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Mourning Place in Pastoral Elegy

TREVOR LAURENCE JOCKIMS

This paper seeks to centralize the role of the pastoral place, of generic convention, as it functions within John Milton's pastoral elegies, focussing on "Lycidas" and the Latin elegy "Epitaphium Damonis."¹ I do not mean to trace out these poems' generic markers and echoes, as this has been done extensively elsewhere.² Rather, I would like to focus on the speaker of these poems, the shepherd-elegist, as a figure who is inscribed by the worldview of a pastoral landscape so that I may, in turn, address the violent disruption to this landscape which the event of death has provoked and which the elegies themselves attempt to remedy. Within the much more voluminous criticism of "Lycidas" one may note a paradigmatic trend that has occluded the importance of the shepherd-elegist's generic center.³ Samuel Johnson's commentary on the poem offers perhaps the best known instance of this perspective:

In this poem ["Lycidas"] there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind [...] We know that they [Milton and King] never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten. (60-61)

Johnson's comments polarize convention and sincerity, suggesting that the shepherd figure is both hackneyed and improbable, since neither Milton nor King were in fact shepherds (nor Charles Diodati for that matter). In his essay "Literature as Context: Milton's *Lycidas*," Northrop Frye seeks to qualify this fission by expanding the notion of sincerity into two concepts: "personal sincerity" and "literary sin-

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debjockims01303.htm>>.

cerity.”⁴ “If we start with the fact that *Lycidas* is highly conventional and that Milton knew King only slightly,” Frye argues, then “we may see in *Lycidas* an ‘artificial’ poem” which lacks “personal sincerity” (210). However, Frye continues, “*Lycidas* is a passionately sincere poem” in terms of “literary sincerity” precisely because of “Milton’s [deep interest] in the structure and symbolism of funeral elegies” (210).

My present interest is in highlighting the shepherd-elegist’s literary sincerity—his full generic weight—as an interpretive crux that is inscribed at the center of the poem. Granting the seemingly transparent assumption that the speakers of “*Lycidas*” and “*Epitaphium Damonis*” are shepherds from a harmonious pastoral setting confronted by the event of death, certain more provocative questions arise: How prepared is this figure to mourn? What capacities can a shepherd, a wandering emanation from the pastoral, have for elegy? How, indeed, is this figure’s pastoral center inflected by the death-event which brings the poem into being? And how, in turn, is the mourning of this death inflected by the elegist’s pastoral center? These questions are essentially questions of place, and it is my aim to show that the shepherd-elegist, as a survivor of a disrupted pastoral place, speaks an elegy that strives not only to place the deceased within an otherworldly, protective enclosure but, perhaps more urgently, to reconstitute the unstable boundaries of the pastoral itself. Death has caused intense disruption within the pastoral landscape, cutting the dialogic pair in two. At the center of this cut is the pastoral elegist who has lost companion, dialogue and—most traumatically—*place*. Cast as a figure of placelessness, an *unheimlich*⁵ wanderer, the shepherd-elegist works through the elegy to restore his own sense of place within the altered pastoral landscape. He must, after all, go on living there. It is his place.

Mourning the death of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida remarks, in *Béliers*, upon the ontological position of the surviving friend in terms which are pertinent to our current discussion. Evoking Freud and Heidegger, Derrida speaks of the surviving friend as *unheimlich*: the survivor, Derrida suggests, becomes homeless, or placeless, fol-

lowing the death of his companion. "Survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision," writes Derrida (8). This incision, or cut, begins with the event of death itself, the "blind Fury with [...] abhorred shears / [Who] *slits* the thin-spun life" as Milton describes it in "Lycidas" (75-76; emphasis added).⁶ Following the event of death, the incision "multiplies itself" (Derrida 7) and the cut which had begun as an external event becomes internalized by the survivor. "One interruption affects another" (7), asserts Derrida. Death begins by cutting one person off from another, and then it proceeds to cut the survivor off from himself. The dialogic world which the friendship, the coming together, had constituted is violently severed and although, as Derrida writes, "the dialogue [...] will forever be wounded by [death's] ultimate interruption" (6) the survivor persists, cut in two, speaking singly in a once dialogic landscape. "Death," Derrida contends, "is nothing less than an end of *the world* [...] every time" (8), not only for the deceased but for the survivor who is left "in the world, outside the world, deprived of the world" (8) which that dialogue had once constituted.

Derrida's speaking of death as a lost dialogue directly suggests pastoral elegy itself, where the fundamentally dialogic world of pastoral becomes the monologic voice of elegy.⁷ Pastoral elegy's lost dialogue, further, suggests a loss of home, a loss of the world which the now-absent dialogue had constituted. This, I would argue, is the status of the shepherd-elegist as "Lycidas" and "Epitaphium Damonis" begin: a placeless figure mourning a lost companion and, moreover, mourning the loss of pastoral's prototypically dialogic construction. Where there were two, now there is one, and that one must now make his way through an altered landscape. On the surface of taxonomy, the ontological disruption of place with which the surviving shepherd is confronted is clear: the genealogy indicated by the rubric *pastoral elegy* (the mode's status as the offspring of two independent *modes*, *pastoral* and *elegy*)⁸ is about as fundamentally incongruous a meeting as one can imagine. What, after all, has the pastoral to do with elegy? "Pastoral feeling," in Paul Alper's phrase, is characterized not by mortality

but by “the warmth of the sun, fresh air, and [...] free perambulation with purpose temporarily suspended”(6), characteristics which all suggest a harmonious view of time. As Orlando observes in *As You Like It*, “there’s no clock in the forest”(III.ii.291-92). Contrary to the harmonious temporality of pastoral, elegy’s temporality is, as Peter Sacks writes in *The English Elegy*, a setting of “extreme discontinuity”(23), a linear urgency which is decidedly “unpastoral”(Alpers 6). The coming together of *pastoral* and *elegy* in *pastoral elegy* represents, I would suggest, a coming together of antithetical temporalities, and it is the shepherd-elegist (as my hyphenated nomenclature indicates) who embodies this converged antithesis.⁹

The notion that death moves violently counter to the pastoral is centralized in the opening lines of “Lycidas”:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc’d fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, [...] (1-8)

In part conventional, self-protecting modesty—“denial vain and coy excuse” (18)—the poem’s opening also establishes early the troping of death as a violence done to the pastoral landscape. “Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear / Compels me to disturb your season due.” The survivor’s elegy, figured as an unripe, unskilled picking of foliage before fruition, ignores pastoral’s harmonious, cyclic flow—its *season due*—and damages the pastoral landscape, “shatter[ing]” its “leaves before the mellowing year.” Thus the shepherd, a steward of the pastoral, becomes—in his initial reaction to death—an instrument that damages the pastoral landscape. This oddly inverted relationship speaks of the cut, the fission, which the event of death has triggered between the surviving shepherd and his pastoral landscape. In “Epitaphium Damonis,” we similarly witness a surviving shepherd

whom death has cut off from his landscape. Indeed, the elegist of “*Epitaphium Damonis*” seems to be even more violently cut off from his landscape, his sense of dislocation serving as an organizing principle of the entire elegy, given in the refrain “*Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni*” [Go home unfed, my lambs, for your troubled master cannot tend to you].¹⁰

Both poems present responses to nature which mimic each elegist’s respective concern over prematurity and belatedness: Lycidas has died too young, and the shepherd-elegist is a (self-styled) premature talent; Damon has been dead two years, “*Et iam bis viridi surgebat culmus arista, / Et totidem flavas numerabant horrea messes, / Ex quo summa dies tulerat Damona sub umbras*” (9-11) [And by now twice has arisen the green ear of grain (*arista*), and just as many (*totidem*) years has the yellow crop been harvested and counted since his last day (*summa dies*) had carried Damon below, to the shades], thus casting his mourner in a position of belated grief and song. The play on “*sub umbras*” here is delightful in its blending of a place of pastoral living into a place of death: in the context of Damon’s death it means, indeed, “to the shades,” or “in the underworld”; however, this is an ironic reapplication of the phrases’s more regular usage within pastoral, where “*sub umbras*” refers to the place in which shepherds meet to engage in dialogue (Milton, in fact, employs this very usage at line 148 of “*Epitaphium Damonis*”). As Lycidas’s elegist’s concern with prematurity is further troped as a premature plucking of fruit, the belatedness of Damon’s elegist is analogously reflected in his response to his surroundings; rather than breaking the fruit before its time, he lets his surroundings overgrow, neglected:

Heu! quam culta mihi prius arva procacibus herbis
 Involuntur, et ipsa situ seges alta fatiscit!
 Innuba neglecto marcescit et uva racemo,
 Nec myrteta iuvant; ovium quoque taedet, at illae
 Moerent, inque suum convertunt ora magistrum. (63-67)

[Alas, how my formerly (*prius*) cultivated fields are overgrown with useless weeds, and the tall wheatfield (*seges*) itself sags from blight! The neglected

grape withers unwedded on the vine, and the myrtle groves delight (iuvo) me not; my sheep also are disgusting (taedet), *but* they are sad and turn their faces to (convertunt) their master.]

These pastoral elegies present responses to nature which display not only the shepherd-elegist's severance from a harmonious relationship with his surroundings but, moreover, scenes which mimic each elegist's respective concern over prematurity and belatedness. In both instances place—the pastoral place—is damaged by the event of death, by the shepherd-elegist's encounter with death, either through neglect or direct violence.

The theory of place which I am extending in this essay is deliberately (and necessarily) selective: primarily, I take Aristotle's pronouncements in the *Physics* as my organizing hypothesis (cf. *Physics* 212a14-21). It is in the *Physics* that Aristotle provides the metaphor of place as being something very much like a vessel.¹¹ This metaphor is instructive, as it emphasizes place as a collocation whose purpose it is to gather, hold together, and protect. The pastoral landscape of the eponymous genre is itself a bounded, protective enclosure. Place, within the pastoral, in every sense, *holds*, an operation that is predicated as much by what is inside the pastoral place as by what is outside of it: in the *Januarye* woodcut of *The Shepheardes Calender*, as Colin turns toward the city, one recognizes that he must, simultaneously, turn his back to the pastoral.¹² As Edward Casey writes of the holding operation of place, "what holds the collocation there is the landscape's horizon within which [one is] situated by means of a distinguishable *here vs. there* that forms the epicenter of the place where [one is] at" (248-49).¹³ This Aristotelian "here vs. there" notion of bounded place is pertinent to our current discussion of the surviving shepherd of "Lycidas" and "Epitaphium Damonis," who is attempting to reconstitute and regain the boundaries of his own pastoral place, for this restoration of place can only be achieved by reconstructing the *horizon* of the pastoral. The "here vs. there" boundaries of the pastoral, that is, must be rebuilt. The transgressing element—death and the deceased himself—must be, in a physical, spiritual, and ontological sense,

moved. It is only through the creation of a “there”—a new landscape, a new place—for the deceased that the shepherd-elegist’s “here,” the pastoral, may be reconstituted.

The first step toward the recovery of place for the elegist is the bringing to presence of the deceased. As Lloyd Kermode notes, until the deceased can be possessed in some measure, it is impossible to fully mourn the loss and, paradoxically, to release it: “[The] double-bind of the community’s need to settle the lost one in a context of absence and safety (e.g., the woods, heaven) yet also to possess some token or reminder, some presence relating to the lost one” (13) is central to the work of mourning. But it is precisely this impulse which cannot be satisfied within “*Lycidas*.” The deceased’s body is nowhere to be found. The poem immediately draws us into the surviving shepherd’s perplexity over the physical absence of the other:

For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for *Lycidas*? [...] (8-10).

The effort here is to orientate oneself, using the repetition of the deceased’s name as a form of recovery and a bringing to presence.¹⁴ The name “*Lycidas*” is spoken three times in as many lines in the poem’s opening section; it is spoken only twice in the poem’s subsequent 145 lines, and then three times again in quick succession in the song’s final verse paragraph. “The survivor leans upon the name,” (26) Sacks writes, discussing elegiac convention. “The name, by dint of repetition, takes on a kind of substantiality” (26). “The griever must be convinced of the actual fact of loss” (24).

For the elegist of “*Epitaphium Damonis*,” the conflict between the physical absence of the deceased and the importance of presence in the process of mourning is all the more pronounced: the elegist is two years too late. Indeed, the pair had been separated *before* the death, and physical absence—the severance of their coming together—was indistinguishable from death. “Ah!,” the elegist complains, “quoties dixi, cum te cinis ater habebat, / ‘Nunc canit, aut lepori nunc tendit

retia Damon / Vimina nunc textit varios sibi quod sit in usus'' (142-44). [Ah, often I would say, although dark ashes already held you (habebat): "Now Damon is singing, or stretching (tendit) nets for hares; now he is weaving twigs together (textit) for a variety of uses."] Historically, this speaks of the intense fragmentation of the period, of not only an often criss-crossed and stymied flow of information about loved ones but also of incorrect information, of rumours of death and, as here, instances of unknown deaths. The elegist longs for clarity, longs for the position of witness as a necessity of mourning: "Ah! certe extremum licuisset tangere dextram, / Et bene compositos placide morientis ocellos, / Et dixisse, 'Vale! nostri memor ibis ad astra'" (121-23). [Assuredly (certe) had I stayed, at the last (extremum) I might have touched his hand and closed his eyes, him who was gently passing away (placide morientis), and said: "Farewell, remember me as you go toward the stars."] To say "farewell," (Vale!), to watch Damon go "toward the stars" (ad astra) marks a desire, besides that of saying one's good-byes, of having witnessed a transition from one world, one place, to another—a transition from "here" to "there." As Ellen Lambert writes in *Placing Sorrow*:

Like Castiglione, he [the shepherd-elegist of "Epitaphium Damonis"] feels his grief the more intensely because he was not there at the time of his friend's death [...] and he too spins fantasies of reunion, not realizing that his friend is already dead. The poem itself becomes, like "Alcon," an attempt to effect a symbolic burial, a symbolic farewell. (182)

In "Lycidas," too, the elegist lacks a body to sing over. The absence of a corpse is presented in fact in terms of a frustrated convention: there is no hearse to cover with flowers, only the desire to do so:

Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Jessamine,
The white Pink, the Pansy freakt with jet,
[...]

To strew the Laureate Hearse where *Lycid* lies. (139-44; 151)

The shepherd-elegist's frustrated desire to cover the hearse of the deceased with flowers represents a double longing for the presence both of the body and the ontological solidity which pastoral elegy's self-reflexive and self-repeating structure entails.¹⁵ As Barbara Johnson notes, the strewing of the hearse with flowers is a "conventional mode[] of consolation [...] of pastoral elegy" (69); critics tend to emphasize the poem's inability to enact this convention as a testing of the pastoral. However, since the breakdown of the flower convention is a corollary of a deeper absence—the absence of the corpse of Lycidas—it is this which must be addressed.¹⁶

As I have suggested, the shepherd-elegist must *place* the deceased's body outside of pastoral's "here" so that he may reconstruct his landscape's horizon. The inability to possess the body of either Lycidas or Damon, the inability to bring it to presence, I would argue, tropes the shepherd-elegist's desire to locate and move the deceased to an identifiable "there." This desire is made visible when one notices, in "Lycidas," just how frenetically cast the body's present, undesirable status is in the *no-place* of the sea. The description of the body of Lycidas is given vivid motion—and, one might add, intensely ironic and disturbing motion, given that it is a corpse—as it travels through the poem, ungraspable: Lycidas, in the poem's opening, "float[s]," and "welter[s]" in a "parching wind" until the "remorseless deep / Close[s] o'er [his] head," and "s[i]nk[s] so low [his] sacred head," which the sea then "Wash[es] far away" as Lycidas is "hurled" by the "sounding seas," "under the whelming tide" and, finally, cast to "the bottom of the monstrous world." The descent of Lycidas's body begins at line twelve and does not reach the "bottom of the monstrous world" until line 158.¹⁷ The body's "downward trajectory" (Johnson 22) reaches its nadir at line 167 ("Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor"). This *end* is a place, as Barbara Johnson notes, at which the narrative of Lycidas's body "has finally reached a resting point" (22). If we recall the Aristotelian notion of place as constructed by a "here vs. there" relationship, we see just how suggestive the descent of Lycidas is: he

ends up, as Johnson correctly notes, “as far outside the pastoral world as it is possible to go” (23). (Until, of course, his ascent, which is able to begin only after this lowest point has been reached.) To begin to repair the rift of pastoral place which the event of death has occasioned, the elegy precisely needs to get Lycidas “as far outside the pastoral as it is possible to go.” The Shepherd-elegist also needs to make sure that he stays “there” by combating motion with the spatial fixity of place. The elegist’s, and indeed the elegy’s, first success is in sinking the body in an identifiable “there” far outside the pastoral and stopping its motion.

Damon’s elegist’s response to the absence of a body is equally revealing: lacking a corpse, he turns to memory as a surrogate means by which to create the necessary bringing to presence of the deceased. The function of memory as a surrogate means by which to create place—a means by which to combat temporality—is clearly suggested by the cognitive function of memory. As Edward R. Casey writes of memory, “one basic dimension of the world in which the past is kept is *place* [...] memories are, if not expressly *about* place, richly rooted in them and inseparable from them” (284-89). Memory, that is, attempts to freeze time *in* place. The elegist of “Epitaphium Damonis” repeatedly slips into the landscape of memory in precisely this manner, attempting to recover the deceased and fix him in a specifically remembered place, a “vision of remembered pastoral felicity” (Lambert 182). For example, as the elegist asks, “At mihi quid tandem fiet modo?” (37), or “quis mihi fidus / Haerebit lateri comes, ut tu saepe solebas / Frigoribus duris, et per loca foeta pruinis, / Aut rapido sub sole, siti morientibus herbis, / [...] / Quis fando sopire diem cantuque solebit?” (37-40; 43) [*But* what finally (tandem) will become of me now (modo)? What faithful companion will stay close by my side like you often did in the harsh (duris) cold of winter (frigoribus) and through (per) places ugly with hoarfrost (pruinis), or when the grass was dying of thirst beneath the first sun [...] Who now will distract my days with talk and song?], the lines following the question provide a conciliatory moment of recollection, a bringing to presence of a lost

past and place. "Pectora cui credam?" (45) [To whom shall I trust (credo) my heart?] the elegist asks. This asking brings immediately forward the severed past whose combined role as an object of comfort and mourning is so skillfully cast as a series of stabilizing memories blended into the interrogative:

quis me lenire docebit
Mordaces curas, quis longam fallere noctem
Dulcibus alloquiis, grato cum sibilat igni
Molle pirum, et nucibus strepitat focus, at malas auster
Miscet cuncta foris, et desuper intonat ulmo (45-49).

[Who will teach me to relieve (lenio) my biting cares and to shorten the long night with sweet (dulcibus) conversation, while on the pleasing fire soft pears hiss, and nuts crackle on the hearth, *but* out of doors (foris) the wicked (malas) south wind is distorting everything into confusion and, from above (desuper), roaring through the elms?]

At first a frightened question of what the elegist is to do, followed by a remarkable bringing to presence of a pleasantly recalled scene from the past in which the pair roasted pears, and chestnuts, sheltered in dialogic discourse through an otherwise dark night. Memory, however, fails the elegist; indeed, the great pain which the elegist finally confesses is that his landscape, the very *place* in which friendship and dialogue once flourished, is now a *place* of loss, of aloneness: "At iam solus agros, iam pascua solus oberro, / Sicubi ramosae densantur vallibus umbrae, / Hic serum expecto; supra caput imber et Eurus / Triste sonant, fractaeque agitata crepuscula silvae" (58-61). [*But* now alone through the fields, alone through the pastures, I forage (oberro); wherever the branches thicken shade in the valleys, here (hic) I await the evening; above my head a rain storm (imber) and the south wind (Eurus) make a mournful sound (triste sonant) in the agitated twilight of the forest.]

A similarly troubled effect is enacted, in "Lycidas," by the shepherd-elegist's frustrated effort to bring the deceased to presence within his own memory. The project of utilizing memory as a surrogate mode of recovery is presented in lines 23-36:

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.
 Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
 Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
 We drove afield, and both together heard
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
 Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright
 Toward Heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
 Meanwhile the Rural ditties were not mute,
 Temper'd to th'Oaten Flute;
 Rough *Satyrs* danc'd, and *Fauns* with clov'n heel
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,
 And old *Damaetas* lov'd to hear our song. (23-36)

What is being remembered is not merely a specific person, but a specific *place*, a pastoral place; in fact, one might remark that what is being remembered is the landscape of the pastoral mode itself. The memory contains all the markers of pastoral: nature “nurse[s]” the pair “upon the self-same hill,” as they, in reciprocity, feed “the same flock,” in a landscape of “fountain, shade, and rill.” What is remembered is a mode of existence, an activity of reciprocity between nature and man running the full, pastoral daily cycle. The elegist remembers not only the deceased but himself as well. As such, memory becomes another means by which the surviving shepherd attempts to recover not only the deceased but the pastoral, through a nostalgic turn toward the reassuring power of the memory of a place which predates the event of death. As Casey writes of the restorative power of placial memory: “place is eminently suited for the keeping operation which we found earlier to lie at the core of remembering [...] the past itself can be kept in place, right in place, especially when place is taken in its full landscape being” (284).

Since place and memory are conjoined one sees, in the lines quoted, a unification of place, deceased, and elegist: “*we* were nursed upon the *self-same hill* / Fed the *same* flock,” “*Together* both,” “*together* heard,” “*our* song.” But the precise problem with memory lies within its very effectiveness: that is, just as the dialogic construction of the memory—

we, together, our—comforts, it also destabilizes the memory. The other is, after all, gone, and it is clear that what the elegist misses most intently is the image of himself *with* his lost companion. He remembers, and longs for, *them*—the hills, *otium*, the dialogism of pastoral. Even as the elegist recalls his own pastoral past he reveals his sense of severance from that pastoral inheritance, proclaiming:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn. (37-41)

Following the Derridean paradigm of mourning, one observes that death has penetrated deep into the surviving shepherd, down even into his memory. Just as the surviving shepherd had once inhabited, and was inhabited by, the pastoral landscape he recollects as a *self-same hill*, so now he is inhabited by, and inhabits, a landscape inscribed by the heavy change of death¹⁸: “As killing as the canker to the rose [...] Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd’s ear” (45-49).¹⁹ The failure of the memory to provide consolation is an important failure because it tells us that the rift, the cut, of death has passed through the shepherd-elegist’s surroundings, into him, all the way into his own past.

