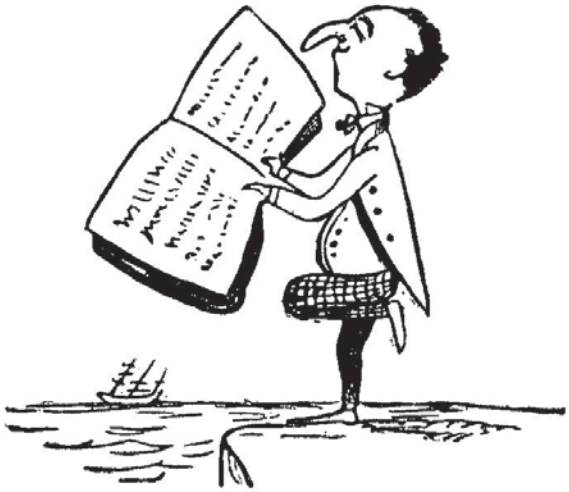
Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



Volume 13 (2003/2004) Numbers 1-2
Waxmann Münster / New York

Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate

Published by *Connotations: Society for Critical Debate*

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Waxmann Münster / New York

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

Printed in Germany
ISSN 0939-5482

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

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Sympathetic Parody (III)

Other ARTICLES and RESPONSES

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Highways and Byways: A Response to Donald Cheney*

ANTHONY ESOLEN

Professor Donald Cheney has done lovers of literature a kindness. He has coined the term "sympathetic parody" to describe how Edmund Spenser replays, in *The Faerie Queene*, the plots and aims of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and indeed the plots and aims of that same *Faerie Queene*. Such a coinage is especially welcome in a time when terms like "irony" and "parody" are too often rolled like tanks out of the munitions roundhouse to level all distinctions among invective, raillery, merry wit, self-deprecation, sly doubt, genial smiling, and old bulky physicalistic burlesque. The term—and what I think is the rich and subtle insight behind it—repays a good deal of pondering, as there surely is a laughter that affirms its object, a laughter that is a mischievous cousin of love itself.

And there is no finer poet to illustrate such an insight than Spenser. He is the self-deprecator *par excellence*, Hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo, pretending to tell stories about dragons and dragonets and knights a-pricking, with gore enough sometimes to turn the paddlewheel at a millrace; yet his humble pose, now and then deliberately lumbering ("Yet never did he dread," says he in a climactic line so bad that only a great poet could get away with it, "but ever was y-drad," I.i.2.9), is at heart a laughing affirmation of his own poetic skill and of the Christianity he has set his mind and pen to celebrate. The faith that claims that the last shall be first, that finds its Savior as an unknown carpenter in the outback of an outback, may well play the Hobgoblin unseating the Olympian deities.

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*Reference: Donald Cheney, "Spenser's Parody," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 1-13.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debcheney01201.htm>.

Spenser surely learned the laughter, though not necessarily the humility, from Ariosto, and may well have learned the sympathy too. Ariosto's treatment of Dante in *Orlando Furioso* borders on wicked burlesque, yet, in the end, the great evil for Ariosto is exactly the same as it was for Dante, ingratitude—the smallhearted thanklessness that caused Satan to fall like lightning from the sky is the same that now causes his, Ariosto's, beloved lady to spurn his erotic advances! We smile, we know that Ariosto is not entirely in earnest about the lady, yet we suspect that he is in earnest, insofar as he can ever be in earnest about anything, when it comes to gratitude. Spenser saw in Ariosto the type of parodist that Professor Cheney sees in Spenser: the poet who wishes to arrive finally at the same place where his predecessor stands—though by taking a few delightful detours. Cheney cannily points out that, for all the humorous and outrageous revisions of Virgil that Ariosto indulges, "at the end of the poem we see Bradamante marrying Ruggiero and founding the Este dynasty, just as Aeneas and Lavinia had founded the Roman line, and as Odysseus had returned to his own family" (6). Dante takes the high road, and Ariosto takes the low road, and Ariosto is in Scotland—and Spain, and Ethiopia, and Bulgaria, and Frisia, and the far-flung isle of Ebuda—before him.

What we make of the subtleties of self-deprecation, canny revision, the irony that cuts and the irony that heals, is another matter. Donald Cheney has ventured into that treacherous land where critical pratfalls abound—the land of the Humor to be Explained. There is nothing for it; if that is where Spenser wants his most cunning readers to go, then go they must, and let them add faith unto their force, and be not faint. And here precisely, in the twilight of quiet laughter, is where he or I or any reader of Spenser can go astray. For example, Cheney notes as self-parody the wonderful moment near the beginning of Book Two, when Spenser says that Una has acquired the honorific nickname, "The Errant Damozell" (7; cf. *FQ* II.i.19.8). What on earth can Spenser be doing here, associating the chaste Una, as it seems, with that coily female monstress Errour, with her double parts

and her labyrinthine tail? But the apparent contradiction compels us to look again, and more deeply, at the meaning of Error, and at the meaning of wandering. The man who is wrapped in "Errours endlesse traine" (I.i.18.9) in one sense wanders everywhere, just as the tail of the monster is all bound up in inextricable knots, but is at the same time caught, stuck, motionless, exactly as if he were locked in a maze. For example, the unshriven knights of the Cistercian *Quest of the Holy Grail* are always on the go, nowhere; but singlehearted Galahad never swerves from his goal and thus is impossible to locate and catch up with. Una too never ceases in her own quest to find Redcross Knight after he has abandoned her. She seeks him everywhere, never resting. In this regard she is wholly unlike the spiritually errant Redcross and the Babylonian harlot Duessa, who are always finding some reason or other to sit down in the middle of nowhere and do nothing, and who do not even make love with any passion (cf. I.vii.3-4).

Thus the true and steadfast Una may go with good angels—I almost wrote "with a will"—anywhere in the world: her heart is ever fixed upon her love; and thus Redcross Knight, before his repentance, may wander anywhere in the world and not really escape one inch from that black hole of a central cave called Error.

The daring re-use of the word "error" in Una's nickname, then, is not so much a self-parody as it is a surprise for the too confident reader: it is the reader's experience of the poem and not the poem itself that is being gently nudged. For there never can be an end to the mysteries of faith and hope and love, and when we think we see all there is to see of them, the poet shows us that we have mistaken ourselves quite. The same thing, I think, happens when Lucifera, the Sataness of Book One, strives, it seems illogically, to outshine herself, "as enuying her selfe, that too exceeding shone" (I.iv.8.9). We register her immediately in our book under Pride, and we see the comic self-contradiction inherent in her attempt to place herself higher than her own parentage, higher than the highest, even higher than anything that might be higher than the highest! But then, as Redcross wakes on the morning of his battle with the great Dragon, Una—Una of all

people, Una who represents the Truth, and the True Church, which is to say a truly Protestant and Calvinist-friendly Church—Una urges Redcross in these proud words:

> The sparke of noble courage now awake,
> And striue your excellent selfe to excell;
> That shall ye euermore renowmed make,
> Aboue all knights on earth, that batteill vndertake. (I.xi.2.6-9)

How can this be? Are we baptizing the House of Pride? But it can be; it must be. "I can do all things," says Saint Paul, "by Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13), for the works of the Christian are the works of Christ: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Just when we thought it was safe to go outside in Faery Land, just when we knew, or thought we knew, that excelling oneself is simply not done, along comes Spenser with the tidings that excelling oneself is precisely the aim of the Christian life: in humility to put on Christ, and in that new man to shine forth those excellences that are not ours by right, but that through the work of Christ within us become ours by grace.

It is this spiraling, this re-examination of terms, this ever deepening view, that characterizes Spenser's poetry. Nor is this dizzying playfulness to be divorced from his desire to see more and more deeply into the truths of the Christian faith, and to present them in such a way that the reader will be forced, at times with a slapstick bump on the noggin, to open his eyes again and peer again and try to see what the poet has seen. We almost lack the words to describe the warm humor of such an enterprise—it may be rather like the flash in the eye of Christ as he compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. But there it is in Spenser; you do not walk twenty feet without it. Professor Cheney justly sees that this is so, and has given us the term "sympathetic parody" for starters. I suspect he knows that he will have to revisit his own term, too—because Spenser's humor is rather like Una, and will be out and about, searching far from the well-beaten highway for the never-changing object of its love.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Parody, Sympathy and Self
A Response to Donald Cheney*

RICHARD A. MCCABE

In his seminal essay on parody Mikhail Bakhtin asserted that "the literary and artistic consciousness of the Romans could not imagine a serious form without its comic equivalent. The serious, straightforward form was perceived as only a fragment, only half of a whole; the fulness of the whole was achieved only upon adding the comic *contre-partie* of this form."[1] This constituted a very significant moment in the modern theorizing of the mode. A relationship that had often been regarded as confrontational—as though parody were synonymous with satire—was presented as not merely sympathetic but directly complementary, as fulfilment rather than negation. The irony, however, was that neo-classical criticism had long been aware of the point although it expressed it in somewhat different terminology. Pope provides a good example. Commenting in the second book of *The Dunciad* (1742) on the passage beginning "As what a Dutchman plumps into the lakes" (405-08), Scriblerus notes that,

> it is a common and foolish mistake, that a ludicrous parody of a grave and celebrated passage is a ridicule to that passage. The reader therefore, if he will, may call this a parody of the author's own similitude in the *Essay on Man*, Ep. iv: *As the small pebble, etc.* but will anybody therefore suspect the one to be a ridicule of the other? A ridicule indeed there is in every parody; but when the image is transferred from one subject to another, and the subject is not a *poem burlesqued* (which Scriblerus hopes the reader will distinguish from a *burlesque poem*) there the ridicule falls not on the thing *imitated*, but *imitating*.[2]

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*Reference: Donald Cheney, "Spenser's Parody," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 1-13.

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This is not necessarily the impression one might gain from a casual reading of the *OED* which defines parody as "a composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects." On closer inspection, however, this is far from saying that the purpose of parody is to debunk its original. Parody is rhetorically well armed to deliver the effect of ridicule, but that is merely one of its effects. As Gerard Genette has argued, the relationship between hypotext (source) and hypertext (imitation) may range from the hostile to the indulgent.[3] In the *Poetics*, Aristotle recognised 'parodia' as a separate genre originating with Hegemon, but also recognised its ambivalent relationship to epic by ascribing the *Margites* to Homer (1448a-b). Scriblerus was joking in earnest when he represented *The Dunciad* as Pope's third 'Homeric' work (after the translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and the *Margites* as Homer's *Dunciad*.[4] Throughout ancient criticism the term 'parodia' was applied to diverse techniques of quotation and imitation whether the intention was satiric or not.[5] Intertextuality was always involved but serving many different purposes. Indicative of this attitude is the definition of 'parodia' supplied in Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary*: "(counter-song), a reply retaining nearly the same words or the same turn, a parody." Viewed in terms of 'reply' or response, literary criticism is now, perhaps, the most vibrant form of parody, constantly quoting, contextualizing and recontextualizing "nearly the same words" from a variety of conflicting viewpoints.

Lewis and Short lend weight to Bakhtin's speculations, but the weakness in his position was the creation of too absolute a dichotomy between the 'serious' and the 'parodic,' between Virgil and the 'numerous parodies of Virgil' that he believed to have been rejected or suppressed by the dour keepers of the canon "upon whom the transmission of this heritage depended." By positing a 'serious' mode constituted by "straightforward genres and direct discourses, discourses with no conditions attached" he occluded the actual polyva-

lence of the genres concerned.[6] He missed the parody within, the self and self-reflexive parody producing a variety of meta-discursive effects. The protracted controversy as to whether Eumolpus's poem on the civil war, inserted into Petronius's *Satyricon* (119-24), does or does not perform a parodic critique of Lucan's *Pharsalia* is merely one case in point. An even better example is the emergence of Aeneas from Virgil's underworld, carrying the vision of Rome's imperial destiny, through the gate of ivory, expressly identified by the narrator as the gate of false dreams (VI.893-98). Under certain circumstances mock-epic may be integral to epic, a vital 'condition' attached to its discourse. By the Renaissance it was well understood that an epic might, with perfect decorum, display "a mixture of styles as modulations on a basic style, which is supposed to be grand."[7] Scriblerus's caution is therefore well taken: the genre we now term 'mock-epic' is generally sympathetic, rather than antipathetic, to that we term 'epic.' In view of the fact that mock-epic is largely dependent upon epic for its effect, this is hardly surprising. To a reader unfamiliar with the conventions, topoi and language of epic, the mock-epic joke must inevitably fall flat. The relationship between the two genres is rather symbiotic than oppositional, and the benefits are by no means entirely one way. A recent translator reminds us that in creating the *Orlando Innamorato* Boiardo was "the first to see the potential for humour and humanization in the deep discrepancy between the Arthurian themes of love and magic and the stolid righteousness of traditional Carolingian characters."[8] Again and again he throws his heroes into comic relief yet, as Graham Hough notes, "his admiration for the virtues of chivalry is whole-hearted and perfectly genuine."[9] So genuine that Ariosto fashioned the *Orlando Furioso* out of the same materials.

An equivalent 'mixing' of styles may be seen in *Paradise Lost*. Dryden famously alleged that Milton had made the Devil his 'hero' instead of Adam but failed to notice how that 'heroism' is deliberately and repeatedly offset by descent into the grotesque. Few epic heroes are to be found "squat like a toad" by a lady's ear (IV.800).[10] Satan's value system aligns him to those, both ancient and modern, who are

alleged to have ignored "that which justly gives heroic name / To person or to poem" (IX.40-41) in favour of,

> Wars, hitherto the only argument
> Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect
> With long and tedious havoc fabled knights
> In battles feigned; […]. (IX.28-31)

According to this account, 'mock' epic is discovered at the heart of the epic tradition, parody at the very centre of the heroic. One reader's hero is another reader's Hudibras. It might, therefore, be more accurate to say that Milton made Satan the hero of the great mock-epic contained within his 'higher argument.' Yet the result, according to Dryden, was a lack of containment that transformed *Paradise Lost* into a travesty of heroic romance, one in which the 'giant' foils the knight and drives him "out of his stronghold, to wander through the world with his lady errant."[11] Similarly, the attempt to describe celestial matters in terrestrial terms—and on the part of one "not sedulous by nature to indite / Wars" (IV.27-28)—produces a rich vein of irony in the description of the war in heaven.

In commenting upon the form of *The Dunciad*, Scriblerus was drawing upon a long tradition. In the prose preface to the first of his *Silvae* Statius lists Homer's *Batrachomyomachia* and Virgil's *Culex* as playful preludes to the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. "Nor," he remarks, "is there any of the great poets who has not made prelude to his works in lighter vein" ["nec quisquam est inlustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit"].[12] As the Homeric translations, and even the surviving fragment of the *Brutus*, serve to remind us, Statius's remark is also highly applicable to Pope, whose early mastery of mock-epic by no means signalled an antipathy to epic nor diminished his personal aspirations in the heroic mode. Such 'parody' as *The Rape of the Lock* affords is very much in the nature of a highly complex, intertextual game played for the benefit of sophisticated, classically educated readers. So far as the classical models are concerned the attitude is rather ludic than satirical. In the case of *The Dunciad* the point is emphasised by Scriblerus's choice of example.

