon an alien culture about which Tony knows nothing. The sacred is mixed with the profane, the familiar with the exotic, and belief is irrelevant in this sentimental vision of the ideal" (137). The argument is that Tony, like Marlow and Kurtz, has his moment of revelation on realising that "There is no city," albeit during his delirium and with no textual guarantee that he remembers this when recovered. But this is somehow unsatisfactory if the conclusion is that, because "Like Kafka's baffled protagonists, Tony undergoes his trials without any sense of their meaning" (137), the revelation of meaninglessness can be aligned to that in *Heart of Darkness*. It is unsatisfactory because it fails to acknowledge a level of irony implicit in the Catholic consciousness that produced this work. It is not that there is no City. It is merely that Tony's essentially secular mind can only conceive of it in terms of "a pretty, Pre-Raphaelite dream."

It might amuse readers to learn that the scene in question appears to have been partially borrowed from Fleming rather than from Conrad:

> I fell asleep, to dream that, in the office of that august weekly journal [the *Spectator*] from which it was now certain that I should outstay my leave, I was commissioning Miss Ethel M. Dell (who wore, I noticed, a beard) to write an obituary of Major Pingle. I said that I was authorised to offer her a pyjama jacket and two metres of tobacco: not more. "Not more," I kept repeating, until she took offence and changed into the Headmaster of Eton.[35]

Waugh does much more with it, of course. Where Fleming is dozing off contentedly, the account of Tony's delusions hovers painfully between farce and nightmare. But the correspondence is striking and it might just be possible that Waugh was parodying Fleming here, his literariness, his boyish enthusiasm, the regression to the childhood figure of authority, the headmaster of Eton, who seems to have appeared in order to reprimand offensive behaviour towards women.

More interesting as a parallel, though, is a passage from *Ninety-Two Days*:

> Already in the few hours of my sojourn there, the Boa Vista of my imagination had come to grief. Gone, engulfed in earthquake, uprooted by a tornado and tossed sky-high like chaff in the wind, scorched up with brimstone like Gomorrah, toppled over with trumpets like Jericho, ploughed like Carthage, bought, demolished and transported brick by brick to another continent as though it had taken the fancy of Mr Hearst; tall Troy was down.[36]

Set this alongside a much-quoted passage from *A Handful of Dust*:

> A whole Gothic world had come to grief … there was now no armour glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorn had fled …[37]

Waugh is surely not mocking himself in the first extract, although the mock-heroic narrative of fiasco and anti-climax was very much in the 'modern' style of travel writing. Fleming does it all the time. These texts persistently make copy from nothing happening, predicted

delights and solaces failing to materialise. The "tall Troy" reference comes (slightly mangled) from D. G. Rossetti, the subject of Waugh's first book and something of an aesthetic hero. It would be easy to read the *Ninety-Two Days* passage as an overdone joke or simply as pompous. But it might be as well to recall, while we are in the business of restoring historical context to the novel, that it was the first in which Waugh dealt directly with the most painful event in his life, and the one which led to his becoming a Catholic: the desertion of his first wife.

Waugh knew only too well the sense of utter desolation felt by Tony who "had got into the habit of loving and trusting Brenda,"[38] and *A Handful of Dust*, like *Brideshead Revisited*, is an unusually personal book for Waugh. It may be "about the cost of idealism and the futility of nostalgia," but it is also about the need for idealism and the writer's nostalgia for a world in which it once existed. When Evelyn Gardner left Waugh, his sense of the collapse of the known world was exactly like Tony's. "I did not know," he wrote to Harold Acton at the time, "it was possible to be so miserable & live but I am told that this is a common experience."[39] His novel translates the banality of that experience into something both epic and uniquely painful but also temporary and farcical *sub specie aeternitatis*. It speaks of how it is possible to be so miserable and still to live.

Had Waugh never become a Catholic, Tony Last's revelation that "there is no City" might legitimately be read alongside "Mistah Kurtz, he dead" as a statement of epistemological collapse. But there was only one epistemology for Conrad, that of Western scepticism, where for Waugh there were two: that of the rational world with its delusions of Progress, and that of theology, the Queen of the Sciences as it was known in Campion's day. When Waugh explained that *A Handful of Dust* said all he had to say about humanism, he quickly moved on to speak of *Brideshead*. The former, he remarked, used to be his favourite. No longer. *Brideshead* was "vastly more ambitious." Why? Because it demonstrated "a preoccupation with style and the attempt to represent man more fully, which, to me, means only one thing, man

