

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



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Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate

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Each issue consists of articles and a forum for discussion. The forum presents, for instance, research in progress, critical hypotheses, responses to articles published in *Connotations* and elsewhere, as well as to recent books.

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What is the Dream in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

ROBERT CROSMAN

At the end of the play, after the newlyweds have retired to bed, leaving Theseus's Athenian palace to the fairies of whose existence they are still unaware, Puck addresses the audience with one of those deferential closing speeches that not only begs for applause but also subtly complicates our response to the play we have just seen by giving something that is almost (but not quite) that rarest of Shakespearean moments, authorial comment:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And as I am an honest puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long,
Else the puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

On its face, this speech seems to explain the play's title: what we have just witnessed was merely a *dream*, and thus there is no offense in it, no offense in the world!

The "offense" would presumably be the play's benign view of fairies in the face of an orthodox Protestant Christian belief that fairies, if they

existed at all, were evil spirits.¹ But the fear of offending seems itself light-hearted: if Shakespeare were seriously worried about frightening his audience with demonology, then would he have put his apology into the mouth of the mischievous Puck? Far from abandoning his trickster character, Puck in his epilog persists in equivocating: "As I am an honest puck . . . Else the puck a liar call." These lines remind us that Puck is a trickster, and again put into question his ambiguous assertion that the play has been "but a dream."

Delivered by Puck, this innocent, deadpan advice on how to take the play seems pretty clearly to contain an ironic false bottom: after all, it was Theseus who confidently ascribed the night's adventure in the woods to fantasy, and Theseus for all his practical wisdom was wrong. My view is that if you take Puck's advice at face value and regard the events in the woods as moonshine, then you will be just as sensible and hard-headed as Theseus, but just as wrong. This I infer not only from the verbal irony of Puck's last speech, and from the dramatic irony of Theseus's reasonable but mistaken reaction to "the story of the night," but above all from the staging of a play within the play, where Shakespeare models for us not only an inept bunch of actors but a foolish audience who fail to understand what has been put in front of them, and who thus provide a model of how we as an audience should *not* interpret the play.

I

That *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is only a harmless fiction, a collective illusion, may well be the view of many in the audience, too, who like Theseus will have no truck with "These antique fables nor these fairy toys" (5.1.3) that the lovers have recounted from their night in the woods. And yet, to accept Puck's retractions at face value is to miss the sly ironic note of "If" and of "Think but this," which does not quite have the force of "remember this," but has more that of "assume," or even of "imagine": If you have trouble accepting the presence of fairies in the lives of flesh-and-blood people, then *think of* the adventures you have just witnessed as a *dream*—"even though they weren't" is silently signalled.²

One critic who purports to take dream seriously in Shakespeare is Marjorie Garber. "Shakespearean dreams are always 'true,' when properly interpreted," she writes, "since they reflect a state of affairs which is as much internal and psychological as it is external."³ This is an excellent way of recuperating the play for a modern audience troubled by fairies on stage, but Puck's hypothetical attribution of dream status to the events of the play, even backed up by Shakespeare's title, does no more than create an ambiguity in our minds: what do Shakespeare and Puck mean by "dream"? What is the dream in this play, and who dreams it?

Theseus thinks the lovers' adventure in the woods is imaginary, and hence a kind of collective dream, but he is flat wrong when he dismisses as fantasy "the story of the night" (5.1.23). As Hippolyta points out, four people all report the same experiences, and dreams are not communal. Moreover, we have just witnessed what happened, and know that it was no dream: in the world of the play it really happened. But it is fantastic, and many critics beside Garber agree with Theseus that the four are guilty of hyperactive imaginations: "Did it happen, or didn't it happen?" asks C. L. Barber. "The doubt is justified by what Shakespeare has shown us. We are not asked to think that fairies exist. But imagination, by presenting these figments, has reached to something, a creative tendency and process."⁴

Of course in one sense it didn't happen: after all, this is a fiction, like *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; yet we would hardly expect a critic to ask so naive a question of those plays as "Did it happen?" Surely Barber means something more: do the fairies exist in the world of the play? But since there can be no doubt that the fairies are real (in the play), and that the only delusion is Theseus's dismissal of the mysterious events that the fairies have caused, we can only wonder that Barber decides that they are "figments." The reason is, of course, that we don't believe in fairies, and would like to think that Shakespeare dismissed them, as we do, as fantasies and delusions. Sometimes he does just that; and yet in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he depicts a world where people mistakenly regard *their* strange experiences as "dreams," and are thus unaware of the real, unseen forces that shape their lives.

Still, Shakespeare's title does mention a dream, and for most critics the events in the woods seem the most likely referents for that word "dream." James L. Calderwood thinks that what happens in the forest is Theseus's dream, or rather a joint dream with his fiancée: "what happens to Titania is as much Hippolyta's nightmare-dream as it is Theseus'."⁵ There is no sign in the text that we are to take Oberon and Titania as dream-projections of Theseus and Hippolyta, but Calderwood thinks that the effect of doubling the roles (one actor plays Theseus and Oberon; one plays Hippolyta and Titania) would make that point to the audience. In a theater where actors routinely played multiple parts, however, it seems to me unlikely that an audience would spontaneously surmise that one character was merely another's dream-projection, unless given some clearer signals. Not only are the fairies presented on stage as real, but later, when Theseus and Hippolyta hear an account of it, they experience no shock of recognition, even though it is according to Calderwood *they*, not the four young lovers, who have had the dream.

By invoking dream, Puck and Shakespeare jointly ask us to consider the hypothesis that the fairies are not real but imagined. But clearly the play asks us to do the opposite, too: to consider that they may be real, and something else the "dream" to which the title refers. It thereby questions the "reality" that Theseus has so firm but mistaken a grip on. As David Young puts it:

. . . if we are willing to say that the play is a dream, and, as a result, inconsequential, then we are no better than the characters we have just been laughing at. If we have learned anything from the play, we have learned to be wary of dismissing unusual experiences as meaningless dreams and of regarding dreams as yielding no significant knowledge. Puck's invitation must be heard or read in the light of these perceptions. It then becomes one more blow at the customary distinction between dream experience and waking experience.⁶

I am not saying that fairies are real, nor even that Shakespeare thought so. I am saying, rather, that he, or more properly the play, is exploring the possibility that fairies and other unseen, spiritual beings *may* be real, and may intervene in our lives. And this undecidability, Shakespeare's unwillingness to choose between two mutually exclusive views, is conveyed most powerfully by means of metatheater. The play-within-a-

play here, as in *Hamlet*, enables the playwright to model the ambiguities not merely of the rest of his play, but also of the world outside the theater's walls—the *real* world, as we complacently call it.

I suspect that fairies are not an agreeable topic for most of us. Not surprisingly in a secular age like ours, many critics have a blind spot when it comes to interpreting these and other supernatural dimensions of Shakespeare's plays. Marjorie Garber, for example, refers to manifestations such as Macbeth's witches, Banquo's ghost and Hamlet's as *dreams*, when they are no such thing. But to take them at face value would be to betray our scientific world-view, which denies the existence of witches and ghosts. A common way of explaining the presence of fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is to attribute them to the power of the human imagination: thus the play is about human creativity in general, and Shakespeare's in particular. Such a view can be arguably sanctioned by Theseus's lecture on the power of poets, madmen, and lovers to people the world with imaginary beings (5.1.1-27). His is indeed a naturalistic account of how such things as fairies come to be imagined, but it is Theseus's explanation, not Shakespeare's, and is belied in the play by the objective existence of facts that Theseus attributes to fantasy. Of course, the supernatural experience of the sojourners in the woods—and most of all Bottom—has been imagined by Shakespeare: his fairies are largely original creations. But that supernatural experience in general is purely imaginary is a hypothesis that some of his characters assert, but his plays themselves elsewhere do not support. Ghosts and witches, the god Hymen in *As You Like It*, and the angels that bring Richard III bad dreams on the eve of battle are *really there* in the world of the play, and are not dismissable as projections of the characters' imaginations.

II

Tempting as it is to read Puck's epilog as an authorial mandate to think of the play we have just witnessed as the "dream" referred to in its title, the ironic overtones of Puck's final speech ask us to look for a more discerning answer to the question: "What is the dream in *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream?" A play is a conscious, waking fantasy shared with others in the audience, and manipulated by the actors, or by their script-writer. A dream, on the other hand, could be described as an involuntary fantasy that the dreamer does not recognize as such, and hence does not control: on the contrary, it controls him. So let us begin by assuming that the title means more than that the play itself is a dream, and ask what other dreams there are in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? At one point or another many of the principal characters fall asleep. Of those who sleep—the four lovers, plus Titania and Bottom—most refer to the odder aspects of their nocturnal adventures, including love-affairs with unsuitable or fantastic partners, as "dreams" they have had. But we in the audience have witnessed these adventures, and know that they are no dream: Hermia has been scorned by her lovers and Helena loved by her scornors, Bottom has been loved by a fairy queen and Titania has loved an ass. So what (again) is the "dream," and who is having it?

There is one actual dream in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for at one point in the play Hermia and Lysander lie down to rest and fall asleep. Shortly thereafter Hermia awakes from a bad dream:

HERMIA (*waking*)

Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here?
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
Lysander—what, removed? Lysander, lord—
What, out of hearing, gone? (2.2.151-58)

Dramatically the function of this dream is to waken Hermia, so that she can go after the lover who has just abandoned her, while psychologically it tells us something about Hermia's fears: Lysander does not take seriously her being hurt by that prototypically deceptive animal, the snake.

Norman Holland makes a good deal more of this dream, and sees it finally as emblematic of the play as a whole—"Literature is a dream dreamed for us" he asserts—but his interpretation turns on taking Puck's epilog seriously.⁷ By ignoring Puck's playful, ironic way of suggesting

that we may take the play for a dream if we choose, Holland reduces the play as a whole to the rather questionable status of Hermia's dream, which is an illusion—in Theseus's common-sense psychology, she has mistaken a bush for a bear (5.1.22). The "truth" of the play, for Holland, like that of Hermia's dream, is entirely symbolic: no serpent ate her heart, just as no fairies fixed her love-life. Yet manifestly they *did* fix her love-life, and so the analogy between Hermia's dream and the play in which she dreamt it is not a good one. We must look further.

Current trends in Shakespeare criticism—feminism, cultural materialism, new historicism—are also eager to see Shakespeare's play as dreamlike in its lack of truthfulness, but far more sinister than Holland's benign "self-knowledge" model. Louis Adrian Montrose's seminal reading, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," argues that "the festive conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* depends upon the success of a process by which the female pride and power manifested in misanthropic warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives, and wilful daughters are brought under the control of lords and husbands."⁸ For him, the play is not festive at all, but rather a sort of collective dream in which the society of Shakespeare's day tried to reconcile the fact of hierarchy with the desire for justice. To Montrose this play is a "dream," and hence it achieves only the illusion of justice, which is the only irony Montrose hears in Puck's epilog. In effect Montrose is trying to shake us awake from the bad dream of patriarchy.⁹

A dream is an illusion—this is what critic after critic is telling us about the dream in Shakespeare's title. But the adventures in the woods were all real in the play; there are a great many illusions on show in the play, but most of these occur not in fairyland, as we might suppose, but back in Athens, where Demetrius "dreams" that he loves Hermia, Egeus "dreams" that his daughter must marry his favorite suitor, Theseus dreams that the laws of Athens compel him to enforce Egeus's fancy, and Helena dreams that she will benefit by informing Demetrius that Hermia and Lysander have eloped. Their own waking life, then, is the "dream" from which these characters need to awake.

There is one more famous "dream" that is no dream in the play: "Bottom's Dream." Oberon, in revenge for being denied the Indian Boy

that he wants for a page, orders Puck to put a love-spell on Titania so that she will fall in love with the ignoble Bottom. And to make her shame more complete, he orders Bottom to be given the head of an ass. In that guise, Bottom frightens his friends away, but is taken to Titania's bower, where she embraces him while he falls asleep (4.1.39). When he awakes the spell has been lifted, he has his own head again, and he cannot believe his memories of what just happened:

. . . I have
had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit
of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he
go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—
there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and
methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he
will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man
hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's
hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his
heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter
Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called
'Bottom's Dream,' because it hath no bottom; and I will
sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Per-
adventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it
at her [Thisbe's?] death. (4.1.201-15)

Bottom's "dream" is different from that of the four lovers because he has seen Titania and her fairy train, while they have merely felt the effects of Puck's tricks and potions. Bottom alone has been given a vision of divinity, but that very transcendence makes it impossible for even him to believe in it. Despite his plan here to make his experience into a ballad, he never reports it to Peter Quince or to anyone else—apparently it is far too strange to be believed. Bottom's words, as is well known, parody St. Paul's famous reference to transcendent reality ("Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." [1 Cor. 2:9]) But the parody cuts two ways: while Bottom's version may be said to mock Scripture, Scripture may also be dignifying Bottom's "dream," as Christians are reminded that there is such a thing as transcendent reality, invisible to the eye of the body. No serious Christian can dismiss the supernatural as an illusion, even if the status of fairies within that realm is problematic.

If by dream we understand illusion, then the "dreams" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are strangely inverted: when the characters were wide awake at home in Athens, they were "dreaming" in the sense of being deluded, and when they enter the dark woods their adventures are real, not illusory, their only delusion being to disbelieve the reality of what they take to have been dreams. As Harold Goddard puts it: "this world of sense in which we live is but the surface of a vaster unseen world by which the actions of men are affected or overruled."¹⁰

The magical way in which their lives are fantastically disordered and then re-ordered by magical beings whom they cannot see and do not infer—this whole adventure resembles a dream, and exemplifies a surrender to forces greater than themselves to solve problems that seem otherwise insoluble. Yet in this play, what happens in the woods is no dream. The "dream" is not what happens to them in the woods, which is quite real; rather, the dream is the illusion that they were certain about their lives in the first place. The "dream" is this waking life, which they foolishly believe they have understood, but which is actually in the control of forces far greater than they: the fairies, the Moon, the Fates, and ultimately the playwright himself.

III

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the world is a dreamlike play in which the characters behave in irrational ways that they do not comprehend because their wires are being pulled by forces that they are totally unaware of. And the occasion of the play-within-the-play, the lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe, offers them the opportunity to see what fools they are, but they entirely miss the point. Their failure to comprehend should make us in the audience realize that we are in the same position as they. We are watching a play just as they are, and yet we most likely do not notice this commonality, and so do not grasp that we, too, may be characters in a play that we do not recognize as such, and so cannot comprehend, much less control.

One reason why no one in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* realizes that the world is a stage is that there are no conscious roleplayers in this

play: everyone is painfully sincere—or more properly, trapped inside an unprofitable role. Unlike the characters in plays such as *The Taming of The Shrew* or *Hamlet*, where the theatrical nature of waking life is suggested by their obsessive roleplaying, all the human characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* behave precisely as themselves, and all are trapped in their own inflexible identities and impulses: “the conventions are entrapping,” as J. Dennis Huston puts it, “because the nature of the lover’s role is already determined for him.”¹¹

Though Hermia and Helena are indistinguishable in everything but height, the interchangeable lovers Demetrius and Lysander are certain that life with one of them will be bliss, while with the other it will be hell-on-earth. Yet half-way through the play the two women switch their positions in this formula. Helena accuses the men of deception, but she is mistaken: after being given a love-potion they are as genuinely in love with her as they were a few minutes earlier with Hermia. Meanwhile Egeus has set his mind on his daughter Hermia marrying Tweedledum, but never Tweedledee, while Duke Theseus regretfully observes that though he sees the absurdity of Egeus’s position, he can only enforce the ineluctable laws of Athens (1.1.119). Later, he changes his mind, and no heavens crumble.

Nor when they get to fairy land do they fare much better. Titania and Oberon are themselves at all times, except when pansy-juice has caused Titania to fall in love with Bottom; when she is given the antidote, she saves her self-esteem by imagining that she has merely been dreaming. Puck alone is called upon to roleplay a little—he impersonates Demetrius’ and Lysander’s voices at one point—but Puck like his master Oberon is more apt to accomplish his deceptions simply by going invisible and applying a potion rather than by taking the trouble to disguise himself.

So it is really only the “mechanicals” who act parts, and they are of course marvelously inept at roleplaying. That these simpletons take it into their minds to write and perform “the most lamentable comedy” (1.2.11-12) of Pyramus and Thisbe is a wonderful joke that enlivens Shakespeare’s play with an example of how not to put on a play. For example: Shakespeare’s play, much of which takes place by moonlight, must evoke the presence of that moon despite the fact that it might also be performed in the open air, in broad daylight.¹² This Shakespeare

accomplishes by poetic appeals to the imagination, a recurrent evocation of the moon by mentioning it, by describing the world of the forest as it would appear by moonlight, and most of all by a kind of “versified moonlight”—a magical, incantatory verse that suggests a land of darkness, fairies, and silvery glow.

The mechanicals, on the other hand, after considering and rejecting the option of merely opening a casement window to the moon that will be shining on the night of their performance, decide to appoint one of their number to impersonate the moon, which he does by carrying a lantern, and by announcing this identity to the audience. Needless to say, the audience is not persuaded, and makes merry with poor Robin Starveling, and with Bottom’s woeful attempt to evoke darkness in immortal lines such as:

O grim-looking night, O night with hue so black,
 O night which ever art when day is not;
 O night, O night, alack, alack, alack . . . (5.1.168-70)

Thus the mechanicals are unable to create the illusion of night, even though they have the advantage of playing their scene late in the evening, by artificial illumination.

Yet these players are hilariously unaware that they are not performing a highly illusionistic drama. Bottom, the deep thinker of the group, decides that the audience must be informed that Pyramus does not really die by his own hand, or it will affright the ladies:

. . . Write
 me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will
 do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not
 killed indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell
 them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus but Bottom the
 weaver. This will put them out of fear. (3.1.15-20)

Other measures must be taken, too, to prevent their drama from appearing *too* realistic: the lion must be recognizably a man in disguise, and he must speak words of reassurance: “. . . I am a man, as other men are’—and there, indeed, let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner” (3.1.39-42).

Paradoxically, though, the more the mechanicals laboriously spell out the brute facts of playing and playgoing—it is all illusion; no one is who he pretends to be—the more engaging and credible these characters become, and as we watch these very sincere people fail to become the characters they hope to impersonate it still does not occur to us to say to ourselves: “This is not Bottom speaking, but rather it is yon celebrated, intelligent actor.”

Such facts are too obvious to state, for one thing; but secondly it would spoil *our* illusion to recognize that Bottom and his excellent foolishness are actually the brilliant inventions of a clever actor and playwright. And so when it is agreed upon that Robin Starveling shall represent the moon, abetted by a bush and a lantern, though we laugh at the foolish device we do not doubt that this is actually Robin Starveling who will perform it, or that the troupe believe in its effectiveness. Nor (least of all) do we pause to think that we have already been hoodwinked elsewhere into imagining a moon present in this play when there was only moonshine.

So, when the last scene in the play arrives, and the mechanicals perform their lamentable comedy, we watch and listen approvingly as the aristocratic, sophisticated audience makes merry at the poor actors' expense. This is a wedding feast, and these tipsy newlyweds are determined to laugh, just as we are. Since the story itself is anything but merry, the audience must be merry at the inept staging and performance, even though to do so they must be unfair, if not downright unkind:

STARVELING (*as Moonshine*)

This lantern doth the hornèd moon present—

DEMETRIUS He should have worn the horns on his head.

THESEUS He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible
within the circumference.

STARVELING (*as Moonshine*)

This lantern doth the hornèd moon present,

Myself the man i'th' moon do seem to be—

THESEUS This is the greatest error of all the rest: the man
should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man
i'th' moon?

DEMETRIUS He dares not come there for the candle; for
you see it is already in snuff.

HIPPOLYTA I am aweary of this moon. Would he would change.

THESEUS It appears by his small light of discretion that he is in the wane; but yet in courtesy, in all reason, we must stay the time.

LYSANDER Proceed, Moon.

STARVELING All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon, I the man i'th' moon, this thorn bush my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.

DEMETRIUS Why, all these should be in the lantern, for all these are in the moon. But silence; here comes Thisbe. (5.1.235-56)

Many of these criticisms are not apt, and arise from a determined literal-mindedness—a refusal or inability to “dream”—on the part of an audience who have given up trying (if they ever have tried) to enter into the play’s illusion. Poor Robin’s moon is “horned” because it is a crescent, and because it is represented by a “lanthorn” (the pun is lost in modernized spelling); such facts have nothing to do with Demetrius’s stock response inferring cuckoldry. And Theseus’s objection to Starveling’s *carrying* his lantern is mere quibbling: the lantern fairly represents the moon’s light, and Theseus cannot seriously suppose that constructing a lantern large enough for Starveling to be inside would be any improvement. The other quibbles are equally specious, and reflect an audience determined to amuse themselves by finding fault with a performance that is otherwise devoid of amusement for them. And yet most of their wit is rather lame—look at Demetrius, who after his cuckoldry cliché tries next to get a laugh out of a joke that Theseus has already made.

As these nobles see it, they are being gracious merely to allow the mechanicals to perform at their wedding-banquet. Theseus, the largest-minded and highest-ranking member of the party, has already explained that since he knows the play will be terrible, it is a mark of nobility on his and everyone else’s part to endure it patiently:

HIPPOLYTA

I love not to see wretchedness o’ercharged,
And duty in his service perishing.

THESEUS

Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

HIPPOLYTA

He says they can do nothing in this kind.

THESEUS

The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake,

And what poor duty cannot do,

Noble respect takes it in might, not merit. (5.1.85-92)

The whole scene, in short, is one in which an audience—including us, perhaps, the audience at Shakespeare's play—is depicted as discerning and aristocratic, while actors are portrayed as bumbling plebeians. Moreover, rude heckling and interruption from that aristocratic audience is described by that audience's most authoritative voice as patience, kindness, and "noble respect"—and probably is, since this performance cannot be enjoyed by a discerning audience on any other terms than superior amusement, and since the mechanicals would be far more crushed by not being permitted to perform at all, and thus missing out on the payment they hope to earn.

But isn't the joke ultimately on Theseus, Hippolyta, and the rest of this bunch? For though they laugh at the mechanicals' simple antics, there is a race of beings superior to them who actually control their destinies as surely as Theseus rules in Athens, and who see and laugh at their follies—"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (3.2.115). On the whole these superior beings are patient and kind, as is evidenced by their straightening out of the tangles that the lovers and patriarchs have made of their lives, yet Theseus's pigheaded assurance that he understands how the world works is utterly belied by facts which are in our possession but of which he is blissfully ignorant:

HIPPOLYTA

'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

THESEUS

More strange than true. I never may believe

These antique fables nor these fairy toys.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
 That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.
 Such tricks hath strong imagination
 That if it would but apprehend some joy
 It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
 Or in the night, imagining some fear,
 How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA

But all the story of the night told over,
 And all their minds transfigured so together,
 More witnesseth than fancy's images.
 And grows to something of great constancy;
 But howsoever, strange and admirable. (5.1.1-27)

Only Hippolyta voices any belief that the lovers' strange tale of adventure in the forest may be other than a simple delusion, but her doubts are brushed aside by the hardheaded Theseus, who knows how to keep imagination in its place.¹³

And yet it is she, not he, who intuitively grasps the truth as we have witnessed it. The play the mechanicals have just performed may be moonshine and foolishness, yet the audience that derides it is equally foolish in their smug assurance that they know what truth is and what is fantasy. Around them, and all unseen, a race of superhuman beings straightens out their love lives, blesses their marriage beds, gives them healthy children, protects them from malign influences, and in return asks only the simple pleasure of being allowed to watch and laugh at their follies. And all in turn are watched over by the influential moon and stars, and by their Creator—and of course by us, who sit in Shakespeare's audience sublimely unaware (unless we are very perceptive) that we in turn may be watched by higher powers that find us diverting. Lord, what fools we mortals be!

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NOTES

¹For a survey of contemporary views on fairies, see Peter Holland's introduction to his edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 21-34. Quotations from Shakespeare's play refer to this edition.

²Though Hamlet famously asserts that "thinking makes it so" (*Hamlet* 2.2.50-51), Bolingbroke in a play closer in date of composition to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has no trouble showing that this is not always so: "O, who can hold a fire in his hand / By thinking of the frosty Caucasus? / Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite / By bare imagination of a feast?" (*Richard II* 1.3.280-81; 294-97; my emphasis). Unless Puck is suggesting that the audience has been literally asleep and dreaming, which is manifestly untrue, then he is speaking metaphorically, and weakening the comparison by pointing out its hypothetical status: if we wish we may think of the play we have just witnessed as a dream, but it wasn't.

³*Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974) 3. On "dream" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see also Peter Holland 3-21.

⁴C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959) 162.

⁵*A Midsummer Night's Dream: Anamorphism and Theseus' Dream*, SQ 42 (1991): 414; rpt. as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), Ch. 3.

⁶David Young, *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1966) 125.

⁷Norman N. Holland, "Hermia's Dream," *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 7 (1979): 369-89; rpt. in Richard Dutton (ed.), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, New Casebooks (New York: St. Martin's P, 1996) 61.

⁸"Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture" (1983), Dutton (ed.) 128.

⁹New historicists sometimes seem to be latter-day Puritans, intent on blaming Shakespeare and others for not being twentieth-century social reformers. James Calderwood writes of Montrose and others: "A major danger in writing 'politically conscious' criticism of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is that the critic may discover in himself a capacity to ferret out sins that borders on genius but that also belies the spirit of comedy and militates Malvolio-like against life's cakes and ale. The genre Shakespeare worked in when writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—a blend of Greco-Roman 'New Comedy' and native English festive forms filtered through Lyly and seasoned with Ovid—defined its happy ending as social reconciliation and provided little encouragement for the kind of satiric subversiveness of so-called Old Comedy" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* xxv).

¹⁰*The Meaning of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951) 74; cited by James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1971) 122. Also cf. John Arthos: "And so from many sides, from the events, from Bottom's words, from what Theseus says about fancy and lunacy and love and poetry, the play has been entertaining us with innumerable ways of looking at life as if it were a dream, making us wonder if reality and dream are not forever masking as the other" (*Shakespeare's Use of Dream and Vision* [Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977] 102).

¹¹J. Dennis Huston, *Shakespeare's Comedies of Play* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981) 104. Cf. also Richard Henze, "Role Playing in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Southern Humanities Review* 4 (1970): "Kate plays her obedient wife part . . . so well that one cannot say for sure whether or not she is an obedient wife at heart; one can only say that she plays the part well enough to encourage us to imagine that she is obedient indeed. . . . Because Petruchio plays contradictory roles with equal effectiveness, we cannot say simply that Petruchio is a possessive husband or a tamer or a wooer We can say, however, that Petruchio plays each part quite well, that the roles are 'aptly fitted and naturally perform'd'" (234-35). My unpublished article, "The World as Stage in *The Taming of The Shrew*," analyses the entire play in terms of the roleplaying of the various characters in it.

¹²Although the Lord Chamberlain's Men made their livelihood principally by selling admission to a public theater that was illuminated by natural daylight, the common supposition that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written for a noble wedding, though there is not a shred of evidence for this speculation, invokes a picture of it being first performed indoors, perhaps at night, and certainly under conditions that were rather dim. It makes sense to think that Shakespeare was challenged by such circumstances to invent a play that could make use of the darkness of the hall in which it would be played; but the play we have, at any rate, would have had to evoke nighttime even on a sunny afternoon on an outdoor stage.

¹³Meredith Skura confutes the view of Theseus as the voice of the playwright by pointing out that he is not only stupid and rude, but anti-theatrical as well: "Theseus's rudeness to the players is telling, though it is less vicious than Navarre's or Berowne's in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Once again the nobles insult, or even merely analyze the players as if they were not there—like children, or slaves, or animals. . . . Even Theseus's famous defense of 'Pyramus and Thisbe,' after Hippolyta calls it 'the silliest stuff that ever I heard,' is no more than faint praise (*MND* 5.1.210); and he goes on to a patronizing dismissal of playing which extends to all professionals as well as to the tacky amateurs on stage at the moment" (Meredith Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993] 112-13).

The Opening of *All's Well That Ends Well*

RICHARD A. LEVIN

This essay focuses on a short passage—approximately eighty lines (mainly prose) in the Folio text—that introduces at the start of *All's Well That Ends Well* the elderly ruling class of the play. This class is conspicuous for its idealistic belief that rank and virtue, extrinsic honor and intrinsic, should be brought into alignment. At mid-twentieth century and for a while thereafter, critics praised the gerontocracy, as it may be termed,¹ for living up to its code.² More recently, not only has the king's *locus classicus* declaration of the rewards due to virtue been interpreted as a figleaf for his abuse of power, but a few critics have associated the king along with other members of his class with the failings or limitations of age. I have in mind especially the moving portraits Arthur Kirsch and Ruth Nevo offer of the old as they cope with bodily decrepitude and residual desires, their hesitancies challenged by the energies of youth.³ Yet these accounts occlude some of the harsher aspects of the ruling class, which despite advanced old age rules in more than name and dominates the life of the young. The play's opening passage portrays the elderly as meritorious in trying circumstances; yet the passage also suggests to us the need to be alert to contradictions between the way these elderly behave and their inner thoughts and feelings. Paradoxically the passage both creates expectations that *All's Well* will take comic shape and poses seemingly insuperable obstacles to such shaping.

The play begins with four characters entering in mourning attire, "all in black" (1.1.0 s.d.). His father having died, "young Bertram" has succeeded to his father's title, Count Rossillion. Bertram is to become a ward of the king—of wardship more in a moment—and old Lord Lafew, the king's emissary, has arrived to conduct him to the royal court.

Two women are present, Bertram's mother and Helena, the daughter of a middle-class physician. Helena's father (like Bertram's) has died recently, and as a consequence the countess has taken the orphaned young woman under her protection.⁴ It is a time, then, of sorrow and transition; the countess and Lafew commiserate with one another while the young say little.

The elderly share a fully articulated world view which is implicit in their manner of expression. Their speech is self-conscious and cultivated, with carefully balanced clauses and deliberate but not overly precious figures of speech, most especially chiasmus.⁵ Here is Lafew describing the king's despair of finding a cure: "He hath abandoned his physicians, madam, under whose practices he hath persecuted time with hope, and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time" (10-12). The countess expresses her regret that Helena's physician father has not survived to minister to the ailing king: "Would for the king's sake he were living! I think it would be the death of the king's disease" (16-17). Lafew and the countess are capable of simpler, colloquial effects; though never without courteous reserve, they are attentive to the needs of one another, and can ask a question or offer comfort in direct, unadorned language. While their speech is not so mannered or stilted as to suggest a self-enclosed world, its refinement may, by inadvertence or design, exclude the unpolished young.

The assured cadences and the traces of wit in elegantly turned phrases also bespeak the disciplined stoicism of those who have already endured losses and expect more. The following passage exhibits the speech patterns of the countess and Lafew, as well as their tendency to echo one another, and their fortitude and solicitude, in this instance, for Helena, who weeps, apparently for the death of her father:

LAFEW Moderate lamentation is the right of the dead; excessive grief
the enemy to the living.

COUNTRESS If the living be enemy to the grief, the excess makes it soon
mortal. (1.1.43-46)

The counsel of moderation, the endorsement of a balance between respect for the dead and regard for the living, give further evidence of a class which confronts living with a practiced sense of responsibility.