I would like to conclude this discussion of the role of place in these elegies by highlighting the two most important placements which have been under discussion as central facets of mourning: the placement of the deceased and, following from it, the placement of the survivor. Although, as I have argued, these two placings are entwined, for the sake of clarity it is perhaps useful to break the process in two. I propose therefore to first discuss the placement of Damon and then, focusing on the perplexing emergence of the new voice at the close of “Lycidas,” to discuss the placement of the shepherd-elegist, suggesting that the coda of “Lycidas” is a necessary framing device that recovers the memory landscape of lines 23-36 and by

which the poem speaks of the shepherd-elegist's ultimately successful recovery of, and replacement in, the pastoral landscape.

It is in the concluding ekphrasis of "Epitaphium Damonis" that the shepherd-elegist is able, at last, to place the deceased. The antithetical tension between the temporality which death suggests and the harmonious time which pastoral suggests, is addressed by this ekphrastic placing. Ekphrasis, in many respects, represents the ultimate atemporal placing, working to render the spatial in language, thus seeking to overcome the temporality of language.²⁰ "Time," Casey writes, "'displaces subsistence,' and it is not at all surprising that our distressful thoughts concerning the oblivion to which the past is prone are tied to time, to its dispersing movement" (254). The recompense of ekphrasis is that it emphasizes spatial fixity—emphasizes *place*—outside of the dispersing movement of time. This appeal is exactly right for the elegist of "Epitaphium Damonis," precisely the vehicle by which to place the deceased in not only a "there" but an atemporal, objectified "there." Milton, I would argue, is also quite aware of the irony involved in presenting Damon's emplacement as entwined with frustrated convention. The cups, that is, are gifts which (in keeping with the tradition of gift exchange among shepherds) the shepherd-elegist has been keeping (*servo*) for Damon. "Haec tibi servabam lenta sub cortice lauri. / Haec, et plura simul" (180) [These things I was saving for you (*servo*) under the tough laurel bark, these and more together (*plura simul*)]. Instead of giving the gift, however, the elegist offers a brief history, explaining, "tum quae mihi pocula Mansus, / Mansus, Chalcidicae non ultima gloria ripae, / Bina dedit, mirum artis opus, mirandus et ipse" (181-83) [At that time (*tum*), I thought to show you the two cups that Manso (Manso who is not the least glory of the Chalcidian shore), gave me; they are wonderful works of art, but Manso himself is wonderful]. But, of course, this is now not possible.

Following the frustration of the possibility of gift exchange, the ekphrasis becomes more detailed, focussing on the circular nature of the described cups' engraving: "Et circum gemino caelaverat argumento. / In medio rubri maris unda, et odoriferum ver, / Littora longa

Arabum, et sundantes balsama silvae; / Has inter Phoenix, divina avis, unica terris" (184-87) [They are banded all around with a double motif. In the middle are the waters of the Red Sea, and the odoriferous spring, the far off shores of Arabia, and the woods of balsam. Among these is the Phoenix, divine bird, the only of its kind on the earth (unica terris)]. The cups' circularity, suggestive of atemporality, is also suggestive of a protective enclosure, which is precisely what I would argue the poem's concluding ekphrastic placement functions as. The cups, that is, act as an 'encircling embrace' around the deceased. "Place," as Casey writes, "offers protection against time's diasporadic or 'ecstatic' proclivity [...] by its encircling embrace, place shields, holds within and withholds rather than scattering subsistence in dissemination" (254). The ekphrastic placement of Damon brilliantly emphasizes this central tension of mourning, by positing a possible emollient that has been sought throughout the poem (recall: *quis me lenire docebit / Mordaces curas* ...): "Tu quoque in his—nec me fallit spes lubrica, Damon— / Tu quoque in his certe es" (198-99) [You also are among these—nor does elusive hope deceive me, Damon—assuredly you too are among these], the elegist exclaims, of Damon's placement. "Nam quo tua dulcis abiret / Sanctaque simplicitas, nam quo tua candida virtus?" (199-200) [For where else should your sweet and holy simplicity go, where your dazzling excellence?]. As we shall see of Lycidas's placement, mourning ceases immediately at the instant of emplacement, the instant at which the deceased has been moved into the decidedly unpastoral landscape ekphrastically rendered: "Nec tibi conveniunt lacrymae, nec flebimus ultra. / Ite procul, lacrymae; purum colit aethera Damon [...]" (201-03) [Tears for you are wrong, and I weep no more (nec flebimus ultra). Then, away tears! Damon dwells in the pure ether [...]] (purum colit aethera Damon)].

As we reach the coda of "Lycidas," Lycidas has already been placed into the secure "there" of heaven, a placement which ends his floating and weltering and, as a corollary, makes it possible that the shepherd-elegist may too find an end to his ontological drift. "So *Lycidas*, sunk low, but mounted high, / [...] / In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and

The echoes between the two passages are numerous. The direct repetitions of single words include: "hill" and "hills"; "rill" and "rills"; "morn" and "morn"; "gray" and "gray"; "western" and "westering"; "rose" and "rose." In addition, various topical echoes may be identified: "song" is answered by the coda's "sang"; the "glad sound" and "oaten flute" of the earlier passage become the coda's "warbling" and "Doric lay"; "descent" is echoed in "dropped"; "pastures" in "a-field." These surface repetitions constitute a larger, essential pattern which the two passages share—a movement from morning to evening, across the whole pastoral daily round, with an emphasis on song. Missing, however, from the coda are the dancing satyrs and the dialogic singing patterns, but we have already had our song—the monody itself—which has functioned as a surrogate for the pair's singing. Despite the reading of the coda as a harbinger of Milton's desired movement toward epic, the coda clearly emphasizes the pastoral: the shepherd-elegist is going to pastures, however 'new' they may be. The final, framing voice creates a new landscape to be sure (since it now includes a direct apprehension of death), but it is a decidedly pastoral one.

With the echoing coda one can see the poem offering up the ontological solidity which the shepherd-elegist has been lacking all along: the elegist's memory of the pastoral, recalled and spoken by a new, detached voice, loses its nostalgic longing and becomes, as it echoes through the coda, a bracing known whose presence the reader feels at the core of the coda. The elegy is suddenly framed, by the coda, as a singing that has unfolded across a full pastoral day decidedly similar to the prototypical pastoral day recalled in lines 23-36. (Lycidas's ascent, too, in being associated with the "day-star," enacts this return to cyclicity). It is by once more recalling the memory sequence of the earlier passage that the coda makes the shepherd-elegist's return to the pastoral clear. After placing Lycidas in the secure "there" of heaven, the shepherd-elegist leaves off the work of mourning: he stops speaking the poem. Instead, the poem speaks him. The new framing voice allows the reader to view the pastoral-elegist not as an

actively mourning figure within a disrupted pastoral landscape but, rather, as a figure within a conventional setting. In a remarkable pulling back, the coda presents a placing of the shepherd-elegist not so fully depicted in “Epitaphium Damonis.” The framing voice provides another point—a “there”—which solidifies the boundary into which the “uncouth swain” is placed, locating him within a reconstituted, regained, pastoral place.

Stony Brook University
New York

NOTES

¹The sense of “conventional” as a “coming together” (from the Latin *convenire*) is doubly apt with regards to the pastoral. As Paul Alpers notes in *What is Pastoral?*, “pastoral poems make explicit the dependence of their conventions on the idea of [shepherds] coming together [...] for songs and colloquies” (81). A central trope of “Lycidas” is *the frustration of such dialogic convening*.

²For an exhaustive cataloguing of echoes and allusions in “Lycidas” see *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, 2: 544-734. For a cataloging and discussion of the generic echoes of “Epitaphium Damonis” see the *Variorum*, 1: 282-324.

³This paradigm has long held a central position in discussions of “Lycidas.” Richard P. Adams’s pronouncement in 1949 that “it has been made increasingly evident by critics in recent years that the drowning of Edward King was the occasion, rather than the subject, of Lycidas” (111) suggests that readings centered upon the occasionality of the poem were vital long after Johnson’s commentary. Such readings, as I argue below, have tended to blur the epistemological force of the pastoral world inscribed at the center of the poem’s shepherd-elegist by shifting the focus away from genre and toward occasionality.

⁴Frye is certainly addressing Johnson, but as an exemplum of the “fallacy [which confuses] personal sincerity and literary sincerity” (210). The concepts are readily apprehended in terms of their everyday meaning—“personal sincerity” being a direct, subjective expression of feeling and “literary sincerity” being an expression mediated through conventional, recognizable tropes. Conventionality, in Frye’s view, as it pertains to his notion of literary sincerity, is a vehicle which makes articulation possible: “one may,” Frye writes, “burst into tears at the news of a friend’s death, but one can never spontaneously burst into song, however doleful a lay” (210).

⁵*Unheimlich*, as Derrida notes, is “untranslatable” (3); however, its lineage as a concept may be usefully traced. As Svetlana Boym has noted in her chapter “On Diasporic Intimacy” in *The Future of Nostalgia*, “Freud examined multiple meanings for the word *homey* (*heimlich*) from ‘familiar,’ ‘friendly’ and ‘intimate’ to ‘secretive’ and ‘allegorical.’ The word develops greater ambivalence until *homey* (*heimlich*) finally coincides with its opposite, the *uncanny* (*unheimlich*)” (251). See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Derrida’s use of the word certainly includes these nuances but emphasizes, as I do, *unheimlich* as a condition of homelessness or placelessness analogous to Heidegger’s notion of homesickness or restlessness as communicated in *Being and Time* (cf. 188-91).

⁶Milton’s poems are quoted from the ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes.

⁷Pastoral expression, as Alpers notes, is most often cast dialogically: two shepherds, that is, singing to one another (Alpers 21-25). The way in which the act of dialogue itself represents—gives form to—other concerns of the pastoral may be noted in the various dichotomies which it plays out—country/courtly, nature/art, and, as exemplified by William Empson’s well known dictum, the complex/simple dialectic by which pastoral puts the “complex in the simple” (*Some Versions of Pastoral* 14). When we enter the realm of pastoral elegy we see Milton’s elegists singing monologically. “Lycidas” in fact emphasizes this in the prefatory note added to the 1645 edition, declaring itself a Monody.

⁸This statement is problematic, but necessary, even though a proper explanation would be far beyond the scope of the current paper. As Ellen Lambert notes in *Placing Sorrow*, it is not known “what would be most useful to know” (xxii); namely, “the extent to which the origins of the pastoral elegy are involved or distinct from those of the pastoral genre as a whole” (xxii). However, there is an important distinction to be made here regarding the types of temporality which both modes suggest—the former a cyclic, harmonious view of time presented within the *locus amoenus*, the latter an urgent, linear view of time dealing with “mortal loss and consolation” (Sacks 3).

⁹This is not to say that the pastoral world is without threats. As Lambert writes, “neither suffering nor death has ever been excluded from this paradise. And one can make at least a plausible case for the view that the pastoral dirge is the original pastoral song” [Lambert is here referring to Theocritus’s lament for Daphnis in his “first *Idyll*”] (xv). Although this may seem to problematize my view of pastoral’s harmonious temporality, I do not think that it substantively does. Yes, the pastoral is a threatened landscape but its horizon, in the here vs. there construction which I express, is composed precisely of the pastoral’s ability to stay these threats.

¹⁰“The words of the refrain are modeled on line 44 in Virgil, *Ecl.* 7. Milton uses the refrain 17 times; it occurs 19 times in Theocritus, *Id.* 1” (Milton, ed. Bush 163n18).

¹¹Aristotle writes: “just as the vessel is a transportable place, so place is a non-portable vessel” (212a13-15).

¹²Reproduced, among other places, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*.

¹³See Edward S. Casey’s “Keeping the Past in Mind,” collected in *American Continental Philosophy*. In terms of the Aristotelian notion of place, Casey draws directly from *Physics* (cf. 208b10-25).

¹⁴It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the play between presence and absence within (pastoral) elegy. In Peter Sack’s view, the mode presents “a perspective from which to reexamine the connection between language and the pathos of human consciousness” (xii) by animating an extreme instance (i.e. death) of one of the absences “which the use of language may seek to redress or appease” (xi).

¹⁵As Sacks has noted, pastoral elegies (perhaps none more so than “Lycidas”) are often “repetitions in themselves” of the entire genre to which they belong (23). “Epitaphium Damonis” begins, in fact, by creating presence out of generic echoes:

Himerides nymphae—nom vos et Daphnin et Hylan,
Et plorata diu meninistis fata Bionis—
Dicite Sicelicum Thamesina per oppida carmen. (1-3)
[Nymphs of Himera—for you remember Daphnis and Hylas and the long-lamented destiny of Bion—repeat (Dicite) your Sicilian song through the cities of the Thames.]

¹⁶Barbara Johnson describes the generic *unconventionality* of the elegist’s search for the body in “Lycidas” as “unprecedented in the history of pastoral elegy” (69).

¹⁷An important subtext involved in the distancing motion of the body is the critique of Platonic dualism which runs through the poem. “The image of the dead Lycidas,” Barbara Johnson writes, “is continually evoked as the swain attempts to picture where he is and what has happened to his body as well as his soul” (70). The body retreats, corporeality retreats but, Johnson argues, the poem ultimately suggests Milton’s monistic view of the relationship between the body and the soul in its apotheosis: “the image of Lycidas in heaven is not that of a shade or a disembodied soul; his corporeal nature is emphasized in heaven, just as it had been in the poem” (72).

¹⁸Inhabitation, that is, is bi-directional: as Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, “what keeps us in our essential nature holds us only so long, however, as we for our part keep holding on to what holds us” (246).

¹⁹The phrase is not pathetic fallacy but an analogy which centralizes and unifies the shepherd-elegist’s knowledge of death (given in the synecdochal “ear,” itself a locus of knowing) *and* connects this knowing to a corruption of his natural surroundings. Death, as in the poem’s opening section, works against the pastoral setting.

²⁰For further discussion of the tension within ekphrastic poetry between stillness and motion see Murray Krieger's "Ekphrasis and the Still Motion of Poetry," which argues that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's argument in *Laöcoon, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry* with regard to the dualistic distinction between painting's simultaneity and poetry's temporality may be interrogated and challenged: "poetry," Krieger argues, "through all sorts of repetitions, echoes, complexes of internal relations [...] converts its linear movement into [a] circle" (263).

²¹Words in **bold** denote direct repetitions among lines 23-36 and the coda; underlined words and phrases mark not specific repetitions but echoes in subject, theme, or idea.

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The Trials of Sincerity: William Godwin's *Political Justice* v. His *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*

EVA M. PÉREZ

Godwin's changing opinions regarding issues covered in *Political Justice* have been amply documented.¹ My specific concern in this article is the contrast between the rational philosophy put forward in his treatise, *Political Justice* (1793, 1795 and 1797),² and the more subjective arguments expressed in the biography, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (January and August 1798; henceforward *Memoirs*).³ For an assessment of this contrast, three aspects of Godwin's philosophy will be considered. One is the relevance of necessity and sincerity, as defined by Rational Dissent, for Godwin's account of Wollstonecraft's life and acts; the second is the progression in his views on marriage between the different *Political Justice* editions; and the third, the disparity between the views Godwin adopted on suicide in the treatise and in the *Memoirs* respectively. In particular, in the final section of this article, a joint overview of both works will show to what extent Wollstonecraft's influence (or the influence of Godwin's life with and marriage to Wollstonecraft) is visible in the later editions of the treatise as well as in the biography.

For a better appreciation of the arguments put forward in this article, it is necessary to bear in mind the chronology of events, in particular as the two editions of the *Memoirs* and the third edition of *Political Justice* appeared within a half year, with Wollstonecraft's death (September 1797) coming between Godwin's revisions of the treatise towards its third edition (published December 1797) and publication of the biography (January and August 1798).

Wollstonecraft's relationship with Godwin started shortly after the publication of the 1795 edition of *Political Justice*. This second edition is

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debperez01303.htm>>.

generally assumed to favour the sentiments and to endorse a less strict rationalism than the original 1793 edition.⁴ It is then obvious that this change came about for reasons other than the relationship between the philosopher and the feminist. In contrast, the revisions towards the third edition of *Political Justice* were completed on 30 July 1797, exactly a month before the birth of the couple's daughter, the future Mary Shelley, and were therefore carried out during Godwin and Wollstonecraft's relationship and marriage,⁵ with publication taking place towards the end of 1797. However, changes are not abundant in this third edition, and only those concerning suicide and marriage, issues related to the biography of Wollstonecraft, are considered in this article.⁶

Godwinian critics have failed to agree on the import of the changes in ethics between the first three editions of *Political Justice*. While some assert that the core of the treatise's philosophy remains unchanged, others maintain that the third edition bears little resemblance to the first, to the extent of considering both editions different political statements.⁷ It is not the aim of this article to review those changes, but it would be safe to affirm that, while Godwin's belief in the individual's right to the free use of private judgement remains, a more empirical outlook tempers his rationalism and Platonism.⁸ What remained in Godwin of his faith in utopianism has its origin in Rational Dissent: men have an obligation to truth that motivates moral acts. Such subordination to truth and sincerity, according to Godwin, implies that our conduct, whether private or public, must be regulated by morality and utility. This is relevant to Godwin's fiction, where the protagonists are continually brought before inquisitorial father figures, whether social, religious, moral or familial. It is also pertinent to the writing of biography, one of Godwin's favourite literary exercises, and very especially to the *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

Sincerity and Necessity: *Political Justice* v. the *Memoirs*

Rational Dissenters maintained that “candour” and “plain speaking” were necessary for better communication between individuals in society.⁹ As a consequence of such plain speaking, Godwin believed that truth would be accessible to all individuals who, once enlightened, would be self-sufficient without government. This “euthanasia of government,” as it was called in *Political Justice*, was achieved through truth’s very nature: “single and uniform” (*PJ* 104).¹⁰ The relevance of Godwinian ‘sincerity’ in the context of biography is evident. After the convulsed 1790s, Godwin adopted a more limited educational program, favouring the individual above the general and the private above the public: “the more fully we are presented with the picture and story” of a person of merit, the better readers will experience “a sympathy in their excellencies” (*M* 87).¹¹ At the same time, he maintained in his “Autobiographical Notes” that throughout his life, he “was indefatigable in my search after truth—I was perpetually prompting myself with the principle, *Sequar veritatem*” (*M* 42).¹²

One other central doctrine for Dissenters was that of necessity.¹³ The necessitarian doctrine regarded humans as caught in a web of causal relations, built on a series of external stimuli to which the individual responds in a given manner. According to Godwin’s philosophy in *Political Justice*, the “character of any man is the result of a long series of impressions communicated to his mind, and modifying it in a certain manner, so as to enable us [...] to predict his conduct” (*PJ* 161). The theory maintains that every act of the individual is necessary and could not have been different: “if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted” (*PJ* 158). The second edition of *Political Justice* adds the emendation that the principle of necessity merely *influences* man to adopt one given course of action. But that is the only major alteration in an otherwise largely untouched chapter.

Therefore, it might occur that both doctrines, necessity and absolute 'truth-telling,' clashed; for example Godwin as a biographer met with some difficulties when assessing Wollstonecraft's unconventional—as it was perceived to have been—social behaviour. For if one could not possibly have acted differently than they did, and the biographer has an obligation to truth, how can Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts, and liberal relationships and pregnancies be accounted for? There seems to be no answer to the conundrum of necessity *versus* morality. As Jon Klancher has affirmed, Godwin's case is just one more of the "shift from rationalism to empiricism or scepticism, radicalism to liberalism, or Enlightenment assuredness to Romantic ironism," although for this critic the transition in Godwin is better seen through his choice of genres, "ranging from the scientific and the historiographic [in *Political Justice*] to the poetic and the critical [in *The Enquirer* (1797)]."¹⁴ At the late end of that shift, together with *The Enquirer*, I would include the *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft.

Godwin's adherence to truth in Wollstonecraft's biography was misinterpreted in his day, as his readers did not understand the motives of Godwin's candour. Even in Rational Dissent terms, there was a limit to such candid sincerity: charity, discretion and generosity were invoked to temper the devastating effects that the impartial disclosure of truth could cause. Some Rational Dissenters found Godwin's obstinate candour distasteful; William Roscoe, for example, wrote Wollstonecraft's famous epitaph: "mourn'd by thy Godwin with a heart of stone."¹⁵

However, Godwin's fearless attitude was to himself entirely justifiable: "If there ever were any motives of prudence or delicacy, that could impose a qualification upon the story, they are now over" (*M* 127). It mattered little that Godwin could call Wollstonecraft "my wife," for as he had maintained in the famous "fire case," "What magic is there in the pronoun 'my,' that should justify us in overturning the decisions of everlasting truth?" (*PJ* 50).¹⁶ The reason for his liberal vindication of Wollstonecraft's unusual life was that the *Memoirs* were to form part in Godwin's lifelong educational project.