in his relation to God."[40] It was no more popular a view of literary aesthetics in 1946 than it is now. Edmund Wilson promptly withdrew his support and critics talk of Waugh's faith as an enabling myth, like his idea of the British aristocracy, as an embarrassment when dealing with an otherwise brilliant observer of human folly. But there his faith is, and it is there by implication as much in *A Handful of Dust* as it is explicit in his post-war fiction. It is legitimate to detect parallels between any literary works to demonstrate elements of the *zeitgeist*. It is a different order of debate to detect the influence of one work on another where no influence is recorded in literary history. Here we are in the realms of deconstruction rather than of new historicism, and Dr Lobb's essay appears not to embrace the sliding signifier with enthusiasm. Does this mean that it is a 'bad' essay, misinformed, naïve? Not a bit of it. It is lively, fluently written and astutely argued. As with all engaging criticism battling to make connections, its great virtue is that it prompts discussion.

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NOTES

[1]"Why the Man Who Loved Dickens Reads Dickens Instead of Conrad: Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*," *Novel* 13.2 (1980): 171-87.

[2]*The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983).

[3]"Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-Class Novel," *Critical Essays on Evelyn Waugh*, ed. James F. Carens (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987).

[4]*Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years: 1903-1939* (London: Dent, 1986; New York: Norton, 1987) 267.

[5]*The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (London: Methuen, 1983). Cited hereafter as *EAR*.

[6]*A Catalogue of the Evelyn Waugh Collection At the Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin* (Troy, NY: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1981).

[7]Robert Murray Davis, Paul A. Doyle, Donat Gallagher, Charles E. Linck, and Winnifred M. Boggards, eds., *A Bibliography of Evelyn Waugh* (Troy, NY: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1986).

[8]"The Man Who Liked Dickens," *Hearst's International* combined with *Cosmopolitan* Sept. 1933: 54-57, 127-30.

[9]"Out of Depth—An Experiment Begun in Shaftesbury Avenue and Ended in Time," *Harper's Bazaar* Mar. 1933: 46-48, 106.

[10] "Fan-Fare," *Life* 8 Apr. 1946; repr. *EAR*, 300-04, 303.

[11]See Mark Amory (ed.), *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) n1, 88-89. Cited hereafter as *Letters*.

[12]*Letters* 88.

[13]"Mr Waugh's Cities," *Encounter* 15 (Nov. 1960): 63-66, 68-70. Waugh replied to this essay: "Evelyn Waugh Replies," *Encounter* 15 (Dec. 1960): 83: "Your review [sic] […] imputes to me the absurd and blasphemous opinion that divine grace is 'confined' to the highest and lowest class."

[14]Peter Fleming, *Brazilian Adventure* (London: Cape, 1933; repr. World Books, 1940) 98.

[15]Fleming 18, 26.

[16]Fleming 9.

[17]"Mr Fleming in Brazil," *Spectator* 11 Aug. 1933: 195-96; repr. *EAR* 136-38.

[18]*Ninety-Two Days: The Account of a Tropical Journey Through British Guiana and Part of Brazil* (London: Duckworth, 1934; New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934).

[19]Letter to Henry Yorke [May 1933], *Letters* 71.

[20]*Tablet* 7 Jan. 1933: 10. The *Tablet* was an official organ of the Catholic faith, the personal property of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, and to have his good faith impugned there (and in an editorial rather than a book review) shocked and infuriated Waugh. See *The Early Years* 336-42.

[21]"Mr Fleming in Brazil," *EAR* 137.

[22]"Mr Fleming in Brazil," 138.

[23]*Ninety-Two Days* 13-14.

[24]"An Open Letter to His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster," written 1933, first published in *Letters* 72-78, 77.

[25]"Converted to Rome […]," *Daily Express* 20 Oct. 1930; *EAR* 103-05, 103-04.

[26]"Converted to Rome […],"104.

[27]*The Early Years* 380-82.

[28]Letter to Tom Driberg [Sept. 1934], *Letters* 88.

[29]*Edmund Campion: Jesuit and Martyr* (London: Longman, 1935) 13, 14, 54.

[30]*Letters* 84.

[31]"Fan-Fare," *EAR* 304.

[32]"To an Unnamed Old Man," Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Texas, TS, 1-2.

[33]MS 55.

[34]T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922), "III. The Fire Sermon," 243-44.

[35]*Brazilian Adventure* 202.

[36]*Ninety-Two Days* 120.

[37]*A Handful of Dust* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1934; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951 and 1966) 151.

[38]*A Handful of Dust* 125.

[39]Sept. 1929, *Letters* 38.

[40]"Fan-Fare," *EAR* 302.