Speech laden with principle suggests that this class believes rule should be moral rule. Their idealism is explicit when the countess urges Bertram, "succeed thy father / In manners [= morals] as in shape," and "thy goodness / Share with thy birthright" (49-50, 51-52). She worries that Bertram will not be worthy of his title, remarking to Lafew as he prepares to leave with her son, "'Tis an unseasoned courtier; good my lord, / Advise him" (59-60).

That virtue should be recognized and respected wherever it is found is the conviction that lies behind the countess's remarks about Helena and her father; though they are not nobility, the countess praises them and includes Helena in an intimate gathering.

The evidence discussed so far shows the elderly in an admirable light; not a single detail has pointed to any criticism of people who might, after all, have become ingrown, or crotchety, or inclined toward morbidity, or cynical in the use of power (their ideology notwithstanding). None of the dark aspects of age and power, of age linked with power, has so far been noticed.

Yet the opening section of the play depicts not only obvious characteristics of the ruling class but also subtly disturbing undercurrents. In the first lines, a doubt about royal power is briefly glimpsed before it is swept under the carpet:

COUNTESS In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband.

BERTRAM And I in going, madam, weep o'er my father's death anew;
but I must attend his majesty's command, to whom I am now
in ward, evermore in subjection.

LAFEW You shall find of the king a husband, madam; you, sir, a father.
He that so generally is at all times good must of necessity hold his
virtue to you, whose worthiness would stir it up where it wanted,
rather than lack it where there is such abundance. (1.1.1-8)

Bertram remarks, in effect, that he feels imposed upon at a time of sorrow. In becoming a "ward" of the king, he comes under the king's authority. Many in Shakespeare's original audiences would have detected an allusion to a royal abuse for which the House of Commons was seeking redress.⁶ Wardship, based on feudal law revived by the Tudors, affected the landowning classes. If a father died, his minor child became a ward of the crown. The crown then sold (or sometimes gifted) the

wardship, whose value derived from the guardian's ability to raid the minor's estate. That Bertram has touched a nerve may be seen in Lafew's response, which is so soothing and total as to make the audience question its candor. For Lafew is the very model of orthodoxy when he describes his king stepping into the gap created by the death of Bertram's father: the king will become husband to the dowager countess, father to Bertram! Moreover, not only is the king "so generally" and "at all times good," but were he (hypothetically) lacking in virtue, the goodness of the countess would compel the king's goodness. Lafew talks a kind of nonsense—no one is always and in all respects good, nor does goodness in one person compel goodness in another, nor do good deeds ever proceed with the inevitable laws of physics. Lafew's response has the same glibness caught in the title of the play, and invites a degree of scepticism in the audience, in part, indeed, because the remark was intended to foreclose scepticism about power and its possible impact on the young.

By detecting the presence of a still unmeasured gap between what Lafew says and what he must be thinking, the audience realizes the need to look beneath the formal surface of the conversation that ensues. Allegedly, though the elderly rule, they are devoted, both by emotional tie and conviction, to promoting the well-being of the young. Yet the countess and Lafew reveal feelings for Bertram and Helena which deviate from their proclaimed ones. The countess opens the play with a remark already quoted: "In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband." By likening her feelings for her son to feelings for a husband, the countess raises a suspicion that she has incestuous desires for her son.⁷ Yet her paralleling of husband and son is so strong as to make an audience wonder if incest is too obvious an implication. The disparaging and almost ludicrous ring of her remark opens it to an alternate and very different interpretation. To speak of Bertram's departure as a burial is to allude, however remotely, to his death. Moreover, she likens her grief now to a proverbially suspect grief—a wife's at the death of a second husband. That the countess feels something other than unambiguous warmth towards her son is again suggested when she says farewell to him, for her moralizing tendency is stretched to absurdity. In a speech paralleling Polonius's to his

departing son, the countess loads advice on Bertram: "Love all, trust a few, / Do wrong to none. Be able for thine enemy / Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend / Under thy own life's key" (52-55). She concludes with a discordant remark that again suggests distance or displeasure: "What heaven more will, / That thee may furnish, and my prayers pluck down, / Fall on thy head" (56-58). The audience cannot fathom what might explain the countess's coolness towards her "unseasoned courtier," yet her detachment is evident, just at a time when warmth and support would be expected.

Between her opening remark about Bertram and her concluding farewell to him, the countess speaks neither to nor concerning him. What is absent in her response to her son is present in her speeches to and about Helena, though an audience must be alert to the indirection the countess employs. With seeming casualness, she calls Lafew's attention to Helena, identifying her as a "gentlewoman" (13) and the daughter of Gerard de Narbon (20).⁸ Of course, to protect and even foster the fortunes of Helena might well be consistent with the countess's commitment to advance the worthy, but her response to Helena is oddly personal and probing, at least if, avoiding an edited text, we read it in the Folio:⁹

I have those hopes of her good, that her education promises her dispositions shee inherits, which makes faire gifts fairer: for where an uncleane mind carries vertuous qualities, there commendations go with pittie, they are vertues and traitors too: in her they are the better for their simplenesse; she derives her honestie, and atcheeves her goodnesse. ([41]-[47])

This passage is based on a *topos* (or a weave of *topoi*) most fully developed in Hamlet's ramparts speech, which permits a meditation on human character (especially greatness of character), and the difficulty of judging it, in light both of the complex forces that contribute to its formation and of the emotions that color an observer's response. Whether by dramatic design or inadvertence both the ramparts speech and this speech appear imperfect, and thereby create the impression that the issues are too elusive for the speakers to capture.¹⁰ Editorial emendation and repunctuation aimed at simplifying the opening of the present

passage are mistaken.¹¹ To place an end stop or semi-colon after "promises" and open the passage with "I have those hopes of her good that her education promises," is to diminish the passage's insistence on the need for constant qualification and revision, as the nature of nature and of nurture, and therefore of Helena's character, come under continued scrutiny.

The brief opening sentence created by the emendation renders the countess's "hopes" [41] as confident expectations. By way of contrast, in the Folio text, her hopes are hopes and no more—their realization is contingent on Helena's "education" keeping a promise to her "dispositions" [42]. These "dispositions" in the emended text are understood at once to be her "natural tendencies" (OED 6.):¹² "Her dispositions shee inherits." In the Folio text it is initially possible that her "dispositions" are her "inclinations" (OED 9.a.), and inclinations may possibly prevail over "education." The relationship between nature and nurture becomes even more of a puzzle: the antecedent of "which" [42] may be (1) "dispositions"; or (2) "education" or (3) that education whose promises are as yet unrealized. At issue is whether nature is subordinate to nurture or nurture to nature. Uncertainty on the point emphasizes the emptiness of the formulaic assurance that "faire gifts" are made "fairer" [43]. It even becomes unclear that nature can be distinguished from nurture. An "uncleane mind" [43] is identified as an inheritance, yet an "uncleane mind" was once "clean," and presumably became "defiled" or "sullied"¹³ in the corrupted currents of the world. Helena is said to "derive her honestie" [46] but honesty, especially a woman's, is more easily understood as a moral achievement—often, in the early modern period, a woman's honesty is her chastity.¹⁴

Paralleling the erosion of clarity concerning nature and nurture is a growing uncertainty about Helena's character. When in the course of praising someone the faults of others are mentioned, we wonder whether the implication is that the praised person has these very faults. For example, in the opening scene of *Measure for Measure*, the duke's praise for Angelo takes suspect form when emphasis falls on the negative example of those who bury their talents (1.1.26-40). That Helena is unlike others since her "vertues" are not "traitors" [45] is the remarkable

assurance we must get past before arriving at an affirmation of her worth. It seems then that the countess, in insisting on the complementary relationship between Helena's nature and Helena's nurture, is avoiding the possibility that a corrupt nature can pervert nurture, or a corrupt nurture can pervert nature. Further complicating the picture is the chameleonlike evolution of Helena's "education," which is soon said to be constituted by her "vertuous qualities" [44]. Since education and virtue are clearly not synonymous, the countess may conceivably use virtuous as we use *virtuoso*, to refer to Helena's accomplishments.¹⁵ Yet in another moment we hear that "vertuous qualities" may subdivide into virtues and traitors. The countess would restore Humpty Dumpty with an "all's well" conclusion that ascribes "simplesse" [46]—consistency of substance—simultaneously to Helena's "vertuous qualities" and to her mix of acquired and inherited traits. It is doubtful, however, that there is anything simple about a young woman who elicits such convoluted praise.¹⁶ The countess is not saying what she means, and so we want to know more about what she does observe in Helena, and why, even if Helena fails to meet a high standard, the countess will "pitty" [45] but never judge her.

The countess's remarks call forth Helena's tears, cautiously described by the old lady as "the best brine a maiden can season her praise in" (37). If a maiden's virtue is in need of preservation, then it can become corrupted; maidenhood can become corrupted, "honestie" can turn to dishonesty. Of course, it is uncertain that the countess is conscious of these reservations. It does become evident, however, that she entertains suspicions that Helena conceals aspects of herself. After explaining Helena's tears to Lafew as occasioned by her father's death, the countess gently rebukes her: "No more of this, Helena. Go to, no more, lest it be rather thought you affect a sorrow than to have" (39-41). The countess simultaneously draws Lafew's attention to Helena on the basis of the young woman's good character, and reveals that her own liking for Helena has remoter roots.

Conversation alluding to the king's disease provides the most conspicuous hint of hidden matters. The countess introduces the topic, asking, "What hope is there of his majesty's amendment?" (9). Her allusion to the king's being ill avoids identifying the disease, and Lafew,

in responding, is likewise indirect, as we have seen (10-12). After further brocaded speech concerning the king's condition, Bertram asks to have it identified:

BERTRAM What is it, my good lord, the king languishes of?

LAFEW A fistula, my lord.

BERTRAM I heard not of it before.

LAFEW I would it were not notorious. Was this gentlewoman the daughter of Gerard de Narbon? (1.1.24-27).

Lafew's abrupt "fistula" breaks the elaborate rhythm of the conversation; the word explodes with its heavily accented initial syllable concluding in a hissing sibilant. Perhaps with a touch of humor and an invitation for laughter from the audience, Lafew momentarily draws aside a curtain. He provides one further hint by describing the fistula as "notorious." This word is usually glossed as "well-known," one contemporary meaning. Yet it is likely that a disease discussed obliquely is one associated with "some bad practice," a pejorative use of "notorious" that occurs later in this scene as well (88; see *OED* *a.* 5.).

The play's editors do not help the reader who pauses confused over the king's illness. G. K. Hunter, in the New Arden *All's Well*, quotes John Bucknill's *Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare* (1860): "A fistula at the present day means an abscess external to the rectum, but in Shakespeare's day it was used in the more general signification for a burrowing abscess in any situation."¹⁷ Russell Fraser, in the New Cambridge edition, glosses fistula as a "long flute-shaped abscess," and adds that the word "is used by [William] Painter in the source-story to describe a painful swelling on the King's breast" (1.1.25n). Susan Snyder's Oxford edition (1.1.34n) cites Bucknill and follows Fraser in saying that Shakespeare "probably" accepted Painter's rendering.¹⁸ These annotations notwithstanding, a fistula is an ailment of some interest. In *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*, F. David Hoeniger notes that among the most common fistulas was the *fistula in ano*, one cause of which was long rides in cold and wet weather.¹⁹ The word "fistula" derives from the Latin for water-pipe; the *OED* defines the word as "a long, narrow, suppurating [i.e. pus-discharging] canal of morbid condition in some part of the body; a long, sinuous pipe-like ulcer with a narrow orifice" (*fisula* 1.a.). Language such as this is suggestive of some

kind of lower body dysfunction; the circumlocution used to refer to the disease suggests that it is an embarrassment.

Bertram wants to know what the king "languishes of" (24). To languish is "to grow slack" (*OED* v. 2.). The word is commonly used figuratively to describe a person pining "with love or grief" (v. 3); "languish" is the literary term describing love melancholy. Suspicion about the nature of the king's illness is strengthened by mention of the name of Helena's father just before and just after mention of the fistula, both times in a position of emphasis, the end of a sentence. His name is Gerard de Narbon, meaning Healer of the Nose Bone, if Frankie Rubinstein's etymology is accepted.²⁰ That the nose is phallic well before *Tristram Shandy* Lafew is to make clear (2.3.231-32).

Royal illness can symbolize the state of a nation.²¹ The king's disease in 2 *Henry IV* is an image of the impaired state of England, itself the result of the king's earlier usurpation of the throne. It is possible that in *All's Well* no culpability is involved, that the fistula points merely to the infirmity of age. Even if a sexual organ is involved, the disease need not be venereal and indicative of moral turpitude (though it is hard to think when venereal infection is not a symbol of wayward sexuality in early modern English literature). That the disease causes the king to languish may suggest another impediment of old age, the flagging of the spirit, when joy and pleasure are absent. The countess is now mateless and it seems likely that the king and Lafew are too. Yet the notion that the disease reflects a moral failing in the kingdom cannot be dismissed; it may be thought that Lafew and the countess protest their high standards rather too strenuously, and that the "amendment" they desire for the king may be his moral reformation (see *OED* *amendment* 1.a.). His disease, then, becomes a focal point for the audience's effort to understand the gerontocracy.

Bertram's intrusive question about the king's illness prevents Lafew from responding when the countess draws Helena to his attention. As soon as the old lord can, he returns the conversation to Helena, signaling his responsiveness to the countess by echoing her description of Helena as a "gentlewoman" (27) and the daughter of Gerard de Narbon (28). Later, he echoes the countess again—"Your commendations, madam, get from her tears" (36)—showing he has caught the significance of her

"commendations" of Helena [44]: the countess wishes to *recommend* Helena (see *OED commendation* 3. and 5.). To this point, Lafew and the countess appear as parallel representatives of their class. Perhaps they remain so, but Lafew's interest in Helena becomes suspect. His attention never wanders from her. After counseling her against excessive grief (43-44), he offers her a noteworthy parting remark: "Farewell, pretty lady. / You must hold the credit of your father" (65-66). "Pretty lady" represents a break in decorum, for it concludes a sententious conversation with notice of Helena's womanly appeal. Lafew's advice gives an even stronger indication of his intentions with regard to Helena. His suggestion that Helena should "hold the credit of her father" is equivocally phrased. If "hold" is taken to mean "uphold," and "credit" to mean "reputation" (*OED credit sb.* 5.), Lafew is simply telling Helena that she should live up to her father's moral example. A more interesting reading results, however, if "hold" means "retain" (*OED hold v.* 7.a.) and if "credit" bears a specifically business sense and refers to a "reputation of solvency and probity" (*credit sb.* 9.b.). Now Lafew is telling Helena to keep her father's professional standing, which of course she can only do by pursuing his profession! It is true that this advice is startling and Lafew's motive or motives for offering it are obscure. Yet the advice makes a kind of sense, for the countess has speculated that the survival of Helena's father would have meant the "death of the king's disease" (17), and Lafew has observed that medical success brought Gerard de Narbon to the attention of the monarch himself (21-22). The audience knows the king is sick, and that in folklore ailing kings are restored to health, sometimes by maidens.²²

So far, we have focused on the elderly, attending to the young only when the elderly attended to them. Yet the question of how the lives of the young are affected by their elders is already an issue. Bertram, we have seen, is to become the king's ward. He is awkward in three attempts to interject himself into the conversation. Though he has inherited his father's title, it is as yet unclear that he has the ability or desire to meet the expectations of the older generation.

As a social outsider, an orphan, and a woman, Helena would seem to be at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Bertram. Yet her elders offer her entrée into society. Unlike Bertram, she keeps her own counsel, and speaks

only when she needs to. When the countess says to her that she should stop crying "lest it rather be thought you affect a sorrow than to have," Helena responds, "I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too" (42).²³ By having "it" in the second clause refer back not to a specific sorrow but only to "a" sorrow, Helena subtly leaves open the possibility that she has two sorrows. Two sorrows are further suggested by two possible meanings for "affect." Helena pretends to a sorrow she does not have²⁴ (for the death of her father, it is soon disclosed); she also feels or loves a sorrow, alluding to the Petrarchan trope linking love and pain. Helena is astute and cautious, feeling that in spite of the praise and attention lavished on her, her place is insecure. At the same time, her punning reveals inner determination, certainly to express her feelings, possibly also to act on them.

Though no words in the text suggest romantic interest between Helena and Bertram, many directors find ways to indicate it. Are they right to do so? That Helena looks on Bertram longingly should not be in doubt, for her first soliloquy (67-86) will disclose that she has previously gazed on him by the hour. However, this same soliloquy that makes her the hind pining with love, makes Bertram the lordly and indifferent lion. Whatever looks Bertram gives Helena must be ambiguous indeed, but he does probably glance over at her. Bertram's third attempt to intrude himself into the conversation of his elders is a request for his mother's blessing that seems motivated by his desire to redirect attention from Helena to himself. About to depart his childhood home, he feels he should be the cynosure of his mother's eyes. Yet resentment at Helena may be only one of Bertram's responses. He makes two closing remarks that complicate an audience's understanding of him. As is conventional practice, the Folio text does not indicate to whom Bertram speaks. His second comment is plainly directed at Helena; the first is addressed either to his mother or to Helena:

The best wishes that can
Be forgèd in your thoughts be servants to you.
Be comfortable to my mother, your mistress,
And make much of her. (1.1.62-65)

Bertram would be expected to say a farewell to his mother, so in all probability his first sentence addresses her. Yet because the remark does

not seem particularly appropriate for a son speaking to his grieving mother, it should possibly be heard as Bertram's thoughts about Helena, as a glance at her could suggest. That her "wishes" should come within her control is a remark suited to Helena, with her youth and restricted circumstances. She is, in fact, filled with "wishes" (1.1.154-61). Bertram may, then, be half fearful, half attracted, to Helena's wishes, and his final patronizing remark, instructing her to "make much of" her "mistress" (64-65), may be an effort to stifle affection he does feel for Helena. Bertram then is *possibly* of a divided mind about Helena. To go further, and say that a love match between Bertram and Helena is already likely is another matter, and quite wrong.

The play up to this point probably appears to most members of the audience as a comedy. Its title anticipates comedy. By portraying an older and a younger generation, and by making the old so old as to make all but inevitable the breaking away of the young, the play anticipates that the young will break away, perhaps by falling in love with one another. The older generation can also share in an "all's well" ending, for the king may recover his health and become "husband" to the countess; alternately, Lafew may marry her. Lafew's indecorous mention of the fistula provides one touch of humor, and Helena's equivocation hints at a readiness for festive wooing.

A degree of ambiguity hangs over all these markers, and against them countermarkers are set. When Frederick Boas grouped several plays, including *All's Well*, as "problem-plays," he described them as portraying "highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness."²⁵ The purple prose notwithstanding, Boas captures quite well the malaise reflected in the opening passage of *All's Well*. The extreme old age of the ruling class suggests a troubled and precarious state. We expect comedy to adumbrate the transfer of authority from one generation to another. Yet unless the old of this play die—a disruption to comedy, surely—it is hard to project an orderly transition. This old insular class would seem to stand as a block to the aspirations of the young.

Helena is the wild card in the deck. The countess's ambiguous praise, Helena's riddling, the unexpected interest that Lafew and the countess take in her, make her mysterious. They suggest that unusual opportunities may open to her that will elude even young Bertram, though

he be a male heir and to the manner born.²⁶ It is unclear whether any in the audience as yet anticipate Helena's determination to "attempt" (1.1.195) a cure of the king as a way to win Bertram. It is also unclear whether any in Shakespeare's original audiences drew connections between the king's guardianship of Bertram and, on the one hand, the most serious abuse of wardship, enforced marriage, and, on the other hand, the leverage Helena seeks with the king. If the rule of the aged in *All's Well* is puzzling, complex, and troubled, then it may be that "the safety and health of this whole state" depend ultimately on the use to which Helena puts her abilities and on whether she retains the backing of her elders.

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NOTES

¹I adopt the term "gerontocracy" from Keith Thomas, who uses it, in "Age and Authority in Early Modern England" (*Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 [1976]: 205-48), to describe the power elite. (Thomas identifies the early modern period as the years "between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries"). Senior positions in a wide range of fields were generally awarded only to men over fifty: "The young were to serve and the old were to rule" (207). Stephen Greenblatt, building on Thomas and others, discusses the underlying fear of the Elizabethan gerontocracy that the young wished to usurp the power of their elders: "The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and His Heirs" (1982; rpt. in Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* [New York: Routledge, 1990] 80-98). Though (as Thomas points out) the very old were customarily at a disadvantage, they dominated the court and government in late Elizabethan England. The consequence, so Anthony Esler argues in *The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1966), was that young men of privileged birth felt thwarted. The situation was alleviated when James ascended the throne, though the broader pattern observed by Thomas was unaltered. *All's Well*, not printed until its inclusion in the First Folio, is generally dated 1603-05. Elizabeth died and James ascended the throne in 1603.

²See Muriel C. Bradbrook's seminal essay, "Virtue is the True Nobility: A Study of the Structure of *All's Well That Ends Well*," *RES* ns 1 (1950): 289-301. In *Shakespeare's Courtly Mirror: Reflexivity and Prudence in All's Well That Ends Well* (Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1993), David Haley importantly modifies Bradbrook by tracing the role of the courtly ideal in the imperfect lives of the ruling class.

³Arthur Kirsch, in *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981) 121-43, characterizes the elderly of *All's Well* by referring to a source earlier proposed

by A. P. Rossiter, Florio's translation of Montaigne's "Upon Some Verses of Virgil." See Rossiter's *Angel With Horns: And Other Shakespeare Lectures*, ed. Graham Storey (London: Theatre Arts Books, 1961) 98-99. Ruth Nevo views from a psychoanalytic angle the effort of the elderly to accept the loss of abilities and to suppress resentment against the young; see "Motive and Meaning in *All's Well That Ends Well*," "Fanned and Winnowed Opinions": *Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins*, eds. John W. Mahon and Thomas Pendleton (London: Methuen, 1987) 26-51. In the course of their discussions, Nevo and Kirsch cite the passages from *All's Well* which show that the ruling class is elderly (and conscious of its age), not merely old in relation to the young. The king observes that he lives so long as to deprive the next generation of its opportunity; see 1.2.58-67 in the New Cambridge AWW, ed. Russell Fraser (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), the edition from which the play is quoted throughout the present essay. (A few Folio speech headings emphasize age: on occasion, the countess is "Old Countess" and "Old Lady" and Lafew is "Old Lord"; as the Folio probably derives from holograph, these headings are evidence of Shakespeare's conception of the characters.) *King Lear* is about upheaval that results when the elderly yield power; *All's Well* traces the consequences when the elderly retain power.

⁴The countess's patronage to Helena's family began at an unspecified earlier time. Bertram remarks contemptuously of Helena, "She had her breeding at my father's charge" (2.3.106).

⁵Haley remarks of an early speech by the countess (1.1.13-17) that "the paradoxical antitheses and chiasitic turns of phrase . . . stamp [it] as courtly" (77).

⁶Royal abuse of wardship was a concern throughout late Tudor and early Stuart rule. *All's Well*, as we have seen, may date from the beginning of James's reign, which coincides with a peak of agitation on wardship. King James was petitioned regarding the subject at the time of his coronation, and in 1604 Parliament took up the issue with vigor though without success. See Wallace Notestein, *The House of Commons: 1604-10* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971) esp. 85-96. For general background on wardship, see Joel Hurstfield, *The Queen's Wards* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958) 33-217. For wardship as it affects *All's Well*, see Marilyn L. Williamson: *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1986) 60-63.

⁷For discussions of incest in the play, see Nevo and also Richard P. Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980). Critics sceptical about an incest motif include Carolyn Asp, "Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *Literature and Psychology* 32.4 (1986): 56 and 63n18, and Haley 43 and 264n39.

⁸Strongly implied later is the countess's use of her connections at court to aid Helena; see 1.3.223-28 and 2.2.52.

⁹Bracketed line numbers, both in the quoted passage and in references to it in this essay, are from the framing margin of *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, The Norton Facsimile, prepared by Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

¹⁰For the ramparts speech, which appears only in Q2, see *Hamlet* 1.4.13-38, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

¹¹Nicholas Rowe's semi-colon after "promises" [42] influenced many subsequent editors, some of whom made the pause into a full stop. Another full stop is often added, following "simplesse" [46]. Editors who print both full stops render Folio's single sentence as three sentences.

¹²The 2nd edition of the *OED* is cited throughout this essay.

¹³See *OED* *clean* a. II. and *unclean* a. 1.

¹⁴See *OED* *honesty* 3.b. The paradox, "That Virginitie is a Vertue," uncertainly ascribed to John Donne, distinguishes between that virginity which a girl has by nature and that virginity which at her maturity she chooses to lose or maintain. The paradox includes phrasing closely echoing Parolles's disquisition on virginity (1.1.109-39). Undetermined, however, is whether *All's Well* or the paradox is earlier in date. For the "paradox," see *John Donne: Paradoxes and Problems*, ed. Helen Peters (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980) 55-58.

¹⁵See Susan Snyder's edition of *AWW* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993) 1.1.42n.

¹⁶Later, at 2.3.60-61, Helena dallies nicely with "simple": "I am a simple maid, and therein wealthiest / That I protest I simply am a maid" (2.3.60-61). Preparing to leave the king and Helena alone together, Lafew remarks to the young woman, "A traitor you do look like" (2.1.93).

¹⁷In the New Arden *All's Well That Ends Well* (London: Methuen, 1967) 1.1.31n.

¹⁸Snyder is more sceptical concerning the fistula in "The King's not here": Displacement and Deferral in *All's Well That Ends Well*, "SQ 43 (1992): 25.

¹⁹(Newark, Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1992) 295.

²⁰In *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and their Significance*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1989), Frankie A. Rubinstein writes under the entry for "fistula" that Gerard de Narbon is "a pun on *Guerir* (to cure—[based on] Cotgrave)" and on "*de Nar-bon*, of the nose-bone (nare is nostril; L[atin] *nares*, nose)."

²¹See, for example, Julie Robin Solomon, "Mortality as Matter of Mind: Towards a Politics of Problems in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *ELR* 23 (1993): 134-69, esp. 155-58.

²²The Bible also provides a partial precedent; Haley 103 and Susan Snyder, in "Displacement and Deferral" 25, both note the hope at the opening of 1 Kings that a virgin may restore King David to health. Also possibly relevant is medieval and early modern medical speculation on the continent that virginity could cure venereal infection; see Winfried Schleiner, *Medical Ethics in the Renaissance* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1995) 186-96.

²³Helena's line is possibly an aside.

²⁴Though the *OED* does not find *affect* used to mean to "counterfeit or pretend" until 1661, it gives examples of *affectation* passing from "artificiality" to "simulation" and "pretence" in works by Sidney and Bacon (*affectation* 5.).

²⁵Frederick Boas, *Shakspeare and His Predecessors* (1896; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902) 345.

²⁶Helena's "disruptive social significance" is well argued by Peter Erickson in *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991) 57-73; the quotation is from p. 69.

Getting a Head in a Warrior Culture: Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the Problem of Identity

LYNNE M. ROBERTSON

Writing on the conclusion of *Macbeth*, William Ingram observes:

It seems inescapable that the closing events of the fifth act—Birnam Wood moving, Macbeth arming, Macduff telling of his birth, Macbeth's death, the bringing in of the head—repeat in reverse order the apparitions of the beginning of the fourth act . . . Macbeth's own head is 'armed' for the first time to our view when Seyton dresses him for combat in V, iii; the helmet, even more than the head, ought to be the same (in stage productions) as the apparition, and at this point, and not earlier, we ought to notice the resemblance. The prompt fulfilment of the other two prophecies would then leave us in little doubt about the impending fate of Macbeth's armed head.¹

Julian Mates, however, in his response to Ingram's article, surely comes closer to the crux of the matter:

All Londoners were familiar with heads atop the southern gate towers of London Bridge, the heads of those executed as traitors. Surely here we have the reason for Macbeth's death offstage, a death necessarily followed by decapitation, in order that the final view the audience had of Macbeth was not only as dead, but also, and the association must have been immediate, as traitor.²

This seems to me to be highly relevant, but I would disagree with Mates' earlier assertion that Shakespeare creates an "obviously awkward situation" by spending the "better half of the play leading to a confrontation, then [having] the murder take place offstage." What Mates dismisses as a "seeming dramaturgical lapse" is in fact more complex than he allows. In all the breadth of the Shakespearean canon, there is only one other tragic hero who dies offstage (Timon, whose death is of course of an entirely different sort), and no others who are beheaded.

What this means is that Macbeth—unlike any other Shakespearean tragic hero—is denied the right to “stage” his own death; the closest he comes to the traditional death speech which we associate with the likes of Othello, Lear, and Hamlet, is in his climactic battle with Macduff:

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;
And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold,
enough!' (V.viii.27-35)³

This “intolerable . . . dislocated self,”⁴ although at this stage not literally beheaded, is in fact the culmination of a process of disembodiment that has been steadily emerging from the second act of the play onwards. After murdering Duncan, the shaken Macbeth returns to his wife who instructs him to “wash this filthy witness from your hand” (II.ii.47), and continues:

. . . If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt . . . (55-57)

The consistent “hand” imagery is continued over the next fifteen lines in the dialogue between them, and is picked up again by Lennox in the following scene:

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd had done't.
Their hands and faces were all badg'd with blood; (II.iii.97-99)

We notice immediately that Lady Macbeth refers only to the faces of the grooms while Lennox mentions both their hands and faces. This is all the more remarkable as the term “hand” (or its plural) is mentioned five times in the previous conversation between Macbeth and his wife. The significance of this is that Lady Macbeth is here marking the initiation of a process of association through repeated imagery which will permeate the entire play and ultimately inform our reading of the closing scene where it will (having now outlived Lady Macbeth) be

echoed once again, this time by her husband in his conversation with the servant:

- MACBETH The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon!
Where got'st thou that goose look?
- SERVANT There is ten thousand—
- MACBETH Geese, villain?
- SERVANT Soldiers, Sir.
- MACBETH Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?
Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine
Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?
- SERVANT The English force, so please you.
- MACBETH Take thy face hence. (V.iii.11-19)

What this process involves is an initially inferred and ultimately explicit dichotomy between “self” and “body” which is made manifest through a code of imagery and rhetoric linking “self” as essential identity, with head (or face); and “body” with the complete absence of this. When Macbeth is beheaded therefore, he is not only—as Mates correctly argues—marked immediately as a traitor, but his essential identity is also instantaneously removed. It follows that in a warrior culture his social power is removed also. The fundamentally problematic nature of “the self” and its relation to the body in Renaissance literature has, of course, attracted the attention of numerous commentators, with critics such as Norbrook situating *Macbeth* at the centre of the debate.⁵ Belsey's work on Renaissance tragedy is also suggestive in this context:

The quest for the truth of the self, our own and others', endlessly fascinating, is precisely endless, since the subject of liberal humanism is a chimera, an effect of language, not its origin.⁶

From the first act onwards, *Macbeth* has been gradually establishing and developing the “clothes” and “dressing” metaphor as a means of representing the cloaking of one's true intentions. It begins when Lady Macbeth asks her husband “Was the hope drunk / wherein you dressed yourself?” (I.vii.36) and is picked up firstly and most obviously by Macbeth himself later in the same act with the famous “False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (I.viii.81-82), and again in Macduff's hope that “things [be] well done . . . Lest our old robes sit

easier than our new" (II.iv.39), but the metaphor can also be seen as relevant to Macbeth's famous soliloquy which immediately follows the news of his wife's death:

She should have died hereafter;
 There would have been a time for such a word.
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time,
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (V.v.17-28)

It is at this point that the gradual process of disembodiment (which will end with Macbeth's beheading) first begins to build towards its climax. Following the strong medial caesura in line twenty three the imagery centres around the stage metaphor, for it is the opportunity to "stage" his own death which Macbeth is to be denied. "Life" may be "a poor player, / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage" with all the attendant notions this carries, but it is also, equally importantly, "a walking shadow," a disembodied figure—an undifferentiated representation of the original upon which it depends for its existence (the relationship, it is worth noting, is not symbiotic). This disembodied figure has no presence just as it has no present ("struts and frets his hour and then is heard no more"); it has, in effect, no self, just as the tale has no meaning (only sound and fury).