This project also involved philosophy, history, fiction, children's literature, and literary criticism. What biography (and autobiography) alone offered was a form of "individual history," a depiction of the subject's mind, that could morally and socially improve readers: "It has always appeared to me, that to give to the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased, is a duty incumbent on survivors" (M 87). As opposed to the traditional 'life and letters' approach to biography, Godwin advocated total sincerity in an account of an individual's life that considered private and public concerns inseparable. By choosing Wollstonecraft as his subject, Godwin defends her courageous life as representative of the new social order, against institutional imposition and hypocrisy, following the model set by the biographies of many French revolutionary leaders, some of whom had been personally known to her.¹⁷ Godwin's principle is that, by appealing to the reader's conscience, political education is achieved. This turned the *Memoirs* into a defence act just like the publication of *Caleb Williams* had been, with its incendiary Preface, or the production of *Cursory Strictures* to help Holcroft in his trial for treason in 1794.¹⁸

Despite the *Memoirs'* educational purpose, there still remained the so called "ethical question": the biographer's degree of intrusion upon his subject's privacy. The conservative critical position regarding the biography of great persons, observed among others by Addison, was to keep a respectful wait until long after their death.¹⁹ The avant-garde position, by contrast, was "Indifference, with respect to persons, and Impartiality, with respect to truth."²⁰ This attitude seems to have been closely followed by Godwin in his different *Histories* and biographies, including the *Memoirs*. In *History of the Commonwealth*, for example, he assures readers he has passed judgement on events and persons only after "a fair and severe examination of evidence, and the not suffering any respect of persons, or approbation of a cause, to lead the writer to misapprehend or misrepresent the nature of facts."²¹

However, in his old age Godwin would admit to having been suspicious of the intrusiveness of biography: "I have always entertained the

strongest antipathy to this violation of the confidence between man and man, that every idle word, every thoughtless jest I make at another's expense, shall be carried home by the hearer, put in writing, and afterwards printed."²² Godwin's secret misgivings about the intrusiveness of biography and its tendency towards subjectivity, incompatible with impartial philosophy, explains many instances of disagreement between Godwin and other Wollstonecraft biographers. They have also exposed him, the alleged champion of truth and sincerity, to accusations of falsehood or limited sincerity. For example, the happiness Wollstonecraft experienced, according to Godwin, as a chaperone in Bath (*M* 101-03) bears little or no resemblance with her own confessions of disgust at a life of show and dissipation.²³ Likewise, Godwin presents her teaching at the Kingsboroughs' as a fortunate period in her life, in which she was loved by the family. Yet Claire Tomalin paints a totally different picture, affirming that Mary fell out with the Kingsboroughs within less than a year of taking her position. The couple separated shortly after, and the series of scandals that pursued the family were attributed to Wollstonecraft's influence.²⁴

Another Wollstonecraft biographer, Margaret Tims, reveals doubts about Godwin's truthfulness in the case of the Eliza Bishop incident.²⁵ After the rash elopement, Eliza's daughter was left to die, and Tims suggests that, although there is no evidence, maybe Mary Wollstonecraft's sisters refused to take care of Fanny Imlay in Ireland many years later by way of revenge. In Janet Todd's view, "the lack of any anxiety on Mary's part in separating mother and infant was extraordinary."²⁶ It was indeed a neglectful measure, to which Godwin alludes with suspicious brevity: "Mary continued with her sister without intermission, to her perfect recovery" (*M* 94).

It is assumed by modern Wollstonecraft biographers that Eliza Bishop's disorder was what is now termed post-natal depression, and that there was a streak of mental fragility in most members of the family.²⁷ That would account for Eliza's abandonment of her familial

duties, Fanny Imlay's melancholy character and eventual suicide, and Mary Wollstonecraft's own attraction to suicide, too.

Godwin followed Rousseau in the thought that, once an error has been confessed, no-one has the right to criticise the sinner.²⁸ However, the strength of the public reaction to his original account of Wollstonecraft's attraction to suicide forced him to revise both the sections of *Political Justice* regarding the issue and the *Memoirs* themselves. One other issue which suffered revision was marriage.

Marriage and Suicide in *Political Justice* and the *Memoirs*

The final section of this article will focus on these two topics and how Godwin's views on them changed, from the first edition of *Political Justice* to the later two, and the *Memoirs*.

When Godwin and Wollstonecraft married, both the radical and conservative circles of their society were shocked, amused, or both.²⁹ Wollstonecraft had maintained in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* the need for current matrimonial rules to change, if not disappear altogether.³⁰ Godwin for his part had advocated in *Political Justice* the disappearance of all marriage ties. His stance of 1793 was influenced both by his life as a bachelor and his over-rational philosophy, which rested on absolute impartiality and universal virtue. Godwin's original comments on matrimony as a legal institution and social practice can be found in the section significantly entitled "On Property," in the first edition of *Political Justice*. In it, Godwin protests against the tradition and formality of marriage. Marriage, as the chapter heading reads, is "a branch of the prevailing system of property" (*PJ* 448) which deserves Godwin's criticism on the grounds that it presupposes mutual understanding between husband and wife for life, and is entered following a romantic, usually deceptive, decision based on inexperience.

In addition, marriage in 1793 is for Godwin not only an affair of property, it is also against justice for the community, for “[s]o long as I seek to engross one woman to myself, and to prohibit my neighbour from proving his superior desert and reaping the fruits of it, I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies” (*PJ* 453). These views would be echoed in the *Memoirs*, five years later. When he reflects on his and Wollstonecraft’s wedding day, his tone is more legalistic than romantic: “after the experiment of seven months of as intimate an intercourse as our respective modes of living would admit, there was certainly less hazard to either, in the subjecting ourselves to those consequences which the laws of England annex to the relations of husband and wife” (*M* 130).

However, following the speculative manner in which he wrote the last section of *Political Justice*, Godwin provides only suggestions for the abolition of matrimony: man should look for the most virtuous of his community, form relationships and only engage in “sensual intercourse” as “a very trivial object” (*PJ* 454). Reason and duty dictate how the species should be propagated, and paternity loses its relevance, for one’s sense of moral virtue demands total impartiality. Godwin points to a future society in which there is no conflict between public duty and private affection.³¹ This rationalistic attitude even extends to Godwin’s conception of sexuality: Friendship, Godwin says, “may be expected to come in aid of the sexual intercourse to refine its grossness and increase its delight.” Godwin admits that even when two people are satisfied with their relationship, infidelities may occur. That, he says, is all right, as long as that “inconstancy” is not carried out “in a clandestine manner” (*PJ* Variants [2] 338-39).³²

Godwin’s progression in his views on marriage is evident in the definition he gives the institution in the third edition of *Political Justice*, i.e. after his marriage to Wollstonecraft: “a salutary and respectable institution, but not of that species of marriage, in which there is no room for repentance, and to which liberty and hope are equally strangers” (*PJ* Variants [3] 339). The stress is again on the spouses’

obligation to honesty. Respectable though the institution now seemed to Godwin, he still has objections, particularly due to its legal implications. However, he acknowledges that since the social majority accepts the institution, the bad consequences of rejecting it in practice would outweigh the good. He would no doubt understand the strain of opposing society, since he had felt the need to publicly defend Wollstonecraft's adherence to the name "Mrs Imlay":

Mary indeed had, till now, retained the name of Imlay which had first been assumed from necessity in France; but its being retained thus long, was purely from the awkwardness that attends the introduction of a change, and not from an apprehension of consequences of this sort. Her scrupulous explicitness as to the nature of her situation, surely sufficed to make the name she bore perfectly immaterial. (*M* 131)

It is hard to believe, however, that a punctilious philosopher such as Godwin would declare "immaterial" the choice of the name "Imlay," in particular if it was inexact.

A greater challenge is posed to the philosophy of *Political Justice* by the question of suicide, which Wollstonecraft attempted at least twice. As Janet Todd argues, she had not considered suicide in her *Wrongs of Woman* because it was supposed to be the result of emotion, not rationality. Later, however, she came to accept it as the opposite of female resignation, and it thus became "the revolutionary right of rational death." For this critic, however, Godwin's record for posterity of Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts in the *Memoirs* implied the lasting connection of suicide and female rights in the public reactionary mind. In addition, suicide would in future be interpreted as sentimental and romantic, an interpretation against which Wollstonecraft had always battled.³³

Let us have a look first at Godwin's words on suicide in *Political Justice*. In the original version, he rejects suicide as an act of cowardice, as he maintains that "pain" and "disgrace," the two reasons which he considers may drive a person to voluntary death, are "a small inconvenience," and "an imaginary evil" respectively (*PJ* 55). In addition, suicide is a breach of one's duty to the rest of society: "The difficulty is

to decide in any instance whether the recourse to a voluntary death may overbalance the usefulness I may exert in twenty or thirty years of additional life" (*PJ* 56). Although he cites figures of the classical world whose suicides taught self-restraint and love for the Roman republic, his opening stance is that human beings have no right to kill themselves. Similar arguments appear in the second edition of *Political Justice*. The appeal to usefulness remains, but now on the grounds that "to escape from pain is a motive exclusively selfish, and he who postpones the possible benefit of many to his personal ease, seems to be the fit object of censure, and not of approbation" (*PJ* Variants [2] 68).³⁴

Bearing these views in mind, it would be safe to assume that Godwin should have chastised Wollstonecraft in the *Memoirs* for her determination to take her own life, but no reproof is found. In contrast, readers encounter one of Godwin's bouts of extreme impartiality. He enthusiastically approves of Wollstonecraft's dangerous journey to Scandinavia on behalf of Imlay, the man who had put her in that suicidal frame of mind. He also thinks it was "gratifying to her feelings, to be employed in promoting the interest of [Imlay]," in a mission which "seemed the most desirable thing to recruit her health, and, if possible, her spirits, in the present crisis" (*M* 122).³⁵ For a man whose longest trip was to Ireland, it seemed odd to express such enthusiasm for such a risky adventure.

There is a more relevant variation between the two editions of the *Memoirs* concerning suicide. After a meticulous description of Wollstonecraft's method for sinking in the Thames, Godwin in the first edition of the *Memoirs* philosophises about the suicide's state of mind. A man about to kill himself, Godwin says, is blind to "the prospect of future tranquillity and pleasure," but "moral reasoning" should produce different results: men should "impress their minds, in their sober moments, with a conception, which [...] seems to promise to act as a successful antidote in a paroxysm of desperation" (*M* 124). In the revised *Memoirs*, however, Godwin's philosophy becomes both more profound and specific: whereas in the first edition he had made no

reference to Wollstonecraft's specific contribution to society at large, he now does:

By insensible degrees she proceeded to stake her life upon the consequences of her error: and, for the disappointment of his [Imlay's] choice, for a consideration so foreign to the true end of her powers and cultivation, she was willing to consign those powers and that cultivation, pregnant as they were with pleasure to herself and gratification to others, formed to adorn society [...], as well as, through the medium of the press, to delight, instruct, and reform mankind—she was willing, I say, to consign all these to premature destruction! (*M Variants* 154)

The change is explained as Godwin's attempt to prove to his and Wollstonecraft's detractors that the educational campaign he had in mind with the *Memoirs* was intimately linked to her example. Abstraction and generalisation were therefore replaced with specific references to her. In his haste and earnestness, Godwin overlooked his grammatical correctness, for the sentence above, which for the sake of simplicity has been edited, would have merited inclusion in his own *Enquirer* as an example of long-winded syntax.³⁶ Godwin's readership therefore had an effect on the *Memoirs*, but would Wollstonecraft have an effect on the third edition of *Political Justice* as regards suicide?

The chapter on suicide in the 1797 edition in *Political Justice* reads mostly along the same lines as the first two. Godwin chastises suicides on the grounds of social nonchalance in their neglect of the Dissenting duty to foster general improvement, and still adheres to the immorality of terminating our own lives, one of our endowments which fall under moral discipline. And "in common with every branch of morality, it is a topic of calculation, as to the balance of good and evil to result, from its employment in any individual instance" (*PJ Variants* (3) 68). But there is an important change: where Godwin had wondered in 1793 and 1795 whether the suicide had a right to destroy himself "to escape from pain or disgrace" (*PJ* 55), in 1797 he speculates about "pain and *distress*" (*PJ Variants* [3] 68; my emphasis).

The change seems a revealing one: what appears to have been a casual choice of words in the first two editions, posed after the

Memoirs some discomfort to Godwin, for it now seemed that he was supporting the notion that a suicide—and here his reading public would put “Wollstonecraft”—might wish to escape disgrace. Therefore, it was assumed, she *had* been disgraced. Willing to avoid such a line of thought, Godwin would have felt the need to replace, in the treatise’s third edition, this searing word with a more indistinct one. It is significant that Godwin in the *Memoirs* strives to dissociate the term “disgrace” from Wollstonecraft, in a famous passage where he attempts to vindicate her character—with poor results, one might add. The brackets enclose the *Memoirs*’ second edition amendments:

There are no circumstances of her life, that, in the judgement of honour and reason, could brand her with disgrace. [She had errors; but her errors, which were not those of a sordid mind, were connected and interwoven with the qualities most characteristic of her disposition and genius.] Never did there exist a human being, that needed, with less fear, expose all their actions, and call upon the universe to judge them. An event of the most deplorable sort, has awfully imposed silence upon the gabble of frivolity. (*M* 127; *M* Variants 155)

It is obvious that Godwin felt the need to acknowledge Wollstonecraft’s “errors,” although he connected them to her intellect, in a very unfortunate sample of his preference for the *Political Justice* jargon. In the space of sixty-four words, two references to judgement are made; more strangely, also to honour, a very rare occurrence in Godwinian philosophy.

In this article, I have tried to show the extent to which Godwin’s theoretical adherence to sincerity clashed with areas of Wollstonecraft’s life which he covered in his biography of her. From his adjustments in his conception of the institution of marriage to his indecision regarding the motives that could drive a person to suicide, Godwin experienced the gap which opened between writing philosophy and writing a life. Godwin may have protested his faith in Wollstonecraft’s clean past, and believed that her tragic death would seal her accusers’ lips. But the decades to come proved him wrong in his latter assumption.³⁷ A close reading of his contradictions and constant corrections to

the text of the *Memoirs* shows that not even he believed his own words. Understandably, when Godwin returned to a glorification of Mary Wollstonecraft, he chose fiction, and when he returned to biography, he chose a medieval literary personality. *St Leon* (1799) and the *Life of Chaucer* (1803) proved that Godwin maintained his faith in the formative nature of circumstances and the potential of political and social contingency to affect individual growth. Typically Godwinian though these premises looked, they did not touch on any private lives, and both works became successes. His fictional idealisations of Wollstonecraft after 1799 would all read as more elegant, constrained, and, above all, sensible.

Universitat de les Illes Balears
Palma, Spain

NOTES

¹The most comprehensive study is Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

²The second edition of *Political Justice* was published in November 1795, and the third in December 1797. For this reason, most Godwin commentators refer to them as the 1796 and 1798 editions respectively. In order to avoid confusion with the chronology of events, the years used in this article are 1795 and 1797. See Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 360-61, for a detailed chronology of events around the 1790s and 1800s in Godwin's life.

³Originally published in January 1798, the *Memoirs* shocked the majority of the reading public of the time, who did not understand that Godwin, recently widowed, would disclose such personal material about Wollstonecraft voluntarily. See the section "Reactions" in Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker, introduction, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman: William Godwin* (Letchworth: Broadview Literary Press, 2001) 32-36.

⁴Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 142-44.

⁵Godwin's diary entry for the day that revision started, 11 March 1797, also shows "chez elle," his customary key phrase indicating his private encounters with Wollstonecraft (Dep. e. 203). Godwin's Diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Uncatalogued.

⁶For Godwin's revisions of *Political Justice*, see his Diary (Dep. e. 203), for the dates mentioned. Among the relevant readings Godwin recorded are Holcroft's

Hugh Trevor, *Diderot's Religieuse*, *Cowper's Task*, *Darwin*, *Hobbes's Human Nature* and *Leviathan*, and very specially, *Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman*. The readings that followed are similarly representative: on the same day he finished the revision, Godwin read *Werther* (30 July 1797), followed by *Rousseau's Confessions*, *Émile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. He was, in other words, reading for inspiration on sensibility, association and human nature, and for biography and autobiography.

⁷In F. E. L. Priestley's opinion, the 1797 edition offers Godwin's views "in their final form" and is therefore the basis of his own edition. Priestley concludes with Godwin that "through it all, 'the spirit and great outlines of the work' remain untouched." F. E. L. Priestley, ed., *William Godwin: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 3 vols. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946) 3: 99-100. Peter H. Marshall, too, admits that the second edition may have lost in "urgency and daring," but it "therefore offers a more substantial and convincing exposition of Godwin's philosophical anarchism." Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (London: Yale UP, 1984) 163. Mark Philp argues that if we look at the core of Godwin's philosophy in *Political Justice*, we find a set of beliefs that remained constant not only to all the editions, but also all of his works: "a duty-based conception of morality, revolving around benevolence and a conception of utility couched in perfectionist terms, constrained by the right of private judgement." Mark Philp, "Introduction," *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1993) 1: 39. Marilyn Butler on the contrary considers that *Political Justice's* second edition was "so materially changed that [it] represents a new political statement." Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) 237. De Quincey in Godwin's days was of the same opinion: "the second edition, as regards principles, is not a recast, but absolutely a travesty of the first" (Priestley 3: 81).

⁸For an account of the changes in this section, see Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 158-59.

⁹Originally, "candour" in Dissenting circles had implied, precisely, open-mindedness, toleration. Truth could only emerge after the collision of mind upon mind, through the free exchange of opinion, whatever that might be. See Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) 109-12; Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 24 and 95; and Marshall 41 and 45.

¹⁰The edition used is *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1993), vol. 3, *Political Justice*. All further references are incorporated in the text, with the abbreviation "PJ" and page number. When the word "Variants" appears, the quote refers to other than the 1793 edition; "(2)" and "(3)" refer to the second and third editions respectively, published in vol. 4 of *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*.

¹¹The edition used is *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp and Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1992), vol. 1, *Memoirs*. All further references are incorporated in the text, giving page number

and the abbreviation "M." Where the second edition text is quoted, the word "Variants" appears before the page number.

¹²Godwin's "Autobiographical Notes" are published in the same volume of *Collected Novels and Memoirs with the Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*. Godwin wrote these fragments from 1 to 8 October 1809.

¹³See William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 69-73 for an account of the Dissenting notion of the doctrine of necessity.

¹⁴Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Genre Reformers: on Necessity and Contingency in Romantic Narrative Theory," *Romanticism, History and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-forming Literature 1789-1837*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 21-38, 21. My additions.

¹⁵Quoted in Locke 134.

¹⁶According to Godwin, the life of archbishop François Fénelon (1651-1715), liberal author of *Telemachus*, was more conducive to the general good than that of his valet; therefore if a fire broke out in his house, and only one life could be saved, then according to justice, the valet should be left to perish, even if I, or my father, (wife or mother in *Political Justice's* first edition) were the valet (PJ 50).

¹⁷For an overview of these figures and their contribution to revolutionary autobiography, and Godwin's educational concept of "individual history," as he termed biography, see Clemit and Walker 12-22.

¹⁸Hazlitt records how at Godwin's dinner table Horne Tooke expressed his gratitude after the trials: "when [Godwin] went round to his chair, [Tooke] took his hand, and pressed it to his lips, saying—'I can do no less for the hand that saved my life!'" William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits* [1825], ed. E. D. Mackerness (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1969) 52.

¹⁹Philip Daghljan, ed., *Essays in Eighteenth Century Biography* (London: Indiana UP, 1968) 72-73.

²⁰Donald A. Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941) 350. Samuel Johnson had given sanction to this kind of biography in No. 60 of *The Rambler*, where he affirmed that "every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use." Samuel Johnson, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: OUP, 1984) 205. Other examples of this stance were W. Kenrick's *Robert Lloyd* (1774) or Robert Shiels' *Lives of the Poets* (1753), in which total disclosure is favoured: "in biographical writing, the first and most essential principle is candour, which no reverence for the memory of the dead, nor affection for the virtues of the living should violate." Lord Orrery's life of Swift was praised because he had tried to show the man as he really was, both his virtues and his "many failings" (Daghljan 77).

²¹William Godwin, *History of the Commonwealth of England*, 4 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1824-28) 1: v-viii.

²²*Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by their Contemporaries*, vol. 1, William Godwin, ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999) xiii.

²³See Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000) 85-91.

²⁴Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 65. One of the daughters, Margaret King, later Lady Mountcashell, professed lasting admiration for the teachings of Wollstonecraft, and remained a lifelong friend of the Shelleys. Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (London: John Murray, 2000) 24.

²⁵Eliza, Mary's sister, married John Bishop, became pregnant and gave birth to a girl. Although there is no evidence to suggest an unhappy or violent marriage, Eliza fell into acute post-natal depression, and at Mary's instigation, ran away with her, leaving both husband and baby behind. Margaret Tims reveals doubts about Godwin's truthfulness in the incident. His account is, she says, "somewhat disingenuous"; the crisis is "strangely glossed over by Godwin." Margaret Tims, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Social Pioneer* (London: Millington, 1976) 28. For a comprehensive account of the episode, see Todd 45-57.

²⁶Timms 49.

²⁷See for example Kate Chisholm, "In the Full Flood of Feeling," *The Telegraph*, 7 September 2003, www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2003/09/07/botod07.xml.

²⁸Peter France, *Landmarks of World Literature: Rousseau's Confessions* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 25-26. For the relevance on Godwin of Rousseau's concept of biography as a series of personal "revolutions," see Clemit 19-22.

²⁹See St Clair 170-73, and Todd 444-47.

³⁰Several passages illustrate Wollstonecraft's campaign for a change in the institution of marriage; for example, *Works by Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London, William Pickering, 1989), vol. 5, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 66, 211 and 217.

³¹As would happen in many other points of his philosophy, Godwin later changed his views, and towards the end of his life affirmed that we grant priority to those we have near. In this new light, our benefit to the world at large is questionable, but, "The benefits we can confer upon those with whom we are closely connected, are of great magnitude or continual occurrence" (Dep. b. 228/9[e]).

³²However, when Shelley disclosed his intentions regarding free love with Mary, Godwin replied he should have read the second edition of *Political Justice* rather than the first, for society had turned more conservative and was not yet ready for such experiment. See Janet Todd, *Gender, Art and Death* (London: Polity P, 1993) 126.

³³Todd, *Gender* 102-19.

³⁴Although no religious considerations appear in *Political Justice* on the question of suicide, Godwin would have been familiar with the fact that Protestants would interpret the act as irreligious, since they saw themselves as accountable to God for the gifts received at birth, whether physical, intellectual or material (Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 22). Godwin would later express the same idea in an undated letter to an editor, including one of those references to the Creator which became so common towards the close of his life: "Soberly and impartially speaking, the power over my life with which nature has endowed me, is a talent committed to my discretion [...] the being that made us has with equal clearness, endowed us with the empire over our own life or death" (Dep. c. 527).