This is not merely an instance of Pope 'parodying' Pope, but an instance of Pope parodying Pope on the very issue of self and self-love:

> Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
> As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
> The centre moved, a circle straight succeeds,
> Another still, and still another spreads. (*Essay on Man* IV.363-66)

> As what a Dutchman plumps into the lakes,
> One circle first, and then a second makes:
> What Dulness dropped among her sons impressed
> Like motion from one circle to the rest. (*Dunciad* II.405-08)

It is doubtful how many of Pope's readers would have made the connection if the annotator had not pointed it out. But his intervention is highly appropriate in that it raises more general thematic associations between *An Essay* and *The Dunciad*. Dullness, we learn, is no less self-centred than social benevolence. "See all in *self*," councils the "gloomy clerk" of *Dunciad* IV, "and but for self be born" (480). It is no mere coincidence that Cibber, the prime object, or subject, of ridicule in the edition of 1742, was the author of a celebrated autobiography. In one sense Pope is indeed parodying himself but by so doing demonstrating how far he rises about *dull* solipsism. The fact that he can laugh at himself implies that he is not laughable. The joke is at his own expense yet highly sympathetic to a man, and a work, that had been mercilessly pilloried by others. By contrast, as Scriblerus proceeds to say, when "Old Edward's armour beams on Cibber's breast" the satire "falls neither on old king Edward, nor his armour, but on his *armour-bearer* only." Parody, he concludes, judiciously discriminating between literary benefits and personal injuries, "has always a good effect in a mock-epic poem."[13]

Amongst Pope's most illustrious predecessors in the vein of mock-epic was Edmund Spenser, translator of the *Culex* (as *Virgils Gnat*) and creator of *Muiopotmos: or, The Fate of the Butterflie*. But Spenserian parody was by no means confined to the shorter poems. In a recent article in *Connotations,* Donald Cheney calls attention to the rich vein of parody to be found even within *The Faerie Queene*, a phenomenon

facilitated by the highly 'mimetic' nature of the text since 'parody,' as we have seen, embraces a wide range of allusive and imitative techniques. "If you are looking for sympathetic parody," Cheney suggests, "all you need is to find the family romance in the text"—and particularly so where an author is keen to fight off the 'anxiety of influence' while simultaneously staking his claim to be part of the tradition that produces such 'anxiety.'[14] As an instance of 'sympathetic parody,' Cheney calls attention to the way in which the opening lines of *The Faerie Queene* conflate the (pseudo) Virgilian opening of the *Aeneid*, "Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena," with the 'parody' produced by Ariosto, "Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori":

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
> As time her taught in lowly Shepheards weeds,
> Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
> For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,
> And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds. (I.Proem.1)[15]

One feature of these lines that Cheney does not mention deserves particular attention in relation to parody: the use of the term "maske." Within *The Faerie Queene*, in one of the poem's closest approaches to formal mock-epic, we encounter "that masked Mock-knight," Braggadocchio, whose repeated exposure provides matter of "sport and play" to the whole company (IV.iv.13). The coincidence of masked muse and masked mock-knight emphasises the strongly ludic element in Spenser's various authorial *personae*. There is nothing similar to this in the opening lines of Virgil or Ariosto. In Spenser, however, the authorial *persona* is obsessively self-conscious in a manner that typically combines assertions of prowess with professions of humility. These are, of course, 'conventional' poses to strike, yet they encode a very immediate circumspection. The figure of Colin Clout, "under which name this Poete secretly shadoweth himself," hovers uneasily between self-promotion and self-critique, providing a means of simultaneously advancing and ironizing the self. The association between his amorous and literary aspirations is revealed in "October" when we learn that "some" readers "doubt," as does "E. K.," that there is

any distinction between the pastoral poet Colin and the would-be epic poet Cuddie. In other words, the dejected poet is a *persona* of the rejected lover—or perhaps it is the other way around. In the closing lines of *The Shepheardes Calender*, yet another *persona*, one disarmingly named Immerito, advises himself "not to match thy pype with Tityrus hys style"—a dictum contradicted by the preceding assertion that his *Calender* will last forever—"nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman playde a whyle."[16] The latter clause is somewhat cryptic: the highly moralistic *Ploughman's Tale* was generally ascribed to Chaucer in the Elizabethan period but the notion that the pilgrim 'played' the ploughman, or the ploughman 'played' the pilgrim, and then only for 'a while,' underlines the fictive nature of both *personae*. The 'real' Chaucer is far to seek and would, in any case, be appropriated into the Spenserian narrator when *The Squire's Tale* was rewritten, or sympathetically parodied, as *The Legend of Friendship*. Again and again Spenserian 'parody' relates to the complexity, or multiplicity, of the self.

In the second canto of *The Legend of Holinesse*, for example, Archimago, the poem's great mock-magus, disguises himself to deceive Una. The results are presented as follows:

> In mighty armes he was yclad anon
> And silver shield, upon his coward brest
> A bloudy crosse, and on his craven crest
> A bounch of haires discolourd diversly;
> Full iolly knight he seemde, and well addrest,
> And when he sate upon his courser free,
> *Saint George* himself ye would haue deemed him to be. (I.ii.11.3-9)

The description would be familiar to every attentive reader since it constitutes a form of deliberate self-misquotation. The 'false' St George is a parody, or caricature, of the true:

> Y cladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
> Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
> The cruell markes of many a bloudy fielde;
> Yet armes till that time did he never wield:
> His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
> As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:

> Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
> As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt. (I.i.1.2-9)

The complication, of course, is that while the false St George is disconcertingly similar to the true, the 'true' St George is disconcertingly similar to the false: in fact, Archimago succeeds only because "the true *Saint George* was wandred far away" (I.ii.12). Which, then, is the 'parody' of which? To readers familiar with the traditional iconography, the Redcross Knight's arms 'quote' those of the saint, "yet armes till that time did he never wield." Both the 'true' and the 'false' St George merely 'seem' to be what they appear to be. Both are "ycladd" in arms that are not their own, and the word "ycladd" rings heavily thereafter: the "loftie trees" of the Wood of Error are "yclad with sommers pride" (I.i.7) and, more perilously still, Archimago, who conjures up the lascivious parody of Una that sends Redcross wandering far away, is "in long blacke weedes yclad" (I.i.29). The self-discovery of the 'true' George is the work of Spenser's allegory. Looking at the opening lines again in this connection, one notes not the fulfilment but the elision of the Virgilian 'rota': "et egressus silvis vicina coegi / ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono, / gratum opus agricolis" ("leaving the woodland, I constrained the neighbouring fields to serve the husbandmen, however grasping—a work welcome to farmers"). Herein lies the most witty and certainly most 'sympathetic' parody of all. By exploiting the etymology of the name George (then commonly derived from 'geos' and 'orge,' earth and tillage), Spenser will replace Virgil's agricultural *Georgics* with a spiritual equivalent by making a saint of a child found in the 'furrow' of a tilled field:

> Where thee a Ploughman all unweeting fond,
> As he his toylesome teme that way did guyde,
> And brought thee up in ploughmans state to byde,
> Whereof *Georgos* he thee gave to name. (I.x.66.3-6)

Spenser's spiritual 'Georgics' will be welcome to tillers of the soul not the soil.[17]

More daring still, if we pursue Cheney's advice to "find the family romance in the text," is the astonishing use of Chaucer's mock-epic

poem *Sir Thopas* as a source for Arthur's dream-vision of Gloriana, an unprecedented instance of subtextual subversion. With so much 'serious' romance material available, what exactly was the point of this? Andrew King comments that "if Spenser's admiration for Chaucer cannot be questioned, then neither can his own lively irony. Spenser's subversively 'serious' reading of *Sir Thopas* disarms Chaucer's irony and his criticism of native romance." "Spenser," King concludes, "draws upon the same romances which Chaucer had satirized, and in a few instances even named, in Sir Thopas." Examples of the sort are *Bevis of Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick* and *Lybeaus Desconus*.[18] This is a very well observed point, but we need to ask how unsympathetic Chaucer actually was to the tradition that *Sir Thopas* burlesques, a tradition that includes *The Knight's Tale* and much of *Troilus and Criseyde*? May we not rather see *Sir Thopas* (a tale wittily assigned to Chaucer's own narrative *persona*) as a medieval *Don Quixote*, drawing its own imaginative strength from the tradition it appears to mock? And one also wonders how 'seriously' Spenser has taken Chaucer's parody. The dream-vision occurs during the *enfance* that Spenser has created for Arthur, when "first the coale of kindly heat appeares / To kindle love in every living brest" (I.ix.9). But Arthur rejects this "kindly heat," scorns "that idle name of love" and cruelly ridicules other lovers. By his own account he "ioyd to stirre up strife, / In middest of their mournfull Tragedy, / Ay wont to laugh, when them I heard to cry" (I.ix.10). His apparent emotional "libertie" is taken as a sign of divine favour: "the heavens with one consent / Did seeme to laugh on me" (I.ix.12). But the heavens' last laugh is at Arthur's own expense and Spenser greatly enforces its poetic justice by drawing upon *Sir Thopas* rather than any of a multitude of other texts that might have provided a 'serious' analogue. The scornful young knight learns the hard way that in matters of the heart the sublime and the ridiculous meet:

> Me dremed al this nyght, pardee,
> An elf-queene shal my lemman be
> And slepe under my goore.

"An elf-queene wol I love, ywis,
For in this world no womman is
Worthy to be my make
In towne;
Alle othere wommen I forsake,
And to an elf-queene I me take
By dale and eek by downe!" (VII.787-96)[19]

[…]
Me seemed, by my side a royall Mayd
Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:
So faire a creature yet saw never sunny day.

Most goodly glee and lovely blandishment
She to me made, and bad me love her deare,
For dearely sure her love was to me bent,
As when iust time expired should appeare. (I.ix.13.7-9; 14.1-4)

Given its prominence in the opening canto, the word 'seemed' sounds disconcerting on Arthur's lips, and so too is his subsequent Thopas-like profession to follow his vision "whether dreames delude, or true it were." The problem, as we have seen, had illustrious precedents: false dreams were one of Virgil's major concerns. But, as T. P. Roche has noticed, Spenser's own opening canto had already introduced the subject of delusive dreams in direct connection with "blandishment."[20] As the false Una appears to the sleeping St George, we are told, "then seemed him his Lady by him lay" (I.i.47). He awakens to find her apparently standing by him "with gentle blandishment and lovely looke, / Most like that Virgin true" (49). Even more disconcertingly, Arthur awakens to find "nought but pressed gras, where she had lyen" (I.ix.15). Spenser had been over such terrain before in the "Aprill" eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*. Pondering the mysterious nature of "fayre Elisa," Thenot asks "O quam te memorem virgo?" ["How shall I address you, maiden?"] borrowing his words from Aeneas's address to a disguised Venus. Hobbinol replies "o dea certe" ["surely a goddess"] borrowing from the succeeding line (*Aeneid* I.328). Yet the context is anything but reassuring. In the *Aeneid*, Venus demonstrates her true identity, and her divinity, by disappear-

ing, leaving her frustrated son to complain "quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus?" ["why, cruel woman, do you mock your son so often with delusive phantoms?"] (407-08). In raising the spectre of delusion, both passages capture something of the elusive quality of Elizabeth's royal favour. The fairy mistress, as Helen Cooper has recently argued, was a very ambivalent image under which to figure England's monarch.[21] But for that very reason it provided a means of negotiating with the thorny subject of female regiment, a means of insinuating critique into eulogy. The parodies of the *Aeneid* and *Sir Thopas* point in the one direction. Spenser's queen was "fairy mistress" to a number of suitors—Leicester, Anjou, Essex, Ralegh—to whom she made "louely blandishment" only to leave them, like Keats's "Belle Dame sans Merci," pale and wan on the cold hillside with little more, metaphorically speaking, than "pressed gras, where she had lyen." For them "iust time" was fated never to "appear." The parody of the parody of *Sir Thopas* reflects not merely on Arthur but on his lady also, bringing out the mischievous elf in the glorious fairy queen. Throughout the wider poem the queen's sovereignty is figured in Gloriana but her private person, Spenser tells Ralegh, "I doe expresse in Belphœbe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phœbe and Cynthia being both names of Diana)."[22] This recollection of the hopeless, depressive desire of the "Ocean" (Wa'ter being Elizabeth's pet name for Ralegh) for the "Moon," is sufficient to indicate a level of discontent in the portraiture. If Gloriana is largely confined to the role of unmoved mover, the narrative finds in Belphœbe an incarnation who can participate in ongoing events. She proves erratic precisely because of the ironic disparity between royal icon and Tudor reality, because Elizabeth was not, and never could be, "dea certe." It is therefore fitting that we first encounter Belphœbe in a richly mock-heroic context, in her meeting with the masked mock-knight, Braggadocchio. Trompart announces his master (who is, in fact, cowering in a bush) as "my Lord, my liege, whose warlike name, / Is farre renowmd through many bold emprise" (II.iii.35). "With that," comments the narrator,

"he crauld out of his nest, / Forth creeping on his caitive hands and thies." Belphœbe's appearance at this point has been described as an instance of "conspicuous irrelevance" but its mock-heroic context anticipates with delicious proleptic irony her emotionally undignified encounters with Timias in books three and four, episodes that allegorise in embarrassing detail Elizabeth's tortuous relationship with Ralegh, the man credited with first "fashioning" the "conceipt" of Cynthia.[23]

One of the hallmarks of *The Faerie Queene* is the element of self-parody that pervades it on almost every level. For every heroic image there is an unheroic double virtually indistinguishable from the real thing: a true and false St George, a true and false Una, a true and false Florimel, a true and false Venus and Adonis. The die was cast from the moment that Spenser decided to reflect his monarch "in mirrours more then one" (III.Proem.5). Mirrors not only reflect but also, necessarily, distort. They never quite show the self nor ever quite fail to show it. Hence the anxiety in the period, and the poem, to distinguish between true and false "glasses" (VI.Proem.5). Ben Jonson, one of Spenser's acutest readers, evokes the topos perfectly when he has Epicure Mammon announce in *The Alchemist* how he will have,

> my glasses,
> Cut in more subtill angles, to disperse,
> And multiply the figures, as I walke
> Naked betweene my *succubæ*. (II.ii.45-48)

Later in play the "Queen of Faery" is introduced as nothing more than a fraud to cheat a gullible clerk.[24] Her minister is Subtle, disguised as a "Priest of Faery," just as Spenser's Lucifera, audaciously described as "a mayden Queene, that shone as *Titans* ray" is attended by the 'wizard' Avarice—and five other deadly sins (I.iv.8-36).

The true and false Genius of the Garden of Adonis and the Bowre of Blisse encapsulate on a wider philosophical plain all of the particular contrasts between true and false, heroic and mock-heroic, that pervade the poem and problematise the very concept of the 'self.' The effect is all the more acute in that Bowre and Garden are not so much

polar opposites as (to borrow a term from Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) "polar twins." Whereas the false Genius "doth us procure to fall" through "guilefull semblaunts, which he makes us see," the true Genius attempts to offset this by allowing us to foresee "straunge phantoms." How we are to distinguish between "semblaunts" and "phantomes" remains unclear since both Genii operate "secretly" (II.xii.47-48). The false Genius is "quite contrary" to the self yet also somehow integral to it. Appropriately it is within this delusive domain, where art is at its most deceptive, that Spenser supplies, in his use of Tasso, one of the most blatant instances of 'parody' to be found in the poem. Guyon's approach to Acrasia's inner sanctum is set to enchanting music:

> So passeth, in the passing of a day,
> Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre,
> Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
> That earst was sought to decke both bed and bowre,
> Of many a Ladie, and many a Paramowre:
> Gather therefore the Rose, whilest yet is prime,
> For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre:
> Gather the Rose of love, whilest yet is time,
> Whilest loving thou mayst loved be with equall crime. (II.xii.75)

This song, as has long been recognised, is translated virtually verbatim from the sixteenth canto of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

> Così trapassa al trapassar d'un giorno
> de la vita mortale il fiore e 'l verde;
> né perché faccia indietro april ritorno,
> si rinfiora ella mai, né si rinverde.
> Cogliam la rosa in su 'l mattino adorno
> di questo dì, che tosto il seren perde;
> cogliam d'amour la rosa: amiamo or quando
> esser si puote riamato amando. (XVI.15)[25]

The closeness of the translation is self-evident but there is one crucial, contextual difference. In Tasso the singer, identified in Spenser merely as "some one," is a parrot. During this period, as we gather from Shakespeare's *Othello*, to "speak parrot" was synonymous with

speaking nonsense (II.iii.275), and Tasso's identification of the singer ironizes the advice proffered by the song. But the effect is more subtle still. In mimicking human language, widely regarded as one of the distinguishing characteristics of humanity, parrots unwittingly parody it. Tasso's parrot sings 'in a language like our own' ("la voce sí ch'assembra il sermon nostro"). Edward Fairfax supplies the translation "her leden was like humaine language trew"—*like* 'true' human language yet not quite 'true' human language.[26] This is why parrots fascinate us. They raise profound questions about the relationship between sound and sense, between what is merely said and what is really understood. The message of the song—*carpe diem*—has been parroted from generation to generation, but has anyone really understood it? Is it no more than senseless repetition? If so, what can be said of the literary mimesis that here repeats it yet again? Is Tasso Spenser's true or false poetic Genius?

