Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

Volume 9 (1999/2000) Number 1
Waxmann Münster/New York

Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate
Published by *Connotations: Society for Critical Debate*

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Department of English
Johannisstr. 12-20, D-48143 Münster, Germany
Email: connotations@uni-muenster.de
http://www.connotations.de

Waxmann Münster/New York

Connotations wants to encourage scholarly communication in the field of English Literature (from the Middle English period to the present), as well as American and other Literatures in English. It focuses on the semantic and stylistic energy of the language of literature in a historical perspective and aims to represent different approaches.

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. Contributions will be published within five months after submission so that discussion can begin without delay.

Articles and responses should be forwarded to the editors. As a rule, articles should not exceed 12,000 words and follow the MLA Handbook. Responses should be limited to 4,000 words. If possible, all contributions should be submitted by e-mail or on diskette (preferably in a Windows format), accompanied by a hard copy; they should be in English and must be proofread before submission. Manuscripts and disks will not be returned.

Connotations is published three times a year. Private subscribers are welcome to join the *Connotations Society for Critical Debate*. Members receive the journal as well as invitations to the *Connotations* symposia. The suggested annual fee is DM 80 (EUR 41, $ 35); reduced rate (e.g. for students) DM 40 (EUR 20, $ 18). Please write to: *Connotations*, Department of English, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, 48143 Münster, Germany. Email: connotations@uni-muenster.de.

Libraries and other institutional subcribers write to: Waxmann Verlag, Steinfurter Str. 555, 48159 Münster, Germany; or: Waxmann Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1318, New York, NY 10028, U.S.A. Email: connotations@waxmann.com. Annual subscriptions are in Europe DM 75 / EUR 39, in the U.S. and all other countries $ 60, including postage.

A selection of articles and responses is freely available on the internet (http://www.connotations.de).

Printed in Germany
ISSN 0939-5482

Connotations is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals. Contributions are indexed, for example, in the *MLA Bibliography*, the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* and the *IBZ/IBR*.

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

Volume 9 (1999/2000) Number 1

ARTICLES and DISCUSSION

Poetry as Procreation (II)

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Marlowe's *Edward II* as "Actaeonesque History"

CHRISTOPHER WESSMAN

In his historical tragedy *Edward II*, Christopher Marlowe pervasively engages an abundant variety of ancient myths. Most significantly, however, the drama uses as a motif the versatile Diana and Actaeon tale—of naked, angry goddess and metamorphosed mortal hunter—and reworks it to serve distinctly political ends. After all, as Ovid translator George Sandys suggested in 1632, the myth can be taken to show

> how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of Princes, or by chance to discover their nakednesse: who thereby incurring their hatred ever after live the life of a Hart, full of feare and suspicion.[1]

An important key to Marlowe's *Edward II* is this Actaeon story, and the multiple and simultaneous identification between the characters of myth and those of history. Edward and his intruding minion Gaveston are not only reflections of each other, but are both types of Diana *and* Actaeon, often at the same time. Paradoxical as this may seem, it is a crucial component of the myth itself, which Leonard Barkan has deemed a "synthesis" of an "enormous range of possibilities" and "simultaneous" interpretations—including the idea that goddess and hunter are "transfigured forms" of each other.[2] Marlowe skillfully exploits such inherent doublings and multiplicities throughout the drama.

The multivalent symbolism of the Actaeon myth may be considered in several ways. Marlowe engages the interpretive openness of a specifically *Elizabethan* Diana, with its attendant notion of the monarch's "two bodies" reflecting crucial political issues of the Tudor period. The drama's seeing, spying, and showing find expression in two emotionally charged motifs

---

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debwessman00901.htm>.

that dominate the play, both allied to the myth: the hunted hart and the damaged heart; and the punning, inescapable link between peering and piercing. Ultimately, the myth intimates a new approach to the long-standing dispute over *Edward II*'s success or failure in terms of its "history play" genre. Siding against those who believe that Marlowe presents an essentially personal tragedy, I argue that the playwright was intensely, even primarily interested in the political. Marlowe, I contend, wrote "Actaeonesque history," involving an amoral, dismembering competition for visual preeminence and transformative mastery.

Diana, Actaeon, and the *Queen's* Two Bodies

When the formerly banished favorite Pierce of Gaveston returns to England, his once "exiled eyes" are not only eager to "view my lord the King" (I.i.10, 45), but his excited imagination immediately envisions "pleasing shows" to entertain his lover Edward and enhance his own power:

> *Gav.*: Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
> With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
> Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
> And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
> To hide those parts which men delight to see,
> Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
> One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,
> Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
> And running in the likeness of an hart
> By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die—
> Such things as these best please his majesty. (I.i.61-71)[3]

Resembling Marlowe's portrayal of Doctor Faustus declaring "I'll play Diana" to the hapless Benvolio's Actaeon (IV.ii.53),[4] it is startling to see the same myth again offered up as court entertainment. And although the basic plot elements are covered in both—forbidden vision, bestial transformation, dismembering punishment—the differences draw attention. In *Doctor Faustus*, the skeptical Benvolio is the butt of a cruel joke; the horns are not only the stag's, but the cuckold's. And what is stressed is the terror

of the potential punishment. The initial transgressive vision is barely mentioned. In *Edward,* that moment of forbidden vision looms larger. Gaveston lingers over the near-nakedness of the goddess at the grotto of Gargaphie, and his and Edward's projected eyesight caresses the "lovely boy in Dian's shape" in much the same way as the child's hair melds into the water. The initial impulse of Gaveston's masque is voyeurism and exhibitionism, an eroticizing of privilege and power with a distinct homoerotic touch. Attendant upon this and spicing it are the goddess' anger, the chase, and the simulated death or "seeming to die"—echoing the sexually suggestive desire of Gaveston some fifty lines earlier to "die" upon the "bosom" of the King (I.i.17).

The impact of Gaveston's pageant has not been lost upon commentators. Harry Levin calls Gaveston's envisioned spectacle a "portent" in its themes of forbidden gazing and hunting down.[5] Bent Sunesen goes even further, describing the myth as particularly "apt" and praising Marlowe's "lively sense . . . [of] symbolical power":

> the essential significance of the play presses upon us with peculiar force through Gaveston's soliloquy . . . . These lines seem to grow in the tragedy and with the tragedy . . . . The soliloquy appears to make an extraordinarily expressive gesture toward the very center of the dramatic structure . . . . The tragedy is like a plant growing from its seed.[6]

Later critics qualify Sunesen's initial observations by noting his overreliance upon a one-to-one Actaeon/Edward correspondence. Sara Munson Deats subtly warns, "because of their elusive quality, many of Marlowe's mythological figures defy rigid categorization." She does not deny Sunesen's claims, but correctly insists upon expanding their possible range of meanings. For her, Actaeon's "multivalent image elicits contradictory responses," and the myth's "dual symbolism [and] complexity" must be appreciated in order to understand the ways in which "the Actaeon parallel incites sympathy as well as condemnation."[7] John Cutts too notes a dual symbolism and identification in the early soliloquy, observing that "'One like Actaeon peeping through the grove' at first look would seem to be a possible alter ego for Gaveston," but also "represents Gaveston's projection of the King into that role."[8] Similarly, Judith Weil approaches

with caution, declaring that "Marlowe's tragedy upsets all exact identifications between his characters and the characters of the myth."[9] And Charles Masinton broadly interprets "this slightly salacious version of the myth," contending that it "provides the metaphor of psychological change, or metamorphosis, by which we can understand the transformation of the King's character" and other major figures as well.[10]

The versatility of the Actaeon tale and its capacity to sustain multiple meanings—integral to this myth, as Leonard Barkan argues[11]—is evident in the astute observations of the above critics. I would add to this complexity by considering the somewhat neglected figure of Diana in the opening soliloquy, and what she represents. Virtually all of the critics focus on Edward and Gaveston as Actaeons, gazing upon the forbidden and courting dismemberative disaster. But as Barkan shows, the original myth (especially in its Ovidian form) equates the mortal and divine hunter as alternative, "mirrored" versions of each other.[12] In *Doctor Faustus*, the protagonist as stage manager of the Actaeonesque show declares himself a "play Diana" because he controls vision and metamorphosis; in the opening of *Edward II*, Gaveston fulfills this Cynthian role as dreamer and impresario. Similarly, King Edward is not solely an Actaeon. As the monarch who will be spied upon by Gaveston and whose inviolability is called into question, he also stands as a type of Diana—although *what* type is an issue that the play calls into question.

To assess accurately the image of Diana in the contexts of court and show, one must consider the historical and specifically Elizabethan Diana. The Cynthian presence in *Edward II* bears a debt to the Tudor Queen. Gaveston, drawing attention to London as an "Elizium" within the play's first dozen lines,[13] goes on to appropriate a set of signifiers long associated with Marlowe's living monarch Elizabeth. "The myth," Leonard Barkan observes, "takes on considerable vitality within her reign."[14] As Bruce Smith notes, George Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures* at Kenilworth, written expressly for the Queen in 1575, contains the parts of "a boy dressed up as Diana" and retainers "decked out as nymphs and satyrs,"[15] prefiguring Gaveston's

> Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
> My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns . . . . (I.i.57-58)

The goddess appears in this era because symbolically and often dramatically, Elizabeth had *become* Diana, the Virgin Queen. Marie Axton traces this vein of court iconography in the 1570s, '80s, and '90s through Inns of Court plays and other pageants, demonstrating that both Elizabeth and her nobles relied upon "Diana or Cynthia as public image." Regarding Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures*—in which advice to Elizabeth was offered through the veil of allegory—Axton stresses its multiple options for Diana/Elizabeth, and the myth's flexibility as an interpretive and instructional tool:

> The complexity of her situation called for multiple images, so that she is figured as impervious goddess, jealous tyrant who does not wish anyone to marry or beget heirs, enchantress, and helpless nymph pursued by would-be ravishers.[16]

As Axton shows, the early court allusions to Diana questioned the wisdom of prolonged virginity, as nobles gently nudged the Queen towards proper consort, political alliance, and heir to the throne. But as Elizabeth cagily co-opted this mythical persona, she managed to associate Cynthian chastity with national inviolability. Her words to the troops at Tilbury in 1588 provide a sense of the dynamics involved:

> I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms.[17]

The Queen attempted to include her subjects in the fierce guardianship of mingled sexual and geographical boundaries. This mode became so solidified that Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, which Leonard Barkan deems "a great contemporary celebration of Elizabeth as Diana,"[18] depicts a divinity—her "god-head put off" temporarily to "descend" among the mortals—who hammers home her triumph over the Earl of Essex and other potential rebels:

> *Cynthia*: For so *ACTAEON*, by presuming farre,
> Did (to our grief) incurre a fatal doome; . . .

> But are we therefore judged too extreme?
> Seemes it no crime, to enter sacred bowers,
> And hallowed places, with impure aspect,
> Most lewdly to pollute? Seemes it no crime,
> To brave a *deitie*? Let mortals learne
> To make religion of offending heaven.[19]

Protecting the body *and the nation* from "lewd pollution" brings up a uniquely Renaissance notion that has on occasion been associated with *Edward II*, but never properly connected to the Diana and Actaeon myth in the play. The idea of "the King's Two Bodies," as Ernst Kantorowicz delineates it,[20] was first legally postulated in the 1560s:

> The King has in him two Bodies, viz. a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, ... But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the publick-weal; and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and Old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities which the Body natural is subject to.[21]

In this formulation, touches of the divine and transcendent connect with the mortal, in ways that are quite amenable to the Cynthian power and privilege that Marlowe alludes to in *Edward II*. Gregory Bredbeck calls "the King's Two Bodies" a "hybridization" of medieval and Renaissance thought, an "Elizabethan inheritance" that is "most central to an understanding of the representation of *Edward II*."[22] And although Axton cautions that the legal theory would "never attain the status of fact or orthodoxy," it nonetheless was widely known, and carried with it a set of visual cues and meanings.[23] According to one early-seventeenth century description,

> The resplendence and power of soveraigntie in the royall person of a Soveraign, showing itself both in so great maiestie as dazleth the eyes of all beholders, and in so admirable effects, as to transforme savagenesse into civilities, repugnance into concords, vices into virtues, . . . doth (by such the conversion of the body naturall, into a body political) beget thereunto a more admired glory.[24]

Eye-dazzling, miraculous transformation, and admired glory: it is little wonder that the royal double body attracts Christopher Marlowe. It sounds here as if it has already acquired an Ovidian sheen and potency. It attracts for another reason too—its flexibility. Bredbeck describes the King's Two Bodies as "a metaphor that conveniently mutates according to the exigencies of the moment."[25] And with great insight, Axton asserts that in particular, "dramatists were equipped to express its subtle complexity."[26]

In *Edward II*, there is a powerful overlap between the goddess Diana and, as Axton phrases it, the "*Queen's* Two Bodies": the two subjects are indeed ripe for dramatic expression of their subtle complexities. Marlowe was understandably affected by the mythological iconography and the legal theory of his day. With the dramatist's prerogative, he exploits both in his play, making them interact and jar with each other, interrogating them singly and together. Edward, although an Actaeon, is simultaneously a Diana. He repeatedly expresses himself in a Cynthian parlance of exclusive, privileged sight; symbolic displays of power; metamorphic reprisal; and dismembering punishment. These rarefied Cynthian privileges become linked to the supposedly pristine bodies natural and politic of the ruler. However, Edward's actions undercut the aspirations of his Diana-like language. Ironically, his behavior heightens the gulf between divine rhetoric and worldly reality. Furthermore, his actions betray and "pollute" the double body. Bent Sunesen is correct when he senses in Gaveston's soliloquy a reversal of the inviolate Diana, barely hiding the parts men delight to see: "this is the 'divine huntress chaste and fair' engaged in something very much like strip-tease."[27] This image of a Diana playing against type, of Edward as a sporadic, ineffectual, ultimately failed Diana, connects to the ways in which he foolishly exposes his bodies natural and politic.

Edward's opening himself to sight and touch—anathema to Ovid's goddess—is tantamount to opening up the realm itself, and is equally dangerous. His invitation to Gaveston and his proximity to the lowly-born outsider undermine royal and divine privilege, according to the mythic paradigm:

Ed.: Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.
Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowst thou not who I am?
Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston! (I.i.141-43)

This scene is dominated symbolically by the imagined Actaeon pageant coming to life, as Gaveston "stands aside" and spies on the court (I.i.73-139). Marlowe immediately suggests the identification—the interchangeable quality—between the high and the low character, the Diana and the Actaeon type. However, the physical embrace of the intruder in the inner sanctum of court completely contrasts with Diana's rightful ire upon being discovered at Gargaphie. Edward's is an encouraged embrace—an invited invasion and giving away—of the body politic:

Ed.: I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
Chief Secretary to the state and me,
Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man . . . .
I'll give thee more; for but to honor thee
Is Edward pleased with kingly regiment.
Fearst thou thy person? Thou shalt have a guard.
Wantst thou gold? Go to my treasury.
Wouldst thou be loved and feared? Receive my seal. (I.i.154-68)

Edward, as a failed Diana, displays and gives away the bodies natural and politic—his own physical privacy and the kingdom's wealth and power.

This permitted Actaeonesque vision is a form of spying that invades not just Edward, but the realm, the more abstract half of the double body. And while the King invites it, the nobles abhor and resist it. One of the play's strongest images involves their response to Gaveston's spying. Privately counseling patience, the elder Mortimer attempts to excuse the King's irresponsible behavior by citing historical precedent for the sort of male love they are witnessing. "The mightiest kings have had their minions," he says, as well as the "wisest men," offering up a list of homosexual worthies from Alexander, Hercules, and Achilles to Cicero and Socrates (I.iv.390-400). However, his irate nephew Mortimer Junior, Edward's nemesis and the most vocal of the nobles, responds that male love is not the issue.[28] Rather, three things obsess him at this moment of candor. First, "that one so basely born / Should . . . riot it with the treasure of the realm"

(I.iv.402-04), which hits directly upon the social and economic implications of Gaveston's Actaeonesque intruding and Edward's un-Cynthian embrace. Related to this but closer to the emotional core of the issue is the younger Mortimer's intense antipathy to the way Gaveston and his followers "make such show" and "jet it in the court" (I.iv.406-414). Making "show" or display is a court privilege conferred by birth; it should be neither garish nor totally exposing, and it comes with rules and responsibilities—a decorum which Edward and Gaveston have not observed. Finally, Mortimer's deepest animosity is engendered by the intruder's visual supremacy. Gaveston has achieved the power to spy and look down upon them and the entire realm that Edward has placed at his disposal:

> *Mort.*: Whiles others walk below, the King and he
> From out a window laugh at such as we,
> And flout our train, and jest at our attire.
> Uncle, 'tis this that makes me impatient. (I.iv.416-19)

The intrusive spying combined with the disrespect—the failure to revere authority (or divinity)—cry out for punishment.

Mortimer, as a defender and avenger of the body politic, hates and fears being secretly looked at and down upon. In a moment of great anger he tells the King, "we will not thus be faced and *overpeered*" (I.iv.19, italics mine). This not only gives the sense of competition through sight, and the primacy of the visual in the power struggle that is taking place; it also connects to the Actaeon myth these contentions regarding view. In Golding's Ovid the unusual verb "overpeerd" makes one of its first appearances in English: it is what the statuesque, blushing Diana does despite her nymphs' attempts to hide her from Actaeon's gaze.[29] Golding's original context is rich because both his setting and his use of the term are ambiguous and double-edged. Diana "overpeers" as her privilege and a source of her power; however, her height and her overpeering ability are also the reasons she is peered *at*. Her power to see is directly connected to her being seen, and the ensuing vulnerability that this causes. Marlowe capitalizes upon such ambiguity as he experiments with role-reversals of the myth. What does it mean to have the attendant "nymphs"—the

nobles trying to guard their monarch's inviolability—declaring themselves unwilling to be weakened in the face of intrusive spying? Why does their master the King refuse to accept their protection, for himself and the realm? The Diana myth and the monarch's roles are opened up, profoundly unsettled and destabilized by Marlowe.

The nobles' outrage at Edward stems from his exposure of the court, a dangerous accessibility that is expressed in various ways. Many of these are deeply symbolic of Gaveston's (and later the next minion Spencer's) proximity to the natural and political bodies of the monarch. When Edward defiantly seats his minion next to him upon the throne, declaring "It is our pleasure; we will have it so" (I.iv.8-14), the disgusted nobles ironically quote Ovid on the incompatibility of love and majesty, and draw their swords.[30] Charles Forker stresses how the King's gesture here is both "emblematic and shocking," in that it "signifies that Edward has made his lover politically equal with himself."[31] But more than this, it represents a yoking of physical and political contact, a threatening nearness that is despicable and dangerous. The nobles attempt to fight back not only with swords, but with symbols of their own. Sarcastically welcoming Gaveston back from exile, they design "devices" that depict the intruder's effect upon the realm: among others, a canker creeping up to the top of a tree where "kingly eagles perch" (II.ii.11-46). Such symbolism, which Edward reads correctly as "private libeling" (II.ii.34), resembles the barely veiled advice of the Elizabethan pageants of Gascoigne, Jonson, and others described by Marie Axton.[32]

When they do not have the desired effect and their advice regarding protection of the body politic goes unheeded, the nobles resort to more direct means of persuasion. "Look for rebellion, look to be deposed," threatens Lancaster, to which arch-rival Mortimer adds, encapsulating the crisis of this failed Diana figure, "Thy court is naked" (II.ii.158, 171). The court is indeed naked—the consequence of a ruler whose desire for voyeuristic pleasure with and through his minions is as great as his own need to exhibit himself. In this, he is like so many other Marlowe characters whose glee in watching turns into a histrionic zest for showing. Edward's theatrical "carnivalizing" of himself stands as one instance out of many:

Mort.: When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
But once, and then thy soldiers marched like players,
With garish robes, not armor, and thyself
Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
Where women's favors hung like labels down. (II.ii.179-84)

Such inappropriate role-playing—indifference to or ineptitude with fitting displays of power, as Edward turns war into festive theater—have led to national shame, "England's high disgrace" before the "fleering Scots" (II.ii.185-86). In sum, says Mortimer, "The idle triumphs, masks, lascivious shows . . . / Have drawn thy treasure dry, have made thee weak" (II.ii.154-56).

Incompetent as he is with public displays that should accompany the prestige of England's King—a symbolic Diana protecting the pristine body politic—Edward nonetheless verbalizes his wrath in ways that promise Cynthian mutilation and dismemberment. The sword shall "hew these knees that now are grown so stiff," he tells the contentious Mortimer in the first scene. He will decapitate his enemies, making examples of them as they "preach upon poles" (I.i.94, 118). He revenges himself like a true Diana upon the Bishop of Coventry, "christening him anew" in gutter water—a foul version of the Ovidian *ultricibis undis* or "avenging drops" that come back to haunt him later—and "rending" his garments (I.i.187-88). Edward's resolve, "I'll tread upon their heads, / That think with *high looks* thus to tread me down"(II.ii.96-97, italics mine), has Ovidian overtones. And when he triumphs temporarily in Act III, his desire "To be avenged on you all for your braves" means decapitation. "Thy head shall overlook the rest," he tells Warwick, the beheader of Gaveston—with a macabre echo of the notion of "overpeering" (III.iii.40-57).

However, more often than not these threats appear empty and unacted-upon, a marked contrast to Ben Jonson's Cynthia / Elizabeth who taught mortals "religion" by displaying the dire consequences of "braving a deitie" and "offending heaven."[33] When Edward no longer has his power, he feebly and metaphorically attempts the former Cynthian tearing as he grabs hold of the decree of deposition:

[The KING takes the paper.]
Ed.: By Mortimer, whose name is written here.
Well may I rent his name that rends my heart!
[Tears it.]
This poor revenge hath something eased my mind.
So may his limbs be torn, as is this paper.
Hear me, immortal Jove, and grant it too. (V.i.139-44)

The privilege of Diana is gone, so another pagan god is invoked to wreak dismembering vengeance. Karen Cunningham observes that although "Edward adopts the language" and the promise to "'bridle tongues' [and] chop off heads, . . . his acts of mutilation . . . are displaced from flesh to paper."[34] He is a lame, impotent Diana whose punishments are instead inflicted upon himself and the realm.

The nobles, as if to fill the Cynthian vacuum caused by Edward's inadequacies, take up the language and the deeds of dismemberment with much greater effectiveness. Furthermore, they do so in ways that link the transgression of Edward's body natural to the damage sustained by the body politic, the realm. As unity breaks apart, Mortimer describes England in its dissolution as "maim'd" (III.iii.68). He decries "the open wrongs and injuries Edward hath done to us, his queen, and land" (IV.iv.21-22). This "openness" not only has the sense of "apparent" or "obvious," but also hints at Edward's real transgression, the wrong kind of accessibility, and the ways in which it exposes the body politic, the "land." The result of such access is a Cynthian dismemberment of the body politic, which Edward's very language self-destructively has invited:

Ed.: Make several kingdoms of this monarchy,
And share it equally amongst you all,
So I may have some nook or corner left,
To frolic with my dearest Gaveston. (I.iv.70-73)

Ed.: . . . rather than thus be braved,
Make England's civil towns huge heaps of stones. (III.iii.30-31)

The rending apart is physical as well as political, personal as well as national. This is the essence of the Elizabethan double body, and in Marlowe's depiction the Cynthian overtones resound.

In the same way that Edward's speech has held from the beginning the promise of dismemberment, the words of the nobles from early on have responded in kind. In the first scene, the irate Lancaster connects the King's physical self and the symbol of monarchy to decapitation:

> *Lanc.*: Look to see the throne, where you should sit,
> To float in blood, and at thy wanton head
> The glozing head of thy base minion thrown. (I.i.131-33)

This threat, unlike so many of Edward's rending vaunts, is later followed to the letter:

> *Warwick*: . . . by my sword,
> His head shall off. Gaveston, . . .
> . . . it is our country's cause
> That here severely we will execute
> Upon thy person.
> . . .
> *Mort.*: Thus we'll gratify the King:
> We'll send his head. . . . Let him bestow
> His tears on that, for that is all he gets
> Of Gaveston, or else his senseless trunk. (II.v.21-25,55-58)

There is a triumphant lingering over these scattered body parts.