³⁵This passage is virtually unchanged in the second edition of the *Memoirs*. For a detailed account of Wollstonecraft's activities and purpose in Scandinavia, see the authoritative study by Per Nyström, *Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian Journey* (Göteborg: Kungl. Vetenskaps- och Vitterhets-Samhället, 1980).

³⁶Pamela Clemit, "Godwin's Educational Theory: *The Enquirer*," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 12 (1993): 3-11.

³⁷Seymour 31-33.

A Good Natured Warning: Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno"

JOSEPH MATTHEW MEYER

In his essay "Experience," Emerson makes an interesting inference concerning the nature of the nineteenth-century American consciousness. "In this our talking America, we are ruined by our good nature and listening on all sides" (490). Embedded within this statement lies a strong ethnocentric implication that America is limited only by its naturally benevolent demeanor. In Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno," one can see a similar criticism of such a benevolent yet detrimental character trait within the American captain Amasa Delano; however, Melville's notion of "good nature" is quite different from Emerson's. The term "good nature" is used quite often in "Benito Cereno" but not in the way one would most commonly perceive it, as in 'good by nature.' If it is in one's nature to be good then it should be a quality that comes naturally, not forced. Melville does not seem to share in this notion of inherency. Rather than revealing itself naturally through actions or words, Delano's demeanour seems often rationalized and contrived. This begs the question, how can something be both natural and contrived at the same time? Close reading of Melville's text in conjunction with the original narrative of captain Amasa Delano, as well as careful dissection of Melville's use of the term "good nature," the Christian-American perception of both the African slaves and the Spanish as being inferior, and the inability to recognize man's inherent struggle for freedom, will show that Melville has placed a warning for America deep within "Benito Cereno." Captain Amasa Delano's "good nature," in the form of his conscious ethnocentric naiveté, symbolizes America's ignorance of an innate driving goal of humanity: the yearning for freedom of the African slave, by any means necessary.

Most scholars place Delano's inability to grasp what has transpired aboard the ship in either one of two categories: subconscious or conscious. He is either subconsciously unaware of man's capacity for evil and therefore unable to see what is happening before him; or he is conscious of man's ability to commit evil but is simply too ignorant to figure it out. Critics such as Paul David Johnson and Dennis Pahl believe Delano is not led by rational choice, but rather by a "moral blindness that exists within himself" (Johnson 427), a subconscious nature to "desire *not to see*" (Pahl 174). The problem with this interpretation is that there are moments when Delano is very aware of his surroundings. In fact, during one of the more commonly alluded to scenes by critics, the shaving scene, Delano is conscious enough to figure out that what is taking place before him is a play of sorts. In this scene, he comes to the cusp of the truth; and though he dismisses what is ultimately the correct assumption, he is nonetheless perceptive enough to come to a conclusion, rationalize it, and then dismiss it. Though he fails to see the truth, it is still a conscious decision to dismiss the scene as simply another instance of Don Benito's weakness as a captain. If he is rationalizing the situations that he is in then he is not acting through his subconscious. Therefore, we must look at Delano as a conscious individual, one responsible for his decisions.

If he consciously perceives his surroundings, then the next question would seem to be, is he simply an ignorant character, unable to see what is taking place on the ship? Reinhold J. Dooley and David Kirby see a more conscious Delano, aware of his surroundings but unable to solve the mystery aboard the ship due to a lack of intelligence. "In Melville's world, the most successful people are the smart ones who are nonetheless not too smart" (Kirby 154). Dooley goes so far as to call Delano "oblivious" (49) and unable to comprehend even at the end of story what has occurred before him (47). Though throughout the story Delano may be oblivious to the events transpiring before him, he is far from oblivious by the end of the story. Delano is fully aware of what has occurred on the ship. He knows that "Had [he] dropped the least hint, made the least advance towards an under-

standing between [himself and Cereno], death [...] would have ended the scene" (73). Furthermore, it is Cereno who tells us why Delano is not struck with trauma. "So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted" (74). Delano does not experience the terror that Cereno does. Therefore, the question is not whether or not Delano is aware of what has happened. He is quite aware of the danger he was in. Delano is able to continue with life not because of his ignorance, but because he knows "yon bright sun has forgotten it all" (74) and so must he. He cannot sympathize with Cereno because he does not perceive the mutiny aboard the *San Dominick* in the same manner. He is aware of the need to move on and chooses to put the events behind him. In doing so, he makes the decision to continue living. If Delano is neither acting subconsciously, nor ignorant of his surroundings, then he is acting consciously based upon a specific rationale. Melville reveals this rationale of his American captain as based upon a notion of conscious "good nature." To better understand this mode of thought, we must first look at Delano's nature in the original *Narrative of Voyages and Travels* and then look at Melville's interpretation of this "good nature" ideology.

In *The Narrative of Voyages and Travels*, Delano introduces himself as a very rational individual. His crew was in shambles due to the deaths of many good seamen. To make matters worse, there were convicts that stowed away on board the ship, which made the maintaining of order all the more difficult; however, Delano was able to manage his crew.

[M]y crew were refractory; the convicts were ever unfaithful, and took all the advantage that opportunity gave them. But sometimes exercising very strict discipline, and giving them wholesome floggings; and at other times treating them with the best I had, or could get, according to their deeds deserved, I managed them without much difficulty. (*Narrative* 320)

His punishments are according to "their deeds." Delano does not seem preoccupied with generalities of man's inherent good or evil. He

judges the men by their actions. For Delano, it is a person's actions that reveal the character of the individual. Much like his acts of discipline, when confronted with a situation, such as the abhorrent state of the *Tryal*, he addresses the situation first and then acts accordingly. "Presuming the vessel was from sea, and had been many days out, without perhaps fresh provisions, we put the fish which had been caught the night before in the boat, to be presented if necessary" (*Narrative* 322). Again, we see a man basing his decisions on cause and effect. He will present the food only if necessary. This is not a blind act of good nature. Furthermore, he comments on his benevolent mood aboard the ship as being "unusually pleasant" (323). This depicts his state of mind as being rather unusual, indicating that had he been more like himself that day, the events might have turned out differently. In *The Narrative* it is Delano's uncharacteristically benevolent mood that saves his life; however, in Melville's tale, it is Delano's characteristically good nature that saves him. This begs the question, why change the narrator's disposition from an unusually pleasant Delano in *The Narrative*, to a good-natured individual in "Benito Cereno"? Melville is too great a writer to believe this to be simply a matter of artistic license. Therefore, he must be saying something through his version of Delano. Before we can uncover the reasoning behind Melville's reinterpretation of Delano's character, we must first establish Melville's notion of "good nature" and how it correlates with nineteenth-century American ideology.

Melville defines Delano as a character of "good nature," a motif that will be repeated throughout the story. The term "good nature" must be further clarified in order to understand its relevance within the framework of nineteenth-century American ideology. Melville defines the driving characteristic of his American captain as follows:

Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful goodnature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated, incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man.

(1)

The key word in Melville's description of Delano is "indulge." When one indulges in something, he or she yields to a higher authority of need. Delano, even upon "extraordinary and repeated incentives," does not indulge himself in recognizing the possibility of inherent evil in mankind. If indulgence is in fact a yielding to strong desires, then it would require a conscious effort on the part of Amasa Delano to suppress this yearning. Delano chooses to believe man as inherently good until proven otherwise. In true Melville fashion, there is a bit of ambiguity in this description of the American captain. Delano is described as a good-natured man; yet, throughout the text he rationalizes events aboard the ship until they make sense to his nature. If he cannot rationalize the situation, he simply ignores it. How can something be both a part of one's nature and yet rationalized? It is here that Melville not only begins his tale, but seems to begin his commentary on nineteenth-century Christian-American ideology, an ideology claiming to be inherently good, yet, according to Melville, rationally evil.

Melville's quarrel with Christianity is well known and well documented by critics. In his first novel, *Typee*, he tells the story of a deterred French invasion of the Polynesian islands, in which,

The invaders, on their march back to the sea, consoled themselves for their repulse by setting fire to every house and temple in their route; and a long line of smoking ruins defaced the once-smiling bosom of the valley, and proclaimed to its pagan inhabitants the spirit that reigned in the breasts of Christian soldiers. (26)

Melville's attack here is not limited to Europe. He comments on America as well in the novel. He believes "four or five Marquesan Islanders sent to the United States as Missionaries might be quite as useful as an equal number of Americans despatched to the islands in a similar capacity" (126). For Melville, the civilized nation of America would do well to learn from the uncivilized Marquesan Islanders. Civilized Christianity seems to breed destruction, according to Melville. He notes that after a Christian crusade of burning and slaughtering, the pillagers "call upon all Christendom to applaud their courage

and their Justice" (27). At the end of "Benito Cereno," Delano and Cereno seem to do the same. Cereno says, "God charmed your life" (73). To which Delano replies, "Yes, all is owing to Providence, I know" (73). Within the character of Delano, Melville places not simply an American ideology, but a providential Christian-American one that was quite evident in America at the time Melville wrote his story.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, America, still struggling for a unified identity amongst a diverse population, nonetheless, still had extremely strong ties to its early Puritan settlers. David Kirby notes in Delano a feeling of "invincibility that suggests Americans are, as the early settlers described themselves, a latter-day version of the Chosen People" (148). Though Kirby makes an interesting correlation, he does not extend his comparison to the full impact of the allusion. Before Moses delivered the Israelites from bondage, the Egyptians, who undoubtedly felt it their right to rule over the Jewish nation, oppressed God's Chosen People. Melville could undoubtedly see the hypocritical nature of this American ideology, attempting to parallel itself to the enslaved Israelites of the Bible. Though nineteenth-century Americans may have believed themselves to be God's new Chosen People, when it came to its dealings with the African race, America acted as the oppressor, not the oppressed. In "Benito Cereno," Melville reminds America that it too is involved in this slave trade. More than that, just as the Jews were delivered from slavery, the young American nation naïvely believes it has a firm grasp on the institution of slavery, and of the enslaved people; however, the question is, how long can a group of people be completely controlled? "Benito Cereno" seems to remind America that a revolt is inevitable.

Throughout the text, Delano is confronted with suspicious events that take place before him; yet he constantly makes a conscious effort to remove any suspicion from his mind. At one point, thinking that perhaps Don Benito may be planning to murder him, he reprimands himself for even considering such a heinous act fathomable. He asserts, "Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean" (34). The notion implied here is that evil does not simply act without

provocation. Since his conscience is clean, having wronged no one, no man has due claim to harm him; therefore, no one will harm him. This adolescent logic, though comforting to Delano, is clearly not sufficient to convince him that all is right aboard the ship. "Though ashamed of the relapse, he could not altogether subdue it; and so, exerting his good nature to the utmost, insensibly he came to a compromise" (35). He is "ashamed" of his momentary lapse of faith in mankind. Here again, Melville uses the term "good nature" in a way that does not constitute an inherent goodness in Delano, but rather a carefully conceived form of restraint. It becomes something that can be controlled, measured, and acted upon by Delano to make it work. He must "exert" his good nature in this situation. It does not happen naturally. Even though it takes every last bit of his benevolence to keep from thinking unpleasant thoughts towards the ship and its crew, he still chooses to believe that mankind is inherently good, and, therefore, incapable of unprovoked evil.

Delano, growing more suspicious of his surroundings, continues to allow his rationalized good nature to blind him from any clues that may lead him to uncover the truth. Believing "the whites [...], by nature, [...] [to be] [...] the shrewder race," (32) he limits his inquiry of events to the Spanish seamen. After questioning one of the remaining Spaniards, he notices that "as [the Africans] became talkative, [the Spaniard] became mute, and at length quite glum, [seeming] morosely unwilling to answer more questions, and yet, all the while, this ursine air was somehow mixed with his sheepish one" (29). Delano is aware of his surroundings and aware of the Spaniard's growing unwillingness to speak in the presence of the Africans. He says, "And yet—and yet, now that I think of it, that very old fellow, if I err not, was one of those who seemed so earnestly eyeing me here awhile since" (29). Delano recognizes the Spaniard as one of the men trying so intently to catch his eye, as if to tell him something; yet, this does not seem to arouse Delano to action. One would think that an awkward moment such as this one would leave the captain in a more inquisitive state; however, he describes himself as "feeling a little strange at first, he

could hardly tell why, but upon the whole with regained confidence in Benito Cereno" (29). He is simply ignoring the signs around him, a conscious choice on his part. "All this is very queer now, thought Captain Delano, with a qualmish sort of emotion; but, as one feeling incipient sea-sickness, he strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady" (33). As Melville does throughout the story, he initiates the spark of an idea or notion in his American captain only to reverse it within the same statement. He lets his readers know that something "queer" is going on yet he forces them to banish it by pointing them in another direction. In this respect, the reader is led on much like Delano in a myriad of ambiguous notions that do not seem to point to any significant conclusion.

In one of the more unsettling scenes in the story, the shaving scene, Delano completely misinterprets the body language of Don Benito as one of a coward. "Poor fellow, thought Captain Delano, so nervous he can't even bear the sight of barber's blood; [...] is it credible that I should have imagined he meant to spill all my blood, who can't endure the sight of one little drop of his own?" (43). Though Delano, in his "good nature," is quick to dismiss the situation around him, he is not unaware of his environment. The shaving scene reveals to Delano the possibility that "master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out, both in word and deed, nay, to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play before him" (44). After making this observation, he quickly justifies it as his own imagination. "At last, regarding the notion as a whimsy, insensibly suggested, perhaps, by the theatrical aspect of Don Benito in his harlequin ensign [...]" (44). This poignant scene is the closest that the American captain comes to realizing the truth; however, he banishes the thought, believing Cereno's theatrical mannerisms to be simply a part of the captain's character. He finds the idea of such a sinister and well-thought-out plot "whimsical." The notion that both Benito Cereno and Babo could devise such a plan is preposterous to Delano. "Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguering in against it with negroes?" (32). Here Delano

goes so far as to refer to the Africans as “almost” a different “species.” In his mind, the only way to justify such a devious plan is to prove Don Benito to be the leader. Given the amount of planning needed to produce such a scheme, the only way feasible to Delano would be for a white man to orchestrate such an event. Here lies the reasoning behind Delano’s inability to see the revolt aboard the ship. He, like Don Benito, underestimates the intelligence and the drive of the African slaves to attain freedom; however, considering Delano’s gross misconceptions of the Africans as irrational beings, his inability to see them as the masterminds behind this mutiny is understandable. Delano does not seem to extend his “good nature” equally to the whites and the blacks. If it is in Delano’s nature to believe mankind inherently good until proven otherwise, why does he advise Don Benito to “keep all your blacks employed, especially the younger ones, no matter at what useless task, and no matter what happens to the ship?” (15). The answer lies in Delano’s view of the Africans.

It is important to establish Captain Delano’s perception of the African not as a human being, but as an uncivilized animal. He continually makes this comparison of the African to a beast rather than a human, thus giving himself almost a divine right to dominion over them. Edward Grejda notes: “The Negroes in *Benito Cereno* are neither Delano’s docile subservients nor ravenous animals. Both assessments represent an extreme, an indictment of an entire race by a man whose concern lies with the ‘common continent of men’” (91). Delano, in constantly comparing the Africans to animals, is ultimately taking away their humanity; thus, the Africans are excluded from this common continent of men. “Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (41). Here he describes not simply his relationship with enslaved Africans, but with Africans in general as a master to his dog, the implied notion being that they are like domesticated animals, able to be loved but in need of a master to take care of them. A domesticated animal will act upon the will of the owner, and not of its own will. We can see further examples of this when Delano discusses the African women.

Delano describes the African women much in the same way as the men, more as animals than human beings. They are “Unsophisticated as leopardesses; loving as doves” (30). Once again, Delano dehumanizes the Africans by showing that the only way to describe them is through animal imagery. Delano comments on the female African intellect as a “docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind” (41). In depicting the Africans as being content to live in a world where they do not need to rationalize situations, Delano takes away the humanity of the blacks aboard the ship and depicts them as animals whose lives are better off as servants. He goes so far as to suppose the Africans’ involvement in a plan, along with Don Benito, to murder him; however, this is quickly pushed aside when Delano’s logic reminds him that “they were too stupid” (32) to succeed in such a plan. Though Delano explicitly asserts his racial superiority over the Africans, interestingly enough, the Africans are not the only race deemed somewhat inferior to the American captain.

Upon first witnessing Benito Cereno, Delano is quick to judge the captain based upon his attire. He describes Cereno’s dress as follows:

The Spaniard wore a loose Chili jacket of dark velvet; white small-clothes and stockings, with silver buckles at the knee and instep; a high-crowned sombrero, of fine grass; a slender sword, silver mounted, hung from a knot in his sash—the last being an almost invariable adjunct, more for utility than ornament, of a South American gentleman’s dress to this hour. (13)

Delano does not hold back his judgments of the Spanish captain’s flamboyant attire. He says, “However unsuitable for the time and place, at least in the blunt-thinking American’s eyes, [...] the toilette of Don Benito might not, in fashion at least, have gone beyond the style of the day among South Americans of his class” (13). His first inclination is that this attire is “unsuitable for the time”; however, he supposes that this is the way a Spanish captain of his “class” would dress while out at sea. The implication is that Don Benito is first and foremost a man concerned with class and stature before his duties as captain of a vessel. He further implies this notion when “Eyeing Don Benito’s small, yellow hands, he easily inferred that the young captain

had not got into command at the hawse-hole, but the cabin-window" (14). Here he is implying that Don Benito did not earn his status as captain, but attained it through social, political, or economic status. He has not earned it like Delano has, through hard work. These judgments are not limited to Don Benito's attire.

After the incident involving the young Spaniard being struck over the head by the slave, Delano is quick to assert his opinion on the matter. "Had such a thing happened on board the Bachelor's Delight, instant punishment would have followed" (15). To this Cereno simply replies, "Doubtless, doubtless, Señor" (15). For Delano, this is a sign of weakness on the part of the Spanish captain. "I know no sadder sight than a commander who has little of command but the name" (15). Sandra A. Zagarell points out that Delano's "plan to reestablish order by withdrawing Cereno's command and placing his own surrogate, his second mate, in charge until Cereno is well enough to be 'restored to authority' indicates how important the hierarchy of command is to him" (249). Zagarell further notes: "to depose another captain, however gently and temporarily, is to assume that the proper wielding of authority takes precedence over considerations of national sovereignty or private ownership of the vessel" (249). Delano, in assuming command of the situation, is essentially saying that those aboard the ship are unsuited to making such decisions. Therefore, it is up to him. Considering Spain's extensive experience as a naval power, one would think the Spanish seamen are well aware of the chain of command aboard a vessel and are able to handle such situations; yet Delano still feels the need to fix the situation by taking control of it and appointing the second in command as the new captain. As Zagarell points out, he does not consider the politics or economics behind displacing Cereno's authority. Here we can see the ethnocentrism of Delano in assuming an authoritative position aboard the *San Dominick*. He is asserting his authority not simply as a captain, but as an American.

His judgments of the Spaniards are not based solely on seamanship either. "But as a nation—continued he in his reveries—these Span-

iards are all an odd set; the very word Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkish twang to it" (36). Critics such as Dennis Pahl cite this statement as an indication of Delano's racism towards the Spanish as well as the Africans. In Pahl's essay, "The Gaze of History in 'Benito Cereno,'" he notes, "Delano feels that he represents the most enlightened form of humanity, far surpassing those cultures—African and European—that come to signify for him the unenlightened past" (176). Pahl is correct in his assessment of Delano's American ethnocentricity; however, what is equally disturbing about this statement is Delano's abrupt reversal. He states, "And yet, I dare say, Spaniards in the main are as good folks as any in Duxbury, Massachusetts" (36). Delano's first statement is all-inclusive. "[T]hese Spaniards are *all* an odd set." The second statement only relieves the Spaniards "in the main" from their conspirator-like stereotype. That may leave the Spanish seamen still under the general label of conspirators by nature. In the beginning of the story, Delano states that he is "a person of singularly undistrustful goodnature" (1); however, throughout the story, he remains very much distrustful of the Spanish captain and his crew. These distrustful feelings seem to indicate that Delano is indeed capable of seeing mankind's capacity for malevolence; however, though Delano's natural instincts warn him about the state of affairs on the ship, he willingly suppresses these feelings through a conscious choice to see, "in the main," the good in individuals, and it is for this reason that Delano is unable to see the events transpiring before him.

After the revolt has come to full light, the deposition reveals the intricacies of what has transpired. "That all the negroes slept upon deck, as is customary in this navigation, and none wore fetters, because the owner, his friend Aranda, told him that they were all tractable" (63). Herein lies the problem. Had they been in fetters, it is likely the revolt would not have occurred, or at least, would not have succeeded as it did. Since there were no boundaries set, the line between master and slave was not clearly visible. One cannot expect a captive human being to yield to authority simply based upon merit. In treating the slaves as mindless, obedient dogs, the Spanish sailors underestimate

the “uncivilized” Africans’ desire for their freedom. Melville shows the naïve thinking of Don Benito in believing that a group of people, given the opportunity to be free, will remain “tractable” and compliant. The crew, incapable of oppressing the African slave’s desire for freedom, makes a horrific error in judgment in allowing the Africans a taste of liberty aboard the ship. It is a mistake they pay for with their lives.