This process of disembodiment will of course be brought to its conclusion in the final scene when Macbeth's head is held aloft by the victorious Macduff with the pole now taking the place of his body. From the first act the play has prepared us for this through the parallel development of, firstly the cloaking of intentions metaphor, and secondly the association of these cloaked intentions (and therefore the person's true nature and identity) with the head/face:

DUNCAN Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not
 Those in commission yet return'd?

MALCOLM

My liege,

They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
 With one that saw him die; who did report
 That very frankly he confess'd his treasons,
 Implor'd your Highness pardon, and set forth
 A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
 Became him like the leaving it: he died
 As one that had been studied in his death
 To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd
 As 'twere a careless trifle.

DUNCAN

There's no art

To find the mind's construction in the face.
 He was a gentleman on whom I built
 An absolute trust. (I.iv.1-13)

Compare this with Lady Macbeth's later observation:

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
 May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue; look like th'innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under't. (I.v.59-63)

Macbeth later demands reassurance that Banquo is in fact dead, and the murderers supply it with the lines: "Ay, my good lord. Safe in a ditch he bides, / With twenty trenched gashes on his head, / The least a death to nature" (III.iv.2-28) and this is picked up again in Banquo's ghost's "gory locks." When Macduff's wife enquires as to the identity of the murderers she asks: "What are these faces?" (IV.ii.770), but the most obvious foreshadowing of the events of the final scene comes in the immediately preceding act:

That will never be.

Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
 Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements, good!
 Rebellion's head rise never till the wood
 Of Birnam rise, and our high-plac'd Macbeth
 Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
 To time and mortal custom. Yet my heart
 Throbs to know one thing; tell me, if your art
 Can tell so much—shall Banquo's issue ever
 Reign in this kingdom? (IV.i.94-103)

The meaning of the phrase "rebellion's head" is obvious enough in its primary sense, but the verb which follows it is particularly relevant, for if Macbeth is to be the physical embodiment of rebellion, then the raising of rebellion's head (on a pole) is precisely what Macduff will enact in the final scene. There is, however, a further layer below the surface of the text, doubling back upon, and undercutting itself, for at the very moment when Macbeth is held up (literally) and displayed as what he really is (the embodiment of rebellion), he is in fact entirely disembodied (his head is on a pole). At the very moment when the cloaking of intentions metaphor is brought to a conclusion and thrown aside, the disembodiment theme rises up (in two senses: [1] like rebellion [2] on a stick, literally) and dramatically undercuts it. This is one reason why the play has been, since the first act, associating essential identity with the head and face. That Macbeth's beheading is an act bearing considerable symbolic significance is, in itself, irrefutable, but the manner in which this particular act channels into larger questions concerning violence and the State is, for the play as a whole, a more complex issue:

Generally, in Europe in the sixteenth century the development was from Feudalism to the Absolutist State . . . The reason why the State needed violence and propaganda was that the system was subject to persistent structural difficulties. *Macbeth*, like very many plays of the period, handles anxieties about the violence exercised under the aegis of Absolutist ideology.⁷

Justice must be seen to be done, the tyrant must be seen to be overthrown, and a new social order must be seen to emerge, free of the tyranny and oppression of the old. Indeed this is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy in general. In *Macbeth*, therefore, the undercutting of one strand of imagery by the simultaneous climax of another cannot be allowed to stand in the way of this: another means must be found of achieving the effect, and this is why Macbeth is beheaded, for according to the symbolism and imagery of the drama up to this point, a person's essential identity (their essential "self") resides wholly in their face/head. Earlier in the play Lady Macduff proclaims that all traitors "must be hang'd" (IV.ii.50), but Macbeth—traitor though he undoubtedly is—is not hanged because that would not facilitate annihilation of his true "self":

Hail, King! for so thou art. Behold where stands
 Th' usurper's cursed head. The time is free.
 I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl
 That speak my salutation in their minds;
 Whose voices I desire aloud with mine—
 Hail, King of Scotland! (V.viii.54-59)

Writing on beheadings during the French Revolution, Regina Janes asks why a disembodied head should carry such social and ideological power, and finds the answer in its potential, its relevance as a signifier:

Like other detached body parts, ambulatory hands or forlorn feet, a detached head is a sign we privilege. As a sign, it can enter into a variety of discourses and its meanings will derive from the discourse(s) of which it forms a part, from the tribal to the psychoanalytic, from the developmental to the discursive. Wherever it appears, a severed head is a sign in a discourse over which that head exerts no power and no control.⁸

The discourse which Macbeth's head enters into is that of power, or more specifically, a transfer of absolute social power in a warrior culture. Virgil's *Aeneid* (II.557-58) is also quoted by Janes in support of what she terms "the prestige of the head," but this reverence for the human head can be traced back much further than Virgil. There is strong archaeological evidence which points to the presence of head-hunting in Europe during mesolithic times. A reverence for the human head and a recognition of its importance in relation to the identity of an individual has therefore been in place since before the dawn of what we would now term civilisation; it is something both primal and inherent to the human condition and as such its consistent appearance in literature through the ages should hardly surprise us. In classical drama the theatrical on-stage death of the main character is not a prerequisite for tragedy. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the tragic hero not to die at all (e.g. Philoctetes). Even here, however, where characterology can often be—at least in relation to Renaissance tragedy—of secondary significance, the same theme arises:

ELECTRA. Glorious victor, sprung of a father that brought victory from the war at Ilium, receive, Orestes, this diadem for the clusters of your hair. You return from no profitless six-lap race that you have won, but from killing your enemy, Aegisthus, who destroyed your father and mine.

Orestes enters at this point in Euripides' play bearing the head of the slain Aegisthus, whose body is carried by the following servants. Electra then crowns him with chaplets and he proceeds to offer her the head in order that her former master be her slave:

... expose him for the wild beasts to devour, or impale him on a high stake to be plunder for the birds, the children of the sky. He is now yours.⁹

The fact that the head in question is not that of the tragic hero, in combination with the traditionally cosmic scale of classical dramaturgy may well serve to undercut the effect somewhat, but this is still quite clearly a discourse of power. Orestes enters carrying the head, is himself crowned, then offers the head to Electra to impale it. She will then exert power over this head upon the stake (her former master) in the same way that Macduff will control his former master when he holds Macbeth's disembodied head aloft and declares the time to be free. The subtext here is not concerned so much with the acquisition of authority as with the display of authority. And so the Greek text continues:

ELECTRA. I am ashamed, yet I should like to speak—

ORESTES. What? Say it. You have nothing now to fear.

ELECTRA. I am ashamed to insult the dead for fear some ill may strike me.

The fear of the dead is placed here in a social context: "Our city is hard to please and quick to find fault," but it can, on other occasions in classical texts, take a more literal form, and is seen at its most extreme in the concept of "maschalismos"—the act of removing a dead body's hands/feet to eliminate the possibility of its somehow taking revenge upon its murderer.¹⁰

An interesting variant of this is to be found in *Beowulf*. Grendel is killed by a fatal blow which rips his arm from his shoulder. The hero subsequently—in Grendel's lair for the purpose of killing his mother—seeks out the corpse and proceeds to decapitate the lifeless body. As in the *Electra*, the head is then taken as a trophy, to play its part in the discourse of power that operates within the context of "comitatus":

Four men were needed laboriously to cart Grendel's head on a spear-shaft to the hall of gold-giving Then, by the hair, the head of Grendel, fear-some

thing, was borne into the hall where people were drinking, into the presence of the earls, and of the queen in their midst, a rare spectacle; the men stared at it.¹¹

The association of a disembodied head with the notion of spectacle is not uncommon in texts of this period. A. H. Smith defines "heafod-stocc" as "the post on which the head of a beheaded criminal was exposed," and goes on to state that it appears frequently in O.E. charters.¹² *The Toronto Concordance*, however, lists only two occurrences, the first of which is in MS 1. Winchester College.¹³ This is the *Sawyer 470 Charter* and would therefore date the usage around 940 A.D. (Precise dating of the *Beowulf* manuscript is still disputed).

Compare this with the following quotation from *Judith* (London British Library Cotton Vitellius A xv Folio 202a-209a), which dates from approximately 1000, and we can clearly see a line of this type of imagery which can be traced from mesolithic times through classical dramaturgy, to Old English, and eventually into Renaissance art and literature:

Then the clever woman ornamented with gold directed her attentive servant-girl to unwrap the harrier's head and to display the bloody object to the citizens as proof of how she had fared in the struggle. The noble lady then spoke to the whole populace:

'Victorious heroes, leaders of the people; here you may openly gaze upon the head of that most odious heathen warrior, the dead Holofernes'¹⁴

(Relevant sections of the Deuterocanonical Books are 'Judith' Chapter 13, Verses 15 and 18, and Chapter 14, Verse 1).¹⁵

The list of such occurrences could easily be extended, but the point has surely been made; the physical disfigurement of Macbeth—the separation of head from body—which McMillan rightly points to as a "mirror of his psychic disfigurement"¹⁶ can be constructively viewed in this wider context, and Macduff's line "That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face" (V.vii.14) takes on even greater significance for it can reasonably be read as a synonym for 'Tyrant, show thy self.' When we continue into the following scenes this becomes yet more apparent in Macbeth's previously quoted speech: "Before my body / I throw my warlike shield" (V.viii.28-35) where "body" means just that, and in this case (according to the symbolism of the drama to this point) we must

interpret "body" as representative of an absence or lack of essential identity (i.e. self). The fact that all this immediately follows Macduff's "We'll have thee . . . Painted upon a pole" serves, of course, to underline the point. Macbeth's "self" is, in this act, almost exclusively associated with Macduff who uses only terms linked in some way to the head ("face," "pole"), and so all that remains for Macbeth himself is the "body" along with the inevitable accompaniment to this (complete absence of coherent identity).¹⁷ This is the loss or absence which Macbeth has fought desperately to prevent throughout the final act as the creeping inevitability of his fate gradually enveloped him. The witches' prophesy begins to reach fulfilment:

. . . [I] begin
 To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
 That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam wood
 Do come to Dunsinane.' And now a wood
 Comes toward Dunsinane. (V.v.42-46)

and Macbeth responds with a bold and actively direct assertion of his own identity ("My name's Macbeth") in the face of constantly increasing odds, for the momentum is now clearly moving irretrievably in the opposite direction. And so as the incorporeal and intangible slayer of Macbeth ("What's he / That was not born of woman?") becomes the very real and present Macduff, the tragic hero—despite his best attempts at self-assertion—becomes in his own final speech a mere "body," and ultimately not even that (a head upon a pole). Macbeth then, loses not simply his head, but perhaps more importantly, his essential identity, and with it his right to die "as one that had been studied in his death"; his integrity and unity the inevitable sacrifices in order that the final speech of the play may carry the same weight as that of Shakespeare's other non-Roman tragedies.

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NOTES

¹William Ingram, "'Enter Macduffe; With Macbeth's Head,'" *Theatre Notebook* 26 (1971): 75.

²Julian Mates, "Notes and Queries. Macbeth's Head," *Theatre Notebook* 28 (1974): 138.

³All Shakespeare quotations are from *Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994).

⁴Dorothy McMillan, "Introduction to *Macbeth*," in *Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994) 1049.

⁵See David Norbrook, "Macbeth and the politics of historiography," *Politics of Discourse*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987).

⁶Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985) 54.

⁷Alan Sinfield, "Macbeth: History, Ideology and Intellectuals," *Critical Quarterly* 28 (1986): 63, 64.

⁸Regina Janes, "Beheadings," *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 250.

⁹The English translation used here, *The Plays of Euripides*, trans. Hadas and McLean (New York: The Dial Press, 1936) 323, refers to "the body," however, F. A. Paley's commentary on the Greek text clearly relates to Aegisthus' head. See "The Electra," in *Euripides, With An English Commentary*, ed. George Long and A. J. Macleane, vol. 2 (London: Whittaker and Co., 1858) 361.

¹⁰For a detailed study of the fear of the dead see Claude Lecouteux, *Fantômes et revenants aux Moyen Age* (Paris: Ed. Imago, 1986). On "maschalismos" see G. L. Kittredge, *American Journal of Philology* 6 (1885): 151.

¹¹S. A. J. Bradley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent, 1991) 454-55.

¹²A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, English Place Name Society 25 (Cambridge: CUP, 1956) 237.

¹³Muniment Room, Cabinet 7, Drawer 2, no. 2 (s.x med.; O.S. Facs., ii, Winchester Coll. 3).

¹⁴Bradley (ed.) 500.

¹⁵"Book Of Judith," *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments Catholic Edition*, ed. D. B. Orchard and R. C. Fuller (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966) 445.

¹⁶McMillan 1049.

¹⁷For a detailed study of the various fates which could await the "criminal body" in the Renaissance and Reformation period see ch. 4 "Execution, Anatomy, and Infamy" in Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Of Mountains and Men: Vision and Memory in Wordsworth and Petrarch

ÅKE BERGVALL

Ever since Moses saw the back of God on Mount Sinai¹ or Greek poets began invoking the Muses of Mount Helicon, mountains have been associated with oracular inspiration. Scaling the heavens, and providing visionary views of the earth below, they have long carried a heavy metaphorical and metaphysical load. Renaissance and romantic poets were particularly eager to ascend both real and imaginary mountains. Spenser, for example, has Redcrosse, the hero of Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*, take in the view from "the highest Mount; / Such one, as that same mighty man of God, / . . . Dwelt fortie dayes vpon; . . . / Or like that pleasant Mount, that is for ay / Through famous Poets verse each were [i.e., everywhere] renownd" (FQ 1.10.53-54).² Milton, knowing his Spenser better than most, but disagreeing with the earlier poet's easy juxtaposition of sacred and secular, was not to be outdone. Not intending to soar in "middle flight . . . / Above th' Aonian mount," he instead sought exclusive inspiration from the "Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top / Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire / That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed" (PL 1.6-15).³ While the two poets may disagree about the status of the Greek muses, both without hesitation conflate prophetic and poetic inspiration, their epics being conceived on metaphorical mountains not unlike Mount Sinai.⁴

And if Spenser and Milton were interested in high peaks, that was even more true for the romantic poets, who had a fixation on mountains greater than almost any other generation. Their more or less self-projected heroes—whether a Byronic Manfred, a Shelleyan Prometheus, or Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" self—all seemed to seek the solitude and vista offered by mountain ranges, from which to invoke or defy the gods.

In this paper, however, I shall limit myself to two poets, separated by some 450 years, who both took as their literary starting point real, as against fictitious, mountain climbing: Wordsworth's celebrated trek up Mount Snowdon in Wales, and Petrarch's equally famous ascent of Mont Ventoux in the French Alps. And thanks to the Augustinian connection (explicit in Petrarch, implicit in Wordsworth) I shall also have occasion to comment on what the Church Father, who I doubt ever voluntarily climbed any mountain, had to say about such an undertaking.

I

Wordsworth's ascent comes as the climax of the 1850 *Prelude*, dominating the concluding 14th Book. Desiring "to see the sun / Rise from the top of Snowdon" (14.5-6),⁵ the poet, accompanied by a friend and a "trusty" shepherd, starts the climb in the dead of a "close, warm, breezeless summer night" (14.11). A "dripping fog" clouds their vision during the ascent, until suddenly breaking through the mist, the poet sees a moonlit landscape spreading out below:

... at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist. (14.35-42)

Seemingly forgetting his companions, Wordsworth takes in the scene below with its "hundred hills" heaving their "dusky backs" above the mist, which forms a silent ocean whose splendor usurps the majesty of the Atlantic, seen in the distance. Even more impressive is "the ethereal vault," dominated by "the full-orbed Moon, / Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed / Upon the billowy ocean" (13.43-55). Silence reigns, except for the "roar of waters" through an abysmal rift nearby, a sound "Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour, / For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens" (14.61-62).

In a characteristic move, Wordsworth goes on to invest the physical landscape with metaphorical meaning, making it "the emblem of a mind / That feeds upon infinity" (14.70-71). This move takes place not during the actual vision, but in later recollection, when "That vision . . . in calm thought / Reflected . . . appeared to me the type / Of a majestic intellect" (14.64-67). Two aspects of the natural scene, involving the senses of sight and hearing respectively, impress the poet: the *vision* of a moon that itself both gazes down at and casts its radiance upon the scene below, and the *sound* of the roaring waters heard or felt by both the starry heavens and the poet. The main comparison is between the mind of the poet and the moon: both look down at the landscape from an elevated position, and both exert "mutual domination . . . upon the face of outward things" (14.81-82)—the moon through the power of its silvery light, the poet through the power of his imagination, "that glorious faculty / That higher minds bear with them as their own" (14.89-90). As the moon in the process of looking down transforms the scene, so the "higher minds"

. . . from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence. (14.93-95)

This passage is a textbook example of what M. H. Abrams, in his influential study *The Mirror and the Lamp*, described as the "prevailing romantic conception of the poetic mind."⁶ Abrams is talking about the metaphor of the Lamp, "a radiant projector which makes contribution to the objects it perceives" as against the classical or neo-classical metaphor of the Mirror, merely "a reflector of external objects." Yet is Wordsworth, as also Keats charges in his letters,⁷ simply spreading the solipsistic radiance of his sublime ego? If we look carefully at the passage, we shall see that Wordsworth is mixing Abrams' basic metaphors more than the neat distinction between projector and reflector would seem to allow. First, while the poet's vision is of the moon, what he had originally climbed the mountain to see was the early rising of the sun. Clearly, we are meant to consider the age-old comparison of the two heavenly objects: the sun, being its own source of light, is the real lamp, while the moon only reflects the radiance of its solar neighbor.

Therefore the moon is not the emblem of a self-contained and solipsistic mind, but, as Wordsworth expresses it in lines 70-71, a "mind / That feeds upon infinity."

This is where the references to hearing come in. As the starry heavens in lines 59-62 seemed to feel "the roar of waters," so the poetic mind broods

Over the dark abyss, intent to *hear*
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream. (14.71-74; emphasis added)

Admittedly, the meaning of these lines is not self-evident, but there is a clear reference to Scripture via *Paradise Lost*. The Holy Spirit in Genesis 1 likewise brooded over the waters, presumably listening to God's creative word: "'Let there be light'; and there was light." A poetic mind that feeds on eternity is in some sense reflecting the "silent light" of the Creator. But Wordsworth also echoes Milton's invocation of the Heavenly Muse in *Paradise Lost*, a work often alluded to in *The Prelude*:

Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss,
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumine, (PL 1.19-23)

While Wordsworth's own invocation in Book 1 of *The Prelude* is vague enough in its reference to the "sweet breath of heaven" (1.33), here at the end of his epic he intimates that the inspirational wind may indeed be Milton's Heavenly Muse, the pneuma that according to John 3.8 "bloweth where it listeth."

Wordsworth reinforces the sense of hearing right after the passage about the seemingly self-reflective powers of the "higher minds":

They from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence; . . .
Like angels stopped upon the wing by *sound*
Of Harmony from Heaven's remotest spheres. (14.93-99; emphasis added)

In what way is the creative mind like an angel? Both are guided by the sound of heavenly harmony, answers Wordsworth, rounding off this part of the poem with a paean to the divinity of poetry (or rather of the poet):

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That flesh can know is theirs—the consciousness
Of Whom [note, not “Who,” but “Of Whom”] they are, habitually infused
Through every image and through every thought,
And all affections by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to divine. (14.112-18)

My point, again, is simply that for Wordsworth, the poet is like the moon, spreading a transforming light on the surroundings, yet a light that is itself a reflection of the glorious light of day. It is not simply a lamp, but a lamp situated within a mirror. Abrams rightly emphasizes the centrality of the self in romantic poetics, making Wordsworth's celebrated declaration from the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* the touchstone for his very learned study: “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Yet he strangely neglects the equally famous continuation: “it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”⁸ My guess is that the reason for this silence is that the various literary and philosophical texts that form the basis for Abrams' study have precious little to say on the topic. To get a fuller picture of Wordsworth's poetics, we need to look in a different direction, and a good way of doing so is to join another mountain expedition, this time led by Petrarch.

II

Petrarch, like Wordsworth after him, was eager to climb a mountain, in his case Mont Ventoux situated near his long-time residence in the foothills of the French Alps. He relates the adventure in a letter to his good friend and spiritual mentor, the Augustinian monk Francesco Dionigi, supposedly written in 1336 but not published until the 1350s:

"Today," he writes Dionigi, "I ascended the highest mountain in this region, which, not without cause, they call the Windy Peak. Nothing but the desire to see its conspicuous height was the reason for this undertaking" (Ventoux 36).⁹ Accompanied by his brother Gerardo and two servants, Petrarch had started the expedition in the morning hours, not during the night like Wordsworth. Also unlike the later poet, who as an experienced outdoorsman climbed Snowdon without effort, Petrarch has a hard time getting to the top. While his brother goes straight for it, the poet loses his way among the foothills and valleys. Despite these differences in detail, however, what strikes a latter-day reader of the two accounts is their parallel structure: both poets are self-centred metaphor-mongers, who translate the outward landscape into pictures of their internal mindscape. Sitting down exhausted during his ascent, Petrarch for his part turns on himself: "What you have so often experienced today while climbing this mountain happens to you, you must know, and to many others who are making their way towards the blessed life. . . . Having strayed far in error, you must either ascend to the summit of the blessed life under the heavy burden of hard striving, ill deferred, or lie prostrate in your slothfulness in the valleys of your sins" ("Ventoux" 39-40). This sounds more like *Pilgrim's Progress* than a travel guide. The climb becomes an allegory of the spiritual life, with Petrarch playing the role of the prodigal son.

After a strenuous climb, Petrarch eventually does reach the top with its breathtaking view: "One could see most distinctly the mountains of the province of Lyons to the right and, to the left, the sea near Marseilles. . . . The Rhone River was directly under our eyes" ("Ventoux" 43-44). But again, internal promptings take over, this time in the form of a quotation from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine:

I admired every detail, now relishing earthly enjoyment, now lifting up my mind to higher spheres after the example of my body [a beautiful example of the metaphorical power of the mountain], and I thought it fit to look into the volume of Augustine's *Confessions* Where I fixed my eyes first, it was written: "And men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the river, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars—and desert themselves." I was stunned, I confess. . . . I was completely satisfied with what I had seen of the mountain and turned my inner eye toward myself.

What is important to realise here is that Petrarch not only dips into Augustine's autobiography, which he carried with him everywhere, but he emulates the Father's own example. At a critical point in *his* life, Augustine had opened a book at random—in his case, St Paul's letter to the Romans; and that reading had led to his famous garden conversion, recorded in Book 8 of the *Confessions*. Several scholars argue that Petrarch fashions his own autobiography after this Augustinian pattern, to the point of doctoring the whole story of his "conversion" at the top of Mont Ventoux.¹⁰ Even the year of the supposed climb, when Petrarch would have been 32 years old, was chosen perhaps to correspond to Augustine's age at the time of *his* conversion. As in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, the details of Petrarch's life story were later recollected and rearranged to fit a preconceived pattern.

What is clear is that Augustine's introspective and retrospective explorations provided a pattern for later emulation, a pattern that both Petrarch and Wordsworth followed in their different ways. We saw that Petrarch, as a result of reading the *Confessions*, turned his inner eye toward himself. Yet, like many a scholar, he actually misrepresents his text through partial quotation, transforming it into a pious warning against excessive interest in the natural world. If we read the continuation of Augustine's text, however, we find that the Father is less judgmental than Petrarch makes him out to be. More importantly, the section in which the quotation occurs, Book 10 of the *Confessions*, provides the blueprint for all later explorations of the self. Let us look at the fuller Augustinian context: "Yet men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves." This is where Petrarch put down his book, but the passage continues:

They do not marvel at the thought that while I have been mentioning these things, I have not been looking at them with my eyes, and that I could not even speak of mountains or waves, rivers or stars, which are things that I have seen, or of the ocean, which I know only on the evidence of others, unless I could see them in my mind's eye, in my memory, and with the same vast spaces between them that would be there if I were looking at them in the world outside myself. When I saw them with the sight of my eyes, I did not draw

them bodily into myself. They are not inside me themselves, but only their images. And I know which of my senses imprinted each image on my mind. (*Confessions* 10.8)¹¹

The section comes at the beginning of Augustine's prolonged exploration of the memory, an exploration which provides the theoretical foundation for the preceding nine autobiographical books of the *Confessions*. And to Augustine, as to Petrarch and Wordsworth, the faculty of memory is intimately connected with the imagination. As Albert Russell Ascoli explains, "The imagination is the faculty by which the sense perceptions are converted into mental records; while memory is the faculty in which such records are conserved over the passage of time. In short, they are responsible for re-presenting the contents of space and time by removing them, in the form of images and words, from subjection to particular places and times and storing them in the mind."¹²

Autobiography, for Augustine, is to "gather together" or "to collect" the otherwise "scattered" and unconnected facts of our lives into a coherent narrative of conversion. This process first takes place in our memory: abstract thinking, he writes a few chapters further on,

is simply a process of thought by which we gather together [*colligere*] things which, although they are muddled and confused, are already contained in the memory. . . . In other words, once [the thoughts] have been dispersed, I have to collect [*colligenda*] them again, and this is the derivation of the word *cogitare*, which means *to think* or *to collect one's thoughts*. For in Latin the word *cogo*, meaning *I assemble* or *I collect*, is related to *cogito*, which means *I think*. (*Confessions* 10.11)

This process is fundamentally logocentric (*logos* being the Greek word for both reason and language), not only in trying to create order out of the scattered fragments of the past, but because the process is based on the co-operation and grace of the divine Logos, the Word of God. Augustine explains: "But in all the regions where I thread my way, seeking your guidance, only in you [i.e., the divine Truth] do I find a safe haven for my mind, a gathering-place for my scattered parts [*quo colligantur sparsa mea*]" (*Confessions* 10.40). In the first nine books of the *Confessions*, Augustine had collected the significant moments of his personal history of salvation. In the *City of God* he does the same for

world history: in both cases the scattered and seemingly unconnected facts of history, whether personal or universal, gain coherence and meaning.

Despite Petrarch's misquotation of the *Confessions*, he elsewhere shows that he has absorbed its pattern. At the end of the *Secretum*, a long imaginary dialogue between the poet and the Church Father, Petrarch uses Augustine's exact vocabulary: "I will collect the scattered fragments of my soul [*et sparsa anime fragmenta recolligam*]." ¹³ And he goes on to call his famed collection of introspective poems the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, "Fragments of vernacular poetry," also known from a line in the first sonnet as the *Rime sparse*, the "scattered rimes." Clearly, Petrarch felt that he was engaged in a project similar to that of the great Church Father, trying to collect the scattered pieces of his life and love into a coherent and harmonious whole. But, as many critics have noted, he ran into problems. For one thing, neither images nor language were always reliable, partaking as they did in the Fall. In particular, his cherished mental image of Laura, as he himself was fully aware, was liable to turn into a seductive phantasm, a false image that pulled him away from God. "Augustinus," Petrarch's fictive interlocutor in the *Secretum*, undercuts the poet's claim that Laura, "the image of virtue," has had a beneficial effect on him: "She has detached your mind from the love of heavenly things and has inclined your heart to love the creature more than the Creator."¹⁴ The reason for this is that the "plague of too many impressions tears apart and wounds the thinking faculty of the soul, and with its fatal, distracting complexity bars the way of clear meditation, whereby it would mount up to the threshold of the One Chief Good."¹⁵ The construction of a narrative of conversion is seemingly fraught with difficulty.¹⁶

The same can be said for the "Ascent of Mont Ventoux." The writing strategy is clearly Augustinian: "At each step along the way," writes Ascoli, "the Petrarchan narrator calls our attention to the way that the relation between physical and intellectual experience is mediated both by the internal faculties of imagination and memory and by the externalized record of the contents of those faculties, namely, writing itself."¹⁷ Yet despite Augustine's example, Petrarch in fact does not experience any conversion on the mountain top, but descends the same

man as before. This has lead Jill Robbins to claim that Petrarch “wants a perversion narrative, whose principles of construction are the rigorous inversion of conversion narrative,” this in order for the narrative to “claim a closure and self-reflexivity, which amounts to an absolute autonomy.” “But,” as Robbins continues, “such an aesthetic strategy (perversion narrative) is based on the same presuppositions as conversion narrative. The text claims to constitute itself by an aesthetic recuperation of conversion and its negation. Instead of Christ the Word redeeming words, we have words redeeming themselves. The text’s unity is now aesthetic rather than theological.”¹⁸ Analogous readings have been put forward by many others, often in connection with a discussion of the formation of modern individuality and/or the situating of the “Ascent” at the turning point between the Middle Ages and the “modern” world. Robert Durling, for example, argues for an “ironic” rather than “allegorical” strategy,¹⁹ while Walter Haug suggests that Petrarch created a “sprachlich-geschichtliche Zwischensphäre,” in which language, “im Mittelalter nur Spiegel der Korrelation von Geist und Welt, wird nun zur Dimension der Erfahrung von Geschichte und Individualität.”²⁰ Abrams’ chronological dividing line between the mirror and the lamp, it appears, becomes extended from the Romantic to the Early Modern period.

III

The line becomes even more blurred when we move forward again to Wordsworth. Ever since Petrarch made the *Confessions* “the paradigm for all representations of the self in a retrospective literary structure,” John Freccero explains, “every narrative of the self is the story of a conversion.”²¹ This certainly is true for *The Prelude*. If Petrarch knew his Augustine but was not able to live up to his supposed example, the opposite can be said about Wordsworth. Even though Duncan Wu records no references to Augustine in his two books on Wordsworth’s reading,²² few poets have hewed closer to the Church Father in their writing strategies. Who since Petrarch has made introspection such a virtue as did Wordsworth, the creator of an epic on his own inner life?

His celebrated "spots of time" gather together the significant moments of his life into a coherent salvific narrative:

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen. (12.208-18)

And the Imagination, for Wordsworth far more than simply the faculty of storing images in the memory, is what moulds and orders the "spots of time" into a narrative of "spiritual love":

This spiritual love acts not nor can exist
Without Imagination, which in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood. (14.188-92)

Like the *Confessions*, *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's story of conversion, with the salvific climax coinciding with the ascent of Mount Snowdon in Book 14. If anything, Wordsworth has greater faith in the narrative of conversion than either Augustine or Petrarch, tied down as they both were by their hard-earned knowledge of human imperfection and sin. The combination of city life and the French revolution gone sour provided Wordsworth with the needed peripeteia (after all, one has to be saved from something), but the final restoration of his mental well-being is never in doubt.