In enumerating the qualities requisite for a poet in his *Discoveries*, Ben Jonson counselled that

> the third requisite in our *Poet* or Maker, is *Imitation*, to bee able to convert the substance, or Riches of an other *Poet*, to his owne use. To make choise of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him till he grow very *Hee*: or, so like him, as the Copie may be mistaken for the Principall.

Yet this must not be done "servilely" but rather in such a way as "to draw forth out of the best, and choisest flowers, with the Bee, and turne all into Honey." As the bee imagery is borrowed (ultimately) from Seneca, the passage practices what it preaches.[27] In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser appears at first sight to assume the role of the parrot repeating, or stealing, Tasso's words, growing "very *Hee*." Yet he is careful to do so in a context that both replicates and distinguishes itself from the original. The "song," although it brings the two poems so close together as to touch, becomes the focal point for their disparity. Armida loves Rinaldo, but Acrasia strives to destroy Verdant. In Tasso the gardens are destroyed by Armida herself, in Spenser by Guyon. In Tasso Armida and Rinaldo are reconciled, in Spenser Verdant must abandon Acrasia. The danger of any further association is

neatly indicated at the opening of the next book when Guyon rushes unthinkingly against St George, spurring his horse "whose fierie feete did burne / The verdant grasse" (III.i.5). The choice of adjectives ("fierie" and "verdant") constitute a parodic comment on the incipient intemperance of the man who has just saved Verdant from combustion in the "fierie beames"of Acrasia's eyes (II.xii.78). Interestingly, in the revised *Gerusalemme Conquistata* the reconciliation between Armida and Rinaldo is excised—indicative, perhaps, of the poem's wider shift from "liberation" to "conquest." Yet the song of the rose remains beautiful despite Spenser's decision to end it with the very non-Tassitan words "equall crime," and generations of readers have been greatly discomfited by the subsequent destruction of the gardens.

One of the strangest effects of parody is the persistence of 'sympathy' despite opposition. As I have argued elsewhere, something very similar happens when Spenser sets out, in what is apparently the most unsympathetic mode and context, to parody Gaelic bardic poetry in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*.[28] I do not wish to rehearse that argument here but rather to relate it to the subjects in hand, sympathy and antipathy. Like Tasso's song of the rose, bardic poetry is also allegedly associated with 'crime'—in fact with the "equall crime" of Gaelic and Gaelicised Old English families. To Irenius it suggests how "evill thinges beinge decte and suborned with the gaye attire of goodlye wordes maye easelye deceaue and Carrye awaie the affeccion of a yonge minde that is not well stayed […]."[29] Poetry, it is said, is what gets lost in translation—and particularly, one might have thought, translation into prose. In order to illustrate Irenius's point, Spenser produces a prose travesty of an unidentified bardic poem which is meant to stand as an epitome of bardic poetry in general. In doing so he strips that poetry of its complex metres, its dense mythology, its traditional forms of address and compliment, its intricate structure and stylised diction. Yet something of the energy and strength of the original survives the exercise. That is merely one irony of the situation, another is even more striking. One of Bakhtin's most

valuable insights was how in parody—as often also in translation—two different voices converge in a manner that threatens not merely to elide difference but to turn parody into self-parody. In ventriloquizing the bard, Spenser risks the exposure of the 'bardic' element within himself, not, that is to say, the true Genius of bardic verse evident in the original, but his own caricature of that voice, the false Genius, with its alleged attraction to indiscriminate violence and even to 'savagery.' In other words, the parody threatens to render the caricature self-reflexive. "Theoretically," Bakhtin notes, "it is possible to sense and recognize in any parody that 'normal' language, that 'normal' style, in light of which the given parody was created. But in practice it is far from easy and not always possible."[30] Tasso's sympathy for Armida inflects and partially subverts Spenser's own hostility towards Acrasia, just as the bardic cult of heroism, with its rejection of courtly luxury, inflects the vibrant rhetoric of Irenius's parody to betray a latent similarity between ventriloquist and victim. One might even call it a latent sympathy.

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NOTES

[1]M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 58.

[2]Alexander Pope, *Alexander Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers, Oxford Standard Authors (Oxford: OUP, 1993) 487-88. All quotations are from this edition.

[3]Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

[4] Pope 420.

[5]Fred W. Householder, "Paroidia," *Classical Philology* 39 (1944): 1-9.

[6]Bakhtin 58-59.

[7]Annabel M. Patterson, *Hermogenes and the Renaissance: Seven Ideas of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1979) 177.

[8]Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, trans. Charles Stanley Ross (Oxford: OUP, 1995) xiii.

[9]Graham Hough, *A Preface to* The Faerie Queene (London: Duckworth, 1962) 23.

[10]All quotations are from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971).

[11]John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. George Watson, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1962) 2: 233.

[12]Statius, *Silvae*, trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1928) 1: 3.

[13]Pope 488.

[14]Cheney 1.

[15]All quotations are from *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche with the assistance of C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978). All Virgilian quotations are from *Virgil*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986).

[16]*Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999) 13, 38, 133, 156. All shorter poems are quoted from this edition.

[17]For Spenser and the *Georgics* see further Andrew V. Ettin, "The *Georgics* in *The Faerie Queene*," *Spenser Studies* 3 (1982): 57-72; Jane Tylus, "Spenser, Virgil, and the Politics of Labour," *ELH* 55 (1988): 53-77.

[18]Andrew King, The Faerie Queene *and Middle English Romance: The Matter of Just Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 9-11.

[19]All quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

[20]T. P. Roche, "The Menace of Despair and Arthur's Vision, *Faerie Queene*, I.9," *Spenser Studies* 4 (1984 for 1983): 71-92 (74-75).

[21]Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 173-217.

[22]*Shorter Poems* 16.

[23]Harry Berger, *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book 2 of Spenser's* Faerie Queene (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957) 125-46.

[24]Ben Jonson, *Works*, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1925-52) 8: 319, 356-59.

[25]All quotations are from Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, ed. Anna Maria Carini (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961).

[26]Edward Fairfax, *Godfrey of Bulloigne: A Critical Edition of Fairfax's Translation of Tasso's* Gerusalemme Liberata*, together with Fairfax's Other Poems*, ed. Kathleen M. Lea and T. M. Gang (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1981) 451.

[27]Jonson 8: 638-39; 11: 284.

[28]Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: OUP, 2002) 47-51.

[29]Edmund Spenser, *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al., Variorum Edition, 11 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1932-58), 9 (1949): 125.

[30]Bakhtin 76.

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Falstaff's Vocation: A Response to Arthur F. Kinney*

DAVID LAIRD

Arthur F. Kinney has written a masterful essay, well-argued and researched.[1] He contends that Falstaff so abuses language that he loses touch with his audience both on and off the stage and ends up talking to himself. Falstaff executes a series of brilliant parodies but eventually becomes the object of parody or something worse, a dead letter, forgotten, alone and out of action.[2] His verbal high jinks, trickery, and evasions cease to engage those on whom he depends. The hinge of the argument turns on the following: "But a good hard look will show that Falstaff's wit subscribes not merely to inventiveness but, finally, pays allegiance to solipsism" and, even more emphatically, that his language "ceases to function in any reliable way" (123, 124). In Falstaff's exercise of a freewheeling linguistic legerdemain, words are made to mean what he chooses them to mean and, in the resulting scramble, words are stripped of any predictable meaning. One recalls a line that describes a character in Ross Macdonald's *The Galton Case*: "Words meant more to him than the facts they stood for."[3] Kinney makes a similar point about Falstaff, namely, that he delights in free-floating signifiers, wordplay for its own sake, and relies "on the dictum not of Tudor humanists but of the latter-day Humpty Dumpty: 'When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean (123).'" And, Kinney adds, this exercise of semantic freedom invites a certain skepticism, a loss of regard and credibility. To emphasize the point, he recalls that when the actor playing Falstaff delivers the epilogue, he

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*Reference: Arthur F. Kinney, "Shakespeare's Falstaff as Parody," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 105-25.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debkinney01223.htm>.

mocks his character as a counterfeit, an imposter: "For Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man" (Epilogue, *Henry IV*, *Part II*, 27).[4]

The notion that the fat knight can be so easily disposed of seems to counter his commanding presence earlier in his stage career and in the very criticism that Kinney surveys with such authority and grace. We might agree that Falstaff's language is unreliable if by that we mean that the information it conveys is often inflated or wrong, at odds with what others report or what transpires on stage, not a reckoning one can count on. But, if we acknowledge that language conveys more than empirical data, that its communicative function goes beyond the representation of a particular state of affairs, then we might ask what the term "reliable" signifies in this broader context, or, if reluctant to attempt such a puzzle, then, at the very least, we might consider other ways in which language fulfills a communicative function, ways, risky and unreliable though they may be, that, nonetheless, allow us to believe that language works. My concern here is to track some of these "unreliable" ways and to claim an underlying purpose or accomplishment. I hope to defend Falstaff against charges of solipsism and linguistic truancy by showing that he is able to use words to engage others and to instruct them as well. To take the argument further, I hope to show that the instruction he offers enlists the imagination to teach a political lesson.[5]

While it is certainly the case that, as Hal quips, Falstaff is out of all compass, that his rhetorical exploits are varied, ambiguous, often self-serving, he remains accessible enough to draw his audience into ways of responding that are off the beaten path, at a distance from more orthodox or predictable enforcements. Falstaff's language, more often than not, is imaginative rather than literal and furnished more conspicuously than that of any other character in Shakespeare with a wealth of mythological and biblical allusions, proverbs, puns and emblems.[6]

There is an obvious distinction to be drawn between, on the one hand, incoherent, nonsensical, opinionated or biased language or language so private it fails to make sense to others and might be

described as solipsistic and, on the other hand, language that is ambiguous, allusive, open-ended, multifaceted, capable of encoding a multiplicity of tones and meanings. Kinney locates Falstaff on one side of this division; I would argue that he belongs on the other. We can agree, however, that rhetorical excess or the vacancy of substance or support threatens any attempt to communicate, isolating the author and alienating the audience. When language becomes overblown, bombastic, or hyperbolic, it ceases to function as a credible engine of negotiation or exchange; it undercuts authority and promotes cynicism.[7] These are the abuses of which Falstaff stands accused.

In making his case, Kinney gives too little attention to the skill with which Falstaff draws on a variety of rhetorical devices and, more importantly, to the comic space he occupies. Reliable utterance is, in a sense, genre related. What we are prepared to accept as reliable witness or convincing representation varies with the mode of discourse by which it is shaped. Irony and metaphor invite a different scale or measure than do styles of utterance overtly judgmental or biased in favor of an unadorned literalness. Falstaff's rhetorical strategies, metaphor and irony included, not only seek to engage the imagination, but also to fix by example and implication its singular importance in public discourse. Kinney acknowledges Falstaff's role as an agent of satire, his quick-wittedness and humor. But he concludes that in the course of the narrative the audience comes to have second thoughts about the character of Falstaff's appeal, an amused tolerance changing to repulsion and dismay. The spirit of mockery Falstaff directs against institutions and codes of behavior reverses itself, making him its target, the mocker mocked. It is at the point where Falstaff tries to counter the humiliation of the Gad's Hill robbery that Kinney locates this shift in attitude. Foolery and sport give way to ridicule and aversion.

The Prince and Poins confront Falstaff with what they know, firsthand, about the robbery. Hal taunts Falstaff, demanding a defense of the indefensible: "What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?"

(2.5.242-43). That Falstaff comes up with an answer is as much a surprise to the Prince as to onlookers in the theater. He demonstrates mastery of the quick response by seizing on Hal's "apparent" and turning it back upon him.[8]

> By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct. (2.5.246-50)

The escape route, his deliverance, as it were, is variously read: "a crowning lie […] completely unexpected and quite unanswerable,"[9] an assault on common sense, a desperate and transparent evasion of the truth, a brilliantly imaginative gesture that offers transport to a realm beyond the tangled web of circumstance. Kinney is among those who view Falstaff's escape as no more than that, testimony to his agility and wit, but disturbingly unbecoming, a far-out and implausible improvisation undertaken to save face. The further point is made that Falstaff never recovers, never reclaims his former standing. As Kinney puts it, "left to his own devices, Falstaff is solipsistic" (124). The charge is enforced and amplified in the following indictment:

> Style […] can override substance. Serious ideas may be diminished or even erased if their examination is funny enough. Seen this way, parody is not a means of translating ideas but a means of overturning them. This is not a matter of means overcoming ends but of means becoming both means and ends, turning upside-down along the way cherished beliefs in language taught by the humanists who, posing that language should be transparently related to substance, nevertheless saw substance as moral, educative, and finally irrevocable. (121)

To brand Falstaff as a corrupter of words, a practitioner of a kind of sophistry or rhetoric for its own sake is, I think, to discount the link between the images words transcribe and the non-verbal world those images broaden and inform. When Falstaff declares that he is a coward by instinct, that he cannot raise his arm against the true prince he is, of course, kidding Hal, speaking in jest, questioning the legitimacy of Hal's claim to be the heir apparent, teasing him about the uncertain path by which his father forged his way to the throne. But there is

something else at play when he pays homage to instinct, to what remains inexplicable, illogical, to what frees the imagination and offers insight beyond analysis or calculation.

"Instinct" is sometimes understood as an intuitive power, the origin of which remains unclear.[10] Such a meaning is at work in *Cymbeline* when Belarius voices his amazement that "an invisible instinct" should produce "royalty unlearned" and "houour untaught" (4.2.177-78), or again in *Richard III* when men are said to be subject to "divine instinct" (2.3.42). The Renaissance sense of "instinct" implies an authority beyond practical reason or observation. When Falstaff admonishes the Prince to "Beware instinct," his tone is both imperative and threatening, positive in so far as it is a command and negative in the implication that danger lurks should the command go unheeded. Falstaff urges the Prince to pay attention, to heed the warning instinct delivers. The admonition has a biblical association, echoing the pronouncement that foretells the coming of the Angel of the Lord: "Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him" (Exodus 23:21).

Falstaff's extraordinary capacity to represent the world, to select the terms by which it is to be understood, is given eloquent testimony by A. C. Bradley in a remarkable and quite uncharacteristic passage:

> These are the wonderful achievements which he performs, not with the sourness of a cynic, but with the gaiety of a boy. And therefore, we praise him, we laud him, for he offends none but the virtuous, and denies that life is earnest, and delivers us from the oppression of such nightmares, and lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom.[11]

Bradley sees Falstaff's energy and shaping spirit as life enhancing, liberating, as offering glimpses of a world less hostile and constrained. In addition to what so moves Bradley there is a political, perhaps even a moral dimension in which wit and imagination play decisive roles and thereby gain a validation that transcends the realm of fiction.