Connotations
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A Question of Influence and Experience: A Response to Edward Lobb*

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Edward Lobb's stimulating essay is a welcome addition to the criticism concerning Evelyn Waugh's fourth novel, *A Handful of Dust* (1934), thought by many to be his best. While some reviewers felt that the book contains "an uneasy mixture of realism and symbolism," Professor Lobb suggests that "many of these difficulties disappear when *A Handful of Dust* is read in terms of its cultural allusions and references to other writers, particularly Conrad and Eliot" (130). Citing Jerome Meckier's essay "Why the Man Who Liked Dickens Reads Dickens Instead of Conrad: Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*" (1980), Professor Lobb disagrees with Professor Meckier's conclusion that "Waugh connects Dickens with Conrad and satirizes both as instances of that recurring aberration which relies on the innermost humanity of man and accepts as irrevocable a secularized world" (Meckier 187). Instead, Professor Lobb argues, Waugh appreciated Conrad's "clear-eyed recognition that the twentieth century could not long maintain the fiction of moral values without a basis in belief," and the authors' agreement "makes the extended reference to *Heart of Darkness* in *A Handful of Dust* largely sympathetic" (136). An authority on T. S. Eliot, Professor Lobb finds that *A Handful of Dust* is "sympathetic to Eliot's depiction of spiritual quest [in *The Waste Land*] but blackly comic in its depiction of the protagonist and his fate" (138). Waugh's hero, Tony Last, "joins an expedition to find a lost city in Brazil, and, when the expedition goes disastrously wrong, is rescued and captured by the illiterate Mr. Todd, who forces him to read aloud the novels of Dick-

*Reference: Edward Lobb, "Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust*," *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 130-44.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/deblobb01312.htm>.

ens over and over" (Lobb 130-31). Thus, Professor Lobb concludes, *A Handful of Dust* fits into

> the pessimistic modern tradition of cultural analysis of which Conrad and Eliot were the most brilliant representatives […]. Tony's fate in the jungles of Brazil is not […] an aberration in an otherwise realistic novel, but a macabre and allusive image of humanism's dead end and a tribute to two of Waugh's literary fathers. (143)

The resolution of *A Handful of Dust* remains a subject of critical debate. Shortly before Professor Lobb's essay appeared, Jonathan Greenberg published "'Was Anyone Hurt?' The Ends of Satire in *A Handful of Dust*" (2003). Professors Greenberg and Lobb both defend Waugh's choice of an ending by drawing on other writers. Professor Lobb characterizes Waugh as the heir of a literary tradition, while Professor Greenberg invokes Sigmund Freud and his idea of the uncanny: "a psychoanalytic reading can help not only to establish thematic parallels between two parts of the novel, but also to explain why Waugh's novel breaks out of the confines of the drawing room, literally and figuratively" (362). Both Greenberg and Lobb cite the objections of Waugh's friend Henry Yorke: that the "fantastic" ending "throws the rest out of proportion," that Waugh is "mixing two things together," and that readers are left "in phantasy with a ph" (Lobb 134). Professors Greenberg and Lobb also quote parts of Waugh's response: he agreed that the ending is "fantastic" but wanted "to bring Tony to a sad end" and "made it an elaborate & improbable one." Tony's fate fulfilled Waugh's "scheme [of] a Gothic man in the hands of savages" (*Letters* 88). I would also defend the ending of *A Handful of Dust* with two additional arguments, both suggested by Waugh himself.

First, Henry Yorke, who published novels under the pseudonym Henry Green, was not the most likely person to appreciate Waugh's fantasy. As Waugh wrote to Yorke, "the savages […] appear fake to you largely because you don't really believe they exist" (*Letters* 88). James Gindin observes that Green's novels "suggest no transforma-

tions" (133), with their "deliberate limitations of perspective and subject matter" (135); Green's characters, moreover, are "reluctant to move or travel" (150). No wonder Yorke disapproved of Tony's sudden journey to South America and his imprisonment by an illiterate maniac.

Second, Waugh had a scheme for the novel. As Tony moves closer to his improbable fate, Waugh prepares his readers to accept it. Once he has gone into the bush, Tony comes down with fever. Delirious, he recalls most of the characters and events referred to in the previous 200 pages, and combines them in ways that can only be described as uncanny. At the end of chapter V, "In Search of a City," Tony imagines that he sees "the ramparts and battlements of the City" and that he hears "trumpets […] sounding along the walls, saluting his arrival" (*Handful* 233). Professor Lobb quotes this passage at length, and contrasts Tony with Conrad's Marlow. I would add that by the time Tony stumbles into the hands of his captor, the readers are prepared for anything. Though our reasons differ, Professors Greenberg, Lobb and I agree that Waugh's ending is justified.

