

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



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Editors' Note

To our deep regret we have to take our leave from another member of our Editorial Board, Maynard Mack, who died last March. Our feelings for him are best expressed in the words of his son who, answering our last message to him, called him a "wonderful and great man." We are proud and grateful to have had his support. Another death is to be mourned: having first met Hannah Charney last summer at the *Connotations* symposium, we are sad that the exchange which had only just begun came to an end so soon. This issue of *Connotations* includes her talk on Paul Celan, which, we hope, will give rise to a critical conversation in the very spirit in which she opened it.

We are very grateful to Ursula Brumm for accepting our invitation to join the Editorial Board. This was a most generous act on her side because our invitation is unforgivably belated. The reason is: we have always worked together with her, and took our co-operation so much for granted that issuing an invitation just did not occur to us. It is an honour and a pleasure to bid her an official welcome now.

Two other colleagues join the editorial team of *Connotations*: we are happy to welcome Burkhard Niederhoff as an Associate Editor. He will add to the editors' expertise not only in his field of specialization, Restoration Comedy, but many other areas as well. On our Editorial Board, Martin Procházka replaces Zdeněk Stříbrný who wished to retire, and we are very glad indeed that our connection with the Charles University of Prague will continue to exist.

Finally there is another fare-well: Dieter Kranz will no longer be named as our Associate Editor for the merely geographical reason that *Connotations* is edited no longer in Münster but in Saarbrücken. Thank you, Herr Kranz!

Inge Leimberg and Matthias Bauer

Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate

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EDITORS

Inge Leimberg (Münster) and Matthias Bauer (Saarbrücken)

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Lothar Černý, Michael Steppat, Burkhard Niederhoff, and Christiane Lang
Secretary: Jutta Müller

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Matthias Bauer, Universität des Saarlandes, Department of English (4.3),
P.O. Box 151150, 66041 Saarbrücken, Germany
Email: editors@connotations.de <http://www.connotations.de>

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

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A Journal for Critical Debate

Volume 11 (2001/2002) Number 1

The Poetics of Conversation in 20th-Century Literature and Criticism (II)

The Poetics of Conversation in Virginia Woolf's

A Room of One's Own

CHRISTIANE BIMBERG

1

"Weisst du noch, dass ich sang?"

Conversation in Celan's Poetry

HANNA K. CHARNEY

29

"Fortuitous Wit": Dialogue and Epistemology in

Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

BURKHARD NIEDERHOFF

42

Other ARTICLES and DISCUSSIONS

Shakespeare De-witched:

A Response to Stephen Greenblatt

INGE LEIMBERG

60

Narrative, Typology and Politics In Henry Vaughan's "Isaac's Marriage"	78
ALAN RUDRUM	
Another View on <i>The Turn of the Screw</i>	91
URSULA BRUMM	
Conrad, Capitalism, and Decay	98
CHRISTOPH LINDNER	
Response to Alan Latta, "Spinell and Connie: Joyce Carol Oates Re-Imaging Thomas Mann"	116
RODNEY SYMINGTON	

The Poetics of Conversation in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: Constructed Arbitrariness and Thoughtful Impressionism

CHRISTIANE BIMBERG

The reception and critical evaluation of Woolf's essays regrettably falls short of the appreciation of her fiction. All in all her essays comprise more than 800 reviews and articles on biographies, collections of letters, memoirs, single literary works, editions of works and anthologies: fiction, poetry, literary criticism (cf. Nünning 17; Lee, "Essays" 96), but they were published only gradually and incompletely. It was in the middle of the 1980s when Andrew McNeillie started his complete edition of her essays, and not before the 1990s (cf. Lee 91-95; Nünning 7, 16, 17) have they begun to be adequately recognized. In this paper the conception of conversation in her essay *A Room of One's Own* will be regarded in relation to her fiction with a special focus on the politics of feminism in theme and language.

I. Aims of Investigation

Virginia Woolf's critical essay was composed at a time (1928-29) when she was simultaneously working on other literary projects such as *Orlando* and *The Moths*. Its concern for women and fiction rendered it ineffective compared with the Great Depression whose tremendous social and cultural impact was to be felt in the 1930s and 1940s. Virginia Woolf herself was aware of the seeming discrepancy between that world-wide crisis and the theme of her essay (cf. p. 95).

In comparison with the suffrage campaigns before the First World War the feminist movement at the end of the 1920s caused much less public stir. It was in the 1960s and 1970s only, during the second wave of feminism, that the issue of "Women and fiction" or female writing

was to become an important concern. In May 1928, though, women won the right to vote on equal terms with men and by that year also enjoyed more access to higher education (cf. Shaw 157).

My paper, however, does not deal predominantly with the importance of Woolf's essay for the genesis of feminist criticism or gender studies. In *A Room of One's Own* issues of ideology and language are closely linked and it is just the correlation between theme and style that caused so much controversy in Woolf criticism but has not been closely studied. With my essay I should like to try and fill this gap.

II. The Method of Woolf's Essay

From the very start the author makes it clear that to her the writer is not capable of proclaiming a certain "truth." What she can do is document the process of the genesis of her ideas:

At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show *how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold*. (4; italics mine)

[...] much of what I have said in obedience to my promise *to give you the course of my thoughts* will seem out of date; [...]. (104; italics mine)

She [Mary Beton] has tried to *lay bare the thoughts and impressions that led her to think this*. (105; italics mine)

In other words, the ways of reasoning are as important as the aim or the results. For the narrator, the truth to be reached in this difficult question of "women and fiction" (4, 27, 28) is the result of struggling through an "avalanche of opinion" (41) and proceeding through errors also (105). It is not to be had in the form of a conclusion (3, 4) or finite results, embodied in "a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantel piece for ever" (4). Woolf's truth is as unstable and tricky and resisting final definition as her description of erratic, undependable reality is:

[...] now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and

stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. (110)

Offering a metaphor instead of a scientific definition and linking the elusive and evasive term of truth to that of reality (implying for her material and immaterial, physical and mental reality) shows that Woolf finds "truth" in the course of her essay in a similar way that she comes upon reality: in fits and glimpses, through impressions, comments, and discursions, through conviction and instinct (109). She uses an impressionistic method and a meandering style that borrow from fiction and allow for some degree of subjectivity.

From the second chapter on the "pursuit of truth" (26) becomes ever more difficult. Woolf explores questions like why one sex was so prosperous and the other so poor, what effect poverty has on fiction, which conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art. She hopes to get an answer "by consulting the learned and the unprejudiced" (25) in books at the British Museum (cf. also 26, 28, 29), only to find out that neither is to be trusted, which nearly makes her despair of her topic and task. The first reason for her dismay is the sheer quantity of male writing on women: woman is "the most discussed animal in the universe" (26, see also 27). Another reason why it is impossible "to tell the truth" is the multitude of men's opinions concerning women's ability to be formally educated (30).

The third reason is dissatisfaction with her intellectual deficiencies. By that stage she has become more conscious of the problematical, i.e. erratic or arbitrary character of her method that endangers her to fall prey to distraction and yet more questions. The juxtaposition with the methodically working student from Oxbridge (28) makes this all too evident. The final point for a new departure is reached when the narrator notes that even her handwriting has become indecipherable (30). She does no longer try to find out what male writers had to say about women (30, 31) but decides "to give up seeking for the truth" (41) or at least to consult only such historians who record not opinions but facts (for instance about the living conditions of women). This

approach, though not very encouraging in the light of the dismal facts, leads to the formulation of new tasks for historiography and fiction in the future, i.e. the recording and representation of the so far obscure lives of women.

This solution is symptomatic of the entire essay. Instead of “scientific” truth Woolf finally decides to tell a kind of subjective truth concerning a specific historical moment (1928):

All I could do was to offer you *an opinion* upon one minor point—[...]. (4; italics mine)

She admits her own limitations as a critic as well as the danger of spreading prejudice, not being unbiased herself, or telling lies mixed with some truth (4) for various reasons: because female writing is such an important issue to her, because her choice of reading is so very wide (108) and because books have acquired an extreme significance for her in the face of her lacking a formal education. Moreover, her reading in history, biography, poetry, and fiction has become slightly monotonous (108-9). Therefore she wants to read well-written books, preferably by women for the good of women and the world at large (109).

If, then, instead of objective truth a kind of subjective truth is to be aimed at, the very process of reasoning seems the way to make the writer’s ideas convincing and prove their authenticity and establish a perfect rapport of writer and reader:

But in order to make some amends I am going to do what I can *to show you how I arrived at this opinion* about the room and the money. (4; italics mine)

Thus Woolf decides in favour of a circumstantial, leisurely, discursive, and process-oriented method.

What is even more important is the essay’s open claim to fictionalization, the mix of fiction and fact (4). Since, even though there is no chance to arrive at objective truth, there is some prospect of enlightenment on the author’s and the reader’s part if opinions are carefully weighed, Woolf is sure that “Fiction here is likely to contain more

truth than fact" (4). She employs fictionalization in criticism as the only reasonable method for her and boldly confesses to "making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, [...]" (4). She deliberately transfers methods from fiction to criticism and, as in the novels, departs from factual reality.

I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; "I" is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. (4)

Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance) [...]. (5)

Woolf has no doubt about the future for women: provided that there is some advice and encouragement women will, given time and education, enter a new position in society. Yet at the present stage of affairs to cloak her beliefs in the form of fiction is a safety measure for her, the more so because she is likely to raise almost more questions than provide answers to them:

A thousand pens are ready to suggest what you should do and what effect you will have. My own suggestion is a little fantastic, I admit; I prefer, therefore, to put it in the form of fiction. (113)

However, since Woolf usually splits up every major issue into several other minor ones, her procedure is scientific enough and is not likely to provide lazy reading for example, when the author wants to know how women, money, a room and fiction are connected and, furthermore, what the words "women and fiction" mean (3). She also adopts a scholarly attitude when she refuses to speculate on female fiction in the future and limits herself to a critical evaluation of the question in history and the present time (77). She only allows for one exception, the physical conditions for the writing women (78). Otherwise she is clear-sighted enough to realize that the time for an evaluation of the comparative merits of men and women as writers has not yet come and that at present it is more important to gather some knowledge about the material living conditions of women than to speculate on their capacities (105).

Despite these scholarly features in the essay the reader cannot but notice that Woolf often muses so elaborately on single aspects that the original issue has almost got out of sight when she at last resumes it. The gaps, jumps, interruptions, retrospectives, resumings, repetitions, narrative 'inconsistencies' etc. are accepted by her as necessary steps on the way to tentative conclusions. Perhaps this could be called "écriture féminine." Certainly it means an adequate reconstruction of Woolf's conception of a fragmented and multiple reality in criticism, in the form of fragmented narrative structures. These narrative structures and strategies give the essay the character of an impressionistic, spontaneous, subjective, non-authoritative, open-ended, and fictionalized discourse at a specific given point in history with a clearly defined task.

III. Speaker, Situation, and Topic: Material and Mental, Seeming Spontaneity, Constructed Arbitrariness

The correlation of speaker, place and time (situation) and topic or idea becomes most clear in one of the first sentences of the famous beginning at the river which, for me, recalls the start of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on a river bank:

When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down *on the banks of a river* and began to wonder what the words meant. (3; italics mine)

Here then was I [...] *sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought.* (5; italics mine)

In other words, place and time and atmosphere are conducive to the author's thinking as demonstrated throughout the essay. The link between time and place (situation) and speaker and between material and mental aspects of the processes of reasoning in a perfect way is quite obvious:

It was *impossible not to reflect*—the reflection whatever it may have been was cut short. The clock struck. It was *time* to find one's *way* to luncheon. (10; italics mine)

The transfer of methods from Woolf's fiction to her criticism becomes evident when we think of a similar technique in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), where the chiming of Big Ben is the only link between 'real' (or physical, linear) time and the various kinds of relative (or fictitious, subjective, psychological) time in the novel. Her essential working principle of deducing mental abstractions from material evidence is found in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for instance, as well. Woolf connects the material with the mental when she lets Lily Briscoe settle a difficult question of composition in her developing painting by taking up the salt cellar and putting it down again on a flower in the tablecloth's pattern to remind herself to move the tree.

In *A Room of One's Own* the connection of the material and the mental is perhaps most finely expressed in the phrase concerning the influence of good eating and drinking upon thinking and talking (10-11, 18). The kind of eating determines the kind of ideas one has. This notion only seemingly contradicts Woolf's criticism of the lunch-to-dinner business in materialist writers such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and H. G. Wells (cf. Woolf, "Modern Fiction" 147 ff.). In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf transcends material reality for the sake of exploring mental reality. Later in the essay she proves the importance of good eating and drinking for thinking and talking by making the bad dinner in the great dining-hall (17) responsible for the conversation between the narrator and Mary Seton to flag: "The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes" (18).

Woolf exploits the correlation between the material and the mental in other passages as well. Thus she speaks of the two sexes of the mind as corresponding to the two sexes of the body (98 ff.) or interprets the £ 500 needed by every woman writer and the lock on the door as symbolic of the power to work and think independently (106). For her intellectual freedom depends upon the necessary material basis (108).

Above all, however, it is this link between place and time (situation) and theme (topic, idea) as synthesized or embodied in the persona of the speaker which demonstrates the close link between physical con-

ditions and aesthetics in the essay: the speaker conceives her ideas as she is leisurely strolling through Oxbridge, going to Fernham (a fictitious name alluding to the two female colleges Newnham and Girton founded in 1866 only, cf. Erzgräber 133; Nünning 84) and Headingley, visiting the British Museum and walking the streets of London. She arrives at her insights between the time before lunch time on one day at Oxbridge and the morning two days later on October 26, 1928 in London (95, cf. also 4).

The meandering progress in the formulation of ideas is intertwined with certain material or physical circumstances that provide a mental or intellectual stimulus and seem, by chance, to produce almost 'necessary' results. The process of reflection once more turns out to be as important as the ideas. It is significant that certain things happen at certain times and under certain circumstances, producing certain insights:

The narrator arrives at the idea of the cultural disadvantages to be faced by women when she encounters the beadle barring her way across the turf (6).

She comes to grasp the unequal distribution of wealth among men and women in history when she faces the gentleman barring the entrance to the university library and reflects on the material history of the chapel (9 ff.).

She becomes aware of the tremendous socio-political changes in England and Europe caused by WW I (12; a caesura that she depicted elsewhere in fiction, e.g. in *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway* or *The Waves*) when she watches the Manx cat.

She comprehends the economically and materially based cultural disadvantageousness of women when she leaves the modest dinner in the great dining-hall of the women's college (18; cf. also 19, 20, 22, 24).

She understands that money is more important for female emancipation than the female franchise is (37) when she has to pay her bill at a restaurant near the British Museum.

She notes the imaginative importance, but practical insignificance of women in society when she studies the literature on women by men and in books of historiography at home in the evening after a disappointing search in the library (46) and vaguely recognizes the reasons for this discrepancy in women's limited access to education and their difficult living conditions in the Elizabethan Age (46).

She deduces quality standards in essay and novel writing (correlation of sound, sense, and meaning, or, of subject and style) when walking through Oxbridge and recalling Charles Lamb's essay about revisiting Oxbridge in the long vacation (6-7).

The essay thus displays a seeming spontaneity and haphazardness in the narrator's coming to hold certain opinions. Actually, Woolf's ideas are the result of a carefully constructed arbitrariness and thoughtful impressionism (further characteristics of fiction). Woolf herself makes fun of the inevitable causal connections brought about by coincidence:

If by good luck there had been an ash-tray handy, [...] one would not have seen, presumably, a cat without a tail. (11)

Later the narrator misses the turn to Fernham (15) because she is so deep in thoughts about what is truth and what is illusion (about WW I). Yet the accidental physical deviation leads to other interesting insights that are not as 'unplanned' as they seem. In the British Museum the narrator makes an arbitrary choice of a dozen volumes or so. And in a restaurant near the British Museum she idly reads the headlines of a newspaper left there by chance by somebody (33 ff.).

But would a different environment have made any significant change in her reasoning? Or, to express it in Woolf's own laconic way: what if she had not met the beadle? My answer is that certainly it would not have made a difference. Woolf would not really have let her opinions depend on chance and incident. She had already determined her ideas when she construed with great mastership the fictitious 'inevitable' steps which gave rise to them.

IV. Narrator and Reader: Multiple Narrative Voices and Perspectives, Role Play, Conversation, Dialogue, and Communication

In an ordinary scholarly work of criticism it should not be difficult to equate 'author' and 'narrator.' *A Room of One's Own*, however, is a work of criticism and fiction at the same time. Of course, Virginia

Woolf is at the heart of the whole essay, but she fictionalizes herself. Other fictitious personae express their opinions such as Mary Seton (the after-dinner conversation partner in the female college); Mrs. Seton (the mother of Mary Seton, who functions as the female representative of a whole generation of women and mothers still subject and submitting themselves to the rules of patriarchal society); Mary Beton (the imaginary narrator's aunt); Judith (the fictitious sister of Shakespeare); Mary Carmichael (a fictitious female writer in Woolf's own time); and Miss Clough and Miss Davies. We may in fact see a parallel between Woolf's technique and John Dryden's four speakers in his famous essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668).

The personae of the three Marys are generic. They stem from a sixteenth-century Scots ballad with the title *Marie Hamilton* or *The Queen's Marie* (Erzgräber 130-31; Fox 208 ff.). A similar technique is employed by Woolf, by the way, in the form of Mary, Elizabeth and Helen in "Street Haunting" and the three letters in *Three Guineas* (cf. Lee 98).

For most of the essay Mary Beton is presented as the first-person narrator, a fact that the reader is only rarely reminded of:

Here, then, Mary Beton ceases to speak. (105)

On p. 105 Virginia Woolf 'undisguised' a little surprisingly announces the end of that passage and her intention to conclude the essay in her own person. However, the opinions expressed throughout the essay are to be attributed to Woolf, especially as far as the major issue of the essay, the mental independence of women through material safety, is concerned. There is also an autobiographical context to it: at the time when Woolf was revising the manuscript of *A Room of One's Own*, she was beginning to be so successful through writing for the very first time in her life that the danger of poverty (and its material and immaterial consequences) was warded off. In 1928 her income from writing was £ 1434 (Shaw 159). Moreover, Woolf was actually planning a new room of her own at Monk's House (Lee 556). In the essay, however, she hides behind her fictions in order to prevent being misunderstood:

I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious; legendary. If I had said, Look here am I uneducated, because my brothers used all the family funds which is the fact—Well theyd have said; she has an axe to grind; and no one would have taken me seriously. (Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 8 June 1933, *Letters* 5: 2746, 195)

Her role-playing and her use of multiple narrative voices and perspectives—another parallel to her fiction—also show that *A Room of One's Own* is essentially a conversation: the narrator is rather a speaker, the structure is that of a talk, we hear different narrating and talking voices, and there is a talk going on between diverse fictitious or exemplary personae as well as between the narrating and speaking voices and the reader. Thus there is an oral discourse that follows oral strategies of narrative such as conversation, dialogue, direct communication with the reader, and a leisurely proceeding through diverse mental associations.

The qualities of an oral discourse derive to some extent from the genesis of the essay: Virginia Woolf was commissioned to deliver a lecture at two women's colleges at Cambridge, i.e. "to speak about women and fiction" (3; cf. also 4: "the first duty of a *lecturer*"; 111: "a paper *read* by a woman to women"; italics mine) in the form of an after-dinner speech (cf. Jane Marcus 223) to women undergraduates, the potential next generation of writers. She prepared this through walking, talking, thinking and discussing. Later, in an intermediate phase, she would take notes (e.g. when working on the title catalogue and single volumes in the British Museum; 26, 28-30) and transform all this into a lecture (104). As the material was far too vast to be read out, she cut it short for the lecture, i.e. the oral occasion (30, 111). Later she altered and expanded it for the printed version once more, but kept the oral conversational approach (cf. 110: "[...] every speech must end with a peroration").

Furthermore, she frequently uses criteria of sound, for example when comparing the two lunch parties before and after the war: the words "sounded different, because in those days they were accompanied by a sort of humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting, which changed the value of the words themselves" (12). This hum-

ming noise set to words is exemplified in verse by Tennyson and Christina Rossetti (12, 13).

Later, she subjects female writing to an oral test. She tests the soundness of female writers' sentences by exploring the correlation of sound and sense (81), a correlation that again reminds one of John Dryden, who explored it for a lifetime in poetry, drama and music theatre. A test of Mary Carmichael's sentences in her first novel "Life's Adventure," for instance, results in the observation that the "smooth gliding of sentence after sentence" has been interrupted (80). Moreover, Woolf comes to the conclusion that the male sentence construction was unsuited for the female writers of the nineteenth century (76). At least it proved to her to be a "clumsy weapon" for Charlotte Brontë and produced atrocities in George Eliot. The only exception she is ready to make is Jane Austen, whom she credits with the only sentence construction naturally devised (76-77).

A major characteristic of the essay is its emphasis on communication. "Communicate" and "communication" frequently recur to describe the intensive writer-reader rapport or even cooperation Woolf envisaged in good fiction. For example she demands from a good writer:

The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is *communicating his experience* with perfect fullness. (104; italics mine)

Once more she transfers a quality from fiction to criticism (cf. 101, when she criticizes the critic B. for the fact that his emotions do not communicate). The (good) writer has to communicate not only experience and emotion, but other things as well, for instance reality:

It is his business to find it [reality—C.B.] and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. (110)

And this is indeed what Woolf does in the essay, communicating experiences, feelings and reality—through conversation with the listening reader. In her own life, personal talk and letter-writing—two very direct and personal ways of communicating—together with

reading made up for her lack of formal university education. In her collections of essays *The Common Reader*, published before (1925) and after (1932) *A Room of One's Own*, the title alone hints at her aiming to establish a 'community of belief' in aesthetics with the reader (cf. Erzgräber 25; Nünning 43). Woolf made a special point of giving "recommendations for a democratic literary community" on the basis of a "shared, common ground of communication between readers and writers" (Lee, "Essays" 95-96) in her numerous essays.

To bring about this writer-reader rapport it is necessary to record the processes of reasoning. Furthermore, Woolf arrives at her judgments in the presence of the reader who is to be a witness to the process, a necessary constituent and agent in this dialogue- and process-oriented approach:

I am going to develop *in your presence* as fully and freely as I can the *train of thought* which led me to think this [opinion about room and money]. (4; italics mine)

Allowing the reader so much participation and independence is by no means a sign of condescension on Woolf's part. It relieves her of the burden of perfection, absolute responsibility and rightness of judgment, i.e. single authority. Woolf is not ready to take up the role of a gatekeeper. The reader is not regarded as the receiver of an absolute truth, but of debatable opinions that the narrative voices hand over to her or him for judgment and further reflection. Though not a specialist (cf. also *The Common Reader*, 1), the reader is an instrument to be trusted with the responsibility to test the authenticity and usefulness of her ideas, separate fact from fiction, add and deduce things, fill the gaps and make judgments of her or his own. The way that Woolf invites the reader to participate and share is well comparable to the conception of the reader as described in the later-emerging reader-response theory:

Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind this statement *you will find* that they have some bearing upon women and some upon fiction. (4; italics mine)

One can only *give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions* [...]. (4; italics mine)

[...] *it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide* whether any part of it is worth keeping. (4-5; italics mine)

[...] *if you look carefully you may find it* [the thought] *for yourselves* in the course of what I am going to say. (5; italics mine)

While she [Mary Beton] has been doing all these things, *you no doubt have been observing her failings and foibles and deciding* what effect they have had on her opinions. *You have been contradicting her and making whatever additions and deductions seem good to you.* (105; italics mine)

In other words, finding a tentative answer to the urgent questions troubling the author can only be achieved through the critical and active interference of the reader. Woolf's method is one of interaction.

Inviting the reader for active participation is convincingly achieved by giving the impression of an oral situation. We feel the presence of a talking voice as in conversational speech. This technique was also employed by Woolf in quite a number of other works of fiction and criticism (cf. Lee, "Essays" 103-4) such as *The Waves*, the first *Common Reader*, "A Talk about Memoirs," "A Conversation About Conrad," "A Conversation about Art," "Miss Ormerod" and others.

Apart from consistently constructing the situation of a talk and dialogue with the reader, Woolf creates various other speaking situations, e.g. the narrator speaking to herself or with Mary Seton (18) or Mary Beton (37-105). Often she addresses the reader or other characters directly as 'you' as if she was facing the person physically (cf. also 90, 105 etc.):

The only way for you to do it, I thought, addressing Mary Carmichael *as if she were there*, [...]. (84-85; italics mine)

All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael *as if she were present*; [...]. (89; italics mine)

In another passage the speaker makes sure that only women are present as readers or listeners when she raises the subject of Chloe and Olivia:

Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit *in the privacy of our own society* that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. (82; italics mine)

V. Emotional Involvement of the Reader or Listener, Figurative Language, Free Mental Associations, Stream-of-Consciousness, Imagination, Psychoanalysis

Another consistent means of engaging the reader is through establishing emotional ties. The speaker for instance never leaves the reader in doubt about her own emotions and reactions: at the beginning she informs the reader that she feels "bowed down by the weight of the subject" (4, cf. also 5). Woolf even uses a personification to describe her state of mind here: as she sees herself in a striking accord with the nature around her, bushes glow with heat of fire, willows lament (5).

Additionally Woolf mentions gestures and movements and evokes the physical surroundings in her essay. When she is testing the qualities of Mary Carmichael's novel she describes herself as "still hovering at a little distance above the page, [...]" (88)—uneasy about the observer's role of Mary Carmichael (88) and the self-consciousness to be noticed in her work.

Moments of emotional closeness also appear in the passages where Woolf speaks about lesbian relationships, creating an atmosphere of female comradeship, of emotional and psychological 'sisterhood' (cf. 82, quoted above), or about the writer's communicating his experiences to the reader (104), and material and mental presuppositions of female writing (108).