At the end of the story, there is a sense that the tale is not over, especially for Benito Cereno. Delano, as he has done throughout the story, relies on his rationalized good nature to look towards the future. “Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea” (74). He is virtually unaffected by the events he has witnessed. “You are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?” (74). To which, cadaverous-like, Don Benito replies, “The negro” (74). In this simple statement, Melville conveys the absolute fear of the Spanish captain. These words haunt the reader as much as they haunt Benito Cereno. What does the captain mean by “The negro”? Delano narrates to the reader that “the dress, so precise and costly, worn by [Don Benito] on the day whose events have been narrated, had not willingly been put on. And that silver-mounted sword, apparent symbol of despotic command, was not, indeed, a sword, but the ghost of one” (75). Even Babo’s act of dressing Don Benito in such a gallant and commanding dress seems daunting to Cereno. Though he was dressed as a captain, at no point during that day was Benito Cereno in charge of his ship. He had been outwitted by Babo, “the black—whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot—his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat” (75). Delano can remain unaffected because the revolt has not yet come to the United States. When it does, in the form of the Civil War, it will forever change the state of the nation. Therefore, embedded within the final statement of captain Benito Cereno, is a warning to America: do not underestimate the intelligence and the drive of a people in search of their freedom. Freedom will come in the wake of violence and death.

Many critics attempt to rationalize a solid belief concerning Melville's stance on slavery. James E. Miller Jr. takes note of the moment in the story when Babo intimidates each of the Spanish sailors with the whiteness of Aranda's skeleton. Miller believes this is "one of the small incidents which testify to the depth of Babo's 'negro slave' resentment against the 'master' white race" (158-59). There is more to this than simply "negro slave resentment" towards whites. Miller does not take into account Babo's occupation in Senegal. "[P]oor Babo here, in his own land, was only a poor slave; a black man's slave was Babo, who now is the white's" (19). Babo was a slave prior to the Spaniards taking him. This comment seems to show that the two cultures are not so different in social practices. Both the African culture and the white European culture utilize the institution of slavery. Melville does not make it apparent that the whites here are the outright enemy. Nor is the text, as John Haegert believes it to be, a clear "embodiment of Melville's anti-slavery sentiment" (22). To make such a clear and open statement would be to expose himself to much criticism in a time when there was no clear moral stance on slavery. If "Benito Cereno" is neither a text that wholly supports the slave trade nor condemns it, we must look at the text from a different perspective, one that better fits the time period in which it was written.

Melville's ambiguity in determining who is wrong and who is right mirrors the uncertainty of the time itself. On one hand, the slave revolt resulted in the murder of many men, both Spanish and African; yet can one truly blame the African slaves for wanting their freedom? In this dichotomy lies the problem. In his still pertinent discussion of nineteenth-century American literature, F. O. Matthiessen writes, "The [...] impression is that good and evil can be inextricably and confusingly intermingled—a state that was to be one of Melville's chief sources of ambiguity" (384). Matthiessen is correct in that, for critics, "Benito Cereno" will remain an ambiguous text concerning Melville's stance on slavery; however, one cannot help but hear the echo of a line from *Typee*, in which Melville comments on the Euro-American Christian missionary crusades. He states, "how we sympa-

thise for the unhappy victims, and with what horror do we regard the diabolical heathens, who, after all, have but avenged the unprovoked injuries which they have received" (27). Though the Civil War was not something foreseen at the beginning of the slave trade, there were clear indications that potential problems could arise along the way. Did America simply ignore these signs or was it ignorant of them? In "Benito Cereno," Melville does not explicitly suggest any right or wrong answers towards the slave trade. He allows his reader to make judgments based upon the situations and circumstances of Delano, Don Benito, and the African slaves. This is what allows "Benito Cereno" to be so widely interpreted even today. Melville places the responsibility on the reader to come up with the answers. He merely provides the questions.

Hofstra University
New York

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The Politics of Playful Confrontation: Barthelme as Disgruntled Liberal

JOHN WHALEN-BRIDGE

Barthelme's writing career is roughly coterminous with the short story renaissance that began in the late nineteen-sixties. A central figure in that renaissance, he wrote with undeviating verbal wit about domestic themes similar to those associated with the work of John Updike and Ann Beattie. Though he has been as popular as the domestic realists, his Beckettian reductions and occasional metafictional shenanigans have also earned him a place among such postmodernist or experimental fabulists as Borges and Cortázar. Several full length studies of his work have been completed that present Barthelme as a ludic individualist, an ironist who uses humor to preserve his freedom from social demands; this essay, alternatively, explores his short fiction to relate his playfulness to the more serious-sounding matter of the politics of his play.¹

Donald Barthelme is more frequently shelved with the playful than with the serious. In an interview he once took exception to the idea that he was apolitical or generally unconcerned with the world beyond his writing, that he had no interest in such "relevant issues" as the Vietnam war, racial strife, or political scandals: "I think a careful reading of what I've written would disclose that all those things you mention are touched upon, in one way or another—not confronted directly, but there" (McCaffery 1983, 41). Barthelme's offhand comment is a distress signal indicating an under-appreciated aspect of his work.

In *Homo Ludens* Huizinga observed that "Civilization [...] has grown more serious; it assigns only a secondary place to playing" (96). Certainly, Barthelme accepted this formulation in part—and in part re-

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sisted Huizinga's formulation of a "pure play": "Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil" (6). In his playfulness Barthelme does not really mean to abandon the world, even if Huizinga found it less playful than it might be. Instead, playfulness confronts unplay in his stories. Barthelme generates playful good will precisely through his ironic juxtaposition of wisdom and folly, or good and evil. He once spoke of humor in his work not as an evasion of the real world, but as an alternative to psychosis. Involving stories about ethnic strife, tension between the sexes, and even the crisis of authority in American government, Barthelme's fiction is seriously playful.

Though some critics have argued for such an evolution, Barthelme's work does not really "evolve" or "mature" in the ways we have expected a writer's *oeuvre* to do since Joyce gave stylistic maturation a heroic and evolutionary role in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914).² It is better to say that Barthelme's playfulness exists in a more or less constant balance with his tacit assumption that art is and should be publicly responsible. In celebrating Barthelme as a self-cultivating liberal ironist, we have neglected his role as a social commentator. Many of his stories portray the world with Kafkaesque stage props; still, Barthelme's congenial treatment of dire themes almost always assumes an audience that will be more amused than anxious about the alienation and fragmentation presented in his art.

Barthelme gives fictional attention to the matter of art's relationship to civic authority in two ways: art is represented as ironically disjunct from the demands or capacities of civic authority, as we see in "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" and "The Indian Uprising." Or, in "Paul Klee" and "I Bought a Little City," the aesthetic is harmonized with the political, the civic, or even the military, in a self-deflating fantasy. Both approaches actually play with the separation of art and political reality, but the former group of stories mocks the politically adept for lack of imagination. Other writers have "indicted" society for failing to live up to social ideals, but Barthelme at his most political establishes a wry point of view that can be altogether critical, even if it

lacks the self-righteousness required to indict. Harsh judgments are too heavy for Barthelme's inverse gravity in which most objects lacking in levity float away.

Regarding political matters related to race and class, Barthelme presents recognizable political tensions in part as a way to mark his own ironic distance from those concerns—but only in part. “Margins” and “Sakrete” respectively deride the assumptions of liberal civic discourse, mocking the demands such ways of thinking make upon artists. They are also a good pair to begin with because they demonstrate two main dramatic modes of Barthelme's work, the dialogue and the monologue.³ These stories fuse Kafkaesque alienation with Beckettian banter, even as they remain uncompromisingly comic. Barthelme has reminded his readers in interviews that Kafka was a comic artist, but there is an undeniable *angst* running through Kafka's work, especially in his depictions of the bureaucratic imagination, much more muted. Beckett spoke of how the “consternation is in the form” in Kafka's work (Shainberg 104), but readers have not been struck by consternation in Barthelme's stories, even though they may depict such unpleasantness as racial violence (“Margins”) or the Orwellian reorganization of a community (“Sakrete”).

Except for a few sentences that operate as stage directions, “Margins” is written entirely as a dialogue between Edward and Carl. The first sentence sets the stage: “Edward was explaining to Carl about margins” (*Sixty* 9). Edward then presents a brief graphological disquisition:

“The *width* of the margin shows culture, aestheticism and a sense of values or the lack of them,” he said. “A very wide left margin shows an impractical person of culture and refinement with a deep appreciation for the best in art and music. Whereas,” Edward said, quoting his handwriting analysis book, “whereas, narrow left margins show the opposite. No left margin at all shows a practical nature, a wholesome economy and a general lack of good taste in the arts. A very wide *right* margin shows a person afraid to face reality, oversensitive to the future and generally a poor mixer.”

“I don't believe in it,” Carl said. (*Sixty* 9)

Edward turns his attention to the sign that Carl is carrying, observing that Carl's "*all-around wide margin*" designates him as a person "with love of color and form" and as one who "lives in his own dream world of beauty and good taste" (*Sixty* 9). Carl, who appears up to the point to be the practical character rather than victim of an *idée fixe*, once again expresses doubt, prompting the following exchange:

"I'm communicating with you," Edward said, "across a vast gulf of ignorance and darkness."

"I brought the darkness, is that the idea?" Carl asked.

"You brought the darkness, you black mother," Edward said. "Funky, man."

"Edward," Carl said, "for God's sake." (*Sixty* 9-10)

Thus do we learn that Carl is black and Edward white. In the dialogue that follows, Edward's programmatic way of thinking is perfectly suited to the racial prejudice inherent in many of his questions—Are you a drug addict? Are you a Muslim?

Up until this point Carl is still the pragmatic one (despite his all-around wide margins), but then Barthelme undermines the pattern of consistent character development by presenting to the reader the contents of Carl's sign:

"I Was Put In Jail in Selby County Alabama For Five Years For Stealing A Dollar and A Half Which I Did Not Do. While I Was In Jail My Brother Was Killed & My Mother Ran Away When I was Little. In Jail I Began Preaching & I Preach to People Wherever I Can Bearing the Witness of Eschatological Love" (*Sixty* 10).

Carl, who has appeared tough-minded in his skepticism, portrays himself in his sign as a stereotypical victim of white injustice, and in this respect he has suddenly converted from a character who resists stereotypical representations into the embodiment of a narrow-minded white man's fantasy. At the phrase "eschatological love," the attempts to communicate across the vast divide devolve into absurdity. In his attack on literalist thinking, Barthelme turns our expectations concerning character inside-out, betraying the ways in which the demands of character within conventional fiction are akin to the de-

mands on individuals in a racially divided society: "character," if it will be regarded as realistic, must conform to a set of laws or probable aspects prior to its individual existence. But this set of laws then has a tendency to reduce us to stereotypes of ourselves.

The dialogue between Carl and Edward proceeds like a vaudeville skit in which a number of odd topics are bandied about, but in which all of the remarks, it finally appears, can be measured by their proximity to the violence which concludes the story. After presenting the reader with the text of Carl's sign, Edward continues his pedantic analysis:

"Your capitals are very small," Edward said, "indicating humility."

"My mother would be pleased," Carl said, "if she knew."

"On the other hand, the excessive size of the loops in your 'y' and your 'g' displays exaggeration and egoism."

"That's always been one of my problems," Carl answered." (*Sixty* 10)

Once again Edward is on the offensive, making contradictory and therefore self-canceling assertions about Carl, whom he continuously designates as "other." Carl vacillates between ironic curt responses (note the humility in his admission of egotism) and attempts to change the subject:

"Do you think I'm a pretty color?" Edward asked. "Are you envious?"

"No," Carl said. "Not envious."

"See? Exaggeration and egoism. Just like I said."

"You're kind of boring, Edward. To tell the truth."

[...]

"Carl, I'm a fool," Edward said suddenly.

"Yes," Carl said.

"But I'm a *white* fool," Edward said. "That's what's so lovely about me."

"You *are* lovely, Edward," Carl said. "It's true. You have a nice look. Your aspect is good."

"Oh, hell," Edward said despondently. "You're very well-spoken," he said.

"I noticed that."

"The reason for that is," Carl said, "I read. Did you read *The Cannibal* by John Hawkes? I thought that was a hell of a book." (*Sixty* 11)

Edward is the straight-man while Carl provides entertainment in the form of irony, good sense, and the good taste of a person who reads experimental fiction. With racial prejudice as the chief source of tension, the story becomes a single joke with variations between verbal violence and elegant rearrangements of the conversation. Like the characters in most Barthelme dialogue-stories, these two deploy verbal resources, create occasional absurd reversals, and maintain a general pattern of banter that is generally comforting to the reader. That this approach to character may be *superficial* is a matter reflected upon by the very characters in the story themselves:

“Listen Carl,” Edward said, “why don’t you just concentrate on improving your handwriting.”

“My character, you mean.”

“No,” Edward said, “don’t bother improving your character. Just improve your handwriting. Make larger capitals. Make smaller loops in your ‘y’ and your ‘g.’ Watch your word-spacing so as not to display disorientation.

Watch your margins.”

“It’s an idea. But isn’t that kind of a superficial approach to the problem?”

(*Sixty* 13)

When Edward suggests that Carl read his handwriting book, and offers the prospect that a careful perusal might someday land him the job of Vice-President, Carl says “That’s something to shoot for, all right.” Frustrated that he cannot discuss John Hawkes’ literary innovations, Carl becomes impatient with Edward’s pretensions to civic responsibility. But Edward’s suggestions also give parodic expression to the purely aesthetic approach to literary art divorced from meaning or historical context. In one of many Beckettian juxtapositions, this quality is yoked to Edward’s other quality, an invasive interest in Carl’s “inner reality.” Though Barthelme apparently disowns Carl’s attention to surface details in this juxtaposition, many of his books contain final statements similar to the following—a proudly precise afterthought to *Sixty Stories*—which oddly echo Edward’s attention to surface detail:

A NOTE ON THE TYPE

The text of this book was set in Weiss, a typeface designed in Germany by Emil Rudolf Weiss (1875-1942). The design of the roman was completed in 1928 and that of the italic in 1931. Both are well-balanced and even in color, and both reflect the subtle skills of a fine calligrapher.

The whole-hearted attention to detail and craftsmanship in the “Note on the Type” is of course wholly unlike Edward’s manipulative approach to handwriting analysis, and it is just this verbal and artistic will to power that “Margins” satirizes. Dealing as it does with racial tension, where the two characters are not “even in color,” the story can be said to live in the world rather than in an imaginary land of pure art, free from the pains and dangers of this world. The charm of a Barthelme story is in the way it uses verbal and situational wit to play in the world without ever forgetting the difference between the “only pretend” that constitutes play and the worldly demands that are anything but playful. “Margins” confronts the unplayful subject of racism, and for most of the story the reader is entertained by the fantasy that verbal wit can circumvent the dangers inherent in narrow-minded thinking. This confrontation approaches its limit abruptly at the story’s conclusion, however. Carl asks Edward to wear his sandwich boards while he goes to the bathroom, and notes that they are heavy on the shoulders.

“They cut you a bit,” Carl said with a malicious smile. “I’ll just go into this men’s store here.”

When Carl returned the two men slapped each other sharply in the face with the back of the hand—that beautiful part of the hand where the knuckles grow. (*Sixty* 13)

While the ending can be said to follow from the tensions presented (though not *developed*) in the story, Carl has never before been “malicious” and no particular motive has been added that accounts for the fight. This is not merely a fight between Edward and Carl, nor is it just an admission of larger racial tensions. As evinced by the final verbal flourish, “that beautiful part of the hand where the knuckles grow,” the story concludes with the unresolved tension between aestheticism

and morality in art. The absurdity of their conjunction in art is symbolized by knuckles that “grow” on the back of the hand as though fruit on a vine. Their knuckles cannot really be said to grow, and this small verbal silliness in the midst of a most unplayful kind of behavior confirms for the reader, contrary to what Jacques Derrida might argue, that there is an outside to the text. The silly/pleasant twist that Barthelme gives to the unpleasant social reality marks the difference. The story confronts the violence of racism, but it absolutely refuses to do so in a serious way such as in Faulkner’s “Dry September.” As a comic artist, Barthelme acknowledges the worst, but always on his own terms.

Though it also dwells in the embarrassing region between art and social responsibility, “Sakrete” differs markedly in form from “Margins”; it is a comic monologue rather than a dialogue in the manner of Beckett. In particular, it is the monologue of a put-upon husband who also happens to be an artist. In response to a civil emergency (missing garbage cans throughout the neighborhood, many rats sighted), he pretends that he has been ordered to imagine its cause: “In fact, if I were ordered to imagine who is stealing our garbage cans, I could not do it. I very much doubt that my wife is doing it. Some of the garbage cans on our street are battered metal, others are heavy green plastic” (*Forty* 193). The husband views the mock-crisis (a serious matter within the fictional world of the story) with an artist’s eye, and so he is more concerned with ornament, material, and color than with the actuality of the missing cans: “Heavy green plastic or heavy black plastic predominates. Some of the garbage cans have the numbers of the houses they belong to painted on their sides or lids, with white paint. Usually by someone with only the crudest sense of the art of lettering” (193). A proper Barthelme garbage container might have a ‘NOTE ON THE TYPE’ etched under the lid. These cans, however, do not impress the husband as feats of human engineering: “In fact, if I were ordered to imagine what might most profitably be invented by a committee of rats, it would be the dark plastic garbage bag. The rats run up and down our street all night long” (193).

Perhaps Barthelme is twitting us for worrying that art has descended from its stature as the most impressive expression of the highest minds to that of mere cultural flotsam and jetsam. The put-upon husband, presented in the Thurberesque mode, bespeaks the fall of the artist from the height of romantic pretension—but not from any real social power. Because of circumstances beyond his control, the narrator finds himself wondering about the mischief of rats, the construction of the garbage can, and about the activities of his wife, whom he knows to be in many ways empowered by the rat-garbage-can-crisis. He wonders about such things, but has not been *ordered* to imagine them: he is on the periphery of the crisis management and does not even know the secret handshakes of the committee formed to respond to the problem.

The social constructionist world view (the idea that everything is man-made and that nothing has ‘natural priority’) scuttles through this story in a furtive sort of way, much like the rats that the narrator has not been ordered to imagine. The idea that ‘everything is socially constructed’ can be a conspiracy theory of the highest order, and the only real solace to the loss of nature is that some things are made better than others. Most garbage cans are poorly lettered, except for “One Nineteen, which has among its tenants a gifted commercial artist” (193-94).

The idea that the world itself is nought but art ought to be solace enough, but it has two rather depressing effects for the makers of Art. First, this view places the creative artist in a society that consists of a hierarchy of ‘artists’ with whom she or he must compete, not always successfully. Second, the world itself, regarded as art, is something of a mixed achievement. In addition to rainbows and architecture and that sort of thing, there is junk. How shall the artist work in a world where the line between trash and art has become the subject of Orwellian or Kafkaesque conspiracy theories?

One response to the junk-as-art problem is to make a provisional distinction between junk and ‘junque.’ The Rat/Can committee made an inventory of junque as found in the garbage cans of the Louis Escher family:

one mortar & pestle, majolica ware; one English cream maker (cream is made by mixing unsalted sweet butter and milk); one set green earthenware geranium leaf plates; one fruit ripener designed by scientists at the University of California, Plexiglas; one nylon umbrella tent with aluminum poles; one combination fountain pen and clock with LED readout; one mini hole-puncher-and-confetti-mark; one pistol-grip spring-loaded flyswatter. (195)

Junque is junk artistically regarded, and when junk is thus regarded it undergoes a magical transformation, much like the ironic swirl of pattern and object in the art of M. C. Escher. The assemblage of Barthelme's Escher household is certainly not representative of all the residents. The list is compiled to assess the possibility that the Escher family, by disposing of such valuable garbage, may be the "proximate cause" of the disappearing garbage cans. It is interesting that Barthelme has selected items which can all be recognized as non-garbage. There are no egg shells or stained coffee filters, for example. What gives this archeological heap the status of garbage is precisely its inventory form, which, in terms of conventional art, would be an anti-form or a lack of form: the collage as a challenge to conventional principles of composition. In an Age of Junque it would appear that the creative artist is "ordered" to imagine such things, though not by any committee. In Beckett's phrase, modern art must find a form to accommodate chaos. It must accommodate junk.

The narrator is intermittently suspicious of his wife, who is apparently the chief beneficiary of the rat-garbage can connection: "If my wife is stealing the garbage cans, in the night, while I am drunk and asleep, what is she doing with them?" His wife drives a yellow Pontiac convertible, and, although there are as of yet no witnesses, he "can imagine her lifting garbage cans into the back seat of the yellow Pontiac convertible, at four o'clock in the morning, when I am dreaming of being on stage, dreaming of having to perform a drum concerto with only one drumstick" (*Forty* 194). Although he can find no material evidence or logical connection, the appearance of the rats, the empowerment of his wife, and the disappearance of his own artistic power (signified by the missing drumstick) exist in a montage. As the

problem develops, or rather accumulates, the narrator is more and more an outsider in his own community:

My wife has appointed me a sub-committee of the larger committee with the task of finding large stones. Is there a peculiar look on her face as she makes the appointment? Dr. Maugham has bought a shotgun, a twelve-gauge over-and-under. Mr. Wilkins has bought a Chase bow and two dozen hunting arrows. I have bought a flute and an instruction book. (*Forty* 195)

In a sense, he has been incorporated into the increasingly militant community structure, but his appointment is at a low level and his task is bizarre—to search for stones to weigh down the garbage cans. Whereas other men are empowered by this situation, finding rather than losing phallic totems, this narrator acquires a most unwarlike instrument and an instruction book, signifying his apprentice-level efforts even in that artistic realm.

Though the narrator is finally given a job, he is ordered to imagine how artificial stones may be formed out of sakrete when real stones are found to be a rarity in the neighborhood. The narrator complies as best he can, mockingly comparing his creation to the work of Creation: “One need only add water and stir, and you have made a stone as heavy and brutish as a stone made by God himself” (196). However, as he comes to learn, “a good-looking stone is not the easiest of achievements.” His wife comments, “I don’t like them [...] They don’t look like real stones.” He concedes they look “like badly thrown pots, as if they had been done by a potter with no thumbs” (196).