Towards the end of the play, similar sadistic pleasure comes from ripping apart, and is related with tragic irony to Edward's role as a failed Diana. The two final scenes of the deposed King grotesquely invert Gaveston's initial fantasy of a theatrical "Diana" displaying himself in the shimmering waters of a gorgeous Gargaphie. The waters of these last two scenes become progressively more foul; the recollection of the opening titillation, with the boy's hair "gilding the water as it glides" (I.i.62), is a cruel memory. Edward's jailers Matrevis and Gurney are gleefully sadistic versions of Diana's nymphs. Instead of delicately assisting with the refinements of the monarch's sacred bath, they profanely and brutally "bathe" him and shave off his beard in dirty "puddle water" (V.iv.27-38).[35] In Marlowe's treatment, the shaving symbolically prefigures the more literal ripping apart that comes next.

The water in Edward's death scene is completely excremental, "the sink / Wherein the filth of all the castle falls" (V.v.2). His "attendants" have become even further removed from Ovid's nymphs. They are torturers who feed the fallen monarch scraps, and keep him awake for days to "assail his mind" (V.v.1, 8). Referred to as a "lake" (28) and visited by the assassin Lightborn—identified by Harry Levin as a type of Lucifer[36]—this filthy "sink" has been called by Douglas Cole a "Cocytus," the frozen lake of Hell.[37] And so it is; but Marlowe also mingles the waters of Cocytus and Gargaphie. In an uncanny echo of "overpeering," Lightborn tells the sleepless Edward, "You're over*watched*, my lord" (V.v.91, italics mine). In this lake, a failed Diana becomes a suffering Actaeon:

> *Ed.*: My mind's distempered and my body's numbed,
> And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
> O would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
> As doth the water from my tatter'd robes. (V.v.66-69)

Edward exhibits Actaeon's confusion, his uncertainty over his own limbs, and the presentiment that his own blood will shortly fall. Also, in this scene—in ways that will be considered more fully in the next section—the language of the "heart" and the "hart" resounds. In thus intimating Actaeon's punishment, Marlowe engages audience sympathy as well as taps into a profound ambiguity. Edward's murder—an anal penetration by a fiery hot spit, designed to leave no mark—has long been discussed as a parodic gay rape, emblematic of his transgression. It is indeed, as Gregory Bredbeck suggests, an act of "writing" his crime onto him, literally "branding" him with it.[38] However, it is also the mythologically appropriate Cynthian tearing of one who has failed to understand the necessary inviolability of the Elizabethan double body.

The Hunted Hart and the Wounded Heart

Related to the intersection of Diana and the "Queen's Two Bodies" in *Edward II* is a matrix of meanings and effects that have been touched upon

by a few critics, but not fully elucidated. Two distinct strands are interwoven, throughout the play. The first regards the Actaeonesque image of the hunted hart; while the second involves the many dimensions of "peering" and "piercing." In both cases, Marlowe develops complex layers of ambiguity through multiply-mirrored images, reverberant puns, and double- and sometimes triple-entendres.

While I have just finished arguing that Edward has been under-appreciated as a Diana, it is in keeping with the nature of the myth's multiple identifications to say within the next breath that he is simultaneously very much of an Actaeon as well. The duality that I am stressing gives Marlowe's mythologizing a great deal of its charge within this drama. It also supports and refines Charles Forker's observation that "mysterious dualities of conduct and attitude pervade nearly all the central figures of *Edward II*."[39] The Actaeon association is unmistakable; in fact, its specific manifestation in the motif of the hart has been well documented. Bent Sunesen begins the assessment of the ways in which "the pattern of the hunt is reproduced" in the play, and "tragic fate of the 'hart' is inevitable":

> . . . the royal "hart" has been finally tracked down and is now moving aimlessly from side to side, exhausted, beset with the furious pack.[40]

He concentrates on the "images of pursuit by merciless punishers," as well as the flight of Edward, who considers the sufferings of the "forest deer" without actually calling himself one (V.i.8-10). Sunesen also cites lines and scenes where the nobles "appear as hounds in various contexts": "they barked apace a month ago" (IV.iii.11-12); "how oft have I been baited by these peers?" (II.ii.198); "Edward's head . . . [is] encompassed by wolves, / Which in a moment will abridge his life" (V.i.41-42).[41]

Other critics have extended these observations regarding the King as an Actaeon-like hunted hart. Sara Munson Deats displays an awareness of the myth's allegorical history when she suggests that symbolically the noble "hounds" represent Actaeon/Edward's "own devouring desires."[42] Regarding the revolt of the nobles, Judith Weil sees the myth as essential:

> We may surmise that the watchdogs of the realm are deliberately failing to recognize their old master . . . . If Edward is Actaeon, then his noble hounds have

> glimpsed the man beneath the deerskin, and have chased him all the faster for it. They will only kill him when the skin drops away altogether. The hunting of Edward by Mortimer would be quite obvious during a performance.[43]

Weil is right; there are abundant examples of this hunt in such lines as "Shall I be haunted thus?" (II.ii.154); "Was I born to fly and run away?" (IV.v.4); "we, alas, are chased" (IV.vi.22); the Prince's "I think King Edward will outrun us all" (IV.ii.69); and the Queen's "we'll ride a-hunting in the park" (V.iv.112).

Still other critics have attributed the poignancy of Edward's death to the slaughter and mangling of the hart. Charles Masinton stresses that "the tragic fate . . . is influenced by the ancient myth of metamorphosis"; and John Cutts deems the pathos of *Doctor Faustus* almost

> Inconsequential compared with Edward's pleas for warmth, understanding, and love, and his being physically torn apart and dismembered.[44]

Both Weil and Deats partially accept Martha Golden's thesis that the deposed Edward is a Christ-like, suffering hart whose agonies inspired a degree of pity and sympathy, and who is symbolically "resurrected" in the person of the new King, Edward III.[45] Tellingly, for my argument about the myth's powers of multiple identification, Weil prefers to see the new King less as a revived Actaeon/Christ, and more as a "finally . . . just Diana to Mortimer's proud, conceited Actaeon."[46] Finally, Deats notes the subtleties of the hunted hart image and the ways in which Marlowe skillfully uses it:

> the dual symbolism of the myth adds a complexity to the Actaeon exemplum: . . . Actaeon, like Edward, is victim as well as agent.[47]

To the insightful work already done on this particular image, I would add that Marlowe internalizes the hart icon for Edward, and makes it work on yet another, more personal level. He manages this by equating the animal "hart"—self-consciously and with punning linguistic playfulness—to Edward's individual, human "heart." In fact, in the 1594 quarto of the play and in C. F. Tucker Brooke's old-spelling edition, the human organ

was spelled identically to the pursued animal. The sheer preponderance of both kinds of "hart" calls attention to itself: there are dozens of references.[48] And what happens to the human "heart" oddly mirrors what happens to the animal "hart": it is lacerated, punished, possessed, and finally broken. Edward himself unwittingly engages in this tragic punning even early on, as he reproaches Gaveston, "Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words" (I.iv.117)— a foreshadowing of the literal piercing to come. Even the lesser characters speak this "language of the heart" in ways that seem applicable to Edward. During a temporary amity, Canterbury intones, "Now is my heart at ease"; Isabella laments her sighing, breaking heart; Pembroke describes the King's unkindness, "Hard is the heart that injures such a saint"; and Mortimer declares, with double-edged defiance, "What we have done, our heart-blood shall maintain" (I.iv.91, 115, 165, 190).

The human heart is not only a way of expressing passion, anger, and grief; emblematically and linguistically, it also becomes the "human *hart*" Edward who is chased back and forth in a deadly political pursuit. At key moments the symbolic "heart to hart talk" grows extreme. In the pun-crammed Act I, scene iv, of Gaveston's banishment and repeal, the distraught Edward pictures himself as a battered heart:

> *Ed.*: He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn.
> Did never sorrow go so near my heart
> As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston.
> . . .
> My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
> Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers. (I.iv.304-12)

The repeal, he declares, "overjoys my heart . . . ne'er was my heart so light" (I.iv.343, 367).

Such references continue throughout the drama. In Edward's worst moments they are most prevalent and potent: his hunting down, deposition, imprisonment, and slaughter. These are not merely the sufferings of a human heart, but the mirrored images of a pursued and ultimately mangled Actaeonesque hart. "Chased from England's bounds"

(IV.v.71) and "pursued with deadly hate" (IV.vi.5), Edward takes refuge in a monastery and seeks comfort from the abbot:

> *Ed.*: Oh, hadst thou ever been a king, *thy heart,*
> *Pierced deeply sense of my distress,*
> Could not but take compassion of my state.
> . . .
> Oh, might I never ope these eyes again,
> Never again lift up this drooping head,
> Oh, *never more lift up this dying heart!* (IV.vi.8-43, italics mine)

When an agent of Mortimer's captures the King and his new favorites, Edward's surrender comes with similar imagery:

> *Ed.*: Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine,
> And take my heart in rescue of my friends! (IV.vi.66-67)

Edward's "heart with sad laments / That bleeds within me for this strange exchange" (V.i.34-35)—the handing over of the crown—can just as readily cry out for vengeance, from the perspective of the "forest dear" or wounded stag: "Well may I rent his name that rends my heart!" (V.i.9, 140).

In his imprisonment and assassination, the "King's Two Harts" move even closer together. Images of destruction and dismemberment permeate the characters' speech. Edward wonders when the hound-like Mortimer will be "satisfied with blood":

> *Ed.*: If mine will serve, unbowel straight this breast,
> And give my heart to Isabel and him.
> . . .
> My daily diet is heart-breaking sobs,
> That almost rents the closet of my heart. (V.iii.10-11, 21-22)

The human heart sounds increasingly like the torn animal, as the images of ripping intensify. When Lightborn appears, hunter and prey refer to the "heart" five times in forty lines. These include figurative language of possession ("here's a place indeed, with all my heart"); dissolution ("thy heart . . . will melt"); dismemberment ("this breaks my heart"); and slaughter ("murder in thy heart," V.v.40, 52-54, 70, 86). The details of the

sadistic murder are taken straight from Holinshed,[49] but Marlowe's complex mythological and linguistic overlays suggest other reverberations as well. Edward, it seems, has been transformed into a hart ripped apart from the inside—closer to the core that was his human heart to begin with. English chronicle matches and illuminates the essential horror of Ovidian metamorphosis.

Peering and Piercing: Politics, Transgression, and Punishment

Like the heart/hart configuration, Marlowe unleashes another family of loaded puns that is also integrally involved with Diana, Actaeon, and English history. Strangely, scholars have failed to say much about the playwright's skillful and highly self-conscious interconnection of the following: Pierce of Gaveston; the noble peers; "peers," as in looking; and "pierce," as in penetrating. Marlowe resoundingly engages these terms and all that they represent. They hold keys to the play's most central concerns, from court politics and espionage to theatrical display and visual/sexual transgression. To put the relationship into a tongue-twisting, chiastic nutshell: *Piers peers; the peers pierce.* Sara Munson Deats has found a "fearful symmetry" in the structure of *Edward II;* perhaps this mirror-like, chiastic piercing helps to account for it.[50] Pierce Gaveston peers like "one through a grove"; he spies and gazes greedily upon secret sights. As a consequence, the resentful, visually violated noble peers avenge themselves by "piercing" and lacerating the offender and those party to the offense.

Marlowe is not normally associated with what could be called the Shakespearean compulsion to pun. The latter engages in complex wordplay that ranges from petty quibbles—the type denigrated by Samuel Johnson[51]—to the kind of punning in Shakespeare that is not humorous at all. But the opportunity for such loaded word-play—thorough, symbolic, and musically developed—practically forces itself upon Marlowe, from the first name of the minion to the manner of the protagonist's murder, both historical facts waiting to be capitalized upon. Marlowe revels in the reverberations, and has grotesque fun with them; they provide part of the

play's unique power. He cannot resist them for yet another reason: they come so close to the tragedy's Actaeonesque "heart."

A brief catalogue of these multiple peerings and piercings will give some idea of their nature and range. To Edward, Gaveston is "my lovely Pierce" (III.i.8), "Good Pierce, my sweet favorite" (III.ii.43), and finally, "Poor Pierce, headed against law of arms" (III.ii.53)—that is, beheaded in spite of the nobles' promise of safe-passage. It is this Pierce who within the play's opening scene sets the parameters of the alternate peerings and piercings within the drama. First, after reading the King's letter inviting him home, he declares, "Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers" (I.i.18); this designation is reinforced by the irate Lancaster ("My lord, why do you thus incense your peers?" I.i.98). Then, in Gaveston's description of a play-Actaeon peering and "peeping through the grove" (I.i.67), he dramatizes his desires to provide pleasurable "sight" for his "exiled eyes," to "view my lord the King," and to "stand aside" and spy on the proceedings at court (I.i.10, 45, 73ff.). Finally, he also includes the sense of piercing as laceration: dismissing the ill-wishing soldier he has just insulted, he declares,

> *Gav.*: . . . these words of his move me as much
> As if a goose should play the porpintine,
> And dart her plumes, thinking to pierce my breast. (I.i.41-43)

With what we have seen above of the dual "hart" motif, the pierced "breast" here may even be a sly prefiguration of the lacerated "hart / By yelping hounds pulled down," which follows so closely after it (I.i.69-70). In any event, in under a hundred lines Marlowe manages to crystallize the play's essential dynamic of peering vision and its piercing punishments. He sets forth the puns and double-entendres through which they will contend. To return to the musical analogy of the previous paragraph, Gaveston's "exposure" is the musical "exposition," the opening statement of the peering/piercing theme.

The development of this motif throughout the play is lively and varied. Gaveston, hunted and Actaeon-like, yokes the notions of chase, vision, and piercing:

Enter Gaveston, pursued.
Gav.: Yet, lusty lords, I have escaped your hands,
Your threats, your 'larums, and your hot pursuits;
And though divorced from King Edward's eyes,
Yet liveth Pierce of Gaveston unsurprised. (II.iv.1-4)

However, this triumph is temporary: Pierce himself is pierced, as the ambushing Warwick "in a trench / Str[ikes] off his head" (III.i.119-20). The play consistently depicts the consequences of what Roland Barthes calls the "haptic" gaze, an intrusive vision that penetrates and possesses its object.[52] In Marlowe's version of the haptic gaze, peering and piercing become one. The noble peers are aware of this dimension of sight, jealously protective of its power, and angry and fearful when its privilege has been unwisely granted to an undeserving outsider. The use of the noun "peers"—the nobles—reinforces the sense of their visual function. Noble peers are a necessary presence in a successful tableaux of court power. In a moment of accord, the Queen approvingly draws attention to the visual picture the monarch and the surrounding nobles present:

Queen: Now is the King of England rich and strong,
Having the love of his renowned peers. (I.iv.355-56)

When the amity breaks down, Mortimer uses similar imagery of the peerage to show what Edward lacks, with overtones of the goddess Diana at the bath:

Mort.: Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
That make a king seem glorious to the world;
I mean the peers, whom thou shouldst dearly love. (II.ii.171-73)

Marlowe engages more than just abundant references to "these peers" (I.iv.212) and the "proudest peer in Brittany" (II.ii.42). He shows how the nobles understand that their power and privilege consists of being *peered at* in limited and proper ways—as opposed to being spied on, visually pierced by Pierce of Gaveston. Mortimer's absolute refusal to be "overpeered" (I.iv.119)—out-ranked, looked down and spied upon—makes

him for Edward the transgressive leader of the "proud overdaring peers" (I.iv.47); but it is the King who has failed to observe social and visual decorum.

As Edward's own speech has foreshadowed—"Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words," he tells Gaveston early on (I.iv.117)—metaphorical piercing through vision leads inescapably to bodily piercing with weapons. It is not such a far distance from the hunted Edward's "heart, / Pierced deeply with a sense of . . . distress" (IV.vi.9-10), which is figurative, to the literal piercing embodied by the assassin Lightborn. The latter has learned

> *Light.*: To pierce the windpipe with a needle's point;
> Or whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
> And blow a little powder in his ears;
> Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.
> But yet I have a braver way than these. (V.iv.33-37)

All of these "brave ways" are piercings or penetrations of sorts, entries into the body. The "braver way," in which Lightborn takes professional pride, is alluded to by the tools it requires: "a spit, and let it be red-hot, . . . a table and a feather-bed" (V.v.30-32). Actually performed onstage here, its details are well known from Holinshed:

> With heavie feather beddes, (or a table as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him downe, and withall put into his fundament an horne, and through the same they thrust up into his bodie a hote spitte . . . the which passing up into his intrayles, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same, but so as no appearance of any wound or hurt outwardly might bee once perceived.[53]

This is the ultimate penetration, distinguished by its supreme internality as well as its invisibility. "Be secret," commands Mortimer, and have it "be not spied" (V.iv.28, 40). Lightborn follows this to the letter, instructing Matrevis and Gurney to "lay the table down, and stamp on it, / But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body" (V.v.111-12).

Like the intrusive court peering that began the play, this clandestine penetration is internal and physical—a peering and piercing into and within. Although Marlowe certainly makes it a deathly emblem of the

drama's male love, it is more than that. It is the perfect symbol and end point—to use the phrase self-consciously—of a set of conflicts and intersections that transcend Edward's mere sexuality. National politics and social struggle; spying and display; Actaeonesque peering and piercing: all these coalesce in Edward's violated body. It is not just horror and pathos that account for Charles Lamb's powerful reaction to this scene;[54] it is awe. In Marlowe's virtuosic handling of the peering and piercing that dominate this drama, the distinctions between the punned words break down in the same way that human boundaries are crossed and destroyed.

Political and Personal Tragedy: Marlowe's "Actaeonesque History"

A crucial issue to address regarding *Edward II* is one of genre. Interpreters of the work have split into two major camps. The first considers the drama an essentially "personal tragedy" by a playwright who has little concern with politics, and no coherent or cohesive vision of them. The second disagrees, labels the work a true historical tragedy, and finds within it a primary though unorthodox interest in politics. I would like to ally myself with the latter viewpoint, and offer up in support a related notion: that in *Edward II* Marlowe creates "Actaeonesque history."

Those who see *Edward* as mainly personal are emphatic, and they go back to E. M. W. Tillyard in the 1930s: "What animates the play," Tillyard believes, is "Edward's personal obsession, his peculiar psychology, the humor and finally the great pathos of the play." The work, he asserts, is "concerned nominally but not essentially with historical matter."[55] Clifford Leech concurs: Marlowe "cared only for what happened to the individual" and "was interested in Edward not as embodying a suffering England, but as a man who had and lost power." To him the play has "no theory, . . . no warning or program for reform, no overt affirmation of a faith in man."[56] J. C. Maxwell agrees that "the historical process . . . has little interest for Marlowe"; and M. C. Bradbrook that politically there is no "central feeling or theme."[57] Harshly critical, Wilbur Sanders derides the

> singular absence of any guiding and shaping intelligence behind the presentation of the historical material, . . . [and the] consistent subjugation of the political and the public to a very narrowly conceived pattern of personal conflict.[58]

In a similar vein, the early J. B. Steane observes that in this play "the self is all there is"; that England is "mentioned, but . . . not emotionally or dramatically involved."[59]

However, many critics have disagreed adamantly, and stressed Marlowe's deep involvement with history. Tellingly, Steane—one of Marlowe's most insightful interpreters—later reverses himself on the issue of the play's "thinness" and praises *Edward II* as a problem play "akin in genre to *Measure for Measure* or *Troilus and Cressida*."[60] But advocacy of the work as a deeply involved, iconoclastic history actually began much earlier. In the 1940s Paul Kocher took his cues from Holinshed's observations that the "mischeefes" of Edward's reign "happened not onlie to [Edward], but also to the whole state of the realme"; Kocher emphasized the play's "elementary awareness that the nobles and the commons are political forces of prime importance."[61] Harry Levin takes *Edward II* to be a successful mingling of the historical and the personal, arguing that the play's "unique contribution . . . was to bring the chronicle within the perspective of tragedy, to adapt the most public of forms to the most private of emotions." Irving Ribner eloquently articulates the historical view:

> Suffering humanity in this play is a suffering English king, with the ends of tragedy and those of history entirely fused, for Edward's sins are sins of government, the crisis he faces is a political one, and his disaster is not merely death but the loss of his crown and the ruin of his kingdom by civil war.[62]

More recently still, James Voss has seen in the play "a working out of fundamentally hostile but interlocking sociopolitical forces," which Marlowe masterfully brings together "into a meaningful version of history."[63]

Of these divergent critical camps, only the latter is attuned to the nuances of court politics and the destructive sweep of history engaged by Marlowe. The scholars who argue that Marlowe lacks a coherent view of history are baffled because the picture that he consistently presents is not what they

would like it to be: orthodox, optimistic, providential, moral, or didactic. In the cases of Tillyard and Sanders, their impressions of what a *Shakespeare* history play is or should be (including the above list of characteristics) so color their notions of the genre that they refuse to accept deviation.[64] Even so sensitive a critic as Clifford Leech reveals this flaw of oversimplification, when he complains that the work has "no warning or program for reform, no overt affirmation of a faith in man"[65]—presumably, the strong moral center of a "real" history play.

In *Edward II*, Marlowe has written a less affirming and comforting, but certainly a focused and cohesive political drama. The play is an "Actaeonesque history" in that it views events of the court and the nation in ways suggested darkly by the Actaeon paradigm. The central characteristics of this variation upon the history play genre mirror the myth. First, power struggles are waged through vision, sight, and spying. Next, and spectacularly, vengeful victors have the power to transform and mutilate the vanquished. Finally, the entire process is unstable, amoral, and ambiguous; it inspires ambivalence, disagreement, and interpretive uncertainty. "Actaeonesque history" is neither Shakespearean nor providential, nor was it meant to be. Rather, the privilege of Diana—with her imperious wrath and ultimate murderousness—is Marlowe's metaphor for court power and the progress of history.

As in the Actaeon myth, power in *Edward II* is equated with sight. In Ovid and other versions of the tale, only a select few can view naked majesty; those who visually intrude, uninvited, are spies and transgressors. They must be taught to fear the angry looks of divinity. One of the most "Actaeonesque" aspects of this history is that characters constantly express power in terms of an omnipotent Cynthian gaze, of having eyes that overpeer all and at the same time inspire awe and fear. The combatants who contend for power consider it, more than anything, visual in nature. Gaveston values his abilities to see and show, but even more to wield the "eyes" of power; as a threatened, jealous noble puts it, "Happy is the man whom he vouchsafes . . . one good look" (I.ii.18-19). It is Gaveston's visual power—his ability to spy from above and laugh—that most infuriates Mortimer. Edward himself is acutely aware that the struggle that takes

place is for primacy of view and potency of gaze: he declares of the menacing nobles, "I'll tread upon their heads / That think *with high looks thus to tread me down*" (II.ii.96-97, ital. mine). And Mortimer in his glory, at the height of his power, perceives potency in terms of eyes that master all. He mingles Machiavelli and a gaze as severe as Diana's:

> *Mort.*: Feared am I more than loved;—let me be feared,
> And when I frown, make all the court look pale.
> I view the prince with Aristarchus' eyes,
> Whose looks were as a breeching to a boy. (V.iv.52-55)

In their ascendancy, Isabella and Mortimer's "eyes . . . sparkle fire"; Edward gives up his crown "rather than . . . look on them" (V.i.104-06).