Woolf also engages the reader through the intensive use of figurative language, through vivid descriptions that bring the message home, particularly after the passage about the encounter with the beadle. Thus she compares the vast dome of the British Library to a huge bald forehead (26), regarding herself as "a single but by now somewhat harassed thought" (29) in it. In some cases the figurative language (rhetorical figures such as images, metaphors, symbols, similes, personifications, synecdoches, metonymies, antitheses etc.) is

an expression of the whole process of reasoning, as when she creates the image of letting "the line of thought dip deep into the stream" (109).

Moreover, Woolf uses metaphors for creating an expressive shorthand of her major ideas. The cultural dichotomy of male and female is expressed with reference to gendered psychology in life and work and writing. In one instance she describes the contrast between male and female by reference to a complacently sleeping venerable university library whose treasures are locked away safely within its breast, whereas the female comes to waken it and disturb the settled peace and decidedness of the male world (8). Slightly later she refers to the university as "a sanctuary in which are preserved rare types which would soon be obsolete if left to fight for existence on the pavement of the Strand" (8-9). The male here stands for settledness, inflexibility, even stagnation and protectedness, the female for lively and unorthodox action, movement and progress. With this exhilarating expression of doubt as to the male's fitness for survival, Woolf offers, as it were, an unorthodox feminist reinterpretation of Darwinism. The closing of the gates at Oxbridge in the late afternoon, the beadles with keys, and the university are likened by her to a treasure house made secure for another night (13). This evokes the association of a locked-in, stagnant male world which has nothing to aspire to for a woman.

In another passage she illustrates the antithesis of male educatedness and female uneducatedness by stating that for a man a question "runs into its answer as a sheep runs into its pen" (28): he methodically shepherds his question past all distractions. In contrast to this, her own question ("Why are women poor?"), the question of a woman with no university education, "flies like frightened flock hither and thither, helter-skelter, pursued by a whole pack of hounds" (28). Sometimes the figurative language epitomizes her view on female lives, for instance, when she comprises the complex problem of the compatibility of profession and family for women in the phrase "Making a fortune and bearing thirteen children—no human being could stand it" (22), or when she critically addresses the problem of

the material basis of culture in asking, "What force is behind the plain china off which we dined, [...]?" (20), referring to the symbolic power of the material. She strikingly gives expression to the fact that female achievements frequently remain unrecorded, in contrast to lots of documents about historical and political events and male activities in the world:

For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children set to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie. (89)

These images and examples in a twentieth-century essay elucidate the personal character of criticism, the fact that theory and criticism originally derived from the practice of writing and reading. While we are used to scholarly language which is often rather scientific in the bad sense of the word, i.e. 'dry,' impersonal, neutral, inexpressive, Woolf superbly employs poetic speech in a piece of criticism on issues of literature, culture and society at large.

Another prominent working principle, that of progressing through free mental associations, is extremely well linked to the figurative language. Both support the conversational character. One example is the passage in which Woolf proceeds from an observation of contemporary London to the idea of androgyny. Characteristically, a trivial physical incident within a greater flow of things signifies an intellectually important issue. The following example is the more remarkable because here the movement of a leaf in contemporary London is mentally associated with the flowing river, the undergraduate in his boat and other leaves mentioned before:

At this moment, as so often happens in London, there was a complete lull and suspension of traffic. [...] A single leaf detached itself from the plane tree at the end of the street, and in that pause and suspension fell. Somehow it was like a signal falling, a signal pointing to a force in things which one had overlooked. It seemed to point to a river, which flowed past, invisibly, round the corner, down the street, and took people and eddied them along, as the stream at Oxbridge had taken the undergraduate in his boat and the

dead leaves. Now it was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent leather boots, and then a young man in a maroon overcoat; it was also bringing a taxi-cab; and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window; where the taxi stopped; and the girl and the young man stopped; and they got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere. (96)

Woolf works with free mental associations born from the flow of thinking that she names as such several times. For example, she speaks of the "train of thought" (4, 109) or "course of my thoughts" (104) or announces to the reader: "[...] I give you my *thoughts as they came to me [...]*" (6-7; italics mine). Later, when the speaker is so deep in thought about the issue of truth and illusion that she misses the turn to Fernham she says "I spare you the *twists and turns of my cogitations*, for no conclusion was found on the road to Headingley, [...]" (15; italics mine). Again, her ideas develop in that typical peripatetic and meandering way. The quasi-spontaneous character of the thinking process is highlighted when she confesses: "I have handed on all that has come my way *without going in search of it, [...]*" (111; italics mine), but it is in fact a deliberate act of composition on the author's part.

At times her ideas emerge from the stream of consciousness, as for instance when during the talk of the speaker to her friend Mary Seton in her room a new stream of thought is coming up:

In a minute or so we were *slipping freely in and out among all those subjects of curiosity and interest which form in the mind in the absence of a particular person, and are naturally to be discussed on coming together again—[...]*.

While these things were being said, however, I became shamefacedly aware of a *current setting in of its own accord and carrying everything forward to an end of its own*. (19; italics mine)

This thought stream leads Woolf to the idea of the material conditions of culture and the awareness of the cultural disadvantages faced by women. Towards the end of the essay she resumes the image of catching fish, i.e. creating ideas, when she advises women to write and travel and be idle and "dream over books and loiter at street corners

and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream" (109; italics mine). The image of anything first used on p. 5 thus forms a kind of frame for the whole essay.

Her own method of reflection can indeed be fully characterized by the simile of the thought stream and the oaring undergraduate. The line of associations is: sitting in thought on the banks of a river and watching the reflections in the water; the movements of the mind (fishing for ideas) are likened to letting one's line into a stream and catching fish; an idea (fish) turns up and is caught; i.e. thoughts emerge as from a stream:

The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree, and when the undergraduate had oared his boat through the reflections they closed again, completely, as if he had never been. There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it, until—you know the little tug—the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked; the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating. (5)

The fish turns out to be a particularly significant image, in Woolf's essay and in her fiction. The fin of a fish actually produced the idea for the novel *The Waves*. When the passage in the essay is continued Woolf associates fishing for ideas, fruitful fishing and a tumult of ideas, not entirely unlike (to mention Dryden once more) the image of artistic ideas as procreated out of chaos in the Dedication of *The Rival Ladies*.

But however small it [the fish] was, it had, nevertheless, the mysterious property of its kind—put back into the mind, it became at once very exciting, and important; and as it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither, set up such a wash and tumult of ideas that it was impossible to sit still. It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. (5-6)

Once more the circle of physical movement, mental reflection and new physical movement is concluded. Only the encounter with the beadle sends Virginia Woolf's little fish or idea into hiding: the reflections are interrupted (cf. 6). After that episode the speaker can once more indulge in meditation, in harmony with the moment (8), an idea that recalls Paterian sentiments.

All this goes together with the use of the imagination, another feature Woolf's essay shares with fiction. For example the speaker remembers Christina Rossetti's lines and betrays "the folly of fancy" by imagining lilac in October (16). In the garden of Fernham she imagines similar phantoms in the spring twilight, daffodils, bluebells, spring weather and somebody in a hammock (17). In her friend Mary Seton's room she envisages a scene of masons on a high roof five centuries ago with kings and nobles bringing treasure in huge sacks and pouring it under the earth, which is contrasted with another picture in the mind "of lean cows and a muddy market and withered greens and the stringy hearts of old men" (19). The two scenes are combating one another and in the end lead to an awareness of the contrast between a rich male culture and a poor female one.

The use of the imagination and the painting of imaginary scenes serve the same end as the other techniques discussed, namely to further the rapport between writer and audience. In the most productive passages of the essay these imaginative ideas or speculations, which work backwards into history as well as forwards into the future, help Woolf to sustain her main ideas. Inventing, for example, a childhood of Mary Seton spent unhappily while her mother "had been making money" (22), helps her understand the difficulty of making a profession and family compatible. Imagining the streets south of the river in the scene with the elderly lady and the middle-aged woman she recognizes the lack of historical memory and consciousness in women. Recalling the streets of London in her mind she feels the accumulation of unrecorded life (89), and imagining the shop hung with coloured ribbons and a girl behind the counter that Mary Carmichael should depict she fully grasps the necessity of recording

the as yet obscure female lives (90). Imagination helps her to test the validity of her ideas or bring them about at all and is therefore to be seen as an indispensable part of her discourse.

Another element is the reference to methods of psychoanalytical criticism and depth psychology, with which Woolf obviously was quite familiar. In the essay she came to use psychoanalysis in two different ways, passively and actively, so to speak. Passively she applied it in her analysis of human behaviour or special situations in life. One example is the Manx cat episode in which, through the appearance of the cat, all of a sudden the atmosphere is changed when the speaker is right in the middle of reflecting upon how important good eating and drinking are for an excellent conversation and brilliant ideas:

The sight of that abrupt and truncated animal padding softly across the quadrangle changed by some fluke of the subconscious intelligence the emotional light for me. It was as if some one had let fall a shade. Perhaps the excellent hock was relinquishing its hold. (11)

The interruption and disturbance, however, leads her to pursue another idea, that of the difference between pre-war and post-war lunch parties, and is thus a productive element. Alice Fox, by the way, suggests that the tailless Manx cat is also used as a metaphor expressing Woolf's claim to a liberation of women from patriarchal claims (cf. Fox, 202).

In a yet broader context psychoanalytical criticism helped Woolf to discern the character of her own age (the criticised sex-consciousness) and apply psychoanalytic criticism historically and culturally in her gender psychology when she put forward the idea of the female writers' ability to think back through their mothers (76).

But psychoanalytic concepts and practices are also actively employed by her. In *A Room of One's Own* she invents psychoanalytic scenes in order to bring her ideas into focus. A delightful and convincing example of the workings of the unconscious is the passage about Professor von X, in which Woolf expressly refers to Freud's ideas

about insights to be gained from idleness and dreams (31). The speaker cannot agree with the professor's statements about the supposed mental, moral, and physical inferiority of women (32) and finally recognizes the connection between anger and power in men (34). Her belief that no evolution would have taken place without male vanity and her insight into the role attributed to women by men as enlarging mirrors (35) are just two examples of her thoughtful rethinking of Darwinian and Freudian notions in terms of gender psychology.

To work from the surface of a phenomenon toward its essence as demonstrated in the Professor von X-passage epitomizes the overall method of Woolf's essay. Her search for answers takes on a spiral character. She is digging ever more deeply, exploring the issue in an ever acuter way, turning from the concrete, material and physical to the most sophisticated and abstracted insights. Her questions become more and more precise, her probings more profound. She presses insights out of seemingly arbitrary and trivial incidents through free mental associations, talks, imagery, logical reasoning, comparisons, dialectical thinking, and emotions. From under the mass of trivial outward incident she uncovers the philosophical essence. Woolf comes across her 'truth' in moments of vision or revelation (epiphanies), searching for the essence of reality and reconstructing her ideas in similar ways as in her fiction.

VI. Conclusion: The Politics of Essay-Writing; Content and Form, Subject and Style

For me Woolf's major contributions to literary and social criticism in *A Room of One's Own* are doubtless to be seen in:

the orientation of the essay to the future of female writing (opening up of the genre of criticism and essay-writing to women);

a beginning of feminist criticism and gender studies proper (far-sightedly Woolf assigns students, scholars, historians, psychologists, artists, politicians etc. their concrete tasks as to stated deficits in considering the female cause);

an impulse for the study of society, the material or economic basis of its gender-patterned culture;

an intensification of the life-art discussion with respect to fiction (expanding the views of John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, G. E. Moore and others);

a redefinition of the essence of fiction and art in general, touching on autobiography, biography, fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction;

the writing of an associative literary history including genre history (e.g. poetry-writing, essay-writing, novel-writing; comparative poetics);

a reflection, further elaboration and anticipation of important movements in literary criticism and theory such as historical criticism, Marxism, psycho-analytical criticism, reader-response theory, post-structuralism, feminist criticism, cultural studies, deconstruction; post-colonialism etc. ;

a new synthesis in her reflections on the discourses of poetry, philosophy and historiography.

This is not to gloss over her shortcomings and misjudgments, e.g. the lack of solutions for the problems faced by women in social and historical reality (no concrete hints as to how to earn £ 500), the omission of the working-class woman, the ghostlike appearance of the working classes in general, or the apparent contradictions inherent in Woolf's attitudes as to whether genius or tradition and environment are responsible for major cultural achievements.

As a consequence of the second wave of feminist critical theory the reception of Woolf's ideas became very polarized at the hands of essentialist gynocritical and non-essentialist theoreticians. The late 1980s and 1990s only slightly reconciled these extreme judgments. Woolf was denied and newly assigned a role model for the women of our time (cf. Erzgräber 144; Poole ix-xiii; L. Marcus 211 ff.).

The correlation of subject and style in *A Room of One's Own* has, however, remained a critical target since the publication of the essay. Recognition of the quality of her narrative strategies and style was slow to come and provided a hotly debated issue in the reception history of the essay—as did the thematic issue of women and fiction before. In particular, Woolf's use of the imagination and her special way of constructing the narrative texture of the essay were evaluated in negative as well as positive terms. A well-meaning unsigned re-

view "Women and Books" from 31 October 1929 called *A Room* "a delightfully peripatetic essay" and made it clear that "the main path" of the essay was the spiritual and material necessities for female writers. (*Times Literary Supplement* 867; Majumdar no. 79, 255). Vita Sackville-West, in the *Listener* of 6 November 1929, pointed to the mixed generic characteristics of the essay, which could neither be regarded as a novel nor pure criticism (620; Majumdar no. 80, 257).

It was Arnold Bennett who started the real controversy in his review of 28 November 1929. Though not denying to Virginia Woolf that she could write (Bennett 147), he called her imagination "fancy" and held it responsible for the thematic digressions in the essay (148). Since then the controversy has been continuing (cf. Williams 149-50; West 169-70; Rogat 185). The link between subject and style thus already disconcerted the early critics and has only by comparatively few critics been seen as an indispensable or dialectical phenomenon. Among these are female scholars such as Winifred Holtby (171); Alice Fox (201-02, 210-11), Annabel Robinson (215-19); Jane Marcus (221-24, 232, 246), Julie Robin Solomon (252-53, 257, 263), Hermione Lee (91-108) or Marion Shaw (166-68). Following their lead, I hope to have shown that the thematical achievements of the essay are in no way to be separated from its narratological merits. The essay is in fact of seminal importance with respect to subject *and* style. It is a compendium of historical, social, political, cultural *and* aesthetic criticism in the context of a fully emerging Modernism. It is provocative and unorthodox as to its methods and ideas and, with respect to its philosophical, historical, aesthetic and theoretical implications, well comparable to such works as John Dryden's essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* or Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

Woolf succeeds in expressing what she wants to say never 'despite' the narrative and stylistic features of the essay. Rather, they appear to be the immediate result of its compelling conversational strategies. The cross-connections with Woolf's fictional works are evident in *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Orlando*, *The Waves*, *Night and Day* *Flush* and other novels. The dialogic and the interactive, the

casual and the digressive, the ruminative and the associative, the imaginative and the fragmentary are inextricably connected with Woolf's assumptions about gender, culture and fiction.

Moreover, the essay agrees largely with Woolf's own criteria for essay-writing. A look at "The Modern Essay" in the first volume of *The Common Reader* reveals that Woolf derived these criteria from numerous studies of essays from the past and present and consistently put her ideas into practise in *A Room of One's Own*. Her criteria are related to (1) the author (task of giving pleasure; vision instead of just knowledge; presence of the author without preaching the gospel; independent feeling and thinking of the author, triumph of style rather than feat of skill, cf. 220, 222); (2) the circumstances of modern essay-writing (critic writing weekly and daily and briefly for busy and tired people, 219); (3) the text (well-balanced texture; shape and intensity; no decoration; exciting the reader's interest in domestic themes is justified if it is unaccompanied by manipulation and insubstantial peroration; ideas going beyond the level of talk in order to make the essay come alive with the readers; a naturally rich speaking voice; no skimming the surface of thought and diluting the strength of personality; display of beauty, courage, and thought; the essay should be exact, truthful, and imaginative instead of loose, merely plausible, and commonplace, 214); and (4) the reader. The effect on the reader desired by Woolf is

to sting us wide awake and fix us in a trance which is not sleep but rather an intensification of life—a basking, with every faculty alert, in the sun of pleasure [...]. (212)

Woolf's preliminary definition of a good essay, to

have this permanent quality about it; it must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out (222)

shows the indispensable link between personality, conviction, language, artistic integrity, and inclusion of the reader.

Actually for her there are no criteria for good essay-writing other than those for good novel-writing, i.e. artistic integrity or vision:

[...] not knowledge [...], but a vision, such as we get in a good novel where everything contributes to bring the writer's conception as a whole before us. (213)

This credo more or less means a definite farewell to fundamental functions of the classical essay such as educating the reader's taste, establishing a canon of literary highlights and perhaps even censoring cultural achievements—activities that Woolf considered with scepticism though this did not prevent her from expressing very decided opinions on authors and works.

A Room of One's Own opened up new dimensions for modern criticism. It does not defy tradition altogether and yet at the same time ignores the traditional boundaries of non-fiction and fiction, attracting the reader to the common qualities of both discourses. Woolf thus established herself as a skilful theoretician and practitioner of literary criticism, a genre that she encouraged women to explore beyond the novel (together with historiography, biography, scientific and other kinds of writing). She made room indeed for the next generation of women writers and critics.

Universität Dortmund

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"Weisst du noch, dass ich sang?": Conversation in Celan's Poetry

HANNA K. CHARNEY

"The poem becomes conversation—often desperate conversation," Paul Celan said in his "Meridian" Speech in 1960.¹ This statement is as important as it seems paradoxical. Celan's poetic language seems far removed indeed from anything resembling ordinary conversation, and Pierre Joris, in his introduction to his recent translations (*Breath-turn*² and *Threadsuns*³), seems right when he says: "Celan's German is an eerie, nearly ghostly language; it is both mother-tongue, and thus firmly anchored in the realm of the dead, and a language that the poet has to make up, to re-create, to re-invent, to bring back to life [...]. To try to translate it as if it were current, commonly spoken or available German—i.e. to find a similarly current English or American 'Umgangssprache'—would be to miss an essential aspect of the poetry."⁴

Yet Celan's intensely and increasingly complex, sometimes impenetrable poetry, hewn as if from hard rock, is, in large part, and more and more in the later works, imbued with address to a "you," a "Du." This "Du" can cover a wide range of possibilities: it can shift, or merge, or otherwise change, sometimes within the same poem; critics have variously analyzed—and analyzed variously—many of its functions in many poems. The "you" may be lover, or sister, or friend, or—often—mother, as Felstiner points out succinctly,⁵ or it can be the self, in the mode of Apollinaire's "Zone" and other poems.

I will not try to entertain this question in its large sense—for instance, to consider Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's argument, in his book on Celan, that the poet's work is a long dialogue with Heidegger⁶—but limit myself as specifically as possible to one main textual exam-

ple which shows at work the dynamics of a poetic "conversation" with an addressee. I will try to show how interpretation can be influenced by the open workings of this system, despite the enormous difficulties of understanding. First, "Gespräch im Gebirg" ("Conversation in the Mountains"), Celan's short prose narrative (alone of its kind) will serve as a blueprint that sets the tone and levels of a *conversation* with one or several interlocutors. In the prose piece, the speaker is more or less defined in a way which is missing in the poetry, and I will try to show, secondly, in the example of "Zähle die Mandeln," how widely interpretation can vary because of differences in the attribution of the *you*. "Es war Erde in ihnen," the third example, illustrates in the most starkly tragic sense, how personal pronouns can emerge from the void of the Apocalypse. Finally, several examples will illustrate that, eventually, even the stone can be made sentient by a *you*, or rather, by "you" to whom the poem speaks. In that sense I will turn to a conclusion similar to that of Dietlind Meinecke's study, *Wort und Name bei Paul Celan*: "Through always new naming, through new naming discovery or invention of a *you* or something made to be spoken to, the human being can perhaps attain a place, put together in multiple ways, toward which there might be a free movement." ("durch die immer neue Nennung, durch neue nennende Findung oder Erfindung eines Du oder sonst ansprechbar Gemachten, kann der Mensch möglicherweise einen vielfältig zusammengesetzten Ort gewinnen, auf den hin es eine freie Bewegung geben könnte").⁷ She says "Bewegung"—a movement that is certainly congruent with Celan's thought, but "Begegnung"—encounter—should be implicit also. When Celan said "The poem becomes conversation," he did not, of course, say it in English, using a word that can evoke the pleasant-ries of sociability, possible banter, and playful exchanges. "Gespräch" can be grave; it is closely associated with "Sprache," language, "Sprechen," speak: language in the act of speech.

Now, in "Gespräch im Gebirg" a character sets out in the manner of Büchner's Lenz, a human being—perhaps of the same ilk as the poet that Celan characterized in a letter to Hans Bender (May 18, 1960):

"one person, i.e. a unique, mortal soul searching for its way with its voice and its dumbness" (translated by Rosmarie Waldrop).⁸ This person is "the Jew"—later called "Klein" (in relation to "Jew Gross," who came up to meet him). Identity is partial—and gradual—here, and Jew Klein's real name is "unspeakable," but it is in his human, Jewish capacity that he has left home and is meeting an older "cousin":

"I know, I know. Yes I've come a long way, I've come like you."

"I know."

"You know and you're still asking. So you've come anyway, you've anyway come here—Why, and what for?"

"Why and what for . . . Because maybe I had to talk to myself or to you, had to talk with my mouth and my tongue and not with my stick."⁹

All that matters here is talk—"because I'm asking, who is it meant for then, the earth, it's not meant for you, I'm saying, and not for me—well then, a language with no I and no Thou, pure He, pure It, d'you see, pure They, and nothing but that." "A language with no I and no Thou": that is the negative definition and the negative approach to the human world, "I and Thou." Practically all critics of Celan have taken into account the major influence of Martin Buber's thought on Celan's conception of the "I/Thou" relation.¹⁰ The encounter with Osip Mandelstam's work is also crucial here.¹¹ "Gespräch im Gebirg" sets out some of its modulations in ways specifically related to language and especially speech.

John Felstiner provides a superb analysis of this text on which I will partly draw here. He mentions the term "Geschwätz" (which he translates as "babble") that Celan uses, a term liked by Kafka and that Heidegger uses in the sense of everyday talk.¹² The two "cousins" in "Gespräch im Gebirg" talk and babble, "Alright, let them talk." There are different levels of talk, speech, babble. There are also different levels and kinds of language used. Words of a Southern German dialect, Middle High German, Yiddish, High German are layered in a combination that some critics see as indicating a fragmentation of the speaker. Fragmentation, perhaps, in this process where a history of

the language is sketched in these transformations, but it is also a reaffirmation of an identity: "I, I, I" is reiterated and Jewishness is reclaimed. Felstiner shows aptly how "Celan's 'Conversation' starts with a semiotic flip [from "Jud" to "Sohn eines Juden"], the tag of shame a mark of pride."¹³

Unquestionably, however, the "Geschwätz" here is mostly fallen speech. As Felstiner says, "in Walter Benjamin's essay 'On Language in General and on Language of Man,' *Geschwätz* designates empty speech after the Fall [...]. The 'babbling' of Celan's Jews is a come-down—via the cataclysm that ruined Benjamin—from God-given speech."¹⁴ And the speaker may or may not have had a listener—"Hearest Thou ('Hörst Du'), he says nothing, he doesn't answer." Felstiner is right again in saying that "Gespräch" contracts into a monologue. And yet again, at the end there is reaffirmation: "you here and I here—I here, I; who can say, could have said, all that to you; who don't say and haven't said it to you." This I is "on the way" to himself.

"Zähle die Mandeln" was written about seven years before "Gespräch im Gebirg," and I would like to take up the two works side by side, following the lead of Amy Colin in *Paul Celan: Holograms of Darkness*.¹⁵ Both texts are strongly marked by Celan's crucial encounter with the work of Osip Mandelstam. "In fact [Colin writes], Celan's 'Zähle die Mandeln' dramatizes a key concept of Mandelstam's work, the dialogical character of poems, their address to an 'Other,' their movements toward an unknown 'You.'"¹⁶ And Felstiner is undoubtedly right in thinking that among other elements in the background of "Conversation in the Mountains" the presence of Mandelstam is strongly felt.¹⁷

I am taking the two texts, however, in reverse chronological order because we are now entering the realms of poetry. Although, as the translator Rosmarie Waldrop says, "Celan's prose is a poet's prose,"¹⁸ there are nevertheless important differences—and that is a part of the main point I am trying to make. In the poem speech is unmediated—we have no "I say," "he says," "I say" to guide or distract us—and we

are summoned to an immediate response to a harsh imperative: "Zähle die Mandeln." Celan's imperatives tend to be biblically concrete and active: "Geh," "Komm"—and the first "Zähle" has a special formal gravity here in contrast to what follows the "dich" in the third line: "zähl mich dazu," familiar and inclusive. Once a "you" has been alluded to—not named, the name, distanced and sacred, will only be mentioned in the third stanza: "Dort erst tratest Du ganz in den Namen, der dein ist"—once a "you" has been mentioned, a passage to the past opens up: the past tense is used, and the sounds become softer, more muted and liquid:

Ich suchte dein Aug, als du's aufschlugst und niemand dich ansah,
ich spann jenen heimlichen Faden,
an dem der Tau, den du dachtest,
hinunterglitt [...].

The past also corresponds to the subjectivity established for "you": "zähle, was bitter war und *dich wachhielt*" (my emphasis). The wakefulness—in the mode of bitter awareness—is the mark of consciousness, in an extraordinary—prefigured—illustration of what Emmanuel Lévinas wrote about Celan's work: "insomnia in the Bed of Being."¹⁹ This subjectivity is further pursued through "dein Aug, als du's aufschlugst," "der Tau, den du dachtest"—and finally, action: "tratest du," "schrittst du," and the plural "ihr ginget."