No-thumbs is the latest in the accumulating list of missing things. This recession has continued through the story until an equilibrium is reached at the story’s end:

There are now no garbage cans on our street—no garbage cans left to steal. A committee of rats has joined with the Special Provisional committee in order to deal with the situation, which, the rats have made known, is attracting unwelcome rat elements from other areas of the city. Members of the two committees exchange secret grips, grips that I know not of. My wife drives groups of rats here and there in her yellow Pontiac convertible, attending

important meetings. The crisis, she says, will be a long one. She has never been happier. (196)

Barthelme's Orwellian vision of communal reorganization amuses but never terrifies. The external rat threat bolsters the internal regime, and, as in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the animals and humans are last seen cooperating in a way which directly contradicts the anti-rat ideology bracing the wife's committees.

"Sakrete" is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the world of politicians, social problems of general concern, and secret committees. The artist/husband finds himself more or less on the outside, but he is never the object of overt persecution. The put-upon voice of the outsider is paradoxically a voice of empowerment, and this is true of Barthelme's ironic mode of social observation in general. Presumably smiling grimly at each verbal cue, the reader identifies with the voice of the witty outsider and thus smugly transcends the everyday banality of political infighting, seeing it as merely buying sakrete at a hardware store. The put-upon voice is central to the story from beginning to end precisely because it is the frame of reference that gives all the events, details, and junque inventories a narrative shape.

Not all of Barthelme's stories explore social and political themes through the more or less indirect medium of the absurdist parable. "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning," published in 1968 but before Robert F. Kennedy's assassination, juxtaposes a number of viewpoints in order to show how our "real" politicians exist in surreal relation to their constituents. Among the twenty-five or so ways of looking at a Kennedy, we really have two views from the artist: the artist in the story "regards K. with hatred" (*Sixty* 81) for making a philistine remark about his art, and Barthelme as writer of the story regards Kennedy wryly. Barthelme's irony, a clinical view that is more detached than that of the artist within the story, sets up a tension between Kennedy as social icon and Kennedy as typical politician (an ingrate). The Kafkaesque reduction of a person to his initial has, in this context, a side-effect of comic compression. Kennedy has been reduced to a heroic, well-rounded man with many ordinary strengths.

The eponymous final section of the story separates Kennedy from the archaic heroic vestments that are regularly draped over fallen Kennedys:

K. Saved from Drowning

K. in the water. His flat black hat, his black cape, his sword are on the shore. He retains his mask. His hands beat the surface of the water which tears and rips about him. The white foam, the green depths.

“He retains the mask”—even in drowning, the Kennedy surface is all the narrator can know. “Depth” is indicated briefly and matter-of-factly, since there is no depth to the simulacra called “K.” It is as though the narrator rescues a campaign poster:

I throw a line, the coils leaping out over the surface of the water [...] I am on the bank, the rope wound round my waist, braced against a rock. K. now has both hands on the line. I pull him out of the water. He stands now on the bank, gasping.

“Thank you.” (85)

What remains after Barthelme’s ironic reduction process is a Kennedy drained of mystery. But a phoenix springs from the ashes: as in Warhol’s repetitious portraits of celebrities, the mass production of an image, in draining its artistic aura, refurbishes it with a new kind of aura. The Kennedy that says “Thank you” as he escapes death is mysterious because he remains interesting despite his own xerographic continuity. In this respect, Barthelme’s K. is a postmodern political hero, a mock-form of the original which indulges the conventional longings for a paragon, while it also satisfies the iconoclastic urge to treat any and all ideals with caustic doubt. A mutant form within the species of political hero-worship, “Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning” provides enjoyment for disgruntled liberals, but without the sacrifice of honesty that many kinds of political affiliation require.

Though he generally aims to please, Barthelme is not a maker of *kitsch*—the kind of work which, according to Milan Kundera, stems from a “desire to please at all costs” (Carlisle). The pleasures of art are

occasionally tempered by the pain of history. "The Indian Uprising," for example, can be said to approach the treatment of Native Americans by the United States government through the mock form, or it can also be read as a satire on the involvement of the United States in Vietnam. That is, the story juxtaposes suburban comfort with battle zone behavior so as to question the imprecision of "our" involvement in that war. The story begins in the voice of "one of us," since he says "We defended the city as best we could":

The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds. The war clubs of the Comanches clattered on the soft, yellow pavements. There were earthworks along the Boulevard Mark Clark and the hedges had been laced with sparkling wire. People were trying to understand. I spoke to Sylvia. "Do you think this is a good life?" The table held apples, books, long-playing records. She looked up. "No." (*Sixty* 108)

That the arrows "came in clouds" is the sort of cliché that Barthelme likes to isolate within a web of more alert language; the result is that he defamiliarizes and, in a sense, redeems the cliché. Sylvia's flat and humorless denial of privilege and enjoyment similarly derides the strict organization of hatred that develops quickly with announcements of war.

By juxtaposing suburban entitlements with the embattled mentality of white settlers who would displace Comanches from their land, Barthelme once again stakes out the uneven ground of American liberalism. He criticizes American foreign policy while freely enjoying the pleasures of American life; he scrutinizes the past policies of the United States government while at the same time continuing to inhabit land gotten through that dirty work. Thus, the story reflects many of the incongruities of American liberal thought. This is not to make a conservative or an anti-liberal of Barthelme—he defended liberalism as best he could. Once again, his playful approach to the most serious of problems opens up a way of having it both ways. The reader who identifies with the wit of the Barthelme voice can enjoy a political sympathy without sacrificing his or her badge of independence: doubt. This is one of the merit badges common to postwar

American literature. The sort of belief or commitment to a cause that enables or requires the subordination of the individual self is anathema within Barthelme's universe of discourse.

Though "The Indian Uprising" presents several images which could be said to reflect the brutality with which Native Americans have been treated, the story is scarcely a linear narrative of that history. Written in a narrative collage form, the story also contains intermittent commentary on the products of high culture, episodes concerning the narrator's efforts to make a table, and occasional shards from the narrator's love life. Within this collage form, juxtaposition and anachronism occasionally hint at perceptions of brutality alongside cultural elegance in a way that invites political critique, but the collage form is also a form of indirection, a way of looking awry at the jangle of culture and history. This wry smile, never a full-blown smirk, confronts the worst aspects of American history without surrendering to the *cri de coeur*, a less dialogic mode of utterance tending to relax artistic tension and reduce the possibilities of conversation.

By approaching the horrors of history wryly, the writer stirs plausible deniability into the political commitments and sympathies at which readers might guess. The collage effect at once provides a way of connecting past with recent examples of American aggression; but at the same time the burlesque tone insulates the passage:

Patrols of paras and volunteers with armbands guarded the tall, flat buildings. We interrogated the captured Comanche. Two of us forced his head back while another poured water into his nostrils. His body jerked, he choked and wept. Not believing a hurried, careless and exaggerated report of the number of casualties in the outer districts where trees, lamps, swans had been reduced to clear fields of fire we issued entrenching tools to those who seemed trustworthy and turned the heavy-weapons companies so that we could not be surprised from that direction. And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. We talked. (108)

By the repetition "more in love and more in love" instead of the more conventional "more and more in love," we know that the unplayful image of the captured Indian has given way to bathos. There is no bathos in the image of the Comanche being tortured, and the ana-

chronism of the heavy weapons battalion could go either way: it could suggest that nothing has changed in American policy toward native cultures or undeveloped nations, or it could begin to overload our willingness to take the image seriously by undermining the historical frame of reference. The verbal representation balances the reader on a fence separating engaged from detached interpretations. The collage form can be construed as politically progressive in that it offers protection from the monologic approach of, say, the proletarian thesis novel; at the same time, the increasingly silly juxtapositions ward off the danger of responsibility, implying, as that would, a call to action. Anachronism attenuates the immediacy of this call, which, for Barthelme, is in its pure form a threat to literariness.

Instead, we have an approach somewhere between that of the comedian and the anthropologist, each role assuming a close awareness tempered by a clinical detachment: "And he was friendly, kind, enthusiastic, so I related a little of the history of torture, reviewing the technical literature quoting the best modern sources" (111). As in "Sakrete" this interest and detachment are compounded in the junkyard inventory, though in "The Indian Uprising" the heap is actually a barricade:

I analyzed the composition of the barricade nearest me and found two ashtrays, ceramic, one dark brown and one dark brown with an orange blur at the lip; a tin frying pan; two-liter bottles of red wine; three-quarter-liter bottles of Black & White, aquavit, cognac, vodka, gin, Fad #6 sherry; a hollow-core door in birch veneer on black wrought-iron legs; a blanket [...] a Yugoslavian carved flute, wood, dark brown; and other items. I decided I knew nothing. (*Sixty* 109)

Most of the items in this inventory would be familiar to Barthelme's readers, many of them advertised in the pages of *The New Yorker*, which had first refusal rights to Barthelme's stories. The perception of the items as exotic or luxurious commodities gradually displaces their corporate existence as a barricade. The sentence "I decided I knew nothing" is a fairly direct echo of the Beckettian epiphanies found throughout *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. In Beckett this

line is an act of disowning, but in Barthelme it is really a mock-form of Beckettian renunciation. The narrator knows exactly what is valued in his culture.

As the Freudian dream avoids the direct statement of the frustrated wish and instead produces a distorted message that will more successfully circumvent the censor, Barthelme's use of the mock form in stories such as "The Indian Uprising" includes many images which readers of *The New Yorker* generally might wish to avoid within a form that will often delight them. Amid the dwarfs, joke inventories, and mock-melodrama, are such smuggled images:

We attached wires to the testicles of the captured Comanche. And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. When we threw the switch he spoke. His name, he said, was Gustave Aschenbach. He was born at L____, a country town in the province of Silesia. (113)

The image, initially an entirely unplayful matter, is the irritant around which the subsequent absurdity forms. That Barthelme repeats the "more in love and more in love" joke suggests an artistic self-consciousness about this process, as does the reference to Gustave Aschenbach, the aristocratic German hero of *Death in Venice* who destroys himself by submitting to forbidden desires. The absurdity of the juxtaposition is such that Barthelme at once represents the evils of American history and at the same time respects an apolitical literary taboo: thou shalt not confuse writing with Amnesty International work.

Once the form of a story like "The Indian Uprising" becomes clear, what remains for the reader are the occasionally outstanding one-liners, and, even more important, the overall rhythm of the story. In the collage form the writer is not held to the unities that Poe associated with the tale. Instead, we look for the arrangement of the dream-like elements to determine the final emphasis. A dream that is merely a string of neural garbage without narrative direction is not finally interesting.⁴ The tension for readers of "The Indian Uprising" relates to Barthelme as a political fence-sitter: will he wind up on one side,

the other, or poised between? Will "The Indian Uprising" finally become a determinate fantasy rather than a disorganized cut-up of movie westerns, war zone news footage, and bad love scenes? The title "The Indian Uprising" and the final scene give this story a shape that many of its middle paragraphs resist:

We killed a great many in the south suddenly with helicopters and rockets but we found that those we had killed were children and more came from the north and from the east and from other places where there are children preparing to live. "Skin," Miss R. said softly in the white, yellow room. "This is the Clemency Committee. And would you remove your belt and shoelaces." I removed my belt and shoelaces and looked (rain shattering from a great height the prospects of silence and clear, neat rows of houses in the subdivisions) into their savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads. (114)

After letting us run along through his series of formally slack (if witty) juxtapositions, this conclusion operates as the choke-chain on the reader (much like the surreal observation of "where the knuckles grow" at the conclusion of "Margins"). The children killed by helicopters and rockets bring to mind the victims of bombing in Vietnam, but the image also belies the mythology of how the West was won. Though there are moments of cartoonishly heroic hand-to-hand combat earlier in the story, the final paragraph focuses on the kind of details that make wars hard to sell to the suburban public, to the people who live in the "neat rows of houses in the subdivisions."

In Barthelme's image of the bureaucratic cleanup operation, the Indians have won, and the narrator must stare into "their savage black eyes." What Barthelme confronts the reader with here is not the reality of Indian life as a scholar in a Native American studies department might reconstruct it, but with the cliché or Hollywood image that functions as the cultural ghost of the lost reality. The savage black eyes stare from behind a desk, and this juxtaposition of savagery and civilization comically undermines that dichotomy. Read in this way, "The Indian Uprising" undergirds the critical change-the-system-from-within attitude that separates the liberal from the radical, but, as with all of Barthelme's writing, it supports the basic division of labor

between politics and art that is also a tenet of liberal rather than radical dogma.

Barthelme has occasionally written stories—elements of this are in “Sakrete”—that satisfy the wish that art and government could collaborate harmoniously for the greatest civic good. “I Bought a Little City” is a story in this mode, although the narrator is a doggerel poet rather than a genuine artist. “Paul Klee” expresses this fantasy more clearly than any other Barthelme story. With playful intelligence, Barthelme coordinates the two voices in the story which presumably should be at odds, that of Paul Klee and that of The Secret Police. In the story Paul Klee has been transferred into the Air Corps where he and other artists “presented ourselves as not just painters but artist-painters. This caused some shaking of heads” (*Forty* 80). While he eats lunch, one of the three airplanes he has been ordered to oversee has somehow been stolen—an occurrence not lost on the Secret Police as they spy on Paul Klee.

The story involves a series of alternating sections headed either by “Paul Klee said” or “The Secret Police said” (80). Early in the story the Secret Police spy on Paul Klee and notice that he is reading a volume of Chinese short stories in translation. While we are given no other information about the stories (and Paul Klee himself has questions about the faithfulness of the translation), it is a convention in certain kinds of Chinese wisdom literature to precede brief narrative episodes with phrases such as “The Master said” or “Then Confucius said” or “Chuang Tzu said.” Barthelme appears to mimic this tradition in “Paul Klee,” the chief difference being that the story has two alternating sources of authority rather than one primary sage or system of value. This format initially promises a dialogic clash of values and languages, since Paul Klee’s descriptions are refracted through the artist’s optic, whereas the Secret Police spy on Paul Klee through a different sort of lens. The Secret Police ultimately view the situation in terms of power rather than aesthetic composition.

The Secret Police claim omnipotence for themselves, and so their ideal point of view might be the panopticon as described by the

French theorist of social power, Michel Foucault. But while Foucault's work extends what has been called the "hermeneutic of suspicion," charting as it does the way in which various social discourses constrict the freedom of the individual, Barthelme's police are Keystone totalitarians:

Our first secret is where we are. No one knows. [...] Omnipresence is our goal. [...] With omnipresence, hand-in-hand as it were, goes omniscience. And with omniscience and omnipresence, hand-in-hand-in-hand as it were, goes omnipotence. We are a three-sided waltz. However our mood is melancholy. There is a secret sigh that we sigh, secretly. We yearn to be known, acknowledged, admired even. What is the good of omnipotence if nobody knows? (81)

Unlike a real secret police force, which is likely to be organized by paranoia rather than a secure sense of omnipotence, Barthelme's secret agents have inverted J. Walter Mitty fantasies into a hoped-for reconciliation with the public.

When the Secret Police follow Paul Klee into the restaurant where he "eats a hearty lunch" and reads the book of Chinese short stories, they, like Paul Klee, fail to witness the disappearance of the airplane. Their claims of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are all overthrown by this event: "There is something we do not know. This is irritating in the extreme" (82). Paul Klee's response, in contrast, is initially matter-of-fact: "Now I see with my trained painter's eye that instead of three canvas-covered shapes on the flatcar there are only two. Where the third aircraft had been there is only a puddle of canvas and loose rope" (81-82). But his response is absolutely aesthetic:

The shape of the collapsed canvas, under which the aircraft had rested, together with the loose ropes—the canvas forming hills and valleys, seductive folds, the ropes the very essence of looseness, lapsing—it is irresistible. I sketch for ten or fifteen minutes, wondering the while if I might not be in trouble, because of the missing aircraft. [...] might not some officious person become angry? Shout at me? I have finished my sketching. (82)

Paul Klee is aware of the non-aesthetic demands of the real world, but they do not interrupt his aesthetic pleasure. That an *officious* person

might become angry is a graceful touch in a fantasy of art harmonized with military and political realities. Note also the comma after “might not be in trouble,” which makes “because of the missing aircraft” merely non-restrictive additional information.

The Secret Police face the same problem, and, surprisingly, have an exactly parallel response. Their report on Klee approaches the embarrassing problem of the missing aircraft with the same gentle but fastidious attention to detail as Klee’s own meditations on the problem: “The knotty point, in terms of the preliminary report, is that we do not have the answer to the question ‘Where is the aircraft?’” (83). Like Paul Klee, the Secret Police regard the missing airplane from the various perspectives from which that event will be of consequence, considering for example the overall social effects in addition to the particular impact the loss will have on their own careers:

The damage potential to the theory of omniscience, as well as potential to our careers, dictates that this point be omitted from the preliminary report. But if this point is omitted, might not some officious person at the Central Bureau for Secrecy note the omission? Become angry? Shout at us? Omissiveness is not rewarded at the Central Bureau. We decide to observe further the actions of Engineer-Private Klee [...]. (83)

Rather than a mean-spirited or otherwise blameful attitude, they patiently await a more satisfying solution, while taking care to protect themselves.

As they are concerned about their careers, Paul Klee worries that the cost of the aircraft, which is valued at an amount greater than that of all his drawings combined, will be deducted from his pay. Lacking a better solution, Paul Klee falls back on his art:

With my painter’s skill which is after all not so different from a forger’s, I will change the manifest to reflect conveyance of *two* aircraft [...] to Fighter Squadron Five. The extra canvas and ropes I will conceal in an empty box-car. [...] Now I will walk around town and see if I can find a chocolate shop. I crave chocolate. (83)

The Secret Police are absolutely satisfied with this solution and predict that Engineer-Private Klee will go far, but their pleasure in his actions faces a limit: "We would like to embrace him as a comrade and brother but unfortunately we are not embraceable. We are secret, we exist in the shadows, the pleasure of comradely/brotherly embrace is one of the pleasures we are denied, in our dismal service." (*Forty* 84). To step back from this line of humor and interpret it seriously is to see that the fantasy of art-harmonized-with-power, brought to its ideal limit, requires the assurance of artistic independence. The artist may serve the Secret Police, with aesthetic enthusiasm as well as the forger's sureness of detail, but it is a more complete fulfillment of the wish if the artist cannot know that he does serve. The artist, at least in his own fantasy, must not so much transcend as outlast the demands of the State: "I eat a piece of chocolate. I am sorry about the lost aircraft but not overmuch. The war is temporary. But drawings and chocolate go on forever" (84).

Since his death in 1989, several memoirs of Barthelme have appeared, many of which note the muzzled manner of the man who did the writing. Phillip Lopate comments on just this quality in "The Dead Father: A Remembrance of Donald Barthelme":

He was difficult to approach, partly because I (and I am not alone here) didn't know what to do with his formidable sadness, partly because neither did he. Barthelme would have made a good king: he had the capacity of Shakespearean tragic monarchs to project a large, self-isolating presence. (121)

By comparing Barthelme to a king, Lopate alludes to Barthelme's posthumously published novel *The King*, a work which leaves us with a last pour of Barthelme's vintage humor. In between the battles of World War II, King Arthur considers the rumors Lord Haw-Haw spreads about Guinevere; the effects of the atomic bomb upon chivalry are also occasionally considered. The point of the anachronistic wit may be just this: to the degree that we can see fragmentation and entropic decline from a comic rather than tragic perspective, chivalry

is not dead. Readers of Barthelme's stories who know nothing of his life, what with its Lear-like silences, will come away with the impression of a man who took ironies against a sea of trifles and, by posing, upended them.

National University of Singapore

NOTES

¹There are just a few exceptions to this rule. See Courturier and McHale for political commentaries that stay well within the realm of postmodern critical theory: Barthelme is political because he subverts our expectations and brings philosophical certainties into question. Maltby's *Dissident Postmodernists* is the most developed approach to Barthelme as an epistemological activist. Ebert, who discusses Barthelme's subversion of patriarchal entitlement, relates Barthelme's debunking strategies to extra-textual oppression. See for example Wilde, Molesworth and Couturier on interrelations between philosophical attitude and artistic form in Barthelme's work. Also interesting is Wayne B. Stengel's *The Shape of Art in the Short Stories of Donald Barthelme*, a study which divides over one-hundred Barthelme stories into four main types: stories of identity, dialogue, society, and art. The most direct treatment of Barthelme as a writer who comments on extra-textual political events is Stengel's "Irony and the Totalitarian Consciousness in Donald Barthelme's *Amateurs*," a brief study touching on a number of themes developed in this essay. Stengel writes, "At his best Donald Barthelme was a highly moral and political American short story writer" (145). Stengel underlines Barthelme's anti-totalitarian themes, but it does not distinguish Barthelme from very many Cold War authors to do so. In this essay I attempt not just to say what Barthelme was against, but what, in specifically political terms, he was for.

²See Gordon for a chronological review of Barthelme's fiction.

³A third direction might include those stories that involve actual collages or illustrations. Playful as they are, in the McCaffery interview Barthelme has dismissed these stories as products of his own artist-envy.

⁴Barthelme and other prose writers challenge readers with apparently unrelated objects in ways which bring into question the psychological function of art. Ursula Le Guin theorizes that in dreams we experience a series of static objects, but that we form a narrative of these dream-objects upon awakening. Psychotics, the theory goes, are unable to assemble psychic objects into a dream narrative. See her essay, "Thoughts on Narrative" in her essay collection *Dancing at the Edge of the World*.

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“Catholic Shakespeare?”
A Letter in Response to Thomas Merriam^{*}

Dear Sirs,

T. Merriam writes that “Honigmann states incorrectly in ‘Catholic Shakespeare?’ that William was baptised during the reign of Queen Mary. He was born in 1564 during the reign of Elizabeth” (Merriam 104). What I actually wrote was that “it would not be too surprising if Shakespeare, probably brought up as a Catholic (the first child of John and Mary Shakespeare was baptised in the reign of Queen Mary), remained a church papist” (Honigmann 57-58). The first child of Shakespeare’s parents was Joan, baptised on 15 September 1558, two months before Queen Elizabeth succeeded Queen Mary.

Yours sincerely,

Ernst Honigmann

^{*}Reference: Thomas Merriam, “A Letter in Response to ‘Catholic Shakespeare,’” *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 103-04; E. A. J. Honigmann, “Catholic Shakespeare? A Response to Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel,” *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 57-58.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debhonigmann01201.htm>>.