Conversely and somewhat ironically, these characters, so determined to attain a power that makes them visually fearsome, resent and fear any exposure to view that is involuntary or unexpected on their part. As in Diana's case, being seen in this manner incites their rage. Since it is a source of power and an opportunity for one-upmanship, the acquisition of this sort of forbidden view, through espionage and secrecy, permeates the play. Gaveston is not the only one who practices the spy's arts, peering on the nobles for scraps of intelligence. The academics Spencer and Baldock, social climbers planning to insinuate themselves into court life, utilize intelligence techniques that suggest Christopher Marlowe's own background as spy and university man:

> *Spenc.*: A friend of mine told me in secrecy
> That [Gaveston] is repealed, and sent for back again;
> And even now a post came from the court
> With letters to our lady from the King;
> And as she read she smiled, which makes me think
> It is about her lover Gaveston. (II.i.17-22)

Spencer aims to rise by attaching himself to the up-and-coming Gaveston. To do so effectively, observation and surveillance must be practiced. Accordingly, the nobles are "resolute and full of secrecy" (II.ii.124). They too have their sources of intelligence: "Now, my lords, know this, / That Gaveston is secretly arrived" (II.iii.15-16). Mortimer is a master of

intelligence techniques: he sends an ambiguous, coded letter ordering Edward's death, along with a "secret token" that will result in Lightborn's own murder, in order to silence him; and he gives instructions for the "brave and secret" assassination, "so it be not spied" (V.iv.5-20, 28, 40). It is fitting indeed that the master-myth of Actaeon adapted for this play has been taken to show "how dangerous a curiosity it is to search into the secrets of princes."[66]

Further following the Actaeon myth, Marlowe in *Edward II* portrays political power as the ability to transform both allies and rivals, and to mutilate in the pursuit of revenge. The early examples of political metamorphic prowess are benign, at least to those who are "transformed":

> *Ed.*: I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
> Chief Secretary to the State and me,
> Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man. (I.i.154-56)
>
> . . . in this place of honor and of trust,
> Spencer, sweet Spencer, I do adopt thee here;
> And merely of our love we do create thee
> Earl of Gloucester, and Lord Chamberlain. (III.ii.143-46)

For the King and those who would usurp his authority, power is a matter of metamorphic might: the ability to alter the state, shape, or form of others. This can be beneficial—"he that I list to favor shall be great" (II.iii.260)—or destructive. The almost endless threats, catalogued by Karen Cunningham, to hew knees, decapitate, dismember, and to draw and hang, amount to attempts to transform the shapes of one's enemies.[67] The debt to Diana in this is seen quite explicitly when the temporarily victorious King is read the names of his mutilated rivals: he turns them into dogs who "barked apace a month ago," but will "neither bark nor bite" now (IV.iii.12-13). Later, Edward's shaving in puddle water is a miniature symbolic transformation by his vanquishers. Gaveston's altered form, his "senseless trunk" (II.v.54), concludes the first half of the play, as a symbol of Mortimer's rising Cynthian, metamorphic power. Similarly, Mortimer's cut-off head "crowns" the second half, embodying (perhaps *dis*embodying is the better word) the triumph of young Edward III in his ascendance to

manhood and mastery. Judith Weil sees the prince in his acquisition of power as "finally play[ing] the just Diana to Mortimer's proud, conceited Actaeon";[68] perhaps her interpretation is triggered by his ability at last to wield dismembering punishment. Marlowe emphasizes the degree to which the decapitation in all its gore achieves and affirms the young King's triumph:

> *Ed. III*: . . . on [Edward's] mournful hearse
> Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie. (V.vi.29-30)
>
> *1 Lord*: My lord, here is the head of Mortimer.
> *Ed. III*: . . . Accursed head,
> Could I have ruled thee then, as I do now,
> Thou hadst not hatched this monstrous treachery . . . .
> Sweet father, here unto thy murdered ghost
> I offer up this wicked traitor's head. (V.vi.93-100)

From the viewpoint of Marlowe's "Actaeonesque history," cyclical retributive dismemberment accompanies power, as both a forceful tool and a means of display.

The idea of display leads to the final component of Marlowe's unique, mythological variation upon the history play genre: the deep interpretive ambiguity of the mythic paradigm in its depiction of intense suffering. Diana inflicts punishment upon Actaeon as a form of display, and she holds him up for a public judgement that cannot clearly decide about the virtue of what she has done. In Golding's Ovid, there is analysis and discussion over its merit:

> Much muttring was upon this fact. Some thought there was extended
> A great deal more extremetie than neded. Some commended
> *Diana*'s doing; saying that it was but worthely
> For safegarde of hir womanhod. Eche partie did applie
> Good reasons to defende their case.[69]

Has Diana acted "worthely," or with too much "extremetie"? A salient characteristic of the Actaeon myth lies in this ambiguity; meanings are dichotomous and wavering. The myth is amoral, at least in its Ovidian

rendering, in the sense that Ovid does not provide—to use Clifford Leech's criticism of *Edward*—a "program" or an "overt affirmation." The tale is characterized by its indeterminacy and inconclusiveness—as well as by the fact that these opposing ideas about the justice of Actaeon's fate are so much discussed. Marlowe finds in this murkiness and contentious debate an ideal metaphor and forum for English history. He capitalizes upon Ovid's "*Rumor in ambiguo est*"—"Common talk wavered this way and that."[70] *Edward*'s "murmuring commons" (II.ii.157)—with perhaps an echo of Golding's "muttring" of opinion—also hold mixed ideas about their monarch. Some are openly critical, others supportive, and yet others "waver." At Edward's lowest, "the commons now begin to pity him," says Mortimer (V.iv.2).

Pity is a crucial, complex concept in both the Actaeon myth and *Edward II*. Actaeon's suffering is intense, and engenders pity:

> No part of him was free from wound. He could none other do
> But sigh and in the shape of Hart with voyce as Hartes are wont,
> (For voyce of man was none now left to help him at the brunt)
> By breying shew his secret grief amount the Mountaynes hie,
> And kneeling sadly on his knees with dreerie teares in eye,
> As one by humbling of himselfe that mercy seemde to crave,
> With piteous look instead of hands his head about to wave.[71]

The hart-like Edward in his fall also inspires pity, as many commentators have observed.[72] He is entirely different from the exhibitionistic hedonist of the play's opening; he has lost all. "What, are you moved? Pity you me?" he asks as he relinquishes his crown (V.i.102); and Marlowe does shift the sympathies. In Edward's mental and physical agony, and final pathetic demeanor, he is humanized. As in Ovid, with the "piteous" sighing of the hart near death, Marlowe's suffering Edward in his death throes inspires pity. Even the murderous Matrevis senses some pathos: "I fear me this cry will raise the town" and rally public support, he frets (V.v.113). In Holinshed, Edward's "crie did move many in the castell and the town to compassion."[73]

And yet in both Ovid and Marlowe, interpretive inconclusiveness in the face of intense suffering renders the pity almost meaningless. The

agonies of Actaeon and Edward have an immediate cause in their transgressions, but they do not have a clearly justifiable moral reason, nor do they have a cure. As shown above, the pain and pathos are shrouded in ambiguity. There are no virtuous characters in this drama, only corrupt ones whose flaws and bloodthirstiness grow the closer they get to authority. In the end, the justice is debatable—but the slaughter is inescapable. It is also ongoing, the cyclical by-product of a ruthless struggle to achieve a Diana-like omnipotence of view and vengeance. This is Marlowe's brutal, pessimistic portrayal of power, constructed out of Cynthian mythology, the royal double body, and the intersections of "peering" and "piercing," "hart" and "heart." It is a portrayal of power unacceptable to those who would deny the playwright a cohesive political vision. Yet it is the essence of "Actaeonesque history," distilled from the violence and vagaries of English chronicle.

New Jersey City University

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable guidance of Patrick Cullen, as well as the kind assistance of Angus Fletcher and Steven Urkowitz.

[1] George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis: Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Pictures*, 1632, ed. Karl Hulley and Stanley Vandersall (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1970) 151.

[2] Leonard Barkan notes Actaeon's representation as not only spy, but "voyeur, purveyor of multiple identities, victim of love, visionary, gelding, buffoon, holy fool"; "Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis," *ELR* 10.3 (1980): 317-59, esp. 322-26, 359.

[3] Quotations from *Edward II* are in *Drama of the English Renaissance*, ed. Russell Fraser and Norman Rabkin, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

[4] *Doctor Faustus* is also quoted from vol. 1 of Fraser and Rabkin. They base their edition upon the 1616 "B-text."

[5] Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952) 114.

[6] Bent Sunesen, "Marlowe and the Dumb Show," *English Studies* 35 (1954): 241-53, here 241, 245-46.

[7] Sara Munson Deats, "Myth and Metamorphosis in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 22.3 (1980) 311-13.

[8] John Cutts, *The Left Hand of God: A Critical Interpretation of the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Haddonfield, New Jersey: Haddonfield House, 1973) 207.

[9]Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 162.

[10]Charles Masinton, *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1972) 88-91.

[11]Barkan 323-26.

[12]Barkan 322.

[13]"Elizium" is the actual spelling in the 1594 quarto; see *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).

[14]Barkan 322, here cites E. C. Wilson's *England's Eliza* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939) 167-229.

[15]Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 99.

[16]Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977) 60-66.

[17]*The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth: Selections from the Official Addresses*, ed. George P. Rice (New York: 1951) 96.

[18]Barkan 333.

[19]I.i.93; V.ii.14-23; in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson, vol. 4 (Oxford: OUP, 1932).

[20]Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

[21]Edmund Plowden, *The Commentaries and Reports of Edmund Plowden, originally written in French, and now faithfully translated into English* (London, 1797) 213.

[22]Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 131.

[23]Axton x.

[24]Edward Forset, *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique* (London, 1606), cited in Axton 143.

[25]Bredbeck 132.

[26]Axton 60.

[27]Sunesen 244.

[28]Critical opinion is divided over the relative importance of Edward's sexual predilections in engendering the nobles' ire. Those emphasizing his homosexuality include Purvis Boyette, "Wanton Humors and Wanton Poets: Homosexuality in Marlowe's *Edward II*," *Tulane Studies in English* 22 (1977):33-50; and Claude Summers, "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*," *A Poet and a Filthy Play-maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich et al. (New York: AMS Press, 1988): 221-40. Proponents that social class, not sexual preference, is more of a factor include J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964); and Weil 163. For an overview, see *Edward II*, ed. Charles Forker (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 85-90.

[29]The *OED* cites Golding's 1567 "overpeerd them all" as the first recorded usage. *The XV Bookes Entytuled Metamorphosis of Publius Ovidius Naso*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567) 33.

[30]"*Quam male conveniunt!*" declares Mortimer Senior: how badly Edward and Gaveston suit each other. He alludes to Ovid: "Non bene conveniunt, nec in una seda

morantur, / Maiestas et amor [Majesty and love do not go well together, nor tarry long in the same dwelling place]." *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939), II. 846-47.

[31]Forker 160.

[32]Axton 60-66.

[33]Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels* V.ii.14-23.

[34]Karen Cunningham, "Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death," *PMLA* 105 (1990): 209-222, here 218.

[35]Marlowe goes outside of his main source, Holinshed, for these important details. See John Stowe, *The Chronicles of England from Brute unto this Present Year (1580)* 355-56; quoted in Forker 360.

[36]Levin 101.

[37]Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 184-85.

[38]Bredbeck 149.

[39]Forker 81.

[40]Sunesen 246-47.

[41]Sunesen 246.

[42]Deats 311; the hounds are tied to Actaeon's excessive appetites in Geffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises*, 1586 (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1969) 15. For an extended discussion of the myth, see Anthony Brian Taylor, "Arthur Golding and the Elizabethan Progress of Actaeon's Dogs," *Connotations* 1.3 (1991): 207-23, as well as responses to this article by F. J. Sypher, Charles Martindale and Sarah Annes Brown in *Connotations* 2.1 (1992): 52-68, and 2.2 (1992): 163-65, 205-22.

[43]Weil 164.

[44]Charles Masinton, *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1972) 109; Cutts 237.

[45]Martha Hester Golden, "The Iconography of the English History Play," Ph. D. dissertation (Columbia, 1967) 215; cited in Weil 205, and Deats 311.

[46]Weil 164.

[47]Deats 311.

[48]*The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910; 1966); see also *A Concordance to the Plays, Poems, and Translations of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. R. J. Fehrenbach, L. A. Boone, and M. A. di Cesare (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982).

[49]Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 2nd ed. (London, 1587); cited in Forker 355-56.

[50]Sara Munson Deats, "Marlowe's Fearful Symmetry in *Edward II*," in Kenneth Friedenreich et al., 241-62. Deats charts seven scenarios that begin the play, reach the center, and then in mirror image or reverse order, conclude it; esp. 242.

[51]"A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapors are to the traveller: he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire." Samuel Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare*, Abrams et al., *The Norton Anthology*

of English Literature, 6th ed., vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1993) 2398.

[52]On the "haptic gaze" and its "power to seize, to take" see Roland Barthes, *Responsibility of Forms* 238.

[53]Holinshed 341-42; cited in Forker 355-56.

[54]Charles Lamb wrote that Edward's murder instilled more pity and terror than any scene, either ancient or modern, with which he was acquainted; see *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1903) 4: 24.

[55]E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944) 106-09.

[56]Clifford Leech, "Marlowe's *Edward II*: Power and Suffering," *Critical Quarterly* 1 (1959): 181-96, 187.

[57]J. C. Maxwell, "The Plays of Christopher Marlowe," in *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth, 1960) 175; M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935) 161.

[58]Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard UP) 126.

[59]J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964) 122-23.

[60]See the introduction to the 1974 reprint of Steane's *Marlowe: A Critical Study*.

[61]Holinshed 342; Paul Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1946) 207.

[62]Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1965) 124.

[63]James Voss, "*Edward II*: Marlowe's Historical Tragedy," *English Studies* 63 (1982): 517-30, here 530.

[64]In Sanders' case the refusal to accept deviation may stem from undisguised homophobia, which accounts for his discomfort with Marlowe's "overemphasis" on the personal. For an analysis of homophobia and resistance to *Edward*, see Claude J. Summers, "Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*," in Friedenreich et al. 221-40, esp. 221-23, 237.

[65]Leech 187.

[66]Sandys 151.

[67]Cunningham 205-15.

[68]Weil 169.

[69]Golding 34.

[70]Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939) III. 253.

[71]Golding 34.

[72]In addition to Charles Lamb, the shift towards pity for Edward has been discussed by, among others, Deats in "Myth and Metamorphosis"; Cutts 236-37; and David Bevington and James Schapiro, "'What are kings, when regiment is gone?': The Decay of Ceremony in *Edward II*," in Friedenreich et al. 263-78, here 275-76.

[73]Holinshed 341-42.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Cold Monuments: Three Accounts of the Reception of Poetry

JOHN RUSSELL BROWN

Some poets talk of giving birth to a poem and being in the throes of composition, as if poetry were some form of procreation. To be sure, they carry poems in their heads while they are being formed and suffer pains and labour in bringing them before the world, but all such statements are metaphors and bear no more thorough scrutiny than the "vanquishing" of opponents on a football field or a "flight" from the euro. Even responsibility for their poems is not theirs alone, since they draw upon memory of poems by other persons, speech heard in everyday life, and an accumulated experience in which many other persons share.

* * *

Poets who write for a theatre will know that a play cannot be delivered by their efforts alone. They may think, imagine, invent, write, and correct in private and will usually provide the players with a more or less finished script, but the task is not complete, not seen or heard in its full life, until many more agents have made their own contributions to what has been written. While the writer is usually (but not always) the instigator who originally conceives what a play might become, he or she is never the sole maker, cannot give birth to it: the entire complex organism that is theatre company—actors, director, designer, producer, technicians—will play its diverse parts in the arrival of the new product. Nor is any one performance the one necessary form in which a playscript reaches an audience. While the words spoken may not change except in small details, they will be spoken differently and therefore convey different meanings each time they are uttered. And a poet's words do not make their effect alone: change

---

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debbrown00901.htm>.

the cast, the setting, costumes, lights, music, stage, theatre building, and vary the infinity of choices and accidents which contribute to any one performance, and the life of the play is bound to change, often quite radically. All these modifications, some consciously made, some accidentally or thoughtlessly, can make all the difference between acceptance and rejection of a play by the audience it happens to meet on any one particular day.

Even with the same cast in the same well-organized and efficient production, the life of a play will change from day to day, as the actors and their audience change. Changing circumstances in the lives of the people involved, both on stage and in the audience, will affect what happens in performance and in the minds of the audience: theatre cannot entirely ignore or shut itself off from the grief, happiness, or weariness felt by all participants in a performance. Changes in the wider geographical, social, political, seasonal, and intellectual context in which a play is performed are also influential. Amongst all these many variables, most of them beyond the control of its writer, a playscript finds its ever-changing life in the minds of its audiences.

In an important sense, each audience, and not the poet or even the actors, gives life to a play. At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare neglected the necessities of his plot and the comic potential of its action in order to write about the threefold relationship between play, actors, and audience. As the "tedious brief scene" of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is about to be performed, Duke Theseus is challenged by his warrior bride, Hippolyta:

> HIPPOLYTA This is the silliest stuff that ever I have heard.
> THESEUS The best in this kind are but shadows: and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.
> HIPPOLYTA It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.
> THESEUS If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. (V.i.209-14)

What Shakespeare's characters say in a play does not represent what their author thought on his own account, but the categories that are used here to describe an obviously faulty play do indicate how this author thought

of performance and his own art. He accepted that members of an audience are at least part-creators of a play's life and could be responsible for the "best" of it. Actors who speak what their author set down are called "shadows": imitations, reflections, portraits, shapes, not creatures with real life; perhaps they are like phantoms, for that, too, was an Elizabethan meaning of the word.

The "best" of the persons appearing in a play are changing, fleeting, insubstantial beings who need to be "amended" and given substance by an audience's own imagination. None of the technical means of Elizabethan theatre production are mentioned here—no costume, stage-property, sound, or music—as if they were not considered essential to acceptance and success. Theseus and Hippolyta agree that, in giving life to what a poet has written, the crucial agents are actors and audience. Between them, a play can find its ultimate and vivid life in the imaginations of an audience.

The Chorus to *Henry V* gives several similar accounts of how life is given to dramatic poetry. Actors are "ciphers" on which he asks his audience to let their "imaginary forces work" so that their minds "piece out" the imperfections of performance (Prol. 17-18, 23). He rallies his hearers, with "Work, work your thoughts," urging them to enhance what is being presented and make everything seem immediate and actual. Sometimes, the Chorus appeals directly to the audience's imaginations as if they could do all that was necessary and nothing need take place on the stage: he tells them to "eke out our performance with your minds" (III, Prol. 25, 35). As they "sit and see," members of an audience are said to be capable of "Minding true things by what their mock'ries be" (IV, Prol. 52-53), of completing what shadows and unreal shapes indicate and, by this process, give life to the words the poet had set down.

* * *

Shakespeare's comments on non-dramatic poetry imply that he did not consider writing for theatre to be a special case, but rather a form of poetry that usefully illustrates how other forms function. Earlier in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus had spoken of poets in general and his words have become proverbial:

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
> Are of imagination all compact . . .
> 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. (V.i.4-22)

Shapes was then a word far closer in meaning to shadows than it is today; in some contexts the words were interchangeable. Theseus implies that, in his imagination, the poet sees visions and then gives them a place and means of identification by what his pen sets down. Neither a "local habitation" nor a "name" involves the giving of life, but both are consequent on being alive in the mind of the poet and the means whereby another life is created in the minds of readers. As a play needs actors and audience, as well as words to speak, so the words of a poem need readers with their own imaginations before its site and structure are inhabited and an "airy nothing" is given lively substance.

Shakespeare's sonnets, in several instances, bear the same message and here we may feel closer to his own thoughts since he was writing in his own person. The clearest instance is the concluding couplet of Sonnet 107:

> Now with the drops of this most balmy time
> My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
> Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
> While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
> And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
> When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

The poet is said to "live" in the poem: the words themselves have no life. Moreover, the young man, to whom the poem is addressed, will "find" his own "monument" in its "poor rhyme." In this context, Monument is a taunting word: it could mean an effigy, a physical representation of some person and here, while it is natural to presume a reference to a figure of the death-marked poet, "thy" of the penultimate line implies that it refers to that of the young man who is still alive; in both interpretations, the poem

would have no more than a simulation of life. But monument could also mean a tomb (and such a reading is supported by "tyrants' crests and tombs" of the following line) or, more simply, a verbal document or testimony; in either of these senses, monument need not even imitate "life," but exist only as an inscribed block of stone or piece of parchment. In all these meanings for the word, the transformation of "rhyme" to "monument" has to be found by the young man: it has no validity except through the one who will "find" it; his imagination or, at least, his understanding is necessary to convert the words on paper into an enduring "monument" or representation of a living person.

A variation of the same idea is in Sonnet 81:

> The earth can yield me but a common grave,
> When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie.
> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
> Which eyes not yet created shall o'erread,
> And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
> When all the breathers of this world are dead.
> You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—
> Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

The "monument" of the poem has no life in itself. It comes alive only when someone responds to its words and reads them. Once everyone now alive has died, only when a person speaks the words, responding to their cues for understanding and feeling, will some one become aware of the life it commemorates. No poetry has life in itself. On this distinction, Shakespeare's references to poetry and theatre are unequivocal and he invokes the same principle when his characters speak of other kinds of verbal communication. For example, Rosaline, at the end of *Love's Labours Lost*, varies the phraseology when she warns Berowne that

> A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it; never in the tongue
> Of him that makes it. (V.ii.849-51)

Touchstone is more comprehensive in *As You Like It*:

> When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. (III.iii.9-13)

Merely to be understood, poetry needs a responsive understanding; to be truly alive, an answering imagination must be at work in a hearer's mind.

In numerous Sonnets, Shakespeare invokes his "Muse" when writing of the poet's task, speaking of her "fury" and "power," calling her "forgetful" and "resty" (100), rebuking her as a "truant Muse" who, in being "dumb," fails to do her appropriate "office" (101). His relationship with this Muse is neither easy nor reliable: he says she brings forth "poverty" when she should "show her pride" (103) and that she is a "slight Muse" who is sometimes "tongue-tied" (38, 85). On one occasion, he writes that he has "invoked" the young man to act as his Muse and "found such fair assistance in my verse" that "arts with thy sweet graces gracèd be" (78). As many poets did at that time, Shakespeare uses the fiction of the Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and Memory, to show how he could sometimes write as he wished or better than he thought he could, and would sometimes fail in writing anything acceptable. The Chorus of *Henry V* starts addressing his audience by calling for "a Muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention." Poets would write of their Muse when they wished for more resources than they could command or wanted to explain how their best writing seemed to derive from some source outside and independent of themselves. So they acknowledged that they were not sole progenitors of the poems published in their names.

* * *

Shakespeare's views on these matters, in both sonnets and plays, are echoed with variations by other poets. John Milton, using other terminology, also refused the position of only begetter of *Paradise Lost*. He invoked aid from both a "Heavn'ly Muse" and the Holy Spirit:

> What in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support. (i.1-26)

His task was not to speak for himself or bring into existence anything with life of its own; rather he sought to "assert Eternal Providence,/ And Justify the ways of God to men." In *Paradise Regained*, years later, Milton imagines how Jesus Christ must reject all authors who:

> . . . in themselves seek vertue, and to themselves
> All glory arrogate.

With regard to a poem's effectiveness for readers, his Christ insists that they must share conceptually with its author if any benefits are to accrue:

> . . . who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> (And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
> Uncertain and unsettl'd still remains,
> Deep verst in books and shallow in himself,
> Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
> And trifles for choice matters, worth a spunge;
> As Children gathering pibles on the shore. (iv.322-30)

These merciless words value literature according to the understanding of those who read it; without their adequate contribution, all writings dwindle to the status of pebbles beside a vast ocean. Shakespeare was never so dismissive but his insistence on the amending, life-giving function of a reader's or an audience's imagination belongs to the same line of thought.

In his epistolatory poems, John Keats often refused the role of sole creator. Writing to Charles Cowden Clarke, he pictured his attempts to write:

> Whene'er I venture on the stream of rhyme;
> With shatter'd boat, oar snapt, and canvas rent,
> I slowly sail, scarce knowing my intent;
> Still scooping up the water with my fingers,
> In which a trembling diamond never lingers. (16-20)

Less despondently, in *Endymion*, the poet again associated writing with travelling on a flowing stream—providing a point of contrast with Milton's Christ who speaks of readers as children on the shore of a nameless sea:

> I'll smoothly steer
> My little boat, for many quiet hours,
> With streams than deepen freshly into bowers. (46-48)

The poet does not stand alone, firmly grounded and ready to give birth to a poem out of himself: he is carried on some stream that is responsible for his movement: the poet's task is to steer.