At the very centre of Wordsworth's poetics we find a strong Augustinian presence. What happens in "I wandered lonely as a cloud," when the poet "dances with the daffodils," or for that matter when "in calm thought / Reflected" the narrator of *The Prelude* makes a mountain vista an emblem of the poet's mind? Wordsworth's own word for it,

of course, was "recollection," the exact English equivalent of the Latin term used by Augustine and Petrarch both, the verb form of which means "To call or bring back (something) to one's mind; to recall the knowledge of (a thing, person, etc.); to remember" or "to concentrate or absorb (the mind, oneself, etc.) in contemplation" (*OED*). Is it pure coincidence that the continuation of the passages in both the *Confessions* and the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* describe an inner joy?

Only in you do I find a safe haven for my mind, a gathering-place for my scattered parts, where no portion of me can depart from you. And sometimes you allow me to experience a feeling quite unlike my normal state, an inward sense of delight. (*Confessions* 10.40)

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. . . . But the emotion . . . is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*)²³

Admittedly, the differences between these two passages are as important as the similarities. Wordsworth clearly is not Augustine. A fuller study of Wordsworth's poetics would have to combine the textual ancestry of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," so thoroughly investigated by Abrams, with the Augustinian matrix for the continuation of the quotation. Yet the joy of the mystical union with God, which Augustine's text encouraged in later ages, may not be that different from Wordsworth's poetic rapture. He may be closer to Spenser's vision of the harmonious coexistence of Mount Horeb with Mount Helicon than to Milton's separation of the two. At the very least we have to admit that Wordsworth on Snowdon, as much as Petrarch on Mont Ventoux, took to heart Augustine's set of priorities about external nature and human nature (I am quoting from the very last lines of *The Prelude*):

Prophets of Nature, we [poets will] . . .
 Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells. . . .

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NOTES

¹See Exod. 33:18-23.

²Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. and C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

³John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Student's Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson (1930; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1933).

⁴Or the Mount of Olives, the arena for the teaching of Christ, which both poets also refer to in the same passages (a detail which strengthens the case for Milton's conscious discussion with Spenser).

⁵William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. J. C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). All further references to the 1850 *Prelude* will be given in the text by book and line numbers.

⁶M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: OUP, 1953) viii.

⁷Distancing himself from "the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime," Keats in a letter to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October 1818 argues that "the poetical character" should have no self (*Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu [Oxford: Blackwell, 1994] 1019). See also Keats's letters from the same year to John Hamilton Reynolds (1016-18).

⁸William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802 ed., *Romanticism: An Anthology* 263.

⁹Petrarch, "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux," trans. Hans Nachod, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer et al. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1948). All further references to the work will be given in the text by page number.

¹⁰Hans Baron, for example, argues: "The chronology of [Petrarch's] spiritual life—not only in his fictional letters but also in the autobiographical sections of his other works—has been modeled on Augustine's development" (*Petrarch's "Secretum"* [Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1985] 197).

¹¹Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). All further references to the work will be given in the text by book and chapter.

¹²Albert Russell Ascoli, "Petrarch's Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the 'Ascent of Mount Ventoux,'" *Stanford Italian Review* 10 (1991): 17.

¹³As translated (and explicated) in Victoria Kahn, "The Figure of the Reader in Petrarch's *Secretum*," *PMLA* 100 (1985): 163.

¹⁴*Petrarch's Secret: Or the Soul's Conflict with Passion: Three Dialogues between Himself and S. Augustine*, tr. William H. Draper (1911; rpt. Westport: Hyperion Press, 1987) 111 and 124.

¹⁵*Petrarch's Secret* 43.

¹⁶But therefore not impossible: a wider discussion of these issues goes beyond the scope of this short paper, but will be addressed in a longer study on Augustine and the Renaissance that is nearing completion.

¹⁷Ascoli 20.

¹⁸Jill Robbins, "Petrarch Reading Augustine: 'The Ascent Of Mont Ventoux,'" *PQ* 64 (1985): 546. Lyell Asher goes even further: "Self-reference in 'The Ascent' performs a specific kind of work, a negotiation, if you like, the necessity of which can be tied

to a period in the Christian West when it became possible to conceive an order of salvation existing elsewhere than in the City of God—existing in the city of humanity, in the *studia humanitatis*” (“Petrarch at the Peak of Fame,” *PMLA* 108 [1993]: 1059). Ascoli, however, proposes another explanation: “Petrarch’s use of Augustine may . . . be seen as a critique of the saint’s confident memorial account of his own spiritual death and rebirth. As I have begun to suggest, however, it might be that Book 10 [of the *Confessions*] itself actually constitutes the Saint’s own refusal to claim fully for mortal man that ‘perspective of the end,’ which only properly belongs to Christ in Judgement and thereby qualifies the preceding narrative’s claims for a definitive and irreversible conversion” (37, note 65). Both Augustine and Petrarch, in the final analysis, may depend more on divine Grace for their own salvation than their own narratives, however well written (see Ascoli 38).

¹⁹Robert M. Durling, “The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory,” *Italian Quarterly* 18.69 (1974): 7-28. Yet see Michael O’Connell, “Authority and Truth of Experience in Petrarch’s ‘Ascent of Mount Ventoux,’” *PQ* 62 (1983): 509n5.

²⁰Walter Haug, “Francesco Petrarca—Nicolaus Cusanus—Thüring von Ringoltingen: Drei Probestücke zu einer Geschichte der Individualität im 14./15. Jahrhundert,” *Individualität*, ed. Manfred Frank and Anselm Haverkamp (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1988) 303.

²¹John Freccero, “Autobiography and Narrative,” *Reconstructing Individualism: Autobiography, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986) 17.

²²Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), and *Wordsworth’s Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995). That Wordsworth, through years of solid education, should have missed out completely on Augustine seems highly unlikely; however.

²³Wordsworth, Preface 263.

Science and the Re-representation of African Identity in *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*

FRANCIS NGABOH-SMART

At its inception and for a long time thereafter, written African literature was close to nationalist rhetoric.¹ That is, before and immediately after independence, African leaders were not averse to, and even encouraged, the writer's role of creating the cultural referents that would inspire Africans with a sense of nationhood. As Said says, "Literature . . . played a crucial role in the . . . reinstatement of native idioms, in the reimagining and refiguring of local histories, geographies, communities" during the "anti-imperial" struggle (316). In other words, literature complemented the nationalist agenda by teaching people about their history and traditions. So, as long as literature remained ineluctably tied to nationalist rhetoric, its representations were bound to privilege the collective identity posited by nationalism. In any case, for most nationalists, identity was only thinkable within a nation whose culture, whether invented² or not, was supposed to endow individuals with a sense of their uniqueness as Africans.

After independence, it was soon apparent that while the nationalist leaders may have given the writer the responsibility of re-inventing the nation's cultural psyche, its technological soul was reserved for another agent: the scientist. In fact as most African states gained a semblance of nationhood, and as writers became trenchant in their criticism of the venality of the new leaders, the gaps among artist, scientist, and politician widened, creating a dichotomy between science and literature. In 1986, while conceding that the "comprehensive goal of a developing nation is . . . modernization," Achebe, for example, lamented the wedge "literal mind[ed]" bureaucrats were forging between science and the arts (151). "The cry all around is for more science and less humanities for in the narrow disposition of the literal mind more of one must mean

less of the other," Achebe criticizes (161). Thus, if we are looking for patterns in which scientific discourse in African literature enhances or contributes to the narrative on identity, we must go beyond the early or canonical writers. Most of them have been, understandably, too preoccupied with a cultural renaissance, and when they used tropes from science, as they often did,³ it was primarily to create a body of signs that would distinguish Africa from the West.

Recently, though, writers such as Ben Okri seem not to embrace uncritically Senghor's suggestion of using the nation or culture as a space for creating "conscious will[s]" striving for a "harmonious whole" (68). For such writers even the meaning that the nation was previously asked to articulate is now seriously constrained, and they also seem to disagree with the use of culture as a site for generating an authentic identity. These are the writers whose works poach on other disciplines, or for whom the boundaries between science and literature, for example, are crossed at will to resituate African identity. Of course, they still talk about the nation or about how to be African, but their emphases no longer fall entirely on local values. Rather, they now underscore their "in-betweenness."

The Ghanaian writer, Kojo B. Laing, belongs to this new breed of writers, and, like Ben Okri, he challenges Africans "to widen the range of [their] dialogues," or to move away from the "nativist" paradigm of earlier years (2250). Unlike most of his contemporaries, though, Laing primarily uses tropes from science in his re-representation of African identity. Thus, it is within the context created by science or technology that one can discuss Laing's treatment of identity in *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*, a futuristic, part-non-mimetic, and highly poetic novel.

Of course, this does not mean that *Major Gentl* is a conventional science fiction narrative: "a fictional novum . . . validated by cognitive logic" (Darko Suvin 141). In fact, the novel so thoroughly combines elements of science and the supernatural that it can best be called a science fantasy, a hybrid form in which the narrative momentum depends on the overlap between elements of science and fantasy. Elements of science fiction are evident in *Major Gentl's* "extrapolative" concern, namely, its observation of trends in contemporary Ghana and in extending the pattern into a hypothetical future. This is a model Suvin now sees as not exhaustive

enough for describing science fiction, but which he himself still endorses in the “restricted sense of reflecting on the authors’s own historical period and the possibilities inherent in it” (152). According to such a reading then, Achimota in 2020 is “about collective human relationships” in 1992. Also, the novel makes use of conventional science fiction motifs such as galactic travels, adventure and movement (as manifested by Torro’s wanderings), the effect of science or technology on human civilization, and, among others, the appropriation of a science laden idiom.

Elements of fantasy are present through impossible or near-magical events: ghosts and reincarnations, magical revivals of Torro after each death. Also, although the two generals, Torro and Gentl, the central characters in the novel, make use of technology (computers and binoculars), there are mythical or supernatural dimensions to their actions. Each general is supposed to be the savior or source of salvation for those he represents, each has his talisman and helpmates (rats for Torro and snakes for Gentl), and both are severely tested like the supernatural heroes of folklore. In other words, Gentl and Torro have the potential of creating “the type of emotional charge that epic adventures arouse in the reader. . . .” It’s just that Laing extends “the topography of the epos . . . into the future” (Sergio Solmi 12).⁴ *Major Gentl* is thus a science fantasy because of its “mingling” of science and supernatural fictional narrative elements.

I do not, however, intend to suggest that the use of fantasy or even scientific metaphors in African fiction is reducible to Laing. But if, as I have thus far intimated, a writer’s appropriation of the tropes of science pulverizes a bounded notion of identity, then Laing’s writing affords us with an important example of the use of the genre in African literature. Indeed *Major Gentl*’s metaphors, like most narratives that draw on science fantasy for their images,⁵ create the impression of both an expanded spatiality and a decentered identity, a pervasive concern in Laing’s entire fictional corpus. In both the first and second novels, *Search Sweet Country* and *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, for example, Laing questions the authority of the past by creating an active distance between culture and the self. In *Woman* in particular, he not only uses the airplane as a metaphor for reconstituting a world without hierarchy, but he also

creates a startling symbol, the stupidity machine, through which characters interface with the mechanical world. The airplane and the stupidity machine, as symbols of spatial dislocation, both make us realize that human identity is a tissue of perpetually changing meanings.

In these early works, I suggest, Laing lays the foundation for a deeper plunge into the world of modern electronics in his third novel. *Major Gentl* therefore only makes sense when seen as a culmination of the criticism of a unified identity started in the previous novels. In short, the characters, whose appropriation of electronic technology helps extend Laing's criticism of a unified identity, have already been anticipated by the stupidity machine in *Woman*. More than the characters in *Woman*, though, the characters in *Major Gentl*, because of their addiction to technology, bear a striking resemblance to characters or subjects in electronic culture, whom Baudrillard describes as "terminals of multiple networks" (16).

Framed by and set within the scientific developments of this century, *Major Gentl* is thus primarily about technological advancement. In fact it is the vision of an electronically transformed world that provides the novel with much of its impetus for meditating on existence. Which is to say that although the date 2020 is a reference to the future, Laing also underscores a "this-worldly" (Suvin 155) perspective. He, for instance, makes credible references to the present, which imparts an air of immediacy on the agonizing incidents. Also, most of the technologies of transformation are already perfected, and a first war of existence has already been fought. The new electronic gadgets are thus only signs of a second configuration of existence whose "possibilities" have already manifested themselves.

Laing, however, plots the reconfiguration of existence in the form of a war, which he labels the "Second war of Existence," and the war provides the book with its main narrative thread. At a deceptively literal level, though, the war becomes a conflict between Africa on the one side and the West and apartheid South Africa on the other. The West is represented by Torro, the terrible Roman, and Africa by Major Gentl. Preceded by a series of alliances and counter-alliances, the war starts late in the novel. While Achimota waits for the real battle, Torro and Gentl's children start their own war, a war that is never won by either

side. And when Gentl and Torro eventually go to war, Torro loses because of his reliance on technology: "Victory finally came with the destruction of Torro's hub of computers" (176). It is not a decisive victory, however; the ellipses at the end of the book seem to look forward to other strategies and other wars. Structurally, in other words, Laing turns to the open-endedness of science fantasy rather than be restricted by the closure characteristic of many realist narratives.

As important as the war may be for Laing's understanding of relations between the West and Africa, however, it may appear that he is primarily concerned with drawing on a science fantasy megatext to reconceive identity. This concern is evident in the numerous inter-galactic references or adventures in which *Major Gentl* abounds, and which seem to open up a space for a new subjectivity in African fiction. Torro, for example, wants "to burst out of the present galaxy," and he also anticipates inventions that would "negate distance, mass, and even space" (5). Also, most characters in Achimota have rooms in space: "The major had arranged with the golden crawl to rent two rooms on the moon" (1). In addition, the ambitious, power-hungry, wealthy, corrupt, philandering millionaire, Pogo Alonka Forr, wants to have a room in the sun: "Bamboozle the sun with attention and you could even end up having a hotel in it" (12). Further, The Grandmother Bomb, a dedicated scientist, has a "solar calculator," an "orbiting satellite," and "lampposts . . . suspended in the eternal darkness [with] lanes . . . for celestial bicycles" (44). Finally, the Golden Cockroach is usually suspended in the sky when eavesdropping on Western countries.

In addition to the extension of space through these inter-galactic activities is the use of one of the "icons" of science fiction narrative: the city. This is not the first time Laing has used the city in his work, of course. Reference to and use of the city first appears in his poetry, where it takes the form of what M. E. Kropp Dakubu calls "the spiritual town" (24). But it is in *Search Sweet Country*, predominantly set in Accra and its surrounding villages, that the city enters Laing's novelistic discourse. And by *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, Laing uses the twinning of two cities, Tukwan (Ghana) and Levensvale (Scotland), to show his bias for cultural intermingling. In one respect, then, the use of the city in *Major Gentl*

may well be the culmination of Laing's long-standing fascination with the urban landscape.

Laing's relentless concern with the city may however be due to another important reason, namely, to present a severely attenuated vision of the nationalist belief in an "authentic" African identity, which is what the explosion of the geography of Achimota City is probably intended to convey. "Over the last two decades," Laing writes, "Achimota City's fast new geography had devoured Accra almost completely while at the same time most of the rest of the country had inexplicably vanished, land and all" (3). Of course, this may be a reference to "urbanization," as Brian Robert has argued. But Laing's "urbanism" expressly depicts not a city "tied to the idea of place" as is evident in modernist depictions of the city, but rather what Sharpe and Wallock would call a postmodern, "decentered urban field," or an image of "the urban as no longer synonymous with locale" (11, 14). As such, Achimota, the "truncated city bursting to survive and to find the rest of its country," exemplifies the irruption of a new space, the "urban field," in African literature (3).

To reinforce the shift from the modernist city to the postmodern "urban field," Laing situates the actions in the novel within zones or heterotopias, sites that allow "a large number of fragmentary possible worlds [to] coexist in an impossible space" (Brian McHale 45). Structurally, then, in place of chapters, the novel is divided into seventeen zones. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the beautiful and the ugly, the believable and the unbelievable in the following description would show Laing's desire to create "an alien space within [the] familiar space" of Achimota City, an important method of constructing a zone in postmodern fiction:

Thousands of delicately crisscrossing baked-mud pipes [were] hanging all over the city, and built to accommodate the voracious wandering of the soldier ants and termites. Thus ants and fruits were very much a part of the city, in and out of whose pipes dodged aeroplanes and helicopters. And at some points, changing permanently the architecture of the city, were vast anthills, orange, brown, and grey. Government House was itself a series of extraordinary anthills joined and reinforced by arcs, arches, gables, rifts, humps and multi-directional walls; and it looked like some gigantic cathedral dedicated to crawling. (17)

It may appear that the space described above, which is identical with the spaces straddled by Gentl's "house of bamboo" with its "kinetic walls

[and] strange patterns" (137) and Pogo's house of glass, cannot probably be "located anywhere but in the written text itself." However, as Laing's criticism of the West will later reveal, his use of the zone is in consonance with its use by other postcolonial writers such as Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes, among others, in whose writings the non-Western world (Latin America) is conceived as "Europe's other, its alien double" (McHale 49-53).

Also, because of its affinity with science fiction narrative, *Major Gentl's* explosion of space is probably intended to foreground its creation of a cyberspace which, in contemporary science fiction, is "a vast, geometric, limitless field bisected by vector lines converging somewhere in infinity" (Scott Bukatman 119). The descriptions of Achimota, in their distortion of dimension, for instance, transform the city into such a "limitless field," since the "cyberspace arises at precisely the moment when the topos of the traditional city has been superseded" (122).

Among other things, however, the cyberspace is also the effect of the lack of dimension created by gadgets of the information age: computers, televisions, videos, and other visual mediums. In *Major Gentl*, the characters are addicted to technological contraptions such as the computer. Torro wears "computer-controlled roller skates," and the instruments with which he neutralizes his enemies are computers strategically "hidden at various points in the city" (123, 6). Mr. Cee, a cockroach that functions as the symbol or "emblem" of Achimota City, also has "supercables" that give him feedback to see things in a triple view; Gentl's binoculars, like most computer terminals, are "self-translating" (166). Finally, when one of the elders is accused of impotence, he uses a visual medium to disprove his accusers: "He had to walk on to the television screens with an erection to prove his potentiality" (70). The chaotic landscape of Achimota city and the emphasis on the visual are thus important as elements of spatial rupture.

Naturally, any writing that emphasizes a heterotopian space, as *Major Gentl* does, is likely to disavow nativist notions of identity, since in a heterotopia, Foucault reminds us, "'things' are . . . 'arranged' in" such a way "that it is impossible to find . . . a common locus beneath them" (xviii). Indeed, Achimota or the Ghana it is supposed to symbolize, because of its own "internal heterogeneity" as well as its implication

in European culture, can no longer create an undisturbed site for subjective articulation.

Specifically, in his use of the zone as both a structural device and a controlling metaphor, Laing seeks to rethink the supposedly collective subject of nationalist rhetoric. The rethinking of the collective subject will thus be in line with Grandmother Bomb's observation that "we are entering a new era" (134), as well as the novel's reference to the "new man" (123), the repatriated slave perhaps, whom even Gentl admits is neither Ghanaian nor Azanian (105). And Laing, through his mode of characterization, depicts this "new man" in various ways. First, he plugs the characters into electronic hardware, presenting us with bloodless anomalies. Second, but more spectacular, he allows the characters to transgress the boundaries between self and world, conflating the distinctions between humanity and machine, or nature and culture, and destroying, in the process, all the categories conventionally perceived as necessary for structuring identity.

The example that immediately comes to mind is the character called Mr. Cee who, we learn, "would shed its symbolic nature and become a real city cockroach crawling about looking for truth" (1). But, although Mr. Cee's love of home, community, culture, and life as opposed to Torro's love of death and weapons of destruction is a dramatic contrast between the two that also corresponds to the differences between the values of Achimota or Africa and Rome or the West, Mr. Cee still remains insubstantial and ephemeral. This is probably because his demand, "'Shape me, shape me!' . . . 'I am talking about love between you and this emblem that I am . . .'" (51) is a request that is analogous to nationalist quests for a strong sense of identity.

Another character whose lack of identity is stressed is Major Gentl himself. In his case, human reproduction is rendered through non-human means:

Gentl was born in bits when the whole country existed: head on Monday, torso on Thursday, and the popylonkwe on Friday. He could thus be named after his own genitals. Like Torro, the major had maneuvered to be born at a particular place, leading his mother from the womb to give birth to him among the pendant guinea corn in the North. He spoke through her beautiful microphone placenta, which was finally released in the South. (3-4)

Ultimately, Gentl is nothing other than a shadow: "The military leaders promoted his shadow" (1). With Gentl, we see one way in which Laing undermines the physical integrity of his characters, since Gentl's truncated body resembles a computer processed portrait.

Gentl is not the only disembodied character; Commander Zero, deputy defense minister and organizer of the children's war, is another example. "At first," we are told, "Commander Zero was not even a human being: he was a convergence of shadows from various parts of the city. But he was so adept at collecting himself from shadow to shadow that, first, there was a general shortage of shadows . . . and second he burst into a human being out of the profusion of his insubstantiality" (75). In Commander Zero, Laing again grapples with the difficulty of presenting the subject in the electronic age, and no matter how hard he tries, Zero remains an electronic effect.

The splintering of the body of the characters is even more pronounced in *Grandmother Bomb*: "As soon as [she] was born she had power: she was immediately given the choice of bearing her mother back, and she did exactly that, traversing a mighty and wonderful pregnancy to give birth to her own mother in just two hours after herbs had fertilized her" (45). Furthermore, Torro is nothing other than a clone. This is not just because Torro's pedigree spans continents, but also because, at one point, he is represented as a vanishing chimera caught in Bianca's camera: "Then out came the camera. He called Bianca to take his picture And then lo! what came out was not a picture but a full-size clone of Torro. There were two big Torro's on the park When he spat his double spat" (125). Laing's characters seem like digitally enhanced portraits. Such uncanny creations are nothing but products of the electronic age, an era about which Baudrillard says, "There is no soul, no metaphor of the body—the fable of the unconscious itself has lost most of its resonance" (50-51). These monstrous creations, like those of most science fiction writers, redefine what normally constitutes the limits of the human community. For Laing, then, characterization seems to have become a way of rewriting the immutable subject in nationalist fiction, a subject whose status, for Laing, has become problematic.

The novel, consequently, lives up to its description as fantasy or romance, since the characters could possibly be cut off from any reference

to reality. Therefore, if Laing's aim is to transcend the prevalent mimetic impulse in African fiction, as it turns out, he is immensely successful, judging from his method of characterization. Because, whereas nationalist discourse assumed that mimetism is the ultimate way of representing society and culture, Laing, on the contrary, assumes that mimetic techniques are now susceptible to transcoding, since new ways of representing humanity have become available to artists. One can thus argue that Laing may be suggesting that by 2020 humanity will neither be limited by the tenets of the physical world nor by the present social codes as we now know them. He thus abandons narrative analysis or psychological presentation, the modes of characterization through which the realist artist may dramatize a stable world, for the devices that, to him, accurately represent his world of electronic monsters. Ideally, in re-representing African identity, Laing's "claim is not that there is no such thing as 'man.' It is, rather, that the distinction between man and the world is a variable one, which depends on the configuration of knowledge at a given period" (Jonathan Culler 28).

If, as I have thus far argued, Laing's knowledge of transformations in science and technology, and the urban fields or zones that result from such changes, has affected his perspective on characterization or identity, it seems to have an even more profound impact on his use of and ideas about the operations of language. For zones, he should probably know, not only deny the subject a locus for "fixed identification," but they are spaces that "secretly undermine language," "shatter or tangle common names," and "make it impossible to name" things by "destroy[ing] syntax in advance" (Foucault xviii). *Major Gentl* abounds in instances of semantic abnormalities or rearrangement, including deliberately misspelled words such as "freee" (31), "supaglass" (35), "ludicrum" (73), and "funnie" (73). There is also the use of non-standard sentence patterns such as "Let your wet truth reach my height up here" (48), the use of non-English diction to complete sentences: "A proper sexual manager, with some ayoungi popylonkwe pogolaaaaa!" (118), among others. Also, the punctuation is both inconsistent and abnormal, especially the insertion of capital letters, which we know are not really intended for emphasis, in the middle of sentences. Moreover, the vocabulary is expanded not just to incorporate Yoruba, Italian, Akan, Pidgin, and Ga words such

as "logorligi" (50), "you ma-know" (53), but also Laing's own barbarous inventions, "dignitairial," "disestablishmentaristic," among others (56). The result is that one enters a world of vertiginous destruction of syntax, of "infinite mutability," the novel calls it, where even the act of narration seems to struggle with "the very possibility of grammar" (Foucault xviii).

Not every critic has been favorably disposed towards what Robert calls Laing's "linguistic acrobatics," however. Harold A. Waters has dismissed *Major Gentl* as an "awful novel" (427); comparing Laing and Tutuola, he argues, "Tutuola is indeed a literary hero full of such inventions, but he knows where he is going . . . *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars* goes nowhere" (427). Water's criticism, while not by any means irrelevant, somewhat tends to ignore the issue of whether or not the unconstrained literalism is a vital part of the novel's universe. After all, there is ample evidence to show that the novel's "linguistic acrobatics" does not only successfully or capably carry the work's message, but that it is also a genuine attempt to capture the non-naturalistic world of the narrative. The style, in other words, may have been necessitated by Laing's determination to break with the realistic mode of his literary heritage. Indeed, it appears that the seemingly degenerate language is a way of projecting a world that the novel seems to represent, linguistically, as caught in a process of separation from a primal referent, a rupture that the novel has already dramatized through the ontological instability of Laing's characters.

That the text "destroys syntax" (Foucault xix) is nothing other than an enactment of a world displaced from origins and a primal referent is, for example, evident in a complex quasi-mythological subtext, which presents characters groping ceaselessly for an original unity. Of course, one does not have a naive allegory about the loss of Eden in mind, but rather Laing's insistence on the possibility and problems of a pure origin. There is, for instance, the reference to a time "when the whole country existed" (3) as an indivisible entity, but, presumably, it has now entered a period of division. The fragmentation appears in the reference to "a missing land," long separated from the country (a symbolic reference to slavery, perhaps). But the "returning citizens" or "the first gentleman to return never failed to reject" their "origins" (176). Also, in the following injunctions to the people, the elders of government almost

seem to want to recreate a wholeness they can, at best, only imitate: "Fruit was law: every street had to have dwarf banana trees in belts and lines, buckled with close groups of any other fruit trees, so many guavas and oranges. There was fruit in the toilets, fruit in the halls, and fruit in the aeroplanes, so that you could eat the city" (3). The images of fecundity, which obviously evoke vitality or life, allow us to see, through the activities of some of the characters, how irrecoverable that wholeness or vitality has become in an electronic culture that is incapable of generating a counter-myth adequate to the moral needs of its era.

Indeed, the preoccupation of some of the characters with sex shows how concerned Laing is with the theme of wholeness. For, the unfulfilled sexual urges of the characters introduce the wasteland motif, according to which we can construe the amorous liaisons as attempts at regenerating life, all of which fail because the relationships are either factitious or degenerate into decadent desire. Separated from her two former husbands by a door of steel, Grandmother Bomb, for instance, leads a sterile life. Her "two husbands of yore" complain, "When we wanted love, you gave us experiments when we wanted some sly night embraces, we ended up embracing bombs instead" (49). The aridity of her sexual life is underscored by the fact that her most important associates have become the "voices of the dead" (59). Also, Torro's sexual escapade could easily be construed not only as an expression of unbridled emotion, but also as a manifestation of sheer carnality, a debased desire, thereby becoming an ironic debunking of the myth of renewal through sex.

Finally, the attempt at recapturing a rational order of meaning by some of the characters is further demonstrated in the reference to the "ship of truth" (172). If, as it seems, it is the search for truth that motivates characters such as Gentl, Torro, or Mr. Cee, who is always "crawling about looking for truth" (1), then, these characters, like diminutive imitators of Socrates, are searching for a rational structure. The somersaulting of the "ship of truth," however, seems to present us, first, with the impossibility of finding such a rational order and, second, with what the novel calls a "tragedy," as humanity confronts a "cosmic nonsense" (71). The above examples indicate that Laing is presenting us with a world in which humanity's destiny has become its inability

to recreate a lost vitality or unity: "Foundations" have "cease[ed] being foundations" (129).

Therefore, *Major Gentl's* narrative grammar must be understood within the context of the catastrophe the novel presents. Within such a context, the technological advancement that has affected all forms of subjective stability also undermines the structure of language. As such, when Laing uses words such as "atonal," "psitticiformes," and "entilahatic" (sic, 49, 50), he firmly remains within a scientific register, but such locutions may also be his satire on arcane scientific language, which often eludes the average human being. On the other hand, though, he may be really allowing the vocabulary to function as an observation on the linguistic disaster he envisages. Hence, punning constructions such as "Nana Mai didn't care a hoot whether they hooted or not" (45), "a general of general importance" (56), and many more, may subsume the possibility or the type of linguistic transformation Laing anticipates.

Thus, when we come across a passage such as the following description of the encounter between Gentl and Torro, we are probably not supposed to look for its deep meaning:

This evening aMofa Gentl wore a bofrot at each shoulder to emphasise the perishability of man and woman. The intuition he had as he waited for Torro was that whole platoons of soldiers would be ironing dead cockroaches when Torro arrived. Real cockroaches. Thus the army ironed insects with verve. This ironing was another way for a deflected intensity to pass, another wile for attacking the target by looking away from it. How old would you want your war to be before you won it? thought Gentl, with one foot lower on the mound than the other, and the camel with the eyes of effrontery leaning against him nonchalantly. He caught sight of Torro weaving in and out of horizons, with his bobbie-stand bulbs made translucent by vapour and distance. . . . His deputy's head continued to sail over the trees talltall [sic], and laughing into the spaces that his master was not looking in. (144)

The energetic prose catches our attention primarily because of its forceful visual images: platoons of soldiers continually ironing dead and real cockroaches, bulbs made of breasts (bobbie) that derive their "translucence" from "distance and vapour," armies that fire at their target by looking away from it, and a "Torro weaving in and out of horizons." But even more important is the capacity of the prose not only to evoke

an entirely different world, but to ensure that the forceful visual images dislocate the readers from their conventional world and transport them into its "rhetorically exaggerated space" (Bukatman 11) or world. In such a world, signifiers are not ineluctably tied to signifieds; or rather, images cannot faithfully reflect an authentic, integrated world since, as the above passage demonstrates, the images are themselves a set of disorienting objects. That is, language, as a feat of style, becomes an outrage on the readers' understanding of phenomena. Obviously, such an inflated language is an example of a "new mimesis" in science fiction, whose aim is to "resist the totalization of meaning" (Bukatman 11).

The "hyperbolic language" and decentered characters notwithstanding, Dakubu still credits Laing's works with a "peculiarly intimate relationship between language . . . and the ideas it both expresses and embodies" (76). Influenced by Laing's concrete style, she sees his poetry as an "effort to reach the concrete in experience . . . the extremely vivid material imagery, in which ideas and experiences are projected out onto objects" (87). Arguing that we use Laing's poetry as the "background necessary for a discussion of the novels" (76), Dakubu says that Laing's first novel, *Search*, for example, "was deliberately created for the direct expression of unified, existentially authentic experience" (19).