Strikingly, the I, the first person, is granted only two instances of the nominative: "Ich suchte dein Aug" and "ich spann" in the second stanza. "Ich suchte dein Aug" is a quest which, as has been noted by critics,²⁰ is deflected: a quest for a face to face encounter, eye to eye (and I to I). Perhaps there may be here an echo of the haunting poem by Apollinaire, "Le Pont Mirabeau," whose fateful name runs through Celan's tragic death from the bridge over the Seine: "Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine [...]. Les mains dans les mains restons face à face."²¹ "Let us remain face to face" but the hands form a bridge over the extinct past, the water inexorably flowing beneath.

"Standing" and "eye" (as well as the almond as eye) recur throughout Celan's poetry in different constellations. The "gegenüber stehen"

and the "eye" are in stark contrast not only inherently, but also to the notion of being together, next to one another. The two "cousins" in "Conversation in the Mountains" talk and walk together, and there were "next to me the others who were like me, the others who were different and yet like me [...] and they did not love me, and I did not love them because I was one, and who wants to love when there are many [...] I did not love them who could not love me [...]." ²²

In "Zähle die Mandeln" there is no being together and not directly a coming together. But I would submit the following suggestion: in the third stanza, "Dort erst tratest du ganz in den Namen, der dein ist," a wondrously complete subjectivity is formed and consecrated. The image "schwangen die Hämmer frei," which will recur in Celan, indicates a kind of triumphant hope no matter how much compounded of pain and loss. And this reclaiming of personhood and freedom has occurred in that place—"Dort"—in the "Krügen," the vessels, the urn perhaps (as in "Der Sand aus den Urnen") protected by "ein Spruch." "Ein Spruch," a saying, can be proverbially general, can also be a benediction to be said—but is certainly related to "Sprechen" and "Sprache," a saying in language. And the "dew" reached the vessels through the agency of the "I"—the speaking poet-poem: "ich spann jenen heimlichen Faden." "Faden" is another word which will often acquire great importance in Celan. Here in its relation to "spann" ("spun") it may evoke thought, the spinning of words as well as possibly the threads of life and death held by the three Fates.

At the end, the first person only reappears in the accusative—as it appeared at the beginning—"zähl mich dazu"—now "Mache mich bitter. / Zähle mich zu den Mandeln"—a bitter desire for inclusion marked by specific *effect*—"Make me bitter." But this desire, I think, is validated by the quest and the activity of an I that made thought—the "dew you thought"—speak.

Now I must admit that the little I have said about this poem assumes that the "I," self-effacing and muted, is the poem-and-poet, in whatever symbolic and concrete relation, that speaks. I do not know how else one could read a poem. 'Who speaks to whom?' is a question

that has been repeatedly asked and answered in highly diverse ways. Amy Colin sketches a masterful review of critical interpretations of "Zähle die Mandeln," including the question as to who is the speaker and who the you. For instance, "Peter Paul Schwarz [...] associates the 'Thou' with the poet himself, the speaker with the mother, etc. [...]." ²³ Felstiner baldly states that the poem is "addressed to" the poet's mother. ²⁴

This opens up the endlessly debated question, still as active as ever, in the understanding of Celan's poetry: what role should referential information play? A recent review by J. M. Coetzee mentions again Hans-Georg Gadamer's position "that background information should take second place to what the poem [itself] knows" ²⁵ as well as the opposite points of view, which claim with equal plausibility that some poems are incomprehensible without some historical or literary information to shed light on them.

To consider this question in the light of our poem and of the question of "conversation," Celan is again the best guide in his "Meridian" Speech: "[...] the poem speaks. It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks." ²⁶ Turning a little later to the poem as "conversation," Celan says: "Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed, can gather it into a 'you' around the naming and speaking I." ²⁷ The "conversation," the *Gespräch*, the speaking, takes place in that time and in that space—and through that time and space. In "Zähle die Mandeln," if one brings to the poem knowledge of the "you" (or the "I") from outside—from external knowledge, so to speak, interpretation is necessarily narrowed into certain paths. For instance, Felstiner, when he says "The poet is speaking to his mother," then goes on (understandably): "The *Mandeln* he wants to be numbered among call to mind the almonds she baked in breads and cakes." ²⁸ Of course, he also mentions other associations of almonds in Celan, but I believe that the complex system of relations and meanings in the poem no longer works as well or as richly as it can when an initial identification directs the meanings from the start. ²⁹

The "You" of "Zähle die Mandeln" constitutes itself, in the third stanza, into a glorious form of completion, which turns away from the present, the speaker, and the frame: "und ihr ginget selbdritt durch den Abend." Colin writes that "the term *selbdritt* ('with two others') [...] refers to Anna selbdritt, a recurrent motif in painting since the late Middle Ages, depicting Anna together with Mary and the infant Jesus."³⁰ Perhaps this motif of the *third* also marks the irrevocable nature of the turning away, here a sign of completeness and separation.

In one of Celan's most somber poems written not long after "Todesfuge," "Es war Erde in ihnen," the whole range of personal pronouns comes forth from catastrophic nothingness. Repeatedly, the third person, plural and singular, dominates until there is a new conjugation, which, as Felstiner remarks, instead of the usual "amo, amas," the conjugation of the verb "to love," is "Ich grabe, du gräbst," etc. And then this extraordinary line, this "waltzing tune," in Felstiner's words,³¹ "O einer, o keiner, o niemand, o du" figures as pure evocation and invocation. Looked at in a certain way, the first "O" and the last are the pillars of the line: "O einer" and "o du" hold up everything, as in "Gespräch im Gebirg" the I and the Thou. But "einer" is not a subject, not an "I" yet. "Einer," one alone, says Jew Klein in "Conversation in the Mountains" cannot love and cannot be loved; after "einer" comes "keiner," none. But from the bottom of the abyss with "niemand" (no one) arises a "You"—and that "You" will lead, even through the black earth, to an "I" ("du gräbst und ich grab") and an "us," through the moving *toward* you: "Ich grab mich dir zu."

If the poem places the "you" addressed in its coordinates—in the dialogic structure of its seeking and speaking (and this is the relation that everybody always writes about), who is the reader? Where is the reader? Is the reader a part of the "conversation"?

To just make a few suggestions in this largely unanswerable question, I would like to mention the study by Klaus Weissenberger, *Die Elegie bei Paul Celan*,³² not in its specific arguments, but for this idea: considering certain poems of Celan as elegies ("Zähle die Mandeln"

among them) can indicate important aspects of orientation. There is the commemoration of the dead, and they may be addressed in the poem's dialogue. But to come back to "Zähle die Mandeln," when the dead have walked away into the night of the past, does not the poem speak to the living?

The last lines of "Zähle die Mandeln" make the poem resonate into a present or a future with the me-oriented imperatives: "Mache mich bitter. / Zähle mich zu den Mandeln." These lines, as has often been noted, echo the beginning. As we go from this first stanza into the extraordinary evocation of the two middle stanzas and then out of them into the last lines, aren't there some "Breath-turns," in Celan's later term ("*Atemwende*")? Perhaps there is a turn, and a break, a rupture, a split within the first "Zähle," which then shifts onto "Zähl mich dazu," a shift comparable to Rimbaud's famous "Je est un Autre."

The first "Zähle" seems launched into the open—a gesture which may resemble the launching of the poem as "a message in a bottle." Celan says in the "Bremen" Speech: "A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle [an image from Mandelstam] thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may be somehow washed up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart."³³ A message, thus, *toward* a listener, a reader. "Whenever we speak with things in this way [Celan says in the "Meridian" Speech in relation to the poem as conversation] we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an 'open' question 'without resolution' [...]."³⁴ Does this open question not entail the reader?

It may be crucial, for Celan, to take very seriously the notion of poetry as "conversation." It may be appropriate to add to the kind of modernist dictum by Solzhenitsyn—"Whatever else a text is about, it is also about itself"—the following principle: whomever or whatever the poem speaks with, it also speaks with a reader, that other, or other other.

The principle also brings with it some imperatives on how to listen and that is undoubtedly an endless task, "without resolution." Isn't the reader, though, like Lucile in *Danton's Death* by Büchner? To come back for a last time to Celan's "Meridian" Speech (on receiving the Büchner Prize), Lucile, in Celan's words, is "somebody who hears, listens, looks [...] and then does not know what it was about. But who hears the speaker, 'sees him speaking,' who perceives language as a physical shape and also—who could doubt it within Büchner's work—breath, that is, direction and destiny."³⁵

How to listen—that brings back the question of interpretation. Far be it from me to underestimate the admirable contribution of John Felstiner as translator and in his recent book on Celan. As George Steiner said in his review in the *Times Literary Supplement*,³⁶ Felstiner comes close to being a "perfect" reader. His scholarship, insights, and formidable knowledge of Celan are unequalled, and he could not be more justified in showing how wrong-headed critics were who saw nothing but formal and contentless structure in Celan's poetry.

Yet I tried to make the point that even such an ideal reader could be misled by chronological and biographical bias. If we insist on poetry as conversation, we deal not only with the "where-from" but also the "where-to," within and without, a labor of Sisyphus—a Sisyphus among the constellations of time:

Es ist,

Ich weiß es, nicht wahr,
 daß wir lebten, es ging
 blind nur ein Atem zwischen
 Dort und Nicht-da und Zuweilen,
 kometenhaft schwirrte ein Aug
 auf Erloschenes zu, in den Schluchten,
 da, wo's verglühte, stand
 zitzenprächtigt die Zeit,
 an der schon empor- und hinab-
 und hinwegwuchs, was
 ist oder war oder sein wird—,

("Soviel Gestirne")³⁷

We knew and we knew not—"wir wußten, wir wußten nicht"—we know and we do not know, but the dialogue should go on.

Hunter College, City University
New York

NOTES

¹Paul Celan, "The Meridian," trans. Rosmarie Waldrop, *Collected Prose* (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), 50. German quotations of Celan's poetry and prose are from *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1-3, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983).

²Paul Celan, *Breathturn*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995).

³Paul Celan, *Threadsuns*, trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 2000).

⁴Pierre Joris, "Introduction," *Breathturn*, by Paul Celan (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995).

⁵John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995).

⁶Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999).

⁷Dietlind Meinecke, *Wort und Name bei Paul Celan: Zur Widerruflichkeit des Gedichts* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970) 293-94.

⁸Celan, *Collected Prose* 26.

⁹Paul Celan, "Conversation in the Mountains," trans. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 142.

¹⁰Martin Buber, *Ich und du* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1936).

¹¹Felstiner 141.

¹²Felstiner 144.

¹³Felstiner 144.

¹⁴Felstiner 145.

¹⁵Amy Colin, *Paul Celan: Holograms of Darkness* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991).

¹⁶Colin 107.

¹⁷Felstiner 141.

¹⁸Rosmarie Waldrop, "Introduction," *Collected Prose*, by Paul Celan (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986) IX.

¹⁹Felstiner 288; quoting Emmanuel Lévinas, "De l'être à l'autre," *Revue de Belles-Lettres* 96. 2-3 (1972): 198, and in *Chicago Review* 29.3 (1978): 16-22.

²⁰Colin 113.

²¹Guillaume Apollinaire, *Poetische Werke – Œuvres Poétiques*, ed. Gerd Henninger (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969) 64.

²²Celan, *Collected Prose* 21.

²³Colin 107.

²⁴Felstiner 63.

²⁵J. M. Coetzee, "In the Midst of Losses," *New York Review of Books* (5 July 2001): 4.

²⁶Celan, *Collected Prose* 48.

²⁷Celan, *Collected Prose* 50.

²⁸Celan, *Collected Prose* 63.

²⁹[Editors' note:] At the symposium on "The Poetics of Conversation in 20th-Century Literature" in Halberstadt (August 5-9, 2001) Felstiner's consideration of baking gave rise to some discussion which made clear that the allusion to baking by no means implies that the poet is speaking to his mother. Inge Leimberg pointed out that the words "Zähle die Mandeln" might well be imagined to be addressed by a master to an apprentice or a mother to a daughter or maid, since too many bitter almonds do not only spoil the flavour but, containing prussic acid, are dangerous. Baking has, however, not only a nutritive but a sacramental aspect, and when precision is necessary for baking or preparing a meal in general, it is essential for a ritual means as, in Celan's instance, the Seder. The *Matzes* (covered by a fine cloth) on the Seder-plate are surrounded by other symbolic ingredients (especially bitter herbs) meticulously selected and arranged. The prototypical clay of the Egyptian slavery is symbolized by a mixture containing almonds. Other components in Celan's poem which may be suggestive of a mystic kind of partnership in its "conversation" include the mysterious thread combining above and below, on which the tear-like dewdrops glide (from the almond-like eye) into ampullas guarded by a saying. Nearly all of these images may be traced in George Herbert's *The Temple*, which is centred round the altar where bread and wine are administered and which ends with the words "So I did sit and eat." Matthias Bauer's question whether Celan knew Herbert (e.g. the "viall full of tears" in "Hope") was answered by Hanna Charney that in all probability he did. Maurice Charney and Lothar Hönnighausen remarked that the bottle of tears (frequent in folklore and fairy tales) is also well known as a classical topos.

When this note was revised for the press, Inge Leimberg added that Luther's translation of Ps 56:9 reads to her like a kind of fingerpost to "Zähle die Mandeln" (including its possible addressee): "Zähle die Wege meiner Flucht; fasse meine Tränen in deinen Krug. Ohne Zweifel, du zählst sie." Ps 126 also suggests itself as a foil.

³⁰Colin 106.

³¹Felstiner 201.

³²Klaus Weissenberger, *Die Elegie bei Paul Celan* (München: Francke, 1969).

³³Celan, *Collected Prose* 34-35.

³⁴Celan, *Collected Prose* 63.

³⁵Celan, *Collected Prose* 40.

³⁶George Steiner, "A Lacerated Destiny: The Dark and Glittering Genius of Paul Celan," *Times Literary Supplement* (2 June 1995): 2-3.

³⁷Paul Celan, "Soviel Gestirne," *Die Niemandsrose* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1963).

"Fortuitous Wit": Dialogue and Epistemology in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

BURKHARD NIEDERHOFF

1. An Introduction to *Arcadia*

Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, which was first performed and published in 1993, is a play of ideas. It is also a play *about* ideas, in particular about the processes that generate them. The location of the play suits the topic. *Arcadia* is set in a schoolroom, to be more precise, in the schoolroom of Sidley Park, the country estate of an aristocratic family in Derbyshire. While the setting is very stable in one sense (all of the seven scenes take place in the schoolroom), it is highly unstable in another. The play travels back and forth between the early nineteenth and the late twentieth century. In this, *Arcadia* is like a number of recent historical novels such as A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) or Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (1996); it contains two alternating plots, one of which is set in the past, while the other is set in the present. A major concern in the second plot is the reconstruction of the first; thus the play shows some of the characteristics of the mystery or detective genre.

The twentieth-century plot line of *Arcadia* features three researchers. Valentine, a mathematician and member of the Croom family who own Sidley Park, devises models that describe the fluctuations in animal populations. He is currently using the game books inherited from his ancestors to work on grouse. Hannah, a visiting freelance writer, is interested in the history of the garden in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The garden underwent the usual changes: from a formal Italian design with trees cut into geometric shapes, to an English landscape created by Capability Brown, and finally to a picturesque and Gothic wilderness. Hannah is particularly intrigued by a mysterious

lunatic who inhabited a hermitage that was a feature of the Gothic stage of the garden. The third researcher is Bernard, a lecturer in English Literature, who wishes to make a name for himself by proving a sensational theory. He believes that on a visit to the Croom family, Lord Byron killed a minor poet by the name of Ezra Chater in a duel after panning his work and seducing his wife.

Bernard's theory is not entirely wrong. The plot set in the early nineteenth century does include a turbulent visit that Byron pays to the Croom family. The visitor gets involved with no less than two women, among them Chater's wife, and her husband issues a challenge. However, Byron is not the man to whom the challenge is addressed; he is not a major character in this play. His part is that of the "red herring," as Rajeev Patke has put it¹ (in fact, he never makes it onto the stage). Stoppard repeats in *Arcadia* what he did in *Travesties* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, where he assigned minor roles to James Joyce and Hamlet, while moving Henry Carr, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to centre stage. In *Arcadia*, the story that merits reconstruction is not about Byron but about his friend Septimus Hodge, who works as a tutor for the Crooms, and about Septimus' pupil Thomasina, the teenage daughter of the family. Thomasina is a genius who anticipates scientific discoveries that were made much later in the history of science as we know it, for instance fractal geometry or the second law of thermodynamics. However, her life and her intellectual career are cut short when she dies in a fire at the age of sixteen. As a result of the death of his pupil, Septimus goes mad and spends the rest of his days in the hermitage. He is the lunatic that Hannah, the garden historian, is interested in.

The thematic pattern that underlies and connects the two plots is described in the following passage from an article by Heinz Antor:

We intend to show here that Stoppard presents various modes of approaching reality and making it meaningful, both from the arts and from the sciences, and that he depicts a general development from a pre-modern or, one might even say, a classical belief in regularity, order, finite linear teleology and the existence of well-structured patterns to a postmodern and post-structuralist scepticism about these things and an awareness of irregularity, chaos, non-linearity, infinity and unstructured patternlessness or complexity. The play, in order to

discuss these concepts, uses the theory of gardening and the conflict between classicism and romanticism as well as recent developments in chaos theory and thermodynamics and thereby becomes an example of isomorphisms of thought in the two cultures.²

As Antor states, the play is based on a cluster of binary oppositions, whose common denominator may be described as order versus chaos or regularity versus irregularity. These oppositions cut across the arts-sciences divide, informing both the history of culture and of science. *Arcadia* suggests a parallel between the changes in the garden from the formal Italian to the Gothic style and the changes in science from a Newtonian paradigm, which treats nature as predictable clockwork, to a post-Newtonian paradigm, in which chaos theory and the second law of thermodynamics introduce the notions of randomness and disorder. Antor gives a thorough analysis of the oppositions indicated here; his remarks on the motifs of music and noise, which are associated with these oppositions, are particularly instructive. However, I disagree with his reading in one respect, and I should like to make this disagreement the point of departure of my argument.

2. "Semantic Entropy" or "Fortuitous Wit"?

In analysing the binary oppositions of the play, Antor touches upon the misunderstandings that the dialogue is beset with. He argues that these misunderstandings reflect the sceptical or poststructuralist tendency of the play, the tendency that is opposed to order, truth and meaning:

The principles of disorder and entropy also seem to gain ground in the conversation the characters have in the play. Time and again, there is noise in the sense of communication being hampered by such factors as polysemy or varying frames of reference that lead to a kind of semantic entropy and to misunderstandings between the persons involved, such as when, in the first scene, Captain Brice refers to Mrs Chater's affair with Septimus (350).

In my view, it is misleading to describe the misunderstandings of the play as "semantic entropy." Instead of disrupting or dissolving meaning, they create it. The dialogue mentioned by Antor is a case in point. It

takes place when Lady Croom, Captain Brice and the landscape architect Mr Noakes enter the schoolroom, where Septimus has been talking to Ezra Chater. Lady Croom and Captain Brice take Mr Noakes to task for the Gothic innovations that he has proposed for the garden, while Septimus and Chater think they are talking about an entirely different matter. This error is due to a peculiar concatenation of events. Mr Noakes has observed Septimus and Mrs Chater making love in the gazebo, of all places, and he has told the news to Mr Chater, who has issued a challenge to Septimus. However, with a mixture of flattery and bravado, Septimus has talked Chater out of the idea of fighting a duel. Enter the group around Lady Croom, whose talk about the garden is understood by both Septimus and Chater as referring to the sexual encounter in the gazebo:

Lady Croom: Oh, no! Not the gazebo! [...] Mr Noakes! What is this I hear?

Brice: Not only the gazebo, but the boat-house, the Chinese bridge, the shrubbery—

Chater: By God, sir! Not possible!

Brice: Mr Noakes will have it so.

Septimus: Mr Noakes, this is monstrous!

Lady Croom: I am glad to hear it from *you*, Mr Hodge.

[...]

Brice: Is Sidley Park to be an Englishman's garden or the haunt of Corsican brigands?

Septimus: Let us not hyperbolize, sir.

Brice: It is rape, sir!

Noakes: (*Defending himself*) It is the modern style.

Chater: (*Under the same misapprehension as Septimus*) Regrettable, of course, but so it is. [...]

Lady Croom: Mr Chater, you show too much submission. Mr Hodge, I appeal to you.

Septimus: Madam, I regret the gazebo, I sincerely regret the gazebo—and the boat-house up to a point—but the Chinese bridge, fantasy!—and the shrubbery I reject with contempt! Mr Chater!—would you take the word of a jumped-up jobbing gardener who sees carnal embrace in every nook and cranny of the landscip?³

Almost every sentence here can be interpreted both in terms of sexuality and of landscape gardening. As in the famous china scene from Wycherley's *Country Wife*, a *double entendre* is sustained over several

minutes. To complicate matters even further, Thomasina enters in the middle of the scene, with the apposite question, "What is the topic?", on her lips. Although her knowledge of sexual intercourse is very recent (in fact, Septimus told her only a few minutes before this scene), she is the only one to realize that the adults around her are talking about different subjects. When she points this out to Septimus, new confusions ensue. These are again based on misunderstandings, but also on the Stop-pardian technique of characters not answering each other and pursuing different ideas, thus creating a pattern of alternating and overlaying topics. Lady Croom and Captain Brice are scandalized by Thomasina's premature knowledge of sexuality and want to find out where she obtained it, while Thomasina mischievously thwarts their efforts by sticking to the topic of landscape gardening, in which she is assisted by the benighted Noakes who has not realized that the conversation has taken a new direction.

Thomasina: Septimus, they are not speaking of carnal embrace, are you, Mama?

Lady Croom: Certainly not. What do you know of carnal embrace?

Thomasina: Everything, thanks to Septimus. In my opinion, Mr Noakes's scheme for the garden is perfect. It is a Salvator!

Lady Croom: What does she mean?

Noakes: (*Answering the wrong question*) Salvator Rosa, your ladyship, the painter. He is indeed the very exemplar of the picturesque style.

Brice: Hodge, what is this?

Septimus: She speaks from innocence not from experience.

Brice: You call it innocence? Has he ruined you, child? (*Pause.*)

Septimus: Answer your uncle!

Thomasina: (*To Septimus*) How is a ruined child different from a ruined castle?

Septimus: On such questions I defer to Mr Noakes.

Noakes: (*Out of his depth*) A ruined castle is picturesque, certainly.

Septimus: That is the main difference. (*To Brice*) I teach the classical authors, Captain Brice. If I do not elucidate their meaning, who will?

Brice: As her tutor, you have a duty to keep her in ignorance.

Lady Croom: Do not dabble in paradox, Edward, it puts you in danger of fortuitous wit (10 f.).

The sheer fun and ingenuity of the two passages just quoted should preclude a description in terms of "semantic entropy." But even if we disregard fun and ingenuity, the fact remains that the misunderstand-

ings and the pursuit of different topics do not dissolve meaning but help to create it. They establish a connection between sexuality and the garden that is crucial to the thematic structure of *Arcadia*. Thomasina opens the play with the question "Septimus, what is carnal embrace?" (an expression she has overheard without understanding it); among the things that she discovers in the course of the play are the facts of life. Thus the garden of Sidley Park is an Arcadia where exciting but hazardous discoveries can be made, an Eden where knowledge may be gained at the price of innocence.⁴ The link between sexuality and the garden is also important because there are similar *double entendres* linking sexuality and science. One of these is Valentine's definition of sexuality: "The attraction that Newton left out. All the way back to the apple in the garden" (74). This pun links sexuality with the legendary fall of the apple that inspired Newton's discovery of gravity (while also alluding to another Fall in the Garden of Eden). If we take Valentine's *double entendre* and the ones about the garden of Sidley Park together, sexuality works as a bridge that establishes the analogy between the history of the garden and the history of science pointed out by Antor. It is a metaphor that stands for the irregular, anti-determinist forces in both of these histories.

What I have tried to show for the dialogue about Noakes' plans and carnal embrace is generally valid for the first scene. Thought and communication are beset with all sorts of accidents: misunderstandings, failure to listen, pursuit of different topics, interruptions, evasions, slips of the tongue. Paradoxically, these accidents create meaning and insight. Even the opening sentence is already an interruption of this sort. Septimus has given Thomasina a rather demanding assignment, the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, which he hopes will keep her busy and allow him some time to read Chater's poem, *The Couch of Eros*, which he has been commissioned to review. However, Thomasina is distracted by the memory of a phrase that she overheard (by yet another communication accident), and interrupts her tutor with the question "Septimus, what is carnal embrace?" Septimus avoids a straight answer. He gives a literal definition—"Carnal embrace is the throwing of one's arms around a side of beef"—and expatiates on the etymology of "carnal," concluding his

evasions with the melancholy remark “We had *caro* in our Gallic Wars [...]. I am sorry that the seed fell on stony ground” (1-2).⁵ Thomasina misinterprets Septimus’ biblical allusion in a way that counters Septimus’ evasions and keeps the sexual topic alive: “That was the sin of Onan, wasn’t it?” When Thomasina informs Septimus that she “heard Jellaby telling cook that Mrs Chater was discovered in carnal embrace in the gazebo” the tutor commits a revealing slip of the tongue:

Septimus: (Pause) Really? With whom, did Jellaby happen to say? (Thomasina considers this with a puzzled frown.)

Thomasina: What do you mean, with whom?

Septimus: With what? Exactly so. The idea is absurd (2).