> The lion will not touch the true prince—instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life—I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. (2.5.249-53)

The notion that the lion, king of the beasts, will recognize by instinct a king or a virgin appears in a number of classical and early modern texts, most notably, perhaps, in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* where a lion recognizes a royal virgin and becomes her protector:

> But to the pray when as he drew more ny
> His bloudie rage asswaged with remorse,
> And with the sight amazd, forgat his furious forse.[12]

The editors of The Johns Hopkins Press Spenser remark that "the instinctive reverence of the lion […] is […] in keeping with the whole lion cult, for, as frequently observed, the lion, like the unicorn, will offer no injury to a virgin or to a royal personage."[13] In Spenser, it is the incorruptibility of Una to which the lion responds. In Falstaff's account, the lion is tamed by the mystery that surrounds the monarchy. The appeal is to that which lies beyond reason, what must be intuited, a sovereign power commanding obedience and service, enforcing rank and hierarchy.

Falstaff's legendary lion is the creation of the imagination. So too is the aura of mystery that surrounds the true prince. There is the implication that the imagination has a vital role to play in a variety of social and political relationships and particularly in the exercise of monarchical authority. The coward-by-instinct invention is meant as much to tutor the Prince in the wellsprings of power as it is to acquit Falstaff. For his part in the rhetorical contest, he seeks to engage the imagination and, thus, to broaden the Prince's view of the office to which he will succeed. Ruth Wallerstein in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetic* reminds us that

> it is the function of rhetoric […] to appeal to the imagination, if necessary to purge and reorder it tempestuously, and thereby to combat false opinion; and also it is its function to give ceremonious ornament to great things.[14]

Perhaps the Prince has not yet mastered the uses of rhetoric or learned the art of giving "ceremonious ornament to great things."[15] At the battle of Agincourt, he shows a readiness to try, suggesting that he

not only perceives a necessary relationship between monarchy and the imagination but is prepared to exploit it as well. Such, then, is the lesson Falstaff teaches, a lesson underscored by the Chorus in *Henry V* who declares that the success of both actors and monarchs depends on the exercise of "imaginary puissance […] for 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings " (Prologue 25, 28). James I is by no means the first to acknowledge the role of imagination in the theater of kingship.[16] After Falstaff has exhausted himself in his own defense and in lessoning the heir apparent, it comes as no surprise that his next move should be to change the subject: "Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry, shall we have a play extempore" (*Henry IV, Part I*, 2.5.255-57).

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NOTES

[1]I wish to thank Professor Timothy Raylor and the editors of *Connotations*, Professor Matthias Bauer and Professor Inge Leimberg, for their helpful suggestions at various stages in the preparation of this response.

[2]Professor Kinney credits Matthias Bauer with the suggestion that there are two kinds of parody, the one exposing a character or idea to ridicule, the other to praise or celebration as much as to ridicule (120).

[3]*The Galton Case* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956) 225.

[4]Citations and quotations are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

[5]*A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers a similar defense of the imagination. Bottom challenges Theseus's all too fragile authority by invoking the power of the imagination. It is noteworthy that Tom McAlindon has recently argued that contemporaries would have recognized Falstaff as a caricature of Sir John Oldcastle, the first Lord of Cobham, and would have taken the Epilogue's disclaimer "as tongue-in-cheek" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004] 77). In an illuminating discussion of the play, McAlindon identifies Falstaff as the only subversive voice and insists that the play deals "with dynastic conflict between equals and with the problematic relationships between right and wrong in a kingdom where there is no indisputably legal inheritor to the throne" (32, 42). My claim is that, given the conflict McAlindon acknowledges, Falstaff's tutoring is less an attempt

to subvert or even distract the Prince than to prepare him in qualities of leadership required to survive.

[6]As Paul Ricoeur has argued, figures and tropes bring "to language aspects, qualities, and values of reality that lack access to language that is directly descriptive and that can be spoken only by means of the complex interplay between […] words" (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983] 1: xi). See also Stephanie Bird's comments on the capacity of metaphor to communicate "thoughts which may not be readily translatable into 'standard' language" in *Women Writers and National Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) 213.

[7]Examples of the specific abuses of language which Kinney associates with Falstaff are not hard to find. Those that follow are chosen more or less at random to set against Falstaff's language and thus to underscore its greater effectiveness as an instrument of communication and persuasion. Consider the recent pronouncement of a distinguished American academic: "Political nihilism now sets the tone for public discourse, and market moralities now dictate the landscape of a stifled American democracy" (Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* [New York: Penguin, 2004] 28). It can, of course, be argued that quoting the passage out of context is grossly unfair, but it might also be pointed out that the abstractions with which the passage is so splendidly equipped, while introduced earlier in the essay, remain without support or even a nod in the direction of evidence or clarification. Another instance where meaning is strained to the point of unintelligibility occurs in a recent review of *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* in the *Times Literary Supplement*. We are informed that the printing business in the UK was "no longer prosperous after the huge American investment in academe ended abruptly with the Kent State University massacre" (Dec. 10, 2004, 5). In this case there is no context to refer to, merely the bold assertion that the tragedy at Kent State abruptly ended support of higher education in America. One wonders how convincing such an assertion is even among readers unfamiliar with events at Kent State and what followed. It seems fair to say that each of the passages comes within the compass of what Kinney chooses to feature in Falstaff's language, that is, the solipsistic and the failure to communicate in any reliable way.

[8]See Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1947). Cited by Douglas W. Hayes, *Rhetorical Subversion in Early English Drama* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004) 95.

[9]J. Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge: CUP, 1944) 56. Quoted by Kinney 123.

[10]The *OED* defines instinct as "an innate propensity in organized beings […] varying with the species and manifesting itself in acts which appear to be rational, but are performed without conscious design or intentional adaptation of means to

ends. Also, the faculty supposed to be involved in this operation (formerly often regarded as a kind of intuitive knowledge)."

[11]A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1959) 263. Quoted by Kinney, 122.

[12]Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1932) Bk. I, Canto iii, stanza 5.

[13]Spenser, Bk. I, p. 398 (Appendix IV).

[14]Ruth Wallerstein (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1950) 71.

[15]That Falstaff is in some doubt about the progress his pupil has made is implied in his response to the Lord Chief Justice who says to him: "You have misled the youthful Prince." Falstaff replies: "The young Prince hath misled me." "Well, God send the Prince a better companion!" answers the Chief Justice. "God send the companion a better prince!" *Henry IV, Part II*, 2.1.140-41, 196-97. And, again, to describe his service, "[…] I have done the part of a careful friend and a true subject, and thy father is to give me thanks for it" (2.4.321-23).

[16]The figure of the monarch as an actor on the stage of history appears in public utterances of Elizabeth I. Anne Righter traces its repeated use in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 102 ff. See also Stephen Greenblatt on Elizabeth's "self-theatricalization" in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 165-69. For a detailed discussion of James I in relation to the theater of kingship, see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983). As Goldberg puts it, "James, we need hardly recall, viewed himself as an exemplary performer on stage" (230).

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Parody, Paradox and Play in *The Importance of Being Earnest*[1]

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1. Introduction

The Importance of Being Earnest is an accomplished parody of the conventions of comedy. It also contains numerous examples of Oscar Wilde's most characteristic stylistic device: the paradox. The present essay deals with the connection between these two features of the play.[2] In my view, the massive presence of both parody and paradox in Wilde's masterpiece is not coincidental; they are linked by a number of significant similarities. I will analyse these similarities and show that, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, parody and paradox enter into a connection that is essential to the unique achievement of this play.

2. Parody

The most obvious example of parody in Wilde's play is the anagnorisis that removes the obstacles standing in the way to wedded bliss for Jack and Gwendolen. The first of these obstacles is a lack of respectable relatives on Jack's part. As a foundling who was discovered in a handbag at the cloakroom of Victoria railway station, he does not find favour with Gwendolen's mother, the formidable Lady Bracknell. She adamantly refuses to accept a son-in-law "whose origin [is] a Terminus" (3.129). The second obstacle is Gwendolen's infatuation with the name "Ernest," the alias under which Jack has courted her. When she discovers that her lover's real name is Jack, she regards this as an "insuperable barrier" between them (3.51). Both difficulties are removed when the true identity of the foundling is revealed. It turns out

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that Jack has been christened "Ernest" and that he is Lady Bracknell's nephew. Thus he bears the name that Gwendolen insists on, and he has also acquired respectable relatives—even Lady Bracknell would find it hard to raise convincing objections against herself.

The anagnorisis comes about through a visible sign, a time-honoured method first discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics.* The most famous example of this method, also mentioned by Aristotle,[3] is the scar which Odysseus owes to his courageous fight with a boar and which reveals his identity to his nurse Eurycleia when he returns to Ithaca after an absence of twenty years. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the sign that proves Jack's identity is the handbag in which he was found. His former nurse, Miss Prism, explains how the baby ended up in the bag:

> *Miss Prism*. [...] On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I can never forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette and placed the baby in the hand-bag.
>
> *Jack*. (*who had been listening attentively*) But where did you deposit the hand-bag?
>
> *Miss Prism*. Do not ask me, Mr Worthing.
>
> *Jack*. Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.
>
> *Miss Prism*. I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.
>
> *Jack*. What railway station?
>
> *Miss Prism*. (*quite crushed*) Victoria. The Brighton line. (*Sinks into a chair*)
>
> […]
>
> *Enter Jack with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand*
>
> *Jack*. (*rushing over to Miss Prism*) Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.
>
> *Miss Prism*. (*calmly*) It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had

> them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years. (3.344-90)

Even in comedy, anagnorises that bring about family reunions tend to be tearful events, or at least highly emotional ones,[4] but the emphasis placed on Miss Prism's battered old bag undercuts any such sentiments. It introduces the comic incongruity between debased or trivial content and dignified form that figures prominently in most definitions of parody.[5] To Miss Prism, the scene is not about the restoration of a lost child but about the recovery of a handbag. The sign whose function it is to identify the hero usurps the status of the hero. Instead of identifying Jack by means of the bag, Miss Prism identifies the bag by means of the "injury" that it received from a Gower Street omnibus—an injury that would appear to be a parodic allusion to the famous scar which shows Eurycleia whose feet she is washing (in both cases, two decades or more have passed when the hero re-encounters his nurse).

Parodies have a metaliterary tendency. By both imitating and distorting a text or a genre, they lay bare its conventions, pulling the audience out of the represented world and making it aware of the means and methods of representation. This is especially true of the anagnorisis of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde makes no attempt to hide the fact that he is using a literary convention. On the contrary, by offering an extremely ingenious and improbable solution to Jack's problems he highlights the contrived and artificial character of the convention. A metaliterary note is also struck by the curious replacement of a baby with a manuscript, of a child with a brainchild. While the manuscript obviously stands for literature, the baby represents life in its most pristine and natural form. When Miss Prism puts the former in the place of the latter, literature prevails over life. Perhaps we may even detect an allegory of parody in Miss Prism's mistake. After all, there are two contents and two containers: a baby who belongs in a pram, and a manuscript which belongs in a bag. Exchanging the baby and the manuscript brings about the very incongruity of form

and content which is typical of parody. Be that as it may, the metaliterary quality of the anagnorisis is also suggested by the comments of the participants, who talk as if they knew that they are characters in a play. When Jack rushes off to search for the handbag, Lady Bracknell states that "strange coincidences are not supposed to occur" (3.369-70), and Gwendolen adds, "This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last" (3.378)—a paradoxical wish that combines the point of view of a character with that of a spectator.[6]

The way to the true anagnorisis is paved with a number of ludicrously false ones. After Miss Prism's assumption that the scene is about handbags rather than about human beings, Jack makes a discovery that is no less ridiculous:

> *Jack*. (*in a pathetic voice*) Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this handbag. I was the baby you placed in it.
> *Miss Prism*. (*amazed*) You?
> *Jack*. (*embracing her*) Yes—mother!
> *Miss Prism*. (*recoiling in indignant astonishment*) Mr Worthing! I am unmarried!
> *Jack*. Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. (*Tries to embrace her again)*
> *Miss Prism*. (s*till more indignant*) Mr Worthing, there is some error. (*Pointing to Lady Bracknell*) There is the lady who can tell you who you really are (3.391-404).

Just as in the exchange about the handbag, moods and attitudes are singularly mismatched. Jack feels all the emotions appropriate to an anagnorisis scene. He is so full of joy and gratitude that he is moved to forgive his mother for straying from the path of virtue. But Miss Prism, who has maintained a rigid respectability throughout the play, is highly offended by Jack's assumption that she has given birth to an illegitimate child. To her, his generous words of forgiveness come as a gross insult. It should be added that the exchange between Jack and Miss Prism amounts to an exercise in self-parody on Wilde's part. It makes fun of the fallen woman, a subject that he deals with in a seri-

ous manner in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. Jack's speech is a comic echo of the message of these earlier plays, including an almost verbatim repetition of Hester's complaint about the double standard in *A Woman of No Importance* (2.299-300).[7]

The scene in which Jack proposes to Gwendolyn provides us with another interesting example of Wildean parody:

> *Jack*. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.
> *Gwendolen*. Married, Mr Worthing?
> *Jack*. (*astounded*) Well ... surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.
> *Gwendolen*. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.
> *Jack*. Well ... may I propose to you now?
> *Gwendolen*. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.
> *Jack*. Gwendolen!
> *Gwendolen*. Yes, Mr Worthing, what have you got to say to me?
> *Jack*. You know what I have got to say to you.
> *Gwendolen*. Yes, but you don't say it.
> *Jack*. Gwendolen, will you marry me? (*Goes on his knees*)
> *Gwendolen*. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.
> *Jack*. My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.
> *Gwendolen*. Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present. (1.413-40)

Even more than in the anagnorisis scene, in which she and her mother make comments with metadramatic overtones, Gwendolen thinks of the occasion in terms of a script and of a part that has to be played and to be practiced. In this case, the parodic incongruity does not result from a clash between a high, dignified form and a low, ignoble content, but from the contrast between Gwendolen's formal and artificial script and Jack's more flexible and spontaneous one. He talks extempore, assuming that there is no need to utter what has already been implied. Gwendolen, however, does not tolerate any deviation from

her script; she makes her suitor play his part and say all his lines. Paradoxically, her very insistence on following the script brings about a major deviation from it. In a proposal conducted along traditional lines, it is the man who plays the active part, while the woman reacts to his demands. In the case of Jack and Gwendolyn, these roles are exchanged. Not only is Gwendolen in charge of the conversation, she even assumes that ultimate privilege of the male sex, the praise of the beloved's eyes.[8]

A final parodic feature of the proposal and other exchanges between Jack and Gwendolen becomes evident if one compares them with similar scenes from the second courtship plot. I have already mentioned the way in which *The Importance of Being Earnest* parodies Wilde's treatment of the fallen woman in his previous works. In addition, the play offers something like a parody of itself, with later scenes or speeches providing comic repetitions of earlier ones. Jack's proposal to Gwendolen is replayed by Algernon and Cecily, with minor variations on the same themes. Cecily also confesses her fascination with the name "Ernest" (2.505); she also admires her lover's beauty—not his eyes, but his curls (2.489, 2.530)—and she also thinks of the proposal in terms of a script. In her case, this script is not merely a metaphorical or mental one; the story of her courtship by Algernon has literally been written down in her diary. The parodic effect of this has been pointed out by Neil Sammells, who makes a number of perceptive comments on Wildean parody in an essay on Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*:

> The structure of Wilde's play is that of a travesty: Jack's proposal to Gwendolen is played again, and travestied, by Algy and Cecily; Lady Bracknell's interrogation of Jack in Act One reappears in a different form in her haranguing of Miss Prism. Similarly, individual scenes are themselves structured by travesty with one voice restating and confounding the other. (383)

Sammells does not explain what he means by the latter kind of travesty based on "one voice restating and confounding the other" in a single scene, but the following exchange between Gwendolen and

Cecily might qualify as an example. It is the quarrel that follows their mistaken discovery that they are both engaged to the same man:

> *Cecily*. (*rather shy and confidingly*) Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.
>
> *Gwendolen*. (*quite politely, rising*) My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.
>
> *Cecily*. (*very politely, rising*) I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. (*Shows diary)*
>
> *Gwendolen*. (*examines diary through her lorgnette carefully*) It is very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. (*Produces diary of her own*) I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid *I* have the prior claim.
>
> *Cecily*. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.
>
> *Gwendolen*. (*meditatively*) If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.
>
> *Cecily*. (*thoughtfully and sadly*) Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married. (2.622-48)

Gwendolen and Cecily imitate each other to an extraordinary degree. They perform the same actions (showing a diary to their rival), strike the same attitudes ("*meditatively*" and "*thoughtfully*"), and say exactly the same things, a fact that is only highlighted by their elaborate efforts at finding synonyms: "some slight error"—"some misconception"; "I am so sorry"—"It would distress me"; "the poor fellow"—"my dear boy"; "entrapped"—"entanglement"; etc. The parodic effect is brought about in a rather unusual manner in this dialogue. It would be misleading to say that the speeches uttered by one woman are exaggerated, distorted or debased version of the speeches delivered by the other. Instead, the parodic effect results from the closeness of the imitation. Gwendolen and Cecily violate the assumption that

human beings should be individuals, not Bergsonian parrots who repeat somebody else's words and actions. If there is an element of parodic debasing, it consists in this reduction of a human being to a puppet. At any rate, the repetitions across or within the scenes from the two courtship plots are similar to the more obvious examples of parody, such as the anagnorisis, in that they strongly emphasize the artificiality of the characters' words and actions; instead of being spontaneous and unpredictable, these are governed by prior scripts and models.