What seems to govern Dakubu's analyses of Laing's work is a long-standing fascination of critics and writers alike with that modernist foundation in African writing which emphasizes the search for cultural roots or an "authentic" African past and sense of being. Nothing demonstrates this fascination better than the privileged space the city or anxiety about urbanization has held in African literature. And this prodigious discourse about urbanism, often comprising experiences of poverty, wretchedness, crime, prostitution, and the ruin of traditional foundations or structures, invariably links the city to the West, to colonialism, and to modernity.⁶ Such a sensibility appears at its most terrifying in Ousmane's *Thiès* and Ngugi's *Illmorog*, where we are presented with the most devastating accounts of the moral bankruptcy of capitalist colonialism in modern literature. Indeed without such accounts, which make the city or modernity an all-encompassing evil force, Ngugi's articulation of neocolonialism in his last three novels will easily lose its resonance.

In the works of most of Laing's predecessors, however, the city, despite its terrible evil becomes, paradoxically, the most formidable source for political and individual self-transformation. Ayi Kwei Armah, a Ghanaian like Laing, emphasizes the city's political and subjective functions, for example. The Accra of his *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, with its concentration of population, is a locus for nurturing or shaping Ghana's modern political transformation, a massive site for the politicization of the masses, without whom Nkrumah's project of decolonization would have been impossible to contemplate. But the *Beautiful Ones* also underscores Accra's subjective function from a modernist perspective and in a way fundamentally different from Laing's view of Achimota. For, although Armah emphasizes the city's capacity for unhinging traditional moorings, he still assumes that the urban environment can shape the individual's sense of being or identity. The characters, for example, are always moving, experiencing, and seeking to discover their subjective integrity. As Peter Lazarus argues, and I think rightly, "The affirmative vision" of "*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which is couched as a voyage of discovery," is "implicit in 'the man's' search for authentic values," his "adventure of interiority," despite the "blasted landscape" (Accra) in which he finds himself (46).

In short, early African writers, even though they presented the city as an instrument of exploitative capitalism, could not refrain from emphasizing its potential as a locus for Africa's modern political transformation and a site for the individual's subjective elaboration. They therefore could not avoid the reconciliation of binary, contradictory opposites so central to the modernist project in its desire to bring together equally diverse and contradictory cultures. Thus, by saying that Laing's work is concerned with the articulation of an "authentic experience," Dakubu presents Laing as yet re-accentuating his precursors' modernist construction of postcolonial identity, for Dakubu's notion of "authenticity" will probably not make sense to us if we do not believe in the enormous emphasis on subjectivity in modern culture.

So, although Dakubu has done a great deal to draw attention to Laing's remarkable poetics, her discussion of his style does not sufficiently address his shift from a modernist to a postmodern worldview. This is to say that rather than portraying authentic beings, Laing's "whimsical

post-modernism" forces him to compose "novels [that] . . . inhabit an altogether hybridised and heterogeneous world . . . [and which] do not effect any form of closure around exclusivist and traditionalist models of African identity" (Derek Wright 192, 187). Also, one would have liked to see comments on the displacement that seem to have occurred in Laing's somewhat postmodern use of the concrete. In postmodern aesthetics, the concrete is not as unproblematic as Dakubu presents it, since even "the visual element is often purely expressive and improvised" (McHale 184). In *Major Gentl*, it should be obvious by now, Laing seems to have privileged objects for the spectacle they create and not perhaps for their truth value. And like the simulated battles in the novel, language itself is staged: "improvised." Laing's style, in other words, is an example of what Stephen Heath would call a "'theatralization of language,' a foregrounding of the word . . . displayed as an object in its own right which bears the traces of possible meanings" (qtd. in Culler 106).

Furthermore, the problem with Dakubu's notion of "authenticity" or the essence of things is her reluctance to go beyond formal questions: the stylistic operations that ensure the creation of meaning and how the reader can perceive the unity between objects and the concepts they embody. This is to say that she does not sufficiently explore the temporal or cultural dislocation that governs postcolonial writing, a dislocation which raises different expectations or assumptions about the production of meaning by a writer like Laing. In other words, Laing's world is also the world of writers as varied as Achebe and Brathwaite. It is a world that allows for a great deal of linguistic inventiveness, for the rearrangement of semantic space, but still a world that cannot guarantee the self-sufficiency or authenticity of objects because it is a decoded space where things have fallen apart. Hence, the language which emanates from such a site can no longer disclose the essence of things, let alone their full meaning, since narrative itself must flicker between discontinuous, opposing cultural experiences.

Thus, the novel's inclusive vocabulary, its interspersing of English with words from Ghanaian and other languages, for example, can only make sense when situated within the context of postcolonial linguistic practice. Properly situated, the inclusive vocabulary becomes the most important

way in which the novel renders the exchange of bodies and worlds through a linguistic heteroglossia. Through such a heteroglossia, as in almost every other device in the novel, Laing's writing allegorizes the struggle for language as a marker of postcolonial identity, if not the impossibility of ever finding the "authentic" language. Incidentally, Laing's extrafictional comment in the author's preface to *Major Gentil* would justify such an interpretation: "It is usual in Ghana (with such a cosmopolitan mix of cultures) to intersperse one language with words from another. This ought to be done universally for the idea is to create one gigantic language." Laing's theory here, I suggest, is oriented towards Brathwaite's nation language: English that makes profuse use of African patterns of expression to release the "African aspect of experience" for long "submerged" beneath the tyranny of English forms (311). Of course, this mongrelized language is often designed to show the instability or fluidity of identity, since the language, in aspiring towards a global communication, defies territorial limits.

Indeed, it comes as no surprise that Torro, whose bastardized existence spans his experiences in Rome, Azania, and Achimota, is the character whose speech often vandalizes the space of meaning that a fixed culture would otherwise create. His use of language thus ranges from an affectation that strains normal English pronunciation ("darleeng" and "theenking" 35) to the juxtaposition of Italian and English ("I fan my humble fire with my best *nemico* . . . O *sculacciare*" 59). Such juxtapositions may indicate the possibility of a hasty correspondence among the world's languages, even where they continue to remind us of the crisis of identity the "cosmopolitan mix of cultures" tends to foreground. This is not the same as saying that the postcolonial writer in using a hybridized language has capitulated to the hegemony unleashed by a new transnational, corporate colonialism. As Laing's sustained criticism of the West reveals, language itself is or can now be used to underscore the existence or possibility of postcolonial resistance or local assertion. For Laing's contaminated constructions are, like Brathwaite's nation language, a postcolonial rearrangement of a metropolitan language in ways that turn the new language into an instrument of resistance: "a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun" (311).

Generally, however, even if we were dealing with only its linguistic convention, characterization, or imagery, the issue *Major Gentl* raises is whether its generic affinity with much of contemporary writing, namely, its textuality or postmodern appropriations, makes it an ahistorical and an uncommitted work. In short, can the increasing slide into postmodern aesthetic practice, of which *Major Gentl* is just one example, allow postcolonial writers to continue to articulate a sense of place, history or ethical responsibility? Indeed, in some instances, *Major Gentl* totters precariously on the brink of social or political vacuity. However, it does embody a certain relation to normative commitment in the tradition of anti-colonial novels of resistance. That Laing is at pains to render the novel socially relevant is present in the text's broad historical concerns as well as in its complex vision of identity.

Like most anti-colonial fictions of resistance, the fissure of boundaries between self and world and between Africa and Europe becomes, for example, the novel's mode of taking up ideological issues such as the construction and reconstruction of political, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, or the world as it is structured by race and otherness. Thus, *Major Gentl*'s artful construction or its play with technological devices from computers and helicopters to flights to the moon and sun, like Okri's "neo-traditional" narratives, is to be seen as the image of postcolonial societies caught in the fold of a modern technological maze or an unrelenting global capitalism. When *Major Gentl* rails against Torro's strategy of extracting brain energy and sending it through the waves to the countries abroad, the technological image is unmistakable. But what such comments reveal are Laing's commitment to a socio-political vision, since he seems to be figuratively framing neocolonial forms of domination. In short, despite its postmodern techniques, *Major Gentl* avoids the asocial textuality most people have come to associate with the postmodern.

In other words, Laing's is the concerned voice of the postcolonial writer who laments the dilemma of the impoverished parts of the world as they lose most of their intellectual resources to the affluent countries because of the world-economic imbalance. Also, *Major Gentl*, like other postcolonial texts (Farah's *Gifts* is another), exposes the paternalism of the West to Africa because it shows a suspicion of any technology that

is overwhelmingly capitalistic and neocolonial, as it threatens to become in the hands of Torro and his bosses. The novel further shows its commitment by articulating the plight of the global civilization, since the West continues to believe in the ideology of earlier times, when it tried to represent and legitimize images of its own worth.

Probably, this is what Mr. Cee criticizes in one of his most memorable speeches in the novel:

I'm busy generating attacking waves against the enemy, the enemy is aware also that I am having to generate defensive waves to defend our history. There is something wonderful about a subjugated people, so long put under the pile of history, now rising in a subtle and dignified defense of its very existence, and without bitterness that can't be got rid of in two decades either! They said we couldn't think and we thought, they said we couldn't make and we made, they said we couldn't worship and we did, and now they say we can't exist and we do! And the worst thing is that apart from this Torro here, we are fighting a people who are not even interested enough to seek more knowledge of us beyond that old knowledge that they themselves created of us for the benefit of their cursory glances. (156)

However, Laing makes his sense of commitment objective inasmuch as he remains critical of both the West's construction of the African and postcolonial dogmatic assertions of identity. As such, while the novel's injunction to Africans is not to "live in the historical concepts they [West] have manufactured for you [Africans]" (165), it also questions the carefully guarded identity the African maintains through recourse to the past. For example, on looking through his binoculars, the novel's figurative way of reading history, one of the "intelligences" that appears to Gentl says, "After allowing for natural attachments to known people and places, [one must] retain that sort of global subtlety that allowed you to move in and out of cultures, without shouting the greatness of your own throughout time" (165). The novel thus condemns both the West and Africa for the strong sentiment that insists on fine distinctions of worlds: "Those who dealt in outdated distinctions were merely thieves of conclusion and betrayers of premise" (159).

Accordingly, when the novel turns personal or family relationships upside down, we are supposed to interpret it as its general comment on the problem of maintaining a specific identity through membership

in a clearly defined racial or sexual group. The children of both Torro and Gentl, for example, are constantly redefining their attachments, and since the novel sees the future partly through the vacillation of the children, their unstable alliances are part of the novel's cultural statement on the necessity for the circulation of worlds or identities. We will thus probably have to agree with Laing that in the world's cultural wars, the configuration of existence in 2020 shall have to be a world where "invention allowed even the smallest human being to open up into the trees and into the universe, to see the whole" (180). One cannot therefore criticize Laing for a lack of social commitment, but rather for what, at certain points, appears to be an overwhelming fervor in his condemnation of the West, making the criticism somewhat farcical or superficial.

With the above points in mind, we can finally interpret the war of the title as Laing's ideological commitment to and meditation on the "ultimate existence of all human beings" (136). For as he insists, "Who is the enemy anyway?" "At the best of times we can't even tell who our enemies are" (88). As such, the narrative seems to imply that we should "treat all established relationships as unsacred" (128). It is therefore perverse to argue that *Major Gentl's* slippage into textuality supplants a sense of history and an articulation of place, privileged tropes in anti-colonial discourse. If anything, the integrity of the narrative emerges precisely because while presenting us with the exhaustion or enfeeblement of history and place, it nevertheless makes sociopolitical comments.

Thus, *Major Gentl* remains committed to the dilemma or the status of what it calls the "new man [woman]" and his or her strategies of existence, concerned as it is with a world in which electronic technology has the potential of rising beyond human control. In the process, Laing seems to have redefined the whole issue of value and relevance in African fiction which, according to this analysis, shows that, unlike the textuality of most Western postmodernists, form does still embody a certain measure of relevance or responsibility for the postcolonial writer. Of course, Laing's is still a transitional poetics. But he nonetheless demonstrates the propensity among some emerging African novelists to experiment with other narrative possibilities as the tenets of their

precursors become increasingly unsuitable for dealing with the problems of presenting the individual and society in an age of increasing technological transformation.

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NOTES

¹Talking about political transformation in Africa, Senghor once said, "Our renaissance will be more the work of African artists than of politicians" (71). The late Ahmed Sekou Toure also echoed Senghor when he charged the artist with the responsibility of plotting the African's "profound content," his or her "right of existence" (12).

²Senghor's reference to the nation as a "creation after the fact" (68) is certainly not in consonance with the view of people like Gellner (1983) for whom "invent" means falsification. Rather, Senghor and other postcolonial leaders wanted to emphasize the role of artists as one of providing society with a sense of appropriate context.

³*Petals of Blood*, for instance, uses the European road as a symbol for the mechanical Western system whose promiscuous multiplication in rural Kenya becomes the nemesis of the once proud agricultural community of Ilmorog.

⁴Quoted in Teresa de Lauretis, and the translation is hers, too (170).

⁵Note Samuel Delany's *The Einstein Intersection* with its mutated beings, whom the computer PHAEDRA says are a "bunch of psychic manifestations, multi-sexed and incorporeal . . . trying to put on the limiting mask of humanity" (148).

⁶I am indebted to Marshall Berman for his discussion of modernity. For Berman, driven by the capitalist world market, modernity seeks to unify people across ethnic, geographic, and national boundaries. And although modernity's dynamism inverts everything in its path ("all that is solid melts into air," 15), it still gives humanity the possibilities of transforming our worlds and our lives. Of course, one of the "visions or paradigms" Berman uses to explore the modern sensibility is the city.

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Readers, Auditors, and Interpretation*

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In "E.K., A Spenserian Lesson in Reading," I argued *The Shepheardes Calender* often illustrates the complexity and the limitations of language through both successful and failed attempts at human communication. If various orators and the fictional Immerito occasionally fail to express themselves clearly and cogently, auditors and the reader E.K. also have lapses in comprehension. In his response, "Poets, Pastors, and Antipoetics," Peter C. Herman ignored such important distinctions I made as that between Immerito and Spenser—between the author in the fiction and the author of the fiction—assumed the exclusions from my essay are the result not of focus but of an ignorance startlingly inappropriate even for students in an introductory Renaissance class, and, most significantly, failed to respond to my thesis. Let me address the points raised in "Poets, Pastors, and Antipoetics" methodically.

Herman first takes issue with my statement that Spenser's framework "belies the simplicity of its rustic setting" as he argues Spenser's audience would have recognized the eclogue as a forerunner of the epic (317). While Herman views the hierarchy of genres as arcane knowledge, "generic contexts that may have faded" for today's readers (316), I regard this as a given. I would not for a moment assert the simplicity of the *genre* or underestimate the endeavor of writing within that genre. The pastoral, however, gains impetus because it plays on the preconceptions of a cultured audience about the supposed simplicity of rural life in opposition to their own milieu. Pastoral writers often use the world of

*Reference: Frances M. Malpezzi, "E.K., A Spenserian Lesson in Reading," *Connotations* 4.3 (1994/95): 181-91; Peter C. Herman, "Poets, Pastors, and Antipoetics: A Response to Frances M. Malpezzi, 'E.K., A Spenserian Lesson in Reading,'" *Connotations* 6.3 (1996/97): 316-25.

"uncouth" shepherds to satirize problems of their society because they know readers have a penchant to be seduced by idyllic notions of rural life, to be moved by thoughts of valleys, groves, hills, and fields, of birds' melodious madrigals, of shepherds singing and dancing in a May-morning. But the pastoral, like a certain nymph, reminds us that truth is not in every shepherd's (or fox's) tongue any more than it is in every courtier's, that mutability reigns as flowers fade and spring yields to winter's day of reckoning. Rustic charm does not prevent the death of Dido; it does not erase the need of those who mourn her to find solace; nor does it guarantee the course of love (whether true or false) will always run smoothly. The disjunction between readers' expectations of idyllic bliss and the harsh reality of a postlapsarian life ruled by the elements gives the pastoral its cutting edge. The *guise* of the simplicity of the *setting* is inherent to the pastoral.

In his discussion of the pastoral, I would also quibble with Herman's assertion that E.K. makes explicit "Spenser's ambition to become England's Protestant epic poet" (317). To be precise, he makes clear Immerito's ambition. My concern with the interaction between E.K. and Immerito, the fiction of the reader and writer, as it mirrors the interaction between various fictional orators and listeners makes this distinction vital.

Herman finds me remiss for ignoring the political allegories of the *Calender* and the recent scholarship of Montrose and Patterson on the politics of the pastoral. The "not very subtle hints" from E.K. on the topicality of the eclogues (317) and the long history of the critical recognition of political allegory in the pastoral suggest this aspect is not esoteric but a basic foundation educated readers bring to the work. Instead of ignoring political allegory (or any of the numerous subjects that could have been dealt with), I focused the essay by looking at E.K.'s gloss as integral to the text rather than ancillary. Prior discussions of E.K. have concentrated on discovering his identity or arguing that he is a fictional character. Whether E.K. was an actual person or a creation of Spenser's, his commentary becomes subsumed into the fiction of the *Calender*.

Herman chastises me for implying "Spenser addresses a unified, homogenous audience" and assuming community and the virtuous ideal

were "single, monolithic entities" (318). I neither assume nor imply this, nor for a moment do I doubt Spenser's "intervention in the dust and heat of controversy" (319). Just the opposite. The fractious nature of Elizabethan society with its numerous religio-political disputes, however, does not preclude Spenser's having a sense of community or a virtuous ideal. Indeed, such a sense is at the very heart of the Reformation. In *The Transformations of the Word* John Wall focuses on Spenser as a Reformation poet, arguing that in his major works Spenser sought "the achievement of a Christian commonwealth to result from Prayer Book worship leading to charitable behavior" (83-84). For Wall, Spenser used his poetry as a vehicle for achieving the ends of the Reformation:

Putting a grid of possibility over "what is," Spenser opened before his contemporary reader directions for behavior, emphasized the significance of certain of those options, and thus enabled his poems to function (at least potentially) in a didactic way. He therefore made of his work not an object of knowledge but an instrument for knowing, transforming the contemporary social and political landscape into a place of new opportunities for change, moving it through ethical behavior toward the English Reformers' goal of community and commonwealth. (88)

While "imprisonment, mutilation, even execution" (Herman 318) have been used to shape community, so has poetry. Surely Spenser's concern for defining and serving his version of an ideal community is apparent in the many types of positive and negative communities he fictionalizes throughout his poetry. Nor does the implicit criticism of Eliza/Elizabeth within "Aprill" mitigate Spenser's sense of community and the virtuous ideal. Both the criticism of Elizabeth and the praise of Eliza in which it is embedded are effective tools for reform. As Wall has noted, "What we now read as idealized portraits and effusive encomiums were originally strategies of reform in a culture where criticism had to be voiced in the language of compliment if it were to be heard at all" (83). Like the good courtier whose advice to the prince might not always be welcome, the poet who has a vision of society's reformation must criticize circumspectly. Rhetorically, criticism often works better when included with praise (a tradition that continues today as evidenced by Professor Herman's introductory paragraph). While Herman notes, "There were, then as now, many virtuous ideals, many communities" (319), Spenser's

talents served to shape society in a very particular way; by intervening in the "dust and heat of controversy" he furthered the religious and political ends of the English Reformation.

If Herman did not insert absolutes in place of my qualifiers, did not interpret "often" to mean "always," he would realize we are in agreement that it would be "incorrect to assume that the poem condemns *all* earthly desires" (319). I never contend, as he would have it, that "the success or failure of particular speakers is always determinable by their motivation" (316). Rather, I wrote that language often fails "because one of those involved in the exchange failed to move beyond the limits of self" (185). Neither in the *Calender* nor in his other works does Spenser issue a blanket condemnation of earthly desire. Certainly the *Amoretti-Epithalamion* sequence gives a clear sense of the salvific nature of human love. As John N. King has remarked, Spenser adapts the Petrarchan clichés of the religion of love and "reapplies them to a state of grace achievable only through married love" (163). John Wall places Spenser's view of erotic love in the context of the Reformation:

In Cranmer's views, espoused in claims made in the Prayer Book marriage rite, the goals of the English Reformation involved developing a community built up through the domestication of *eros* and the forming of a commonwealth around the one table of the Christian family. (87)

Spenser would appreciate that there are both destructive and constructive varieties of erotic love. Just as the *Amoretti-Epithalamion* sequence suggests how the domestication of *eros* serves the ultimate community, the Church Triumphant, as procreative marital love and morally responsible parenting increase the count of blessed saints, Spenser provides in his works numerous negative examples: Verdant, the knight who removes his armor as he luxuriates in the Bower of Bliss, giving up his honor and defacing his nobility; Grill, whose base sexual indulgence bestializes him; and Colin, whose love for Rosalind brings him such suffering and causes him to neglect his sheep (they are so weak they can barely stand) and his metaphorical flock as he neglects his singing. These loves are not socially or spiritually salvific. If love can be more than base desire, so can poetic ambition. The advancement of the poet does not necessarily negate a commitment to a larger cause any more than pleasure in marital

sex cancels its salvific effect. The desire of a poet to be a politically involved English Virgil who has the power to effect reform can benefit him personally and still be socially and spiritually salubrious to others. Ambition is no less complex than erotic love.

Professor Herman looks at the "October" eclogue as a means of questioning that bad motives lead to failure. Cuddie is a failure "not because of his own failings, but because of the widespread 'contempte of Poetrie'" (321). Herman argues that "unlike Colin, Cuddie is not an unreliable narrator" (321). Cuddie's role in the context of the *Calender* is debatable and could be the subject of a full-length essay. Let it suffice here to say I am not as convinced as Herman of the reliability of the squint-eyed shepherd whose judgment in "August" is compared to Paris's and who in "October" confuses poetic fury with intoxication. In addition, the Argument does not necessarily mark Cuddie as an exemplary poet but as the perfect pattern of a poet who is unable to make a living from his poetry and attributes his failure to the contempt in which poetry is held in his society. Instead of being a perfect poet, might he be the perfect example of one who shifts the responsibility for his failure elsewhere?

Lastly, Herman takes me to task for failing to consider the antipoetic sentiments of the period. Citing such attackers on poetry as Tyndale and Beza (who, although he regretted his *Juvenilia*, did not abandon literary endeavor but went on to write a tragedy about Abraham and Isaac and to complete a translation of the Psalms begun by Clément Marot), Herman concludes, "if Spenser takes his religion seriously, as indeed Malpezzi argues, then he must also take seriously the antipoetic strand within his religious group" (322). The logic here is fuzzy. Spenser could have taken his religion just as seriously by recognizing the arguments of poetry's supporters as well as its detractors. Surely, Herman would not argue that those supporters were nonexistent in the period. Many even found divine sanction for poetry in the paradigmatic psalms and in Paul's injunction in Ephesians 5:15-20; the humanist curriculum suggests educators saw the inherent worth of classical literature, and many educators must have, like the later Milton, recognized "what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things" (*Of Education* 637). Moreover,

conformity to the anti-iconic, anti-poetic, or anti-Disney sentiments of any age is not a reliable touchstone for gauging an individual's religiosity. Valuing poetry does not automatically call one's Protestantism into question. While Herman historicizes Spenser's poetics through statements by Calvin's French successor at Geneva, I prefer to do so through the work of Guillaume de Salluste, Sieur Du Bartas, the French Huguenot who took his politics, his religion, and his poetry seriously. Admired by Spenser and an influence on him (Lee 347, 349-50; Campbell 87-91; Prescott 51, 210, 233), and through his many translators (including Sidney and Thomas Churchyard—works now lost—as well as King James VI of Scotland, John Eliot, William Lisle, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Winter, Robert Barret, Josiah Burchett, and Josuah Sylvester) a pervasive influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Du Bartas ought to be more than a footnote in a Milton textbook. A too-often-ignored poem, *L'Uranie* synthesizes a Protestant poetic aesthetic (Malpezzi, "Du Bartas' *L'Uranie*"). The poem features a poet-pilgrim who has lost his way. Having prostituted his muse and flattered the unworthy, he is re-directed in his vocation by the muse Urania who instructs him about the source and end of poetry. Dramatizing a poet coming to an understanding of his responsibility to God, community, and self, Du Bartas imaginatively presents a poetic creed. For every detractor, poetry also had scores of defenders who were able to reconcile their often staunch Protestant views with an appreciation for poetry's inherent value and an understanding of the way it could serve their religious and political concerns. With an approach to poetry that was far from simplistic, Spenser, like Du Bartas' poet-pilgrim, was well aware of the way in which poetry could be abused and of the limitations of language and the difficulties of interpretation for postlapsarian humanity. Spenser, while aware of the "tensions between 'pastors and poets'" (Herman 324), was also concerned enough about the similarity between the two vocations to use the figure of the shepherd to portray both as they tend to their metaphorical flocks.

Herman and I are, in actuality, in agreement about many things, including the complexity of the pastoral genre, the political nature of the *Calender*, the fractious nature of Elizabethan society, and to a certain extent, the qualms Spenser must have had about poetry. My views are not as simplistic or as uninformed as he chooses to present them. At

the same time, I take issue with his response because he seldom deals with my central thesis, seldom focuses on the role of E.K. as reader. If his concern is with "Poets, Pastors, and Antipoetics," mine was with readers, auditors, and interpretation. His response gives no indication where he stands in relation to the role of E.K. in the fiction of the *Calender*. Does he view the gloss as ancillary to the text or integral to it? How does an understanding of Spenser's anti-poetic sentiments support, refute, or qualify my assertion that "E.K. functions as a lesson about the art and work of reading" (189)? Does E.K., who takes up the challenge of glossing as he immerses himself in the work of interpretation, entertain or articulate anti-poetic sentiments? Herman largely ignores my thesis, shifting the focus from the reader E.K. and the poet Immerito in order to further his own agenda, a concern for Spenser's anti-poetic sentiments. While I can appreciate the songs he pipes, I am less appreciative of his insistence that I sound the same note.

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Exonerating Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*: A Response to Anthony Brian Taylor*

MAURICE HUNT

Anthony Brian Taylor has recently argued in masterful prose that Lucius in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is so severely flawed and ironically portrayed that he does not qualify as a Roman redeemer worthy of being considered a precursor of his namesake, the first Christian king of Britain. Taylor, while admitting some of Lucius' virtues, nevertheless distorts his characterization, partly by neglecting key traits, and omits an apotheosis in this case from pagan to Christian. It is this apotheosis mainly that justifies the argument that Reuben Brower, Jonathan Bate, and I originally made for Lucius as enlightened redeemer.¹

For Taylor, Lucius generally amounts to a cruel pagan, whose bloodlust materializes in his demand that Tamora's captured son be ritualistically sacrificed, an act that elicits her hatred and thus the mutilation of Lavinia (I.ii.163-66).² In this instance, Lucius acts out of pagan religious piety, so that the hovering shades of his brothers recently killed by the Goths might be appeased and Romans not troubled by prodigies (I.i.96-102). Lucius' spoken order that Alarbus' limbs be hewn upon a fire until they are consumed (I.i.127-29), while grotesque, could be spoken piously rather than barbarously—with reverence for what Romans need to do to honor a family and its dead killed in war. Shakespeare appears more interested in historically characterizing a Roman than in portraying a bloodthirsty man of any age and time. Still, regarded from a civilized perspective, the practice is clearly savage.

Positive features of Lucius' piety, presented early in the drama, prepare for his apotheosis from pagan to Christian and make it believable. Lucius' family piety surfaces in his physical defense of his sister Lavinia's right

*Reference: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 138-57.

to marry her "lawful promised love" Bassianus rather than be forced into queenship with nasty Saturninus (I.i.292-98), in his telling his father Titus that killing Mutius in this cause is unjust (I.i.292-93), and in his informing Saturninus finally "That what we did was mildly as we might, / Tend'ring our sister's honor and our own" (I.i.475-76). Later, Aaron perversely asserts that the Andronici can save Martius' and Quintus' lives, charged with homicide, by sending to Saturninus a severed hand of a family member (III.i.150-56). Lucius' Roman piety profoundly expresses itself when Titus resolves that the hand shall be his own:

Stay, father, for that noble hand of thine,
That hath thrown down so many enemies,
Shall not be sent. My hand will serve the turn.
My youth can better spare my blood than you,
And therefore mine shall save my brothers' lives. (III.i.162-66)

Lucius' genuine filial and brotherly love qualifies him for a redemptive martyrdom, if Aaron's announcement were true and not false, and if tricked Titus did not chop off his own hand before Lucius can stop him.

Lucius' capacity for martyrdom reflects a significant sensitivity never admitted by Taylor. Concerning his exile, Lucius says he was "turn'd weeping out / To beg relief among Rome's enemies, / Who drown'd their enmity in my true tears" (V.iii.105-07). Bending over his dead father's face, he exclaims, "O, take this warm kiss on thy pale cold lips, / These sorrowful drops upon thy blood-stain'd face, / The last true duties of thy noble son!" (V.iii.153-55). Lucius' finer, humane feelings manifest themselves in his concluding words to his son:

Come hither, boy, come, come, and learn of us
To melt in showers; thy grandsire lov'd thee well.
Many a time he danc'd thee on his knee,
Sung thee asleep, his loving breast thy pillow,
Many a story hath he told to thee,
And bid thee bear his pretty tales in mind,
And talk of them when he was dead and gone. (V.iii.160-66)

Stereotypically feminine in their overtones of nurturance, these sentiments hardly square with the two-dimensional image of a bloodlusting warrior. Shakespeare perhaps imagined that such delicate

feelings justify the assertion repeated in the play that the common people love Lucius and wish that he were their emperor (e.g. IV.iv.69-77).

It should be noted that the sensitive Lucius becomes most apparent in the last acts of *Titus Andronicus*, after his return from exile. Taylor dismisses the argument, made by Robert Miola among others, that Lucius has undergone a transformation of character during his exile (143).³ Rather than "a bloodthirsty youth" who changes into "a man capable of wise leadership" (Miola's reading), Lucius in my reading metamorphoses from a pagan devoted to Roman religion to a Christian—a worthy precursor of his Christian British namesake. An understanding of the extensive Christian context of *Titus Andronicus* helps playgoers perceive Lucius' later Christian identity.

Taylor recognizes that "the play is set at a time when Rome was 'at the end of its civilized greatness, ready to sink into barbarism'" (147). On the contrary, this would be the time that Christianity passed from being a favored religion of Rome to being the official faith of the Empire. Clifford Huffman notes that the postulated "[literary] source of [*Titus Andronicus*] locates the events in the time of the Eastern Emperor Theodosius (A.D. 378-95)."⁴ Shakespeare's play could be said to be set in the time of a profound transition from pagan to Christian religious values. Mythological allusions and references to religious practices in the first three acts of *Titus Andronicus* are uniformly pagan. But then in act IV something quite remarkable happens. I have argued extensively that the Clown-pigeon episode of act IV ironically focuses Christian values in Titus' iron world.⁵ Appreciated in the context of the non-pagan overtones of the Clown's phrase "God forbid" (IV.iii.91), and the explicit Christian overtones of his word "grace" (IV.iii.100-01), his gift of pigeons by which he would reconcile one of Saturninus' men and his uncle symbolizes the doves of the Holy Spirit (a spirit of forgiveness).⁶ The Clown exits with a plangent "God be with you" (IV.iii.120), unknowingly going to his death at Saturninus' hands as a result of the cruel trick that Titus plays upon this messenger involving a knife secretly wrapped in a letter. That the Clown is meant in his death to be thought of as a kind of sacrificial victim is signalled in his greeting to Saturninus by his allusion to a Christian prototype of martyrdom: "God and Saint Steven give you godden. I have brought you a letter and a couple of pigeons

here" (IV.iv.42-44). "Go take him away and hang him presently" (IV.iv.45), Saturninus snarls, angered by Titus' claim in the delivered letter that the emperor has butchered Titus' sons.