At other times, Keats was keenly aware that a poem needed understanding readers. Adverse public criticism accentuated this conviction: "As to my sonnets," he writes to his brother George in 1816:

> . . . though none else should heed them,
> I feel delighted, still, that you should read them. (117-18)

Feeling must accompany understanding: in the sonnet "On sitting down to re-read King Lear once again" he pictured himself as ready to "burn through" its "fierce dispute / Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay" and so "humbly [to] assay / The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit." (5-8). In the odes, published in 1822, Keats wrote of a Grecian urn so fashioned by an artist that the figures depicted on it do not fade or vanish: it is a "Sylvan historian" expressing a "flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme." Studying those figures, his imagination hears an otherwise unheard music and endows with life its "brede / Of marble men and maidens" so that he, also, can enjoy their happy love that is "For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd." In this way, the "silent form" teases a viewer "out of thought / As doth eternity." Viewing the urn, the poet has found life in a "Cold Pastoral," as the young man of Shakespeare's sonnets is told he will "find" his own monument. Both objects awaken into life only in the mind of the perceiver.

* * *

Representing countless other writers, these three poets imply no essential distinction in the creation and reception of poetry whether it is meant to be read silently, for oneself, or heard with others as part of a performance. The many agents that stand between the poet and a theatre audience greatly

complicate the matter of judging what imaginative life lies behind the words of a play and what life they can be given when received by an audience, but the difference from other poems is a matter of degree not of essence. Poetry has life only in the minds of its author and those who respond to it imaginatively.

All poets use words that have already been influenced by other people and tell stories or create images that have come to them through the medium of others' experiences. A reader's mind can venture further than the strict confines of a poem's subject-matter by gaining familiarity with conditions of its composition and awakening memories of other poems. For criticism, the consequences of these endless collaborations are very great as they complicate and extend the life that may be found in a poem or play, often deepening it is effect. While criticism should analyse every word in a poem, together with its structure, music, texture and so forth, it must also explore its history and hinterland so that the genesis of the poem can illuminate its present life in a reader's imagination, much as it did for the poet who wrote it.

A corollary is still more far-reaching. Because each reader or audience member has an imagination that has been fuelled by an individual and particular life-experience, each will find a different experience when that imagination joins with the poet's and so brings a poem to new and unprecedented life. The objects, beasts, human beings, and natural surroundings depicted in a poem, together with its statements and arguments, pleasures and irremovable difficulties, will all be created afresh in new forms with each new response. A critic will not be able to foretell each powerful and revealing manifestation but some progress towards that aim may be made by studying the spirit of the age, the social, political, cultural, intellectual, sensuous, topical, and geographical (or environmental) context in which most present-day readers and audiences live. If it does not relate to present-day lived experience criticism will fall out of touch with a poem's present life. It must dare to be experiential, as well as analytical, scientific, and historical because only imagination, that derives from personal experience, can "find" the otherwise cold monument of a text and so be able to assess its "true" quality.

Middlesex University

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Response to John Russell Brown*

DONALD CHENEY

While it is true that we are speaking metaphorically when we talk about poetry as procreation, I would argue that all such metaphors demand and reward thorough scrutiny, whether or not they may finally "bear" it. Metaphors have a way of eliding some issues and legitimizing others. When we speak of vanquishing opponents on a football field, we tend to privilege aggressiveness over sportsmanship. More direly, to talk of a "war against cancer" implies that the battle must be carried to the enemy wherever he may lurk, so that a patient finds himself in the position of Donne's sinner who must be ravished by the medical establishment (cut, burned, poisoned) before he can be free of the enemy he has let in. In this spirit of military strategy, doctors may distinguish between 'aggressive' and 'heroic' treatment, although it is unclear whether the heroism of futile struggle is being attributed in this case to the overworked physician, the hapless patient, or the insurer. To paraphrase Wallace Stevens, metaphor is a dangerous thing.

Metaphor is also a two-way street. Generals talk of "surgical strikes" when they wish to vanquish their opponents from a safe distance, albeit with some of the collateral damage that might be avoided in a more traditional, sportsmanlike confrontation on the field of battle. Similarly, I find that John Russell Brown has called our attention to a series of texts that (like roads) lead simultaneously in opposite directions. Theseus and Hippolyta are talking about the relations between art and life, duke and commoner, things said and things heard; and it is finally up to the actors

*Reference: John Russell Brown, "Cold Monuments: Three Accounts of the Reception of Poetry," *Connotations* 9.1 (1999/2000): 34-42.

to determine to what degree their debate does neglect the play's action for a metadramatic moment, and to what degree it may be evidence of the Duke's courtship of this Amazon whom he has already wooed and vanquished with his sword.

In the Sonnets, especially, Shakespeare is repeatedly exploring the relation between two kinds of immortality: procreation as poetry (the young man creating a living but mortal image of himself) and poetry as procreation (the poet creating his cold but lasting monument to the same end). The virtue of Shakespeare's literal pen (the instrument he is writing with) is to provide the text that will live wherever words are spoken, by contrast with his figurative pen (his will, his spear, always a notable feature in this poet's green field of discourse), which creates monuments less lasting than bronze, albeit less cold as well.

The young man of the Sonnets, addressed in vain but memorialized triumphantly, is a figure of the limits of procreative poetry, I would suggest; and in this he is anticipated by Horace's envoy to his first book of Epistles (I.xx), where the near equivalency of *liber*, book, and *liber*, young man (distinguished only by the length of the first vowel) generates a series of witty—and, I would suggest, rather Shakespearean—variations. The poet's book is now impatient to leave home and venture out into the world; leaving the security of locked bookcases and polished with pumice (like boys and books alike, when offered for sale), it will have a brief life before being remaindered and used as a primer in the provinces; later, perhaps, it will regain its lost audience and will be able to record and immortalize its author's name and history. Just so does Shakespeare half-identify himself as his work's only begetter (a tautology in the realm of literal begetting, a palpable falsehood in that of poetic creation), and measure the distance between warm desire and cold monumentalizing.

English offers a comparable pun on sun and son, with memorable examples from Shakespeare and Milton, as well as virtually every other poet in the great tradition. Milton's anxious invocation of holy light in *Paradise Lost*, with its uncertainty over expressing divine paternity in human terms, looks forward to the extended treatment of this most problematic of metaphors in *Paradise Regained*. Most concisely, however, Ben Jonson

offers a poignant example of the corollary to Horace's and Shakespeare's treatment of poetry as procreation, when he writes of the death of his first son. If poems are cold monuments indeed, compared to living offspring, and products as much of tradition as of the individual talent, what then can one say of one's dead child, Benjamin jr? Only that "here doth lie / Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry." More truly his than any non-metaphorical piece of poetry, and colder.

University of Massachusetts
Amherst

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Living Temples and Extemporal Song*

FRANCES M. MALPEZZI

In "Cold Monuments" John Russell Brown reminds us of the extraordinary complexity of poetic endeavor. While it may take a village to raise a child, bringing a poem to fruition and keeping it alive involves many people transcending and uniting past, present, and future. Brown argues the genesis of a poem is more than an isolated act of one individual but rather impacted by all the writer has read, seen, heard, and experienced as the poet draws upon the memory of literary works by others, upon mundane speech heard in daily routine of life, and upon an accumulation of experiences in which many have participated. After the parturient poet delivers this synthesis of past and present, of self and other, the creation only remains alive as it is touched by the vivifying spark of the reader's imagination. Brown posits almost a symbiotic relationship between poem and audience. For its present and future life the poem depends upon the imaginative mind of the reader.

While he markedly demonstrates his point through the example of poets writing for the theater and the theater company that brings the play to life, he shows the applicability of his remarks to non-dramatic poetry as well. Focusing on those whose special concern is the preservation of the mutable, in whose living lines the physical and spiritual beauty of a beloved mortal could endure for the short time of the human continuum, Brown argues such poems would remain but cold monuments entombing decayed remains were it not for the reader whose imaginative response resurrects and transpires the poem's subject beyond the ephemeral. If the young man

---

*Reference: John Russell Brown, "Cold Monuments: Three Accounts of the Reception of Poetry," *Connotations* 9.1 (1999/2000): 34-42 .

of Shakespeare's sonnets or the Elizabeth of *Amoretti* or any other figure celebrated in countless paeans are to *live* in powerful rhyme, the reader must resuscitate them.

Using a different poetic model than Brown's, I would suggest an added dimension by factoring in the divine in the genesis and reception of poetry and looking at those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century devotional poets who saw their works not as monumental tributes to the mutable but rather as living temples for the incarnation, indwelling, and celebration of the immutable. For writers like Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan, for example, who believed a supernatural force lifted them beyond the limits of mortal self, the genesis of a poem subsumes the divine as well as human experience. Brown notes that Shakespeare in acknowledging his muse of fire and Milton in calling upon a heavenly muse to illumine and support him recognize they are not the sole progenitors of their poems. Yet in terms of the genesis and reception of poetry the implications of such invocations extend beyond the conventional and are even more far-reaching than Brown has suggested. Poets following in the footsteps of the poet-protagonist of *L'Uranie*, the work of the French Huguenot poet, Guillaume Salluste, Sieur du Bartas, believe God is the ultimate author of their verse and poems are his instruments in leading members of the Church Militant to membership in the Church Triumphant. For these poets the realm of critical reception of their work transcends the sublunary: God is the ultimate judge of their lines and life as his Word directs and patterns their words. Moreover, like David's psalms and that translation by Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke praised by Donne, verse that sings the highest matter in the noblest form tunes the audience and brings a spiritual salubrity that ultimately facilitates their incorporation into the divine harmony of extemporal song. For these poets, the effect they have on their audience is inextricably linked with the audience's and their own salvation. Their goal is not simply to give life to a mutable love preserved in poetry but to lead their readers and ultimately themselves to eternal life as they seek for their reward not a vile crown of frail bays rejected by the speaker in Donne's *La Corona* but the crown of glory purchased by Christ's thorny crown. The fame they desire is not earthly but rather that of which Phoebus speaks in Milton's *Lycidas*, the one pronounced by the eternal judge.

A poet deemed worthy by such a divine critic believes he can expect an eternal reward for his poetic endeavors because he is God's instrument in effecting the spiritual salvation of his readers. Nine-voiced and wearing a seven-fold crown, Du Bartas' Urania resounds the poet's responsibility to the reader, especially making clear that poetry has the power to imprint the poet's good or evil on the reader's soul (ll. 89-96). Josuah Sylvester, one of Du Bartas' English translators, uses the image of the seal and sealing wax to convey the impression the poet makes on his reader. The Preface to Crashaw's *Steps to the Temple* claims that both Augustine and Crashaw believed "every foot in a high-borne verse, might helpe to measure the soule into that better world" (75). And one might well look to the example of Vaughan's "The Match" as it responds to Herbert's "Obedience" to gain insight into the way the poet can be seen as responsible for the spiritual conversion of his audience.

While I would not disagree with Brown that the reader's imagination is necessary for the poem to have continued life, I would suggest that for a number of poets the relationship between reader and poem is even more complex when the spiritual dimension is added. Moreover, poem as monument and poem as temple are but two models for poetry; given the range of what poetry actually does, one might want to consider the applicability of Brown's comments to numerous other models.

Perhaps Brown's most salient point focuses on the consequences for the critic whose task it is to extend the life of the poem. He argues the critic must engage in the detailed analysis of the New Criticism, attending to the poem's language, structure, music, and texture. Yet the critical task, he asserts, does not stop there but extends to understanding the historical context of the poem's genesis. For poets whose poems were designed to be living temples this must mean understanding their aesthetic, recognizing the salvific mission of the poetic vocation for them was as serious as the ministerial. It also must mean understanding something of the history of religion in a more comprehensive way than we have generally applied to literature. While it is important to recognize whether Donne's leanings were Catholic or Protestant or to determine Milton's theological stance, for example, it is also important to understand how Donne, Herbert, Herrick, Vaughan, Crashaw, or Milton conform to the definition of *homo*

religiosus by Mircea Eliade. Eliade argues that the fundamental orientation of the religious person is sacred rather than secular or profane:

> Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, *homo religiosus* always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He further believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious—that is, participates in reality. . . . By reactualizing sacred history, by imitating the divine behavior, man puts and keeps himself close to the gods—that is, in the real and significant. (202)

That transcendent reality of the sacred is manifest in the world and sanctifies that world, that sacred history can and must be reactualized is the core of devotional poetry. The principal events of sacred experience, especially those in Scripture are repeatable and accessible to humanity: "Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring" as Herbert asserts in "The H. Scriptures. II" (l. 11). The poem as reactualization of sacred time and sacred space and the poem as hierophantic experience revealing the deity connect the reader to sacred reality.

Finally Brown argues that because the critic keeps the poem alive, we must understand ourselves and our world. Criticism, he posits, must "relate to present-day lived experience" or it will "fall out of touch with a poem's present life." This is perhaps the most suggestive of his comments because it has ramifications not only for the work of the critic but for the way we train students of literature. What are the curricular implications here for students of literature? If experiential, reader-response criticism calls for studying the spirit of the present age: how do we go about preparing our students to do this and providing them with the necessary tools for such exploration of the poem's and their present life? If Brown begins by reminding us of the complexity of creative endeavor, he concludes by broaching the equally demanding and varied work of criticism and at least implicitly suggesting the challenge of preparing those who will be engaged in this activity.

Arkansas State University

WORKS CITED

Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959.

The Complete Poetry of John Donne. Ed. John T. Shawcross . Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

The Poems English, Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw. Ed. L. C. Martin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

The Works of George Herbert. Ed. F. E. Hutchinson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945.

The Works of Guillaume De Salluste Sieur DuBartas. Eds. Urban Tigner Holmes Jr., John Coriden Lyons, and Robert White Linker. Vol. 2. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1938.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Cold Monuments Animated: A Receptive Response to John Russell Brown*

EYNEL WARDI

J. R. Brown's contribution to the *Connotations* symposium on "Poetry as Procreation" was an animated and animating paper on the reception of poetry. His choice of topic, as the paper demonstrates, was guided by a belief that poetry has no life of its own, outside of people's imaginations, and so the advent of a poem as a living thing is effected in the reader's more or less active imaginative response. Or, as Brown suggests, drawing on the paradigmatic case of the theatre, a poem's actual realization takes place in the event of its "performance" in the individual reader's mind. Now from this perspective, to talk about poetry as "procreation" is inadequate, because it is to attribute the life of a poem exclusively to the poet, a fallacy that is characteristic of many hubris-stricken poets who, to Brown's obvious indignation, seem to forget whom they are writing for—and *with*. For Brown, "procreation" is only a metaphor, and an inappropriate one at that, disregarding as it does the collective, cultural and public, aspect of poetry and the multiplicity of agents involved in giving life to it over time. "Giving life" is, indeed, the more precise, almost literal, term for what Brown seeks to emphasize. Although his "three accounts of the reception of poetry" also correspond to the generative issue signified by "procreation," his main concern seems to be with the *animation* of poems; with how the "monuments" into which they cool after the passionate imaginative processes that generate them subside are re-animated in and through the reader's creative response.

---

*Reference: John Russell Brown, "Cold Monuments: Three Accounts of the Reception of Poetry," *Connotations* 9.1 (1999/2000): 34-42 .

As a reader, I like Brown's approach, because it centers on my own experience of literary texts, which is, quite frankly, what matters to me the most. I share the view that poetic meaning is first and foremost a matter of subjective, experiential significance, and I am happy to lay claim to my share of responsibility in its creation—or simply *my share in it*. When I read a poem, it is mine! It is intimately mine, in a way, even if my interpretation of it is completely unoriginal. Borges's story about Pierre Menard *The Author of Don Quixote*, who actually re-writes—rather than copies—the original *Don Quixote* word by word, epitomizes this poetics of intimacy (or cannibalism) through an illuminating hyperbole. However, from within this reader-oriented perspective, the diminution of the role of the author in Brown's account seems to me to overlook the interactive, mutual and intersubjective aspect of poetic animation, which I experience as essential to the reading process. Poems animate us in as much as we animate them, largely because they embody something of the poet's spirit in them that moves us. And as spirits are of the essence here (when speaking of animation and of poetic metaphors that, like Keats's Grecian urn, "tease us out of thought" with ontological ambiguities), let me illustrate my point by reference to the haunted metaphors of animation to which Brown alludes.

To make his point about the audience's role as "at least part-creators of a play's life" and possibly as "responsible for the 'best' of it," Brown emphasizes the relatively minor role of (bad? Elizabethan?) actors as conceived by Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who defines them as mere "*shadows*," meaning (says Brown), "imitations, reflections, portraits, shapes, not creatures with real life; perhaps they are like phantoms, for that, too, was an Elizabethan meaning of the word." The conception of the actors as imitations, reflections and portraits, coupled with their definition, in *Henry V*, as "*ciphers*," answers the question regarding their role in Brown's comparison, mediated by Shakespeare's, between the theatrical and the poetic performance. The actors, who mediate between the text of the play and the audience in the theatre, correspond to the poetic text, not to the reader; they figure as a layer in the representational structure of the poem rather than as interpreting agents, or they simply stand for

the words of the poem. On the other hand, as a metaphor for the words of the poem (or its images), the actors foreground that active aspect of the poem which animates us, attributing to the poem an effective agency that acts on our imagination. Thus, the comparison with theatrical performance foregrounds the interactive dynamics at work in poetic reception, the essence of which is, quite simply, that we respond to the poem because it speaks to us. It speaks to us in "cipher" which it invites us to decipher; in *'characters'* that are 'nonentities' and 'mere nothings' (*OED* "cipher"), just like the "airy nothing[s]" of the imagination to which, still according to Theseus (in his earlier, proverbial account of the poet), the poet gives "a local habitation and a name" in his fictional world; and through the "shapes" of "things unknown" which, says Brown, being more or less synonymous with the "shadows" that actors are, require a reader's response to give them living substance.

But the poetic text also needs an author, or at least the spirit of one, to move the reader to animate it. The mutual animation of text and reader could not take place without the poet's presence in the poem—as a ghost, to be sure, but nonetheless a present one, haunting its "local habitation" or inhabiting its "cold monument." Evidence for such a presence is to be found in Shakespeare's Sonnet 107. The poem is a "monument" for the poet's lover, and as such, as Brown says, "exists only as an inscribed block of stone or piece of parchment" until the reader—first the lover and then others—comes to "find" it and realize its commemorative function. But the monument—first a "tomb" and then (when found) an "effigy"—will at no point in the sonnet give life to the lover (other than as a reader); the one who is to "live in this poor rhyme" is the poet, to whom death "subscribe[s]" ('submits,' 'yields,' 'gives in,' 'signs away' or 'yields up'[*OED*] his power), overcome by his triumphant rhyme. And how does the poet live in his rhyme? As a spirit, to be sure, but, in Sonnet 81, at least, one which can actually animate the reader and, by pneumatic extension, also the lover.

> The earth can yield me but a common grave,
> When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,

> Which eyes not yet created shall o'erread,
> And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
> When all the breathers of this world are dead.
> You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—
> Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

Here, by contrast to Sonnet 107, the lover does get to be resurrected from the monument-tomb that is the poem thanks to the transference of the poet's animating breath, or spirit. While at first he is merely "*entombed* in men's *eyes*" that "o'erread" the inscription on his "monument," in the final couplet the lover is revived. "You still shall live," the poet promises him, "in the *mouths* of men" who will breathe life into your nostrils, as it were, while 'rehearsing' this poem. The rehearsal will not be a mere repetition of the poem, such as might substantiate the monument and realize its commemorative function, but an actual re-enactment of the poetic process and of the thrust of the poet's subjectivity which animated it in the first place. Something of that subjectivity and its thrust is still alive and present in the poem, inscribed in its music, or some other trans-verbal forms of materiality, and waiting to be incorporated by the reader in the "oral" act of the poem's re-articulation. That something is embodied in the poet's "breath," which designates both his "spirit" and his "life," as well as his spectral aspect as spirit—"the type of things insubstantial, volatile or fleeting" (as in Shakespeare's Lucr. 212: "A dream, a breath, a froth of feeling joy"; *OED* 5a, 3c). For the poet's spirit is embodied in his "utterance" or "speech" (yet other senses of *breath*: *OED*, 9a), as are his synonymous and metonymic "will expressed in sound" (ibid.) and the feelings for his beloved that animate his "gentle verse." Indeed, such virtue has the poet's pen, that it makes us re-experience his gentleness for his beloved and his wish to prolong his presence, and thereby rekindle his own flame. That this is what the poem is all about is suggested by the structure of lines 5-8 of the sonnet. The parallelism in

> The earth can yield me but a common grave,
> Then you entombed in men's eyes shall lie

suggests the poet's disadvantage in terms of burial place compared to his lover, whom he intends to join in his improved lodgings in the following

line on the strength of that very parallelism: "my verse" in "your monument shall be my gentle verse" becomes another place (like "your monument" which is synonymous with 'your tomb'—the "eyes" where "you entombed . . . shall lie"), which the poet appropriates by way of the contrastive juxtaposition with "your monument." Thus, the squatting (in the lover's monument) is established as a *fact* so as to avoid the initial, less enticing *possibility*: "The earth can yield me but a common grave," so let me yield me a better one, our common resting place in my gentle verse. I will creep in there with you, and haunt your tomb till the end of days.

The reception theory emerging from this interpretation is far from suggesting that in articulating a poem, the reader simply reenacts the poet's experience, or that, as Riffataire suggested in his interpretation of Baudelaire's "Les chats," the competent reader's response is always already embodied in the text.[1] I fully agree with J. R. Brown that the reader brings his own subjective, private and cultural experience into his necessarily re-creative response to the poem; that "because each reader or audience member has an imagination that has been fuelled by an individual and particular life-experience, each will find a different experience when that imagination joins with the poet's and so brings a poem to new and unprecedented life" (42 above). What I am suggesting is that any meaningful subjective response to a text is prompted by the encounter in which identification with the poet's subjectivity takes place. That subjectivity is partly embodied in the poem: it is the libidinal and affective energies which are invested and inscribed in the language of the text. This intersubjective encounter is only the starting point, and may take the reader very far away in interpreting the poem, but it is nonetheless what stimulates him into response—if he submits to an experiential reading of the text, which, as Brown stresses, is essential to a good critical reading and to the reception of the "'true' quality" of a poem as meaningful to us. However original and creative our response may be, it is precisely the submission to the spirit in the poem—to the poet's call to relive his passions and thereby embody his spirit—that generates our animated subjective response to it. This is even clearer in the similarly interactive case of still life drawing, where the more intense one's objective concentration on the object, the more intimately subjective is one's response to it. Paradoxically, it is the humility

of "look[ing] closely at [one's] object," as Wordsworth declared he was doing,[2] that enables one to appropriate it—as one's subjective property. At issue is the humility of submitting to an other which Keats wrote about in his sonnet about re-reading *King Lear*, where he "picture[s] himself as ready to 'burn through' its "fierce dispute / Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay" and so "humbly [to] assay / The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit" (ll. 5-8, in Brown). That this humility is in no way self-annihilating or uncreative is made very clear in Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," where what "stout Cortez," the metaphorical reader of Homer's reader (Chapman), sees from the "peak in Darien" is so new, that none of his men nor even Keats himself can envision it. All we get is a sense of the unimaginable vastness of its scope, through the metonymical image of Cortez's "eagle eyes" reflected in the men's as they "Looked at each other with a wild surmise."

As for Keats's "Grecian Urn," it is quite clear to me that without the ghost which haunts this ambiguous vessel, the "cold pastoral" inscribed on it would remain as cold as the ashes that it surely contains. The present missed between the "not yet" and the "never more" in this "*still* unravished" monument is the very reason why ghosts haunt the tombs of the dead and the lives of the living, whose breath they sometimes venture to possess. Between the anticipated moment and the missed one is desire, "haunt[ing] about" the "leaf fringed" urn that is both a tomb and monument, animating the writings we read and our readings alike.

The Hebrew University
Jerusalem

NOTES

[1]See Michael Riffaterre, "Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's 'Les Chats,'" *Yale French Studies* 36-37 (1966): 200-42.