Before we move on to paradox, a final word needs to be said about the mode of parody in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Parodies can be satiric; witness Henry Fielding's *Shamela*, which ridicules both the literary form and the social values of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Richard Foster interprets *The Importance of Being Earnest* along these lines. He argues that "[b]y exposing and burlesquing the vacuities of a moribund literature Wilde satirizes, too, the society that sustains and produces it" (23). According to this view, the girls' romantic scripts, which they have imbibed from novels and plays and which they impose on their lovers, are bound up with hollow social values, and the parody of the literary conventions becomes a satiric attack on these values. In my view, however, the play's parody is ludic rather than satiric.[9] The parodic scenes discussed in this essay offer a lot of comic incongruity, but the laughter evoked by this incongruity is not directed at a particular target. It is not satiric laughter that attacks one set of values in the name of another. As Andreas Höfele argues, the play lacks a precondition of effective satire: a standpoint (191). In the proposal scenes, for instance, we laugh at the young women's infatuation with an artificial social ritual, but we also admire the energy and the inventiveness that they show in shaping this ritual. And we laugh at their lovers just as much as at the young women. It would be simplistic to argue that the proposal scenes ridicule formality and etiquette in order to endorse a more natural and spontaneous way of interacting with other human beings.

To clarify what I mean by ludic parody, it might be helpful to borrow a distinction from Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Irony*, a borrowing that seems to me justified because of the proximity of irony and parody. Both of these rhetorical strategies entail the assumption of a voice that is not one's own; in irony, this voice is usually an invented one that is created by the ironist him- or herself; in parody, it is borrowed from a prior text. Booth distinguishes between stable and unstable irony. Faced with stable irony, the audience notices that the speaker cannot possibly mean what he or she says, and it infers what is meant instead (usually the opposite of what has been said). Faced with unstable irony, the audience notices that the speaker cannot possibly mean what he or she says, but it is incapable of taking the second step, of concluding what is really meant; the speaker does not commit him- or herself to any particular meaning. If we apply this distinction to our topic, stable irony becomes the equivalent of satiric parody, while unstable irony becomes the equivalent of ludic parody. With satiric parody, the audience realizes that the parodist ridicules the parodied text and its values, and it infers what a more natural text and a saner set of values would look like. With ludic parody, the audience notices that there is some sort of comic incongruity (in other words, that there is parody), but finds itself incapable of taking the second step, of inferring a set of values and a text that could replace the parodied text and its values. The experience of watching or reading *The Importance of Being Earnest* is of the latter sort.

3. Paradox in Wilde

I have given a fairly extensive analysis of parody in *The Importance of Being Earnest* as this topic has not been discussed by many critics. The topic of paradox in this play and in Wilde's writings generally has received more attention;[10] thus it need not detain us very long. However, before moving on to the connection between parody and paradox we should consider a distinction between two types of paradox that is relevant to Wilde's use of this device. The first type links opposite terms in a contradictory manner, as in "less is more." Paradoxes of

this sort are infrequent in Wilde. He prefers a second type, which consists in stating the opposite of a received opinon; in other words, this second type of paradox contradicts not itself but common sense.[11] An example is provided by Gwendolen. As the analysis of the proposal scene has shown, she has little respect for traditional gender roles. This also becomes evident in the following speech: "Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man" (2.563-65). There is nothing self-contradictory about this speech; what it contradicts is the Victorian view that a wife should be the angel in the house, while her husband goes abroad to fight the battles of the world. A further example of the anti-commonsensical paradox comes from "The Decay of Lying," an essay that is in the tradition of the paradoxical encomium, a genre that praises what is normally dispraised.[12] Wilde's praise of lying attacks a number of received ideas, in particular the nineteenth-century doctrine of realism. Whereas the realists argue that it is the task of art to imitate life, Wilde claims that the exact opposite is valid: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (239).

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that a mere contradiction, of whatever kind, does not amount to a paradox. With both types of paradox, the element of contradiction has to be complemented by the possibility of sense. On the one hand, a paradox startles us with a violation of logic or common sense; on the other hand, it allows and challenges us to make sense of it, to endow absurdity with meaning. If this possibility of sense did not exist, we would not be dealing with a paradox but with mere error and inconsistency.

4. The Connection between Parody and Paradox

Para means 'beside,' *ode* means 'song,' and *doxa* means 'opinion.' Literally, a parody is something that positions itself 'beside a song' (or, more generally, beside a text), whereas a paradox positions itself 'beside an opinion.' This etymological consideration suggests a first link. The text or opinion that parody or paradox responds to must be

generally known. There is no point in positioning oneself beside something which no one is familar with; if a parody or a paradox are to be recognized as such, the audience must be acquainted with the text or the opinion they are based on.

The preposition *para*, which is present in both terms, refers to the procedure that parody or paradox apply to a text or to an opinion. If we stick to the principal meaning of *para*, this procedure places parody 'beside' a familiar text, and paradox 'beside' a received opinion. In the case of paradox, 'beside' does not designate the concept with sufficient precision. The meaning has to be shifted to 'against' or 'contrary to.' For a paradox is not merely incongruous with a received opinion; it maintains the exact opposite. In the case of parody, the meaning of *para* cannot be narrowed down in a similar fashion. The preposition has a greater range of meaning as the techniques of parody are various: it can exaggerate the stylistic features of the parodied text, debase its content, or invert one of its elements, turning it into its opposite. In other words, a parody can place itself 'beside,' 'below,' or 'against' a text. Thus there is a partial overlap in the procedures of parody and paradox: inversion, or the change to the opposite, which amounts to the principal procedure of the latter, is at least one of the techniques of the former.

The main difference between the two terms is that between *ode* and *doxa*. A parody responds to a song or, more generally, a text, while a paradox responds to a received opinion. However, this difference is minimised if a received opinion is routinely expressed in a particular text, if text and opinion are so closely connected that a response to one entails a response to the other. A connection of this kind exists, for example, in proverbs and idioms, in which a commonsensical notion is coupled with a fixed expression. Interestingly, Wilde has a predilection for taking such an expression and replacing one of its words with its opposite.[13] What results is both a parody and a paradox. An example is provided by the following speech from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in which Algernon anticipates the tedium of a dinner at Lady Bracknell's:

> She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent ... and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. (1.239-44)

Algernon parodies the idiom *to wash one's dirty linen in public* by performing a minimal formal change; he replaces the adjective *dirty* with its antonym *clean*. The resulting inversion of the idiom's meaning also produces a paradox. While common sense maintains that one should not publicise one's affairs and adulteries, Algernon thinks the same about marital happiness and harmony. He considers it "perfectly scandalous" for a couple to flaunt the lack of scandal in their marriage.

A second example of the combination of parody and paradox from *The Importance of Being Earnest* is slightly more complex. The received opinion that is targeted here is the notion that a person's social rank is reflected not merely in birth and possessions but also in his or her manners. The 'text' that expresses this opinion is not a fixed string of words but, more loosely, a convention in the characterization of masters and servants in comedy. In this genre, the masters drink, preferably wine or champagne, whereas the servants eat, usually fairly rich food.[14] Wilde brings about an exchange of these roles in the first scene of his play:

> *Algernon.* [H]ave you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?
> *Lane*. Yes, sir. (*Hands them on a salver*)
> *Algernon*. (*inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa*) Oh! … by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreham and Mr Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.
> *Lane*. Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.
> *Algernon*. Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.
> *Lane.* I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.
> *Algernon*. Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

> *Lane*. I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.
> *Algernon*. (*languidly*) I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.
> *Lane*. No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.
> *Algernon.* Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.
> *Lane*. Thank you, sir. *Lane goes out*
> *Algernon*. Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. (1.8-36)

Wilde parodies the convention by inverting it. The servant drinks champagne, while the master eats voraciously.[15] By the time Lady Bracknell arrives, Algernon has devoured all of the cucumber sandwiches, and in a later scene he will make short work of the muffins served at Jack's country residence. The dialogue between Algernon and Lane nicely illustrates the closeness between parody and paradox in the play, as it culminates in a paradox which is also based on an inversion of the roles of master and servant. Whereas Victorian common sense regards it as a task of the middle and upper classes to set a good example to those lower down the social scale, Jack expects Lane to act as a role model for him: "Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?" One might retort that Lane is still useful to Algernon in serving the cucumber sandwiches, but such mundane considerations are foreign to Algernon, who shares his author's penchant for sweeping generalisation.

My final and most important argument for the connection between parody and paradox hinges on the concept of play. This concept has already been touched upon in the second section of this essay, where the mode of parody in *The Importance of Being Earnest* has been described as ludic. This ludic mode should not be confused with recreational drollery. It is not a temporary relaxation from (and thus subordinate to) seriousness. It is rather motivated by a fundamental uncertainty, by a scepticism that finds it difficult to take anything seriously. It is this mode of sceptical play which also characterizes Wilde's para-

doxes—at least if we follow the author's own suggestions. Wilde offers us a theory of paradox in which the concept of play figures prominently. This theory is to be found in the first chapters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and it is mainly associated with Lord Henry, Dorian's aristocratic mentor (and tempter). The following passage describes Lord Henry enchanting a dinner-table audience with his paradoxical rhetoric:

> "Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes."
>
> A laugh ran round the table.
>
> He played with the idea, and grew wilful; tossed it into the air and transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with fancy, and winged it with paradox. The praise of folly, as he went on, soared into a philosophy, and Philosophy herself became young, and catching the mad music of Pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober. […] It was an extraordinary improvisation. (78-79)

Lord Henry's rhetoric is essentially paradoxical. He starts out by disparaging common sense, the antagonist of paradox, and continues with the paradox that "the only thing one never regrets are one's mistakes." In his poetic description of Lord Henry's talk, the narrator mentions the term explicitly ("winged it with paradox"), and he also weaves the title of the most famous paradoxical encomium of world literature, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, into this description.[16] The terms used to characterize Lord Henry's paradoxical rhetoric emphasize its ludic quality. It is play and improvisation; instead of weighing and pondering his ideas, Lord Henry throws them into the air and juggles them. This intellectual play is slightly mad and inebriated, but it is also far from mere drollery and facetiousness. For all its folly, it maintains the rank of a philosophy.

Lord Henry's interlocutors frequently claim that he does not mean what he says, or they ask him whether his paradoxes are to be taken seriously (55, 76, 77, 80). He carefully avoids giving a straight answer to this question. If he answers in the affirmative, the ludic quality of

the paradoxes will be eliminated. If he answers in the negative, the play will be at least diminished, framed and diminished by a context of seriousness. Lord Henry prefers a more radical kind of play, a play which includes seriousness at least as a *possibility*, which leaves its audience in the dark as to whether, and to what degree, it should be taken seriously. Here is how Lord Henry responds to Basil Hallward's charge that he lacks sincerity:

> "I don't agree with a single word that you have said, and, what is more, Harry, I feel sure you don't either."
>
> […] "How English you are, Basil! That is the second time you have made that observation. If one puts forward an idea to a true Englishman—always a rash thing to do—he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it oneself. Now, the value of an idea has nothing whatsoever to do with the sincerity of the man who expresses it. Indeed, the probabilities are that the more insincere the man is, the more purely intellectual will the idea be, as in that case it will not be coloured by either his wants, his desires, or his prejudices." (55)

Again, Lord Henry carefully avoids stating how serious he is about the claims he has made. Instead, he launches a surprising but not unpersuasive attack on the merits of seriousness and sincerity, thus giving a defence of the cognitive value of intellectual play.

In the following passage, we see two listeners responding to a paradox uttered by Lord Henry at his aunt's dinner table:

> "I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It is hitting below the intellect."
>
> "I do not understand you," said Sir Thomas, growing rather red.
>
> "I do, Lord Henry," murmured Mr Erskine, with a smile.
>
> "Paradoxes are all very well in their way ..." rejoined the Baronet.
>
> "Was that a paradox?" asked Mr Erskine. "I did not think so. Perhaps it was. Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth." (77)

The first response comes from Sir Thomas, the advocate of common sense. At first he finds Lord Henry's remark so absurd that he fails to understand it; then he grudgingly concedes that it might qualify as a paradox. But the manner in which he phrases this admission—

"paradoxes are all very well *in their way*"—indicates that he considers them an aberration from the path of reason and virtue. To him, paradox is a frivolous and inferior mode of speech that should not be admitted into postprandial conversation, let alone into serious intellectual debate. The second response comes from Mr Erskine, introduced by the narrator as a "gentleman of considerable charm and culture" (76). Mr Erskine does not find Lord Henry's remark absurd. He does not even regard it as a paradox; so convincing does it appear to him. Then he admits, like Sir Thomas but from a very different point of view, that it might be considered a paradox, but he hastens to add that paradoxes lead towards truth. Mr Erskine picks up the image of the way introduced by Sir Thomas, an image that implies movement, and his own response is significantly dynamic, characterized by a to and fro. Lord Henry's paradox has set Mr Erskine's mind in motion. This is, on the listener's part, the same intellectual motion that also characterizes the rhetorical play of paradox on the speaker's part, a kind of play that embraces seriousness as one possibility among others.[17]

I would like to make a final stab at defining the ludic mode discussed here by looking at the pun on which the comedy ends. As it plays with a word that refers to the opposite of play, it has an obvious bearing on the present discussion:

> *Lady Bracknell.* My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.
> *Jack*. On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

The form of the final sentence conveys the exact opposite of its content. The ludic manner in which it states the vital importance of being earnest amounts to an assertion of the vital importance of not being earnest. Because of this combination of opposites, it amounts to a kind of paradox and provides another example of the link between paradox and play that I have discussed with respect to Lord Henry's rhetoric. In playing with the word "Earnest," the final pun repeats what the entire play has done with the name "Ernest" and the concept of seri-

ousness. Throughout the comedy, Ernest is only played: it is a fiction invented by Jack, a role used by him and Algernon, a fantasy embellished by Gwendolen and Cecily. When the final twist of the plot reveals that Jack's name is Ernest after all, it does so in the same spirit of parodic play that we have seen at work in the earlier stages of the anagnorisis, such as the recovery of a long-lost handbag. "Earnest" may be the final word of the comedy, but only according to the letter; according to the spirit, the final word is play.