The Clown's part in the play thus provides a Christian perspective that, by contrast, stresses Titus' lack of grace and unfitness for any kind of salvation. When Titus in act I tells Tamora—

Patient yourself, madam, and pardon me.
 These are their brethren, whom your Goths beheld
 Alive and dead, and for their brethren slain
 Religiously they ask a sacrifice:
 To this your son is marked, and die he must,
 T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone— (I.i.121-26)

his manner of expression focuses the need for a once-and-forever martyr—Christ—whose death can by itself rectify the souls of present and future dead. Along with his killing of Mutius, Titus' responsibility for the gratuitous death of the pious Clown qualifies him not for classic martyrdom but for the role of God's scourge in a Christian pattern of Providence, wherein (as in *Hamlet*) a once good but now coarsened ("bad") man destroys evil greater than his badness but also dies in the process (thus effecting a certain economy in sweeping the stage of taint).⁷ Christian elements in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman plays as a rule constitute anachronisms. But because of its historical date, *Titus Andronicus* represents the exception. References in *Titus* to an elder tree growing by hell-pit (II.iii.277)—the tree associated with Judas—and to a "ruinous monastery" (V.i.21) where Aaron is captured do not represent unequivocal instances of religious anachronism. The symbolism of the Clown-pigeon episode and these differences retrospectively valorize the first reference in the play to God rather than Jupiter—Marcus' invitation to Lavinia to "display at last / What God will have discovered for revenge. / Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain" (IV.i.73-75).

Exonerating Lucius in *Titus Andronicus* depends upon placing his major oath sworn within the above-described larger Christian context of the latter part of the play. At the beginning of act V, Aaron tries to persuade Lucius to exempt Aaron's bastard son from execution in exchange for Aaron's confession of all the unknown heinous deeds he has committed. "Yet for I know thou art religious," Aaron exclaims,

And hast a thing within thee called a conscience,
 With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies,
 Which I have seen thee careful to observe,
 Therefore I urge thy oath . . .

. . .
 . . . therefore thou shalt vow
 By that same god, what god soe'er it be
 That thou adorest and hast in reverence,
 To save my boy, to nourish and bring him up,
 Or else I will discover nought to thee. (V.i.74-78, 81-85)

Aaron's phrase "popish tricks and ceremonies" anachronistically invokes a Christian context for Lucius' solemn reply: "Even by my God I swear to thee I will" (V.i.86). Lucius' phrase "my God" has an intimate personal feel, carrying no association with the public deity Jupiter. Taylor notes that Lucius had planned to hang Aaron's bastard "that he may see it sprawl— / A sight to vex the father's soul withal" (V.i.51-52, Taylor 143-44). But Lucius' Christian oath supersedes this remnant of sadism in his character, and he keeps his word. Aaron's child lives through the concluding events of the play. Lucius had earlier described himself as a man who "loves his pledges dearer than his life" (III.ii.291), a man for whom "fulfill[ing] his vows is dearer . . . than life."⁸ Taylor asserts that the baby's hanging "is avoided only when [Lucius] is duped by Aaron into swearing an oath that he will spare the child" (144). Lucius is hardly duped. As a Christian, his God-sworn oath is no "popish" trick of policy; acting on principle, he saves an infant's life.

Taylor claims that the child's "fiend-like" face among those of the characters assembled at the end of the play incarnates the evil of his father and predicts the future savagery of the Goths that Lucius has brought within the Roman fold (151-52). I would argue on the contrary that Lucius' preservation of the child providentially breaks a pattern of retributive son-killing that began with Lucius' and Titus' determination to sacrifice Tamora's son Alarbus to appease the shades of the dead Andronici and included Tamora's resolution to kill Titus' sons Quintus and Martius in retaliation and Titus' afterwards to murder her remaining boys Chiron and Demetrius. At roughly the same time that he was writing *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare was showing in the latter parts of *Henry VI* that the retributive killing of the son of a homicidal parent

was a main catalyst for the Wars of the Roses.⁹ The miraculous preservation of the Earl of Stanley's son, whom Richard III had resolved to kill if his father defected (as he does) to Richmond, breaks a talionic pattern and plays its role in beginning a benign phase of English history, the establishment of the Tudor dynasty.

The fact that such a phase may not be in store for late-Imperial Christian Rome does not diminish the significance of Lucius' exemplary forbearance. "Lucius, all hail, Rome's gracious governor!" (V.iii.146), the people cry, emphasizing by the word "gracious" the enlightenment of Lucius apparent to astute playgoers. In an Elizabethan view, this enlightenment included a Christian governor's understanding of the need through violent execution to punish and deter crimes inimical to the welfare of the body politic. Taylor notes that the "Elizabethan playhouse was adept at catering for the taste of an age in which savage public punishments such as the cutting off of hands or disembowelling drew large crowds" (148). If a Catholic priest was disembowelled, he died ostensibly not because he was a Catholic but because his Catholicism had made him a traitor to the Church and state of England. The threat of politico-religious dismemberment that he posed came back upon his head in his disembowelling. Elizabethans understood that gracious Christian governors, such as they imagined their Queen was, routinely applied death penalties for homicidal treason, often in a way that mirrored the crime. They at least would not have questioned Lucius' justice—as Taylor does (144)—in ordering Aaron to be set breast-deep in the earth until he starves to death. Shakespeare has made the notion of earth swallowing her own increase a symbolic motif of *Titus Andronicus* (e.g., V.ii.190-91), and Lucius' decorous punishment for man-killing Appetite positively concludes it. As for Tamora, Lucius judges that, once dead, her body should be thrown "forth to beasts and birds of prey: / Her life was beastly and devoid of pity, / And being dead, let birds on her take pity" (V.iii.198-200). Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience almost certainly approved rather than condemned this early Christian governor's decorous punishment of—to use a celebrated phrase of *3 Henry VI* (I.iv.137)—a tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide.

NOTES

¹Maurice Hunt, "Compelling Art in *Titus Andronicus*," *SEL* 28 (1988): 197-218, esp. 213-14; Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 1971) 194; William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995) 21.

²All references to *Titus Andronicus* are to the text in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

³Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983) 69.

⁴Clifford Huffman, "Titus Andronicus: Metamorphosis and Renewal," *MLR* 67 (1972): 730-41, esp. 735. Grace Starry West, in "Going by the Book: Classical Allusions in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *SP* 79 (1982): 62-77, remarks that "we should remember that the Rome of *Titus Andronicus* is Rome after Brutus, after Caesar, and after Ovid. We know it is a later Rome because the emperor is routinely called Caesar; because the characters are constantly alluding to Tarquin, Lucretia, and Brutus, suggesting that they learned about Brutus' new founding of Rome, from the same literary sources we do, Livy and Plutarch" (74). In this respect, Huffman describes the setting of Shakespeare's play as "late-Imperial Christian Rome" (735).

⁵"Compelling Art in *Titus Andronicus*" 204-06.

⁶In *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), James Hall catalogues the many painterly versions of the dove as a symbol of the Holy Ghost (109). "Pigeon" was a common sixteenth-century synonym for "dove," as the *OED* #1 and #2 definitions of the former term indicate.

⁷Ronald Broude, in "Roman and Goth in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shaks* 6 (1970): 27-35, remarks that the Andronici "bring about the regeneration of Rome in much the same way that, in Shakespeare's later revenge play, Hamlet, acting as 'scourge and minister,' operates on Denmark's 'hidden impostume'" (32-33). In "Four Forms of Vengeance in *Titus Andronicus*," *JEGP* 78 (1979): 494-507, Broude argues that "notwithstanding the paganism of the characters . . . the guiding force of the play is something very much like the Christian Providence of Shakespeare's histories" (496). For readings of Providence at work in *Titus*, see Broude's "Roman and Goth in *Titus Andronicus*" 27-34 and "Four Forms of Vengeance in *Titus Andronicus*" 500-07. Moreover, Irving Ribner, in *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1960), argues that "Shakespeare tries also to place the fall of Titus within a larger framework in which evil too is destroyed, so that the audience, while lamenting the damnation of one soul, may have a renewed awareness of the perfection of God's order and of the operation of justice in the world" (18). For Shakespeare's "Christianizing" moments in *Titus*, moments replete with "Protestant phraseology," see James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama: The Argument of the Play* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 42-43.

⁸*The Riverside Shakespeare* 1083.

⁹See, for example, David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: Henry VI and Its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971) 127-39; and Ronald S. Berman, "Fathers and Sons in the *Henry VI* Plays," *SQ* 13 (1962): 487-97, esp. 494-97.

"Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*": A Reply*

PHILIP C. KOLIN

For centuries, including at least the first half of the Twentieth, *Titus Andronicus* has been the outcast of the Shakespeare canon, an easy prey for stalking critics. In denouncing the play, the critics' motto has been close, if not identical, to Aaron's—"Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things . . . / And nothing grieves me heartily indeed / But that I cannot do ten thousand more" (5.1.141-44). The turning point in *Titus* criticism came in 1955 with Peter Brook's haunting production starring the Oliviers as Titus and daughter Lavinia. Either because of that production or because of criticism in the late 1950s/early 1960s corroborating Brook's interpretation, the tide of *Titus* criticism, or more properly the rivulet since so little positive about the play had been written up to that time, had changed, and Shakespeare's first Roman play began to elicit a more varied and dynamic critical response that saw power in its verse and formidable ambiguity in its action. Highly influential studies by Eugene Waith on the Ovidian characteristics of Shakespeare's theatre poetry and A. C. Hamilton on *Titus* and Shakespearean tragedy opened rewarding possibilities for (re)examining the play. In the last ten years or so, *Titus* has been an emerging script for highly provocative studies of race, gender, and political ideologies in Shakespeare.

Enter Anthony Brian Taylor and his article on Lucius in *Connotations*, 6.2. There is much to applaud in Taylor's discussion of Lucius, especially his evidence publicizing the sins against a false historicity claimed for Titus's only surviving son and Saturninus's successor to the Roman throne. But when Taylor attempts to discredit Lucius on internal grounds,

*Reference: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 138-57.

I fear he propagates a view of the play that is retrograde to the contemporary, and welcome, criticism that privileges ambiguity, indeterminacy, and complexity in the script. Taylor's reading of the political events in Shakespeare minimizes the subterfuges and pacts that are central to *Titus*. Clearly, the implications of Taylor's argument extend far beyond the single character of Lucius, who has less than five percent of the 2700 lines in the play.

Attempting to dethrone Lucius as either savior or order figure, Taylor devotes much energy to drawing out damning parallels between father and son. He marshals a long list of similarities, in action and in word, to demonstrate that Shakespeare attaches the same blame to Lucius as to Titus. Underpinning Taylor's argument is his belief that Shakespeare, in this "witty, consciously repetitive play," valorizes what mathematicians call binomial distribution or expansion—the proliferation of binary sets. Repetition for Taylor forecloses recuperation for Lucius. Yet this approach resembles earlier imagery studies by Caroline Spurgeon and others in the 1940s and "theme and structure" articles thriving in the 1950s when Structuralism ruled benignly over a text. While Taylor dutifully presses comparisons between Titus and Lucius, I wish he had gone beyond the traditional to explore the more ambitious political strategizing that Shakespeare and contemporary directors delight in foregrounding through *Titus*.

There are major differences between father and son, and these differences are, I contend, what makes *Titus* an aggressively problematic political play rather than a spectacle of violence an early Shakespeare served up to gore-happy Elizabethans. As events turn out, Lucius does not end up like his father, nor is he the inept political bungler that Taylor accuses the Andronici patriarch of being. Lucius's grasp of politics far exceeds his father's reach. The son's winning is not confined to the battlefield; he succeeds on the homefront as well by instituting a renewed *Pax Romanorum* and by offering a new profile in polity. Lucius is not fixed in the past, as Taylor suggests, but ushers in a *novus ordo seculorum*, different from the past yet not devoid of its legacies for rule. A popular leader, Lucius is a shrewd student of the realpolitik. He engineers a "Rainbow Coalition," similar to those multi-racial, multi-ethnic groups found in contemporary society, between Romans and Goths to purge

Rome. For Taylor, a Goth is a Goth is a Goth, all blood-thirsty varlets, though he recruits pity for Tamora by heaping coals on Lucius's head for his revenge toward her. Yet for Shakespeare (and Lucius), the Goths at last support a Roman emperor rather than the other way around, as under Saturninus's short-lived reign. Thanks to Lucius, there is a Roman on the throne and not a Roman-turned-Goth like Saturninus or a Goth-defeated Roman like Titus. Unlike his father, Lucius controls the Goths and not the other way round.

Taylor's view of what/who constitutes a political "savior" or order figure is conventional, paradigmatic. Pointing out that Lucius must be seen "in stark contrast" to "savior-figures in Shakespeare like Richmond and Malcolm" (141), Taylor is unresponsive to Shakespeare's (and Marlowe's, and Marston's, and Tourneur's) variations on and subversions of the type. Surely Shakespeare did not believe that all rulers must be sanctified in hagiography, as Richmond and Malcolm were. The Elizabethan/Jacobean political necessity of patronage (Elizabeth was descended from Henry VII and James I's honor was emblazoned through Malcolm) no doubt influenced Shakespeare's portrait of these two particular "saviors." But more often than not, Shakespeare pushes the notion of a "political savior" outside the bounds in which Taylor wants to circumscribe Lucius. Shakespeare incessantly demystifies order figures revealing the irony underneath their crown.

Lucius is among the first in a long line of savvy saviors who bring an unconventional resolution to their respective plays. Amid Shakespeare's array of savior/order figures are cunning plotters, exiles, political opportunists, men not afraid of wily deals and/or restitutions made at the block, e.g., leaders like Bolingbroke and his craftier son Hal, Caesar, Fortinbras, Duke Vincentio, and especially Ulysses. When we compare Lucius with them, and not the shadowy and saintly Richmond, we get a keener appreciation of how unorthodox and devious Shakespeare's savior/order figures can be. In such company Lucius deserves more latitude—and maybe even respect—than Taylor grants him.

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Lucius, Still Severely Flawed: A Response to Jonathan Bate, Maurice Hunt, and Philip Kolin*

ANTHONY BRIAN TAYLOR

Jonathan Bate shares many of my misgivings about Lucius.¹ Recognizing the ironic parallel with the brutal treatment of Alarbus, he questions his refusal of burial rites to Tamora; he queries how exactly he will reward the Goths; and he speculates about whether he will "resort to strong arm tactics." All this makes him sceptical about the play's ending and the prospect of the new emperor ushering in "a new golden age." Where we differ is that I focus on the disastrous effect of Lucius' flaws for his family and Rome in the play; he sees them largely as placing question marks against the future. He also gives much greater weight to virtues which, in his view, enable Lucius to redeem the situation and live up to his name and bring light to a darkened and confused world. This positive view of Lucius is considerably reinforced by his discovery of a Reformation context in the play, which makes it possible to interpret the Goths as the forerunners of the German reformers in opposing Rome and Lucius' accession as a "Protestant succession."² But seeing Lucius in this way gives rise to a degree of discomfort: it involves a *volte face* on the Goths midway through the play, for example, and a "Protestant" Lucius also necessitates standing a moment in the text on its head. When he is taken prisoner and asks for an oath to spare his son's life, Aaron says he knows Lucius is "religious" and uses "popish tricks and ceremonies" (5.1.76).³ But, we are told, because the words come from

*Reference: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of Titus Andronicus," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 138-57; Jonathan Bate, "'Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of Titus Andronicus': A Reply," *Connotations* 6.3 (1996/97): 330-33; Maurice Hunt, "Exonerating Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*: A Response to Anthony Brian Taylor," *Connotations* 7.1 (1997/98): 87-93; Philip C. Kolin, "'Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of Titus Andronicus': A Reply," *Connotations* 7.1 (1997/98): 94-96.

Aaron, "this strongly suggests Lucius should in fact be regarded as the very opposite of Catholic." Yet he himself has raised not the least objection to having his religion defined in Catholic terms, and tacitly accepted what has been said without comment. In addition, although there is no doubt that the Moor is "the great twister of truth" in the play, when taken prisoner, he uncharacteristically commits himself to telling the truth for two reasons: to save his son, and because he knows the truth will torment Lucius.

Notwithstanding Lucius' barbaric butchery of Alarbus and willingness to kill Lavinia rather than return her in the family quarrel, Maurice Hunt takes a sanguine view of Lucius in the early part of the play, seeing him as a "humane," "sensitive" candidate for "redemptive martyrdom." But the key to Lucius' eventual "apotheosis" in Hunt's opinion is the silent, unexplained conversion which Lucius and the Roman world undergo in Acts 4 and 5 when he "metamorphoses from a pagan devoted to Roman religion to a Christian." But this sudden Christianising of Lucius (and indeed, the Roman world)⁴ involves all kinds of difficulties. For one thing, it involves Hunt in what is, given the uncertain practices of Elizabethan compositors, traditionally a Shakespearean mare's nest: assuming references to "god" in the text are upper case. A crucial piece of evidence in establishing Hunt's case is Lucius' response to Aaron's plea that he will spare the child: he cites it as, "Even by *my God* I swear to thee I will" (5.1.86, italics mine). Yet a stream of modern editors, including J. C. Maxwell, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Eugene Waith, Jonathan Bate, and Allan Hughes, find no evidence whatsoever of a Christian god in this line; in their texts, it reads: "Even by *my god* I swear to thee I will" (italics mine).⁵ And such is his anxiety to make Lucius Christian, Hunt accepts without demur the reference to his "popish tricks and ceremonies." So in a play written some time between 1589 and 1594, it is being suggested that Shakespeare is offering for the approval of an Elizabethan playhouse audience, a saviour-figure patently associated with the Pope, the Catholic head of the church of Rome who had blessed the Armada and offered pardon to anyone who might assassinate the Queen. Nonetheless, Hunt rounds off his reply impressively by praising his Christian Lucius for sparing Aaron's child and thus breaking the "pattern of retributive son-killing" in the play. The idea of the nightmare

finally ending is most appealing and would be convincing if Lucius exhibited the least spirit of compassion at this point. Instead, Aaron's child is a mere pawn to be produced as evidence of Tamora and his father's guilt while Lucius devises a protracted and agonising death for his father who is to "stand and rave and cry for food." The figure of Aaron breast-deep in the earth constitutes the play's final dramatic icon, and is proof that the nightmare goes on. The earth appears once more to be swallowing men, as it has swallowed the good and the bad, the living and the dead, from the very beginning of the play.

Philip Kolin holds the view that Lucius is a master of polity and the architect of a "*Pax Romanorum*." But neither Lucius nor anyone else refers to such a grand design in the text. When he addresses the Goths as he and they near the end of their triumphant march on Rome, he confines himself to promising them "treble satisfaction" in their desire for revenge on the city, seemingly preoccupied, to use the words of Jonathan Bate, with "how the Goths are to be paid off for their assistance." The other glorious opportunity to breach the subject is when as newly acclaimed emperor, he addresses the Romans, but on that occasion, having promised the avenging Goths a pound of Rome's flesh, he never so much as mentions the invaders whose menacing presence gives his promise to "heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe" (5.3.168) a decidedly hollow ring. So resonant is his silence about the Goths at this point that it is understandable that he was played in the 1985 BBC production as a hypocrite.⁶ Regrettably, all the signs are that Lucius will be as powerless to help Rome at the end of the play as his aged father was at the beginning. Kolin also quite rightly objects to my limiting discussion of redeemers in Shakespeare to Malcolm and Richmond. Lucius, he argues, belongs to a line of what he calls "savvy saviours" which includes Bolingbroke, Hal, Caesar, and Ulysses. But none of these figures at the outset personally butchers a living victim and then sadistically refers to the smell of burning human entrails as "perfume." None by "lopping" and "hewing" another human being introduces the bloody theme of dismemberment into a dramatic world in which throats are cut, hands chopped off, tongues torn out, and heads ground to powder; none, as A. C. Hamilton reminds us, sets a bloody and gruesome example that "first occasions the cycle of revenge."⁷

In the replies to my article, there is also discussion of the Goths. Kolin attempts to undermine my treatment of the Goths by remarking ironically that I see them all as "bloodthirsty varlets." But with respect, his rather quaint phraseology has connotations I would never place upon the Goths in *Titus Andronicus*. My view, consistently stated here and elsewhere, is that the Goths are "barbarous," the epithet used in the play, the kind of savage people who, left to their own devices, would rape and mutilate a defenceless woman, and, as soldiers, if ordered, would not hesitate to participate in atrocities like infanticide or the torture of prisoners. And in precisely placing the Goths outside the civilized pale with this word, I, and, I believe, Shakespeare, reflect the general Elizabethan estimate as expressed by such figures as Ascham and Thomas Cooper.⁸

But the real interest lies in Jonathan Bate's elaboration of the thesis that the Goths who follow Lucius are not the same Goths who earlier in the play terrorize Rome. In his reply, this involves a surprising construction being placed on Shakespeare's only reference to the Goths outside *Titus*, Touchstone's remark to Audrey: "I am here with thee and thy goats as the most capricious poet honest Ovid was among the Goths" (*As You Like It* 3.3.5-6). To take this as praise of the Goths is to ignore Touchstone's attitude to Arden—"when I was at home, I was in a better place" (2.4.15); alone among those exiled, the Clown is impervious to the benefits of Shakespeare's "green world," finding nothing in the forest but a contemptible, "greasy" existence where life is reduced to a crude matter of "country copulation." More significantly, it is to ignore Touchstone's characteristic play on words; "goats" in his remark gives way to "capricious" (goatish, witty, lustful) and then to "Goths" which, as Alan Brissenden, the recent Oxford editor of the play (OUP 1993), reminds us in his note on the lines, the Elizabethans pronounced "Goats." Touchstone is not praising the Goths; he is saying that they are little better than animals, which is just what Ovid said about them in his exile at Tomi. And there is evidence that the source of his remark, the *Tristia*, which was known to Shakespeare from his schooldays, also underlies the treatment of the Goths in *Titus Andronicus*. As Ovid bewails the savage and barbarous life-style of the Goths, he refers to the considerable Greek influence on their lives—they attempt to speak Greek, for instance, doing so with a Getic twang (*Tristia* V.vii.52).⁹ And this uneasy fusion

of Greek and Gothic culture is reflected in the names of Tamora's two sons, Chiron and Demetrius, Goths who behave like animals in the forest.

The claim that *Germania* underlies the Goths of the play's second part, rests on its praise of certain aspects of the Germans' lifestyle (primarily their simple diet and chastity) as idyllic in contrast with Roman decadence, but Tacitus also stresses their crudity (dressing in animal skins, using dung on their roofs) and their laziness, drunkenness, and brawling.¹⁰ Nor is there need to go to Tacitus to explain Aaron's resolve to take his child to the Goths and have him raised on a diet of berries and roots and live in a cave and be brought up "To be a warrior and command a camp" (4.2.174 ff.). This is the concept of the "selvage man" (or "noble savage") which frequently appears in Elizabethan writers who generally regarded it with healthy scepticism. Moreover, any inclination to put a praiseworthy gloss on Aaron's words is checked by the example of another Moor who was brought up from his earliest days "To be a warrior and command a camp"; in Othello's case, the result of such a "barbarous," uncivilized upbringing ultimately proved disastrous, allowing Iago to strip away the veneer of civilization and reveal the lecherous, savage "black devil" beneath who would "chop her into messes." And there is another more arresting, even closer parallel in the figure of another "selvage man," Caliban, that "thing of darkness," who was also, like the Moor's black child, the product of a union between "the devil" and his "dam,"¹¹ and who actually did grow up close to Nature, feeding on berries and dwelling in a cave.

For all the excellence of three distinguished respondents' arguments, I remain convinced that Lucius is a further, fascinating development of the play's central theme of "flawed *Romanitas*." An iron Roman, he has the virtues, devotion to family, selfless patriotism, courageous soldiership, that made Rome great; but he also has vices, mindless sadistic cruelty, an inability to grasp or respond to complex political situations, that represent the debility and coarsening in the Roman character that led to the city's fall. And that fall which is prefigured in the rape of Lavinia by the Goths is ominously at hand at the close where, as the politically naive young emperor fills the air with patriotic sentiments, Rome lies at the mercy of the avenging "barbarous" Goths.

In what has become a classic article, A. C. Hamilton traced the veins of Shakespearean tragedy in the play. But perhaps *Titus Andronicus* remains problematic because insufficient attention has been paid to its elements of un-Shakespearean tragedy. In this early play, the young playwright was heavily influenced by two great writers, Ovid and Christopher Marlowe, whose work is marked by structural irony coupled and invested with unexpected, sometimes startling, moral values. Beyond this point in time, however, as Shakespeare matured and found his own superb tragic metier, they would never influence him so heavily again.

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NOTES

¹Although I differ from Jonathan Bate somewhat in my appreciation of Lucius, I am conscious that no one has done more in recent years to illuminate the play for us, first with the stimulating treatment in *Shakespeare's Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) and then with the splendid recent New Arden edition (London: Routledge, 1995). I also owe him an apology; in quoting from the New Arden edition, I unintentionally gave a misleading impression by not acknowledging that he, too, found Lucius flawed.

²His perception of a reformation context in the play leans heavily upon the incident when a Goth serving Lucius surveys a ruined monastery harbouring Aaron, the play's devil, and his son. In my article the scene is interpreted as one more picture of the play's utterly fallen world.

³Reference is to the New Arden edition. Reference to other works is to *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 1987).

⁴Hunt introduces the Christian metamorphosis of the Roman world with an ingenious decipherment of the Clown episode (4.3.77 ff. and 4.4.39-48); but his interpretation takes no account of a well established sixteenth-century tradition whereby Clowns stepped straight from the contemporary world using current Christian terminology into distant dramatic settings. (See my forthcoming article, "The Clown Episode in *Titus Andronicus*" in *N&Q*.) In discussing Christian references, he also refers to the elder tree growing by the pit in the forest (2.3.277), noting its association with Judas. But in the Warwickshire countryside where Shakespeare grew up, the elder tree was traditionally associated, not with Judas, but with the Cross on which Jesus died. That this particular tree should be growing over the pit, the perverse "swallowing womb" which contains not the seeds of life but a form of death in the figure of the one virtuous member of the Roman royal family, Bassianus, lying "like to a slaughtered lamb" (2.2.223), is deeply ironic; like the scene

involving the "ruin'd monastery," it is a bleak reminder that this is a dramatic world beyond redemption.

⁵Evidence of a Christian god is also seen in Marcus' remark as Lavinia is about to reveal the name of the rapists: "here display at last / What God will have discovered for revenge" (4.1.73-74). But this is set in a thoroughly pagan context, Marcus having begun speaking with "Apollo, Pallas, Jove or Mercury / Inspire me, that I may this treason find" (66-67).

⁶Lucius was played with "shifty eyes, an oily look, and the physical characteristics of Mussolini" (*Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin [New York: Garland 1995] 37).

⁷A. C. Hamilton, "Titus Andronicus: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy," *ShQ* 14 (1963): 202.

⁸Ascham regarded the Goths as a coarse, "beggerlie" people and reflects the orthodox Humanist view that the invasion of Italy by "Goths and Hunnes" signalled the destruction of "all good learning"; and in his widely used dictionary, Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Lincoln, associates them with the most ferocious and savage of all peoples, the Scythians, writing that they "dyd depopulate and brynge in subjection the more part of Europa, and finally destroyed Rome." For Ascham, see *The Scholemaster, Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. G. Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1904) 1: 29, and for Cooper, see *Dictionarium Historicum et Poeticum* in his *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (London, 1555).

⁹Reference is to the Loeb edition, *Tristia: Ex Ponto*, ed. A. L. Wheeler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1924; rpt. 1965).

¹⁰Reference is to the Loeb edition of *Germania*, ed. M. Hutton, revised by E. H. Warmington (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1970). For the simplicity of the Germans' diet and their "fenced-in chastity" ("saepta pudicitia"), see 18 and 19, 23, for their wearing animal skins (17.2) and piling dung on their roofs (16.4), and for their drunkenness, love of noise and brawling, and habitual laziness (22.2, 23.2, and 15.2).

¹¹Cf. Aaron's comment on Tamora on learning of the birth of their child—"she is the devil's dam" (4.2.57), and Prospero's opening remark to Caliban—"Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam" (*The Tempest* 1.2.323-24).

Lisa Hopkins on John Ford's *The Broken Heart*: A Letter*

To the Editor:

We are very pleased that Lisa Hopkins has found our work on *The Broken Heart* useful. Her essay is of great interest, and we find much to commend in it. The connection that she draws between Lady Arbella Stuart on Penthea is especially convincing, and we are chagrined that we did not make this connection ourselves.

In her essay as a whole we find that each of the points Dr. Hopkins makes is well argued and defensible but that the overall logic by which the pieces are fitted together seems somewhat tenuous. This is not to say that Dr. Hopkins is wrong, but that we would need more evidence to make the kinds of connections that she sees in Ford's work among colonization, land inheritance, and the making of Stuart Britain.

Yours sincerely,

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*Reference: Lisa Hopkins, "'I am not Oedipus': Riddling the Body Politic in *The Broken Heart*," *Connotations* 6.3 (1996/97): 259-82.

The Incorporation of Identities in *Perkin Warbeck*: A Response to Lisa Hopkins*

WILLY MALEY

In her thoughtful and provocative essay on John Ford's *The Broken Heart*, Lisa Hopkins raises a number of important issues around the dramatisation of national identities in Ford's corpus. In this brief response I cannot hope to do justice to her incisive suggestion, argued with great authority and insight, "that a concern about the relationships between different nations is not confined to *The Broken Heart*, or even to *Perkin Warbeck*, but is a recurrent element of Ford's dramatic work as a whole."¹ What I can do, picking up on what Hopkins rightly identifies as an enduring preoccupation on Ford's part with land, inheritance and titles, is to indicate some ways in which *Perkin Warbeck* fits into this territorial framework. In fact, I want to argue that the play sheds light on what the new seventeenth-century historiography calls the "British Problem," the successive crises of sovereignty that beset the British polity throughout the early modern period, and which come to a head in the 1640s. What I have to say is thus less a follow-up than a footnote to Hopkins.

Perkin Warbeck can be read as an untimely example of a Stuart history play that confronts questions of identity in the three kingdoms at the inception of the Tudor Myth. Ford's text in fact participates in three historical junctures—the 1490s, where it is set, the 1590s, whose history plays it recalls, and the 1630s, where it both anticipates and participates in a decade of violent political upheaval. *Perkin Warbeck* charts the progress of the pretender from the moment he disembarked at Cork in 1491 posing as Richard IV to his execution at Tyburn on 23 November

*Reference: Lisa Hopkins, "'I am not Oedipus': Riddling the Body Politic in *The Broken Heart*," *Connotations* 6.3 (1996/97): 259-82.