Thomasina is quick to notice that Septimus’ slip of the tongue hints at a truth that he wants to hide from her, and eventually she persuades him to give her a more accurate account of carnal embrace. A little later, the butler arrives with a note from Chater, which contains the challenge to Septimus. This interruption establishes the pattern for the rest of the scene; tutor and pupil keep getting interrupted from the outside, first by Chater himself, then by the group around Lady Croom. Thus little progress is made on the assigned work, but the interruptions do not result in disorder and confusion. Instead, they lead to crucial discoveries on Thomasina’s part. She learns what carnal embrace is, that it addles the brain, that Septimus shared it with Mrs Chater, and that Septimus is in love with her mother; as I will show below, she also has a first inkling of the second law of thermodynamics or the principle of entropy. “That is enough education for today” (14), as Septimus aptly comments at the end of the scene.

The interruptions of Thomasina’s lesson do not cause pedagogical or cognitive entropy. They result in worthwhile lessons and insights, just as the misunderstandings that characterize the dialogue create interesting and relevant meanings. Antor’s failure to account for this paradox indicates what I take to be a problem in his treatment of the binary oppositions of the play. He describes the relationship between the opposed principles as antagonistic; meaning and insight have to be created *in the face of* disorder and irregularity. In my view, we should also allow for the

cooperation of the opposed principles. This cooperation is suggested in an episode in which Valentine explains chaos theory and fractal geometry to Hannah.⁶ The explanation follows her question whether it is possible to plot the shape of an apple leaf by iterating an algorithm (the technique that he uses in modelling animal populations):

If you knew the algorithm and fed it back say ten thousand times, each time there'd be a dot somewhere on the screen. You'd never know where to expect the next dot. But gradually you'd start to see this shape, because every dot will be inside the shape of this leaf. It wouldn't be a leaf, it would be a mathematical object. But yes. The unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is. It's how nature creates itself, on every scale, the snowflake and the snowstorm (47).

What is true of snowflakes, snowstorms and the images on Valentine's computer screen is also true of creative thought in *Arcadia*. In this play, meanings are found and discoveries are made when "the unpredictable and the predetermined *unfold together*," when a random or chaotic element finds its way into a rational, goal-oriented pursuit. The double-layered dialogue about Noakes' Gothic innovations, which furnishes an example of this cooperation of the opposed principles, also provides us with a phrase that describes it. When Lady Croom tells her brother not to dabble in "fortuitous wit," she coins a phrase that captures not merely Captain Brice's unintentional paradox ("As her tutor, you have a duty to keep her in ignorance"), but more generally the workings of intellectual discovery in *Arcadia*.

3. Intellectual Discovery in Koestler and Stoppard

To provide the foregoing analysis of the first scene of *Arcadia* with a theoretical framework, I should like to make a brief digression into the psychology of creative thought, which is based on Arthur Koestler's interdisciplinary classic, *The Act of Creation*. Koestler argues that truly innovative ideas in the arts and the sciences are based on what he calls bisociation, the linking of two matrices that have not been connected so far (matrix is a generic term embracing theories, methods, fields of asso-

ciation, routines with set rules, etc.). A famous example of bisociation is the legendary Eureka incident. Faced with the task of establishing the volume of a crown, Archimedes tries to solve the problem within the matrix of his geometrical knowledge, using measurement and calculation. But the highly irregular shape of the crown defies all his attempts along these lines. Then one day when Archimedes enters his bath and sees the water level rise he suddenly recognizes that his own body is just as irregularly shaped as the crown, and that the volume of the water displaced by human bodies or crowns can be measured quite easily: Eureka! The crucial element in this discovery is the bridging of the gulf between two matrices that are worlds apart in Archimedes' mind: solving a mathematical problem with his intellect on the one hand; indulging in a pleasurable routine for the comfort of his body on the other.

According to Koestler and numerous scientists quoted by him, the bisociation that characterizes truly innovative ideas does not result from planned, rational, and rule-governed thinking. This kind of thinking will solve the problems that lie within the scope of an already established matrix, but it will not take the bisociative leap that connects this matrix with a different one. Bisociation depends on "thinking aside," on the regression (or progression) to less disciplined modes of thinking: playing around with sounds or shapes, using visual images instead of verbal concepts, following the associative and non-logical ways of dreams or daydreams. It also depends on chance encounters and on the openness to recognize the solution of a problem when it comes from an unexpected direction, as in the case of Archimedes in his bath. Sometimes it even comes about as the result of an accident, a phenomenon that Koestler describes as "discovery by misadventure." The history of science knows many experiments that were spoilt through inadvertency or other causes but yielded new insights because the experimenters had the genius to perceive the meaning of the mess they had made.⁷

The workings of intellectual discovery in Stoppard's *Arcadia* correspond in many ways to Koestler's theory. Some instances of this have already been pointed out: the misunderstandings, interruptions and slips of the tongue that, in the first scene, contribute to the "fortuitous wit" of

Stoppard's dialogue and to Thomasina's discoveries about sexuality. A further instance, which concerns a genuinely scientific discovery, also occurs in the first scene. The butler who interrupts the lesson to hand Chater's challenge to Septimus also tells Thomasina that there will be rice pudding for dinner. Thomasina immediately turns this pudding into food for thought. She has a first intuition of the second law of thermodynamics, the tendency of closed systems to develop towards greater entropy, in other words, towards less organized states:

Thomasina: When you stir rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomical atlas. But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again. Indeed, the pudding does not notice and continues to turn pink just as before. Do you think this is odd?

Septimus: No.

Thomasina: Well, I do. You cannot stir things apart (4-5).

Thomasina has the gift for "thinking aside" and for drawing inspiration from visual images. Like Archimedes, she can extricate the everyday activity of eating dessert from its usual context and bisociate it with abstract physical problems.

Koestler's ideas may also be applied to the research conducted by Bernard and Hannah. When they first meet each other, both have fully-fledged theories about what happened at Sidley Park in the early nineteenth century. These theories reflect their different personalities. Hannah, who is rational and reserved, regards the development from the formal Italian to the Gothic garden as a "decline from thinking to feeling" and the lunatic in the hermitage as a symbol of the "whole Romantic sham" (27). Bernard, who is ambitious, flamboyant and without scruples, creates Byron in his own image: a man that ridicules a literary rival in the press, seduces his wife and shoots him dead in a duel. However, the way in which the two characters go about testing and proving their theories is different. Bernard searches the library "like a bloodhound" (44), hunting down documents favourable to his ideas with impressive energy and speed. His attitude is summed up in his confident statement "We can find it!" (50), referring to the evidence that will sup-

port his theory. On a similar occasion Hannah is talking about evidence which will prove her suspicion that the lunatic is Septimus. But in contrast to Bernard, she adds the proviso "*if only* I can find it" (66, my italics). Another characteristic moment occurs in the final scene. Having been caught in carnal embrace with Chloë in the hermitage, Bernard makes a hasty exit and treats Chloë rather callously. Hannah, who witnesses this, calls him "bastard," only to receive a sharp rebuke from Chloë herself:

Chloë: And you mind your own business! What do you know about anything?

Hannah: Nothing.

Chloë: (to Bernard) It was worth it, though, wasn't it?

[...]

Hannah: (An echo) Nothing (95).

Surely, the echo of Hannah's answer carries beyond the immediate context. It expresses a Socratic awareness of her ignorance, which is entirely lacking in Bernard's intellectual temperament.

What is even more important than Hannah's healthy scepticism about her own ideas, is her capability of "thinking aside." An important piece of evidence is a portfolio with Thomasina's lesson book and other items. These indicate that Thomasina was a mathematical genius way ahead of her time, and they also contain a clue to Septimus' later career as a lunatic in the hermitage. It is the bloodhound Bernard who chances upon this portfolio, but since it does not smell of Byron the rake or Byron the duelist, he passes it on to Hannah without paying any attention to it. At first sight, the portfolio has as little to do with Hannah's interests as it has with Bernard's, but somehow she senses its importance. In addition to thinking aside, she also talks aside, as it were, asking the scientist Valentine to explain the mathematical significance of Thomasina's scribbles. This again distinguishes her from Bernard, who is far from seeking any interdisciplinary cooperation. In the squabble resulting from the trial lecture in which he presents his theory, he ridicules Valentine's grouse project and embarks on a polemic against the sciences in general (61-62).

In quizzing Valentine about Thomasina's work, Hannah has to overcome considerable resistance. "Not a schoolgirl living in a country house

in Derbyshire in eighteen-something!" (47), Valentine exclaims at one point, quite understandably rejecting the idea that Thomasina could have anticipated the mathematical techniques he uses in his work on animal populations. Elsewhere he remarks, "there's an order things can't happen in. You can't open a door till there's a house" (79). The play is very good at depicting the forces that prevent the bisociative leap. It shows the gravitational pull that is exerted by habit, routine and prejudice, keeping people's thoughts within the range of a familiar matrix. Hannah's mathematical ignorance is a blessing in disguise; her lack of knowledge entails a lack of prejudice that enables her to ask the right questions. Eventually she succeeds in making Valentine think aside as well. When his own research project on the grouse population fails, he realizes the relevance of one of Thomasina's projects and completes it on his computer.

What clinches Hannah's guess that Septimus is the lunatic is a drawing by Thomasina. This is the piece of evidence of which Hannah says "if only I can find it." And *find it* she does not. It is given to her. In the final moment of the play, Valentine's brother Gus enters the scene, awkwardly thrusting an old folio with the drawing at Hannah. Gus is the third in a series of men (after Valentine and Bernard) who contribute evidence or ideas to her work because they are attracted to her. But Gus is also rather different from the other two. He is a bit of a lunatic and a hermit (he stopped speaking at the age of five), and he is a teenage prodigy like Thomasina, an heir to the genius that runs in the family. Thus the final piece of evidence is not found; it arrives out of the blue, as a present from a character who represents both lunacy and genius, and who is motivated by the "attraction that Newton left out." A more striking depiction of the element of chance, of non-rational thought, of thinking or looking aside in intellectual discovery is hardly imaginable.

4. *Arcadia* and Scepticism

Having discussed the workings of intellectual discovery in *Arcadia*, I should like to return once more to Antor who also touches upon episte-

mological questions in his reading: "No matter where we look in the play, we time and again come across a scepticism with regard to our attempts at understanding the world and an awareness of the precarious status of the patterns we create in order to explain what we perceive" (348). Admittedly, Antor does not overlook the passages that give a more optimistic account of the search for truth and meaning. In fact, he sees the play as a debate between scepticism on the one hand and the belief in truth and meaning on the other. Other critics have been less sceptical in their claims about the scepticism of the play. Thus Guy Stern writes that in *Arcadia* Stoppard "outdistances even all his previous deconstructions of reality [...]. [T]hree recondite researchers prove before our eyes that the past is unreconstructable, reading its records, intuiting its spirit, or trying to quantify it via modern mathematics inevitably leads to major distortions."⁸ Peter Paul Schnierer's reading of the play combines epistemological scepticism with an argument about the evasiveness of the pastoral genre: the Arcadias created by this genre are utopias that necessarily remain elusive. According to Schnierer, Stoppard highlights this elusiveness in his treatment of Byron:

Access to Byron is only within textuality, and thus requires an interpretation of signs. Any such interpretation can and will go wrong. [...] By maintaining, even emphasizing, Byron's absence, Stoppard turns him into a screen for our projections. He dramatizes not just absence, but the principal impossibility of presence. Once permanent absence is established, and with it the certainty that no more authoritative versions of reality can intrude henceforth, the absence becomes capable of being pastoralized.⁹

After what I have said about "fortuitous wit" and intellectual discovery in *Arcadia*, it should come as no surprise that I disagree with the claims about the play's scepticism, at least the unqualified ones made by Stern and Schnierer. Schnierer's essay is entertaining and persuasively written, but, with all due respect, he seems to be repeating something like Bernard's mistake in focusing on Byron. Furthermore, it appears to me that the Arcadia of the play is not located in an elusive elsewhere, but right before the audience's eyes: in the schoolroom shared by Thomasina and Septimus. This is Thomasina's room of her own, a privileged and

protected environment in which she can pursue her intellectual interests and make her discoveries in the company of a gifted and sympathetic teacher.

One feature of the play that runs counter to scepticism is the way in which the two plots alternate, thus providing the audience with the information that the characters in the twentieth-century plot are desperate to obtain. While these characters are asking questions, making guesses and pulling each other's hypotheses to pieces, the audience are in the know. This concerns major questions such as who challenged whom to fight a duel, and also minor questions such as who shot a hare. In his trial lecture Bernard triumphantly cites an entry from a game book, which is crucial to his argument as it proves that Byron spent some time at Sidley Park: "April 10th 1809—forenoon. High cloud, dry, and sun between times, wind southeasterly. Self—Augustus—Lord Byron. Fourteen pigeon, one hare (Lord B.)" (54). At this point, the audience have already heard Septimus say that his friend is a poor shot (13), and their doubts about Byron's marksmanship are confirmed in a later scene when the Augustus mentioned in the game-book entry, Thomasina's brother, refers to the hunting episode: "Lord Byron?!—he claimed my hare, although my shot was the earlier! He said I missed by a hare's breadth" (79). Thus the audience learn that Byron did not shoot the hare just as he did not shoot a fellow poet in a duel.

The outcome of the research or detective plot also precludes scepticism. The researchers may be plunged in comparative uncertainty, lagging behind the audience, but eventually they succeed in catching up, in falsifying or verifying their theories. This plot contrasts Bernard's theory, which is wrong, with Hannah's theory, which is right, and both are *proved* to be so in the course of the play. "[T]he play is an affirmation," as John Fleming writes, "that despite all the indeterminacy, people can use their intellect and intuition to gain knowledge[.]"¹⁰ As I pointed out above, the final moment of *Arcadia* is about the discovery of the missing piece of evidence that establishes the truth of Hannah's theory. A sceptical play would end on a different note.

Thus far, I have tried to disprove the claim that *Arcadia* is a sceptical play by showing that it does allow for a reconstruction of the past, and that it does distinguish between true and false theories. This refutation is valid, I hope, as far as it goes, but a different argument also needs to be made in discussing the alleged scepticism of *Arcadia*. In my view, the play is not primarily a reflection on the possibility or impossibility of truth. Stoppard is less interested in truth than in how it is found or missed; he is less interested in the result of research than in its process.¹¹ The play's attitude towards this process is not sceptical at all. Whatever the truth of its results, research appears as an intensely captivating and exhilarating activity (which is, I suspect, one reason for the popularity of the play with scholars, including those who maintain its scepticism). For all his selfishness, even Bernard helps to communicate this attitude; one cannot help admiring the skill, the energy and the exuberance with which he searches proof for his wrong-headed theory. There are three speeches in the play that express a profound commitment to the activity of research regardless of its results. The first of these is made by Septimus who describes the history of the arts and the sciences as a long march, which individuals join for a little while, shedding and picking up intellectual equipment (38-39). In a similar speech, Hannah argues that it "is wanting to know that makes us matter," that it is not the answers in the back of the book that count but the process of searching for them (75-76). As Antor aptly comments, to Hannah "it is the journey that matters, not the arrival" (352). Valentine's speech follows his remarks on the interaction of the unpredictable and the predetermined quoted above:

It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. [...] The ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about—clouds—daffodils—waterfalls—and what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in—these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks. [...] We can't even predict the next drip from a dripping tap when it gets irregular. Each drip sets up the conditions for the next, the smallest variation blows prediction apart [...]. The future is disorder. A door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong (47-48).

Again, there is an intense commitment to research regardless of the truth of its results (almost in inverse proportion to the truth of its results). The awareness that the knowledge he has acquired is largely wrong does not plunge Valentine into Pyrrhonic gloom; it fills him with joy and excitement. The acknowledgement of irregularity, unpredictability, and disorder does not lead to scepticism. On the contrary, it opens the door to a new research paradigm that creates fresh possibilities and opportunities.

As a postscript to this essay, I should like to point out a postscript that the history of science has added to *Arcadia*. As I mentioned above, the assignment that Thomasina is working on in the first scene is the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem (which states that there are no whole-number solutions for the equation $x^n + y^n = z^n$, with n being greater than 2). The French mathematician Pierre de Fermat, who first stated this theorem in the early seventeenth century, wrote in the margin of a mathematical treatise that he had found a proof for it, which, however, he could not write down as the margin was too narrow. This proof eluded mathematicians until Thomasina's time and, in fact, until the time when Stoppard wrote the play. When Septimus tells Thomasina about the note that Fermat wrote in the margin, she jumps to a rather hasty conclusion: "There is no proof, Septimus. The thing that is perfectly obvious is that the note in the margin was a joke to make you all mad" (6). Despite making light of Fermat's claim here, she later echoes it when she scribbles a note in a maths primer that refers to her discovery of plotting irregular shapes by iterating algorithms: "This margin being too mean for my purpose, the reader must look elsewhere for the New Geometry of Irregular Forms discovered by Thomasina Coverly" (43). This remark is more than a mere joke—in fact, it is the joke that makes Septimus mad; as a lunatic in the hermitage, he will cover thousands of pages with the iterations of Thomasina's algorithm.¹² Thomasina's remark is also the statement that catches Hannah's interest and leads to the rediscovery and the completion of Thomasina's theories by Valentine. Fermat's remark, too, finally turned out to be more than a mere joke. Only two months after *Arcadia* opened at the National Theatre in April 1993, the

Cambridge-born Andrew Wiles gave a lecture in his home town that contained a proof of Fermat's Last Theorem.¹³

Universität des Saarlandes

NOTES

¹Patke's remark was made in the discussion that followed my presentation of an earlier version of this paper at the Halberstadt Conference, "The Poetics of Conversation in Twentieth-Century Literature and Criticism," in August 2001. I should like to thank the participants of the conference for their comments on my paper.

²"The Arts, the Sciences, and the Making of Meaning: Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* as a Post-Structuralist Play," *Anglia* 116 (1998): 326-54, 328-29.

³*Arcadia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 9-10. All further references will be to this edition.

⁴A somewhat different reading of the dialogue about the gazebo is given by Theres Fischer-Seidel, who argues that it introduces the most important theme of the play, which in her view is the relationship of life to art, and art to art; see "Chaos Theory, Landscape Gardening, and Tom Stoppard's Dramatology of Coincidence in *Arcadia*," *Emerging Structures in Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Rudi Keller and Karl Menges (Tübingen: Francke, 1997) 93-114, 98. For a comprehensive typology of puns and related devices in Stoppard's early plays, see Heidrun-Edda Weikert, *Tom Stoppards Dramen: Untersuchungen zu Sprache und Dialog* (Tübingen: Narr, 1982) 63-127.

⁵Hersh Zeifman spots a somewhat recondite but ultimately plausible pun in this speech. The title of Hannah's recent book is also *Caro* (an abbreviation of the name of Byron's lover Caroline Lamb). Zeifman's discussion of Hannah shows how, in the course of the play, her classical preference for rule and reason and her rejection of love, including its carnal variants, are challenged and modified. See "The Comedy of Eros: Stoppard in Love," *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard*, ed. Katherine E. Kelly (Cambridge: CUP, 2001) 185-200, 190-91.

⁶Several critics have discussed the treatment of chaos theory in *Arcadia*; see in particular Bernhard Reitz "Beyond Newton's Universe—Science and Art in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*," in Reitz (ed.), *Contemporary Drama in English*, 3 vols. (Trier: WVT, 1996) 3: 165-77; Prapassaree and Jeffrey Kramer, "Stoppard's *Arcadia*: Research, Time, Loss," *Modern Drama* 40 (1997): 1-10; Lucy Melbourne, "'Plotting the Apple of Knowledge': Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* as Iterated Theatrical Algorithm," *Modern Drama* 41 (1998): 557-72; Susanne Vees-Gulani, "Hidden Order in the 'Stoppard Set': Chaos Theory in the Content and Structure of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*," *Modern Drama* 42 (1999): 411-26. Prapassaree and J. Kramer make the interesting observation that the play echoes the so-called butterfly effect (i.e. a minimal cause like a butterfly flapping its wings producing a maximum effect like a storm). In *Arcadia* the butterfly

flaps its wings when Lady Croom casually picks up Septimus' copy of Chater's *Couch of Eros* to give it to Byron; this is the event which, two centuries later, results in Bernard's spectacular misconstruction of the past. Reitz' essay differs from other readings of the play in that it sounds a rare note of disapproval. Most critics have commented in appreciative or enthusiastic terms on *Arcadia*; Reitz argues that it is like a lecture, requiring a passive rather than an active audience.

⁷*The Act of Creation* (London: Penguin, 1989; 1st ed. 1964); for the concept of bi-sociation, see 35-38 and *passim*, for "discovery by misadventure," 192-96.

⁸"Romantic vs. Postmodern Reality: An Examination of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*," *Contemporary Drama in English*, ed. Bernhard Reitz, 3 vols. (Trier: WVT, 1996) 3: 155-64, 155. Doris Mader also diagnoses a fair amount of scepticism in Stoppard's plays; however, she sees it qualified by a plea for a consensual construction of reality, and by an awareness of the necessity of moral commitment. Given the focus on epistemological issues in this book-length study, it is surprising that Mader chooses not to discuss *Arcadia*. See *Wirklichkeitsillusion und Wirklichkeitserkenntnis: Eine themen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchung ausgewählter großer Bühnendramen Tom Stoppards* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000).

⁹"In *Arcadia* Nemo: 'The Pastoral of Romanticism,'" *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama*, ed. Werner Huber and Martin Middeke (Woodbridge: Camden House, 1999) 152-61, 159-60.

¹⁰*Stoppard's Theatre: Finding Order amid Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) 200.

¹¹I have tried to make a similar point in an essay on two recent metahistorical novels, Carol Shields's *Swann* and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*; in my view, Shields and Atwood are less interested in the truth or falsehood of historical reconstruction than in its effects on people's lives. Their concerns are not epistemological but pragmatic. See "How to Do Things with History: Researching Lives in Carol Shields' *Swann* and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 35 (2000): 71-85.

¹²This is only part of his work; he also tries to disprove Thomasina's anticipation of the second law of thermodynamics and its pessimistic implication that "the Newtonian Universe must cease and grow cold" (93); see Paul Edwards, "Science in *Hapgood* and *Arcadia*," *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard* 171-84, 182.

¹³To be precise, the first version of the proof delivered by Wiles turned out to contain a gap; it took some additional work and the cooperation of another mathematician until the proof was finally completed and published in 1995. For an accessible account of Fermat's Last Theorem and Wiles' proof, see Simon Singh, *Fermat's Enigma: The Epic Quest to Solve the World's Greatest Mathematical Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

Shakespeare De-witched: A Response to Stephen Greenblatt

INGE LEIMBERG

The following response was written some three years ago and sent, successively, to the editors of some of the most likely journals who were, however, "unable to accept it for publication; [because] it is not really an article, but rather a response" and therefore "not suitable" for that journal, or because (though "largely convincing, [...] very interesting" and "learned") it is "vulnerable to the claim that the author's approach is simply an old-fashion [sic] reaffirmation of old pieties about the Elizabethan world picture against trendy critics." In another case the editors' affirmation that they looked "forward to being in touch with [me] soon" was the last I heard of them in two years.

Since, rereading my paper, I still think the main points if not "largely convincing" at least worthy of discussion, I now publish it in a condensed form (needless to say, with my co-editors' consent) in *Connotations* for my readers to see for themselves and, hopefully, to enter into critical debate.

* * *

The focus of Greenblatt's article "Shakespeare Bewitched,"¹ as I see it in this response, is the dramatist's unique contribution to the problem of witchcraft and witch prosecution, so much disputed in Shakespeare's age. According to Greenblatt the leading role the witches play in *Macbeth* makes the historical and the histrionic coalesce and the critic gets a chance to elucidate the dramatists's techniques and

purposes by seeing the play in the light of the non-fictional literature on the subject.

Greenblatt is not concerned with historical documents in the strict sense but with treatises devoted to magic lore for political and theological purposes. Apart from some older ones as well as King James' *Daemonology*,² the text he mostly refers to in this study of *Macbeth* is Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. What matters is, as it seems to me, that Scot and Shakespeare are not primarily regarded as real or possible partisans of reaction or progress but as writers concerned with the problem of using words in order to transform into a "speaking picture"³ what otherwise would have remained an abstract argument.

While, as Greenblatt shows, this is to Scot what poets do but should not, it is to Shakespeare the very office of the poet⁴ (especially the dramatist) who is situated beyond the good/bad divide of moral treatises, however welcome when of such humane fibre as Scot's *Discoverie*. In a play including witches the audience are not to expect moral or social directions on witches being evil or harmless and, therefore, to be prosecuted or not. The poet wants to teach and delight⁵ his audience, i.e. to make them aware of matters social, moral, political etc., not to lay down the law for them. Quite unlike Reginald Scot, that pleasant moralist, the dramatic poet, Shakespeare, wants us, quite literally, to see and hear for ourselves, and when he puts witches on the stage he uses a device most congenial to dramatic expression.

This is how I see Greenblatt's position, and I find it convincing in many respects. To me, too, it is a matter of course for the critic to be on the lookout for facts and texts belonging to the practical as well as intellectual life of a poet's era which may help us understand his work as well as his era (seen in a complex, not a "monolithic" way) perhaps just a little better; I welcome Greenblatt's reading of Scot which focuses (*e negativo*) on the very elements of literary production; and I am positively grateful for his convincing demonstration of the literary text being different in kind from what in German is called *Gebrauchsprösa* (functional prose). But though I largely agree with him in principle, I

am afraid that I cannot always see eye to eye with him in practice. Therefore I should like to discuss the following points.