5. Why Is *The Importance of Being Earnest* Wilde's Masterpiece?

The Importance of Being Earnest is generally considered Wilde's supreme achievement. Some critics have justified this view by arguing that in his earlier plays, and in *Dorian Gray*, the sophisticated rhetoric of such characters as Lord Henry, Mrs Erlynne or Lord Illingworth is at odds with other elements of the work, whereas in *The Importance of Being Earnest* this rhetoric is part of a coherent whole.[18] Erika Meier describes the artistic discrepancy in the early plays as a clash between witty dialogue and melodramatic plot. Only in his final play does Wilde succeed in fusing action and dialogue:

> The surprising events find their counterpart in the unexpectedness of the epigrams; the plot, with its final ironic twist, is complemented by the innumerable paradoxical sayings; and the parallel development of the action (the romance of Gwendolen and Jack on the one hand and of Cecily and Algernon on the other hand) corresponds to the formal and often symmetrical dialogue. In his last play Wilde indeed succeeded in fusing the drama of language (as created in his earlier works) and the drama of action. (195)[19]

I find myself in basic agreement with Meier's claims. In fact, the present essay provides an explanation of how "the plot [...] is complemented by the innumerable paradoxical sayings." It is because the treatment of the plot is parodic, and because of the links between parody and paradox pointed out above, that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is all of a piece. In the earlier plays and in *Dorian Gray*, the plot is treated in a serious or even melodramatic fashion; these works lack

the coherence between parody and paradox that characterizes Wilde's last play.

The incompatibility between playful paradoxes and a serious plot in the earlier works is illustrated by the ending of *Dorian Gray*. In this novel, the protagonist and his portrait change places in the first chapters. The man remains pure and beautiful like a work of art, whereas the picture turns more and more hideous with every evil act that Dorian commits. When he finally attempts to destroy the portrait, wishing to eliminate the visual record of his sins, he brings about his own death. Portrait and protagonist change places again; the former regains its original beauty, while the latter turns into an ugly and withered corpse. Thus the ending of the novel depicts a punishment of sin; it underlines the allegorical and cautionary character of the plot, whose orthodox morality and seriousness are a far cry from the exuberant and playful scepticism of Lord Henry's paradoxes.

The incompatibility between the plot and the paradoxes of *Dorian Gray* is not merely a matter of mode and atmosphere; there are even more specific contradictions between them. At one point, Lord Henry states:

> The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. [...] The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. (61-62)

Whereas common sense maintains that we keep morally pure by resisting temptation and avoiding sin, Lord Henry claims that the opposite is true. Self-denial poisons; sinning purifies. The plot, however, does not follow this paradoxical logic. Every temptation that Dorian yields to leaves its mark on the portrait; every sin that he commits adds another blemish. It is only in Lord Henry's speech that action is a mode of purification; in the plot of the novel, it remains a mode of defilement. The plot also clashes with the paradoxes of "The Decay of Lying" mentioned in the third section of this essay. Admittedly, there is a temporary period in which these paradoxes seem to

govern the plot. After the man and the portrait have changed places, life does imitate art in that Dorian is and remains as beautiful as the picture of his younger self. But in the portrait the traditional principles of mimesis and morality are upheld; art imitates life and teaches an ethical lesson in that every sin committed by Dorian is mirrored in the painting. It is the logic of the portrait that prevails in the end. Dorian's self-fashioning fails; the beautiful lie that his life is built on collapses, while the ugly truth is revealed. To sum up, the ending of *Dorian Gray* is at odds with the paradoxical rhetoric in this novel and in "The Decay of Lying," and this discrepancy remains unresolved.

The ending of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is comparable to the ending of *Dorian Gray* in that it also concerns the identity of the protagonist and his relationship with a kind of *doppelgänger* that enables him to lead a double life. In the novel, the *doppelgänger* is the miraculously changing image that inhabits the picture painted by Basil Hallward. This image allows Dorian to lead a life of sin because it bears the marks of this life, thus making it possible for him to appear spotless and innocent in the eyes of the world. The ending of the novel shows the tragic folly of this double life; the *doppelgänger* is annihilated when the picture returns to its former status as an ordinary portrait that is no longer subject to miraculous change. The *doppelgänger* of the play is "Ernest," the role that Jack has invented for the time he spends in London; this *doppelgänger* is surprisingly confirmed by the ending. It is revealed that Jack has indeed been christened "Ernest"; he has invented the truth, as it were. Of course, this confirmation is given in the same spirit of parodic play that characterizes the entire anagnorisis up to the final pun; the *doppelgänger* is confirmed precisely because he, too, is a manifestation of playing. Thus the ending does not amount to a lapse into seriousness; it is informed by the ludic mode that also inspires the paradoxical rhetoric of the play. The ending is also in tune with the very paradoxes of "The Decay of Lying"[20] that are negated by the ending of *Dorian Gray*. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, life imitates art in that "Ernest," the

creative lie, turns out to be true. The role is the ultimate reality; the truest poetry is the most feigning.

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NOTES

[1]The first version of this essay was delivered at the *Connotations* Symposium on "Sympathetic Parody," which took place in Mettlach and Saarbrücken in late July 2003. I am grateful to Matthias Bauer for organising this event, which was a felicitous combination of *prodesse* and *delectare,* and to the participants for their responses to my talk. I should also like to express my gratitude to Maik Goth, Frank Kearful, Sven Wagner and the anonymous *Connotations* reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

[2]To the best of my knowledge, this connection has not been systematically explored. In "Raymond Chandler: Burlesque, Parody, Paradox," Winifred Crombie analyses the links between clauses in Chandler's prose; she touches upon paradox only in the rather remote sense of inter-clausal connections of an illogical kind. She also claims that Chandler parodies the genre of detective fiction, but fails to establish a connection between parody and paradox.

[3]See *Poetics* 1454b.

[4]A particularly lachrymose example is the anagnorisis in Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (5.3), in which the merchant Sealand is reunited with his long-lost daughter Indiana.

[5]See, for instance, Abrams 26, and Genette 19.

[6]There is an additional metadramatic comment in the original four-act version, which Wilde cut at the behest of the director, George Alexander. After Jack has left the scene to search for the handbag, Lady Bracknell says, rather like an Aristotelian drama critic, "I sincerely hope nothing improbable is going to happen. The improbable is always in bad, or at any rate, questionable taste." See *The Original Four-Act Version of* The Importance of Being Earnest 105.

[7]This parodic self-echo is also pointed out by Meier 190 and Gregor 512-13.

[8]Female dominance is not limited to the proposal scene or the relationship between Gwendolen and Jack; it characterizes all of the heterosexual relationships in the play, and some others elsewhere in Wilde's oeuvre. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for instance, Lord Henry gossips about a forward American heiress who "has made up her mind to propose" to Lord Dartmoor (76). On female dominance

in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, see Kohl, *Das literarische Werk* 176-77, Parker 176-77, and Raby 63.

[9]I borrow the term *ludic* from Gerard Genette's typology of parody and its related modes. One of Genette's distinctions concerns the attitude that a text may take towards the text(s) that it transforms or imitates. There are three basic modes: first, a satirical or polemical mode in which the source text is ridiculed; second, a ludic mode which creates comic tension between the two texts but no ridicule or derision at the expense of the source; third, a serious mode that translates a text into another genre or cultural context without any comic distortion (33-37). An example of the first mode is Henry Fielding's *Shamela*, of the second (as I would like to claim), *The Importance of Being Earnest*, of the third, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. In his important article on parody and comedy, Ian Donaldson makes a distinction which is similar to the distinction between the first two of Genette's modes: "[M]uch of our delight in watching a comedy comes from our recognition of the presence of time-honoured situations, complications, and resolutions, which are introduced in a spirit not so much of ridicule or burlesque as of playful affection. The kind of comic parody which I want to explore […] is not the open and sustained parody of the better-known burlesque and rehearsal plays, but a parody altogether more genial and gentle, devoid of major satirical intent, playing wryly but nonetheless delightedly with the conventions of the comic form" (45). I am grateful to Ian Donaldson for sending me a copy of his instructive article, which I had difficulties in obtaining.

[10]See, for instance, Catsiapis, Hess-Lüttich, Nassar and Zeender.

[11]On the differences between these two types of paradox and on their ultimate similarity, see Niederhoff 49-52.

[12]On this genre, see Henry Knight Miller and Niederhoff 50-52, where further studies of the genre are listed.

[13]For further examples of this technique, see Donaldson 45 and Ogala 228-29.

[14]Some examples of servants who like to eat: Sosia in the various versions of *Amphitryon*; Dromio of Ephesus, who advises the man whom he believes to be his master, "Methinks your maw, like mine, should be your clock, / And strike you home without a messenger" (*The Comedy of Errors* 1.2.66-67); Jeremy, who, in the opening scene of William Congreve's *Love for Love*, prefers real food to the nourishment of the mind. The link between masters and wine is shown by Congreve's Mellefont who is praised as "the very Essence of Wit, and Spirit of Wine" (*The Double-Dealer* 1.1.34-35), or by Sheridan's Charles and Careless who see it as "the great Degeneracy of the Age" that some of their fellows do not drink, that "they give into all the Substantial Luxuries of the Table—and abstain from nothing but wine and wit" (*The School for Scandal* 3.3.1-5). Another case in point is the debate about the respective merits of wine and women, a debate frequently conducted by young gentlemen in comedy (e.g. by Merryman and Cunningham in Charles Sedley's *Bellamira*); the debate is never about food and women.

[15]This inversion of roles is missed by James M. Ware in his article on Algernon's appetite; Ware relates this appetite to the hedonism of the rakes in Restoration comedy.

[16]This allusion may be more than a passing reference; it may indicate an influence of Erasmus on Wilde or at least a profound affinity between them. *The Praise of Folly* evinces some very close similarities to Wilde's writings and to *The Importance of Being Earnest* in particular. First, it draws on the literary traditions of both parody and the paradoxical encomium, as C. A. Patrides points out in an article on Erasmus and Thomas More (39). Second, the preface asserts that "[n]othing is more puerile, certainly, than to treat serious matters triflingly; but nothing is more graceful than to handle light subjects in such a way that you seem to have been anything but trifling" (3). This seems fairly close to the subtitle of Wilde's play, *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*. Third, *The Praise of Folly* is also informed by a spirit of sceptical play, by the eschewal of a fixed position. As Patrides writes, "Erasmus's mercurial protagonist is wont to disavow a number of specifically Erasmian tenets, admit as many others, and—more often than not—disavow and admit them at once" (40).

[17]The present explanation of the ludic quality of Wilde's paradoxes consists in a commentary on some passages from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Elsewhere I have given a more technical analysis of the ludic paradox, which distinguishes it from the comico-satirical paradox on the one hand, and the serious paradox on the other. This distinction is based on the relative weight of the opposites linked in a paradox, on the relative weight of the two principles which are at work in a paradox (contradiction and sense), and on the attitude taken by the speaker; see Niederhoff 60-76.

[18]Ian Gregor claims that Wilde found a fitting dramatic environment for the dandy only in his final play but not in the earlier ones, a claim that is echoed in Raby 34. Norbert Kohl takes a similar view of the earlier plays: "Der grelle Kontrast zwischen Pathos und Paradoxon, zwischen der unvermittelten sprachlichen Melodramatik rührseliger Heroinen und dem artifiziellen Idiom der Dandys resultiert in Disharmonien, die der ästhetischen Homogenität der Stücke nicht eben zuträglich sind" (*Leben und Werk* 189).

[19]See also Dariusz Pestka, who argues that in the early plays "the plot is not comic at all, and only verbal wit and a few amusing characters counterbalance the serious problems; whereas in the latter [*The Importance of Being Earnest*] the plot contributes to the playful mood and reinforces other comic devices" (191).

[20]A link between this essay and the play is also established by E. B. Partridge in his article, "The Importance of Not Being Earnest."

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

"Across the pale parabola of Joy": Wodehouse Parodist

INGE LEIMBERG

In his stories and novels Wodehouse never comments on his technique but, fortunately, in his letters to Bill Townend, the author friend who first introduced him to Stanley Featherstonaugh Ukridge, he does drop some professional hints, for instance:

> I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right down into life and not caring a damn. (*WoW* 313)

This is augmented by a later remark concerning autobiographic interpretations, especially of Shakespeare:

> A thing I can never understand is why all the critics seem to assume that his plays are a reflection of his personal moods and dictated by the circumstances of his private life. […] I can't see it. Do you find that your private life affects your work? I don't. (*WoW* 360)

In 1935, when he confessed to "ignoring real life altogether," Wodehouse had found his form. Looking at his work of some 25 years before, we can get an idea of how he did so. In *Psmith Journalist* (1912), for instance, that exquisite is indeed concerned with real life, but, ten years later, in *Leave it to Psmith,* he joins the Blandings gang and, finally, replaces the efficient Baxter as Lord Emsworth's secretary, with hardly a trace of real life left in him.

Opening one of Wodehouse's best stories or novels is like saying, "Open Sesame!" or "Curtain up!" and from then on, in a way, nothing is but what is not. The lights in the auditorium go out and there is

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nothing but the play which is, of course, the result not of a conjuring trick, or even of genius alone, but of highly professional hard work.

For years Wodehouse worked in a team of theatrical professionals who made plays, e.g., the so-called *Princess Shows*, which were very popular and highly praised by the most fastidious critics in their day. Wodehouse wrote the lyrics but also helped with the plot and dialogue and this was, perhaps, instrumental in his cultivating a kind of prose fiction that was indeed, not in a metaphorical but technical sense, "musical comedy without music." In one of his letters to Townend, in 1923, he wrote:

> The more I write, the more I am convinced that the only way to write a popular story is to split it up into scenes […]. (*WoW* 252)

and:

> The principle I always go on in writing a long story is to think of the characters in terms of actors in a play. (*WoW* 255-56)

So the narrative technique he increasingly wanted to perfect was essentially scenic. And what he wanted to show is, emphatically, not life—but what is it? What happens, when London and New York, where Psmith had been employed as bank clerk and journalist, fade away, and his maker transports him to Blandings Castle? It seems that Wodehouse went even further than Virgil did (according to "An Essay on Criticism" 132-35):

> Perhaps he seem'd above the critics' law,
> And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:
> But when to examine every part he came,
> Nature and Homer were, he found, the same. (Pope 61)

Wodehouse obviously found not only that "Nature and Homer were […] the same," but that—for the purposes of his musical-comedy-fiction—Nature was less useful and fitting than Homer, or Sir Thomas Malory, or Sir Walter Scott, or Alfred Lord Tennyson, or Edward Lear, to name but a few. So he gave up following nature altogether and

followed those who also had followed their elders and betters; and this is a course which, when followed most strictly, is likely to lead to parody, be it literal or burlesque.