1499. Staged initially in the year that Edmund Spenser's *A View of the State of Ireland* (1633) was first published, Ford's play, like Spenser's text, is an untimely meditation on the past that carries with it portents of the future. Ford's full title reads: "*The Chronicle Historie of Perkin Warbeck. A Strange Truth.*"² The "Strange Truth" of *Perkin Warbeck* is that it is a compelling instance of a revisionist literary text, a play that both revives and revises the Tudor Myth, parodying the genre of the history play, mocking established models of monarchical authority, and displacing the centre of power from London to a host of national and regional settings on the so-called "margins" of metropolitan English culture—Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland. Ford's abridgement of the British Problem in *Perkin Warbeck* poses questions of sovereignty and statehood that are especially vexed in the context of a composite monarchy. In keeping with a central motif in his other plays, Ford asserts that: "Eminent titles may indeed inform who their owners are, not often what." *Perkin Warbeck* negotiates the space that can open up between status and substance. He who plays the king, he who is deemed a pretender, may be more monarchical than he who sits on the throne. Claims of right are Ford's lasting concern.

Perkin's progress foreshadows the new course of British history, which will see a shift in English investment from Wales to Scotland. Henry VII complains of feeling like "a mockery king in state" (I.i.4). He rails against Warbeck, and observes that:

Foreign attempts against a state and kingdom
Are seldom without some great friends at home. (I.i.84-5)

"Home" and "foreign" are of course vexed categories in a British context, for where does "home" end and "foreign" begin? It comes as no surprise, either to the historian of the early modern period, or to the student of the British Problem, to learn from whence Perkin Warbeck found support for his claim: Ireland (I.i.105-9). Since the pretender is an "airy apparition" of a king, Henry curses "th'superstitious Irish" (I.iii.39).³ Having launched himself from Ireland, the pretender next seeks protection at the court of James IV, before finding "Ten thousand Cornish" willing to fight for him. If the Tudor Myth depended on the vindication of that dynasty, then the Stuart Myth subjects it to

interrogation, chiefly from the so-called “margins” of the British state, a state in turmoil in Ford’s time. My own view is that *Perkin Warbeck* is less a deconstruction of the Tudor Myth than a reconstitution of it that uncovers its ideological roots and routes, and at the same time passes comment on the first thirty years of Stuart rule.

Patricia Parker sees Shakespeare’s *Henry V* as being preoccupied with “England’s control over its border or borderers,” and this too is the crux of *Perkin Warbeck*.⁴ Ford, unlike Shakespeare, is writing in the wake of Anglo-Scottish union, when the boundary separating England and Scotland has been breached, and the respective sovereignties of those two countries are at once fused and confused, as the margins have rejoined and rejuvenated the centre.

James IV’s own justification for helping Warbeck is revealing. The Scottish king points to the precedent of seeking foreign assistance to resolve domestic disputes (II.i.18-28). While James is defending the right of nations to petition for aid abroad, Henry is complaining of domestic disorder:

We are followed
By enemies at home that will not cease
To seek their own confusion. (II.ii.125-7)

Fresh intelligence arrives, informing Henry:

That James of Scotland late hath entertain’d
Perkin the counterfeit with more than common
Grace and respect, nay, courts him with rare favours.
The Scot is young and forward; we must look for
A sudden storm to England from the North;
Which to withstand, Durham shall post to Norham
To fortify the castle and secure
The frontiers against invasion there. (II.ii.149-56)

Ironically, when he comes to refer to Henry’s Tudor origins, James IV undermines at a single stroke both his adversary’s Englishness and his legitimacy:

The Welsh Harry henceforth
Shall therefore know, and tremble to acknowledge,

That not the painted idol of his policy
 Shall fright the lawful owner from a kingdom. (II.iii.62-5)

Henry's identity is no more fixed or firm than that of Warbeck, but is precisely "incontinent." Having moved from the Irish to the Scots, Warbeck next elicits help from Cornwall. The Scottish threat to English dominion is followed by a further hazard to the integrity of England, as Daubeney brings the news of yet another incursion from the periphery:

Ten thousand Cornish,
 Grudging to pay your subsidies, have gathered
 A head, led by a blacksmith and a lawyer;
 They make for London. (II.iii.129-32)

The occupant of the English throne plays one component of the state off against others. Thus "Welsh Harry," as James called him, celebrates the victory over the "Cornish rebels" on "Saint George's Fields" (III.i.9). This victory, it has been noted, was achieved historically by virtue of a heavy reliance "on the loyalty of the Welsh contingents."⁵ In *Henry V* the king, despite his claims to Welsh origins, had been addressed as "Harry of England" (III.6.118), and had cried "God for Harry! England and Saint George!" (III.i.34) We can see here a gap opening up between Tudor and Stuart interpretations of history. With the accession of James I, it was no longer necessary to appeal to the antiquity of Welsh origins or to ancient British origin myths, since a new unified political system, a constellation that included Scotland, was now a reality. While Shakespeare's Henry V made much of his Welsh pedigree in order to foreground the provenance of the Tudor regime, Ford offers a case for preferring the English pretender—supported most notably by the Scots, but also buttressed by Irish and Cornish elements—over the English incumbent who owes his existence to the Welsh.⁶ We can juxtapose Henry VII's Welshness and defensive Englishness to Perkin Warbeck's resort to non-English sources of support.

Perkin Warbeck shares the concerns of Shakespeare's histories. Throughout Ford's play, national boundaries are broached by invasion and the forging of alliances. When he weds Katherine Gordon, daughter

of the Earl of Huntly, Warbeck declares that "An union this way," that is, through marriage, "Settles possession in a monarchy" (II.iii.79-79). A union any other way may be not quite so secure, such as the various acts of incorporation or conquest that marked the slow coming together of the British state. Union through marriage furnishes a relatively painless means of fleshing out the body politic. Warbeck's words are prophetic, of course, since another marriage, between James IV and Margaret Tudor, will pave the way for an accommodation with England.

The view that Ford is doing something radical with the history play can find supporting evidence in a number of features of Ford's presentation. One example is in the area of gender relations. Ford can be seen to be shifting the gender balance in the genre. One can instructively contrast Henry V's courting of the French Catherine in Shakespeare's play with Warbeck's wooing of the Scottish Katherine in Ford's drama. The sexual politics of the play are crucial. Jean Howard has written of Warbeck's apparent or alleged "effeminacy," the representation of his relationship with Katherine Gordon as one of intimacy, closeness, reciprocity and tenderness, a relationship absent from other history plays.⁷ Where Shakespeare's histories arguably present essentially masculine models of monarchical rule, Ford is concerned with a different configuration of sovereignty and sexual politics.⁸

The pretender's wedding itself sees a marriage of cultures. Warbeck's Irish followers fear being upstaged at the celebrations that follow the ceremony:

'tis fit the Scots
Should not engross all glory to themselves
At this grand and eminent solemnity. (II.iii.139-41)

The father of the bride, Huntly, mocks the mixture of Scottish and Irish entertainment:

Is not this fine, I trow, to see the gambols,
To hear the jigs, observe the frisks, b'enchanted
With the rare discord of bells, pipes and tabors,
Hotch-potch of Scotch and Irish twingle-twangles,
Like so many quiristers of Bedlam
Trolling a catch! (III.ii.2-6)

Irish and Scottish entertainers appear, in a scene that seems both to recall and parody Ben Jonson's *Irish Masque at Court* (1613).⁹ The stage direction reads:

Enter at one door four Scotch Antics accordingly habited; enter at another four wild Irish in trowes, long-haired, and accordingly habited. Music. The masquers dance.

Whereas Jonson's *Irish Masque* was ostensibly a compliment to the conversion powers of James I, as the rude Irish masquers revealed themselves to be sophisticated Anglo-Irishmen, in Ford's play the entertainment for James IV is more ambiguous, designed both to expose the lack of cultivation in evidence when popular Scottish and Irish traditions converge, and to suggest that Scotland and Ireland have more in common culturally than either has with England. If the Scoto-Irish combination amuses Huntly, it also serves to point up the difference between the English and Scottish courts. As Jonas Barish observed: "Not only does love bulk large at the Scottish court—we hear nothing of it in England—but there is also ceremony and revelry, music, dancing, feasting, and masquing."¹⁰ Perkin's model of Englishness and courtly conduct is at odds with Henry's potent but problematic mixture of grim severity, military prowess, and underhand political manoeuvring. The pretender holds out the promise of a different kind of Anglo-Scottish relationship than that of an unbalanced incorporating union. Warbeck, having thanked James for his "unlimited" favour, speaks of the alliance that must ensue when the pretender takes his proper place on the English throne:

Then James and Richard, being in effect
One person, shall unite and rule one people,
Divisible in title only. (III.ii.106-8)

While Warbeck seeks the assistance of the Celtic nations that encircle England, Henry has a "charm" that will break the spell Warbeck has woven over James IV. He has a Continental card up his sleeve. Facing Scottish forces, Surrey remarks that not only is the time out of joint, but the "frame" (IV.i.12) is too. The national context of the dispute over the English throne is criss-crossed by various kinds of foreignness. We learn

of Henry's attempts to woo James from Warbeck with promises of a British and European peace, in the shape of amicable relations with both Spain and England. Outflanked by Henry's politicking, Warbeck finds succour in the news that the Cornish are entreating him to land in Cornwall with a force and lead them against Henry. Astley, one of Warbeck's followers, sums up the situation thus:

. . . that if this Scotch garboils do not fadge
to our minds, we will pell-mell run amongst the Cornish
choughs presently and in a trice. (IV.ii.57-59)

Ultimately, Warbeck is hopelessly outmanoeuvred by Henry. While the pretender draws support from Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall, the king outwits him through some devious intrigues with Spain. Warbeck's "antic pageantry," recalling Hamlet's antic disposition, is no match for Henry's ruthless machinations. Perkin is literally eccentric insofar as he haunts the margins of the state. Hialas, the Spanish agent, proposes a union between Henry and James (IV.iii.1-4), recalling Warbeck's earlier appeal for one between himself, as Richard IV, and the Scottish king, and he urges James to accept the offer of a way of avoiding a damaging Anglo-Scottish war (IV.iii.14-15). By marrying Margaret, Henry's daughter, James will forge an alliance in blood that will bind Scotland and England together, aligned against the challenger forged in Ireland, that "common stage of novelty." The Scottish king cannot resist the prospect of such a happy solution to his quandary. As the ruler of a nation whose support for the claimant to the throne of a more powerful neighbour has placed his people at risk, James is pleased to have found such a simple way of saving face (IV.iii.56-60). With the Scottish door closed to Warbeck, Cornwall affords another vantage point from which to assail Henry. Like the English pales in France and Ireland, and the Marches of Wales and Scottish Borderlands, Cornwall offers an alternative English power base. Within the compass of a pale the English state is simultaneously at its most forceful and its most vulnerable. In keeping with the pretender's gift for choosing losers to back him, the Cornish are duly routed, though Warbeck is still at large, albeit ensnared "Within the circuit of our English pale" (IV.ii.3).

If Ford's treatment of the British Problem shifts the gaze from the English metropolis to the perceived margins of the state, then his play also has a crucial European dimension. Indeed, then as now one cannot separate developments in Continental Europe from issues affecting "The Continent of Great Britain." Jane Ohlmeyer's suggestion that the War of the Three Kingdoms in the 1640s was actually a War of Five, given the involvement of France and Spain, can be pushed back into the fifteenth-century, so that the British Problem is acknowledged to be inseparable from a much wider European Problem.¹¹

The strength of *Perkin Warbeck*, and its revolutionary import, is that the pretender emerges as a much more charismatic figure than the enthroned Henry, and the real centre of "The Continent of Great Britain," certainly in terms of the play, is the court of King James. Ford's version of events is in places dependent on historical sources, and yet, at the same time, in its sympathetic portrayal of the self-styled second son of Edward IV, it flies in the face of established historiography, and flatly contradicts previous canonical accounts of the pretender—one thinks here immediately of Thomas Gainsford's *True and Wonderful History of Perkin Warbeck* (1618) and of Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of Henry VII* (1622).

Ford does not merely illustrate the contingency of kingship. He shows that there are other kingdoms whose claims to sovereignty impinge upon the English crown. The question of British identity at the heart of the play, and its implicit promotion of compromise, foundered with the advent of conflict in the three kingdoms in the 1640s. Promoting a narrow English national perspective on history is arguably not Ford's chief aim. In his play the fact that the court of James IV is given far more attention than that of Henry VII may reflect an overriding preoccupation with British statehood rather than English monarchy. After reading Ford's play, a piece of Caroline drama set on the cusp of the Tudor regime, and clearly informed by late Elizabethan history plays, one returns to Shakespeare's histories with a fresh insight into the shaping of "The Continent of Great Britain."

Ford is arguably concerned above all with the fortunes of Britain. Questions of sovereignty in the sense of both personal rule and political dominion are rehearsed throughout *Perkin Warbeck*. Within this

interlocking multiple monarchical matrix, one may detect the shadow of republicanism,¹² a republicanism that thrives in the non-English nations that make up the British state. The historical irony is that it was only when those nations threatened to usurp English authority that an English republic came into being, under Cromwell, a republic whose principal achievement was the reassertion of English supremacy within the three kingdoms. One may also discern here the rudiments of another concern of Ford's, the idea of advancement through merit. But the play furnishes us with more than a classic instance of Renaissance self-fashioning. It shows that the fashioning of a state from a number of nations and monarchies is a painful process, beset with troubles. The matter of sovereignty is complicated if an expansion of the state results in a questioning of monarchy. More than one crown in a state can amount to less than one crown. I would go so far as to suggest that what we have in Ford's play is a confrontation between two possible futures for Britain, a federal republic or a centralised monarchy. Moreover, the Continent of Great Britain is shown to be reliant upon the Continent of Europe, one composite monarchy among others.

That Warbeck should have to comb the Celtic Fringe in order to survive is marvellously apt given the way in which the Tudor Myth, centring on England and Wales, depended upon the suppression of Irish and Scottish elements in the nascent British state. What we get in the Stuart Myth, which reconfigures the relationship between the four nations, is the return of the repressed elements of the British state. Wales loses credibility and visibility, Scotland becomes crucial, and Anglo-Scottish partnership proves a necessary prerequisite for the successful recolonisation of Ireland.

In the figure of Perkin Warbeck, guardian of a "Strange Truth," the English claimant who derives his strength from the "borderlands" of "Great Britain," one may hear the distant rumble of a coming conflict. It would be tempting to see Ford as the Stuart revisionist of Tudor nationalism, but if Ford's is arguably a critical nationalism sensitive to the interplay of the three kingdoms, then Shakespeare is far less jingoistic than his most conservative English readers would attest. Much of Shakespeare's work, and not only in the histories, was concerned with rehearsing tensions made explicit in Ford's reprise of the chronicle play.

I prefer to see both playwrights wrestling with a problem that in recent years has been rather too exclusively the province of the professional historian.

As an English historical drama that foregrounds the non-English components of the British political state-in-formation, *Perkin Warbeck* provides an example of what Patricia Parker, with reference to Shakespeare, has termed "the edification from the margins . . . that can be gained by attending to what might appear the simply inconsequential."¹³ Ford's play is more than merely an ironic reflection on an outmoded theatrical genre. Rather, the play grapples with different modes of Britishness, conflictual identities that are also evident within those earlier historical dramas that have too readily been seen by critics, radical and conservative alike, as professing a narrow English nationalism. The body politic is not merely riddled, but dismembered in Ford's drama. In *Perkin Warbeck* England may be at the helm of Britain Incorporated, but the real business of politics unfolds in the extremities. Lisa Hopkins has expertly characterised Ford's project as one which works at the interface of "the crucial questions of both the Stuart succession and the English colonial enterprise," and she has amply illustrated the extent to which Ford's enterprise constitutes "a searching exploration of the problematics of the right to rule."¹⁴ She also hits the mark with her insistence that Ford's interest in elaborating upon these issues is not confined to *Perkin Warbeck*, his most obviously historical play. Topicality has no respect for genre. If the literary critic desires a model for exploring the British Problem in English Renaissance literature then it may be that, in addition to the sterling work of the born-again British historians, the literary texts of the period, particularly those hitherto seen to be preoccupied with a specific national context, may offer valuable insights. Moreover, they may be read in conjunction with cultural documents that are less easily classified as historical, but which nonetheless display, in subtle and sophisticated ways, an engagement with the truths of state and the lie of the land.

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NOTES

¹Lisa Hopkins, "'I am not Oedipus': Riddling the Body Politic in *The Broken Heart*" 259. In what follows I am presenting an argument more fully developed in an essay entitled "Fording the Nation: The British Problem in *Perkin Warbeck*," forthcoming in a special early modern issue of *Critical Survey*, edited by Andrew Murphy. That essay was itself inspired in large part by another piece of work by Lisa Hopkins, "*Perkin Warbeck*: A Stuart succession play?" in her excellent volume *John Ford's Political Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 39-71.

²All references to *Perkin Warbeck* are to Keith Sturgess (ed.), *John Ford: Three Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

³Warbeck's followers include John a-Water, "sometimes Mayor of Cork." For a discussion of Perkin Warbeck's bases of support in Ireland, see Steven G. Ellis, *Tudor Ireland: Crown, Community and the Conflict of Cultures, 1470-1603* (London: Longman, 1985) 72-83.

⁴See Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: The University of Chicago P, 1996) 168-69.

⁵See Glanmor Williams, *Henry Tudor and Wales* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1985) 73.

⁶On Henry VII's relations with Wales, see Brendan Bradshaw, "The Tudor Reformation and Revolution in Wales and Ireland: The Origins of the British Problem," *The British Problem, c.1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (London: Macmillan, 1996) 39-65.

⁷See Jean Howard, "'Effeminately Doleful': Gender and Legitimacy in Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*," *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge: CUP, 1988): 261-79.

⁸For a sensitive and nuanced reading of modes of masculinity in Shakespeare see Alan Sinfield, "Masculinity and Miscegenation," *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: U of California P) 127-42.

⁹See Stephen Orgel (ed.), *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1969) 206-12.

¹⁰Jonas A. Barish, "*Perkin Warbeck* as Anti-History," *ELC* 20.2 (1970): 161.

¹¹See Jane Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: The Career of Randall MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim, 1609-1683* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 14-17.

¹²For republicanism and contemporary drama, see also an earlier discussion in *Connotations*: Dale B. J. Randall, "The Head and the Hands on the Rostra: *Marcus Tullius Cicero* as a Sign of Its Time," *Connotations* 1.1 (1991): 34-54 and John Morrill, "Charles I, Cromwell, and Cicero (A Response to Dale B. J. Randall)," *Connotations* 1.1 (1991): 96-102.

¹³See Parker 1.

¹⁴Hopkins, "'I am not Oedipus'" 276, 277. The interplay between "New World" colonisation and Stuart state consolidation is, as Hopkins ably indicates, one which warrants close critical attention. I have argued elsewhere that the process of British state formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is both a prerequisite of empire and an exercise in English expansionism in itself. See "This Sceptred Isle: Shakespeare and the British Problem," *Shakespeare and National Culture*, ed. John Joughin (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 83-108.

Modernism Revisited: Willi Erzgräber's Studies in Modern English and Anglo-Irish Literature*

BERNFRIED NUGEL

"The structure is now visible."

—Virginia Woolf¹

By the very fact of its publication, a book of critical essays like Erzgräber's collection *nolens volens* constitutes a challenge to the contemporary state of criticism. As in most cases of this kind, the topics and critical categories of essays which were written and—with one exception—published in a period spanning more than thirty years of a critic's life are not related, let alone adjusted to present critical standards but are left in their original state, functioning rather as historical documents of the critic's development than as direct contributions to current issues. Yet beyond its distinctly retrospective character such a collection clearly demands attention to the accumulated insights of a critic's career, inasmuch as it raises the expectation that the critical findings of more than three decades will prove to possess a value of their own despite their remoteness from contemporary critical debate.

Erzgräber's collection is a case in point, since it braves the tides of poststructuralism and the Derridean legacy simply by not taking cognizance of them. And quite deliberately so, it seems, for in a short prefatory note and a two-page foreword Erzgräber merely gives a very brief and general outline of modernist tendencies in the writers his essays deal with—Hardy, Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, Huxley, Yeats, Hopkins, Eliot, Tomlinson and Hughes—and does not explain his own critical position

*Reference: Willi Erzgräber, *Von Thomas Hardy bis Ted Hughes: Studien zur modernen englischen und anglo-irischen Literatur* [From Thomas Hardy to Ted Hughes: Studies in Modern English and Anglo-Irish Literature] (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1995).

nor discuss alternative critical approaches nor present a working definition of modernism; all this is left to the critical reader to determine.

Now such a reader, while readily granting that close text analysis is one of Erzgräber's fortes (which, however, cannot be discussed adequately within the scope of this highly selective review), is bound to raise a wider question, viz. what are the critical assumptions that underlie Erzgräber's overall view of modernism? For a tentative orientation one should first of all turn to his prefatory remarks since they represent his latest pertinent pronouncement in this book ([7], 11-12). Here Erzgräber describes modernism as an intellectual and literary movement that originated from a profound change in English and Anglo-Irish literature at the end of the nineteenth century and had its main representatives in Joyce, Woolf, Conrad and Eliot. With regard to general modernist trends, Erzgräber singles out his essay on "the moment of vision" in the modern English novel, and as far as individual novelists are concerned, he states that

- Conrad's peculiar mixture of tragic and comic aspects paved the way towards the literature of the absurd,
- Joyce's experimental use of structural schemata made *Ulysses* "the quintessence of modernism" whereas *Finnegans Wake*, with its special narrative technique and new treatment of language, became a basis for postmodern literature,
- Woolf succeeded in representing modern consciousness by employing experimental techniques in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*,
- Huxley's *Brave New World* revealed the problematic implications of modern utopian thought by satirizing a technocratic utopia and addressing issues that are still under discussion at the end of the twentieth century, such as gene technology and test-tube babies.

As for modern poetry, Erzgräber only mentions Yeats' change of style from late romanticism to modernism, Hopkins' role as a model for poets of the twenties and thirties, and Eliot's creation of a modern style by drawing on Metaphysical Poetry as well as on French symbolism. Finally, he loosely links Tomlinson with the Eliot-Pound tradition, and associates Hughes' poetry with the "theatre of violence" of the seventies, implicitly admitting that at least Hughes is out of place in a collection devoted

to modern literature in the stricter sense adumbrated at the beginning of his foreword.

Seen together, Erzgräber's summary remarks on modernist tendencies in rather different writers and genres do not add up to a working hypothesis that could profitably be used to differentiate modernism from other literary movements, such as romanticism, symbolism or aestheticism. For neither the modernity of subject-matter (modern consciousness in Woolf, modern utopian thought in Huxley) nor that of the manner of representation (experimental methods in Joyce and Woolf, absurd mixture of tragic and comic aspects in Conrad) are specified so as to define a common ground that distinguishes this particular group of writers from others. In fact, it seems to be a general feature of avant-garde movements to claim a modernity relative to their time, which is normally couched in vague words like new, experimental or peculiar. However, it is only fair to state at the outset that, in his line of research, Erzgräber focusses much more on historical contexts and developments than on the theoretical problems of classification and terminology. So the imprecision of the term 'modernism' is not so much his fault but rather reflects a widespread dilemma of contemporary literary history, viz. the inconsistency of using a critical term which is doomed to become increasingly meaningless the farther we move away in time from the period with which it was originally connected. In my view, it has by now degenerated into an empty convention and ought—together with its derivative 'postmodernism'—to be avoided by future literary historians. Similarities between writers of the first half of the twentieth century should rather be denoted by more specific terms. A closer look at some of Erzgräber's essays may serve to identify such terms and discuss their appositeness. Following Erzgräber's own emphasis in his collection, I shall concentrate on 'modern' novelists, mainly Joyce, Woolf and Huxley, and examine four critical categories that play a constitutive role in Erzgräber's conception of modernism.

One of those fundamental categories is the treatment of time by the writers under consideration. In his important essay "'The Moment of Vision' im modernen englischen Roman ['The Moment of Vision' in the Modern English Novel]"² Erzgräber uses a combination of history-of-ideas method and structural analysis to determine the meaning and the

functions of the "moment of vision" in Conrad, Woolf and Joyce. In Conrad's associative rather than causal method of narration, Erzgräber argues, "moments of vision" mark the crucial points in the narrative structure where spontaneous insights into the reality of things stand out from the chaos of accidental impressions, even if truth remains mysteriously unattainable. In Woolf's novels, he notes, quasi-mystical "moments of vision" or rather "moments of being," which express a 'mysticism of life' ("Lebensmystik," 102, quoting W. Rasch) and not a religious illumination, form essential structural units in the overall narrative pattern, as can be seen in the visions of Clarissa and Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily Briscoe's creative transformations of important moments in *To the Lighthouse* and in the snapshot-like structure of "moments of being" in the lives of the six characters in *The Waves*. In Joyce's *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he continues, so-called epiphanies, triggered off by trivial events or observations, highlight the development of Stephen's consciousness, inducing reflections on the process of perception and leading to a new attitude towards reality, language and also art. According to Erzgräber, Joyce even incorporates the concept of epiphany into Stephen's literary theory, where it is equated with the third stage of aesthetic apprehension, "radiance" ("claritas"). But this only goes for Stephen's reflections in *Stephen Hero*, since, in *Portrait*, Stephen no longer uses the term "epiphany" in his literary theory, as Erzgräber correctly observes in a special essay on *Portrait* in this collection.³

However, the reason he gives for this, viz. that Stephen wants to avoid any religious connotations, is debatable; in the pertinent context Stephen rather emphasizes the uniqueness of the instant of artistic creation, introducing an analogy with Shelley's romantic metaphor of "a fading coal" and thus distinguishing the artist's vision from everyday epiphanies. Moreover, Joyce later, viz. in *Ulysses*, attributes a self-ironic reflection to the maturer Stephen, implying that he may have overrated epiphanies in his earlier years.⁴ Indeed it seems that, as early as in *Portrait*, Joyce began to lose interest in epiphanies, the notion of moments of insights being too narrow a concept of man's relation to time, and increasingly occupied himself with more comprehensive patterns of time. Thus the snapshot-like spatial layout of *Portrait*, which is composed in

five chapters like so many tableaux by a painter, is meant to be understood also as a temporal structure, consisting of five phases in the development of Stephen's consciousness, as "the curve of an emotion" (see Joyce's essay "A Portrait of the Artist," 1904),⁵ reflecting the time-scheme of a five-act drama. And in *Ulysses*, Joyce has Stephen reflect on his personal involvement with the past, the present and the future, referring again to Shelley's metaphor (*U* 9.381-85), as well as on the larger question of man's historicity (e.g. *U* 2.277: "History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake").

Even in Woolf's works, I would argue, despite her obvious fascination with the "moment of vision," a strong interest in larger patterns of time manifests itself in the correlation between the undulating or cyclical rhythms of nature and the life rhythms of six human beings (see *The Waves*) or in the eleven time sections of a family chronicle (see *The Years*). In my view, this shift of interest, which is characteristic of the later Joyce and Woolf, is a necessary complement of the preoccupation with the "moment of vision" up to *Portrait* or *To the Lighthouse* respectively. Therefore Erzgräber's argument to the effect that interest in the "moment of vision" is an important "modernist" tendency is only convincing as far as Joyce's and Woolf's early works are concerned. If these writers shared the experience of transitoriness and longed for lasting patterns in life, as Erzgräber puts it in his conclusion, the fruitful "moment of vision" was only one possible solution to their dilemma; the fragmentation of time into a chaos of isolated moments can also be overcome by discovering structures that determine the connections between moments. That such structures necessarily entail some notion of permanence or even eternity, can even be gathered from Erzgräber's final remarks interpreting "moments of vision" as epiphanies in which time seems to stand still, and as an expression of the human endeavour to create patterns which last beyond the moment (117). As the underlying critical category one can thus detect a scale reaching from the isolated moment at one end via phases of relative permanence to timelessness or eternity at the other end, even if Erzgräber contends that the notion of eternity in the theological sense no longer exists for writers like Conrad, Woolf and Joyce. Perhaps—since Erzgräber himself justly includes Aldous Huxley in his selection of 'modern' writers—it is not

amiss in this context to refer the reader to Huxley's novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), in which the protagonist Anthony Beavis starts from a literally snapshot-like kind of time experience, called "psychological atomism," passes through phases of a search for a "principle of coherence" and eventually arrives at a tentative vision of cosmic unity in variety.⁶

As the example of *Eyeless in Gaza* reveals, too, the above scale of time experience is interrelated with a corresponding concept of personality, which in Joyce, Woolf and Huxley replaces the time-honoured notion of character. If human beings, Huxley suggests, experience life as a continuous succession of separate momentary states and resulting actions, they will at a given moment not feel bound to previous psychological states and pertinent actions: their personalities will be merely "atomic."⁷ If, however, such persons develop a degree of responsibility for their actions past and present, their personalities tend to become "co-ordinated" or even "completely unified."⁸ Now Erzgräber's interpretation of characters in Woolf and Joyce tends—quite in accordance with the main current of contemporary criticism—to stress disintegration of character, antithetical elements and incompleteness as an expression of the instability of 'modern' consciousness, as can be seen in his essay "Form and Function of Virginia Woolf's Novels"⁹ with reference to *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*, as well as in his article "James Joyce: Quintessenz der Moderne—Basis der Postmoderne [J. J.: Quintessence of Modernism—Basis of Postmodernism],"¹⁰ in which he points out the continuous metamorphoses of Stephen and Bloom. But it is much to his credit that he at times also recognizes integrative tendencies towards a co-ordinated personality, particularly in *The Waves*: "The six *personae* are arranged in such a way that all their attitudes and positions supplement and correct each other; their fusion would form one complete human being. . . . Each variant of one sex has its counterpart in one of the other: . . . In the mutual relations of the pairs three possible forms of a perfect human being become visible" (251). Even if one disputes the assumption that Woolf actually depicts a "perfect human being," one cannot deny that she works within the above scale of characterization extending from fragmentation of character via typical, generally representative traits to the ideal of a complete personality.

The same, I would argue, appears to be true for Joyce's *Ulysses*, if with a different emphasis, in which what Erzgräber calls the "Entgrenzung der Persönlichkeitsstruktur" (181), i.e. the dissolution of the fixed limits of the structure of personality, also entails a transformation into a wider and more complex structure of personality ("metamorphosis") with a tendency towards generally representative traits. This becomes clear, for instance, in Joyce's technique of transpersonal characterization, i.e. in his transference of seemingly individual traits from one character to another,¹¹ and in his symbolic implications, which Erzgräber discusses in great detail (e.g. Bloom as Everyman and Molly as Everywoman, 182-83). Compared with Woolf and Huxley, however, Joyce is much farther away from the notion of a "unified personality" since his characters are involved in an unending process of transformation, in which any temporarily stable structure of personality is bound to be replaced with a different combination of traits. Still, there is something in Joyce that one may call a basic anthropological interest, an interest in all-inclusive patterns of personality, borne out in *Ulysses* and particularly in *Finnegans Wake* (see Erzgräber 186-88), even if Joyce refrains from any final definition of man or woman. Thus, as in Woolf and Huxley, one can see disintegrative and constructive tendencies at work in Joyce's representation of structures of personality.