1. Literal and Figurative Meaning

Greenblatt employs the metaphor "bleeding" to characterize the "mutual contamination of the secular and demonic" in *Macbeth*⁶ and borrows from Puttenham the term "Translacer"⁷ to point out the transformation of the comparatively harmless witchcraft that is Scot's concern into the "phantasmagorical horror" (125) of this play. An outstanding example of such a poetic transformation of meaning while preserving the "initial verbal elements" (125) is Lady Macbeth's pronouncement: "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear [...]" (1.5.25-6).⁸ "The 'spirits,'" says Greenblatt, "she speaks of here are manifestly figurative [...]" (124). But are they? Certainly the vision of murder done by poison poured into someone's ear did not strike Hamlet's father as "figurative,"⁹ nor did it Claudius. The closeness of the parallel between the murder of Gonzago and Lady Macbeth's doings is, moreover, borne out by Lucianus's words: "*With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected, / Thy natural magic and dire property / On wholesome life usurps immediately.*"¹⁰ This pattern of poisoning through the ear which may have been suggested to Shakespeare by Pliny or by reports of the murder of the Duke of Urbino in 1538,¹¹ haunted him in such a measure that he employed it as an outstanding topos in three of the great tragedies, for Iago also murders in that way: "I'll pour that pestilence into his ear."¹² Instead of "pestilence" Lady Macbeth says "my spirits," and this leads me to Greenblatt's interpretation:

The "spirits" she speaks of here are manifestly figurative—they refer to the bold words, the undaunted mettle, and the sexual taunts with which she intends to incite Macbeth to murder Duncan—but, like all of her expressions of will and passion, they strain toward bodily realization, even as they convey a psychic and hence invisible inwardness. That is, there is something uncannily literal about Lady Macbeth's influence on her husband, as if she

had contrived to inhabit his mind—as if, in other words, she had literally poured her spirits in his ear. Conversely, there is something uncannily figurative about the “sightless substance” she invokes, as if the spirit world, the realm of “Fate and metaphysical aid,” were only a metaphor for her blind and murderous desires, as if the Weird Sisters were condensations of her own breath. (124-25)

The reference (in note 38, 133-34) to a passage from Hobbes’ *Leviathan* concerning “[...] the connection between the literal and figurative uses of the term spirit: both rest on the breath,” implies the interpretation of “spirits” in the sense of the vapours and fluids permeating and animating the body (*OED*); otherwise this quotation is rather non-committal. I would suggest rather to consult contemporary works providing more detailed information. Robert Burton, for instance, writes in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*:

Spirit is a most subtle vapour, which is expressed from the blood, and the instrument of the soul, to perform all his actions; a common tie or medium between the body and soul.¹³

Helkiah Crooke, in a meticulous scholarly description of the organs and substances involved in the process of hearing, provides a further link for the understanding of Shakespeare’s text:

[...] the receiued opinion is, that in this cauity [of the ear, where the larger branches of the nerve of hearing form a membrane] the sense of hearing is especially administred, because into it the Animall spirit entreth through the nerve, & is there mixed with the inbred ayre [...].

The vse of this nerue is (according to Galen [...]) to be the Organ of hearing, and to receiue the sensible obiect that commeth from without, and to leade the images of the sounds vnto the braine as vnto their competent Iudge and Censor [...].¹⁴

Needless to say, nothing happens in the brain without the animal spirit as a conveyor or, in Kepler’s words, the effect of hearing on the mind and the will is reached only

cū species Membri sensationi destinati, ut id est affectum ab externa re, venit introrsum ad sensus communis tribunal, commeatu spirituum.¹⁵

If we take the poet at his word there can be no doubt that the words "That I may pour my spirits in thine ear" have a literal meaning. This holds good, too, when the "spirits" are taken to be the meaning conveyed by the words into the psychosomatic line, which reaches from the spirit (or breath) poured into the ear, via the mingling of the speaker's and hearer's spirits when the air of the breath comes to be mingled with the "inbred ayre," up to that "*tribunal*" where reason speaks and the will receives and issues its commands.¹⁶ In Macbeth's case this is a doubly "infected will"¹⁷ because it is influenced by the "contagious breath"¹⁸ of a woman about to commit herself to the Devil. The spirits Lady Macbeth intends to pour into her husband's ear are not "manifestly figurative" but unmistakably literal and there is nothing of the "as if" about her pouring them. She does so.

When Greenblatt goes on: "Conversely, there is something figurative about the 'sightless substances' she invokes, as if [...]," the very context speaks, to me, against rather than for this interpretation because, in the text, the expression "sightless substances" does not denote the abstract complement of a sensual image but the proper name of a real, though not mundane, entity. The actual words are: "Come [...] / [...] you murth'ring ministers, / Wherever in your sightless substances / You wait on Nature's mischief" (1.5.48-50). The relation between the "murth'ring ministers" and the "sightless substances" is not an aesthetic one of image to meaning (whether figurative or literal) but an ontological one of accident to substance, or of the merely phenomenal to the metaphysical, or of appearance to reality. Far from being "objective, substantial beings" in an only concessional manner, "though invisible,"¹⁹ these "ministers" derive their final reality from the very invisibility that is the hallmark of their substance.

One need not be a believer in hard-and-fast, one-sided world pictures to assume that in Shakespeare's work (and age) the chain of being, reaching from the apparently lowest region of nature to the very highest spiritual reality, was not yet irreparably broken—though, historically, very near that break. Thomas Mann says, an era seems the remoter for its having occurred immediately before a decisive

historical change.²⁰ Shakespeare's was just such an era. What was declared to be mythical by rationalist scientists from Descartes onwards but has meanwhile been rediscovered and scientifically rehabilitated by psychosomatic research, was still unquestioned by many Elizabethans, to whom body and soul, thanks to the sublimation of the spirits from vegetative to sensitive to vital to animal, formed an indivisible unity; the spoken word *was* the spirit in a theological as well as in a physiological sense, being not only a conveyor of *spirit* but conveyed by the *spirits* permeating the microcosm of man.

And that is where Greenblatt's expression "only a metaphor" comes in. Metaphoric expression is as vast a field as the unity of body and soul; it has been controversial from, at least, Cicero onwards and there always have been schools of thought who would have agreed to an "only" going with metaphor. But, as far as I can see, Shakespeare did not belong to them, and the statement that there is "something uncannily figurative about the 'sightless substances' [Lady Macbeth] invokes, as if the spirit world [...] were only a metaphor [...]" (124), to my mind, does not meet the case. Dividing the literal from the figurative meaning like this, as well as reducing both to a merely conditional status, seems like reading them with the eye of a classicist who firmly takes sides in the old scholastic struggle concerning "ambiguity," drawing a firm line between image and meaning and demanding not a disturbingly interesting (or even missing) *tertium comparationis*, but an obvious one, sanctioned by nature and the ancients.²¹ But in the passages under discussion image and meaning in metaphor seem to me as closely and mysteriously related as mind and matter or body and soul.

From the angle of literary theory these problems are discussed in detail by Puttenham but, though focusing on the term "Translucer," Greenblatt does not refer to the chapters of the *Arte of English Poesie* concerned with the impact of words on the ear and, accordingly, on the mind.²² Nor does he consult Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (published 1595) when he discusses "*energeia*, the liveliness that comes when metaphors are set in action" (121).²³ Why, in a study aiming at imme-

diate historical relations, leave *energeia* (or *enargeia*) to Aristotle and Quintilian alone and disregard Sidney whose contributions to this subject are innovative rather than traditional? Nearing his *peroratio* Sidney regards "*energia*," not in the sense of rhetorical instrumentality but of the poet's profound emotion, as the *sine qua non* of persuasion which poets can only achieve when

in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be betrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.²⁴

Sidney's pleading for "*energia*" as a means of moving to fear and pity and replacing the Horatian alternative of "*aut prodesse [...] aut delectare*" by the triad *delight—teach—move* (which he saw as a climax) is perhaps one of the most effective steps of Elizabethan literary theory towards the impact of Shakespeare's metaphoric language.²⁵

2. Locating Theatre and the Demonic

According to Greenblatt, Reginald Scot's "concern is with the boundary between the imaginary and the real" (114), his project being "disenchantment in the interest of restoring proper religious faith" (115); by contrast "*Macbeth* manifests a deep, intuitive recognition that the theater and witchcraft are both constructed on the boundary between fantasy and reality [...]" (123).

To prevent a misunderstanding: my quoting Greenblatt's term "witchcraft" does not mean that I adopt it. As I hope to show, the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* have very little in common with witches in the sense of the prosecutors, and their doings are something very different from what writers concerned with "witchcraft" like Scot mean when they use the term. I agree, however, with Greenblatt that the components represented for him by "witchcraft," i.e. "fantasy [...], imagination [...], figure [...], psychic disturbance" (123) are indeed essential for Shakespeare's (or any other) theatre. But then, again, I find myself disagreeing with the binary and, therefore, somehow two-

dimensional structure of the concept ("fantasy and reality, [...] figure and actuality, psychic disturbance and objective truth [...]," 123).

Why, for instance, is the component "religious faith" left out on Shakespeare's side of the comparison with Scot? Though it was not Shakespeare's aim to "restore" religious faith in the men and women who constitute a Christian commonwealth, surely it was a major concern with him to make them aware of it. In *Macbeth* the English scene alone shows clearly enough that all the manifestations of fate so characteristic of this play have to be regarded against the background of faith. The words "take a bond of fate" (4.1.83-84) lose their edge when religious faith is left out of consideration. The word "bond," partly sharing its meaning with *covenant*, had (in 1606) a strong political denotation, but the theological one was, if anything, even stronger.²⁶ And what a Shakespearean word it was in all its semantic shades from the *bonds of marriage* to the *bonds* which are fetters. Moreover the "bond of fate" in *Macbeth* is foreshadowed by the "bond of faith" in *Richard II* where, for all the monarchical connotations of "bond of faith," the religious ones are overtly present in that very scene (4.1.76). Taking one's bond implies the exclusion of other allegiances: taking "a bond of fate" means discarding the bond of faith. Macbeth's words "I'll [...] take a bond of fate" transport the hearer into a linguistic, intellectual and iconographic realm where *fatum* and *fides*, shaped into the near homonyms *fate* and *faith* in English, clash with the force of tragic inevitability.

When it comes to finding the place where theatre and the demonic are constructed the religious issues so palpably present in *Macbeth* seem most helpful to me. From Aeschylus onwards, the theatre has had a firm grounding in Homeric theology; and the theatre of the Christian middle ages which survived into Shakespeare's life-time was essentially religious and not so much situated "between fantasy and reality" as on the "place" where "the Castle of Perseuerance [...] stondyth [...] In the myddys" between "Deus," "Mundus," and "Belyal."²⁷

This "place" is not a nameless in-between where fantasy and reality meet. It has, in different facets, an existential value all its own which it sometimes shared, nearly up to Shakespeare's days, with the places of religious worship.²⁸ It did not survive only in some decadent mystery plays until the final ban pronounced in 1579²⁹ but, in the very beginnings of the great Elizabethan drama, in what is perhaps its most striking example outside Shakespeare, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. There that tragic clash of "faith" and "fate" was first enacted on a stage representing the very old and very modern and enduring place where everyman, flanked by the good and bad angel, has to face his hell-within.

In a Shakespearean context "fate" is as closely bound up with "faith" as with the history of the theatre. This is mentioned by Greenblatt when, having quoted Scot's confession that he had never seen any devils conjured up by witches "except it were in a plaie," he writes:

I do not know what plays Scot who published the *Discoverie* in 1584 had in mind. (He had been a student in Oxford and may have seen or acted in plays there.) The great English Renaissance drama—including, of course, *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth*—lies ahead. What, if anything, does it mean for this drama to come after Scot? (117)

To me it means something only in connection with the dramatic tradition brought to bear in the sixteenth century, with its unthought-of flood of editions and translations, retaining certain vestiges of the old catholic culture while humanist learning and protestant thinking took over, continuing and changing, and promoting or condemning the theatre which, however, withstood the various onslaughts and, as has been documented by E. K. Chambers, eventually became a political factor to count with.³⁰ Plautus and Terence being part of the grammar-school curriculum,³¹ an educated man like Scot just could not help having been made acquainted with plays. That, for reasons of personal taste as well as doctrinal convictions, he does not seem to have liked them, is another matter that does not diminish the immediate

impact of a manifold dramatic tradition where the demonic, in different facets, had always played its part, and a star part at that.

Nobody would deny that Shakespeare had an intuition all his own. But when it comes to the creation of dramatic unity and purpose out of "theater and witchcraft" (meaning the kind of "witchcraft" represented by the Weird Sisters) he was certainly not confined to his "intuitive recognition." The combination of theatre and the demonic is so deeply traditional that it is felt to be natural, and the examples, for Shakespeare, were legion.

To realize the wideness of this field it is useful to consult Holinshed: "[...] afterwards the common opinion was that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromanticall science, [...]"³² Since I propose to add the furies to Holinshed's list, I had perhaps better quote a reliable source for their affinity to "the goddesses of destinie," alias *the fates*, and here it is:

Pyr. Thy mantle good,
 What! Stain'd with blood?
 Approach, ye Furies fell
 O Fates, come, come!
 Cut thread and thrum:
 Quail, crush, conclude, and quell.³³

But, joking apart, in *King Lear* the tragic conflict echoes the fates and faiths of Oedipus and Antigone and Hamlet is Shakespeare's Orestes. In *Hamlet* the furies are not put into the costumes of anything resembling the Weird Sisters but they are present none the less, if not more alarmingly so. Moreover, many of the ghosts and spirits which haunt the Elizabethan stage come, needless to say, from *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*. Opening the first of them, *Hercules Furens*, we see before our mind's eye "The Syster of the Thunderer," Juno, who, possessed with the desire of revenge on Hercules, realizes that there is only one way:

Seekes thou a match t' Alcides yet?
 Thers none, except hymselfe: let him agaynst hymselfe rebell.
 Let present be from bottome deepe upraysd of lowest hell
 Th'Eumenides [...]
 Let hateful hurt now come in anger wood,
 And fierce impiety imbrewe hymselfe with his own bloud,
 And errorr eke, and fury arm'd agaynst it selfe to fight.
 This meane, this meane, let wrath of myne now use to showe my might.
 That mad of minde and wittes may Alcides driven bee
 With fury great through pearced quight, my selfe must first of all
 Be mad. Wherefore doth Juno yet not into raging fall?
 Mee, me, ye Furies, systers three throwne quite out of my wit
 Tosse fyrst [...].³⁴

If this is supposed to be merely a kind of drama more recited than acted, or more to be heard than seen, so was (compared with cinematic naturalism) Shakespeare's, as he expressly tells us, for instance, in the final *captatio benevolentiae* of the first Prologue in *Henry V*; and if *Newton's Seneca* is supposed to be an outdated classical source, that just does not meet the facts. In the translation (1581) Seneca was felt to be very much up to date and had enormous influence. Surely the amalgamation of the demonic and the theatrical, or of reality and fantasy, or of the mundane and the transcendental in Juno's prologue helps to locate the "boundary" where Shakespeare's theatre and the demonic are "both constructed," and I should perhaps prefer to ask what it means for "The great English Renaissance drama to come" after *Newton's Seneca* than "after Scot."

3. The Witches and the Weirds

Greenblatt's argument proceeds from Donalbain's whispered advice to Malcolm that flight is inevitable:

What should be spoken here,
 Where our fate, hid in an augur hole,
 May rush and seize us? (2.3.117-19)

The augur hole has ceased to be an actual passageway, uncannily small and hence virtually invisible, for witches to pass through and has become a figure for the fear that lurks everywhere in Macbeth's castle. And the Weird Sisters, of whose existence Malcolm and Donalbain are entirely unaware, have been translated into the abstraction to which their name is etymologically linked—fate. (125)

I am sorry to disagree with most of this statement. To me, the link between the Weird Sisters and fate is not an etymological but a semantic one; fate, as nearly always in Shakespeare, is not used here as an "abstraction" (abstractions who "hide" in order to "rush and seize" their victims cease to be abstractions through the force of metaphoric *energia*), the Weird Sisters are neither here nor anywhere "translated into [an] abstraction," and the "augur-hole," in the context of this play, is not fully appreciated as a mere opening made by a drill. The "augur-hole" does indeed echo the one in Scot's *Discoverie* and wants to be visualized as a hole made by a (n)auger,³⁵ but the *augur*, too, is suggested who takes the measurement of the *templum* in order to disclose the hiding place of fate.³⁶

"Fate" and "augur-hole" are used energetically in the three lines, the potential abstract, "fate" striking with the force of a mythological name by being verbally enlivened and making the audience witness, with their minds' eyes, a vision of horror. "Fate," in the context of Donalbain's words as well as in the context of the play (with much corroboration in the Shakespeare-canon)³⁷ quite openly denotes not an abstraction but a demonic power related to the Weird Sisters in a semantic as well as in a seminal way. "The Weird Sisters" is another name for "The Fates" or "The Destinies" with "The Nornes" or "The Moiras" lurking in the background of northern or classical mythology.

In Holinshed, as mentioned above, Banquo and Macbeth first believe to have met with some "women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of an elder world" and treat them and their promises as

[...] some vaine fantasticall illusion [...]. But afterwards the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would

say) the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromantical science, bicause euerie thing came to passe as they had spoken.³⁸

Shakespeare took over the archaic "weird" (usual in OE, rare in ME but occasionally present in Chaucer, Langland, and Gower)³⁹ from Holinshed to use it exclusively in *Macbeth* with hardly a verbal alternative. The word "witch" occurs only once in "Aroint thee, witch!" (1.3.6); apart from this there is "Witches' mummy" (4.1.48) and "Witchcraft" (2.1.51-52), and that is all about "witches" in *Macbeth*. For, surely, the *dramatis personae* weigh lightly compared with the evidence of the text recited on the stage. The name "Weird Women" (3.1.2) or "Weird Sisters" (1.3.32; 1.5.7-8; 2.1.20; 3.4.132; 4.1.136) may have been used to make the audience "attentive" (because of its archaic tone), "benevolent" (because of fate being such a common enemy), and "docile" (because of the historical verisimilitude provided by Holinshed).

Of course the Weird Sisters are nothing if not equivocal. Shakespeare makes them enact various kinds of witchery (as, for instance, in the sailor's wife-episode). Moreover, they are dramatically reborn into an era of transition, when Death, Fortune and Love have ceased to figure as mythological powers in dramatic inductions⁴⁰ and appear in their no less formidable substrata in the human soul as represented by the *dramatis personae* in the "historical" world of the main action. This holds the mirror up to men and women who are becoming aware of the (very old and very modern) "hell within"⁴¹ being rather more terrible than the one safely located in some nether world. Giordano Bruno's many-centred, endless universe, in which there was no place for an abyss of hell, was felt (for instance by Kepler)⁴² to be more hauntingly charged with mystery than the old three-storied cosmological hierarchy surrounded by the *primum mobile*. Modern man, in *Macbeth*, has to face the existentially uprooting fact that "[...] security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy" (3.5.32). And that is how the Fates once more enter the main action. Surely the Weird Sisters are made to pose as witches and want to be considered in terms of witchcraft (and,

perhaps, witch prosecution) as well as in terms of psychological projection but, compared with their demonic character, only marginally so. This pattern seems to me reversed in Greenblatt's statement:

[...] Shakespeare is staging the epistemological and ontological dilemmas that in the deeply contradictory ideological situation of his time haunted virtually all attempts to determine the status of witchcraft beliefs and practices. (123)

The "status of witchcraft beliefs and practices" is not Shakespeare's object in *Macbeth*; he is concerned rather with "The Wirde, that we clepen Destine, / [...] / [...] the fatal systren"⁴³ than with the kind of witches Reginald Scot has in mind when he describes "*Who they be that are called witches*":

One sort of such as are said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drowsie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat [...].

Another sort of witches there are, which be absolutelie cooseners. These take upon them, either for glorie, fame or gaine, to do anie thing, which God or the divell can do: either for fortelling of things to come, bewraing of secrets, curing of maladies, or working of miracles [...].⁴⁴

The one link between Scot's witches and the Weird Sisters is the witches' pretence to be able to prognosticate. This is, however, a theme not coming up with the medieval discussion of witches but is at least as old as Aristotle's *Poetics*. The fallacy to which Macbeth succumbs when he thinks that the Weird Sisters (who have appeared to him as what Holinshed calls "three women in strange and wild apparell") must know all the future because they know some of it, follows the same pattern as Aristotle's Homeric paradigm for "the proper way of telling lies."⁴⁵ Aristotle mentions this in his discussion of the marvellous as a constituent of tragedy⁴⁶ which, following the formalist kind of reasoning still valid in Shakespeare's time, is the appropriate category where the Weird Sisters are concerned.

By contrast with the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* who happen to have foretold the future indeed, Scot's witches, for all the pretence of some of them to be able to tell the future, are women of flesh and blood who have succumbed, to what degree and in what way howsoever, to the Devil. If, in *Macbeth*, there is a witch in the sense of the prosecutors, it is Lady Macbeth who gives herself up to the Devil, in a scene of nightmarish obscenity, before the spectators' very eyes. Accordingly, in her case the question of punishment, which would be an absurdity with respect to the Fates, does come up in the play. Following the reasoning of King James in the *Daemonology*, her madness might be called a "Daemonique" sickness and, as such, be very real and comparable (characteristically) to the "Pest"⁴⁷ and to be cured "Only by earnest prayer vnto God, by amendment of their liues, and by sharpe pursuing euery one, according to his calling of these instruments of Satan, whose punishment to the death will be a salutarie sacrifice for the patient."⁴⁸ That is Lady Macbeth's case. "More needs she the diuine than the physician" (5.1.71) says the "amaz'd" Doctor who finds himself unable to "minister to a mind diseas'd" (5.3.40). Very soon the final remedy is applied: "The Queen, my Lord, is dead" (5.5.16)—and still no prayer but instead of it Macbeth's nihilist vision.

The scenes concerned with Lady Macbeth's madness and death gain an added distinction in being preceded by as well as contrasted with the English scene. Here another Doctor testifies to the "sanctity" that "Heaven" has given to the King's hands, so that he can, indeed, cure people who are "The mere despair of surgery," combining, moreover, his "healing benediction" with a "heavenly gift of prophesy" (4.3.141-59). Lady Macbeth is shut out from this healing influence by having prostituted, in herself, womanhood and humanity, to the Devil. In Lady Macbeth's case Shakespeare does give us some hints as to his attitude toward capital punishment of "witches" as he also does, in this play, concerning the different spheres of human beings gone wrong, or demonic powers realized in archaic shapes and called by mythological names, or the terrors of hell within the human soul or,

finally, of "Heaven" curing incurable diseases through the hands of a good king.

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster

NOTES

¹Stephen Greenblatt, "Shakespeare Bewitched," *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 108-35.

²See Greenblatt 108-11.

³Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Nelson, 1965) 101.36.

⁴Greenblatt 114 ff., esp. 121.

⁵Greenblatt, *passim*, esp. 127.

⁶Greenblatt 124 and 125.

⁷"Translacer" is Puttenham's term for L. *transductio* which (after using some sartorial metaphors) he explains in a very apt and simple manner: "[...] this word life is translaced into liue, liuing, liuely, liuelode [...]." I find it hard to recognize this in Greenblatt's reading: "Translacing is a mode of rhetorical redistribution in which the initial verbal elements remain partially visible even as they are woven into something new." See George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. S. D. Willcock and A. Walker (Cambridge: CUP, 1970, 1st ed. 1936) 203-04, and Greenblatt 125.

⁸*Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972). Unless otherwise noted, Shakespeare's plays are quoted from the latest available Arden editions.

⁹*Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982) 1.5.62. ff.

¹⁰*Hamlet* 3.2.252-54.

¹¹See Harold Jenkins's note to *Hamlet* 1.5.63.

¹²*Othello* 2.3.152.

¹³For the whole classic summary of the theme, beginning with these lines, see Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols., introd. H. Jackson (London: Dent, 1961): 148. See also Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1965) 1: "[...] Renaissance psychology is a physiological psychology" or 8: "The animal spirit flows in the nerves ('in nervos infus[us] velut lumen'). Its

function is to act as messenger between the brain and the organs in other parts of the body." The reference is to Melanchthon.

¹⁴Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1615) 8. Booke, Chap. 23, 605-06. See also "The Controversies of the eighth Booke," 646-701.

¹⁵Johannes Kepler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6, *Harmonice Mundi*, ed. M. Caspar (München: Beck, 1940), Lib. III, Cap. I, p. 107, 10-12.

¹⁶This is a constant concern of Puttenham's in the second book of the *Arte*, "Of Proportion Poetical." See esp. Chap. V (VI), 76-78, and *passim*; see also Inge Leimberg, "Kein Wort darf fehlen," *Studien zur Englischen und Amerikanischen Literatur: Festschrift für Helmut Papajewski*, ed. P.G. Buchloh, H. Rauter, I. Leimberg (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1974) 267-93, esp. 285 ff.

¹⁷Sidney, *Apology* 101.23.

¹⁸See *Twelfth Night* 2.3.55 and *King John* 5.4.33.

¹⁹According to the OED "sightless" means "Invisible, unseen, dark; impenetrable by vision," but also "Unable to see; destitute of the power of sight; blind," and (as in *King John* 3.1.45) "Unsightly," i.e. "offensive to the eye," thus resembling "ugly" in Marlowe's famous "Ugly hell," *Doctor Faustus* XIX.189, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1962).

²⁰See *Der Zauberberg*, "Vorsatz."

²¹See H. Papajewski, "Chimäre und Metapher: Ein Beitrag zum kritischen Problem von Phantasie und Rationalität im englischen Neoklassizismus," *Anglia* 82 (1964): 88-104.

²²Cf. note 16.

²³On the subject of *energeia* see Madeleine Doran, *Endeavours of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1954), esp. 242-44. On p. 243 Doran quotes the Player's Hecuba speech in *Hamlet* as an illustration of all the features of *energeia* and *enargeia*, i.e. "[...] the setting of the action [...] forcefully [before the audience's eyes] by the metaphors that animate inanimate things [...]."

²⁴Sidney, *Apology* 138.1-3 and note to 138.3.

²⁵Sidney 103.2-8 and 112.30-35; see also Shepherd's highly informative note to line 30.