A Damsel in Distress (1919) is a novel modelled closely on Tennyson's *Maud*, though not yet purged completely of reality. Of course everyone knows the story, but here is its *protasis* in Wodehousean terms: Lady Maud Marsh, the heroine, loves a mysterious stranger, whom she met a year ago, predictably, in Wales. But the family, that is to say the inevitable ogrish aunt, Lady Caroline Byng, will have none of it and keeps Maud shut up in Belpher Castle. The father, in this case, is nice and harmless but no help whatsoever, because Lady Caroline has him under strict control. The bad brother, Percy, is indeed bad but completely grotesque; overdressed and fat and supercilious. Came a day, when Maud, reading in the society column that her Geoffrey is back in town, goes there on the sly and, walking along Piccadilly, is sighted and pursued by Percy. To hide from him, she enters a cab which, needless to say, is occupied by George, the real hero, who had fallen in love with her at first sight, long before:

> "I'm so sorry," she said breathlessly, "but would you mind hiding me, please." (*Damsel* 28)

Of course, George does not mind but

> gazed upon Piccadilly with eyes from which the scales had fallen […] though superficially the same, in reality Piccadilly had altered completely. Before it had been just Piccadilly. Now it was a golden Street in the City of Romance, a main thoroughfare of Baghdad […] a rose-coloured mist swam before George's eyes. His spirits, so low but a few moments back, soared like a good niblick shot out of the bunker of Gloom. (*Damsel* 29)

Where are we? In Piccadilly, or in Fairyland, or on an allegorical golf course? But however real or mythical the scene, in one respect we have firm ground under our feet: we may be sure that we are moving in literary circles. For immediately after the Arthurian legends and *The Thousand and One Nights* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* comes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:

> What would Sherlock Holmes have done? (*Damsel* 44)

comes Longfellow:

> A dreadful phrase, haunting in its pathos, crept into [George's] mind. "Ships that pass in the night!" (*Damsel* 44)

comes Lady Fortune in person:

> Luck is a goddess not to be coerced and forcibly wooed by those who seek her favours. (*Damsel* 45)

comes the report in the *Evening News* of the enraged Percy who, prevented by an obliging policeman from hitting George, hits the policeman instead, who duly marches him off to Vine Street police station. This makes the reporter break into verse:

> *… Who knows what horrors might have been, had there not come upon the scene old London City's favourite son, Policeman C. 231. "What means this conduct? Prithee stop!" exclaimed that admirable slop* […]. [But eventually Percy] *gave the constable a punch just where the latter kept his lunch. The constable said "Well! Well! Well!" and marched him to a dungeon cell* […].
>
> (*Damsel* 46)

That "Well! Well! Well!" rings a parodic bell. We are meant to see through the incognito of that *Evening News* reporter: his name is Hilaire Belloc and he has been present all along, for the child Godolphin Horne in Belloc clearly is the father of the man Percy Lord Belpher in Wodehouse:

> Godolphin Horne was Nobly Born;
> He held the Human Race in Scorn,
> […]
> And oh! the Lad was Deathly Proud!
> He never shook your Hand or Bowed,
> But merely smirked and nodded thus:
> How perfectly ridiculous!
> Alas! That such Affected Tricks
> Should flourish in a Child of Six!
> (For such was Young Godolphin's age).
> Just then, the Court required a Page, (Belloc 29-31, ll. 1-2, 5-12)

but when Godolphin Horne is suggested, murmurs of dissent are heard all around, and even Lady Mary Flood,

> (*So* Kind, and oh! so *really* good)
> Said, "No! He wouldn't do at all,
> He'd make us feel a lot too small."
> The Chamberlain said, " ... Well, well, well!
> No doubt you're right.... One cannot tell!"
> He took his Gold and Diamond Pen
> And Scratched Godolphin out again.
> So now Godolphin is the Boy
> Who blacks the Boots at the Savoy. (Belloc 34-36, ll. 38-46)

Percy and Godolphin, the metre and the rhythm, the stylistic level and the tone fit, and the policeman borrows some of the Chamberlain's words, and Wodehouse, like Belloc, writes cautionary verse that culminates in a moral:

> *At Vine Street Station out it came—Lord Belpher was the culprit's name. But British Justice is severe alike on pauper and on peer; with even hand she holds the scale; a thumping fine, in lieu of gaol, induced Lord B to feel remorse and learn he mustn't punch the Force.*
>
> (*Damsel* 46)

We are in literature and we are in the theatre. That is where George belongs in the plot (he is the composer of the musical now running at the Regal Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue), and what happens, when the girl has boarded George's taxi which moves slowly on with brother Percy in hot pursuit, is a "spectacle" with carefully made-up and attired characters. Strangely enough, one shop-girl in the crowd calls the other "Mordee" (*Damsel* 31). So besides the Lady Maud of Belpher Castle there is a very different Maud ("Mordee" to friends) with her own untold story which might happen in a sentimental novel or play called—quoting Wodehouse—"*Only a Factory Girl*" (*Jeeves* 190). We are watching a show. George protruding from the window of the taxi like a snail feels that he is part of a theatrical scene: he "was entertained by the spectacle of the pursuit" (*Damsel* 31). And a man in the crowd says "'It's a fillum! […] The kemerer's 'idden in the keb'"

(*Damsel* 32). So, the stars as well as the bit part-actors, which are in the scene, feel that they are in a scene. It's the old trick of a stage within a stage. If we have missed this, we are reminded of it by the nice young man who takes Percy home after the night spent in Vine Street police station. "'This […] is rather like a bit out of a melodrama. Convict son totters up the steps of the old home and punches the bell'" (*Damsel* 48).

After this obvious, general persiflage, a very specific one takes place when it comes to bringing us a little nearer to the heroine, Lady Maud, and, incidentally, to Albert the page-boy at Belpher Castle. Maud, who is fond of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, would prefer Albert to be like a silk-and-satined medieval page, and tries to educate him with the help of Tennyson's "Mariana":

> "Read me some of this," she said, "and then tell me if it doesn't make you feel you want to do big things." (*Damsel* 75)

When Alfred begins to read we are treated to the Cockney version of "With blackest moss the flower-pots […]" copied in *My Fair Lady* some thirty years hence.

Needless to say, Albert is not reformed by Tennyson's poetry. Seeing pigs killed is what fascinates him. But this speaks against Albert, not Tennyson, who charms both the romantic heroine and hero with his poetry. To Maud it seems that "Mariana" might have been written with an eye to her special case, so vividly do its magic words echo her own story.

> *She only said, 'My life is dreary,*
> *He cometh not,' she said.*
> *She said 'I am aweary, aweary,*
> *I would that I were dead!'* (*Damsel* 77)

It is exactly the same with George, who

> has just discovered the extraordinary resemblance […] between his own position and that of the hero of Tennyson's *Maud*, a poem to which he has always been particularly addicted—and never more so than during the days

> since he learned the name of the only possible girl. When he has not been playing golf, Tennyson's *Maud* has been his constant companion. (*Damsel* 111)

So Tennyson's poetry remains on its high romantic pedestal, the sympathy of both the heroes craving ours, the readers'. And if we are made that way, we like it all the better for being, like the heroes themselves, romantic with a vengeance: the course of their true love runs far from smoothly, but there is always golf. Similarly, "Mariana" is a lovely poem, but there are always the Cockney potentialities of the flower-pot sequence. If we get too deeply involved by empathy and sympathy and too depressed by that "I am aweary, aweary," we may switch to Alfred's, or Eliza Doolittle's, cockney recital of "'Wiv blekest morss […]'" (*Damsel* 76).

Far from being brought in opposition with a more life-like, more up-to-date, more enlightened kind of literary reality, the poems appear as the masterly rendition of an ever-recurring myth, recurring, for instance, in this story, whether or not Lady Maud or the "Mordee" of that cockney crowd is its heroine. There comes, however, a kind of epitasis and anagnorisis in the sequence of scenes, when even golf doesn't seem able to provide relief from romantic melancholy: George, mistaken by "the family" for the man Maud wanted to meet in London when she hid in George's taxi, thinks he has reached journey's end, but has to discover, suddenly and tragically and (apparently) inevitably, that Maud only wants him to help her regain the man she has fallen in love with the year before in Wales.

It is all very romantic and tear-jerking but, again, we are saved from drowning in sentimentality: Shakespeare comes to the rescue when George, recovering from the first shock, finds that he seems to be "in the position of the tinker in the play whom everybody conspired to delude into the belief that he was a king" (*Damsel* 145). Certainly all is not lost for a man who is able to compare himself with Christopher Sly. Moreover we, the readers, have been in the know all along about "the man from Wales." He is an absolute bounder and, worse, will turn out to have grown fat during that year of absence. Finally, a *deus*

ex machina appears in the costume of a crook lawyer who presents the papers to him concerning a breach of promise, and Maud can wave him good bye with a clear conscience.

Up to this funny *dénouement*, Maud's and George's story is so very similar in all its essentials to Tennyson's "Maud" that it appears as a self-parody modelled on the parodied romance. It shares its sentiment, its remoteness from reality, not only with regard to content but form as well: if the old romance is clothed in verse, the "modern" novel is a (musical) comedy in prose.

Wodehouse loves making fun of Tennyson's poetry, especially its supposedly ennobling effect. All that "Trouble Down at Tudsleigh," where a young girl imitates Lady Godiva to the letter, is a case in point. But as an exact replica of a Tennysonian romance, *A Damsel in Distress* stands alone. There is only one other case in which the romantic love-story dominates a short story (not a novel), but now it is the squashily sentimental novel in general that is parodied, not a specific work.

We are spared the effort of composing a summary of this short story by Wodehouse himself, who wrote in a letter to Townend:

> The short story I have just finished, entitled *Honeysuckle Cottage*, is the funniest idea I've ever had. A young writer of thrillers gets left five thousand quid and a house by his aunt, who was Leila May Pinkney, the famous writer of sentimental stories. He finds that her vibrations have set up a sort of miasma of sentimentalism in the place, so that all who come within its radius get soppy and maudlin. He then finds to his horror that he is—but it will be simpler to send you the story […]. (*WoW* 259)

Well, there was a clause in the aunt's testament to the effect that James (the thriller-writer) has to live for some months every year in the cottage, if he wants to get the money. He does of course, and so he finds himself transformed into the hero of a typical Leila May Pinkney-story complete with fragile golden-haired girl and soldierly guardian and all the other clichés. This is how he first becomes aware of what he has let himself in for:

> He shoved in a fresh sheet of paper, chewed his pipe thoughtfully for a moment, then wrote rapidly:

> For an instant Lester Gage thought that he must have been mistaken. Then the noise came again, faint but unmistakable […]
>
> His mouth set in a grim line. Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the desk, noiselessly opened a drawer, drew out his automatic. After that affair of the poisoned needle, he was taking no chances. Still in dead silence, he tiptoed to the door; then, flinging it suddenly open, he stood there, his weapon poised.
>
> On the mat stood the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld. A veritable child of Faërie. She eyed him for a moment with a saucy smile; then with a pretty, roguish look of reproof shook a dainty forefinger at him.
>
> 'I believe you've forgotten me, Mr. Gage!' she fluted with a mock severity which her eyes belied.
>
> James stared at the paper dumbly. (*Mr Mulliner* 150-51)

The miasma is stronger than James, and so, in the end, he is on the point of proposing to the girl, Rose, when, like the crook lawyer in *A Damsel in Distress*, a *deus ex machina* comes to the rescue. It is the gardener's dog, William, a mongrel to end all mongrels, who has, in fact, kept intruding from the very first, but really takes over only now. After having upset the tea-table and thus interrupted the proposal, he starts to chase Rose's cherished little dog Toto, and thus makes James chase him in order to save Toto, whom, after having passed farmer Briskett's farm, farmer Giles's cow-shed, and the Bunch of Grapes Public House, he finds hiding in a small drainpipe.

> "William," roared James, coming up at a canter. He stopped to pluck a branch from the hedge and swooped darkly on.
>
> William had been crouching before the pipe, making a noise like a bassoon into its interior; but now he rose and came beamingly to James. His eyes were aglow with chumminess and affection; and placing his forefeet on James's chest, he licked him three times on the face in rapid succession. And as he did so, something seemed to snap in James. The scales seemed to fall from James's eyes. For the first time he saw William as he really was, the authentic type of dog that saves his master from a frightful peril. A wave of emotion swept over him.
>
> "William!" he muttered, "William!" (*Mr Mulliner* 169-70)

And so, at the end of this story, where he wholeheartedly ridicules a kind of literature that cannot but be a self-parody, Wodehouse again sympathizes with the original in out-pinkneying the Pinkney: The hero vanishes from the readers' eyes not betrothed to the lovely Rose,

but bound in eternal friendship to the ugly mongrel William, who has saved him from becoming the hero of a sentimental love-story only to make him the hero of a sentimental dog-story:

> William looked up into his face and it seemed to James that he gave a brief nod of comprehension and approval. James turned. Through the trees to the east he could see the red roof of Honeysuckle Cottage, lurking like some evil dragon in ambush. (*Mr Mulliner* 170)

And this is the last short-story entirely modelled on a parodied type of literature. As an episode, of course, the sentimental novel will come up again and again, especially in its modern form, the film-script.

In *Laughing Gas*, for instance, where sentimentality has (nearly) completely vanished, three would-be script-writers kidnap (as a publicity stunt) the child-star Joey Cooley (who in fact is not Joey Cooley at all but an English earl changed temporarily into the boy by a dentist who has applied laughing gas). Now (treating him to an excellent breakfast of pancakes) they insist on telling him a story they have concocted, which, they are sure, cannot but widely surpass the fame of *All's Quiet on the Western Front* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Frequently interrupting each other, they are interrupted eventually by little Joey Cooley, who points out the lack of a love interest:

> "Love interest?" said George. He brightened. "Well, how does this strike you? Coast of South America, girl swimming out to the anchored ship. The air is heavy with the exotic perfume of the tropics […] and a cloud of pink flamingoes drifts lazily across the sky, and there's this here now prac'lly naked girl swimming out to—"
>
> […]
>
> "Don't you worry about love interest," said George. "Let's get on to where you blow in. These gangsters scuttle the ship—see—and they get off in the boat—see—same as in *Mutiny on the Bounty*—see—and […] supposing that in this boat there's a little bit of a golden-haired boy […]"

And so, in an obstacle race of interruptions they reach their climax:

> "Who do you think Public Enemy Number Thirteen turns out to be? Just your long-lost father. That's all. Nothing but that. Maybe that ain't a smacko? There's a locket you're wearing round your neck—see—"
>
> "And this bozo takes a slant at it while you're asleep—see—"

> "And," said George, "it's yessir sure enough the picture of the dead wife he loved …" (*Laughing Gas* 174-75)

Wodehouse more or less celebrates the little plot, being quite openly grateful to Hollywood for taking it off his hands, and at the same time providing him with all those absolutely unsuitable, grossly inelegant, perfectly lovely clichés heaped together, which have fascinated the reading and theatre-going public at least since the days of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica.*

Is this kind of parody still sympathetic? Surely it is. Wodehouse wouldn't miss that kind of film-script for the world. Nor would he, at the other end of the literary scale of styles and values, that lyrical gem,

> "Across the pale parabola of Joy."

This cryptic line pops up again and again in *Leave it to Psmith*, published, long before *Laughing Gas*, in 1923. It is a Blandings-novel in which the chatelaine, Lady Constance Keeble, sees herself playing the role of a patroness of up-and-coming poets. A female specimen of this kind, Miss Aileen Peavey, is already in residence at the Castle. Lady Constance has made her acquaintance on an ocean-liner, wherefore we suspect her from the very first of being the crook she eventually will turn out to be. Nevertheless she has published some poems with some success, though we can only guess from her conversation what her poetry is like. One morning, for instance, she waylays Lord Emsworth to ask him, if he doesn't think that it was fairies' tear-drops that made the dew (*Psmith* 96).

This is, however, far from being either the conversational or poetic style of Ralston McTodd, the "powerful young singer of Saskatoon" (*Psmith* 81), who has also been invited by Lady Constance. Since he is, however, already a celebrity, Lord Emsworth is despatched (to his utter dismay) to meet him in London at the Senior Conservative Club and bring him to the castle in person. Of course Lord Emsworth makes a complete mess of everything. McTodd swears that he will never come near Blandings. Psmith, having fallen in love at first sight with the young Lady who is going to Blandings to catalogue the

library, feels sure that his going there too, under the name of McTodd, will be a good deed for all concerned.