A Response to “‘Across the pale parabola of Joy’: Wodehouse Parodist”*

BARBARA C. BOWEN

This is a thoroughly enjoyable article, which combines interesting information, a plausible general argument, and a keen appreciation of P. G. Wodehouse’s sense of the ridiculous. Leimberg helpfully stresses P. G.’s love of theatre and construction of stories as though they were plays or puppet shows, and discusses parody in a number of novels and short stories.

The most extended analysis is the first, of *A Damsel in Distress* as a parody of Tennyson’s “Maud.” There is one very minor error, on page 58: George had fallen in love with Maud a few minutes before they met, not “long before”; and I’m not entirely convinced that the versifying *Evening News* reporter is meant to be Hilaire Belloc, though P. G. certainly seems to be imitating Belloc’s verse style. But Leimberg’s retelling of the story, and her comments on how the parody works, are excellent, as are the episodes she chooses from “Honeysuckle Cottage” and *Laughing Gas*.

The “pale parabola of Joy” in Leimberg’s title comes from *Leave it to Psmith*, and is the only line P. G. gives us from the poems of Ralston McTodd, whom Psmith is impersonating. Leimberg’s list of nine similarly structured phrases (67) is hilarious, though I wish she had given us the source in all cases (who came up with “The deep larder of illusion”?). There is also new information here about flower-pots (starting with the ones Baxter throws at Lord Emsworth’s window) and P. G.’s fondness for the syllable *ot*. I did know the poem from *Plum Pie* about the printer who printed “not” instead of “now” (and

*Reference: Inge Leimberg, “‘Across the pale parabola of Joy’: Wodehouse Parodist,” *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 56-76.

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

was therefore justifiably shot), but was not aware that Philip Sidney and Mark Twain also enjoyed playing with this syllable.

Leimberg's brief characterisation of Galahad Threepwood as "a true Galahad in purpose, but a Punch in execution" (74) is perceptive, and she is no doubt correct in concluding that P. G. abandoned both direct literary parody and sentimentality in the course of the twenties. There is so much to enjoy here that it seems churlish to point out that the article covers only a few aspects of "Wodehouse Parodist."

Certainly P. G. was an accomplished 'dramatist,' but he was also a brilliant linguist who could pastiche, in a paragraph or a few words, an apparently inexhaustible variety of language contexts. The parable of Joy is a charming parody of 'poetic' language, but I still prefer Cora McGuffy Spotsworth's "Hark to the wavelets, plashing on the shore. How they seem to fill one with a sense of the inexpressibly ineffable" ("Feet of Clay"). And listen to P. G. as the emotional French cook:

"All right? *Nom d'un nom d'un nom!* The hell you say it's all right [...] Not yet quite so quick, my old sport [...] It is some very different dishes of fish [...]" (*Right Ho Jeeves*, ch. 20);

the ponderous German psychologist:

"[...] in 65.09 per cent of cases examined it has been established that at this point [the subject] will with clarity and a sudden falling of scales from the eyes the position of affairs re-examine and to the conclusion will come that he is *auge davonkommen*" (*Hot Water*, ch. 17);

the inhabitant of the Kingdom of Oom, where periphrasis is the normal mode of speech: "O thou of unshuffled features but amiable disposition! Thy discourse soundeth good to me" ("The Coming of Gowf"); the crossword expert:

"Oh, George!" said Susan. "Yes, yea, ay, aye! Decidedly, unquestionably, indubitably, incontrovertibly, and past all dispute!" ("The Truth about George");

or the disillusioned tough American (female) private eye: "Guess I'll be beatin' it [...]. F'all th' bunk jobs I was ever on, this is th' bunk-est" (*Piccadilly Jim*, ch. 24).

These are just a few examples of P. G.'s astonishing ear for speech patterns, which presumably encouraged his delightful technique of juxtaposing characters from quite different *milieux* in the same setting; we are apt to meet, in the stately home of England or the country village, or on the ocean liner, upper-class characters varying in age from the young lovers to the irascible aunt or uncle, alongside servants and crooks in disguise, with perhaps the addition of a temperamental prima donna, a Captain of Industry, a policeman and/or a pig. This melding of literary characters and genres, with the lightest possible touch of satire, is another aspect of P. G.'s parody well worth exploring, and I hope that Leimberg has further installments planned.

Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

An Answer to Barbara C. Bowen*

INGE LEIMBERG

Barbara C. Bowen's response to my paper on P. G. Wodehouse gives me great pleasure. She seems to share my appreciation of Wodehouse's genius and craftsmanship, and she makes a helpful and generous offer of critical debate. This includes some blunders of mine, on which we can easily agree. Wanting to point out that Maud (in *A Damsel in Distress*) entered George's taxi (on page 58) without knowing him at all, while he had fallen in love at first sight with her perhaps a quarter of an hour before, I should have said just that, not "long before"; and identifying that rhyming journalist in the same novel as "Hilaire Belloc," I have tried to be funny but, apparently, succeeded only in being cryptic.

Bowen's question concerning the bibliographical notes to some possible originals of "the pale parabola of Joy" on page 67 is very welcome, because it gives me an opportunity to clear up that chiaroscuro. What happened, was this: I wanted to avoid footnotes, and *Connotations* wanted to stick to MLA usage. Thus, authors of single poems got mixed up with editors of anthologies, and most of the references were assembled in "Works Cited" under the name of "Roberts" (editor of *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*), for only some uncannily keen-sighted readers to detect. My shoddy proofreading shows that I do not belong to that class. The answer to Bowen's

*Reference: Barbara C. Bowen, Response to "'Across the pale parabola of Joy': Wodehouse Parodist," *Connotations* 13.3 (2003/2004): 271-73; Inge Leimberg, "'Across the pale parabola of Joy': Wodehouse Parodist," *Connotations* 13.1-2 (2003/2004): 56-76.

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

question, who invented "the deep larder of illusion," is, by the way, Laura Riding did, in "Nor is it written."

As to Bowen's suggestion to go on with the interpretation of Wodehouse parodist and find other vistas besides literary parody, especially the linguistic one of mixed idioms and dialects, I wholeheartedly agree with her. Her examples are as delightful as they are striking, and they must be an irresistible challenge for a scholar specialized in that field, but only for such a scholar. Take, for instance, Aunt Daliah's temperamental French chef Anatole, mixing his mother tongue with a totally un-Addisonian English, picked up, if I remember rightly, in Chicago! I would spring to the task of solving the mystery of this lingo, if only I could. But I can't, since I am not enough of a linguist and, as to my French, I am, like Bertie Wooster, "more or less in the Esker-vous-avez stage" (*Right Ho, Jeeves*). Literary parody is my job, "Paronomasia in Wodehouse," or "Jeeves and the Cat in the Adage," or "Wodehouse and 'The Ancient Mariner.'" But Barbara C. Bowen has given us an appetite for a very different type of essay, titled, e.g., "This type on my window, making a few faces" (*Right Ho, Jeeves*), and I would suggest that, having given us all those intriguing examples, and having added, moreover, quite a number of equally intriguing interpretive aspects, she has already begun to write the piece. I am sure that *Connotations* would be charmed to publish it.

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster

Analogy and Contiguity: A. S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale**

ANNEGRET MAACK

In her article June Sturrock comments on the interdisciplinary aspects of Byatt's novella "Morpho Eugenia" and concentrates on the many analogies which help the main characters find out who they really are. The present article takes up Sturrock's argument and surveys analogies as well as contiguities in Byatt's work. It then focuses on *The Biographer's Tale* in order to examine how Byatt connects apparently contiguous fragmented parts by her use of metaphor.

The pros and cons of imagery

In the essay "Still Life/Nature Morte," Byatt comments on her novel *Still Life* (1985) and her attempt "to give the 'thing itself' [...]. I wanted at least to work on the assumption that [...] accuracy of description is possible and valuable. That words denote things" (*Passions* 11). She quotes Josipovici's warning of "demonic analogy," which takes up Mallarmé's phrase "démon de l'analogie." Following Mallarmé's and Josipovici's line of reasoning, the discovery of correspondences leads to the realization that "what we had taken to be 'the world' is only the projection of our private compulsions: [...] a bounded world bearing the shape only of our imagination" (Josipovici 299). Although Byatt wanted to avoid analogies and metaphors, she did not succeed—this is illustrated in, e. g., *Still Life*: "I had the idea that I could emphasise contiguity rather than analogy. I found that this was in fact impossible

*Reference: June Sturrock, "Angels, Insects, and Analogy: A. S. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia.'" *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 93-104.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsturrock01201.htm>>.

for someone with the cast of mind I have" (*Passions* 13). According to her understanding of language, naming is a process which creates metaphors: "Adam in the garden named the flora and fauna [...]. But even in the act of naming, we make metaphors" (*Still Life* 302). In *Possession: A Romance*, the poet Ash illustrates this conviction:

The first men named this place and named the world.
 They made the words for it: garden and tree
 Dragon or snake and woman, grass and gold
 And apples. They made names and poetry.
 The things *were* what they named and made them. Next
 They mixed the names and made a metaphor
 Or truth, or visible truth, apples of gold. (464)

In "Morpho Eugenia," Byatt explains: "Names, you know, are a way of weaving the world together, by relating the creatures to other creatures, and a kind of *metamorphosis*, you might say, out of a *metaphor*, which is a figure of speech for carrying one idea into another" (131). Imagery in *Still Life*, especially the sun flowers of Van Gogh and his "Yellow Chair," have been explained by Byatt herself. The many analogies in *Possession* have extensively been commented upon by literary critics; they do not only exist between the poets of the nineteenth and the literary critics of the twentieth century—e.g. between Maud Bailey and Roland Michell, who repeat the love affair of the Victorians Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash; intertextual references support these parallels. The poetry of the Victorians, e.g. Ash's poems, also establishes analogies between characters of Christian and Nordic mythology; Ash speaks of "figuration" (*Possession* 163). According to Hansson, *Possession* can be read as an allegory; "Morpho Eugenia," too, stands in the tradition of "allegorical writing" (453-54). Hansson interprets allegory as a "classic example of double discourse," a model which is appropriate for postmodern literature: "like postmodern literature—[it] avoids establishing a center within the text, because in allegory the unity of the work is provided by something that is not explicitly there" (454).

In the novella “Morpho Eugenia,” parallels between animals and humans are so obvious that reviewers took this as a basis to criticise Byatt and accuse her of “applying the message with a trowel” (Lesser). Her character Matty Crompton, author of the “tale-within-the tale” entitled “Things Are Not What They Seem,” fears that her story contains “too much *message*” (“Morpho” 141). However, in order to understand Byatt’s novels and stories, it is not enough to point out such parallels. Byatt rather follows Genette and writes stories based on an “arrangement of things [which] suggests both contiguity—‘les unes à côté des autres’—and analogy—‘les unes *dans* les autres’” (*Passions* 13).¹

Even though Byatt makes an almost excessive use of analogies and metaphors, warnings about thinking in analogies are to be found throughout her novels. Cassandra in *The Game* criticises: “I hate these simple analogies” (140). In “Morpho Eugenia” analogy is considered a “slippery tool” (“Morpho” 100; cf. Sturrock 99). In a discussion with his father-in-law, who defends his Christian conviction, the scientist William Adamson objects: “You may argue anything at all by analogy, Sir, and so consequently nothing” (“Morpho” 89; cf. Sturrock 97). Adamson himself has to come to terms with his role in the Alabaster family, which resembles that of a drone, before he is able to reject it. To Adamson, being aware of analogies means being able to perform the metamorphosis into a new role. Adamson’s process of recognition is fostered by Matty’s story “Things Are Not What They Seem,” which Byatt herself describes as “a metaphor about metaphor making” (“True Stories” 20). But only the play with anagrams and accidental combinations of letters—contiguous material—reveals the secret of the Alabaster family and leads to the composition of the word ‘phoenix’ which outlines a concept for the transformation of both Matty and Adamson. Campbell’s comment on “Morpho Eugenia”: “In the end, analogies fail to account for lived experience” (145), accentuates the importance of contiguity (“lived experience”) versus the interaction of correspondences.

Byatt’s fictional characters try to avoid “demonic analogy”: In *Babel Tower*, Frederica with “laminations” sketches a concept “[of] Keeping

things separate. Not linked by metaphor or sex or desire, but separate objects of knowledge, systems of work or discovery" (359; cf. Sturrock 93). In *A Whistling Woman*, in a lecture entitled "Metaphors for the Matter of the Mind," Byatt has the (fictitious) cognition psychologist Hodder Pinsky elaborate:

Human beings could not think without such metaphors and analogies, the action potential for an electric jump of comparison must be born with the branchings of the grammatical forms in the embryonic brain to which he had just alluded. But what he intended to do, today, was to make opaque and visible and problematic, these facile and often beautiful metaphors with which human beings tried to think about thinking. (353)

The difference was *endlessly* more instructive than the analogy, said Hodder Pinsky. The analogy is made by the slipperiness of thought with words. [...] But thought is not words, life is not words. (355)

The Biographer's Tale: Analogy vs. "lived experience"

The Biographer's Tale (2000) opens with an epigraph from Goethe's *Elective Affinities*:

Diese Gleichnisreden sind artig und unterhaltend, und wer spielt nicht gern mit Ähnlichkeiten?

These similarities are charming and entertaining, and who does not enjoy playing with analogies?

Byatt thus draws the reader's attention to the fact that analogies are now more important than ever. Her protagonist and first-person narrator Phineas G. Nanson, however, votes for "lived experience" and gives up his dissertation project on "poststructuralist literary theory" in order to deal with factual reality. He opts to write the biography of a biographer and thus be directed by "*things*, [...] facts" (BT 4) in order to avoid ambiguities. He decides to investigate the life of the (fictitious) Scholes Destry-Scholes, who in 1965 presumably drowned in the maelstrom and who himself had written a monumental three-volume biography of the (equally fictitious) Victorian poly-

math Sir Elmer Bole. However, there is little material on Destry-Scholes. Phineas finds only three fragmentary manuscripts written by Destry-Scholes dedicated to three historical personalities, namely the Swedish taxonomist Carl Linnaeus, the statistician Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, and the dramatist Henrik Ibsen.

Dominant metaphors: images of part and whole

Avoiding ambiguities very soon proves to be impossible. Although Phineas' narrative starts with the decision to be guided only by the world of facts, his very first pages contain metaphors which prove to be vital to the novel: The first one is found in the topic of a lecture which Phineas attends and which induces him to drop his post-structuralist dissertation project. It is called "Lacan's theory of *morcellement*, the dismemberment of the imagined body." The image is even intensified by a quote from Empedocles' *Fragments*—"Here sprung up many faces without necks [...]" (BT 1, cf. 214), and the reference to a seminar on *Frankenstein*, and thus to the creature which is composed of parts of dead bodies. To Phineas, putting together separate pieces in order to compose a whole is a process he knows from mosaic-making. "Mosaic-making" (BT 29) recurs in variations throughout the novel and is, at the same time, an image of its structure. Like old stones which can be put together to form new mosaics, quotations assume new meaning in new contexts, a process which Phineas calls "transmission of scholarship" (BT 29). This new meaning of the thus constructed text is again metaphorically described: the newly combined mosaic stones reflect light in a new way—"catching different light from a different angle" (BT 29). Byatt herself confirms that the metaphor "from mosaic-making" becomes the central image of the novel when she describes it as "A patchwork, echoing book" (BT 264). The novel's topic, which in Jensen's words is "the relation of language to things, the arrangement of those things in the world" (23), is reflected on its surface in the combination of different texts, among them Phineas' own narrative, manuscripts by Destry-Scholes, record

cards with his entries, drawings, and extensive quotations from Linnaeus,' Galton's and Ibsen's writings as well as from Pearson's biography on Galton, Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, and a number of further literary sources.

To join random bits together to form a whole, or "[to] piece things together" (BT 33), as Byatt calls it, is Phineas' task. He learns from the manuscript fragments that the three personages in their individual contexts have tried to find an overall structure into which the parts fit, thus "bringing order to the rampant world of creatures and things" (BT 53). Linnaeus' system of naming plants records the distinctive features in a system which relates each plant to other plants. Phineas' research leads to Linnaeus' illustration of *Andromeda polifolia* which the taxonomist describes as:

ficta et vera
mystica et genuina
figurata et depicta (BT 112)

The drawing of *Andromeda polifolia* and the inscription exemplify that, by naming plants, Linnaeus refers to the two levels of metaphoric language, the figurative and the literal. In his research of evolution, Galton uses "composite pictures" by assembling parts of different photographs to form a new portrait. According to Galton, the combination of cells in a body resembles that of individuals in a nation:

Our part in the universe may possibly in some distant way be analogous to that of the cells in an organised body, and our personalities may be the transient but essential elements of an immortal and cosmic mind. (BT 225)

Galton applies his studies of a flock of cattle to the study of human communities. Individual members are similarly "'knit to one another by innumerable ties'—one metaphor drawn from a web" (BT 67). Ibsen describes the process of creating characters as a composition of many details: "He observed those he met on trains like a naturalist [...]" (BT 85). Georg Brandes, whom Byatt mentions in her novel, already commented on Ibsen's ability of constructing "aus kleinen

zerstreuten Wirklichkeitszügen ein ideales und unsterbliches Ganzes“ (Brandes 36). The topic of the quest for the true self—that of the author as well as of his characters—is reflected in Phineas’ own research. Among Destry-Scholes’ record cards, Phineas finds an excerpt from *Peer Gynt*, Peer’s dialogue with the allegorical figure of the “Button Moulder” (BT 233), who melts old buttons and forms new ones out of them. Phineas adds the monologue in which Peer describes the process of peeling an onion layer by layer without finding a core in order to illustrate the process of dismembering a character in search of a centre.

Again and again, Phineas broods over the question why Destry-Scholes wrote about these three precisely, the taxonomist, the statistician, and the dramatist: “Why *these three*?” (BT 236). He asks himself whether Destry-Scholes, like Galton, attempted to create a “composite picture” of the three personages. To Phineas they seem like images in an advertisement, “an image, made up of a series of vertical stripes, for a calculated number of minutes, and then flick, or revolve, the stripes, to constitute (to reveal) a quite other image” (BT 98), which finally make up the picture of Destry-Scholes. Even in his dreams Phineas melts “many images into one image,” which to him appears “as a kind of indisputable vision of the truth” (BT 190).

Phineas discovers more material that lacks order and, thus, meaning. His research leads him to Vera Alphage, Destry-Scholes’ niece, and to a suitcase containing her uncle’s belongings. Together with some disparate objects, such as a cork screw, old socks and a cheese grater, he finds a box with record cards, another one with photographs, and a bag with 366 glass marbles. Phineas’ hope that his findings are “*facts, [...] things, [...] nuggets of pure quiddity*” (BT 165) that reveal Destry-Scholes’ character does not come true. Vera’s taxonomic approach, which is to arrange the marbles according to the enclosed list of names in clusters, succeeds as little as Phineas’ attempt to establish a systematic order to subsume all the record cards.

"Reading signs"—the meaning of things

A second dominant metaphor is the image of the dirty window in the lecture hall which Phineas himself interprets: "a dirty window is an ancient, well-worn trope for intellectual dissatisfaction and scholarly blindness" (BT 2), but at the same time the dirty window is really there, "A *thing*" (BT 2), and not just a trope. Phineas repeatedly experiences his own "blindness." Although as a post-structuralist he has learnt to read signs he does not understand the language of objects: "I was a failure as a semiotician" (BT 143); "I am not very good at codes in real life, or any even glaring semiotic system" (BT 188). On the other hand, he is not able to avoid post-structuralist thinking though he regards it as false: "You decided what you were looking for, and then duly found it—male hegemony, liberal-humanist *idées reçues*, etc." (BT 144). And though Phineas wants to take the Wallace Stevens-quotation—"To find, not to impose" (BT 144; cf. Sturrock 101) as a guide-line, it seems easier "to translate everything [...] into our own Procrustean grid of priorities" (BT 167).

Autobiography instead of biography—analogy of biographer and biographee

Finally, Phineas has to realize that all three documents contain both fact and fiction: Destry-Scholes' description of Linnaeus' impression at the maelstrom is fiction, because he never got there. Galton's expedition never reached Lake Ngami—despite Destry-Scholes' reports (cf. BT 164). The dramatic scene between Ibsen and his illegitimate son and double (cf. BT 88f.) has never taken place, a meeting of father and son cannot be verified. Phineas has to learn that instead of "mapping the mind of Destry-Scholes" (BT 175), he is working on his own life story. He phrases an insight that can already be found in *Possession*, when Maud Bailey describes Cropper's biography on Ash as being "as much about its author as about its subject" (*Possession* 246) and asks: "Whose subjectivity was studied? Who was the subject of the sen-

tences of the text [...]” (*Possession* 250). Even in writing his own story, Phineas cannot escape analogies, because his story is similar to all others: “and all our lives are partly the same story, beginning, middle, end” (*BT* 251).