A third important category that Erzgräber suggests for discussion in the context of 'modernism' is the pronounced use of irony in Huxley's *Brave New World*. Whereas many sections in Erzgräber's pertinent essay¹² serve as a basic introduction to contents, plot, characters and utopian elements, not unlike his students' coursebook *Utopie und Anti-Utopie* [Utopia and Anti-Utopia] (1980), his remarks on Huxley's principles of representation (344-46) raise the question of how 'modern' Huxley's kind of irony is. The author's prevailing attitude towards his subject is sceptical and ironical, Erzgräber argues, and, in contrast to traditional satire, presents no unshakeable norm of judgment. The reader feels invited to judge in turns in favour and against the same characters and is offered no solution at the end of the novel. *In nuce*, Huxley's pervasive irony can, according to Erzgräber, be understood in two ways: either as an expression of a playful mastery of all stylistic devices or as a sign of an unsolved dilemma in the author's philosophy of life.

Erzgräber here only touches on two important issues that Huxley scholars have discussed from the seventies till nowadays. It should at least be noted that the manner of representation Huxley developed in the twenties is characterized by his contrapuntal technique, in which starting from a multiplicity of perspectives he set incompatibles against each other in a quasi-polyphonic arrangement.¹³ But Erzgräber is certainly right in observing that Huxley's playful use of irony for comic effects, which in itself, seen from nowadays, looks almost "postmodern" in its seeming self-referentiality, is closely related to his *Weltanschauung*. However, he might have specified that in those years this was "the philosophy of meaninglessness," as Huxley himself remarked in retrospect.¹⁴ One should also add that meaninglessness as it can be found in contrariety, incompatibility and fragmentation functions as an extreme at one end of a scale that, for Huxley, clearly entailed a continuous search for meaning at the other. As Jerome Meckier recently observed, "a persistent 'hunger for certainty' . . . demanded a 'nobler hypothesis' . . . than the Pyrrhonist's ironic promotion of meaninglessness as the only meaning in life."¹⁵ What is more, this fundamental dialectic can be detected in Huxley's intellectual development even before *Brave New World*, viz. in his poetry, especially toward the end of *The Cicadas* (1931).¹⁶ Meckier, again, pointedly sums up Huxley's scale of thought: "The principal intellectual problems of humanity—what is this world and what business have we in it?—seemed to dictate a partnership between speculative insight and corrosive satire . . ."¹⁷ Erzgräber, in his way, has certainly noticed that this bi-polar category is somehow implied in *Brave New World*, since after his analysis of the novel he proceeds to quote Huxley's own criticism of the all-pervading ironic structure of *Brave New World* as well as his conception of a saner society, contained in his 1946 preface to the novel, and even mentions Huxley's positive utopia *Island* (1962) as a late result of his 'new' attitude. Yet this should not be misunderstood as a total reversal of judgment; it is rather a shift towards the positive pole of the above scale without completely foregoing the potential of irony and scepticism: even *Island* contains extended ironic passages.

Compared with Joyce and Woolf, one can see that Huxley went through his 'postmodern' phase—if this critical label is permitted here

for a moment—in the twenties and early thirties and later opted for an approximation to “Knowledge and Understanding.”¹⁸ Woolf rarely practised the ironic mode, and if so, surely not with the same consistency as Huxley, and this may be one of the reasons why she could not develop more than a comparatively vague conception of reality, whether of external nature or of human society. Joyce, on the other hand, used irony extensively from the start of his career, but, in contrast to Huxley, increasingly employed it to disqualify reality as the ultimate frame of reference, and, substituting art for reality, eventually found ‘knowledge and understanding’ in an unremitting aestheticism, as Erzgräber notes, too, in calling *Ulysses* ‘the document of an extreme, subjective aestheticism in the modernist movement’ (184) and *Finnegans Wake* a novel ‘in which language gains autonomy’ (194).¹⁹

This question of the relationship between literature and reality is closely connected with a fourth category in Erzgräber’s essays, the concept of artistic design. What aspects of reality in the widest sense do Woolf and Joyce take into account and how do they transform them into the overall structure of a literary work of art? This is the issue that Erzgräber addresses, for instance, in his article “Virginia Woolf: *The Waves*—Die Struktur des Romans und ihre Beziehung zur Thematik” [V. W.: *The Waves*—The Structure of the Novel and Its Relationship with the Subject-Matter].²⁰ Within Woolf’s general structural frame, which consists in the thorough distinction between the external reality of nature and the internal reality of human existence, Erzgräber recognizes two basic tendencies in the presentation of the six characters: a progressive differentiation of the given life pattern of each person and a tendency towards an artistic integration as reflected in Bernard’s final monologue. This interpretation clearly recalls the above scales of fragmentation versus permanence in respect of time as well as of disintegrative versus constructive tendencies with regard to structures of personality and is convincing as long as it keeps to the basic ambivalence of these scales. But it becomes one-sided when Erzgräber praises Bernard’s notion of design as an all-encompassing life pattern and at the same time convincing artistic model of the novel. The ending of *The Waves* surely can also be read as an expression of the feeble human effort to confront

death and solve the mystery of existence by artistic means: "*The waves broke on the shore.*"

Even in Joyce Erzgräber at times tends to over-emphasize integrative tendencies, if more cautiously, for instance when he states that 'nets of allusions' and 'systems of correspondences' lend 'a certain artistic unity' to *Ulysses* (183) or that Joyce proved a constructive novelist in *Finnegans Wake* by using Vico's cyclical conception of history and other abstract theories as structural principles (188-90). In such statements Erzgräber appears to overrate the degree of planning and the kind of unity that Joyce tried to achieve. Joyce's artistic design rather seems characterized by the awareness that every structure is liable to be superseded by other structures, that temporary stability is accompanied with instability in other respects, that seeming unity is followed by diversity and vice versa. This is what gives the reader the impression of reading a "Work in [continuous] Progress." The highest degree of planning that Joyce ever reached may well be the circular structure of *Finnegans Wake*, which suggests a perpetually identical perfect pattern but at the same time invites infinite different interpretations with each successive reading. In this sense, Joyce may be said to prefigure both structuralist and poststructuralist positions, if one for once accepts Hubert Zapf's description of the basic poststructuralist procedure: "The text is redefined from a structural model of centrifified totality into a processual model of decentered plurality, into a conflictive field of signifying energies which no longer refer to meanings outside themselves but are related to each other in multiple and never fully controllable ways."²¹ Even Huxley can be shown to hold a conception of literature similar to Joyce's except that he does not stop with self-referentiality but regards further insights into the reality of things as possible. Like Joyce he theoretically aims at the totality of subject-matter as well as at the totality of manner of representation, takes into account centripetal and centrifugal tendencies and employs the notions of closure and openness.²² In comparison, it is debatable whether Woolf offers the same scope and complexity of subject-matter or the same degree of experimental openness, though, as Erzgräber justly notes, her novels present major innovations in rendering the reality of the mind and "have the function of drawing attention to their own aesthetic form" (263).

In conclusion, Erzgräber's remarks on Woolf, Huxley and Joyce do not only form a rich reservoir of stimulating observations regarding details of text analysis, but by virtue of their underlying critical categories may also serve as a basis for a future definition of the similarities between these writers once one has got rid of the misleading labels 'modernism' and 'postmodernism.'

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NOTES

¹*The Waves*, ed. J. M. Haule and P. H. Smith, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 104. 297-117; originally published in 1984.

³"James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," 139-74; originally published in 1971.

⁴*Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (2nd impression, New York: Random House, 1986) 3.141-43; cited as U.

⁵See Jörg W. Rademacher, *James Joyce's Own Image. Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Begriffe "image" und "imagination" beim Schreiben in A Portrait und Ulysses* (Münster: Waxmann, 1993) 192-202 and 202-41.

⁶See B. Nügel, "Huxley's Response to Joyce: Literary Criticism in the Modern Novel," *Critical Essays on Aldous Huxley*, ed. Jerome Meckier (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996) 121-25.

⁷See *Eyeless in Gaza* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936) 143: "The others [types of personality] are to a greater or less extent impersonal, because to a greater or less extent atomic."

⁸See Huxley's early essay "Personality and the Discontinuity of the Mind," *Proper Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927) 244, 245, and *Eyeless in Gaza*, especially ch. 11.

⁹247-63; originally published in 1984.

¹⁰175-94; originally published in 1987.

¹¹See Peter te Boekhorst, *Das literarische Leitmotiv und seine Funktionen in Romanen von Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf und James Joyce* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1987) 177-80, 203-09.

¹²"Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World*," 331-47; originally published in 1984.

¹³See, for instance, Donald Watt, "Huxley's Aesthetic Ideal," *Modern British Literature* 3 (1978): 128-42.

¹⁴*Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937) 273. For a detailed discussion of this "modern" outlook on life see Jerome Meckier, "Aldous Huxley's Modern Myth: 'Leda' and the Poetry of Ideas," *ELH* 58 (1991): 439-69.

¹⁵"Aldous Huxley, from Poet to Mystic: The Poetry of Ideas, the Idea of Poetry," "Now More Than Ever:" *Proceedings of the Aldous Huxley Centenary Symposium Münster* 1994, ed. B. Nugel (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1995) 133-34.

¹⁶See Meckier 129.

¹⁷Meckier 130.

¹⁸Title of an essay in Huxley's *Adonis and the Alphabet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956) 39-72.

¹⁹See also Josef W. Pesch, *Wilde, About Joyce: Zur Umsetzung ästhetizistischer Kunsttheorie in der literarischen Praxis der Moderne* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1992).

²⁰297-315; originally published in 1991.

²¹"Literary Theory in America between Innovation and Dogmatism: Some Reflections with a View to the Cultural Function of Literature," *Why Literature Matters: Theories and Functions of Literature*, ed. Rüdiger Ahrens and Laurenz Volkmann (Heidelberg: Winter, 1996) 396.

²²See B. Nugel, "Aldous Huxley's Revisions in the Final Typescript of *Island*," "Now More Than Ever" 240-42.

Some Comments on "T. H. White, Pacifism and Violence"*

ELIZABETH BREWER

It is no doubt idle to speculate as to what might have happened if T. H. White had not gone to Ireland in 1939 and then been marooned there, eventually eating his heart out in intellectual isolation. Despite the enormous success of *The Once and Future King*, he might have achieved so much more, even though his life was to some extent blighted by his sexual and psychological problems. At first his extended stay at Belmullet seemed a good idea, allowing him to finish his writing as an important contribution to the civilisation that he so highly valued, while he decided what to do next. But the very fact that he was thus isolated seems to have made it impossible for him to sort out his ideas about war. Dr Hadfield's epigraph suggests White's contradictory feelings about war and violence, as well as the more comprehensive internal conflict with which he was perpetually tormented. For, paradoxically, although he was a passionate lover of animals, he could happily shoot not only animals but even the wild geese whose "way of life" he idealised in *The Sword in the Stone*. He could represent chivalry on the one hand as glamorous and exciting, and on the other as grotesquely silly. It is hardly surprising therefore that his attitudes to war were inconsistent, both in *The Once and Future King* and in actual life.

White's earliest upbringing would have instilled into him the idea that an army career was an honourable, even an admirable one. G. M. Hopkins asks "Why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him?" in a question that indicates former attitudes to the military. He then answers it:

*Reference: Andrew Hadfield, "T. H. White, Pacifism and Violence: The Once and Future Nation," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 207-226.

... the heart

Since, proud, it calls the calling manly, gives a guess

That, hopes that, makesbelieve, the men must be no less;

As a boy at Cheltenham College White was placed in that division of the school that prepared boys for a career in the army. At Stawe his enthusiastic engagement in pursuits such as shooting and hunting and his cultivation of a macho image ran counter in some respects to the pacifism which was being widely promoted in the years before World War II (not least in the school itself) and to which to some extent he was attracted. In chapter 2 of *The Queen of Air and Darkness* Merlyn actually equates foxhunting with war in the middle ages: "The link between Norman warfare and Victorian foxhunting is perfect," he says. Though Merlyn is outraged when Arthur unwittingly remarks of one of his exploits: "It was a jolly battle, and I won it myself, and it was fun" (QAD ch. 2), there is no mistaking the zest with which White later describes the cavalry charge at the battle of Bedegrain.

The fact that White intended *The Sword in the Stone* to be a children's book in the manner of Masefield's *Midnight Folk* which he so much loved and admired differentiates it from the subsequent parts of *The Once and Future King*, and surely affects the way in which we should interpret it. Because of its very nature, its affinities with fairytale for example, there are questions to which, if we still insist on asking them, we cannot necessarily expect a satisfactory answer. It does not do to ask if Mr P.'s warning of the hopelessness of love is meant to forewarn the Wart of the disastrous effects of his own future love for his unfaithful Queen Guenever (213). The cynical comment, "Love is a trick . . .," is surely only to be taken as a general observation. The implications of his transformational experience for the Wart's adult life are never fully worked out, though the case may be altered somewhat when it comes to the ants and the geese, since these episodes were worked in later.

The Wart's transformation into a merlin and his night among the hawks again suggests the ambiguity of White's attitude to the military. Represented as army officers, the hawks are of course caricatures, but almost affectionate caricatures of some members of the upper classes with whom White would have had a considerable amount of sympathy.

They represented the social milieu within which he had grown up; and it may be remembered that while at Stowe he liked to be considered a "toff" himself. The Wart is "almost overwhelmed by their magnificence," while the mad Col. Cully is referred to sympathetically as the "poor colonel." The hawks do indeed embody social prejudice, but to regard them as creatures as sinister as the Nazi ants goes against White's intentions, since the vileness of the ants' regime is that, apart from anything else, it destroys all individuality and initiative.

I would certainly agree with Dr Hadfield that Merlyn is not consistently White's mouthpiece throughout *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn*, although White often does try out, through him, different positions by no means always consonant with each other. As tutor in the fairy-tale-like *Sword in the Stone* Merlyn is obviously meant to be right, but it may be noted that his rôle changes as his milieu changes. He is in effect a schoolmaster to begin with, a figure of authority; but in *The Book of Merlyn* he frequents the Combination Room in the badger's set, which implies that he is now a *university* tutor, supposedly promoting intellectual argument—though the implications of his higher status are not fully worked out. It may also be noted that important character though he is, he disappears from the story before the end of the second book, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, until White invents a rôle for him in the somewhat apocryphal *Book of Merlyn*.

Merlyn undoubtedly has a difficult task in trying to get Arthur to reject the idea that might is right, but there are moments when he feels that his educational program has been successful. One of these, as Dr Hadfield has noted, is the moment at the end of *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, chapter 6, when he strikes a dramatic attitude and says the first few words of the Nunc Dimittis. The significance of this utterance is more fully apparent if we consider the form of the words which White must have had in mind. They first appear in the New Testament, Luke 2:29-30, as: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation." In this formulation also, rather than in the metrical version quoted by Dr Hadfield, they begin the Nunc Dimittis in the *Order for Evening Prayer*, familiar to all readers brought up in the Church of England and in college chapels. White intends them to take the point that Merlyn feels that he can now

depart in *peace*—and the emphasis should surely fall on that particular word—since Arthur has at last learnt the lesson he has striven to teach him. Merlyn now sees some hope of salvation for his young pupil, but the tone of this closing sentence is surely sardonic rather than quasi-religious.

When Merlyn forgets to warn Arthur about Morgause, ironies do indeed abound with considerable dramatic effect for the reader who knows only too well what it is that Arthur needs to be told, and longs to be able to jog Merlyn's memory. Destiny is of course the key to the understanding of his forgetfulness: White was surely right in handling his source, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, as he does at this point, in the way in which he ingeniously makes Merlyn absent-minded at the critical moment, and in emphasising the inescapability of destiny. Instead of bowdlerising the story as he might have done by cutting the drowning of the babies, and by making Mordred aware that his natural/unnatural father had tried to destroy him as an infant, White adds powerful motivation as well as another dimension to the figure of Arthur.

His problems as he worked over *The Once and Future King* again and again, especially as he radically changed *The Witch in the Wood* and turned it into *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, seem to have been enormous. His passion for history (he wished that he had read that subject at Cambridge, rather than English) was in many respects romantic but, aware as he was of the gulf between the popular notion of the middle ages and the probable reality, he inevitably had problems with the topic of warfare, problems which could only become more acute as his own conflicting emotions were more deeply involved. He delights in suggesting the richness and colourfulness of the pavilions on the plain of Bedegrain, but if Arthur ever did fight such a battle it certainly did not take place in the Age of Chivalry. If, therefore, White is less than clear and consistent when Merlyn and Kay discuss reasons for starting a war it is hardly surprising. It would seem that consistency was in fact impossible, that he had to try out different positions, so that Merlyn can say, on one page, "There is one fairly good reason for fighting—and that is, if the other man starts it" and on the next "There is no excuse for war, none whatever."

The impact of the passage which Dr Hadfield describes as "extraordinarily scandalous" (273-74) depends very much on how it is read. Arthur may not be much like Jesus, but his readiness to fight at this stage in his career to unify and settle his kingdom (or in Kay's words, having "discovered a new way of life" which he intends to promote by making might serve right) can hardly by any stretch of imagination be compared to Hitler's methods which included the Holocaust. Furthermore, Arthur's campaign at this point is in line with White's source-material, while it also relates to the actual course of English history.

Though the apparent confusion in Merlyn's mind suggests that it is very difficult to distinguish between good and bad motives for war, it would seem that the dominant idea White wants to put across at this point is that of man's slow and halting progress towards the more civilised behaviour represented by Arthur's adult ideals and aspirations. He has "begun to set a value on heads, shoulders and arms" and has established the Round Table, with all the ideals it represents, summed up as: "something about doing a hateful and dangerous action for the sake of decency." Though Kay had seen the battle of Bedegrain as being about Arthur's wish to impose his ideas on King Lot, by chapter 12 White has moved on to another aspect of his topic, the conventions of medieval warfare. His comment that "Arthur began with an atrocity and continued with other atrocities," the first of which was that he did not wait for the "fashionable hour" for beginning a battle, the second being his disregard of the kerns because he knew "that they would have to be allowed their fight," is heavily ironic. The description of the tactics used by Arthur, seemingly more in line with modern warfare than with medieval, are followed by a long account of the ensuing battle which can only be described as zestful: "Imagine it now Add the cymbal-music of the clashing armour to the jingle of the harness Turn the uniforms into mirrors, blazing with the sun," etc.

In returning again and again to the question of civilisation and the form in which it might be said to exist, or the form which ideally it should take, White must have been caught between the constraints of the traditional story to which he had committed himself and his desire to make it profoundly meaningful for his own time. Any attempt to

define the ethos of the British was bound to founder because of the gulf between Malory's limited vision and the immensely complex twentieth-century reality. White however did succeed in revealing between the lines of his narrative the form of the civilisation in which he so passionately believed: it is summed up in the word "decency," not a word often used at the present time, nor a concept greatly admired. It was, however, a quality highly valued by the social class and the generation to which he belonged. It shows itself particularly in White's own personal life—in a mixture of courage and generosity. To practise it in his own life he was prepared to endure the bitterness of almost intolerable loneliness and frustration, as Sylvia Townsend Warner's biography so poignantly illustrates. This "decency" is what Arthur stands for throughout *The Once and Future King*, and is shown, for example, in the generosity of his attitude to Guenever and Lancelot as lovers. Arthur

had been taught by Merlyn to believe that man was perfectible: that he was on the whole more decent than beastly He had been forged as a weapon for the aid of man, on the assumption that men were good . . . by that deluded old teacher But the whole structure depended on the first premise: that man was decent. (*The Candle in the Wind* ch. 14)

It becomes increasingly apparent, however, that Merlyn's teaching was wrong; that the ideals that had been generally accepted before World War II are no longer current, and that the fleeting late-nineteenth-century dream of man's perfectibility was gone for ever. But though in *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn* White may be far from consistent in the representation of his attitude to war, though (not surprisingly) he never satisfactorily solves the problem of how war may be prevented, the reader is by the end, despite the jumble of contradictions, left with a clear sense of the ethos and underlying values to which White subscribed. He sums it up in *The Book of Merlyn*:

After a bit there was poor old White, who thought that we represented the ideas of chivalry. He said that our importance lay in our decency, in our resistance against the bloody mind of man. What an anachronist he was, dear fellow! (35)

In *The Book of Merlyn* (ch. 18) in his almost visionary experience shortly before the last battle, Arthur catches "a glimpse of that extraordinary faculty in man, that strange, altruistic, rare and obstinate decency which will make writers or scientists maintain their truths at the risk of death." The determination that fairness and decency shall prevail constitute the foundation of the "civilisation" for which White was, at least at some points, prepared to fight. And though perhaps it was not England "qua geographical boundaries" for which he might have fought there was another aspect of England the significance of which is suggested most vividly in Arthur's vision of his country. In the course of his long story Arthur has come to be seen not only as "the idea of Royalty" but as the very embodiment of England. Towards the end of *The Book of Merlyn* (ch. 18) he climbs the great tor with the hedgehog and then watches as England, the English countryside

came out slowly, as the late moon rose: his royal realm of Gramarye ... He began to love the land under him with a fierce longing, not because it was good or bad, but because it was: because of the shadows of the corn stooks on a golden evening He found that he loved it—more than Guenever, more than Lancelot All the beauty of his humans came upon him, instead of their horribleness

Though the Oxford Union debate before World War II had ended with the members voting that they would not fight for king and country White, despite his sporadic attacks of pacifism did in the end undoubtedly feel that not only civilisation as he understood it but also England must be defended. The long history and great traditions of the nation, suggested to some extent by the term "Gramarye," the beauty of the landscape, intimately known and loved from childhood, the self-sacrificing courage of those individuals prepared to die for "The Truth" constitute despite their disparity the ideal which underlies *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn*. It is an ideal worth fighting for, in the words of Blake sung to Arthur by the hedgehog, with weapons both real and symbolic and with the ceaseless mental strife that resulted in White's great retelling.

More Than Just a Fashion: T. H. White's Use of Dress as a Means of Characterization*

CHRISTIANE BERGER

The discussion of T. H. White's Arthurian novel *The Once and Future King* in *Connotations* drew my attention to this text, and as a medievalist and art historian I was struck by White's abundant use of anachronisms and visual details.¹ He characterizes his protagonists not only through their words and deeds and through the psychological explanations of his narrator but also gives detailed descriptions of their clothes, and I would like to suggest that he uses them as an additional means of characterization by making different stages of psychological development visible.

In his monograph on White John K. Crane points out that White's Arthur is very human in comparison with Malory's Arthur, who is more impressive and impersonal, and that accordingly White gave him "fair hair and a stupid face."² What Crane does not mention is Arthur's royal robe without which the portrayal is incomplete:

Arthur was a young man, just on the threshold of life. He had fair hair and a stupid face, or at any rate there was a lack of cunning in it. It was an open face, with kind eyes and a reliable or faithful expression . . . He had never been unjustly treated, for one thing, so he was kindly to other people. The king was dressed in a robe of velvet which had belonged to Uther the Conqueror, his father, trimmed with the beards of fourteen kings who had been vanquished in the olden days. Unfortunately some of these kings had had red hair, some black, some pepper-and-salt, while their growth of beard had been uneven. The trimming looked like a feather boa. The moustaches were stuck on round the buttons.³

*Reference: Andrew Hadfield, "T. H. White, Pacifism and Violence: The Once and Future Nation," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 207-26.

The gruesome robe is not T. H. White's invention. In his source, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, a very similar robe belongs to King Royns of North Wales and Ireland. He had overcome eleven kings and now wants Arthur's beard because he "had purfilde a mantell with kynges berdis, and there lacked one place of the mantell; wherefore he sente for hys bearde, othir ellis he wolde entir his londes and brenne and sle"⁴ Arthur's answer is that this desire is outrageous and that in addition he is too young to provide a proper beard for the trimming. Malory makes the young king reject this cruel and primitive custom, but later on Arthur is cruel enough to expose his new-born son and other babies because of Merlin's prophecy that his son will destroy him and his realm. White elaborates the robe he found in his source—the moustaches round the buttons are his own fantasy—but he transfers it to Arthur. The grotesque impression of Arthur's royal robe is heightened by the description of his honest and kind face. Unfortunately, at this early stage of his royal career, White's young king Arthur is not above wearing his father's savage trophies, and of course Uther's robe does not suit him because of the humane nobility which shows in his face. Still, being young and naive he does feel the temptations of royal power, and his fight against "the Uther Pendragon touch" will be a life-long exhausting task.⁵ Both Malory and White depict Arthur as a good character who is capable of cruel deeds, but while Malory achieves this through his narration, White makes it at once visible in Arthur's portrayal.

There is another major male character whom White invests with a grotesque dress, and again, there is an interesting parallel, in this case in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*.

After the Grail quest, Arthur's court

had 'knowledge of the world' now: it had the fruits of achievement, civilization, savoir-vivre, gossip, fashion, malice, and the broad mind of scandal.

. . . .

Clothes became fantastic. The long toes of Agravaine's slippers were secured by gold chains to garters below his knee, and as for Mordred's toes their chains were secured to a belt round his waist.

. . . .

Mordred wore his ridiculous shoes contemptuously: they were a satire on himself. The court was modern.⁶

In *Ivanhoe*, Scott ridicules the *dernier cri* of aristocratic fashion when he describes one of the degenerate Norman noblemen, the Prior of Jorvaux, who belongs to the train of Prince John at the tournament of Ashby:

Fur and gold were not spared in his garments; and the point of his boots, out-heroding the preposterous fashion of the time, turned up so very far, as to be attached, not to his knees merely, but to his very girdle, and effectually prevented him from putting his foot into the stirrup. This, however, was a slight inconvenience to the gallant Abbot, who, perhaps, even rejoicing in the opportunity to display his accomplished horsemanship before so many spectators, especially of the fair sex, dispensed with the use of these supports to a timid rider.⁷

Neither Scott's Abbot nor White's Mordred are simple fashion victims. The sensuous Prior's ridiculous boots give him the opportunity to demonstrate his superb horsemanship. Mordred's attitude, however, is entirely different. He wears his shoes out of contempt, as "a satire on himself." After the tragic death of Gareth, Gawain's brother and Mordred's half-brother, Mordred's vicious mind and political ambition are made manifest in his outward appearance:

Both were in black—but with the strange difference that Mordred was resplendent in his, a sort of Hamlet, while Gawain looked more like the gravedigger. Mordred had begun dressing with this dramatic simplicity since the time when he had become a leader of the popular party. Their aims were some kind of nationalism, with Gaelic autonomy, and a massacre of the Jews as well, in revenge for a mythical saint called Hugh of Lincoln. There were already thousands, spread over the country, who carried his badge of a scarlet fist clenching a whip, and who called themselves Thrashers. About the older man, who only wore the uniform to please his brother, there was a homespun blackness, the true, despairing dark of mourning.⁸

White makes Mordred resemble Hamlet not only because of his dramatic black dress, but also because of his strange relation to his mother and his—in this case definitely real—madness. On the other hand, he is also a fascist whose uniform badge shows an even more aggressive symbol of punishing power than its ancient model, the Roman *fascies*. Finally, Mordred looks like the man he really is, malicious and destructive. In striking contrast to him Arthur, who started his royal career in his

father's savage robe that did not suit him, as a mature man wears his own dignified royal robe, which is a heavy burden:

Finally the trumpets were at the door, and England came. In weighty ermine, which covered his shoulders and the left arm, with a narrower strip down the right—in the blue velvet cloak and overwhelming crown—heavy with majesty and supported, almost literally supported, by the proper officers, the King was led to the throne He sank down where he was put.⁹

Another point of interest is the different function of clothes in the case of Mordred's and Lancelot's madness. Mordred's uniform is a manifestation of his political aims, but at the same time his splendid outward appearance helps to conceal his madness:

. . . he stepped into the room, sumptuous in his black velvet, with one cold diamond beaming in the rushlight from his scarlet badge. Anybody who had not seen him for a month or two would have known at once that he was mad—but his brains had gone so gradually that those who lived with him had failed to see it.¹⁰

In comparison with Mordred's precious dress and seemingly composed behaviour after he has gone mad Lancelot's madness is of another kind: he is a raving maniac, a naked "Wild Man" almost reduced to the state of an animal:

A Wild Man . . . was being run through Corbin by the villagers who had once gone out to welcome Lancelot. He was naked, as thin as a ghost, and he ran along with his hands over his head, to protect it.

. . . .

King Pelles could clearly see the blood running over his high cheekbones, and the sunken cheeks, and the hunted eyes, and the blue shadows between his ribs.¹¹

King Pelles, after having tried in vain to find out whether the madman is Lancelot, keeps the "dummy" as his jester locked in the pigeon house, in comic clothes. A few days later, when the king's nephew is knighted and Pelles presents a new gown to everybody during the celebration, he orders the fool to be fetched from his pigeon house:

Sir Lancelot was fetched from the pigeon house, for the royal favour. He stood still in the torchlight with some straws in his beard, a pitiful figure in his jester's patch-work.

'Pore fool,' said the King sadly. 'Pore fool. Here, have mine.' / And, in spite of all remonstrances and advices to the contrary, King Pelles struggled out of his costly robe, which he popped over Lancelot's head.

....

Sir Lancelot, standing upright in the grand dress, looked strangely stately in the Great Hall. If only his beard had been trimmed . . . if only he had not starved away to a skeleton in the cell of the poor hermit after the boar hunt—if only he had not been rumoured to be dead—but, even as it was, a sort of awe came into the Hall. The King did not notice it. With measured tread Sir Lancelot walked back to his pigeon loft, and the house carls made an avenue for him as he went.¹²

The compassionate but drunken King Pelles cannot understand what his stately robe does to Sir Lancelot: the Wild Man might have looked ridiculous in it, but in spite of his terrible condition the robe suits him because of his innate nobility. This is the first step towards his recovery, towards the restoration of his self-respect and dignity:

Lancelot was stretched out in his knightly gown. Sir Bliant, in remarking that gentlemanly things seemed to stir something in his head, had noticed truly. Moved by the gown, by some strange memory of miniver and colour, the poor Wild Man had gone from the King's table to the well. There, alone in the darkness, without a mirror, he had washed / his face. He had swilled out his eye sockets with bony knuckles. With a currycomb and a pair of shears from the stables he had tried to arrange his hair.¹³

White's version of this episode is more dramatic than Malory's, because he stresses Lancelot's own struggle to regain his dignified appearance, while in Malory's version he has been taken care of by others. The dramatic effect of the robe on Sir Lancelot is White's addition to his source.¹⁴ He also stresses the fact that nakedness is not necessarily humiliating. Earlier in his life, when Lancelot realized that he had been seduced by Elaine "his ugly face took on a look of profound and outraged sorrow, so simple and truthful that his nakedness in the windowlight was dignity."¹⁵

Elizabeth Brewer in her recent monograph on White states that "White . . . sees history as a series of transformations and changes, taking the form of a long struggle out of barbarism towards order, justice and

tolerance, a slow process of gradual achievement which is ever in danger of / being reversed by the return of chaos."¹⁶ White's detailed descriptions of his protagonists' clothes serve to make this process visible.

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NOTES

¹See Elizabeth Brewer, T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993) 18-19, 188, 191.

²John K. Crane, T. H. White (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1974) 88.

³Terence Hanbury White, *The Once and Future King* (Glasgow: Fontana / Collins, 1980) 217.

⁴Eugène Vinaver (ed.), *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3rd ed. rev. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 1:54.

⁵White 221-22.

⁶White 474.

⁷Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. with an introduction by Ian Duncan (Oxford: OUP, 1996) 92.

⁸White 590-91.

⁹White 595.

¹⁰White 609.

¹¹White 400.

¹²White 401-02.

¹³White 403-04.

¹⁴See Vinaver 2:823-24. Here, Lancelot's madness is healed by the power of the grail.

¹⁵White 372.

¹⁶Brewer 199-200.