²⁶See, for instance, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (Oxford: OUP, 1966), "Covenant" and "Covenanters."

²⁷*Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. J. Q. Adams (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside P, 1924) 264.

²⁸Ironically so, for instance, in the old Blackfriar's frater serving as a playhouse since 1576. See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1951) 2: 495-97.

²⁹See Chris Hassel, "Shakespeare's 'Removed Mysteries,'" *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 7.3 (1998): 355-67.

³⁰Chambers 1: 322-28, esp. 326.

³¹See, for instance, T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1944) *passim*.

³²See Appendix A in *Macbeth*, ed. Muir, 170-81, here 171-72.

³³*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979) 5.1.271-76.

³⁴See OED, "auger [...]" the initial *n* has been lost [...] through confusion of *an nauger*, *a nauger* and *an auger*."

³⁵*Seneca His Tenne Tragedies: Translated into English*, ed. Thomas Newton (1581), 2 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1967) 1: 11-12.

³⁶See A. Walde and J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1965) "augur" and "templum." Cf. also *Coriolanus* 4.6.86-88 where the close juxtaposition of "temples" and "an augur's bore" suggests the paronomasia *auger-augur*.

³⁷See the long list of entries in Spevack's *Concordance* from "fatal" to "fates," with an accumulation of examples in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, but with some striking instances, too, in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Henry VI*.

³⁸Appendix A, *Macbeth*, ed. Muir, 171-72.

³⁹See OED "weird," *n.* and *a.* which provides interesting etymological information for the use of the word in F1, and many elucidating examples. The meaning is: "Having the power to control the fate or destiny of men."

⁴⁰See Inge Leimberg, *Shakespeares Romeo und Julia: Von der Sonettdichtung zur Liebestragödie* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1968) 16-44. Here I focus on Robert Wilmot's *Tancred and Gismond* and *Soliman and Persida*, ascribed to Thomas Kyd.

⁴¹See, for instance, Plotinus, *Ennead* I.8, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* III.76-84, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* I.255 and IV.75.

⁴²See Dietrich Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1966, 1st ed. 1937) 131-32.

⁴³*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Oxford: OUP, 1968), *The Legend of Good Women* IX, "The Legend of Hypermnestra," suggestively spelled, in the Latin subtitle, "Incipit Legenda Ypermystre," 2580 and 2630.

⁴⁴Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, introd. H. R. Williamson (London, Arundel: Centaur P, 1964) I.iii.29-30.

⁴⁵Aristotle, *Poetics* 24.18, 1460a.

⁴⁶Aristotle 24.15-17, 1460a.

⁴⁷King James, *Daemonologie*, in *Forme of a Dialogue* II.6, 119 in *The Workes* (London, 1616, rpt. Hildesheim: Olms, 1971).

⁴⁸King James II.5, 118-19.

Narrative, Typology and Politics in Henry Vaughan's "Isaac's Marriage"

ALAN RUDRUM

"Isaac's Marriage" has attracted some attention as the only poem of the 1650 *Silex Scintillans* that was revised for the 1655 edition. A reviewer of my edition of Vaughan's *Complete Poems* asked "Who did this correcting, and why? And why that poem?" He went on to castigate me for dereliction of editorial duty; I had simply recited the facts of the case and had failed to theorize.¹ More recently Philip West has theorized: "Though critics have tended to ignore 'Isaacs Marriage', it is the only text which Vaughan decided to revise for the 1655 edition of *Silex*, suggesting that he continued to value and want to perfect it."² He goes on to say that Vaughan "requested" that "Isaac's Marriage" be reset with alterations, adding in a note that this interpretation is based upon internal evidence (64 and n. 6). These remarks need to be put into context. The first part of the 1655 edition of Henry Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* is made up of unsold sheets of the 1650 edition, with the exception of leaves B2 and B3, which were reprinted. These leaves run from line 75 of "The Search," the poem before "Isaac's Marriage," to the end of "The British Church," which immediately follows it. The latter, a poem of some twenty lines, is thus the only complete poem, apart from "Isaac's Marriage," on those leaves. Four brief passages of "Isaac's Marriage" are amended and one error introduced.³ What Philip West writes, of course, makes some sense. The fact that Vaughan introduced revisions does indeed suggest that he continued to value the poem. However, the phrase "the only text which Vaughan decided to revise" seems to me misleading, in carrying the implication that Vaughan valued the poem uniquely. The likeliest explanation for the revisions is that those sheets were spoiled in the

printing house and for that reason Vaughan was asked to supply fresh copy. Given the opportunity, he may well have wished to revise a number of poems, but publishers were no more likely then than they are now to accede to the wishes of an author whose work had already left them with unsold sheets on their hands.⁴

As an editor, critic and teacher I was naturally interested in the poem's biblical sources. I was given fresh occasion to think about the poem and Vaughan's particular "take" on its principal source when, in preparing to teach a course in biblical narrative, I read Robert Alter's book on that subject.⁵

I remain fascinated by Vaughan's description of Isaac's prayer above all, and want to add to what Barbara Lewalski and Donald Dickson have written about that passage.⁶ Philip West, mentioning it three times in two pages, stresses Vaughan's youth at the time he wrote "Isaac's Marriage." My own exploration of the poem's meanings led to the reflection that its author was a remarkably learned young man.

"Isaac's Marriage" may at first appear to offer little more than a comparison between the innocence and simplicity of early biblical times and the moral ethos of the 1650s, as seen by a self-consciously pious ("puritanical") Royalist. Its epigraph (*"And Isaac went out to pray in the field at the even tide, and he lift up his eyes, and behold, the camels were coming"*) points to one verse only of the amply detailed narrative of Genesis 24 and the poem begins with the invidious comparison between the biblical then and Vaughan's now: "Praying! and to be married? It was rare, / But now 'tis monstrous" (1-2). At line 5, however, in what appears as an explanation of Isaac's prayer, the reference moves away not merely from the epigraph's reference to Genesis 24:63 but from the story of Isaac's marriage to the earlier episode (Genesis 22) in which God "tempted" Abraham to offer Isaac for a burnt-offering. We are thus reminded of the typological significance of Isaac, which has several aspects: he had been born as a result of God's intervention, when his father Abraham was a hundred years old and his mother ninety (Genesis 17:17) and, to make it quite ex-

plicit, past the menopause (Genesis 18:11); and he had been offered up as a sacrifice by his father. With regard to both miraculous birth and sacrifice he was seen as a type of Christ; he was typical also in relation to the subject of this poem, since his marriage to Rebekah was regarded as a type of the marriage of Christ to the Church.⁷ As Philip West points out, Isaac features as a child sacrifice in a number of seventeenth-century poems about Abraham's faith.⁸ What needs to be stressed is that Vaughan's choice of Isaac's marriage as his subject, and more than one instance of language indicating knowledge of patristic allegorical and typological expositions, reminds us that for Vaughan 'the British church' did not begin with the Reformation. He was clearly both aware of, and in sympathy with, the manner in which Philo and the early Fathers treated the marriages of the patriarchs as spiritually significant. He was no doubt aware also that the marriage of Isaac, who took only one wife, was regarded as the most significant of all.⁹ That the Church had historically regarded the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah as especially significant, and continued to do so, is indicated by its appearance in the Order for the celebration of Holy Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰ This last piece of typology involves a question controversial at the time, as between the Roman Catholics, who favoured seven sacraments, and the Reformed Churches, which favoured two. The acceptance of marriage as sacramental by the Roman Catholics had its basis in Paul's admonitions to wives and husbands in Ephesians 5, ending with the words "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" where the word translated "mystery" in the Authorized Version is *sacramentum* in the Vulgate ("*Sacramentum hoc magnum est, ego autem dico in Christo et in Ecclesia*"; 5:32). Belonging to the group of Laudian Anglicans who fell under the general condemnation "An Arminian is but the spawn of a Papist," neither of the Vaughans took undue precautions to avoid such imputations. Thomas for example had remarked that "Marriage is in a moderate sence *Sacramentall*."¹¹

In Vaughan's explanatory passage there is a nice mingling of well-established typological reference and more esoteric lore:

But thou a chosen sacrifice wert given,
And offered up so early unto heaven
Thy flames could not be out; Religion was
Rayed into thee, like beams into a glass,
Where, as thou grew'st, it multiplied and shined
The sacred constellation of thy mind.

Here the matter of the sacrifice of Isaac is linked, by way of explanation, to a less widely known aspect of the Isaac-Christ typological nexus, the implied sinlessness or moral perfection of Isaac, anticipating Christ who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). That this is important to what Vaughan wishes to convey in the poem is suggested by his recurrence to it at the end:

Thus soared thy soul, who (though young) didst inherit
Together with his blood, thy father's spirit,
Whose active zeal, and tried faith were to thee
Familiar ever since thy infancy.
Others were timed, and trained up to't but thou
Didst thy swift years in piety outgrow,
Age made them reverend, and a snowy head,
But thou wert so, ere time his snow could shed;
Then, who would truly limn thee out, must paint
First, a young Patriarch, then a married Saint.

Vaughan's language, especially in the earlier passage ("Religion was / Rayed into thee, like beams into a glass") may be his own, in the manner of his other appropriations from Owen Felltham, but the idea has an ancient source. Jean Danielou remarks that for Philo the Patriarchs "represent stages in the mystic ascent: Abraham is the virtue which comes from study, μαθησις; Jacob, that which is acquired by moral effort, ασκησις; while Isaac is virtue perfected, τελειωσις, which is entirely a gift of God, from the nature (φυσις) which is infused (αυτομαθης)."¹² Danielou goes on to comment that in the typological approach it is "Isaac who holds the first place, on account of his birth and sacrifice [...] for Philo he always represents perfection. For he was not born according to the ordinary laws of birth, but through divine intervention. He represents 'infused' virtue,

αυτομαθησ, a purely divine operation, and his marriage to Rebekah typifies the union of virtue and wisdom [...]. It is his birth and marriage which are essential [...] his sacrifice takes second place."¹³ Danielou illuminates the typology of Isaac further by reminding us that Josephus bears witness to a tradition which makes Isaac consent voluntarily to his death;¹⁴ and that in Galatians 3:16 Paul tells us that Isaac's birth is a type of Christ (one might add that this interpretation is strengthened by Galatians 4:22-26 with its references to Ishmael and to Isaac).

Vaughan's dealing with Isaac in this poem is also consistent with Boehme's view, as set forth in the section "Of Regeneration" in *The Way to Christ*: "For the Promise of Christendom was made to Abraham; therefore the Type was then also set forth by two Brethren, Isaac and Ishmael, in order to show how Christendom would behave itself, and that two sorts of men would be in it, viz., true Christians and Lip-Christians. Which latter under the title of Christianity would be but mockers, as Ishmael was and Esau, who also was a Type of the outward Adam, as Jacob was a Type of Christ, and his true Christendom."¹⁵ It is important to note that significantly different estimations of the importance of Isaac's marriage, and of Isaac himself, were available. Augustine writes that "there can be no doubt that the merits of [Abraham's] faith and obedience were superior [to those of Isaac], so much so that God says that the blessings he bestowed on Isaac were granted him for his father's sake."¹⁶

Lines 13-23, in evoking the licentious behaviour of the times, contain passages that remind one of the concreteness of certain of Vaughan's secular poems: on the whole realistic depiction of particular evils is rare in *Silex Scintillans*. It functions here, as on occasion later, to evoke by contrast the virtues of Isaac and his bride. It is interesting to see what Vaughan selects from the biblical account and what he adds to it. Line 30, in which Rebekah is described as "the chaste, and lovely object" of Isaac's thought, corresponds to Genesis 24:16: "And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her;" but lines 31-38, in which Rebekah is shown not to exhibit

the sophisticated coqueties observable in Vaughan's contemporaries, have no such explicit backing in the biblical account, in which we learn her name, the fact that she was a relative "in law" of Abraham and that she had a pitcher on her shoulder, before we learn of her beauty and virginity. Her carrying the pitcher is made occasion for further animadversion on the corruption of Vaughan's times, and the role of the servant in the episode of the drawing of the water (Genesis 24:17) is ignored in a way that makes Rebekah's charity and hospitality entirely spontaneous. It is typical of Vaughan that he should have remembered the camels of the biblical account and forgotten the gift of jewels, emphasizing instead the "native [...] simplicity" of Rebekah. In fact Vaughan omits reference to verses 21-60 of the Genesis 24 account, ensuring that his poem does not simply rehash the narrative. Before turning to what Vaughan does instead, it is worth remarking in what ways the poem is consonant with standard contemporary commentary and how it differs. Vaughan's treatment is interesting in relation to what he might have read in recently printed bibles, as it is in relation to the more ancient and rarefied discussions of Philo and the early Fathers. Vaughan stresses that angels advised Isaac's servant (Abraham's rather in the source) "what to do, and say," whereas a contemporary catechism puts the question "What may servants see here?" and gives the answer "How to undertake their Masters' business." The further question "What other good property is in that servant?" is answered "He would not eat [...] before he had done his master's business" (4).¹⁷ The annotations to a Bible published in London in 1645¹⁸ comment on the chastity of the proceedings, suggesting (on 24:2) that the servant was sent "so that the choice of his wife might be made rather by religious discretion, than sensuall affection." This serves as a reminder that part of the point of Vaughan's poem is to oppose sexual licence in behaviour, as the Preface to the 1655 *Silex Scintillans* opposes licentiousness in verse. A Bible published in 1649, with annotations from the Geneva Bible,¹⁹ stresses the servant's obedience to his master, and, of verse 33, the fidelity servants owe to their masters; it comments, in relation to the jewellery given to Rebekah by

the servant (24:22,30) that God then "permitted many things [...] which are now forbid"; says of verse 58 "This sheweth that parents have not authority to marry their children without the consent of the parties"; and, of verse 63 (the epigraph to Vaughan's poem), "This was the exercise of the godly fathers, to meditate God's promises and to pray for the accomplishment thereof."

It is possible, in relation to the biblical narrative and standard contemporary commentary, to make these points: that Vaughan de-emphasizes the role of the servant and avoids the banality of the commentaries on that role; that in ignoring the jewels and pointing up the "freshness" and "simplicity" of Rebekah he is both accepting the then-current view (in relation to the jewels) and following his own preference, expressed elsewhere, for unadorned feminine beauty.²⁰ It seems also fair to say that in basing the poem on verse 63 Vaughan focuses largely on Isaac; whereas almost the whole of the biblical account is given over to Abraham's discussion with his servant, the servant at the well with the women, his conversation with Rebekah, followed by his conversation with her male kindred. The episode, according to the rules enunciated by Alter, ends at verse 61, when the servant and Rebekah leave to return to Abraham. It is perhaps worth adding that in his choice of epigraph, Vaughan is recalling a biblical occasion which gives sanction to what was apparently his own habit: to pray and meditate in the open air, and to do so in the morning and "at eventide."

Barbara Lewalski deals with "Isaac's Marriage" in accordance with her general thesis, saying that Vaughan "includes among the first poems of *Silex* a sequence in which Catholic modes of meditation on the events of Christ's life ("The Search") and upon the creature as an ordered scale of ascent to God ("Vanity of Spirit") are found wanting." The corrective is applied in "'Isaacs Marriage,' through an analysis of the Protestant meditative exemplar, Isaac in the fields" (172). She points out that it follows "The Search" and argues that it "is almost certainly intended as an example of proper meditation—in several modes at once. One key to this intention is that Vaughan's text

here was "a locus classicus for meditative practice, cited in all the Protestant manuals" (336). Lewalski's view of the poem's interest and success is apparently based on the way in which it "serves as a paradigm for the several meditative kinds important in *Silex*," as "meditation on a biblical event [...] an occasional meditation upon a particular marriage [...] a meditation upon experience—Isaac's courtship, and our courtships, and God's ways with Isaac [...] a meditation upon a biblical text, displaying in the Protestant way the speaker-mediator's engagement with that text and its meanings for him and us [...] [and] a brief nature-meditation on Lahai-roi's well, in which a cyclical round of emanations resulting in showers which produce perfumes is set forth as an emblem of Isaac's prayers" (336-37).

Accurate as this account is, one might wonder whether the incorporation of several different meditative kinds is in itself inherently likely to produce a successful poem; and one may not be fully convinced that Vaughan conceived it primarily as a model, an example for his readers of "proper meditation." A comparison of the poem with standard contemporary homiletic on the same subject suggests an intensity of engagement which goes beyond the didacticism implied in Lewalski's account, in spite of such passages as "marriage of all states / Makes most unhappy, or most fortunates." The ecstatic description of Isaac's prayer, followed by the extended simile beginning at line 53, are both quintessentially Vaughan and at some remove from the biblical account. There is perhaps some tension between the traditional description of the soul as feminine²¹ and what, in the context, cannot help but seem like sexually-charged and masculine language (of undressing, piercing, scattering). Similarly, the "brief nature-meditation on Lahai-roi's well" of Lewalski's account omits consideration of the well as fertility-symbol and female-symbol²² (Vaughan's anachronistic use of "his" as a neuter possessive is perhaps unfortunate in this connection) and the way in which the cycle of emanation-shower-perfume, elicited by the masculine Sun, operates as feminine analogue to the sexually-charged description of Isaac at prayer. The entire passage, from lines 43 to 62, is both baroque and quintessen-

tially Vaughan, and serves to remind us that dislike of the sexual crudity attendant upon some wedding ceremonies, in Vaughan's time apparently as well as in our own, does not entail rejection of sexuality. In my view, West fails to take this passage into consideration when he describes the poem as a "curiously prim meditation on the nuptials of Jacob's father," as the wording of that description fails to take into account the significance of the marriage of Isaac in biblical typology.²³

This poem, though it occurs in the 1650 *Silex Scintillans*, nonetheless raises the question of whether the reader should be looking for "passages, whose history or reason may seem something remote" (Preface to the 1655 volume, pp. 142-43). If the poem had been first published in 1655, there would be the suggestion that one aspect of the interest of the subject for Vaughan was personal: his twin brother Thomas had married a Rebecca, and Isaac married a kinswoman, as did Vaughan himself in marrying his deceased wife's sister. In that respect the poem might have been regarded as an apologia, within the circle of those who knew him personally, for doing what others might have thought questionable. This aspect only has bearing if we accept that Vaughan might have been intuitively prescient.²⁴ How we read this poem is significant in relation to West's judgment that Vaughan was "influenced by the Protestant typology that developed from what Aquinas [...] called the *tropological* or moral sense of Scripture. Rather than reading the Old Testament for types of Christ, the new typology read scriptural persons, objects and events as types of the spiritual lives of individual believers and events of the present day" (42). Vaughan's language in "Isaac's Marriage" makes it clear that he is familiar with, and making use of, a more traditional typology influenced by Philo. It is likely that the author of such a poem, himself a young married man, would have seen an *applicatio* in reference to himself, but such self-reference is not primary to the poem.

In religio-political terms, Vaughan chose the marriage which was held to typify the marriage of Christ and the Church: a marriage which was later held by the Roman Catholics to impart to all Christian marriages the nature of a sacrament. It is evident throughout his

religious writings that Vaughan made little effort to distance himself from the imputation of crypto-Catholicism frequently levelled at Laudian Anglicans during this period; not because he was a crypto-Catholic but because he saw himself as a member of the historic Church to whom the early Fathers were as important as post-Reformation divines. His position resembled that of Hooker, for whom the Catholic Church, though in error, remained "a part of the house of God and a limb of the visible Church of Christ."²⁵ The flaunting of banners his opponents thought Papistical was a kind of defiance likely to encourage readers whose sympathies were with the faithful remnant of Laudian Anglicans. There is a further possible religio-political implication which raises the question of what may be validly held to be "context." In Galatians 4 Paul writes:

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

The contemporary implications of verse 29, in terms of eventual emancipation, are clear, as is the call to subterranean opposition in verse 30, if we admit that the passage may be relevant context, as I should argue that it may. It is often remarked that literature and music are linear arts: a matter of words and notes following one another in sequence through time. But, in books read and re-read, as the Bible was by many of Vaughan's contemporaries, the reader's apprehension of meaning is likely to have synchronicity enough. Alert contemporaries would have needed no Concordance to recall the reference to Isaac in this Pauline context. Moreover, they were used to the notion that meaning in one part of the bible was to be controlled and enriched by reference to other parts, as George Herbert expresses it in "The Holy Scriptures II": "This verse marks that, and both do make a motion / Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie."²⁶

T.S. Eliot remarked, of the notion that hermetic ideas might be important in Vaughan, that this would make the poems mere cryptograms, and it might be felt that to suggest Galatians 4:28-31 as part of the "meaning" of "Isaac's Marriage" is to invite similar comment. But this is to ignore the relationship between censorship, legally spelled-out or implicit in power-relations at any particular moment, and the way in which writers go about their work. If the bible itself can be called "The Great Code,"²⁷ and if, as Owen Barfield wrote, the New Testament is latent in the language of the Old,²⁸ there is little question that allusion to it carries much of the "encoding" of political comment in Vaughan's poems and in those of some of his contemporaries. Indeed, the implicit reference to the banned Book of Common Prayer was not without its message to that work's adherents.

Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, British Columbia

NOTES

¹*Poetry Wales* 11.2 (1975): 140.

²Philip West, *Henry Vaughan's Silex Scintillans*, (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 53-54.

³For details see Alan Rudrum, *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1976, repr. 1995) 541-42.

⁴The 1650 volume was published by Humphrey Blunden, the 1655 by Henry Crips and Lodowick Lloyd, who had purchased Blunden's bookshop from his widow. See West 63.

⁵See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), especially chapter 3.

⁶Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: PUP, 1979) 336-37; Donald R. Dickson, *The Fountain of Living Waters. The Typology of the Waters of Life in Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1987) 151-52.

⁷See the chapter "Allegory of the Marriage of Isaac" in Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality* (London: Burns & Oats, 1960; a translation of his *Sacramentum Futuri*). He remarks (134) that the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca is considered as a

mystery by the Pseudo-Barnabas (XIII.2), and quotes "Rebecca is a type of the Church and Isaac a type of Christ."

⁸He cites poems by Francis Quarles and Alexander Ross (54 n 81).

⁹See the chapter "The Allegory of the Marriage of Isaac" in Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality*.

¹⁰"[...] as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made" (*The Book of Common Prayer* 1559, ed. John E. Booty [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1976] 293).

¹¹*Anthroposophia Theomagica, The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, ed. Alan Rudrum (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984) 72.

¹²Danielou's quotation from Philo's *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia* 35-36 (p. 135) is also important in this connection.

¹³Danielou 118. He adds that in the Rabbinical literature the sacrifice of Isaac is prominent. He argues, however, that the "cycle of the Patriarchs, more than any other, came to be strongly touched by the Philonian influence, to such an extent that in the great commentators from the third century the two streams meet" (131).

¹⁴Danielou refers to *Antiquities of the Jews* I.xiii in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, tr. William Whiston, Standard Edition, p. 49. In the Loeb edition, tr. H. J. Thackeray (London: Heinemann, 1930), see pp. 109 ff.; especially 115.

¹⁵This passage of Boehme is of course consistent with Romans 9:1-13.

¹⁶Book 16, ch. 36 of *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 699.

¹⁷*The Way to True Happinesse, Leading to the Gate of Knowledge [...] by question and answers, opening briefly the meaning of every several book [...] of the Bible*, 1642 (Bodleian 8 J 556 Th) 4.

¹⁸Bodleian 101 c 196.

¹⁹Bodleian Douce B. B. 168 (1649)

²⁰In, e.g. "St. Mary Magdalen" (p. 273).

²¹Vaughan treats the soul as feminine, although the Welsh *enaid* (soul) is masculine. See the note to "The Burial of an Infant," *Complete Poems* 570.

²²See Alter 52.

²³See the chapter "The Allegory of the Marriage of Isaac" in Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality*.

²⁴Thomas and Rebecca were married, by Thomas's own account, on September 28, 1651 and Henry's first wife Catharine was almost certainly still alive when the poem was first printed. Thomas Vaughan refers to a "great glass full of eye-water, made att the pinner of Wakefield, by my deare wife, and my sister Vaughan, who are both now with god" (*The Works of Thomas Vaughan* 587). The reference is almost certainly to his sister-in-law Catharine, Henry's first wife.

²⁵See H. R. Trevor-Roper's review of the Preface and Books I-V of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in *The New York Review of Books* 24.19 (24 November 1977). 50. It is worth remembering too that Hooker had been accused of "impiously ascribing to God a general inclination [...] that all men might be saved" (51), which puts him squarely with the Laudians as against the Calvinists of Vaughan's time.

²⁶*The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1941, repr. 1959) 58.

²⁷Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

²⁸*Saving the Appearances* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) 176.

Another View on *The Turn of the Screw**

URSULA BRUMM

Professor Edward Lobb in his essay "*The Turn of the Screw, King Lear, and Tragedy*" has drawn attention to a striking similarity between Henry James's story and Shakespeare's tragedy by pointing to "six 'nothings' in four lines of dialogue" (31) in these two works. The possibility that James may have had Shakespeare's drama in his ear or mind presents itself and with it the question of what this means in terms of intertextuality and how far it may carry. Professor Lobb thinks that "there are a number of ways in which *The Turn of the Screw* parallels *King Lear* quite closely" and believes "that James makes allusions to suggest those parallels" (32). In the course of his interpretation he suggests similarities in themes, such as the desire to be assured of love which develops into a possessiveness and confusion of self-delusion or blocked insight which results in the death of the beloved person. These are thematic aspects in the two works and yet they belong in the large field and general pattern of love, true or misguided. One may wonder, therefore, whether they are sufficient evidence to prove that James had *King Lear* in mind when he wrote the story and that Shakespeare's tragedy served as a model.