The maelstrom in which Destry-Scholes presumably drowned, which Linnaeus never reached and which as an origami-imitation decorates the window of the travel agency *Puck’s Girdle*, where Phineas temporarily jobbed, is the destination of Phineas’ own journey, and it is an image for the novel at hand: “this story has funnelled itself into a not unusual shape, run into a channel cut in the earth for it by previous stories” (*BT* 251). For his narrative, Phineas finds ever new images: it is for instance “that segment of the tapeworm” (*BT* 249) or “a snuff movie”; his working process means “*organising* the quarry of secondary materials” (*BT* 227), “stirring and cooking together of disparate things” (*BT* 190), simply overcoming contiguity. Since he is a literary critic, he repeatedly analyses his own language and that of the documents. He particularly classifies metaphors—“mixed metaphors” (*BT* 171), “clichéd metaphors” (*BT* 23), “silly metaphors” (*BT* 26), “dangerous metaphors” (*BT* 238) and “false analogy” (*BT* 156). Phineas deciphers Elmer Bole’s “coded metaphor” of the “red apple” (*BT* 16), which is Bole’s term for his Turkish wife, and the “green apple,” for his English wife, both of whom do not know about each other. He also discovers parallels to his own life story. Phineas leads “two splendidly dovetailed lives” (*BT* 257): with Vera, the radiographer whose photos show a “picture of the inner life” (*BT* 186) of her patients, and with Fulla Biefeld, the entomologist who is devoted to the taxonomy of bees and who includes Phineas in her projects. He eventually gives up the project of writing his own autobiography which he regards as “slippery, unreliable, and worse, imprecise” (*BT* 250) and makes up his mind to work with Fulla in her research programmes. He learns to observe stag beetles and—like Linnaeus—gives them mythological names, “literary names of horned gods—Hern and Moses, Horus and Actaeon” (*BT* 252). He becomes a “second Adam” (*BT* 55), a *Historiens naturalis*, whose task Linnaeus describes: “[he]

distinguishes the parts of natural bodies with his eyes, describes them appropriately [...] and he names them" (quoted in Foucault 161). In her essay "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction," Byatt comments that it is exactly the study of the "Natural world" which makes the observer conscious of analogies:

One of the most peculiar aspects of analogy in the study of the Natural world is mimicry—not the mimicry of the poisonous pharmacophages by the edible, but the walking metaphor visible possibly only to humans. [...] We see eyes in the wing-spots of butterflies, we see the death-head on the hawk-moth, and we recognise the mask of the bluff attitude of the Elephant Hawk-Moth and the Puss Moth. (119)

Phineas continues to take pleasure in writing—setting down the English language" (*BT* 250; cf. Wallhead 294). He uses "synaesthetic metaphors" (*BT* 219), instead of factual language, to describe as accurately as possible the difference of Vera and Fulla:

Vera's scent, which I thought of as silvery, [...] Fulla's [...] which I thought of as golden. [...] Vera [...] is a darting silver fish, a sailing moon in an indigo sky, quicksilver melting into a thousand droplets and recombining. Fulla is gold calyx strenuously spread in gold sunlight, Fulla is golden pollen clinging to bee-fur, Fulla is sailing fleets of dandelion clocks. (*BT* 219)

Fulla wandered the plains of my flesh, causing every hair to rise to her, and inside my nerve-strings sang Vera. (*BT* 216)

While observing beetles in Richmond Park, he experiences what he later calls an epiphany, the appearance of a flock of parrots which he understands as "a sign" (*BT* 254). To him it either means that he has to stay in England with Vera or that he has to travel with Fulla. Phineas realises both options, thus not accepting an "either/or" but only a "both." In *Babel Tower*, Byatt already criticised: "Either/or. Whereas you and I know, it's both-and" (341).

Metaphor as structural principle

Reviewers have severely criticised *The Biographer's Tale* for being "a novel that reads like a research notebook" (Scuor in Campbell 217). Updike complains of "the load of near-random texts" (222), Eder disapproves of its "lovely untidyness." More kindly disposed reviewers realise that the novel is several things at once, a truly hybrid text—"satire," "fairy-tale," and "erudite" (Clark 10). However, the fragmentation of Byatt's text, offending to some critics, is counterbalanced by the author's use of metaphors which are a device for making connections, thus establishing patterns of connectedness. Again and again they illustrate the relation of part and whole, thus forging the disparate parts—the different texts by different authors, photographs and drawings—together, to form a hybrid whole. Jensen's opinion: "the interconnectedness of things [is] made possible by the power of analogy," confirms this reading. Only by imposing an order, by naming and applying metaphors, is Phineas—and through him Byatt—able to make sense of the random, contiguous world of "lived experience," thus suggesting both "'les unes à côté des autres' (contiguïté) et '[...] les unes dans les autres' (analogie)" (Genette 61; cf. *Passions* 13). By repetition and variation of the part/whole metaphors, Byatt simultaneously illustrates the function of metaphors which is "to connect, to blend, to fuse" (Hawkes 41).

Phineas ends his narrative with a well-known quotation from Sir Philip Sidney: "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done [...] Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (BT 259). But he does not agree with his sixteenth-century predecessor: "The too-much-loved earth will always exceed our power to describe, or imagine, or understand it" (BT 259). This "excess" of the natural contiguous world is also discussed by Foucault, again in metaphoric language:

Things and words are very strictly interwoven: nature is posited only through the grid of denominations, and—though without such names it would remain mute and invisible—it glimmers far off beyond them, con-

tinuously present on the far side of this grid which nevertheless presents it to our knowledge and renders it visible only when spanned with language. (160)

Bergische Universität
Wuppertal

NOTE

¹Byatt quotes from Genette, "Metonymie chez Proust" in *Figures III*, who quotes Proust: "toutes les choses, perdant leur aspect premier des choses, sont venues se ranger les unes à côté des autres dans une espèce d'ordre, pénétrées de la même lumière, vues les unes dans les autres" (60).

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Analogies and Insights in “Morpho Eugenia”: A Response to June Sturrock*

DIRK VANDERBEKE

In “True Stories and the Facts in Fiction,” her essay on “the relations of precise scholarship and fiction” (92) and in “The Conjugal Angel” and “Morpho Eugenia,” the novellas published together as *Angels and Insects*, A. S. Byatt mentions the entomologist and ‘father’ of sociobiology E. O. Wilson twice. The first time, the name appears in the last of the three epigraphs:

“I must buy that. It would give me new metaphors.” A poet, my friend, on the telephone, after my enthusiastic recommendation of E. O. Wilson’s *Insect Societies*. (“True Stories” 91)

What sounds like a full endorsement of the exploitation of science for poetic purposes is later retold in a more cautionary vein:

Insects are the object of much anthropomorphising attention—we name their societies after our own, Queen, Soldier, Slave, Worker. I think we should be careful before we turn other creatures into images of ourselves, which explains why I was worried by my poet-friend’s wish to find metaphors in E. O. Wilson’s *Insect Societies*. Wilson’s own extensions of his thought into human sociology have led to anxieties about political correctness, but he does have the ability to make us imagine the *antness* of ants—at least as constructed by this particular scientist. (“True Stories” 115)

The ambivalence expressed in these two quotes is very much at the core of “Morpho Eugenia,” a text in which A. S. Byatt explores the

*Reference: June Sturrock, “Angels, Insects, and Analogy: A. S. Byatt’s ‘Morpho Eugenia,’” *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 93-104.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsturrock01201.htm>>.

process by which humans turn other creatures into images of themselves.

The narrative of “Morpho Eugenia” repeatedly directs our attention both to the multiple analogies between human and insect behaviour and to the inevitability and the dangers of all reasoning through analogy. (Sturrock 98)

However, once the power and dangers of metaphors and analogies are diagnosed, the following questions are necessarily: Who invented the metaphors? And who noticed or made up the analogies? The answers here are ambivalent, as the novella taps into the discourse on Darwinism in the nineteenth century, but, in doing so, also enters the more recent discussion on sociobiology. In my response to June Sturrock’s article, I would like to expand on this aspect and the specific form in which Byatt evokes analogies and, at the same time, challenges arguments based on analogies between human and animals.

The link between humans and social insects like ants has a pedigree going back as far as Darwin—actually, the bee-hive has been a metaphor for a well-ordered state for even longer. In her essay on *Angels and Insects* A. S. Byatt quotes Maeterlinck’s *La vie des fourmis* from 1930, but his earlier work *La vie des abeilles* from 1901 is probably even more important for “Morpho Eugenia.” It is here that he suggests a ‘spirit of the hive’ as the ruling entity of the community of bees—it is something of an anachronism that William Adamson ‘precedes’ Maeterlinck when he muses about a possible “Spirit of the Nest” and asks whether the ants are individuals, or whether they are

like the cells in our body, all parts of one whole, all directed by some mind—the Spirit of the Nest—which uses all, Queen, servants, slaves, dancing partners—for the good of the race itself, the species itself. (*Angels and Insects* 47)

A similar idea was then introduced by William Morton Wheeler in 1911 when he formulated his concept of the animal colony as a superorganism.¹ In literature we find it adapted in T. H. White’s *Book of Merlyn* when King Arthur is transformed into an ant, but also in Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men*, in which the invading Martians

may act as individuals or form a superorganism. In 1971 the idea was brought up again in Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach* with the ant colony now serving as an analogy to the human brain. In their seminal book *The Ants*, Bernd Hölldobler and E. O. Wilson suggest: "The time may have arrived for a revival of the superorganism concept" (*The Ants* 358), and recently the ant-hill was compared not only to the brain, but also to the city, in Steven Johnson's *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities and Software*. Thus, the basic idea of forging an analogy between the ant colony and some aspect of human life is hardly original.

Nevertheless, A. S. Byatt's book is highly original, and I want to suggest that some of its impact derives from the specific form in which the analogy is constructed, not for a trans-historical or essential phenomenon, but only for a comparatively brief moment within the history of a limited environment. In an interview, A. S. Byatt comments about the origin of her novella:

I began with a visual image. I wanted to write a story which combined my obsession with television naturalism with my obsession with Victorian gothic. I thought you could make a really beautiful film which compared an ant heap to a Victorian mansion. And in the middle of the ant heap there's this large fat white queen simply producing children. The question is: is she the power centre, or is she the slave? ("Ant Heaps")

The answer to this question is, once more, ambivalent,² as the matriarch does indeed exercise some power over the servants,³ and, in general, the hierarchy within the mansion is not really challenged. However, there is the moment when the community itself seems to act, although the source of the action remains vague. When William is called to his wife and detects her incestuous relationship with her brother, it is quite unclear who had actually ordered his return to the house and intended the subsequent discovery. Matty's explanation then argues for the presence of some 'spirit of the hive' when she claims that "now and then *the house* simply decides that something must happen" (*Angels and Insects* 177, italics in the original).

I would like to suggest that, in passages like these, Byatt indeed enters the recent discussion on sociobiology and its frequent emphasis on similarities between human and animal behaviour. She is cognizant of its claim that behaviour is at least to some extent genetically encoded and that our genes keep us on a leash the length of which has yet to be determined.

To show how Byatt signals her concern with recent discussions, I need to digress for a moment and focus on some seemingly casual terms which occur on two consecutive pages, as they may well signal the presence of some of the new scientific protagonists and their arguments in the historical context. The terms are 'altruism,' 'Pangloss,' and 'watchmaker.' The word 'altruism' was coined by Auguste Comte in 1851 and, according to the *OED*, introduced in England two years later. In Byatt's novella, it appears in the writings of Harald Alabaster: "We have been accustomed to think of *altruism* and *self-sacrifice* as human virtues, essentially human, but this is not apparently so. These little creatures exercise both, in their ways" (*Angels and Insects* 98, italics in the original). In Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, the term is never used; he speaks of 'love' or 'sympathy' instead. In Harald Alabaster's attempt to defend the Christian faith in the face of Darwinism, the word sounds very much out of place; with the emphasis on 'love' in Alabaster's tract, one would rather expect 'charity' to express the turn from egotism to benevolence. However, it is one of the terms most often discussed in the field of sociobiology, and social insects are very much present in the investigation as to whether altruism may be genetically encoded (cf. for example Wilson 1978, 151-53). Its appearance in "Morpho Eugenia" thus signals Byatt's awareness of its recent significance. Earlier on the same page of "Morpho Eugenia" we find a reference to Pangloss, the schoolmaster of Voltaire's *Candide*, and his firm belief that we live in the best of all possible worlds. Harald Alabaster writes: "We do not have to be Pangloss to believe in beauty and virtue and truth and happiness and above all in fellow-feeling and in love, human and divine" (*Angels and Insects* 98). Indeed, we do not, but while Pangloss has been proverbial

for a long time, it may well be significant in this context that one of the most controversial texts in the discussion on sociobiology was Stephen Jay Gould's and R. C. Lewontin's "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm."⁴

A few lines earlier, the concept of the watchmaker is introduced, however not in the tradition of William Paley and his argument concerning design, with God as the divine watchmaker. Instead, the hypothetical craftsman is presented as a far less benevolent alternative to Alabaster's own firm belief in the Christian concept of creation:

Our God is not a *Deus Absconditus*, who has left us darkling in a barren waste, nor is He an indifferent Watchmaker, who wound up a spring and looks on without passion as it slowly unwinds itself toward final inertia. (*Angels and Insects* 97)

Two contradictory ideas are fused in this image of the watchmaker, the origin of creation and a universe that is running down, and thus the sentence evokes in one image the seemingly contradictory scientific concepts that were so influential in the second half of the nineteenth century. The indifferent watchmaker would, of course, be Darwin's nature itself with the promise that "as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (*The Origin of the Species* 428). But here we also find the intrusion of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and, instead of constant progress and perfection, we face a universe that is doomed to deplete its energy and ultimately end in heat death.⁵ However, there is more at stake than the historical context, for the indifferent craftsman evoked here is strongly reminiscent of *The Blind Watchmaker* as described by Richard Dawkins, the scientific antagonist of Stephen Jay Gould: "Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view" (Dawkins 21). Thus, in a comparatively short passage of the book, some of the most popular exponents of evolutionary theory are, if only implicitly, mentioned, and I suppose that this indicates Byatt's awareness of, and interest in the recent discussion.

However, I want to suggest that her own contribution also remains implicit, i.e. her position cannot be isolated in particular quotations and statements from her protagonists; rather the text in its entirety is the argument.

To make my point, I need to address the ways sociobiological claims about the influence of genes on our behaviour are usually argued and defended.⁶ There are several possibilities, the main ones being the establishment of universals, the discovery of an evolutionary stable strategy, and/or analogous behaviour among animals. If a behaviour or feature exists in all human cultures and thus seems to be a universal feature of humanity, chances are that it is genetically encoded, as the diversity of cultures would indicate that historical contingencies would have had an impact on the particular trait in at least some cultures. Moreover, if a particular behaviour brings about evolutionary advantages in the course of the development of the human race and still exists in a world in which it is no longer necessarily advantageous, it can be argued that it is ingrained in our nature. And, finally, if some form of behaviour can be found in animals such as, for example, our next of kin on the evolutionary scale, but also more distant species like social insects, it goes to prove that this behaviour can be encoded and transmitted non-culturally. Of course, none of these arguments are absolutely conclusive, and since evolution as a historical science cannot be replayed and verified experimentally, there is always room for reasonable doubt. If some behaviour appears in all different cultures, this may also indicate that it is useful in all cultures or that it has spread by a form of intercultural contamination. If human behaviour fits an evolutionary stable strategy it could also result from cultural transmission—and the questions as to when precisely human culture began and what the exact conditions and evolutionary demands were have not yet been answered conclusively. And if some form of behaviour is genetically encoded in animals, this does not prove that a similar behaviour in other beings has to be genetically encoded as well.

However, a closer look at many sociobiological approaches—and, in particular, popularizations and semi-scientific accounts—shows that the searches both for universals and for evolutionary stable strategies are frequently marred by a cultural bias which takes our own culture as a general standard. Consequently, the arguments often rest on the assumption of monogamy as the natural form of partnership among humans, even if this is certainly not a universal in all human cultures. Moreover, the evolutionary advantage of various aspects of courtship, infidelity, jealousy, etc. are constructed in relationship to our cultural environment, and, in the search for analogies in the animal kingdom, those aspects are selected for closer inspection which actually fit some form of animal behaviour. With the enormous amount of species and behaviours, it will always be possible to find something resembling human behaviour.⁷

In A. S. Byatt's novella, the characters are, of course, also biased towards the discovery of similarities with their own culture, and the analogies they find, or construct, are thus restricted in their validity for 'human nature' as such. Life in a Victorian mansion may have seemed natural to a tiny part of humanity within a very limited period of time, but it will hardly appear to be so for the present reader and probably even less for the present scientist. Thus, the 'visual image' that first drew A. S. Byatt to her topic is also one of the aspects that actually undermine the analogy between human beings and the ant heap as presented in her text. One could well argue that the closer the analogy between the Victorian mansion and the ant heap, the less it applies to humanity in all its cultural diversity. Neither can the wider historical context and the specific perspectives on human natures as evoked in Byatt's novella be taken as indications of biological universals, even if they appear as such to the protagonists. A good example is the topic of slavery. In "Morpho Eugenia" it is raised several times, and Matty at one point, possibly cynically, observes that slave-making ant species "resemble human societies in that, as in many things" (*Angels and Insects* 44). In a later passage, slavery seems to be linked to biologically determined aspects of human behaviour,

while culture may offer a chance to overcome this cruel and barbarous practice (cf. *Angels and Insects* 93-94). Of course, the perspective on slavery has changed since mid-Victorian times, and at present it is hardly seen as a natural aspect of human social organization. Consequently, E. O. Wilson treats it as a transitory element of human societies, and its continuity is ultimately counteracted by a recalcitrant biology which differs distinctly from the ants':

The territorial expansion of the state, by making enslavement of other people profitable, temporarily solves the economic problem. Were human beings then molded by the new culture, were they to behave like the red *Polyergus* ants for which slavery is an automatic response, slave societies might become permanent. But the qualities that we recognize as most distinctly mammalian—and human—make such a transition impossible. (*On Human Nature* 80-81)

The historical displacement of the sociobiological discussion in "Morpho Eugenia" thus serves as a comment on the selection of examples and arguments within the recent controversy—and analogy, as the text points out, is indeed "a slippery tool" (*Angels and Insects* 116).

However, another form of analogy may also be detected on a different level. If we look at the ant colony as a superorganism in which a multitude of organisms make up a larger organism, we face a form of self-similarity in which the part resembles the whole to a certain extent. And this self-similar structure can also be found in the novella itself. Within the larger narrative, there is Matty's story "Things are not what they seem." June Sturrock argues that this is a coded warning and invitation to William (95), and, on the level of plot, this is unquestionably the case. But the story goes beyond a simple warning by retelling "Morpho Eugenia" in the guise of a fairy tale with many mythological motifs.

Moreover, later in the text there is also the anagram game which leaves the reader with a riddle, as the word following 'insect' and 'incest' is left out of the narration and we only learn that the next and

last word is 'phoenix.' As June Sturrock points out, the missing word must be 'sphinx,' and thus we once again find a self-similar structure as the four words sum up the complete text.

First [William] must understand the relation between incest and insect—that is, he must see that Bredeley Hall is, like the ant-hills, essentially an incestuous society [...]. Only then is he enabled to see Matty as the sphinx who set him the liberating riddle [...]. After this, he can liberate himself and become like the phoenix, reborn out of his own ashes. (Sturrock 100)

I want to suggest that there is even more to this riddle. The original riddle of the sphinx did not call for the recognition of her identity but for self-awareness. Oedipus, who is conspicuously absent from Byatt's text which evokes the sphinx so often, has to realise that man, i.e. he himself, is the answer to her question. Similarly, he will later have to recognize that he himself is the cause of the catastrophe that devastates Thebes. The problem of self-recognition is, of course, also at the core of many discussions in "Morpho Eugenia." June Sturrock draws attention to a quote from *Possession*: "Are we automata or Angelkin?" (273); for the novella it could be rephrased as 'are we mere beasts or are we something special?' The answer to this question may well be the sphinx, which is half human and half animal,⁸ and thus it is not only William who has to make sense of the anagram game, but also the reader who has to fill in the gap in order to realize that s/he may also be addressed in the solution to the riddle. Moreover, this solution is part of a game; the game itself is part of a self-similar structure, and this structure actually links the narrative to the scientific image of the ant colony as a superorganism. In this regard, Byatt's text argues that story telling and the construction of the scientific concept follow similar patterns, and thus, as June Sturrock points out, "she refuses to accept the division between the 'two cultures' of science and the arts" and her writing is indeed "concerned with the actual operations of the mind, the brain, whether physical or metaphysical" (101).

NOTES

¹Actually the concept is older and can already be found in the writings of Herbert Spencer, but ultimately also in Hobbes' *Leviathan* and various other organicist models of societies.

²Indeed, a similar ambivalence also briefly appears in Hölldobler's and Wilson's book *Journey to the Ants* when they write about the ant heap as a superorganism: "The queen is the heart of this entity in both a hereditary and a physiological sense. She is responsible for the reproduction of the group, both the generation of the parts and the creation of new superorganisms" (37-38). Of course, the queen is the heart of the ant heap only in the metaphorical sense, physiologically she corresponds to the womb as the authors point out later in the same book: "The queen is the reproductive organ, the workers the supporting brain, heart, gut, and other tissue" (110).

³The most obvious candidate for this role seems to be Lady Alabaster ("William felt that this immobile, vacantly amiable presence was a source of power in the household," *Angels and Insects* 31), even though the daughters have now taken over as the reproductive agencies in the mansion. But then in the course of the text Eugenia also seems to develop into an immobile fat queen following the model of her mother.

⁴In this article the authors reject a radical adaptationist and functionalist perspective on evolution with attempts to explain each and every aspect of the organism (including possibly its behaviour) as a genetic adaptation to particular natural demands and circumstances in favour of the concept of organisms as integrated wholes which cannot be reduced to the sum of their genes.

⁵This aspect of Harald Alabaster's writings once more seems a little anachronistic to me. Indeed, Hermann von Helmholtz first formulated his concept of heat death in 1854, but, as Peter Freese points out, "the dire implications of the Second Law were scarcely recognized by the general educated public" (101).

⁶I would like to point out here that my argument does not intend to take sides in the discussion about sociobiology. I am not a biologist and thus I do not feel in a position to evaluate the scientific fundamentals on which sociobiological assumptions rest. However, in a context which addresses human nature as such it is hard to remain completely neutral, and so I have to admit that while quite a few suggestions about evolutionary foundations for complex social interaction have the true ring of just-so stories for me, some sociobiological arguments do sound very reasonable and have influenced my views on human behaviour. But this is of no concern in this paper.

⁷E.g. in their controversial study *A Natural History of Rape* Thornhill and Palmer present their readers with a scorpion fly which is endowed with an appendage that serves as a tool for rape (63-64)—but then it is not exactly clear what the evolutionary link between the scorpion fly and human beings may be.

⁸The motif can also be found in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* where a white sphinx marks the border between the beastly Morlocks and the angelic Eloi.

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