[2]The 1802 "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" is quoted from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., gen. ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Norton, 1987) 1386.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

The Mysterious Genesis of *Paradise Lost*

DONALD CHENEY

A poem or any other product of mental labor (such as this essay) naturally lends itself to procreative metaphors. It seems to have dwelled—or to give promise of being about to have dwelled—within us for months, first as little more than an anxious gleam in its parent's eye, a promise expressed genially with little forethought to its implications, then gathering mass and energy (figuratively in the mind, or more literally in the computer's womb) as months wear on and the deadline approaches, and finally thrusting itself forth into a potentially hostile environment with a violent peristalsis that belies its own sense of vulnerability. And once the child is born, parents and friends—authors and readers—cluster round and speculate on the origins of its features. Behind this harmless exercise in identifying family traits lies a more somber awareness that the dead live on in the genetic markings of the living: *non omnis moriar*, not all of me will perish if I have been productive.

Of course, there are inconsistencies or paradoxes inherent in this ruling metaphor when applied to poetry. Most notably, it is usually a male poet who gives birth, and he is likely to be rather vague as to the means by which the fetus was engendered in his male womb. Perhaps it was one of the Muses, daughters of Jove and Memory, who entered his breast or whispered in his ear; perhaps he was overborne by the literary tradition, generic constraints, or the influence of some prior artist. Donald W. Foster has recently reminded us that it was customary in the early modern period for printers to refer to the author himself as the "onlie begetter" of his poems; but it is hardly surprising that generations of readers tried to take this phrase, when applied to Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as pointing instead to the young man who is supposed to have inspired at least some of them.[1]

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debcheney00901.htm>.

When we learn from Foster that the mysterious Master W. H. is most likely only Master W. SH., with the 'S' having dropped out of the forme, we may feel somewhat dismayed by the thought that not only these poems but perhaps all our declarations and analyses of love are equally self-engendered, equally solipsistic projections. But I am afraid that this insight must have been quite congenial to a Shakespeare who so delighted in questioning the conventions of his stage, turning his characters' soliloquies into fantasies of self-representation and consequent self-delusion rather than conventional transmissions of fact.

As heir to the multifarious richnesses of the English Renaissance, John Milton inherited his predecessors' self-conscious skepticism about the transparency of language. In "Il Penseroso," he aspires to hear "the Muses in a ring, / Ay round about Jove's altar sing" (47-48), and presents a portrait of the poet as relatively passive in receiving, transmitting, and adding to the tradition—'authorship' here in its presumed derivation from *augeo, auctus*, augment.[2] The tradition of choral song he invokes is conspicuously rooted in specific writings by his Elizabethan predecessors: in his project of augmentation, the melancholy Penseroso would "raise Musaeus from his bower" (104), as Marlowe had done in his unfinished *Hero and Leander*, and "call up him that left half-told / The story of Cambuscan bold" (109-10)—thereby recalling both Chaucer whose Squire's tale was broken off, and Spenser who finished that tale but left his own half-told after six books of *The Faerie Queene*. The conclusion to "Il Penseroso" is similarly intertextual: "These pleasures Melancholy give, / And I with thee will choose to live." As editors have noted, the endings of both of Milton's paired poems echo the proposal of Marlowe's passionate shepherd, as well as Ralegh's and other poets' responses to it.

These early poems show Milton flirting with the conventional Muses of Elizabethan poetry (whom he chooses to name Mirth and Melancholy, though he glances as well at their classical functions and categories), but stopping well short of a commitment to either or any of them. These poems are 'masterpieces' chiefly in the earlier, literal sense of apprentice works that demonstrate the young artist's mastery of his craft and assimilation of the lessons of his masters. I begin by citing them because I want to

consider an elaboration of this same tendency toward polysemous intertextuality in Milton's later and far darker epic.

Paradise Lost is at once a retelling of Genesis and a rehearsing—with passionate urgency—of the poet's sense of his origins and of his claims to originality. If we look at a few familiar moments in the poem, under the rubric of "Poetry as Procreation," I think we can gain a fresh perspective on Milton's brooding treatment of poetic creativity. Consider, for instance, his proposal to pursue "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (1.16). Modern editors note that Milton "ironically paraphrases," as both Hughes and Fowler put it,[3] the opening of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, promising "Cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima" (1.2), and explain the passage by reference to 9.28-31, where Milton disparages the traditional subject matter of epic as

> Wars, hitherto the only Argument
> Heroic deem'd, chief maistry to dissect
> With long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights
> In Battles feign'd . . . .

Their explanation is that Milton is mocking Ariosto's claim to originality, disparaging both the traditional matter of epic, warfare, and the 'tinsel Trappings' of romance, in favor of the "better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic martyrdom" (31-32) his predecessors had left unsung.

Yet, while it is true that Milton's poem *praises* patience, and looks forward to Christ's passion to redeem the Fall, it is a bit of a stretch to claim that this is his Subject. If we recall the context of Ariosto's presentation of his own subject, we observe that he too explicitly breaks with the Virgilian epic matter, by talking not of Arms and the Man, but of men and women, wars and loves (1.1)—in fact, of something very close to this allegedly unattempted subject of Milton's own poem. In short, then, the echo of Ariosto at the opening of Book 1 suggests that the story of Adam's Fall, like that of Orlando's love-madness (and the mortal fury of Seneca's Hercules, recalled by Ariosto's choice of title), is—or at least risks turning into—a love tragedy, the story of a man driven to fatal distraction by love. When the poet aspires to soar in adventurous song but fears he is doomed

to fall, fears that "an age too late, or cold / Climate, or Years [may] damp my intended wing / Deprest" (9.44-46), we can recognize parallels between the poet and his fallen protagonists, between his own ambitious project and the causes of their falls.

These parallels are clearly present from the opening lines of the poem, though they become more explicit in the invocations to later books. The failure of the Commonwealth, and his own personal blindness, are understood from the start to be signs of the poet's apparent exclusion from divine favor and illumination, though they may also be interpreted *in bono* as evidence of his role—like Moses —to teach the new children of Israel, and—like other blind bards such as Homer or Tiresias—to testify to a truth the sighted cannot perceive. Invoking a Heavenly Muse superior to those of the benighted gentiles, he identifies her knowledge with the creative power of God:

> Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
> Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
> And mad'st it pregnant . . . . (1.19-22)

These lines address—and if anything, complicate further—the confusion of roles that I spoke of earlier as being inherent to the metaphor of poetic procreation. A bird sits brooding on a fertilized egg, she doesn't make it pregnant by virtue of her brooding; incubation is not insemination. If the dove-like aspect of God's creativity—easily recognized here by virtue of the conventional image of the Holy Spirit—is presented as working in a different manner than with other winged creatures, Milton is calling attention to this disparity. Fowler notes that this is "not a mixed metaphor, but a deliberate allusion to the Hermetic doctrine that God is both masculine and feminine."[4] I would say instead that it is a deliberately mixed metaphor *because* it alludes to this doctrine and invites us to consider its singularity. Simultaneously, too, it alludes to other creation myths which derive the earth from an egg, and to the visual art of the period which gives an egg-shaped mass to depictions of chaos. Most pertinently of all, Fowler

notes (ibid.) a simile developed by Sylvester in his translation of Du Bartas' hexaemeral epic:

> As a good Wit . . . on his Book still muses:
> . . . Or, as a Hen that fain would hatch a Brood,
> . . . Even in such sort seemed the Spirit Eternall
> To brood upon this Gulf.

Milton corrects Sylvester, that is, by insisting that this Spirit is not just hatching a brood that was engendered by another, but is engendering it him- and herself. And musing on his own book, Milton requires the aid of that same Spirit as his Muse and declines to presume a similarity in brooding.

But again, here as with the Ariosto parallel mentioned earlier, Milton is not simply providing an ironic parody that marks his difference from the other poet. Silvester himself had distinguished the good Wit that muses and the hen that really does brood from the Spirit Eternal that only *seemed* to brood. Milton's revision of the earlier play on brooding and breeding brings into play the resonance that results from the two senses of 'brood'. From the darkness of his blindness and failure, the poet broods on the chaos of his fallen world and prays to have his darkness illumined, his lowness raised and supported, so that he too can give birth to an order that imitates and confirms God's. Like the penseroso earlier, he calls for help that he cannot be sure Providence will supply. The tone of these lines is sombre and anxious, and owes much, I think, to the poet's mastery of the dramatic effects achieved by the soliloquies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It prepares us, of course, for the more fully developed appeal to "holy Light" that will come at the opening of Book 3 when the poet aspires to move from Hell to Heaven, from fallen to unfallen perspectives.

Milton is quick to insist from the outset on his awareness of the anxieties that a skeptical reader might express in approaching a work that presumes to "justify the ways of God to men"—as if such ways either needed justification or indeed *could* be justified by reason, measured by rational standards, rather than taken on faith. Andrew Marvell's dedicatory poem

(added to the second edition) expresses the fear that "the poet blind, yet bold" might

> ruin . . .
> The sacred truths to fable and old song
> (So Sampson groped the Temple's post in spite)
> The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight. (1-10)

The point of Marvell's wit here depends on our recognition that this is of course a misleading characterization of Samson's story, to the degree that his destruction of Dagon's temple was divinely willed rather than a simple act of vengeful spite, while at the same time knowing that the blind Milton had indeed already turned the story into a tragedy in which personal motivation was bound to take precedence over divine will.

It is not always easy to separate sacred truth from fable in the stories of the Hebrew Bible; Milton is typically drawn to the harder cases like those of Adam or Samson. An instance that has proved especially difficult for modern readers occurs in the catalogue of Fallen Angels in Book 1, which concludes with the lewd and gross Belial, who may owe his pride of placement to his resembling the cavaliers of Milton's day:

> . . . when night
> Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
> Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.
> Witness the streets of Sodom, and that night
> In Gibeah, when the hospitable door
> Exposed a matron to avoid worse rape. (1.500-05)

What is most notable about this passage is its conflation of two stories of forbidden lust and violated hospitality. The more familiar, and somewhat less difficult story, is that of Lot and his angelic guests in Genesis 19: the Sodomites demand that Lot give them his guests "that we may know them" but like a good host Lot demurs and urges them to take his two virginal daughters instead. When they insist, they are blinded and God rains vengeance on the city, after providing for the escape of His faithful servant and family.

A partial parallel to this story of homosexual lust and violated hospitality occurs in Judges 19. There, an unnamed Levite comes with his concubine to the Benjamite town of Gibeah and receives hospitality from a single old man. When "certain sons of Belial" come to the old man's house and demand to know his guest, the old man offers instead his own virginal daughter along with his guest's concubine. The men take the concubine and fatally rape her; the Levite then takes her body home with him and divides it "together with her bones, into twelve pieces," and sends them to all the tribes of Israel. When the united Israelites fail to persuade the children of Benjamin to deliver up the guilty sons of Belial they kill thousands of Benjamites before finally making peace with them.

Milton's characterization of this latter story as affirming the sacredness of hospitality—the hospitable door exposing a matron to prevent worse rape—begs a number of issues that are raised here but not in the second story of Lot. We might well feel that we have to accept as a given that the Jewish Bible (and hence the Judaeo-Christian tradition) considers homosexual acts to be, ipso facto, 'worse' than heterosexual because unnatural; and the story of Lot implies, to be sure, that he was being a good host in offering his own daughters to the rapists rather than surrendering his guests. In Gibeah, however, the issue of hospitality scarcely arises, for the host surrenders his guest's 'matron' rather than one of his own women. This entire episode in the book of Judges is replete with confusing turns. The Levite is on the road in the first place because his concubine had "played the whore against him" by returning to her father's house and he has had to bring her back. The story turns into one of a breach in the tribes of Israel which must be repaired by the surviving Benjamites seizing wives among the daughters of Shiloh when the Israelites have sworn not to give them wives. No wonder, we might feel, that Milton wearily ends his catalogue of the demons at this point—"The rest were long to tell."

I would suggest that Milton's casual or partial summation of the incident in Gibeah, anticlimactically concluding a list of far more substantial diabolisms, introduces a leit-motif of misogynistic anxiety that will sound throughout the main action of *Paradise Lost*. Milton is wrestling with a tradition of the Fall whereby the guilt falls primarily on Eve. If we are ready

to accept without any qualms this casual exposure of a matron to avoid worse rape, it follows that we will feel that Adam too should have allowed Eve to die without taking death into himself. In Judges, the rape of the Levite's concubine is an incident rather like the rape of Helen, a *casus belli* that ignores the whorishness of the woman who must be brought home at whatever cost, to redeem male honor. The story makes only a token gesture toward sexual morality or hospitality while veering into larger issues of *realpolitik*, the compromised union of the tribes of Israel, at a time when, as the Book's final verse puts it, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

We might suggest that in creating his poem, Milton finds himself forced to mediate between two kinds of making: the Divine creation which proceeds without sexual difference, and human procreation which requires it. As we have seen, the opening lines of the poem address a Heavenly Muse that is feminine in manner, dovelike and brooding, but exists without sexual difference, impregnating as well as fostering—in short, that Holy Spirit whose existence as a separate person in the Trinity Milton had argued against in *De doctrina* i.6. Yet, although Milton tries his best to believe in a God that is One, his treatment of the Father and Son—a relationship that is essential to generating the War in Heaven and the consequent need for earth and mankind—repeatedly exposes the absence of the third figure in the nuclear heavenly household. Mary, the Mother of God, or at least the mother of God-made-Man, can come into existence only after, and as a consequence of, the Fall; and although we might expect Milton's Protestantism to ignore or downplay her role, she is conspicuously part of a feminine absence that resonates through the poem. The 'matron' in Gibeah who is exposed, violated, and dismissed so cavalierly in two lines of Book I anticipates the matronly aspect into which Eve will grow, as mother of us all; the Old Testament story even hints at the mystery of the Eucharist, since the distribution of her broken body will unite the twelve tribes of Israel, albeit in war. Her rape marks a gap in Milton's own argument that will only be made whole at the poem's end.

Milton begins his poem—as readers have widely recognized and variously described—with an acute sense of his own fallen state. He thrusts

himself and the reader into the middle of the fallen condition, aligning his (and our) first view of it with that of Satan and the other fallen angels. The poem's apparent empathy for the devil, at least in its opening books, has been too widely noted and debated to necessitate rehearsing here; whether or not Milton was of Satan's party, as Blake would claim, he clearly presents himself as sharing with the fallen angels a sense of darkness and estrangement from the divine. When he moves from Hell to Heaven at the beginning of Book 3, his hymn to "holy Light" is freighted with the sense of dark brooding that is willing a creativity that may not occur. He is the wakeful bird, the raped Philomel turned into the nightingale, who "Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid / Tunes her nocturnal note" (3.38-40). Yet, like the singer of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, he immediately goes on to declare that he is not a part of that fertile world that moves his harmonious numbers: "Thus with the year / Seasons return, but not to me returns / Day . . . / But cloud instead, and ever-during dark / Surrounds me . . ." (3.40-45).

Milton's invocation in Book 3 of the light of Heaven, "offspring of heaven first-born" but also the primal generative force itself, is matched by Satan's despairing and adversarial address to the same sun at the beginning of Book 4. The two monologues are tellingly different, but they link Satan and the poet in a common theme of estrangement, both of them echoing the famous opening soliloquy in *Richard III* where Richard both laments and celebrates his apartness from the royal sun of York, "determined to prove a villain" in the senses both of his willed subversion of the state and his being a victim of an external determinism as well. Although Milton differs from Satan in praying for atonement with the Almighty, he resembles him in his acute sense of estrangement.

Milton's difficulties in expressing this light "unblam'd" are embodied in the dramatic problems of the heavenly council in Book 3, which has disturbed many readers since it presents a divine Father whose foreknowledge of the Fall aggravates those questions of human free will that He is trying to answer for us. Readers are likely to feel that they have been left behind with the more intellectual of the fallen angels at the end of the infernal council in Book 2, reasoning high "Of providence, foreknowledge,

will and fate, / Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, / And [finding] no end, in wandering mazes lost" (2.559-61). Milton has further underscored this problem by presenting a pair of council scenes in adjacent books, one presumably bad and one good, but both of them directed by a single powerful chairman who has predetermined the outcome. At the end of the first Satan volunteers to visit earth, at the end of the second the Son volunteers something that seems dangerously, blasphemously similar, and like Satan confirms his authority by so doing.

The first books of *Paradise Lost*, then, dramatize a pair of fallen conditions, that of the angels which precedes and necessitates the creation and temptation of Adam and Eve and that of poet and reader whose knowledge will be the consequence of the poem's foreknown action. Milton's brooding on his personal abyss as well as on the mysterious confluence of motives in the story he is to tell engenders the poem we are reading; but the movement from Hell to Paradise and eastward from Eden accompanies that other fallen creature, Satan, and shares his burdens.

The principal figure of procreation in the first part of the poem appears at the end of Book 2, when Satan encounters Sin and Death at the gates of hell. Sin's birth from the head of Satan recalls that of Athene from the head of Zeus, traditionally compared by Christian writers to that of the Son of God from His Father. As an explicitly allegorical figure, Sin clearly recalls the milieu of *The Faerie Queene* and Errour in particular, whom the Red Cross Knight encounters at the beginning of his quest. Like Redcrosse, Satan at first recoils in horror from this monstrous female form, seeming "woman to the waist, and fair, / But [ending] foul in many a scaly fold / Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed / With mortal sting" (2.650-53). A figure of monstrous fecundity whose hell hounds surround her waist and creep in and out of her womb, she is a carefully developed elaboration of Spenser's Errour (*F.Q.*, 1.1.14-26). Once recognized, she is greeted by Satan as his "Dear Daughter"—dear too in the mortal price of his Sin—rather as Spenser's own creatures of darkness delight in their kinship; but we and the narrator are clearly meant to react with continuing horror at her aspect.

As Michael Lieb has shown in great detail,[5] Milton associates Satan throughout with images of perverse sexuality that contrast with the unfallen naturalism of Adam and Eve in the Garden, performing their "rites / Mysterious of connubial love" (4.742-43). I would add that the obvious derivation of Sin from Spenser's Errour serves to remind us that she stands not simply for another's sin but more generally for the condition of wandering that we experience as pilgrims or knights-errant in seeking illumination. Her folds voluminous are comparable to "Errours endlesse traine." Her birth from Satan's head reminds us that Errour too was a projection of the "little glooming light" of Redcrosse's virtue; and that Eve was the product of Adam's desire and of his own body. Sin is, then, a riddling, Sphinx-like figure of our divided nature, a 'sign' as Milton puts it, and one to be interpreted.

At the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, poet and reader respond with horror and loathing to figures of uncontrolled female desire, and in this they resemble Spenser's Knight of Holiness in the early stages of his quest. Like Adam, Redcrosse must fall to a fatal acceptance of his sexuality, flirt with Despair, and be educated to his mortal and redeemable identity. The first book of *The Faerie Queene* takes its hero from an initial misogyny to a readiness to accept and participate in a procreative readiness to be fruitful and multiply. Only after his strenuous recovery at the House of Holiness is Redcrosse ready to meet with Charissa and see her surrounded by her offspring, a redeemed vision of the horrific Errour with her misbegotten brood. Only then, after he has seen how the two are connected, can he go on to defeat the Dragon and win the maiden.

A similar education occurs in *Paradise Lost*. Most obviously, Adam himself falls (as Milton puts it) through an excessive or undiscriminating uxoriousness, despairs, and finally is atoned both with Eve and alongside her with the Deity. As matron, now, rather than concubine or mere help meet, Eve is revealed as a clarified figure of the female, purged of the misogyny found in the poem's earlier books. Indeed, as Michael sums up the message for her, the 'great good' that will come from her as a result of the Fall is "The great deliverance by her seed to come / (For by the woman's seed) on all mankind" (12.600-01). Michael's parenthetical (and

seemingly paradoxical) emphasis on "the woman's seed" here reminds us that mankind will be redeemed by a Man born of a virgin; phrased in this manner, it echoes and complements the mysterious genesis of earlier Creations and incarnations. The mystery of the Virgin Birth seems to impute a comparable power to Mary as Mother of God.

Both Milton's poem and Spenser's Legend of Holiness similarly educate narrator and reader as well as the protagonist, from initial misogynistic views of sexual difference which echo Protestant identification of the church of Rome with the Whore of Babylon, to a more nuanced Reformation of Christian values that emphasizes the wholeness of man's divided nature through the union of male and female. The ending of *Paradise Lost* carries the full weight of a romance conclusion that is also a beginning. Lovers are united, hand in hand, and their expulsion from Paradise is also a homesteading voyage eastward through an Eden of human possibilities. "The world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest, and providence their guide" (12.646-47). The place of rest is both that New World that these pilgrims can make their home in life, and the plot of earth to which their mortal bodies will return. Their "wandering steps and slow" represent an internalizing of Errour and Sin as the familiar process of rational progress.

As we examine the features of the poem that Milton has brought forth (brought forth, that is, in its canonical second edition), we can understand its genesis by observing its family resemblances. Like Virgil's epic and Spenser's projected moral anatomy, it is divided into twelve books, in the latter case completing a Spenserian tale left half-told; and as we have seen, it imitates in somewhat greater detail the pattern of sexual fall and regeneration seen in Spenser's twelve-canto Legend of Holiness, which can stand as a model for his unfinished larger work. Finally, we can see a significant trace, I think, of an earlier ancestor whom Spenser was attempting to overgo according to his friend Gabriel Harvey. We noted at the outset that Milton echoed Ariosto's promise of "Cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima." In pursuing "Things [the plural may be significant here] unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," Milton invites us to see how his poem both resembles *and* differs from Ariosto's. Like Ariosto, he gives

us a new kind of epic, his own answer to the chivalric romance, in which his hero is distracted from the path of virtue by his love of woman. But Ariosto's poem ends with a terrible irony: Orlando gets his senses back after Astolfo locates them on the moon, and he is able to get on with his life, no longer pursuing his impossible dream of winning Angelica's love. We know the rest of the tragic story from all those songs of Roland that have been told in prose and rhyme. By contrast, Milton affirms—as he had done elsewhere in his polemical writings—the possibility as well as the need for a fulfilling marriage. Adam does not learn to live without the faithless Eve, but falls with her just as he had earlier (we feel) fallen for her. This is indeed something that Ariosto had not attempted. Finally, we may recall that Ariosto's poem ends with a motto whose meaning and relevance critics continue to debate: *Pro bono malum*. This may be no more than the conventional lament of an underappreciated or underpaid poet who feels he has been treated badly; it may refer as well to the poem's radical denial of a romantic ending, since Orlando fails to get what readers would have wanted for him.[6] But although Milton does not allude directly to this motto, his positive ending, with its emphasis on what historians of ideas refer to as the paradox of the Fortunate Fall, suggests that he has reversed Ariosto's message to read *Pro malo bonum*, to call attention to the good that has come from the evil of the Fall, and specifically from the fruit—also *malum*[7]—of that forbidden tree. It is the birth of human nature as we know it—fallen but redeemable—that Milton has been pursuing; as he remarks so memorably in *Areopagitica*, "It was from out the rind of that one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the world." Here as in the poem, Milton is drawn to monstrous images to figure our origins; but it is out of this polymorphous chaos of impulses that the brooding poet has drawn order and presented us with a goodly child. The full mapping of this child's family resemblances remains an endless task, but an urgent one, for we cannot help wanting to locate our own fallen selves here.

University of Massachusetts
Amherst

NOTES

[1]"Master W.H., R.I.P," *PMLA* 102 (1987): 42-54.

[2]See Jacqueline T. Miller, *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1986) esp. 30-33.

[3] *Paradise Lost*, ed. M. Y. Hughes (Indianapolis and New York: Odyssey, 1962), and *The Poems of John Milton*, eds. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and Harlow: Longman, 1968).

[4]Fowler 461.

[5]*The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth & Regeneration in 'Paradise Lost'* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1970).

[6]The motto accompanies an emblem showing bees being smoked out of their hive by a peasant who wants their honey. We may recall Milton's comparison of Pandaemonium to a similar "straw-built Citadel" (1.773), with its conflation of Virgil, *Georgics* 4.149-227, and the completion of St. Peter's in 1636 by the Barberini Pope Urban VIII whose arms similarly featured bees.