The editor of Waugh's essays, Donat Gallagher, believes that placing Waugh in literary and cultural contexts is the most important task ahead in Waugh studies. Professor Lobb's essay is quite useful in this respect, as it explains Waugh's relationship with Conrad and Eliot. To Waugh specialists, however, it seems unlikely that *A Handful of Dust* is in part a reaction to *Heart of Darkness*. One of Waugh's biographers, Martin Stannard, points out that there is "no evidence of Waugh's having read *Heart of Darkness*" (267), a statement that Douglas Lane Patey confirms (101). In February 1931, Waugh visited the Congo and found conditions much like those described in *Heart of Darkness*. He kept a diary and wrote a book about his travels, *Remote People* (1931), but he never refers to Conrad (*Diaries* 351-53; *Waugh Abroad* 349-64). In late 1932 and early 1933, moreover, Waugh made a journey to South America like that of Tony Last in *A Handful of Dust*, described in his *Diaries* (354-85) and a travel book, *Ninety-Two Days* (1934). In British Guiana, Waugh stayed with a crazed rancher named Christie (*Waugh*

Abroad 431-36), and Waugh sensed "how easily" Christie could have kept him as a prisoner (*Essays* 303). Three weeks later in Brazil, Waugh wrote a short story, "The Man Who Liked Dickens" (1933), which became the penultimate chapter in *A Handful of Dust* (*Diaries* 371-72). In 1946, Waugh wrote that he had "wanted to discover how the prisoner got there, and eventually the thing grew into a study of other sorts of savage at home and the civilized man's helpless plight among them" (*Essays* 303). In 1949, Waugh wrote that he did not read Conrad "often or with any great enjoyment" (Doyle 10).

Since the origins of *A Handful of Dust* are well known, there is no need to repeat them, except to dispel the impression that the novel is largely derived from other literature. According to Professor Lobb, the similarities between *Heart of Darkness* and *A Handful of Dust* are "obvious enough," as they both include "an encounter with a sinister, possibly mad European who tyrannizes over the natives" (132). In *A Handful of Dust*, however, Tony asks his captor, Mr. Todd, if he is English. Mr. Todd replies that his "father was—at least a Barbadian," but his "mother was an Indian" (239). Whereas Mr. Kurtz is European, Mr. Todd is a colonial of mixed race; like Mr. Christie, whose face had, according to Waugh, "unmistakable negro structure" (*Waugh Abroad* 432-33). An Indian mother was more appropriate for the novel, because she taught her son that there is "medicine for everything in the forest" (*Handful* 239). Thus Mr. Todd is not only able to help Tony recover from fever, but is also able to knock Tony unconscious for two days, so that Tony evades the search party that is looking for him. Even if Waugh had read *Heart of Darkness*, the many differences between the two books weaken the case for Conrad's influence.

Professor Lobb, however, misses one opportunity to strengthen his case. He uses the 1964 revised edition of *A Handful of Dust*, as Robert Murray Davis does in *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* (1981). This edition includes, "as a curiosity," an "alternative ending" written by Waugh for the version of the novel serialized in *Harper's Bazaar*. Since "The Man Who Liked Dickens" had already appeared as a short story, the magazine insisted on a different resolution ("Preface," *Handful*). In the

alternative ending, Tony never meets Mr. Todd: he returns to England and keeps the flat his wife used to commit adultery, presumably because Tony is arranging his own acts of infidelity. According to Professor Lobb, Waugh sees "the Conradian alternatives—nihilism or the lie—[as] responses to the loss of religious faith" (136). Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended at the end of *Heart of Darkness*, but Tony's life at Hetton Abbey in *A Handful of Dust* is an example of "the *unconscious* lie (Dickensian sentiment and/or the belief that moral values are self-evident)," which "encourages passivity and drift" (Lobb 136). Professor Lobb considers Tony "[e]motionally and mentally incapable of nihilism or of real faith" (136); but, in the alternative ending, Tony embraces nihilism, bent on the same sort of behavior that has caused his wife's pregnancy. The two endings of *A Handful of Dust* correspond to the Conradian alternatives of nihilism or the lie, though the case for Conrad's influence remains only circumstantial.