"Tragedy" in the title of his essay and frequent reference to tragic aspects in events and persons serve to reinforce an interpretation which takes its cues from this genre. I would like to take issue with this interpretation, as I am unconvinced that the governess is "A genuine tragic heroine" (35) or that the story can be seen as a classic tragedy as Professor Lobb maintains: "*King Lear* not only provides a

*Reference: Edward Lobb, "*The Turn of the Screw, King Lear, and Tragedy*," *Connotations* 10.1 (2000/2002): 31-46.

clue about the theme of James's story, then, but a framework for interpretation of it as a classic tragedy of belated insight" (35). James's most popular story *The Turn of the Screw* since its publication in 1898 has received a great number of interpretations producing a great variety of insights. It may therefore be allowed to add another attempt to unravel its complexity, an analysis which starts in skepticism of its presumed tragic nature. Can the governess really be seen as a "genuine tragic heroine" (35) when Prof. Lobb at the same time discovers "overt suggestions" of her "depravity" in the later part of the story (38)?

The terms "tragedy" and "tragic" have come to be used in a wide and loose sense, but if they are to remain at all meaningful in literary discourse, they should still refer to a fall from a high position in a fateful contest with powers and values. The difference between the stringent literary form of tragedy and *The Turn of the Screw* is strikingly apparent in narrative tone and structure; it is ultimately rooted in a difference of genre, more precisely a number of genres which James took up and united in a mood of playfulness and freedom from conventions. In his Notebook, his letters, and in the Preface to the New York Edition, Henry James has commented on his aims and manner in writing this story and in doing so referred to a variety of genres: to write a ghost story (106),¹ to have written a potboiler (112), "a tale of terror" (115), "I cast my lot with pure romance" (121), and he thinks of "some fairy tale pure and simple" (119). Furthermore, in the Preface to the New York Edition, that is after the publication of the story, he confesses to a singular playfulness in writing: "allowing the imagination absolute freedom of hand" (118), to have "the imagination working freely," and "to improvise with extreme freedom" (119) are only a few of his expressions indicating delight in writing a "flower of high fancy" or an "irresponsible little fiction" (117). Even if not all of these comments have to be taken at face value, a freedom in the use of literary rules and conventions may be expected in the story.

With improvisation "breaks bounds" and the wish "to improvise with extreme freedom" (New York Preface, 119), James in *The Turn of*

the Screw boldly and freely takes up genres and joins a hybrid form of narration combining the ghost story and the detective story² with what may be called the "governess story." Of the three, the story of the governess is made central. As a subgenre and a characteristic invention of English literature, it depends on a class-structured society in which aristocratic, genteel or wealthy families, living in their country seats employ a governess to take care of their children, usually a woman from a middle-class, respectable but impoverished background, who is educated, conscientious, and eager to provide the best care for her wards. James's unnamed governess conforms to this type as the daughter "of a poor country parson" "out of a Hampshire vicarage" (4). At one point in her report she remembers the paragon example in English literature, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, which in her words deals with "an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement" (17). There is a mystery in the two works which are otherwise very different, except for a dominant if disguised theme: the ultimate desire to save. *Jane Eyre* finally becomes savior to a maimed and helpless Rochester, while James's governess is defeated in her ambition to save Miles and Flora.

In her duty to care for and protect the children the governess serves as a kind of guardian, a character close to James's interest and important to his writing.³ In this story it is, uncharacteristically, a female guardian who accepts this role in a fervent commitment, enhanced by an infatuation with "the splendid young man," her employer (6). The employer, uncle of the two orphaned children Miles and Flora is actually their legal guardian, in effect, however, a non-guardian as he categorically rejects his responsibilities. "A man of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits," (5) he delegates all his duties to the governess; although he is aware of Miles's dismissal from school, he instructs the governess "never, never: neither appeal nor complain and to meet all questions herself" (6). Although physically absent from his country seat, he remains a negative, even evil influence on the events at Bly, often discussed by the governess and Mrs. Grose as well as by the children who desire his presence and help. It is the

"seduction exercised" (6) by him and a continuing erotic attraction which entices the governess to "find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism" (28) of the responsibilities imposed on her.

The task which she faces presents itself as a challenge and provides the detective part of the story: to solve the mystery why Miles's school finds it "impossible to keep him" and considers him "an injury to others" (11). His dismissal from it without a reason given convinces her that there is an element of mysterious evil doing or influence attached to the boy, which at this point is not a "delusion" of the governess but something she is responsible for dealing with. It is in this context that the ghost-story part is integrated into the governess's tale. On various occasions the ghosts of her two deceased predecessors appear to her, representing or projecting her apprehension of an evil influence of Quint and Miss Jessel, the "demon spirits" and a "haunting pair" as James calls them in his Preface (122).

Here again, James made use of the freedom of imagination and improvisation he claimed in his Preface (120). The ghosts which are seen by the governess may be taken as mental creations of her suspicion, while at the same time her description of their clothes and physical appearance is recognized by Mrs. Grose as identifying Quint and Jessel. Furthermore, Mrs. Grose links Quint closely to the absent guardian. The apparition of Quint, she thinks, wears his master's clothes, and she tells the governess that he was "his own man, his valet, when he was here" (24), "the master believed in him," thereby casting another dark shadow, even a taint of guilt on the Master guardian who emerges from behind the scene as the villain of the drama. Although in his Preface James stressed that he did not intend to write a ghost story of the "new type [...] the mere modern psychological case" but a story of "the disquieting sort" of bad servants and "haunted children" (118) he has given his ghosts a psychological function and meaning in defining the governess. The ghosts express her apprehensions and at the same time suggest their own nature and role in nineteenth century England: they are the "ghosts" of the then unmentionable facts and problems of sexuality.

At this point the drama and theme of the story is put forward in its full extension and significance as all three genre elements come together. The ghosts point to the detective task of the mystery to be solved, which, taken up by the governess develops into a contest between her and her wards. This contest is the most serious, most original, and also the most haunting part of *The Turn of the Screw*, in other words, exactly the additional turn of the screw. If there is a "tragic" ingredient in this contest it is to be located on the children's side, not the governess'. As the governess narrates the story we have to rely on her point-of-view, her perceptions and restricted, perhaps even biased knowledge of her wards. It is Miles who by initiating a discussion with her gives us an insight into the children's feelings, desires and predicament, revealing at the same time that their problems to the very end are not really understood by their governess.

While "Walking to church on a certain morning"—not a child's favorite entertainment and the governess feeling "like a gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes" (54)—Miles takes the initiative with the blunt question "when in the world am I going back to school" (55). This and further requests are somewhat condescendingly—or awkwardly—phrased by addressing her as "my dear": "you know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady always—!" (55). He makes clear in the continuation of their discussion that he "wants to see more of life," cease to lead "a life that is so unnatural for a boy," that he wants his uncle to know about him (57). As these wishes not only challenge the governess's government but defeat her in all she has been hoping to achieve, she is ready "to give up the whole thing" (59). There is, however, another dialogue in which Miles again challenges her with "the way you bring me up" (62) and repeats his desire "to get away" (63) and have his uncle come "completely to settle things" (64) with her, presumably as ersatz parents. Yet all the while to the very end the governess in Protestant single-mindedness, insists on "being told," bringing into the open the presumed evil of his past misdemeanor,—which by this time she, as well as the reader, should

have guessed, and she should perhaps have considered how to deal with it.

Here is a pubescent boy, unhappy in an all-female company, fatherless, asking for the help of his only male relation, who fails him. He reveals precociousness in his way of talking to the governess, a precociousness which may be traced to Quint and what he learned from him: a knowledge in the bare facts and workings of male sexuality. As a matter of fact, sexual information at this time was more often passed on from "downstairs," the servant level, than from the "upstairs" of genteel parents. Being pressed by the governess, Miles admits that he "said things," which he discussed with other boys: he told them "to those I liked" (88). They in turn told them to others: "They must have repeated them to those they liked! But I didn't know they'd tell" (87). Obviously this proliferation of information was reason enough to send him away: "They thought it was enough" (86). James in *The Turn of the Screw* has written a sad story of children, "orphaned" in more than one aspect, growing up and left alone with sexual problems in an Age which refused to speak of and deal with adolescent puberty. The governess obviously does not even dare to think about them, as, even when writing her story, she has not solved the mystery, while she should have guessed already in reading the school official's letter the nature of Miles's "unmentionable" misdemeanor.⁴

One is reminded of a famous incident in American intellectual history. Jonathan Edwards, minister and philosopher, the most eminent intellectual among American Puritans, was dismissed in 1750 by his congregation for his overzealous handling of a minor scandal. A group of adolescent parishioners had gotten hold of a midwife's handbook and had somewhat freely discussed its information. The true nature of this scandal was also unmentionable: in his *Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (1765) Edwards's disciple Samuel Hopkins, himself a minister and Puritan philosopher, merely speaks of "books" which promoted "lascivious and obscene discourse."⁵ The governess in her moral fervor and determination to excel in fulfilling the task imposed on her is also incited to overact.

She continues the relentless interrogation of Miles which now reveals a possible involvement of Miss Jessel in his sexual education. Without any sensibility or consideration for the boy's qualms and mortification she has by this time turned her frantic effort to solve the mystery of a suspected evil into an exorcism which is bound to go wrong. At the end she is "stupefied" rather than "deluded" nor is there "a belated insight" rather a failure of insight. A parson's daughter, she remains a victim to Victorian prudery; she has not gained any insight, leaving her detective task unsolved. Her conviction that Quint "has lost [Miles] for ever" (88) is only true in the sense that Miles loses his life within the mental turmoil of his ordeal. If there are tragic aspects in this story they have to be assigned to him.

Freie Universität Berlin

NOTES

¹Quotations from the text of *The Turn of the Screw* and comment on it are taken from the Norton Critical Edition. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1966).

²The presently reigning "Queen of Crime," P. D. James in a "Fragment of Autobiography" which she called *Time to Be in Earnest* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999, 169-70) has briefly discussed *The Turn of the Screw* as detective fiction.

³Winfried Fluck, *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit: Der amerikanische Realismus 1865-1900* (München: Fink, 1992) has discussed the role and importance of the guardian figure in James's work.

⁴An interpretation along similar lines is suggested by Mark Spilka, "Turning the Freudian Screw, How Not to Do It," *Literature and Psychology* 19 (1963): 105-11.

⁵The biography is reprinted in David Levin, ed., *Jonathan Edwards: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969). The quotation is on p. 53.

Conrad, Capitalism, and Decay

CHRISTOPH LINDNER

This essay examines Conrad's vision of decay in *The Secret Agent* (1907) to argue that the novel expresses acute anxieties over capitalism's decadent social and material effects. Set in the seedy underworld and grimy back-streets of London in 1894, Conrad's savagely ironic novel of half-baked revolutionary politics and bungled urban terrorism shows the dark side and damaged face of consumer society as it moves into the twentieth century. Specifically, it envisions the material and social worlds in a state of advanced corruption and decadence that puts them beyond the capacity for repair. Following this thought, the discussion that follows focuses on three key aspects of Conrad's vision of decay: the sex shop, the city, and the anarchist figure of the Professor.

1. The Sex Shop

Conrad begins *The Secret Agent* by introducing us to Verloc's shop—the base of operations for the novel's anarchist movement and, as such, the novel's narrative and symbolic center. It crouches in an anonymous corner of the city. It is stranded in commercial obscurity. It exudes an almost spectral aura. And it houses an outlandish and eclectic assortment of valueless objects, as Conrad's description of its window display throws into high relief:

The window contained photographs of more or less un-dressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two and six in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of

marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like the *Torch*, the *Gong*—rousing titles. And the two gas-jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers. (13)

The entire point of a window display is, as Baudrillard points out in *Consumer Society*, to assault the gaze with a "calculated riot of colour" that invites passers-by to convert fantasies of material indulgence into "real, economic exchange inside the shop" (166). The dimly lit shop window in Conrad's novel, however, seems to be missing the point entirely. Its monotonous and neglected appearance offers no "calculated riot of colour" to seduce the consumer gaze, nor does it extend any tantalizing invitations to real economic exchange inside the shop itself.

Here, the gratuitous spectacle of the window display that becomes such a definitive fixture in retail practice by the late nineteenth century—and that receives elaborate representation in department store novels like Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883) and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900)—is conspicuously missing. In Zola, for example, we are incessantly confronted by vivid images of dazzling Parisian store fronts. This passage shows the Baudu family, just arrived in the city from the provinces, instantly waylaid by a succession of fantastically ornate window displays:

They walked down the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, past the shop windows, stopping again in front of each fresh display [...]. But it was the last window, above all, which held their attention. A display of silks, satins, and velvets spread out before them in a supple, shimmering range of the most delicate flower tones: at the top were the velvets, of deepest black and as white as curds; lower down were satins, pink and blue, with bright folds fading into tender pallors; lower down still were the silks, all the colours of the rainbow [...] pieces brought to life by the knowing hands of the shop assistants [...]. (5)

Zola's images of visual excess show exactly what is missing in Conrad, illustrating just what Baudrillard means in *Consumer Society* when he talks about the shop window's "calculated riot of colour" with all

its "glorious *mis-en-scène*" and "sacrilizing ostentation" (166). These window displays are alive with energy and tension. They have form, texture, layers, structure, depth. The colors are intense and brilliant. The commodities look new, glossy, luxurious, and sensuous. They are inviting to the touch and tantalizingly accessible.

This makes the novel's store fronts a "great fairground of display" (Zola 4). Crucially, this fairground has the desired effect on its captive audience. Hit with the full hypnotic force of the window displays, the Baudus experience what Walter Benjamin describes in a comment on late nineteenth century Parisian shopping arcades as "the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers" (Baudelaire 55); and what Dreiser, talking in turn about the visual lure of Chicago department stores in *Sister Carrie*, calls the "drag of desire" (21).

In contrast to Zola's *grands magasins* in *The Ladies' Paradise*, Conrad's little shop in *The Secret Agent* goes out of its way *not* to make a gratuitous, sensational, or even tantalizing spectacle of its public face. And in the absence of that spectacle, this shop gives the public body no incentive at all to stop and indulge in the dreamy ritual of window shopping. It is clear, then, that the appearance of the shop in Conrad is deliberately designed to ensure a state of obscurity and anonymity. The reason is suggested by the character and condition of the objects on display in Verloc's window. Taken together, the semi-nude photographs, nondescript packages, flimsy yellow envelopes, books hinting at indecency, and obscure foreign pamphlets with inflammatory political titles allude discreetly to the shop's real business of dealing in pornographic and anarchist materials—what Conrad enigmatically refers to as the selling of "shady wares" (15), and what in the cultural politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a socially taboo form of trade. So although it may well look like an ineffective advertisement for the shop's interior, the window display does in fact hint at the shop's business in its own veiled and oblique way. The exhibited objects are shady in character (morally and politically dubious). They are shady in their material condition (damaged and decay-

ing). And thanks to the poor lighting, they are quite literally shady in appearance.

To complete this picture of the shop as a site of shady dealings Conrad carefully matches up the shop's appearance with that of its customers. As this passage highlights, those customers look as soiled and damaged as the suspect goods they consume:

These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. Some of that kind had their collars turned right up to their moustaches, and traces of mud on the bottom of their nether garments, which had the appearance of being much worn and not very valuable. And the legs inside them did not, as a general rule, seem of much account either. With their hands plunged deep in the side pockets of their coats, they dodged in sideways, one shoulder first, as if afraid to start the bell going. (13)

These self-effacing, ghostly forms are the antithesis of the flamboyant and leisurely figure of the *flâneur*—the parading streetwalker, habitual crowd watcher, and inveterate window shopper whom Benjamin sees in *Illuminations* as the embodiment *par excellence* of the late nineteenth century metropolitan consumer (168-69); and whom Deborah Parsons, following Benjamin, describes in *Streetwalking the Metropolis* as an "itinerant metaphor" for urban modernity (2). Darting furtively into the shop with their "collars turned up and soft hats rammed down" (14), Conrad's customers go out of their way to escape the scrutiny of the public gaze. They seek not to stand out from the crowd, but to melt invisibly into it. Like the shop itself, in other words, these faceless customers work hard to ensure their anonymity and obscurity. To this end, they similarly disassociate themselves from consumer society's spectacular practices. They share in none of the eye-catching pleasures of *la flânerie*.

The fact that the shop's customers are exclusively male further hints at its pornographic orientation. As Steven Marcus notes in his study on Victorian sexuality and pornography, the material of pornography has historically been produced in Western culture—as it still is today—almost exclusively "by men for men" (281). That is, as an indus-

try catering almost exclusively to male desire, the selling of pornography targets and attracts a dominantly male consumer body. Even so, the notable absence of any female clientele in Verloc's shop does not in itself betray the presence of a pornographic trade. But it does become strongly suggestive of just such a trade when coupled with the shop's own seedy and secretive appearance.

More to the point, however, Conrad makes it clear in his account of these anonymous consumers that the shop engages in a form of commerce that—however paradoxically—positively requires obscurity and anonymity in order to draw in its customers and shift out its goods:

Sometimes it was Mrs. Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell [...]. Then the customer of comparatively tender years would get suddenly disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart would proffer a request for a bottle of marking ink, retail value sixpence (price in Verloc's shop one and sixpence), which, once outside, he would drop stealthily into the gutter. (14)

This passage basically reads as a description of the amateur buyer of pornographic articles. The discomfiting presence of a woman behind the counter makes the insecure customer acutely aware of himself as a consumer of explicit material. It punctures his sense of invisibility. The overpriced marking ink is of course a decoy good that allows him to salvage the embarrassing situation by making an entirely innocuous transaction. That he buys an overpriced item he clearly does not want simply confirms the value he attaches to remaining both inconspicuous and anonymous.

Accordingly, unlike the department store that thrives on the spectacle of goods and the seduction of display, Conrad's back-street shop absolutely needs to deflect and defuse the curiosity of the public gaze in order to capitalize on its merchandise. Rishona Zimring makes this point in a recent article fittingly titled "Conrad's Pornography Shop," noting that "instead of making a spectacle of its goods" Conrad's shop "sells by hiding them" (334). She rightly adds that the shop entices its highly self-conscious clientele "with the comfort of obscurity, not the

seduction of display" (334). The indication is that the shop does not evade the gaze as a way to resist consumerism. Rather, it does so precisely as a way to participate in it.

This disguising of the shop's identity plays an important role in articulating the novel's attitude towards revolutionary politics. Significantly, Conrad does not slip behind the commodity's disguise to disclose any dirty or salient details about the shop's pornographic and anarchist material. In fact, he makes the description of that material increasingly vague over the course of the novel. By the time the Assistant Commissioner of Police—himself in disguise—visits Verloc's shop, the merchandise on display is reduced to an amorphous mass:

[...] another suspect patch of dim light issued from Mr Verloc's shop front, hung with papers, heaving with vague piles of cardboard boxes and the shapes of books [...]. By the side of the front window, encumbered by the shadows of nondescript things, the door, standing ajar, let escape on the pavement a narrow, clear streak of gaslight within. (127)

With its vague imagery, nebulous shapes, and "shadows of nondescript things," Conrad's description in this passage makes it impossible, as Brian Shaffer points out, "to tell whether it is the politically rousing or sexually arousing materials that are being detailed" (444). This, however, is no accident on Conrad's part. From the outset, Conrad deliberately collapses the distinctions between the two forms of merchandise. They share the same physical space, the same material condition of damage and decay, the same look of emptiness and waste, the same forms of disguise, and even the same anonymous consumers.

Brian Shaffer argues that Conrad forges these "bonds between revolutionary politics and pornography" in order "to tarnish the glamour of subversive politics with the smuttiness of tawdry sex" (443). To this end, Shaffer adds, both spheres "are depicted as figuratively or literally masturbatory, and as attracting a morally dubious readership" (443). Conrad's early account of Verloc's customers, with their soiled clothing and suspect behavior, certainly bears out Shaffer's point about a dubious readership. Similarly, something of pornography's

association with lonely and humiliating acts of self-abuse rubs off on these seedy figures.

But although Shaffer makes an important point, he does not follow through to take the relationship between the shady wares and consumerism fully into account. Rishona Zimring does, however, when she argues that Conrad's sex shop fulfills the function of a safety valve for a society that generates "excess desire," desire that "in turn finds satisfaction in the commodification of women and the reproduction of rousing revolutionary titles" (334). This idea that the shop acts as a kind of safety valve is one that Conrad himself touches on when he states that the shop's dubious goods "preserve an imperfect society from the dangers of moral and physical corruption, both secret, too, of their kind" (231). For Zimring, this suggests that Conrad sees "desire, whether sexual or revolutionary," as having "as its object simulations and as its banal relief, an economic transaction: the purchase" (334-35). In such terms, Conrad's collapsing of the distinction between pornographic and anarchist material can be understood not just as a way to satirize and debunk revolutionary politics, but also as a commentary on the social function of catering to 'deviant' consumer desires. In *The Secret Agent* the selling of anarchist material, like the selling of pornography, is about defusing existing desires not fueling new ones.

The effect is a disorienting consumer experience that becomes an obstacle to sociality. The stress on anonymity, obscurity, detachment, and deception positively impedes human relations. It even reduces the human subject to the dehumanized category of an inanimate *thing*. And like the commodities populating the space, the shop's customers are similarly cut-off from their own identities as well as the identities of others. They are dislocated from the wider consumer world. In sum, Conrad sees the sex shop as a deeply asocial space that exerts an alienating and dehumanizing influence over its customers.

2. The City

This sense of alienation and dehumanization extends beyond the confines of the sex shop to encompass the whole of Conrad's vision of the city. In his 1920 "Author's Note" to *The Secret Agent*, Conrad recalls the daydream that inspired the novel's cityscape. It is a vision of London so somber and brooding that it transforms the metropolis into a place of darkness as engulfing and menacing as the African interior in *Heart of Darkness* (1902):

Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light. There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough for any passion, variety enough for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives. (10)

Such images of the city's hostility and indifference towards humanity—of a human population buried alive and suffocating in the obscurity and anonymity of urban existence—recur throughout the novel. In *The Secret Agent*, the city figures as "an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, suffocated by [...] blackness" (126). The buildings are "a black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man" (54). The streets are like "a slimy aquarium from which the water [has] been run off" (124). Conrad's squalid urban wilderness is, as Randall Stevenson notes, positively Dickensian in its "images of hostility and horror" (45). Certainly, it evokes the opening of *Bleak House* (1852-53) where Dickens, in terms almost verbally echoed by Conrad's, describes the city as a place of gloom soaked in "soft black drizzle," plastered in "mud, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth," and "mourning" by all appearances "for the death of the sun" (1).

Conrad's vision of the city in *The Secret Agent* also brings to mind the distinctively bleak cityscapes of *film noir*. Through dimly-lit photography and shadow-laden camerawork, classic *noir* films such as

John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1946) similarly see the city in menacing images of darkness, disorder, waste, and decay—images that the *future noir* of films like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) takes to visual and conceptual extremes. Set in the Los Angeles of 2019, *Blade Runner* envisions a sprawling urban wasteland where, in a classic *noir* gesture, it is always night and always raining. In its dystopian projections, as Ralph Willet notes in *The Naked City*, the film imagines the metropolis of the future as a place where "empty warehouses and abandoned industrial plants drip with leaking acid rain," where "rubbish piles up," where "infrastructures are in a state of disintegration," and where "scavengers roam among the garbage" (100). And though *Blade Runner* does offer some glimpses of another city built high above this one—of a high-tech world filled with flashing neon lights, flying cars, and majestic skyscrapers—it does so only to highlight even further the urban decay taking place everywhere at street-level.

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad takes the novel's images of urban decay to visual and conceptual extremes of their own. In the following street scene, for example, he exposes the full severity of the city's alienating and dehumanizing effects. The imagery that ensues is so uncompromisingly bleak and brutal that it would not be out of place in the dystopian urban world imagined in *Blade Runner*:

On one side [of the street] the low brick houses had in their dusty windows the sightless, moribund look of incurable decay—empty shells awaiting demolition. From the other side life had not departed wholly as yet. Facing the only gas-lamp yawned the cavern of a second-hand-furniture dealer [...]. An unhappy homeless couch, accompanied by two unrelated chairs, stood in the open. (74)

What is particularly striking about this street scene is the total absence of a human population. The street is deserted. The houses look uninhabited. Even the second-hand-furniture shop seems abandoned. Here, the material degeneration is so acute that the city becomes more than just hostile and indifferent towards humanity. The condition of "incurable decay" also makes human living in this demolition zone

seem unthinkable and even potentially lethal. The word "incurable," moreover, gives the terminal decay infecting this urban space the malignant feel of a cancerous disease.

It is, in turn, through the description of the second-hand-furniture shop that Conrad comments—albeit obliquely—on the impact of that urban space on social relations and human experience. The only visible life in the street is the fetish life of objects. That is, Conrad projects human characteristics onto the shop's collection of used furniture, endowing it with a life-like autonomy and subjectivity of its own. It is significant, then, that Conrad brings material objects to life only to stress their condition of estrangement and paradoxical look of lifelessness. The chairs are "unrelated". The couch is "unhappy" and "homeless". Abandoned, neglected, and unwanted, these commodities are marked by immobility, stagnation, inertia. But most importantly, as unrelated objects, Conrad's mismatched pieces of used furniture have no relationship with each other. That Conrad uses the condition of objects here as an expression for the reified human condition accordingly suggests that in this place of terminal decay human subjects are, like the objects representing them, damaged goods. More importantly, it also suggests that the experience of urban life under capitalism estranges and depersonalizes the individual. The indication is that the city's human population is similarly inhibited from entering into social relations.

These exact ideas inform another key passage in the novel. It is a description of the city's public trade in newspapers that again highlights a breakdown in social relations:

[...] a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of dirty men harmonised excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printer's ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like a tapestry the sweep of the kerbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution. (72)

The language of garbage saturates the entire passage. The newspaper sellers operate out of the gutter. The posters are "maculated with filth." And the papers themselves, harmonizing with the dirt of the people, the streets and even the sky, look "damp," "rubbishy" and "soiled". In short, Conrad is showing the decay of yet another of the city's social spaces. It is significant that he does so by focusing on newsstands. The newsstands represent what should be a hot-bed of social activity—a public place of congregation, gossip, information, and exchange. But they do nothing of the sort. The look of filth and waste disables their potential to stimulate social relations. The news is literally covered in dirt.