[7]Lewis and Short (*Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1879) note a pun on the two words—identical except for a long first vowel in the word for apple and a short one in that for evil—in Plautus, *Amphitruo* 2.2.79, and also call attention to the proverb, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, from beginning to end, alluding to the Roman custom of beginning a meal with eggs and ending with apples—as we have done in this essay.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

Poetic Procreation in Edward Taylor's Meditations

URSULA BRUMM

Edward Taylor's poetry is a special case: its most important part are meditations of a Puritan clergyman put into poetic form as a mental exercise in preparation of administering the Lord's Supper. In that personal function they were not meant for publication and as a consequence remained unknown for more than 200 years. Yet their discovery in the 1930s occurred at a fortunate time: the recent revaluation of the English Metaphysical Poets had prepared literary critics for the appreciation of seventeenth-century religious poetry. Yet even here Taylor is special; his Meditations are not religious in the sense of a communication between a Christian poet and an audience of believers. They are theological in a highly professional and intellectual sense, meditations on dogmatic problems, the theological discourse between a biblical scholar and God, to whom he directs urgent appeals:

> It grieves me, Lord, my Fancy's rusty: rub
> And brighten't on an Angells Rubston sharp. (Med. II, 92, 1-2)

At the same time the biblical motto of these Meditations received a communicative pastorly function in the extended prose form of sermons preached by Taylor to his congregation before celebrating the Lord's Supper (A few of these sermons have been preserved).

The urge behind Taylor's meditative exercises is rooted in the Puritan conviction to take very serious the Protestant doctrine of justification according to which true belief, "saving faith" cannot be earned by human effort; it is a gift of God's Grace, which is provided by Christ's sacrifice and brings about conversion and regeneration in the elect. As sinful man

---

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debbrumm00901.htm>.

has lost the ability to do anything toward his salvation, evidences of this gift of "saving faith" which determines eternal life or eternal damnation are anxiously sought for. God's decision is irrevocable, yet election remains forever doubtful to the human being, and even if a pastor may consider himself a true believer, he feels bound to constantly renew his faith. Taylor's intensive meditating is an effort toward renewal; it is centered on the desire to approach an understanding of God's Grace by getting a full perception of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice which "purchased" redemption for sinful man.

An immigrant after the restoration of Charles II to the English throne, Edward Taylor arrived in New England in 1668 at the age of 24 (or perhaps 26). On completing his studies at Harvard in 1671 he was called as minister to the small settlement of Westfield at the Western frontier of the Massachusetts Bay Colony where for about 45 years he served his congregation. Taylor was a learned man, also a Puritan of strong convictions; he practised the strict rule of admitting only those who could give evidence of conversion to full church membership and to participation in the Lord's Supper. His wide range of interest and knowledge is evidenced by his poetry and a remarkable library which besides major theological works contained books on history, medicine, metallurgy, and botany. He also brought the 6-volume Folio edition of the *Magdeburg Centuries* to the Western frontier. As a Puritan minister he was college-educated and read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. At intervals of 4 to 6 weeks, he administered the Lord's Supper to his congregation. On these occasions from 1682 to 1725 he wrote 217 Meditations which he called "Preparatory Meditations before my Approach to the Lord's Supper. Chiefly upon the Doctrine preached upon the Day of administration" and collected them in two series. They were preserved in a manuscript which was discovered in the late 1930s in the Yale Library. Although difficult to modern readers in their dominant theological concern, they have elicited a considerable number of interpretations; they are now rightly considered a major opus of American poetry—which, however, could not influence or inspire American literature till our time. A complete edition of the Meditations appeared in 1960.[1]

Taylor's Meditations average from 7-12 stanzas (sometimes less, often more); in accordance with the sacred meaning of numbers which plays a significant role in the Meditations, the stanzas invariably have six lines (perfect number 6) of ten syllables (the sum of the first 4 numbers, Pythagoras's sacred tetractys). As the composition of the Meditations is not only an exercise in theological comprehension but an effort in the renewal and revitalization of faith they most often start with a confession of incomprehension, confusion or "dullness," and proceed to an understanding of its reasons, the Fall, Original sin, and natural depravity; next, and most important, is the reactivated comprehension of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, which enables the meditator to understand and receive God's grace, and results in the ability to "sing," that is, to praise God's glory and grace of granting "saving faith." In that sense, each of the Meditations contains the implicit substructure of poetic creation: only when the meditator has come to fully comprehend the nature and conditions of God's grace, the essence of Godhead, is he able to produce the poem: in the state of regeneration he is finally capable to perform an act of aesthetic procreation.

The successful completion of the meditative process is in the majority of Meditations expressed by the ability to "sing," or by playing or "tuning" a musical instrument like the bell, harp, trumpet, flute or virginal, quite often in reference to David and his psalms,[2] or by promises to praise, all of which is combined in the ending of Med. II, 42:

> My Soule shall sing Thanksgiving unto thee
> if thou wilt tune it to thy praise in mee.

Some Meditations begin with the poet's inability to respond to the overwhelming splendor of God's Glory, an inability successfully expressed in a stanza resplendent with playful self irony:

> When thy Bright Beams, my Lord, do strike mine Eye,
> Methinkes I then could truely Chide out right
> My Hide bound Soule that stands so niggardly
> That scarce a thought gets glorified by't.
> My Quaintest Metaphors are ragged Stuff,
> Making the Sun seem like a Mullipuff. (I ,22, 1-6)

While "Hide bound" in his sinfulness, he can only confess: "All Dull, my Lord, my Spirits flat, and dead" (II, 7)—"Dull, Dull, my Lord, my fancy dull I finde" (II, 131; also II, 12 and 69). The reason is man's depraved nature, the consequence of original sin: "Unclean, Unclean, My Lord, Undone, all vile, Yea all Defild" (II, 26) immediately addresses this sinfulness, which Taylor describes with a great variety of images of dirt, dung, filth and corruption. In the Puritan ritual of conversion, self-deprecation, even self-loathing is a necessary precondition of faith and conversion. The initial dullness may also be understood as an inability to find the proper words for the praise of God which cannot but lead to poetic failure—but this very inability finds persuasive poetic expression:

> My Lord, I fain would Praise thee Well but finde
> Impossibilities blocke up my pass.
> My tongue Wants Words to tell my thoughts, my Minde
> Wants thoughts to Comprehend thy Worth, alas!
> Thy Glory far Surmounts my thoughts, my thoughts
> Surmount my Words: Hence little Praise is brought.[3] (I, 34, 1-6)

In his effort to reach the deepest meaning of God's revelation Taylor intensely searched for and boldly linked biblical quotations and images of different kind or provenience, an effort which sometimes resulted in awkward poetic tinkering when theological meaning was more important to him than poetic polish and beauty. He was aware of aesthetic failures when he complained in Med. II, 82 (1-2):

> My tatter'd Fancy, and my ragged Rymes
> Teeme leaden Metaphors . . . .

Paradoxically, such admission of failure can produce wonderfully apt lines.

As all Meditations are meant to serve the preparation to the Lord's Supper, this sacrament in all the complexities of meaning controversially discussed by Protestant leaders is treated by Taylor in a variety of approaches. In the theological discourse of Med. II, 108 he rejects the conceptions of "Ubiquitarians," and of "Consubstantiation," and "Transubstantiation." In Med. II, 81 and 82 he is concerned with the

challenge the sacrament poses to reason: to accept the bread and wine of the Eucharist as body and blood of Christ: "What, feed on Human Flesh and Blood? Strange Mess!" Seen in a spatial sense, however, this becomes a metaphor: "This feeding signifies, that Faith in us / Feeds on this Fare . . . ." But for all these scruples, the Lord's Supper is for Taylor the most intimate spiritual communion with Christ, the ultimate mystery of life, death and eternal life. Meditation II, 80, 81, and 82 are all based on John 6:53: "Except you eate the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no Life in you" (II, 80 leaving out "and drink his blood"). Surprisingly, this does not belong to the relation of the Last Supper, but to Jesus addressing the skeptical Jews after the feeding of the five thousand and defining himself as the "living bread that came down from heaven" (6:51). Med. II, 80, leading up to the climax of a newborn "babe of Life" which "shall sing" is the only one that ends on a note of triumph in which the Meditations' generative process is made explicit by sexual imagery.

80. Meditation. Joh. 6.53. Except you
Eate the flesh of the Son of
Man, etc. ye have no Life in you.
6.1m [Mar.] 1707/08. Pub. ETG.

This Curious pearle, One Syllable, call'd LIFE,
That all things struggle t'keep, and we so prize
I'd with the Edge of sharpen'd sight (as knife)
My understanding sheath'th anatomize
But finde Life far too fine, I can not know't.
My sight too Dull; my knife's too blunt to do't.

And if you say, What then is Life? I say
I cannot tell you what it is, yet know
That Various kinds of Life lodg in my clay.
And ery kinde an Excellence doth show:
And yet the lowest sort so secret lies
I cannot finde it nor anatomize.

But here I finde, that all these kindes proove Stares
Whereon I do ascende to heaven to,
My Lord, thyselfe, and so do mock earths Snares
Those snick snarls, and thus my Soul Steps goe

From Vegetate to Sensitive thence trace
To Rationall, and thence to th'Life of Grace.

What though I know not what it is? I know,
It is too good to bee full known by any
Poor Perblinde man, that squints on things, although
It's Life, its quickening Life to very many,
Yea t'all th'Elect. It is a slip up bred
Of Godlike life, in graces garden bed.

Grace is the Pearle, the Mother Pearle of Pearles
In which this Pearle of Life is kirnell choice.
Christ dropt it in the Soule, which up it ferles
A Lignum Vitae's chip of Paradise.
Its Heart and Soule of Saving Grace outspred,
And can't be had till Grace be brought to bed.

The Soule's the Womb. Christ is the Spermodote
And Saving Grace the seed cast thereinto,
This Life's the principall in Graces Coate,
Making vitality in all things flow,
In Heavenly verdure brisking holily
With sharp ey'de peartness of Vivacity.

Dead Looks, and Wanness, all things on them weare,
If this Life Quickens not, Things Spirituall Dead.
The Image too of God is grown thrid bare
If this Choice Life be n't with Christ's body fed.
All outer lives dance on, in hellish wayes
Eternally, unless this Life out blaze.

Thou art, my Lord, the Well-spring of this life.
Oh! let this Life send Rivelets in my heart.
That I may by lifes streames in Holy Strife
Conquour that death, at whose dead Looks I start.
When of this Life my soule with Child doth spring
The Babe of Life swath'de up in Grace shall sing.

In answer to the question "What Then is Life?" (l. 7) Taylor starts with a comparison:

This Curious pearle. One Syllable call'd LIFE,
That all things struggle t'keep, and we so prize (l. 1-2).

"This Pearle . . . we prize": it is, of course, eternal life, "The pearl of great price," according to Matt. 13:45-46: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Christ's parable is the basis for Taylor's discussion of the pearl as eternal life which, of course, stands in a long tradition of pearl imagery in Christian mysticism from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century and beyond.

But at the beginning of this Meditation, the poet's understanding is "dull"; his attempt "to anatomize" life miscarries: "My sight too Dull; my knife's too blunt to do't" (6). Actually, a special kind of knife is introduced for the task: "The Edge,"[4] which is "a thin, sharp side of a blade" and also a pun on *adz*, a special knife to open a shell (much used on New England's shore); implicitly already here the oyster is introduced, in which the pearl is generated. However, before the image of the oyster is related to the womb the possibilities and forms of life are considered: The poet only knows that "various kinds of Life lodg in my clay,"[5] but even in natural human life, "the lowest sort so secret lies / I cannot find it nor anatomize" (11, 12). But then different degrees of life in nature's course can be distinguished:

> From Vegetate to Sensitive thence trace
> To Rationall, and thence to th' Life of Grace (17-18)

and "all these kindes proove Stares" (stares of astonishment as well as stairs) "Whereupon I do ascende to heaven" like the angels on Jacob's ladder (14)—as it refers, of course, to eternal life:

> It's Life, its quickening Life to very many,
> Yea t'all th'Elect. It is a slip up bred
> Of Godlike life, in graces garden bed . . . . (22-24)[6]

The second part of the poem, starting with stanza 5 returns to the pearl as grace in order to explain its spiritual role and meaning for eternal life. This "Pearl, the Mother Pearle of Pearles" (mother-of-pearl and the mother-pearl) is the Pearl of eternal Life, brought into existence by a "kirnell" dropped into the soul by Christ "the spermodote," and this seed is "A

Lignum Vitae chip of Paradise," a chip of wood from the cross (wood of life), signifying Christ's crucifixion which provides grace for the elect. The soul which after impregnation "ferles up" like a shell which has been pierced by a grain of sand—is the womb or oyster in which the pearl comes to life.

> Its Heart and Soule of Saving Grace outspred
> and can't be had till Grace be brought to bed. (29,30)

That this Grace has been "brought to bed" completes the sexual context. According to the interpretation of Canticles, Christ is bridegroom to his bride, the Church, which comprises the community of saints: on the marriage bed he is the sperm-giver to the oyster/womb/soul; he performs a spiritualized sexual act to generate the conversion of the elect which is accomplished in stanza 6:

> The Soule's the Womb, Christ is the Spermodote
> And Saving Grace the seed cast thereinto
> This Life's the principall in Graces Coate,
> Making vitality in all things flow. (31-33)

If this sounds daring, even shocking in a puritan meditation, we should remember that the comparison of pearl and human embryo is ancient lore. The equation of oyster-shell and womb, the grain of sand which penetrates the shell to produce the pearl and the sperm which creates the embryo is archetypal; it is recognized in many ancient cultures and establishes the meaning of the pearl as a life-creating and life-renewing force. As such it is also basic to the biblical role of the pearl as the kingdom of heaven.[7] Seed has a double meaning, the botanical and the human seed, the descendants; from God's covenant with "Abraham and his seed" the Puritans derived essential aspects of their covenant concept, admitting only the "seed," the children of church members, to baptism. "Grace's Coat" returns to the mother-of-pearl quality of the "Pearle," the shining coating of both pearl and shell, which makes it so precious. Yet "grace's coat" is also the piece of clothing which distinguishes the true believer, according to Christ's Parable Matt. 22:1-14. It is the "wedding garment" required

for the marriage feast and the kingdom of heaven.[8] It is basic to Taylor's conviction that the Lord's Supper can only be taken by converted, true believers, a conviction which he defended in an exchange of letters and treaties with a liberal colleague. At the same time, a "wedding garment" is the proper cloth for the birth and marriage images of this poem.

For all the Meditations' biblical foundations, there was also the lived life of Taylor's personal experience. The Records of Westfield Church, faithfully kept by Taylor and registering births, reveal that Taylor's wife at the date of Med. II, 80 was eight months pregnant,[9] so that Taylor was deeply concerned with the marvel of human procreation of life which results in the birth of a babe.[10] It should be added that stanza 6 stands out not only as the central section of the poem presenting its central theme and meaning but also as a singularly short stanza of only 39 words, when the average is from 49 to 52 words.

In contrast to the "vitality in all things," and "sharp ey'de peartness of Vivacity" which "Saving Grace" has brought about, stanza 7 lists the negative consequences of its absence. It is perhaps the least interesting stanza of the Meditation, and one may wonder whether Taylor added it for numerical reasons. For in this, as in most other Meditations a numerical system can be discovered which Taylor seems to have considered necessary to make his praise worthy of the Godhead, which is also defined in numbers. Key concepts are invariably presented in significant or holy numbers: in Med. II, 80 "Life" occurs 16 times (2 times 8, multiple of 4, sum of digits 7); the Meditation has 8 stanzas; "grace" occurs 8 times, soul 3 times. Counting the words in individual stanzas we get 49 (multiple of 7) in the first three stanzas as well as in the seventh, which refers back to them. The sum of words for the whole poem is 396 (3 for trinity, 9 its multiple, 6 a perfect number) it is the sum of 6 times 66.[11]

Finally, stanza 8 sums up the understanding reached and proclaims it as a confession of faith: "Thou art, my Lord, the Well-spring of this life" (in reference to John 4:14 "a well of water springing up into everlasting life"), adding the petition "Oh! let this Life send Rivulets in my heart," which raises the hope that hereby death is conquered. All of this—faith, petition and hope—amounts to the conviction:

When of this Life my soule with Child doth spring
The Babe of Life swath'd up in Grace shall sing.

The supreme spiritual stage is reached when the soul, impregnated by Christ, has given birth to a Babe which, wrapped up in Grace, is able to sing.

All of Taylor's Meditations are exercises in creative writing, in the "procreation" of meditative poetry, and, as we have seen in Med. II, 80 this may result in erotic, even sexual imagery. If this seems surprising in a Puritan poet and pastor we should remind ourselves that erotic thought and sensibility is an element in all religious feeling and worship. The Westminster Confession (New England Faith) speaks of "the seed of God" in the saint, the converted believer. Eroticism is part of the catholic tradition, of protestant pietism, and also of puritan faith.[12] In his late Meditations Taylor shows a preference for verses from Canticles (sometimes giving the Hebrew original for a word), displaying a marvelous ingenuity in spiritualizing their erotic images: the "two breasts" of the "Beautious Spouse," (II, 150); their "nibbles" and "spiritual milke" for Christ's "Spirituall Babe" are the two testaments which nourish the believer.

Lord put these nibbles then my mouth into
And suckle me therewith I humbly pray,
Then with this milk thy Spirituall Babe I'st grow . . . . (13-15)

Here is another babe to sing praise!—As the ability to sing is reached at the very end of the meditative effort, the progression toward it which the Meditation describes can only then be composed in a state of renewed faith. The text of the Meditation should therefore be considered a reviewing, a retelling after the fact. Taylor's demonstration of the "procreation" of poetry is circular: the end is also the beginning. Yet in a sense this is true for all aesthetic creation; a successful poem is the end-result of a mental effort; by congratulating himself on the ability to sing, Taylor celebrated God and also the success of his meditative labor.

Although characteristic in their theological significance, Taylor's poems in their own way fulfill an archetypal scheme of poetic procreation in that

they proceed from a theme or "memory" to scrutiny and examination, leading to a comprehension which achieves aesthetic form. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper celebrating the mysterious communion with the Son of God in his sacrificial death—concerned with the mystery of life, death, and granting the participant eternal life—for Taylor provided the ultimate challenge, a test for his faith as well as his creative power as a poet. Focussed on the all-important achievement of regeneration, the Meditations also re-enact the archetypal rite of initiation which compels frail humanity to descend to the depth of a flawed self, so that after relentless purges he may attain purification and redemption.

Freie Universität Berlin

NOTES

[1]*The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale UP, 1960).

[2]Taylor wrote metrical paraphrases for the singing of Psalms, cf. Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, "Edward Taylor's Metrical Paraphrases of the Psalms," *AL* 48 (1976/77): 455-70.

[3]The beginning "I fain would praise thee" with slight variations is used also as a beginning in I, 43; II, 6; II, 74 and II, 106.

[4]The Edge's/adz's "sharpen'd Sight" (l. 3) receives a negative contrast in "Poor Perblinde man, that squints on things" (l. 21).

[5]Taylor uses "kinds" and "kindes" three times in this Meditation on "Life"; also in the related Med. II, 89: "All kinds of things did from its belly leap." One may suspect that he knew the German *Kind* and uses his *kinde* for a pun.

[6]There are two biblical and meaningful references in these lines: 1 Cor. 15:45 "The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." Also in line 38: "If the Life quickens not . . ."; "bred" = bread refers to John 6:51 (Christ calls himself "the living bread") but also puns on breed, bred as well as braid = arch woven into strands, plait.

[7]Cf. "Perle" in Manfred Lurker, *Wörterbuch biblischer Bilder und Symbole* (München: Kösel, 1987) and "Pearl" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987): "In many archaic cultures, the marine shell, because of its appearance, is associated with the female genitalia, and the pearl is believed to be both the sacred product and the emblem of the female generative power. The pearl thus symbolizes both the life that is created and the mysterious power that begets life. . . . It is through

this connection with feminine generative power that the pearl becomes a symbol of regeneration and rebirth as well."

[8]In this parable Christ defines the Kingdom of Heaven as "a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." His servants are several times sent out without finding anybody willing to come. Finally on the highways they find "both good and bad." When the king at the feast sees a man "which had not on a wedding garment," He scolds the man and tells his servants "Bind him hand and foot and take him away and cast him unto outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."

[9]Thomas M. Davis, *A Reading of Edward Taylor* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992) 176.

[10]II, 89, written after the birth of a son, begins with "Birth" in the first line followed by "womb," "cradle," "Midwife Song," "Travail," "bare (bear)," "big-bellied," "Infant born," as well as "All Kinds of things did from its belly leape."

[11]Karen Gordon Grube, "The 'Secret Sweet Mystery' of Numbers in Edward Taylor's Meditation 80, Second Series," *EAL* 13 (1978/79): 231-37, and Ursula Brumm, "'Tuning' the Song of Praise: Observations on the Use of Numbers in Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations*," *EAL* 17 (1982): 103-18. Taylor's quotation of the "secret sweet mystery" of the "elected number seven" occurs suitably in Med. II, 21 (3 times 7).

[12]Karl Keller discusses eroticism in Taylor's work and Calvin's writing in "The Rev. Mr. Edward Taylor's Bawdry," *NEQ* 43 (1970): 398-99.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

A Visitation of Kipling's Daemon?

M. M. MAHOOD

Like Longfellow's infant daughter, Kipling, when he is good, is very, very good, but when he is bad, he is *horrid*: the loud jingoist of Max Beerbohm's parodies and caricatures. This disparity between Kipling the hooligan and Kipling the spellbinder is felt by every reader of his short stories—one critic even titles his study *The Good Kipling*[1] and nowhere is it more marked than in the collection he assembled in 1904 under the title of *Traffics and Discoveries*. In the first half-dozen stories of this volume it is difficult to recognise the author of *Kim*, published only three years earlier. Some have the Boer War as their setting, which give the author the chance to trundle out a whole barrow-load of national, racial, and political prejudices. Interspersed with these are the Heavenly Larks, embarrassing practical jokes perpetrated or related by Petty Officer Pyecroft, an Edwardian card if ever there was one. And there is worse to come. The centrepiece of the volume, and according to the writer the chief reason for its publication, is the reprint of a long Utopian vision of an England made unified and formidable by peacetime conscription.

Few readers today, I imagine, get to the end of "The Army of a Dream." Yet this inert lump is flanked by three of the finest tales that Kipling ever wrote. "Wireless," "They," and "Mrs Bathurst," all deal with matters of a tragic magnitude: a poet's hopes frustrated by impending death; the craving for the presence of a child who has died; two lovers destroyed by a casual deception on the part of one of them. Each tale shows great originality in the way it links its perennially tragic theme to some aspect of the young century's nascent technology—radio telegraphy, the automobile, the cinema. Above all, all three are told with that extraordinary,

---

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debmahood00901.htm>.

Ancient-Mariner-like compellingness which places Kipling, whatever faults academic critics may find with his work, among the great exponents of the short story for the common reader.

Kipling had his own explanation for the unevenness of a writer's output, whether his own or that of others. "*You* did not write *She*, you know; something wrote it through you!"[2] he told Rider Haggard. According to his unfinished autobiography, that something, which also created his own most successful work, was nothing less than daemonic possession: "When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey."[3] Such readiness to surrender to an irrational force is disconcerting, coming as it does from the writer most of us associate with the necessity of keeping one's head. But Kipling also insisted that, once the inspiration had passed, hard thinking had to take over in the toil of repeated revisions, cutting out every word, sentence and even paragraph which might be held to be superfluous, until the story was pared down to its very essence. For those of us who are interested in the procreation of the literary work, this is an explanation of a story's making that deserves fuller investigation. As luck has it, we can discover enough about the origins of one of the three outstanding stories in *Traffics and Discoveries*, "Mrs Bathurst,"[4] to make it a test case for Kipling's theory that his successful work came to him entire and, as it were, from "out there" so that the artist's labour was primarily a matter of excision.

The setting of "Mrs Bathurst" is a chance gathering of four men on the Cape Peninsula in South Africa, where Kipling and his family were accustomed to spend the first four months of each year. Stranded near the naval base at Simonstown on a fiercely hot day, the narrator runs into an old acquaintance, a railway inspector called Hooper, who offers him refuge from the heat in a brake van pulled into a siding. Here they are joined by two men who have strolled along the beach from the base. The reader's heart momentarily sinks when one of these turns out to be Pyecroft. But on this occasion Kipling's sense of artistic decorum has stripped Pyecroft of his usual tiresome jocularity, so that the story he finally tells, after an exchange of reminiscences between himself and his companion, a gigantic Marine called Pritchard, is a sobering tale, soberly told.