Professor Lobb's case for Eliot's influence on *A Handful of Dust* is stronger, and he makes a number of intriguing points that I can only gloss. According to Professor Lobb, "the relationship of Brenda and Tony throughout *A Handful of Dust* is intended to refer thematically to the impotent-king motif and dramatically to the weak husband/strong wife scenes in *The Waste Land*" (138). It is perhaps worth adding that Brenda and her sister Marjorie were before marriage known as "the lovely Rex ['king'] sisters" (*Handful* 44). Professor Lobb suggests that Tony's quest to find "the City" stems from the same theme in *The Waste Land* (142). When Tony enters Mr. Todd's ranch and imagines himself at last in the City, Professor Lobb describes the scene as a "pretty, Pre-Raphaelite dream" (137) and provides an endnote: "Waugh wrote a book on the Pre-Raphaelites (1926), and the resemblance of this imagined scene to the pseudo-medieval landscapes of the school is not accidental" (144). Professor Lobb's connection is astute, but he is too generous to call *P. R. B.* a book. Waugh's subtitle is accurate: *An Essay on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 1847-1854*, privately printed in a tiny edition of 25 pages. There is more evidence of Waugh's abiding interest in the Pre-Raphaelites, such as his first real

book, *Rossetti: His Life and Works* (1928), or his eventual acquisition of Pre-Raphaelite paintings: Rossetti's *Spirit of the Rainbow*, Holman Hunt's *Oriana*, and "a version of *The Woodman's Child* by Arthur Hughes" (Hastings 532). *Ninety-Two Days* also has a Pre-Raphaelite quality: Waugh imagines that the object of his journey, Boa Vista in Brazil, is a city of "fountains and flowering shrubs," with "dark beauties languorous on balconies" (*Waugh Abroad* 459). When the city turns out to be only a "ramshackle huddle of buildings" (*Waugh Abroad* 456), the Boa Vista of Waugh's imagination is "toppled over with trumpets like Jericho" (*Waugh Abroad* 459). Waugh's own journey to Boa Vista clearly inspired Tony Last's quest and realization that "There is no City" (*Handful* 238), though Waugh himself had followed Colonel P. H. Fawcett and Peter Fleming. In 1925, Fawcett went to Brazil to find a lost city and disappeared; Fleming tried to find Fawcett and wrote about the experience in *Brazilian Adventure* (1933). *The Waste Land* may have stimulated Waugh's interest in the quest for the City, but the poem was only one of several influences.

In his letter to Henry Yorke, Waugh explains that the ending of *A Handful of Dust* is "a 'conceit' in the Webster manner" (*Letters* 88). Professor Lobb does not quote this remark, but it may be another link to *The Waste Land*. In his notes, Eliot refers three times to John Webster, twice to his tragedy *The White Devil*. Shakespeare merits only two references, both to *The Tempest* (Eliot 47-54). Perhaps Eliot was responsible for Waugh's interest in Webster.

After quoting the end of *The Waste Land*, Professor Lobb observes that "Waugh ends *A Handful of Dust* in similarly equivocal fashion" (140). With Tony presumed dead, his cousins inherit his estate, and

> cousin Teddy is Tony reborn, complete with illusions and devotion to Hetton; the cycle is set to begin again. But the poor cousins are more enterprising than Tony, and Teddy has chosen the famously uncomfortable "Galahad" as his bedroom (253). Perhaps, like his namesake, he will be a faithful questing knight and find the Grail; perhaps Last will be a verb, not an adjective, and the family will endure. As in Eliot, the reader's decision about the ending says much about his or her spiritual outlook. (Lobb 140)

This reading is unusually hopeful; Professor Meckier, for instance, sees the end of the novel as a "downward spiral," a combination of "purposelessness and unstoppable descent" (187). The prospects at Hetton seem bleak. On the morning of Tony's memorial service, "the clock chimed for the hour and solemnly struck fourteen." The servants have been reduced to a "skeleton staff," and the dining room and library have been "added to the state apartments which were kept locked and shuttered" (*Handful* 250). Nevertheless, Waugh's early novels generally conclude in ominous but ambiguous ways, and Professor Lobb does well to counter the often lugubrious interpretations of *A Handful of Dust*.

Although I do not believe that everything in Waugh's fiction can be explained by his life and nonfiction, I do believe it is essential to be familiar with Waugh's life and nonfiction when interpreting his fiction. By focusing on Waugh's relationship with Conrad and Eliot, Professor Lobb has provided a fresh interpretation of *A Handful of Dust*. I am doubtful about Waugh's debt to Conrad, which is unsupported in biographies of Waugh, nonfiction by Waugh, and other sources. I would, however, welcome Professor Lobb's reading of *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), a novel that includes a quotation from *The Waste Land*, another journey to South America, an allusion to Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and a reference to a Pre-Raphaelite painting, Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*.

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