The effect, as Rishona Zimring points out in her reading of this passage, is that "the circulation of news" figures "as the flow of garbage" (335). With this idea in mind the dirt of the newspapers can also be seen, as Zimring argues, to represent "the printed words themselves" (335). In other words, the newspapers' trashed condition doubles as a statement about the trashy material they contain, so that the dirt *on* them becomes figuratively representative of the dirt *in* them. In such terms, it makes even more sense that Conrad depicts the news as "disregarded" and its reading public as disinterested. Even this textual social space has deteriorated to the point where it overflows with its own verbal form of garbage.

It is clear from these various street-scenes that Conrad's treatment of the city goes out of its way to emphasize the asociality of urban space, the anonymity and obscurity of urban existence, and the states of alienation and dehumanization that ensue. What follows is a vision of the city dominated, like that of the sex shop, by images of darkness, disorder, waste, and decay that not only draw on the urban imagery of earlier writers like Dickens, but also prefigure that of *film noir* in its blackest moments. In particular, as Randall Stevenson points out, Conrad's images make the city into "a chaotic space in need of [...] order and rule of law" (45)—into the kind of menacing urban "jungle" (126) that the character of the Assistant Commissioner finds it to be when he sneaks about the city streets at night. And it is precisely by

stressing in this way the city's material and social deterioration that Conrad "sets the stage," in Zimring's words, "for corrective visions of cleanliness and order" (335)—visions that emerge paradoxically from the novel's anarchist figure of the Professor.

3. The Professor

It is, significantly, through the figure of the "incorruptible Professor" (249) that Conrad delivers his most explicit critique of anarchism in *The Secret Agent*. In this key passage, the Professor berates his fellow revolutionaries for their hypocrisy, indolence, and corruption:

You revolutionists [...] are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defence of that convention [...]. You are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you [...]. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. He plays his little game—so do you propagandists. But I don't play; I work fourteen hours a day, and go hungry sometimes [...]. I've the grit to work alone, quite alone, absolutely alone. I've worked alone for years [...]. You talk, print, plot, and do nothing. (64-67)

The Professor's tirade identifies one of the main problems with the "game" played out in the novel between the forces of chaos and confusion and those of law and order—namely, that it *is* a game, and one in which "revolution" and "legality" have become nothing more than "counter moves" that cancel each other out, what the Professor also describes as "forms of idleness at bottom identical." In other words, the Professor points out the futility of *playing* at anarchism. Specifically, he suggests that participating in the game means enslavement to social convention. It means selling out to the forces of domination. But above all, it means doing nothing.

The Professor claims not to play at being a revolutionary, but instead to work at it. In fact, he is the only anarchist in *The Secret Agent* who does not subsidize his revolutionary lifestyle through some other form of activity. Verloc has his trade in pornographic commodities, while Ossipon, Michaelis, and Yundt all profit from turning them-

selves into sex objects through male prostitution. By contrast, the Professor's source of income is directly and inextricable linked to his political extremism. He sells bombs. Or to put it another way, he deals in exploding commodities. So although the Professor does participate—however unlawfully—in capitalist modes of exchange, the objects he exchanges have the potential quite literally to explode the system in which they circulate. Unlike the others, the Professor engages in a form of trade that expresses a fanatical commitment to spreading instability, a commitment to the explosive disruption of capitalist order.

Even so, the Professor's vocation is not without its own inner paradox. In its capacity as a sort of safety-valve for consumer society, as Rishona Zimring has suggested, Verloc's shop supplies commodities that defuse volatile desires. Its pornographic material, for example, offers temporary relief from desire through the consumption of the graphic fantasies it contains. By contrast, the Professor's explosive material is designed not to relieve desire through the safety-valve of fantasy, but instead to enable its violent realization. The problem, however, is that the Professor's exploding commodities have the potential to kill their consumers (the Professor designs the bomb that kills Stevie at the Greenwich Observatory). There is, of course, a certain gruesome appropriateness about an opponent of capitalism selling a form of commodity that kills the consumer. But the complication is that the people who 'consume' the Professor's merchandise are themselves opponents of capitalism—so that, in this case, eliminating the consumer means weakening the forces of chaos and confusion working against capitalism. In other words, the Professor's commitment to spreading instability is paradoxically undermined by the instability of the explosive material in which he trades. Hence his sick ambition to invent a "perfect detonator that would adjust to all conditions of action," a "variable yet perfectly precise mechanism," a truly "intelligent" bomb (62).

Conrad's description of the physical space in which the Professor works and lives further comments on the figure's fanatical commitment to the cause of revolution:

The enormous iron padlock on the doors of the wall cupboard was the only object in the room on which the eye could rest without becoming afflicted by the miserable unloveliness of forms and the poverty of material [...]. There was nothing on the walls but the paper, an expanse of arsenical green, soiled with indelible smudges here and there, and with stains resembling faded maps of uninhabited continents. (242)

It is interesting that Conrad singles out the locked cupboard as the only object in the room that is not "afflicted" by material poverty and "miserable unloveliness" of form, since the cupboard is where the Professor stores his explosives. From this it would be fair to infer that the reason the Professor exempts this particular piece of furniture from aesthetic mutilation and material neglect is because it functions as a container for the one and only form of material object with which he allows himself to enjoy a fetish relation: bombs. More to the point, the neglect evident in the rest of the room speaks of the deliberate starvation of all but the most basic human needs in the service of the revolutionary cause. It speaks, in other words, of a dedication not to material comfort, but to material deprivation. The effect this has on the appearance of the room is the same look of terminal decay as the one so graphically represented in Conrad's vision of the city's damaged exteriors. This domestic space is as hostile and potentially lethal to human living as the novel's decaying urban spaces. Even the colors in the room are poisonous.

Conrad carefully matches up the appearance of this room with that of its human occupant, just as he does with the sex shop and its faceless customers. Specifically, he depicts the Professor as "physically very empty" (84):

A dingy little man in spectacles [...]. His flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull; [...] the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark

whisker. The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual. (58)

The description of this "miserable and undersized" (73) human figure immediately recalls that of the domestic space he inhabits. Both are represented in terms of material poverty and physical damage. Both share a look of emptiness and waste. Commenting on the Professor's physique, Brian Shaffer rightly suggests that this figure of "radical alienation" and "creeping insanity" is represented "in a state of degeneration" (454). To this I would add that it is a state of degeneration that perfectly mirrors the images of decay through which Conrad represents urban conditions under capitalism throughout *The Secret Agent*.

In such terms, the Professor can be seen as a human embodiment of the city. He even has the same hostile and indifferent attitude towards humanity. That attitude is evident not only in his mania for bombs, which speaks of a complete disregard for human life, but also in the social views underpinning his anarchism. In this revealing moment at the end of the novel, for example, Conrad shows the Professor fantasizing about mass murdering the masses. In so doing, he provides the novel's most disturbed and disturbing vision of correction:

The weak! The source of all evil on this earth! [...] They are our sinister masters—the weak, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart, and the slavish of mind. They have power. They are the multitude [...]. Exterminate, exterminate! [...] First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong. You see? First the blind, then the deaf and dumb, then the halt and the lame—and so on. Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom. (243)

The passage is not without a heavy dose of irony. Throughout *The Secret Agent* Conrad repeatedly draws attention to the Professor's physical defects, such as his diminutive stature, his frail physique, and his shortness of sight. In other words, the Professor belongs in every physical sense to the category of the weak he so passionately wants to destroy. But this "agent of destruction" (103) conveniently glosses

over the awkward point that in calling for the extermination of the weak he is also calling for his own extermination.

More to the point, this aversion to the "multitude of the weak" culminates in a vision of social purification disturbingly similar to the final solution envisioned by Hitler. In particular, the Professor's views on the extermination of the physically disabled bring to mind the kind of genocidal thinking behind the Nazi project of racial and ethnic cleansing that led to the horrors of the Holocaust. Equally disturbing about the Professor's homicidal fantasy is the vagueness about where, if at all, the killing would stop. What category comes next after the weak and the relatively strong? We get the distinct impression that the elimination of "every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention" means the elimination of humanity itself.

Conrad does not present this corrective vision as any kind of genuine solution to mass culture's decay. Rather, he makes it clear that the genocidal thinking underpinning the Professor's revolutionary politics is just another part of the problem—just another symptom of decay. Conrad ends the novel with precisely this idea. The final scene shows the Professor indulging in apocalyptic daydreams as he walks alone and ignored through the city streets. In reading the passage, it is worth remembering that the Professor never goes out in public without concealed explosives strapped to his body—explosives that he constantly fingers through the pockets of his coat:

The incorruptible Professor walked [...] averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men. (249)

The word "incorruptible" suggests that nothing can or will sidetrack the Professor. He has given up on humanity. He has even given up on himself. And in renouncing his future, he becomes a force beyond reason and control. The idea is reinforced by the knowledge that the

Professor's body is laden with explosives. While his mind caresses "images of ruin and destruction" his hands are nervously fondling the means to create them. The threat of violence hangs over the entire passage. This human time bomb could explode at any time.

Conrad ends *The Secret Agent* on this ominous note and without ever providing relief from the disturbing images of social and material decay present everywhere in the novel. In the end, Conrad offers no potential, however remote, for regeneration and renewal. Rather, through the treatment of the sex shop, the city, and the Professor, he sees consumer society's decay as incurable, its damage as irreparable, its corruption as irreversible, its stagnation as inevitable. The result is a novel that speaks of a profound cynicism over the possibility of resisting or correcting capitalism's decadent social and material effects. And it is, significantly, precisely this attitude that comes to dominate literary representations of consumer society in the modernist period. It leads to the diseased Dublin of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), to the superficial cocktail set of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1926), to the dystopian consumer projections of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and even to the self-deluding scenarios of Parisian retail therapy in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939).

University of Wales
Aberystwyth

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Response to Alan Latta, "Spinell and Connie: Joyce Carol Oates Re-Imagining Thomas Mann?"*

RODNEY SYMINGTON

Alan Latta argued in his essay that Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (1966) is a "re-imagining" of Thomas Mann's novella "Tristan" (1903). The evidence for this claim is of two kinds: *biographical-circumstantial* and *textual*. In regard to the biographical-circumstantial evidence he cites Oates's oft-expressed admiration for Thomas Mann, her preoccupation with his works in the 1950s and 1960s, and hints in other works of hers that she had used motifs from Mann's works. Furthermore, in her collection of short stories *Marriages and Infidelities* (1972) she included five stories that she called "re-imaginings"—namely, of stories by well-known American and European writers (Thoreau, James, Kafka, Chekhov and Joyce). "In each case, Oates transformed the original text in varying ways, creating new texts which could stand on their own as independent stories" (Latta 322).

All this is interesting and offers a context for the argument of Professor Latta's essay, but it does not by itself present us with any conclusive or convincing proof of any relationship between Oates's story and Thomas Mann's "Tristan." To be convinced—short of a direct admission from the author herself—we need some hard textual evidence. The bulk of Professor Latta's argument comprises what he considers to be conclusive textual evidence of the intertextuality of the two texts. His starting-point is the description of the secondary character Ellie in Oates's story, who is depicted as having "[...] a pale, bluish chest [...] a fair, hairless face, cheeks reddened slightly as if the

*Reference: "Spinell and Connie: Joyce Carol Oates Re-Imaging Thomas Mann?" *Connotations* 9.3 (1999/2000): 316-29.

veins grew too close to the surface of the skin, the face of a forty-year old baby" (Latta 317; Oates 45-46).

This description of Ellie Oscar reminds Professor Latta of Thomas Mann's description of the writer Detlev Spinell in "Tristan": "[...] his looks were quite out of the common. Imagine a dark man at the beginning of the thirties, impressively tall, with hair already distinctly grey at the temples, and a round, slightly bloated face, without a vestige of a beard. Not that it was shaven—that you could have told; it was soft, smooth, boyish, with almost downy hair here and there" (Mann 326).

Insofar as the two characters both give the impression of being childlike or boyish they do, indeed, resemble each other in a general way, although the only specific physical similarity is their lack of facial hair. However, it is quite clear from the totality of the two descriptions that they are not alike physically in any other respect—in fact, they are quite dissimilar. In order to be accurate, we must complete the description of both characters, as given by the respective narrators. Ellie Oscar is further described as follows: "He had fair brown hair, with a lock that fell onto his forehead. His sideburns gave him a fierce, embarrassed look [...]" (Oates 40). This description stands in stark contrast to that of Spinell with his grey hair and slightly bloated face. Furthermore, in relation to Spinell, Mann's narrator tells us, his "bright doe-like eyes had a gentle expression, the nose was thick and rather fleshy. Also, Herr Spinell had an upper lip like an ancient Roman's, swelling and full of pores; large, carious teeth, and feet of uncommon size" (Mann 326). The detail of the hairless face recedes into the background when we compare the full description of the two characters: they could scarcely be further apart physically. Alan Latta also cites as evidence the remark of the narrator of "Tristan" that one of the patients at the sanatorium, "a cynic and ribald wit" (Mann 326), christened Spinell "the dissipated baby" (Latta 317; Mann 326). However, the narrator comments: "The epithet was malicious, and not very apt" (Mann 326). Thus this piece of evidence is of questionable value, since the narrator denies its

accuracy and since it occurs in any case in the context of a story whose style and intent are satirical. But Professor Latta believes he has found some further textual evidence of a connection between the two characters. In the case of Ellie Oscar, his "lips kept shaping words, mumbling along with the words blasting in his ear" (Latta 317; Oates 46). The author believes that this is reminiscent of the description of Spinell's mode of speech: "His voice was mild and really agreeable; but he had a halting way of speaking that almost amounted to an impediment—as though his teeth got in the way of his tongue" (Latta 317; Mann 328).

In fact, on closer reading there is really no comparison at all between the manner of speaking of the two characters. In the quotation cited above Ellie Oscar is listening to popular music on a transistor radio and simply mouthing the words he hears. He is not speaking at all, but simply following the song to which he is listening. The music is playing loudly in his ear, because earlier in this scene he had "turned up the volume on his radio" (Oates 43) and "was pressing the transistor radio up against his ear and sat there in a kind of daze" (Oates 45), and he is so enrapt that Arnold Friend "pounded on the car to get Ellie's attention" (Oates 45). When he does speak later on two occasions, he utters, in fact, only a brief sentence each time, asking Arnold Friend if he should "pull out the phone" (Oates 50). He does, indeed, speak those words (at least the first time) in a halting manner "[...] pulling the words out of the air one after the other as if he were just discovering them" (Oates 50), but this is more indicative of his slow-wittedness, rather than a speech impediment.

In a similar manner, Spinell's "halting way of speaking" has to be read in context: he has just met Herr and Frau Klöterjahn, and the description of his speech in this scene is an ironic adumbration of his nascent (and at this point perhaps unconscious) desire for Herr Klöterjahn's wife Gabriele—as well as the artist's nervousness (a frequent occurrence in Mann's works) when meeting "normal" people. That this "halting way of speaking" is not his normal manner is indicated by two pieces of evidence. First, earlier in the story we

had been told that Spinell, though "unsocial" (Mann 326), is "once in a while overtaken by an affable, blithe, expansive mood; and this always happened when he was carried away by an aesthetic fit at the sight of beauty [...] 'How beautiful!' he would say [...] 'My God! Look how beautiful!' And in such moments of ardour he was quite capable of flinging his arms blindly around the neck of anybody, high or low, male or female, that happened to be near" (Mann 326-27).

Second, following the first meeting with Gabriele Klöterjahn, Spinell has no problem with frequently approaching her (once her husband has returned home!) while she is "taking the cure" on the terrace of the sanatorium, and on these occasions he waxes eloquently and frankly about various topics. In the key scene of the novella, where Gabriele plays the piano at Spinell's urging, there is not even a hint of his "halting way of speaking." In fact, his speech is fluent and persuasive (features one would never expect from Ellie Oscar).

Thus we must conclude that this initial textual evidence is too thin and too selective to constitute proof of genuine intertextuality. The few details that might hint at Oates's having borrowed from Thomas Mann reveal themselves in the final analysis as either very minor parallelisms or not even equivalent.

Professor Latta believes, however, that the plots of the two stories offer further evidence of a re-imagining. In Joyce Carol Oates's story, Arnold Friend "proceeds to try and convince Connie to come for a ride with them, using a combination of music, charisma, and gradually increased threats" (Latta 320). In "Tristan" Spinell becomes infatuated with the sickly Frau Klöterjahn and one day persuades her to play Chopin and then Wagner on the piano. When she has finished playing, he "falls on his knees before Gabriele, in a silent gesture of desire and imploring" (Latta 320). The ending of Oates's story clearly hints at sexual coercion—and some interpreters have said rape and death (cf. Wegs; Robson; Latta 321). "Tristan" describes Gabriele's worsening health after her musical tête-à-tête with Spinell—and eventually strong indications of her impending death. However, this is not the end of "Tristan": the concluding scene portrays Spinell's

confrontation with the baby Anton Klöterjahn and the former's defeat by and escape from that which the baby symbolizes: potent life.

Do the plots of the two stories, in fact, demonstrate enough similarities to permit any conclusions? "Tristan" is, in essence, a satirical (and merciless) portrayal of an inept artist and human being, Spinell, whose clumsy attempt to woo Gabriele Klöterjahn causes a serious relapse in her illness. Spinell's later behaviour is likewise ridiculous: he writes a long and vituperative letter to Herr Klöterjahn, chastising the latter for his boorishness and accusing him of being unworthy of having such a sensitive, artistic wife as Gabriele. For his part, Klöterjahn confronts Spinell in person, charging him for being such a coward ("[...] it strikes me as idiotic to write pages of a letter to a person when you can speak to him any hour of the day" [Mann 354]), and denouncing him as (among other things) a "tomfool" (Mann 355), "a cowardly sneak" (Mann 355), "a contemptible cur" (Mann 355), and a "skulking fool" (Mann 356). The artist, who claims to be superior to the insensitive bourgeois, is "crestfallen, like a big, unhappy, chidden, grey-haired schoolboy" (Mann 355) and finally put in his place when confronted soon thereafter with the Klöterjahn's "fat son" (Mann 359), who is being taken for a walk by his nurse. The concluding paragraph of the story reads: "Herr Spinell turned around and went thence [...] his gait was the hesitating gait of one who would disguise that, inwardly, he is running away" (Mann 359). All in all, the story is Mann's pitiless "castigation" (Mann's own word: see below) of aspects of his own persona, but transposed and distilled into a form that bespeaks a more universal significance. The oppositions art versus life and artist versus bourgeois are recurrent themes in Mann's fiction. One of the most significant aspects of these themes emerges in Mann's works under the influence of Schopenhauer: the question whether art has the power to transcend Will.

Thomas Mann's "Tristan" is an early example of what would become a long list of works in which Thomas Mann portrayed his doubts about the role of the artist and his position in society. The story

"Tonio Kröger" (published in the same collection as "Tristan," 1903) presents Mann's serious discussion of the problem of the artist, while "Tristan" looks at the problem from a satirical perspective (cf. Vaget 82-91; Kurzke 106-10). Spinell is one in a long line of artists in Thomas Mann's works, from Tonio Kröger—who is detained and questioned when he visits his birthplace because he resembles a wanted criminal—to Felix Krull (1911) who is the artist as consummate confidence-trickster, to Adrian Leverkühn (1947), the composer who makes a pact with the Devil. Even the use of Wagner's music in "Tristan" (namely, themes from the opera *Tristan and Isolde*) is employed in ironic contrast to Spinell's hopeless and inept wooing of Gabriele: he knows what the music means ("He explained in a few low-toned words" [Mann 345]), but his ineptitude is unwittingly brought into focus by Gabriele's innocently devastating reply: "Yes, yes. It means that. How is it you can understand it all so well yet cannot play it?" (Mann 345). The narrator comments: "Strangely enough, he was not proof against this simple question. He coloured, twisted his hands together, shrank into his chair" (Mann 345). Both as an artist and as a man, Spinell is inadequate. The pseudo-artist as a detached observer and critic, yet incapable of participating fully and freely in life (viz. Tonio Kröger) is a commonplace in Thomas Mann's works.

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" on the other hand, contains not a hint of such preoccupations. In contrast, it is a much simpler and starker study of Connie's "seduction" by the sheer charisma and intimidation of Arnold Friend. To summarize both plots as comprising the same basic motif: "a young woman is seduced away from her family by a male who desires her, using the power of music as a weapon" (Latta 320) is to oversimplify both stories and to ignore the obvious chasm between the two (as well as the actual ending of "Tristan"). In Oates's story music is not the means of seduction, as it is in "Tristan," rather it forms no more than the background to the initially seductive and eventually menacing words of Arnold Friend (cf. Latta 324). The "Liebestod" of *Tristan and Isolde*

provides Spinell with an excuse for insatiable yearning; the music behind Arnold Friend's words provides the sexual rhythm for his enticement of Connie. But it is surely going too far to claim that the difference in the type of music and the use of it are an intentional re-working on the part of Oates: "[...] changes were necessary, even here. The transformation of setting and protagonist brought with it the change from Wagner to Presley et al., and from actively playing the piano to passively listening to a radio" (Latta 324).

Furthermore, the claim that "Ellie Oscar, in charge of the radio, embodies this transformation exactly: he combines the appearance of Detlev Spinell with a clothing style and first name similar to Elvis Presley's" (Latta 324) is unfounded since—as was shown above—Ellie and Spinell are physically quite different except for the lack of facial hair. The argument that Oates has changed the male protagonist in "Tristan" into a female protagonist in her own story (Latta 323) is both unconvincing and inaccurate, since the two works share a parallel structure insofar as they portray a man pursuing a woman (there is simply no need to view Oates's Connie as a transformation of Spinell). Furthermore, Latta later argues, in addition, that Spinell had to be transformed into *two* characters: Ellie "with Spinell's appearance" (Latta 325) and Arnold Friend with his "charismatic masculinity" (Latta 325). It is not clear how Spinell could have become all of Connie, Ellie and Arnold through Oates's re-imagining. In fact, there is a striking parallel between the male characters in the two works: Detlev Spinell "lacks testosterone" and "resembles a castrato" (Heilbut 158), whereas the name Klöterjahn is derived from the Low German idiom for testicles (Luke xxiv). Thus Mann has set up a clear opposition of the feeble artist and the virile businessman (a theme that he had already treated at length in his novel *Buddenbrooks* [1901]). In Oates's story Ellie Oscar is the asexual companion of the over-sexed Arnold Friend. However, the parallel between the two sets of characters does not lead us to any useful conclusions, since in "Tristan" the two characters are rivals, whereas in Oates's story they are friends.

Professor Latta's conclusion that "Thomas Mann's novella is clearly an intertext for 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" is unsupported by the evidence. In fact, when examined closely, the evidence falls apart. Thomas Mann's "Tristan" was written, the author himself tells us, "as a judgement on an undesirable element in myself, that lifeless preciousness of the aesthete which I consider supremely dangerous [...] in this character I was castigating myself" (cited in Luke xxii). Is it plausible that Joyce Carol Oates would have "re-imagined" this merciless persiflage of the artist as a tale of sexual predation? What kind of "re-imagining" would that be? With such wide parameters surely anything could be seen to be a re-imagining of something else. "Tristan" is not about sex: it is about the confrontation between sexless aestheticism and virile life. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is an entirely different kind of fiction. In sum, the plots of the two stories are only superficially similar: they deal with the relationship between a man and a woman, but they do so in quite a different manner and with different concerns and conclusions.

The great danger of comparative literature and intertextual studies is that they may establish a parallelism between two texts, but one that does not necessarily have any significance. The fact that two clocks tell the same time does not mean that they are connected. In the case of these two stories by Thomas Mann and Joyce Carol Oates, one must conclude that the evidence is simply not strong enough to draw any useful conclusions: in this case the two clocks are not even telling the same time. The assiduous search for intertextual references demonstrates the truth of Tonio Kröger's pronouncement: "If you are possessed by an idea, you find it expressed everywhere" (Mann 96).

Such references are, of course, to be found throughout the works of Joyce Carol Oates and those of Thomas Mann. In the case of the latter, his use of other texts (long before the term "intertextuality" even became current) was a manifestation of Mann's view of the novel at a late stage in the life of this genre. Was there anything left to say? Was any novel in the twentieth century not merely repeating things that

had been said before? Mann's answer to these and similar questions was not simply to incorporate passages from the works of others into his own stories and novels, but to engage in his own "re-imaginings"—by re-creating archetypal myth in twentieth-century guises. In so doing he "borrowed" figures from life (rather than from the works of other writers), modelling his characters to some degree on family members (e.g. in *Buddenbrooks*) or on prominent personages (e.g. Gerhart Hauptmann in *The Magic Mountain*). In all such cases, however, the fictional figures in his works became the repositories for and expressions of more universal concerns.

A final point: Thomas Mann's stature as the pre-eminent German novelist of the twentieth-century has not resulted in his having had a major influence on writers who came after him (cf. Kurzke 13-14). This is a remarkable situation, and it stems from the fact that those writers who have concerned themselves with Mann's works have done so chiefly from a position of stated opposition or feigned indifference. "Dozens of writers," wrote Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "declared that they were indifferent to no one more than the author of *The Magic Mountain*. But they asserted that in voices that were quaking with anger and even envy" (quoted in Kurzke 13). Joyce Carol Oates is the rare case of a contemporary writer who has expressed her strong admiration for Thomas Mann. Thus it may well be that in her voluminous body of work there are still mother-lodes of intertextuality to be mined.

University of Victoria

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