It concerns a shipmate of Pyecroft's, Vickery by name, who has recently deserted or, at any rate, disappeared, thus sacrificing the pension for which he has almost qualified. There is only one conceivable explanation. "Who was she?" asks the narrator. The reply, "Mrs Bathurst," stuns Sergeant Pritchard because, as further exchanges between the two seafarers make clear, this is not the usual kind of desertion in which the deserter jumps ship in pursuit of an unfaithful woman. Mrs Bathurst is a widow of (both men imply) steadfast virtue who runs a small hotel on the other side of the world, in Auckland, New Zealand. They remember her for her generous and trusting nature, and her long memory, but also for what—using a term since vulgarised beyond recall—Pyecroft calls It, as he launches into his explanation of why he knows her to be the cause of Vickery's disappearance.

The ship in which Pyecroft and Vickery serve has been in dock since before Christmas. The best that Cape Town has been able to offer by way of entertainment over the holiday is a circus at which one turn is the great fairground novelty of the time, a motion picture made up from an assemblage of scenes of everyday life. Having gone ashore to see the first performance, Vickery virtually compels Pyecroft to accompany him to the same show on each of the following five nights, but only to watch one brief episode of the film, the arrival of a train at Paddington station in London. A woman is seen getting out of the train and advancing towards the ticket barrier, and before she melts out of the picture the sailors in the audience recognise Mrs Bathurst. This is the point at which, each night, Vickery stumbles out of the circus tent and takes Pyecroft on a prolonged pub crawl—a wet walk Pyecroft calls it, since after circling the city at speed they end up awash inside and freely perspiring outside from the Cape's hot south-easterly wind. Vickery offers no explanation. Indeed, all Pyecroft hears from him, other than "Let's have another," is the click of the other's ill-fitting dental plate. His one attempt at a question—"Don't it seem to you she's lookin' for someone?" is met by the reply "She's lookin' for me" and the threat of murder if any more questions are asked. Pyecroft realises that Vickery is near to breaking point, and he wonders what will happen when the circus leaves town. What does happen is that Vickery has a long

interview with his captain, and shortly afterwards is sent upcountry alone to collect some ammunition left over from the war. The ammunition comes back to the base, but Vickery himself fails to return.

As the four men sit drumming on their empty beer bottles and pondering this story, Inspector Hooper reverts to an incident he had been on the point of telling the narrator about before the two seafarers arrived. He has himself been upcountry recently, as far north as Rhodesia. There, on a siding in a teak forest, he came across the bodies of two tramps, who had been struck by lightning. Both corpses were reduced to charcoal, but clues to the identity of one man remained in the form of tattoo marks—and a distinctive dental plate. The marks are only too familiar to Pyecroft; and the effect this disclosure has upon him and his companion is suggested by the fact that Hooper does *not* produce the denture from his waistcoat pocket, as we have been expecting him to do all along. The thoughts of the Marine, a simple and sentimental man, are with Mrs Bathurst. But Pyecroft has the final word: "Well, I don't know how you feel about it, but 'avin' seen 'is face for five consecutive nights on end, I'm inclined to finish what's left of the beer an' thank Gawd he's dead!"

No one could call "Mrs Bathurst" a transparent story. As with any tale presented through a less than omniscient narrator, the reader, in order to complete his understanding of the story, has to make his own deductions about what "really" happened. Three questions in particular present themselves. What has Vickery done? What has happened to Mrs Bathurst herself? And who is the second tramp? Like other readers, on a first encounter with the tale I found myself supplying answers to these questions in a way that filled in the gaps more or less to my satisfaction. So it came as a surprise to discover, years later, how many and how varied have been the inferences made during the course of nearly a century by a host of commentators, some of them very distinguished. But perhaps an advertisement that appeared in *The Kipling Journal* for December 1992 gives a more piquant taste than any critical studies of the atmosphere of controversy that continues to surround the story:

> "MRS BATHURST? NO PROBLEM" by Shamus O. D. Wade explains Kipling's "difficult" story very simply in 1,390 words. "Mrs Bathurst? No problem" is sold

> in aid of the Commonwealth Forces History Trust (Registered Charity No 1011521). Just send £5 (or US. $12) to the Commonwealth Forces History Trust, 37 Davis Road, Acton, London W3 7SE. (No. 264, 45)

One can glimpse in this all sorts of fund-raising possibilities. "The Turn of the Screw Unloosed," perhaps, to be sold in aid of the Benevolent Fund for Distressed Governesses . . . . But whatever the loss to an appropriate (and no doubt deserving) charity, I am going to proffer, absolutely gratis and in far fewer words than Mr Wade, answers to the three questions just posed, in order to complete the summary I have here attempted.

"What had Vickery done?" an early reader asked Kipling outright. He replied very properly that only Vickery knew that. He did however add "He may have represented himself as a single man and so have won her widow's heart."[5] Although the original of this letter has been lost, the story's manuscript, of which Dr Richard Virr, Curator of Manuscripts at McGill University, has generously furnished me with a photocopy,[6] bears out its authenticity, for in a cancelled passage Pyecroft ventures upon the same explanation: "My notion is that he lied to her about being married." By deleting this, Kipling left room for other possibilities and so heightened the element of indeterminacy that, David Lodge has suggested, is a means of deepening a reader's involvement.[7] It could be that Vickery has not merely told Mrs Bathurst a lie, but actually contracted a bigamous marriage with her. In the end, though, one albatross is very like another albatross: the consequent obsessive remorse is what matters for the tale. As for the mystery of Mrs Bathurst's arrival at Paddington station, Kipling, who loved rebuses and riddles, drops a cryptic clue in the two opening sentences of the story: "The day that I chose to visit H.M.S. *Peridot* in Simon's Bay was the day that the Admiral had chosen to send her up the coast. She was just steaming out to sea as my train came in." The day that Mrs Bathurst, in far-away New Zealand, made her decision to follow her lover to London could have been the day that the Admiralty made its decision to send his ship to sea, so that when her train arrived at Paddington, the *Hierophant* ("Guardian of Mysteries") was patrolling the Atlantic. As for her subsequent fate, she may be dead at the time of Vickery's disappearance; she may be adrift on the streets of London; she may even, *pace* Pritchard,

be safely back in New Zealand. The reader is encouraged to make his own interpretative effort, but once again what matters for the story is the sheer fortuitousness that has caused Vickery to lose her. Finally, there is the puzzle of the second tramp. My conviction is that he is just that: another drop-out, like Vickery, from ordered human life, but one who has no marks of identification because his significance lies in his total anonymity.

With the lesser aim of testing these inferences, as well as the larger aim of testing Kipling's theory that his best work resulted from a kind of daemonic possession, I turn now to what is known about the genesis of "Mrs Bathurst". Here we find that, despite his reputation for reticence, Kipling has left us a surprising number of clues, including two accounts of how the story came to him. The better known but later of the two is in *Something of Myself*:

> All that I carried away from the magic town of Auckland was the face and voice of a woman who sold me beer at a little hotel there. They stayed at the back of my head till ten years later when, in a local train of the Cape Town suburbs, I heard a petty officer from Simon's Town tell a companion about a woman in New Zealand who 'never scrupled to help a lame duck or put her foot on a scorpion.' Then—precisely as the removal of the key log in a timber jam starts the whole pile—these words gave me the key to the face and voice at Auckland, and a tale called 'Mrs Bathurst' slid into my mind, smoothly and orderly as floating timber on a bank-high river. (123)

At first reading, this strikes one as an almost perfect account of the procreative act: the chance conjunction of two tiny, cell-like entities that between them contain the potential to form a new, individual work of art. Have we, though, in fact anything more here than a solitary instance of what Coleridge called the hooks and eyes of the imagination? True, the conjunction makes a link between Auckland and Cape Town, and it helps to establish the seamen's view of Mrs Bathurst as at once alluring ("magic" is a transferable epithet) and morally sound. But the idea that such a mental click—to appropriate Vickery's nickname—could somehow conjure into existence a completely shaped story fits rather too neatly with the daemonic theory of the creative process which Kipling is to offer us in the final chapter of his autobiography. All the same, the explanation is worth a closer

look, because its imagery offers a hint that the origins of the story lie further back, and are more complex, than Kipling gives us to understand.

Log-jams belong neither to South Africa nor to New Zealand, but to Canada; and a Canadian episode figures largely in the early pages of "Mrs Bathurst"—too largely for some critics of the tale. Much of the desultory talk in the brake van is about something that happened at Vancouver back in the eighteen-eighties. Pyecroft and Pritchard had then been among eight members of a ship's company who were tricked by a boy sailor into believing that his uncle owned an island off the coast and was bound by law to give a plot of land to anyone who asked for it. He led them round an uninhabited island looking for his uncle's non-existent farm until they had outstayed their leave. Not only did the eight find themselves court-martialled for desertion but, crowning grievance, the Boy Niven persuaded the court that they had led *him* astray.[8]

This yarn (to use a favourite word of the time) is, of course, highly relevant to the story of Vickery; so much so that it is surprising to find that two other highly skilled storytellers, P. G. Wodehouse and Angus Wilson, both dismiss it as padding.[9] Like the men who are court-martialled, Vickery is absent when he is sought for. But he is no deserter from his passion, and it is part of the story's fortuitousness that, by the time of the film show, his wife's death has made it possible for him to remarry. Moreover, the gullibility of the sailors at Vancouver, together with the shift of blame in the judgment, remind us that it takes two to make a deception. Kipling drives home the relevance of this to Vickery and Mrs Bathurst when, in the course of his final revision, he writes in a rejoinder by Pyecroft to Pritchard's remark that they were all very young at the time: "But lovin' an' trustful to a degree." This makes an important connection. It is, perhaps, a little hastily worded; but then how could Kipling foresee the effect that the use of the word 'loving' in such a context would have on critics a century hence, preoccupied as many of them have been with his bi-sexuality? He could hardly have dreamt that, for one of them, the Boy Niven would actually figure in the body of the story as the second tramp—incited by the ghost of Mrs Bathurst to lure Vickery into behaviour that would draw down the vengeance visited upon Sodom and Gomorrah.[10]

The Boy Niven does in fact have a biographical relevance, but it is of a rather different kind. On his roundabout journey from India to England in 1889, Kipling had himself been persuaded by a plausible rogue, whom he called the English Boy, to buy a plot of land in Vancouver. A dispatch from the west coast of America, one of a series in letter form to the paper he had worked on in India, makes clear that even at the time he suspected that he was being duped. More interesting still, this particular dispatch starts with the words "This day I know how a deserter feels."[11] Although this statement has nothing to do with the land deal (it has been prompted by bad news from Lahore which makes the writer feel he should be back there with his own people), it suggests that a conjunction of the ideas of deception and apparent desertion was already in Kipling's mind early on in the most turbulent period of his life: a time of great creativity, but also a time of much loneliness, of at least one nervous breakdown, of long sea voyages out of touch with all those he knew; above all, a time of turmoil in personal relationships, including both an enduring infatuation and a broken troth. In later years, he and his family eliminated most traces of this period, and I am not going to try to force open closed doors. But I do want to suggest that a story as powerful as "Mrs Bathurst" is likely to have had its origin in multifarious images linked to personal experiences reaching back a long way into the writer's life; and that the account of its genesis that he offered thirty years later was perhaps a little disingenuous.

Fortunately, there exists a much earlier account of how the story came into existence. Writing to a novelist friend on the very day in 1904 that it was completed, Kipling calls it a tragedy, and continues

> It's told by Pyecroft in a guard's brake van on the beach near Simon's Town. I'm rather pleased with it. It came away in a rush—a thing that had been lying at the back of my head [for] three years. "Mrs Bathurst" is its simple and engaging name.[12]

Putting this together with the later account, we get the following scenario. Around 1901, Kipling becomes aware that some half-realised memories of 1891 and earlier are beginning to coalesce; in Dryden's words, a confused mass of thoughts are tumbling over one another in the dark.[13] As yet there is no story as such, because another three years are required for the tale

to take substance and shape. To Kipling's conscious intelligence, this inchoate raw material for a story continues to lie inert at the back of his head during all that time. Dryden knows better: "the fancy was yet in its first *work, moving* the sleeping images of things towards the light."[14] The back of the head is in reality a busy place where Kipling's imagination —Dryden's fancy—goes vigorously to work on many things heard and seen and read about during the course of those three years. Or to revert to the procreation metaphor: the mysterious, unobserved act of conception is followed by development in the biological sense, by a period in which the work of art gestates, nourishing itself from without as it grows in substance and acquires form. In the case of this particular story, we can discover quite a lot about the sources of nourishment that were available to it between 1901 and 1904.

We have seen that there are three constituents to the form the story eventually takes: Pyecroft's narrative; Hooper's narrative; and the integument wrapped round these two stories by the overall narrator. Each of the two tales-within-a-tale has a precise, real-life point of departure. The film itself existed, and still exists. It was "L'arrivée d'un train en gare," made by the Lumière brothers in 1896, which was also the year that films were first shown in London.[15] Such innovations took time to reach the colonies, so it is probable that Kipling saw the film, which he anglicises for the purpose of the tale, at Cape Town in the opening years of the century; probable too, since cinemas did not yet exist, that he saw it at Fillis's Circus ("Phyllis's" in the text), which came down to the Cape from Johannesburg every Christmas. His children were at the right age to enjoy a circus. Subtle comments on the narrative technique of Kipling's story deriving from the art of the cinema are, however, anachronistic: he did not, any more than most people at the time, foresee the film as a form of storytelling. Its significance for him is implicit in the term "biograph," used in the tale,[16] and even more in the name *actualités* which the Lumières gave to their tiny films. The wonder of the motion picture for its early viewers was that it caught, preserved and re-animated actual moments of human existence. To see a shape move across a screen and recognise it as a double-decker bus was its own reward.

Brief as it is, Kipling's description of the film in "Mrs Bathurst" unites the practiced journalist's excitement over a new form of communication with the technophile's prescience about its future developments and with the literary artist's ability to think—in the writer's own phrase—in another man's skin. At first the skin is Pyecroft's: Pyecroft fascinated in an amused and relaxed way at the authenticity of little details, such as the old man dropping his book as he gets out of the train. But what if the viewer knew someone in that film? asks the probing imagination; and Pyecroft's amusement turns to wonder as the never-to-be-forgotten Mrs Bathurst advances down the platform, invading, as it were, the viewer's space and so filling his consciousness with her presence before she vanishes "like a shadow jumpin'over a candle." The roused imagination—and Kipling is now in Vickery's skin—poses a further question: what if I, the viewer, had prior knowledge of what was to happen next? It is as if the writer could foresee the effect on audiences, only a few years later, of watching Tolstoy's wife trying to peer through the window of the railway waiting room where her husband lay dying, or as if he had foreknowledge of the even more disturbing effect that certain closed-circuit television sequences, themselves jerky and indistinct like an early film, have on us today: a small child being tugged across a Liverpool shopping precinct, a man and woman hurrying through the back door of a Paris hotel, each flickering figure bound for a violent death. Finally, in the story, the imagination strikes home with an overwhelming question: what if that consequence were the result of something that I, the spectator, had done or failed to do? And at this point, an almost faceless man, distinguished for us only by one grotesque detail, is transformed into the bearer of a tragic burden.

The success of Kipling's imaginative effort creates, however, its own problem: how is he to sustain the reader's awareness of the anguish he has so powerfully imagined and at the same time keep within the limits set by Pyecroft's powers of expression and his incomplete understanding of the situation? In the manuscript a third narrative intervened, originally, between Pyecroft's story and Hooper's. Sergeant Pritchard related that, after Vickery has confided in his captain and disappeared, he overheard a conversation in which the captain said that Dante miscounted the circles

of Hell; there was a tenth, and Vickery was in it. This was an elaboration that Kipling did well to cut out. Although Pyecroft is unlikely to have read the *Inferno*, his description of a desperate figure circling the dark streets in the hot, dry wind in search of oblivion (never found, as he never succeeds in getting drunk) is all that is needed to convince us that Vickery is his own hell, imprisoned in the depths that Dante reserves for those who have betrayed the innocent. As he says at his final parting with Pyecroft, in a strange echo of the word the other has used of Mrs Bathurst: "You've only had to watch; I'm *it*."

Kipling's imagination, then, is proactive and astonishingly fertile as it works upon his recollection of a minute-long film sequence to create Pyecroft's narrative. The second narrative, or more exactly the other side of the story, Hooper's discovery of the two charred bodies, also had its origin in an experience belonging to Kipling's days at the Cape. It did not, however, make such demands of his imaginative powers as did Pyecroft's tale. For one thing, it was a listening experience, so that the narrative form was already there. For another, compression rather than expansion was called for if this second narration, which fitted with almost unbelievable exactness into the story as Kipling had developed it, was to bring the whole tale to a dramatic conclusion.

The facts behind this part of the story have been corroborated by an independent witness, the railway engineer who was actually in charge of the Rhodesian line in the early nineteen-hundreds. The bodies of two tramps, he recalled, had been found by—he "rather thought"—a locomotive inspector called Teddy Layton, seconded at the time from the Cape railways. "They were trekking up to the Falls for work," he wrote, "or else were returning without having found it, when they were caught in a thunderstorm and instead of keeping out in the open went and leant up against the buffer block in the dead end, and as that was almost entirely built of rail, it naturally attracted the lightning."[17] Since Layton knew Kipling well enough to have been given several autographed copies of his books, we can be confident that he was the source of this part of "Mrs Bathurst," and if he himself found the bodies, then Kipling indeed got the story from the horse's mouth.[18]

Either way, Layton's anecdote was a godsend. It had everything Kipling needed, and only fine tuning was required. Even the railway siding was there, to establish a connection with the main narrative and with the Cape suburban line of the overall setting. Beside its buffers, Vickery is to be found waiting at last: waiting to all eternity for Mrs Bathurst. Kipling even learnt that trains were liable to derailment on this stretch of the Rhodesian line, despite its straightness,[19] and this detail ensures that, riding on the footplate with Hooper, we make a very slow approach to the figures ahead—as slow as if we were Mrs Bathurst scanning the platform for Vickery. And if there is rather too much of the whiff of spontaneous combustion about the two corpses—like Dickens, Kipling found the macabre irresistible—their condition is necessary if one of them is to be identified by what, for the reader, is his only recognisable feature. Moreover, death by lightning, through its association with the idea of divine retribution, accords perfectly with the tragic issues that the story has already raised.

There remains the question: why two tramps? It is of course no answer to say there *were* two; Kipling was at liberty to cut out the second one, and had he realised that half the commentators on the story were going to decide that he was Mrs Bathurst in disguise, he might well have done so. Instead, he puts him to masterly use. Whereas Vickery, who wants to die, courts destruction by standing up against the metal barrier, the other man, who has the natural human desire to survive, crouches down for safety.[20] In spite of this the charge goes through him as well, and in so doing transforms him into one of the marginal figures who, in tragedy after tragedy, are caught up in the fall of princes and destroyed. His fate also sends our thoughts momentarily to another innocent victim: Vickery's fifteen-year-old daughter, now orphaned and, since her father has forfeited his pension, left without worldly provision.

The setting that gives rise to these two narratives regarding Vickery and Mrs Bathurst, a damaged brake van on the edge of False Bay, may have come to Kipling late in the three years during which the story was developing. We know for a certainty that he visited Simonstown in February of 1903, and there was plenty of time for him to do so in 1904 between his arrival at the Cape and his writing of the tale. Certainly the

extreme heat of that January (Fillis was advertising his big top as The Coolest Resort in Cape Town)[21] has got into the story. The heat broods over a physical setting that is one vast emptiness. As the men gaze seaward, nothing other than the breadth of the Indian Ocean lies between them and Australasia. Behind them, the land is made to appear equally desolate; Kipling, as he writes, cuts out any hints of the beautiful, leaving only a barren landscape of dunes and rocks skirted by a single-track railway. The finale of the tale will be an equally deserted scene, and one also bisected by a precarious line of communication: seventy miles of teak forest with two dead men for inhabitants.

We are, in short, in the heart of darkness. Conrad's story with that title, published in book form in 1901, has indubitably left its mark on Kipling's story, not least in the device of having its journey to the interior evolve out of the talk of four men facing an empty horizon and each in his way deeply aware of that sense of human isolation which John Bayley has emphasised in his discussion of "Mrs Bathurst."[22] Although the global village may be portended by the way the camera in London links the man in South Africa with the woman from New Zealand, today's powers of instant communication were still, in 1904, a long way in the future. Ships at sea, as the companion story "Wireless" stresses, had no direct communication with the land. In "Mrs Bathurst," HMS *Hierophant* has arrived at Cape Town from Tristan da Cunha, reputedly the loneliest place on earth, which at the beginning of the last century did not even have a submarine cable. Kipling's fascination with new means of communication in all three stories in the group masks the anxieties felt by the solitary long-distance traveller a hundred years ago, and like Conrad he recognises the serviceman's sense of solidarity—exemplified by Pritchard's resentment of Hooper's curiosity about Vickery—as the best safeguard against the existential loneliness which is experienced by the man who breaks ranks.

So, after three years of embryonic development in which a great deal was absorbed, Kipling's story comes to full term. There follows procreation's third stage: the pangs of birth, the story's delivery to the world in a printed form. In Dryden's account of the creative process, this is the stage at which the judgment labours over what it should accept and what reject.

Kipling, however, would have us believe that a good story had an easy birth and that only afterwards would the writer have to undertake the arduous process of what he calls the Higher Editing, the blacking-out of everything that might be considered superfluous. Readers who are creative writers themselves have tended to blame this process for whatever they find elliptical or enigmatic in the tale. C. S. Lewis thinks "Kipling used the Indian ink too much"; Kingsley Amis, more severely, argues that, out of sheer "authorial self-indulgence," he left out the bits that bored him even if they contained necessary information—"rather like a trendy film-editor today."[23]

The appearance of the manuscript, however, serves to refute these theories. It shows that Kipling's judgment was hard at work during the actual process of getting the story down on paper: the many running deletions, followed by substitutions, reveal a continual watchfulness over the effect of his wording. Some other alterations appear to have been made after he had reached the end of the story,[24] but actual excisions, other than Pyecroft's speculations on what Vickery has done and the conversation about Dante, which have already been alluded to, are very few indeed, and after the opening sentences, which Kipling was at particular pains to get right, virtually nothing is heavily deleted. Subsequent revisions (distinguishable because they are made with a different pen), far from rendering the story obscure through excision, consist largely of additions either to the manuscript or to the printed tale. They include an intensification of Hooper's verbal tic, "You see," and of his gestures towards his waistcoat pocket, and clearly are meant to deepen and clarify the story's import. In point of fact, they leave the reader with the sense of something over-elaborated. This is particularly the case with the epigraph that Kipling added in the volume of collected stories, a maddeningly opaque pastiche of a scene from an Elizabethan play, from which the reader, if sufficiently patient, may succeed in extracting the statement: "She that damned him to death knew not that she did it, or would have died ere she had done it. For she loved him." Eager to get to the stories, most readers skip Kipling's epigraphs. The result of this one being more than usually skippable has been its failure to prevent a number of critics interpreting the tale that follows as being about the revenge taken by a woman scorned.

Interpretations such as this reflect the way that comments upon "Mrs Bathurst" have tended to focus upon the eponymous character. So it is perhaps worth recording that "Mrs Bathurst" was not the title under which Kipling wrote the story. The original title had three words, the last of them short. Kipling vigorously deleted it, substituting "Mrs Bathurst" at (it would seem) the last minute, since beside the title and written with the same pen is a note to his secretary in England requesting her to type the story and send it on to his agent. But the new name has proved altogether *too* simple and *too* engaging. It obscures the fact that the tale is, after all, Vickery's story: a story not of martyrdom or vengeance but of a destructive obsession. His behaviour may seem to others that of a man possessed, but Pyecroft for one knows that he has built his own hell in heaven's despite in a moment of tragic error. Likewise, Kipling himself knows that, whatever his ability to think in another man's skin, the substance of such thoughts could only come from his own experiences and the emotions they generated. And here we have perhaps a clue to the attractiveness, to Kipling, of the account of the creative process that he expounds in *Something of Myself*. Possession by an outside force offers him a convenient way to distance himself from familiarity with mental states—in this case, compulsive obsession—that he would rather not admit, even to himself, to having at one time known, while at the same time his insistence on the conscious effort of careful revision enables him to sustain the self-image of one who is fully in control: in short, *self*-possessed. It in no way detracts from the achievement of "Mrs Bathurst" and comparable stories that an enquiry into their origins throws doubt on both parts of this account, since such an enquiry reveals a creative process that is both more complex and more interesting.

NOTES

[1]Elliot L. Gilbert, *The Good Kipling: Studies in the Short Story* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972).

[2]*Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard: The Record of a Friendship*, ed. Morton Cohen (London: Hutchinson, 1965) 100.

[3]*Something of Myself and other Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) 123.

[4]Quotations of the published text of "Mrs Bathurst" are from *Traffics and Discoveries* (London: Macmillan, 1904).

[5]E. Harbord, Letter in *The Kipling Journal* 163 (September 1967): 14. The letter he quotes is to a Mrs Tulse.

[6]MS 201, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries. Kipling presented this manuscript of *Traffics and Discoveries* to the University.

[7]See "'Mrs Bathurst:' Indeterminacy in Modern Narrative," in *Kipling Considered*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London: Macmillan, 1989) 71-84.

[8]The MS has a deleted sentence referring to the narrator having heard the tale from a coastguard in England.

[9]Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977) 223; *The Letters of P. G. Wodehouse*, ed. Frances Donaldson (London: Hutchinson, 1990) 185.

[10]Nora Crook, *Kipling's Myths of Love and Death* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 71.

[11]*From Sea to Sea* (London: Macmillan, 1911) 2: 53-65.

[12]*Letters of Rudyard Kipling, Volume 3: 1900-10*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1996) 147. In the same letter, which is a copy, Kipling calls the story a 'rather ghostly tragedy,' but Pinney considers this may represent a misreading by the copyist of 'ghastly.' A transcript from Caroline Kipling's diary confirms that February 24, 1904 was the date on which Kipling finished "Mrs Bathurst." I am grateful to the University of Sussex for giving me access to their copy of transcripts made from the diary.

[13]I am grateful to Christiane Bimberg for reminding the Halberstadt seminar on "Poetry as Procreation," in her paper on "John Dryden's Creative Concept of Poetry and Imitation," of the relevance Dryden's compelling account of the creative process in the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Rival Ladies* (1664) had for all our discussions of poetry as procreation. (See now *Connotations* 8 [1998/99]: 304-18, esp. 305-06.) At the same seminar, Matthias Bauer put forward the very interesting idea that "Mrs Bathurst" is in itself, to some extent, *about* the birth of a story, though it proves a still birth, since the relationship of Vickery and Mrs Bathurst is cut short—which gives point to Pyecroft's mystifying comparison of Vickery's stricken face to a foetus.

[14]*Essays of John Dryden*, selected and ed. by W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926) 1: 1. My italics.

[15]Robert Sclar, *Film: An International History of the Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) 29.

[16]Through most of the last century the cinema was known to South Africans as the bioscope.

[17]Letter from F. W. Mackenzie-Skues, quoted by L. H. Chandler, "Notes on 'Mrs Bathurst,'" *The Kipling Journal* 43 (September 1937): 72-75.

[18]H. G. Wilmott: "Kipling and South Africa," *The Kipling Journal* 48 (December 1938): 112-25, esp. 123.

[19]J. Cunningham, Letter in *The Kipling Journal* 215 (September 1980): 43-44. In the manuscript Hooper explains "It's all black boggy soil."

[20]Gilbert, 111 note: "The function of the second tramp, then, as he squats beside the tracks looking up, is to call our attention, by contrast, to Vickery's dangerous gesture."

[21]R. E. Harbord, *Reader's Guide to Kipling, Section IV* (privately printed, 1965/6) 1789.

[22]John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988) 97-108, esp. 101.

[23]C. S. Lewis, "Kipling's World," *Kipling and the Critics*, ed. Elliot L. Gilbert (London: Peter Owen, 1966) 99-117, esp. 100; Kingsley Amis, *Rudyard Kipling and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson) 97.

[24]Minor variations between the manuscript and the text of the story in *Traffics and Discoveries* are presumably due to changes, omissions and additions made on the typescript, or on a proof. Some of the variations between the text as published in *The Windsor Magazine* in September 1904 and as it appeared in book form in December of the same year are the result of the magazine editor's intervention.

Connotations
Vol. 9.1 (1999/2000)

W. B. Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter": The Ironies of the Patriarchal Stance

LEONA TOKER

Modifying Shelley's view of poetry as prophesy, which so sharply contrasts with Marianne Moore's ostensibly skeptical attitude to poetry ("I too dislike it"),[1] William Butler Yeats has written that "Because an emotion does not exist, or does not become perceptible and active among us, till it has found its expression, in color or in form or in sound . . . and because no two modulations or arrangements of these evoke the same emotion, poets and painters and musicians . . . are continually making and un-making mankind."[2] But mankind is also continually making and unmaking the poet. The history of a poem's reception, like the fate of a beloved child, is unpredictable. At one stage of reception the intellectual and emotional repertoire of a poem may appear hopelessly dated; at another it may emerge as well ahead of its time. I shall sketch these two eventualities in respect of Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter."

A prayer is an attempt to exert an influence on the world which, to paraphrase Housman, one "has never made." As a poetic move it is partly akin to what in *Les Figures du discours*, the eighteenth-century rhetorician Pierre Fontanier describes as "metalepsis," that is claiming to produce, one may even say generate, that which one is merely describing. Fontanier's example is the opening of the fourth canto of Delille's *Trois Règnes de la nature*:

> Enfin, j'arrive à toi, terre à jamais féconde,
> Jadis de tes rochers j'aurais fair jaillir l'onde;
> J'aurais semé de fleurs le bord de tes ruisseaux,
> Déployé tes gazons, tressé tes arbrisseaux,
> De l'or de tes moissons revêtu les campagnes,
> Suspendu les chevreaux aux buissons des montagnes,
> De leurs fruits savoureux enrichi les vergers . . . .[3]

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debtoker00901.htm>.

Modern literary theory tends to reverse Fontanier's distinction and say that by using images of fertility Delille may be redeeming the dream wasteland since in doing so he is "instructing"[4] the reader to conjure it up in a certain way. In terms of J. L. Austin's performative speech-act theory, in an everyday speech situation, such a case of ekphrasis would constitute not a constative speech act but a performative one, an "exercitive," that is an act of "giving a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it," a decision "that something is to be so, as distinct from a judgment that it is so."[5] Austin denies the possibility of applying speech act theory to the same utterance if introduced in a poem or a novel since the use of language in such frames is, as he says, "parasitic."[6] The word "introduced" is, however, a spring of ambiguities: does Austen refer to any sentence in a novel or a poem or a direct speech act "introduced" in this derivative discourse? What if the poem as a whole is viewed as a complex speech act, variously deploying and reining in different illocutionary forces?

The oral speech act is made in an actual deictic situation which determines the extent of its "felicity." A literary work, as an act of communication, belongs to a virtual rather than an actual deictic situation; the author cannot foresee what cultural audiences he might eventually be addressing. Hence, the range of the *perlocutionary* effects of a codified literary text[7] is much greater than that of a direct oral speech act; and the control that the speaker can exercise over its consequences diminishes as the time goes by. In that sense "procreation" is a better metaphor for the origin of a literary speech act than "performance."

Indeed, the result of a felicitous performative speech act, one performed by a person in authority and in appropriate circumstances, is definite, limited, and final. When the person authorised to do so proclaims "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth," reality is modified in the precisely intended way. In giving birth, by contrast, contingencies are paramount. To a baby one transmits one's codes but in unpredictable combinations, and the world into which a baby is inserted is one that even the most influential of parents has never made. The future life of a poem and its future intellectual environment are likewise notoriously beyond the author's ken. *Panta rei*:

everything flows, and in every which direction; there is no telling when and how and in what currents of perpetual heterogeneity the poem will be reinserted. The instructions encoded in the text come down to us trailing halos of blanks, and these blanks tend to grow with the passage of time. The resulting semiotic entropy can be partly contained by the study of relevant biographical and intertextual materials that set limits to the liberties we take with texts. Yet these materials are, in their turn, reinserted into the perpetual flow and do not re-emerge from it unchanged.

The contingencies of the ideological reception of "A Prayer for My Daughter" are partly due to the significance of the issues raised in different parts of this rather long poem. Yeats's treatment of one issue may appear archaically culture-bound, his treatment of another may emerge as prophetic. It seems important, therefore, to refrain from extrapolating our response to separate parts of the poem and from turning this partial response into a perlocutionary *dominant* of the poem as a whole.

The negative eventuality in the reception-history of "A Prayer for My Daughter" may be illustrated by the harshly critical reaction of a feminist reader like Joyce Carol Oates to Yeats's metaphors for the future that he would wish for his daughter:

> May she become a flourishing hidden tree
> That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
> And have no business but dispensing round
> Their magnanimities of sound,
> Not but in merriment begin a chase,
> Not but in merriment a quarrel.
> O may she live like some green laurel
> Rooted in one dear perpetual place.[8]

Oates is disgusted with this prospect: "This celebrated poet would have his daughter an object of nature for others'—which is to say male—delectation. She is not even an animal or a bird in his imagination, but a vegetable: immobile, unthinking, placid, 'hidden.' . . . The poet's life-work is the creation of a distinct voice in which sound and sense are harmoniously wedded: the poet's daughter is to be brainless and voiceless, *rooted*."[9]

It would seem, however, that Oates is merely using Yeats as a sample spokesman of a run-of-the-mill patriarchal position, practically identical in purport with that of American popular fiction for lady readers. This is basically the position that George Eliot attributed to her Victorian Middlemarchers and defined in the following way: "Women were expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on."[10] Oates's agenda is to show that despite the immense aesthetic distance between modernist literature and the middle-to-low-brow ladies' reading-matter that she criticises in her article, the persistence of the paleological patriarchal mind-set forms a partial ideological overlap between them.

The only place in the poem that is, indeed, a clear expression of an obsolete patriarchal attitude is the culture-bound belatedly Victorian reference to the bridegroom who is expected to prepare a ready-made form of well-being for the bride: "And may her bridegroom bring her to a house / Where all's accustomed, ceremonious." Already more than half a century before novelists like Dickens and George Eliot created striking portraits of women who offered helping hands to unanchored young men instead of waiting for them to qualify (mainly financially and prior to marriage) for the roles of respectable heads of the family. The two lines just quoted may support Oates's critique of Yeats, but she discredits her case when she attempts to supporting it by her interpretation of lines 65-72:

> . . . all hatred driven hence,
> The soul recovers radical innocence
> And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
> Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
> And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
> She can, though every face should scowl
> And every windy quarter howl
> Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

What for most readers is a poet's dream of his daughter's intellectual and emotional independence is, for Oates, a recommendation of "a kind of autism of the spirit."[11] Here Oates overshoots her goal by betraying her own near-totalitarian tendency to condemn non-joiners. Her metaphor

of "autism of the spirit" conflicts with Yeats's simile which presents his daughter's thoughts not as a natural outgrowth of her being (not, for instance, as the foliage of the tree to which he likens her in his vision) but as singing birds (linnets), gently hosted by the boughs that do not bear the autistic fruit of hatred ("If there's no hatred in the mind / Assault and battery of the wind / Can never tear the linnet from the leaf") and shared by the tree with the outside world. Ideas are thus presented as partners in the relationship, and the worst that can be said of Yeats's imagery is that he does not seem to expect his daughter to *generate* original thoughts. The poem deals not with the desirability or danger of new philosophical insight; the target of its critique is "opinions," that is, the socially formalized and shared attitudes that suppress and damage individuality instead of promoting its growth.

There is, moreover, a difference between the Middlemarchers' dismissively paternalistic attitude to women and an actual father's desire to have his child protected from that "murderous innocence of the sea"—from that "blood-dimmed tide" which, in Yeats 's "The Second Coming" drowns, and "In a Prayer for My Daughter" threatens to drown, "the ceremony of innocence."[12] The impulse of paternal protection works irrespective of the baby's gender; indeed it characterizes both "A Prayer for my Daughter" and "A Prayer for My Son" (1921), written after the birth of Yeats's son. Both the poems contrast sharply with the Romantic wish to have the object of one's care exposed to the seasons; Yeats's agenda is that of the exertion of his psychic energies in a (doomed) attempt to shield. "A Prayer for My Son" lacks the touches of specific tenderness elicited by a girl-baby (they are partly compensated for by the care for the baby's mother); and though it is also free from the imaginary Victorian-style match-making, it is the weaker poem of the two. M. L. Rosenthal has noted that its feelings "seem strained, especially in the comparison of the dangers the poet says the child will confront (such as enemies jealous of his achievements) with those faced by the Holy Family."[13]

> A woman and a man
> Unless the Holy Writings lie
> Hurried through the smooth and rough

And through the fertile and waste,
Protecting, till the danger past,
With human love.

However, this allusion to Mary's and Joseph's plight can be read as emphasizing not the grandeur of the baby's future "deed or thought" but as an ultimate expression of the parents' helplessness to forestall their child's martyrdom: the present danger will pass, but not the one thirty-three years later. The epithet that qualifies the future "deed or thought" of the child is not, as one might expect, "mighty" (or some such bisyllabic word that would fit into the prosodic slot in the line) but "haughty" ("some most haughty deed or thought")—a word with not only positive but also strongly negative connotations.[14] It is almost as if the exercitive speech-act of "prayer" in both the poems seeks to protect the child in each poem not only from the enemies of their ideas but also from the sway of the ideas themselves.

This is precisely the attitude which, if not original, is, nevertheless, ahead of its contemporary philosophical contexts. "Intellectual hatred is the worst," "opinions are accursed," "not but in merriment begin a quarrel"—all these might just as well be among the rhetorical vignettes of the type of late-twentieth-century intellectual whom Richard Rorty calls "a liberal ironist." The ideological portrait of "a liberal ironist" is painted in Rorty's book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*: as a liberal, such an intellectual has one strong opinion—that "cruelty is the worst thing we do";[15] as an ironist, he (or she), recognizes the cultural, political, and biographical contingencies of his / her opinions.[16] "Nor but in merriment begin a chase, / Nor but in merriment a quarrel" might in fact sound as a stylistic improvement on the grain of ironic salt with which a liberal ironist treats all of his / her opinions—except the one on cruelty as the worst thing we do and the self-reflective one on the need for the ironic stance.

Yet, as Rorty himself indicates, the stance of the liberal ironist is "not empowering."[17] Yeats knows that well: in "The Second Coming" the dangerous forces, "the worst," are characterized by "passionate intensity," whereas "the best lack all conviction" and therefore cannot, or will not try to, dam the tides of violence. The prophetic accuracy of these intuitions

requires no comment. In "A Prayer for My Daughter," often regarded as a companion piece to "The Second Coming,"[18] the speaker casts for a prescriptive conclusion, and finds it in the place where another twenty-first century philosopher, Bernard Williams will introduce a correction on the ironic stance. For Yeats the instabilities that result from an ironist's pluralism are to be compensated for by "rooted"-ness in "custom" and "ceremony"; for Williams, they are to be contained by the "ethical confidence" that results from a conscious affiliation with a sustaining cultural or ideological circle.[19] A recognition of the validity of other perspectives need not undermine or even relativize one's own position—one's philosophical foothold has a good chance of stability if it has been planted by a conscious and reciprocated commitment to the people around one. What makes Yeats vulnerable to criticism like that of Joyce Carol Oates is that his motifs of custom and ceremony are intellectually less tenable than Williams's broader concept of ethical confidence. They do not specify, for instance, that the planting of the self in a tradition is to be done by the self, rather than by others.

The "flourishing hidden tree," that is Oates's "vegetable," is a transformation of the tree-of-life topos that grows in many a poetic melodious plot. As noted above, the liberal ironist's commitment to her ideas (the linnets in the tree) is presented not as a matter of organic outgrowth but as companionship. Yeats himself is believed not to have wholeheartedly endorsed his own eclectic "salad" of mystical ideas but rather to have needed these ideas as a counterweight to rationalism,[20] to have liked living in their vicinity, evoking and hosting them, and turning to them for poetic language.[21]

The relationship between the tree and the tenacious singing birds contrasts with the famous bird images of "The Second Coming," where the falconer loses control of the falcon which has been gyrating above him in ever-widening circles and which, in the second verse paragraph, generates the desert birds that angrily *reel* over a slouching monster. The motif of hunting, associated with the falcon, is in "A Prayer for My Daughter" replaced by the playful "chase" ("Nor but in merriment begin a chase"); the "indignant" cries of the desert scavengers cheated of their

prey are replaced by the linnet's "magnanimities of sound." The linnet's generous, magnanimous song is pitted against the howling of the storm, the prophetic "frenzied drum" of the future cataclysms, and the "angry bellows" for which Maud Gonne is accused of having bartered her birthright. Maud Gonne, Yeats's Helen of Troy, is invoked as a negative example, almost a control group: her passionate commitments left no place for liberalist irony.

I do, however, concur with Joyce Carol Oates in one point: the emotional stance that transpires from underneath the intellectual position of the poem is somewhat alienating: something in it dampens the sympathy evoked by an elderly father's anxiety for his infant. A dark vision of the world's future may not be the sole cause of the "great gloom" that has made the speaker walk and pray. In a paper entitled "Between Hatred and Desire," Marjorie Perloff has suggested that the speaker's mask of husband and father conceals troubled memories of a shaking recent debacle with Maud Gonne. Maud Gonne had escaped detention in London and, fully expecting to be welcomed and sheltered, knocked on the door of her Dublin house, 73 Stephen's Green, which Yeats and his pregnant wife were renting for a nominal fee. Concerned about his wife's condition after a bad bout of the flue and intent on protecting her from police harassment, Yeats did not let Maud in. A reconciliation was soon achieved, yet Yeats's conduct in this test of loyalties might have been easier forgiven than forgotten.[22]

If this painful memory haunts the mood that the poem attempts to capture, it is blocked by the massive yet somewhat contradictory motif of protection. The speaker takes on the role of the father who must exert his spirit, in prayer and best-laid plans, to protect his baby from the elements. Not only the fragile "cradle-hood and coverlid" but even the wood and the hill do not seem to him sufficient obstacles to the "roof and hay-stack levelling wind." When he imagines his daughter as a "*hidden* flourishing tree," the word "hidden" is associated with the "half-hid" of the poem's second line; hence with sheltering and protection rather than, as in the case of Wordsworth's Lucy, obscurity. The content of the prayer sharply contrasts with that of Wordsworth's prayer for his sister Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey"—"may the lofty mountain winds be free to blow

against thee," and even with Coleridge's day dreams about the future of his own sleeping baby in "Frost at Midnight"—"but thou, my babe, shalt wonder like a breeze. . . ." While ostensibly dealing with the future of his daughter, the poem also processes Yeats's own predicament: underneath the natural wish for his child to be protected there may be the subconscious need to believe that his erstwhile wish to protect this child's pregnant mother was a sufficient motive for his conduct at a crisis point.

Indeed, the vocabulary of a criminal charge in "Assault and battery of the wind" may be read as striking back at Maud Gonne for Yeats's own deficiency, as balancing the "murderous innocence" of the storm with his own aggressive innocence. The wind instrument ("old bellows") by which the cornucopia, the Horn of Plenty, is replaced in the poem, transforms the god-given, a Dorothea, into a Pandora with the boxful of winds. The heroic Maud Gonne is here associated not merely with hatred but also, through the word "barter," with the "wares peddled in the thoroughfares." The motif of nobleness, which accompanies her image in Yeats's other poems (e.g., "because of that great nobleness of hers" in "The Vanity of Being Comforted") is here transposed onto Yeats's dream child's thoughts spreading "the magnanimities of sound." It is as if the hidden agenda of the poem were one of the transfer of allegiance facilitated by the liberal ironist's stance. The irony of this agenda lies in that it is of women that the patriarchal mind-set usually expects the deliberate prioritizing of family loyalties. This may be the reason for the would-be "atmospheric" gloom of this poem:[23] Yeats is not sure of the legitimacy of his own practicing the principles of family life and courtesy that he recommends for his daughter. In another respect, however, the content of the poem is congruent with its stance: an agnostic's prayer is a speech act whose effectiveness cannot be known—a speech act quite appropriate for a liberal ironist who realizes the contingency of his ideas and of his right to expect their realization.

The Hebrew University
Jerusalem

NOTES

[1]For noting this contrast I am indebted to a lecture by Shimon Sandbank at the Faculty celebration of his winning the Israel Prize for translation. The lecture was eventually published, in Hebrew, as "Two Defenders of Poetry," *Iton 77*, 197 (June 1996): 18-19.

[2]W. B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 157.

[3]Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977) 128.

[4]Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 64.

[5]See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 154.

[6]Austin 22.

[7]The *perlocutionary* aspect of a speech act is its effect on the recipient, which may be totally different from the intended effect or from the *illocutionary* force of the utterance (see Austin 94-107). The perlocutionary aspect of a literary text consists in the responses of a reader as an individual (entitled to individual idiosyncrasies) and as a member of an "interpretive community" (see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980] 13-15).

[8]All the quotations given are according to the Macmillan (London) 1950 edition of Yeats's *Collected Poems*.

[9]Joyce Carol Oates, "'At Least I Have Made a Woman of Her': Images of Women in Twentieth Century Literature," *Georgia Review* 37 (Spring 1983): 7-30, here 17.

[10]George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1977) 3.

[11]Oates 18.

[12]The motif of attempts to protect the child in the poem is rather neglected in Marjorie Perloff's fascinating paper "Between Hatred and Desire: Sexuality and Subterfuge in 'A Prayer for My Daughter,'" *Yeats Annual 7* (1990): 29-50. One may, of course, foresee the nowadays rather common suspicion of such a motif as disguising the wish to use one's baby to protect oneself from the world, but the genuine tenderness the poem breathes would tip the scales the other way.

[13]M. L. Rosenthal, *Running to Paradise: Yeats's Poetic Art* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 245.

[14]This stanza prefigures Nabokov's 1925 poem "The Mother" in which, on hearing Mary's sobs after Golgotha, the apostle John wonders "What if those tears / cost more than our redemption" (Vladimir Nabokov, *Poems and Problems* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981] 33).

[15]Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989) xv. As Judith Shklar notes, a liberal abhors cruelty because cruelty breeds fear and fear destroys freedom; see Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1984) 2, 7-15.

[16]A demand for this recognition is also made by Alasdair MacIntyre, who notes that in choosing one set of conflicting moral premises one does not have to "diminish or derogate" the claims of the other; see *After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1981) 208.

[17]Rorty, *Contingency* 91.

[18]See, for instance, C. G. Martin, "A Coleridge Reminiscence in Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter,'" *Notes and Queries* 12 (1965): 258-60, here 259-60, and Beryl Rowland, "The Other Father in Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter,'" *Orbis Litterarum* 26 (1971): 284-90, here 284.

[19]Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1985) 170-71.

[20] Cf. Richard Ellman: "Yeats found in occultism, and in mysticism generally, a point of view which had the virtue of warring with accepted beliefs, . . . he wanted to show that the current faith in reason and in logic ignored a far more important human faculty, the imagination. And, in his endeavour to construct a symbolism, he went where symbols had always been the usual mode of expression. . . . Predilections of this sort made him not a mystic or an occultist but one of what he called 'the last romantics.'" *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 3.

[21] See, for instance, A. G. Stock: "Though [Yeats] listened hopefully to messages from his evocations he was never their humble slave. They only got into his poetry when they made good poetic sense. . . . He tested philosophy by poetry, not vice versa." *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1961) 83. In an article reprinted in *The Permanence of Yeats: Selected Criticism*, ed. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York: Macmillan, 1950), Allan Tate likewise notes that Yeats's mystical ideas form "not a mythology at all, but rather an extended metaphor" (115).

[22]Perloff (above n12).

[23]"The effect of hate, political and intellectual, occupied his thoughts even in 'A Prayer for My Daughter,' for Anne Butler Yeats, born in Dublin on 24 February 1919. The poem begun two days later was finished at Thoor Ballylee in June—an atmospheric poem, full of foreboding for all its appreciation of courtesy, radical innocence, custom and ceremony." Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats: A New Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1988) 247.