And so we find him in a first class compartment of the five o'clock train, moving slowly out of Paddington Station, "taking his bag down from the rack" and extracting "a slim volume bound in squashy mauve" in order to get ready for answering questions concerning his (i.e. McTodd's) poems, only to find that "[t]hey were not light summer reading." What he reads (to the accompaniment of Lord Emsworth's snores) is:

> "Across the pale parabola of Joy […]" (with a capital J)

"Psmith knitted his brow" (*Psmith* 98-99)—and so do, surely, many readers, though not because they are worrying about the meaning of this line (which obviously does not mean a thing), nor because they are in danger of being questioned about it by Lady Constance and Miss Peavey, not to mention the efficient Baxter. Very probably their brow-knitting concerns the question of how McTodd's stroke of genius makes sense as a parody. If, however, tempted by this problem, they would go to the library and start digging deeply into some of the more celebrated collections of poems of the twenties, they would only waste their time. That brainchild of McTodd's is far from being a caricature of a rarity. It is an imitation of a pattern easily and frequently to be found in any anthology. Here are some specimens:

1. Against the dry essential of tomorrow (Brooks 114)
2. The steep sierras of delight (Campbell 107)
3. The green anatomy of desire
4. The deep larder of illusion
5. A gradual eclipse of recognition
6. Under the snuffed Lantern of time (Roberts 223-31)
7. … pierced with the passion of dense gloom (Roberts 166-67)
8. Peaked margin of antiquity's delay
9. Split the straight line of pessimism (Roberts 201-03)
10. Across the pale parabola of Joy (*Psmith* 98 and *passim*)

It fits perfectly. Apparently turning out something very new and exceptional, all the makers of these phrases follow the same recipe: they mix science (preferably geometry) with emotion or metaphysics by means of synaesthesia plus the subjective genitive which produces metaphor, in order to end, nearly always, in the pathetic fallacy.

As has been mentioned before, in *Leave It to Psmith* Wodehouse had already given reality a miss, and that holds good for comments, too. But four years earlier in *A Damsel in Distress*, a hint at the propagation of an artefact like McTodd's eternal line can be found. The charming and intelligent chorus-girl, who will eventually become Lady Marshmorton, mentions a composer, to whom the manager says that none of his songs in the whole show has a melody, and who answers, yes, perhaps his songs "weren't very tuney, but […] the thing about his music was that it had such a wonderful aroma" (*Damsel* 25). There we have the "pale parabola of Joy" in a nutshell.

And so much for now of that little bijou from Ralston McTodd's *Songs of Squalor* (*Psmith* 145 and 190), be it original or parodic. But we have not yet done with Tennyson's "Mariana," which takes us back to Blandings. As Wodehouse does not seem to like poems devoted exclusively to ill-reeking swamps and worms and toads, he does not like Lord Emsworth's secretary, the efficient Baxter. Rupert Baxter mistrusts everybody, and wants to know everything and that is why, when Lady Constance's famous necklace has been stolen (needless to say by Miss Peavey, the gangster-poetess), Baxter spends the night not in bed but chasing the supposed thief down the stairs and out into the night, realizing too late that the main door has been shut and bolted behind him. Baxter, doing what he always does, thinks, and instantly "Inspiration ha[s] come to him" (*Psmith* 213).

Is this a row of flower-pots, which I see before me? he thinks, and starts digging in them for the necklace—until fifteen flower-pots lie empty, and fifteen geraniums are ruined for nothing, because, of course, the one flower-pot in which indeed the necklace was hidden, had been purloined long before Baxter started his quest. But this is far from being the end of the flower-pot sequence.

Baxter, now including "all geraniums, all thieves, and most of the human race in one comprehensive black hatred," and having tried in vain to wake someone in the castle by tossing pebbles at windows, decides that "this was no time for pebbles. Pebbles were feeble and inadequate. With one voice the birds, the breeze, the grasshoppers, the whole chorus of Nature waking to another day seems to shout to him, 'Say it with flower-pots!'" (*Psmith* 214-15).

So he throws one flower-pot after another through Lord Emsworth's window, who goes and wakes Psmith, who bids him a pleasant good morning and offers him a seat. His lordship apologizes to Psmith and tells him that Baxter has gone off his head.

> "He is out in the garden in his pyjamas, throwing flower-pots through my window."
> "Flower-pots?"
> "Flower-pots!"
> "Oh, flower-pots!" said Psmith … (*Psmith* 218)

… and came to the rescue.

I have counted—not in the whole book where flower-pots have been thrown through windows before, and will go on playing a prominent part to the end, but in this sequence—no less than 29 repetitions of the word "flower-pot." "Say it with flower-pots," all nature said to Baxter, and "Say it with flower-pots," said his muse to Wodehouse snowing us in with the things, as if he wanted us all to feel in the grip of Baxter's flower-pot throwing urge. Of course we remember the moss-covered ones from "Mariana" in *A Damsel in Distress*, which were funny as part of the whole stanza with its cockney affinities. But flower-pots alone? Repeated 29 times in rapid succession? Can the word stand this strain?

Well, Sir Philip Sidney and Mark Twain, for instance, would have said it could, not only for funny semantic associations but for musical and, accordingly, rhythmical reasons. The mere syllable [ot], together with some similar ones like [op] and [ock], makes for persiflage. (Really, Tennyson ought to have known!)

Wishing to make fun of clichéd love-poetry, Sidney writes:

> Some lovers speak when they their Muses entertaine
> Of hopes begot by feare, of wot not what desires: (Sidney 167)

and

> Some do I heare of Poet's furie tell,
> But (God wot) wot not what they meane by it: (Sidney 204)

And Mark Twain, some three hundred years later and on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, chose the name of Bots for the hero of Emmiline Grangerford's famous funeral elegy, which filled Huck Finn so much with pity for the girl (now also deceased) that he "tried to sweat out a verse or two [himself], but […] wouldn't seem to make it go somehow." But Emmiline could, and did:

> Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd.
>
> And did young Stephen sicken,
> And did young Stephen die?
> And did the sad hearts thicken,
> And did the mourners cry?
>
> No, such was not the fate of
> Young Stephen Dowling Bots;
> Though sad hearts round him thickened,
> 'Twas not from sickness' shots.
>
> No whooping-cough did rack his frame,
> Nor measles drear, with spots;
> Not these impaired the sacred name
> Of Stephen Dowling Bots.
> Despised love struck not with woe
> That head of curly knots,
> Nor stomach troubles laid him low,
> Young Stephen Dowling Bots. Etc. (*Huckleberry Finn* 84-85)

Both in Sidney and in Mark Twain, the simple negative particle "not" plays its indispensable bit-part to bring out the comic-value of all the other [ots], and so it does in the refrain of "Mariana," when after "pots" and "knots": "'He cometh not,' she said."

Taking his cue from these masters, Wodehouse wrote a poem on a printer who printed "'not,' (Great Scott!)" instead of "now" and got only what he deserved when the writer decided that he would

> […] go and pot
> With sudden shot
> This printer who had printed "not"
> When I had written "now."

Needless to say, the judge, asking "What?" when he heard that the printer had printed "not" instead of "now," annulled the jury's verdict and shook the writer by the hand. Subsequently the P.E.N. Committee erected a statue for him because:

> "He did not sheath the sword but got
> A gun at great expense and shot
> The human blot, who'd printed 'not'
> When he had written 'now.'
> He acted with no thought of self,
> Not for advancement, not for pelf
> But just because it made him hot
> To think the man had printed 'not'
> When he had written 'now.'" (*Plum Pie* 278-80)

In late Wodehouse, hardly a trace is left of Tennysonian post-romanticism, but the inherent fun of the *Godwotwotnotwhat*-staccato prevails. Surely in *Uncle Dynamite* (written in 1948, when Wodehouse was nearing 70), Constable Potter is called Potter only because "Potter" rhymes with "rotter," (*Dynamite* 401) and because somehow the name sums up Potter's own style, which rings with Sidneyan parody:

> It was Constable Potter who now came before the meeting with a few well-judged words: "Not but what there ain't a lot in what the lad said," he observed. (*Dynamite* 409)

It also takes a *Potter* to demonstrate, in what kind of person he finds his *prop*, and that his is *not* an altogether happy *lot*, and *what* happens when he *knocks* out his pipe, and *props up* a ladder he found near a *pot*ting shed or, when he—doing his *copper's job*—*chucks* a stone at

Elise Bean's window to ask her, when she *pops* out her head, for a *drop* of something. Look anywhere in the Wodehouse canon and you will find the text strewn with these woodnotes wild of parody.

Talking of *Uncle Dynamite* brings us to another linguistic item with inherent parodic qualities, the word "uncle." Why are uncles (to leave aside aunts for the present) funny? Because Latin has only a diminutive for them? Or because they have a reputation of being notorious wise acres (talking like a Dutch uncle?) Or because an uncle, seen with a nephew's eyes, is an old man? "With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side, […]." (*As You Like It* 2.7.159)?

Well, Edward Lear (and Wodehouse knew his Edward Lear) did seem to think that uncles are funny, when he filled the magical rhythmic pattern of the Lady-of-Shalott-Stanza with the life-story of his "aged uncle Arly," who (like most butlers in Wodehouse) was obviously suffering from corns, since he always comes back, in the refrain, to the tightness of his shoes:

> O my agèd Uncle Arly!
> Sitting on a heap of Barley
> Thro' the silent hours of night.—
> Close beside a leafy thicket:—
> On his nose there was a Cricket,—
> In his hat a Railway Ticket;—
> (But his shoes were far too tight.) (Lear 395)

Why does a phrase like "But (God wot) wot not what" make for persiflage? Well, it just does. Why are uncles funny or—in Wodehouse—rather amusing? Well, they just are. Of course, aunts and uncles have always played a prominent part in Wodehouse. Bertie Wooster has been pestered by aunts from the cradle, and so have most of his friends. On the other hand, sometimes the ancient relatives are not without their uses; the plots of many Jeeves stories centre round impecunious nephews with aunts and uncles as their main source of supply.

When Wodehouse drops sentimentality in his novels, the course of true love begins to function as a mere incentive for the ingenuity of its

promoter, usually an uncle like Lord Ickenham or the Honourable Galahad Threepwood. There still is a romantic heroine and a lovelorn youth, but they are also-rans compared with Gally and Uncle Fred. This dwindling of the story's romanticism goes together with parody focusing no longer, for instance, on Tennyson, but on Wodehouse. The ironic detachment pervading the Jeeves stories and the Mulliner stories from the very first, now also sets the tone in the novels. In the preface to *Summer Lightning* (1929), a novel which has an uncle for a hero, Wodehouse touches on this change:

> A certain critic […] made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained 'all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.' He has probably by now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha: but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names […] This story is sort of Old Home Week for my—if I may coin a phrase—puppets. (*Lightning* 7)

Shoving in that glaringly clichéd "if I may coin a phrase," Wodehouse implicitly claims for this novel not only the theatricality, detachment and buoyancy of a musical comedy, but the primitive straightforwardness and—shall I say outlawry?—of the Punch and Judy Show.

He has a story "The Crime-Wave at Blandings" (1937), in which the efficient Baxter, touring England on his motorbike, looks in at the castle with a view to regaining his old post as secretary, and is eventually plugged in the seat of the pants with young George's air-gun not only by that right-minded boy himself, but by Lady Constance, Butler Beach, and finally Lord Emsworth in person:

> "How far away would you say he was, Beach?"
> "Fully twenty yards, m'lord."
> "Watch!" said Lord Emsworth.
>
> Into the sputtering of [Baxter's] bicycle there cut a soft pop. It was followed by a sharp howl. Rupert Baxter, who had had been leaning on the handle-bars, rose six inches with his hand to his thigh […] To one trapped in this inferno of Blandings Castle instant flight was the only way of winning to safety. The sputtering rose to a crescendo, diminished, died away altogether. Rupert Baxter had gone on, touring England. (*Emsworth* 55-56)

For this kind of scene Wodehouse rightly claims similarity with the Punch and Judy show in all its pristine, slap-stick, topsy-turvy, genial outlawry and undauntedness. And looking up "undauntedness" in *Roget's Thesaurus*, what do I find? "prowess, derring-do, chivalry, knightliness, heroic achievement, gallant act […]" (*Roget's Thesaurus* 855).

The old romances are favourites of the puppet show. And that is where Uncle Fred and Uncle Gally come in again, especially the latter.

> "It always makes me laugh," [says his niece Milicent] "when I think what a frightfully bad shot Uncle Gally's godfathers and godmothers made when they christened him." (*Lightning* 20-21)

For the Honourable Galahad Threepwood, "a short, trim, dapper little man of the type one associates […] with checked suits, tight trousers, white bowler hats, pink carnations, and race-glasses bumping against the left hip" (*Lightning* 21), is a true Galahad in purpose, but a Punch in execution. His code is his own, and he is looked at askance by the Lady Constances and Sir Gregory Parslowes of this world, but highly esteemed and loved by the right minded. His brother in law, Colonel Egbert Wedge (though never letting his wife, Lady Hermione, know), is firmly convinced that Gally is "the salt of the earth" (*Galahad* 96), and so is Sue Brown, the chorus-girl, who eventually turns out to be a kind of honorary daughter of Galahad's. Sue is visiting the castle (as nearly all the better elements do) under a false name. Becoming aware that Gally knows of this, she confesses to him, and is more than forgiven:

> If this chronicle has proved anything, it has proved by now that the moral outlook of the Hon. Galahad Threepwood was fundamentally unsound. A man to shake the head at. A man to view with concern. So felt his sister, Lady Constance Keeble, and she was undoubtedly right. If final evidence were needed, his next words supplied it.
>
> "I never heard", said the Hon. Galahad, beaming like one listening to a tale of virtue triumphant, "anything so dashed sporting in my life."
>
> […]
>
> "You mean", she cried, "you won't give me away?"

> "Me?" said the Hon. Galahad, aghast at the idea. "Of course I won't. What do you take me for?" (*Lightning* 159)

This Galahad is a Galahad who writes reminiscences compromising enough to blackmail Lady Constance into letting her nephew Ronnie marry the chorus-girl; who makes friends with all sorts of unsuitable people, and upsets stately homes of England; who intercepts letters, smuggles impostors into castles, and, last but not least, steals pigs. He is a hero belonging to the tribe of Punch and Judy, claiming the fool's licence in smart clothes, commanding beautiful manners, and speaking perfect English.

Direct literary parody vanishes in Wodehouse together with sentimentality in the course of the twenties. But the patterns (formal as well as moral) and figures of knight errantry never lose their charm for him, and he finally exalts them by making the knight-errant surpass himself in exchanging the sword with the slapstick, and playing the fool in a puppet-show. This parodic ideal, brought to perfection step by step, can be glimpsed from the very beginning, for instance in *A Damsel in Distress*, when the very policeman who is soon to be punched in the stomach by brother Percy makes his entrance:

> A rich, deep, soft, soothing voice [saying "What's all this"] slid into the heated scene like the Holy Grail sliding athwart a sunbeam. (*Damsel* 40)

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Parody—and Self-Parody in David Mamet

MAURICE CHARNEY

Parody is a form of imitation for satirical purposes. The parodist ridicules or mocks the object of his parody. But the parodist usually has a sneaking affection for what he is parodying: an old style that has gone out of fashion, highly sentimental discourse, seemingly meaningless clichés that are an essential part of popular culture. The subject is complicated when the parodist seems to be parodying himself in an extravagant, hyperbolic, and overwrought way.

Surely this is true of Shakespeare's Hamlet when he scoffs at his own exaggerated and inflamed heroic style. The First Player has just broken off his histrionic speech about Hecuba, the "mobbled queen" (2.2.505). Hamlet, in the soliloquy that follows, reproaches himself that the player could get so agitated "But in a fiction, in a dream of passion" (2.2.554). The essential point is:

> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her? What would he do
> Had he the motive and the cue for passion
> That I have? (2.2.561-64)

Hamlet then proceeds to work himself up to a grandiloquent climax that goes beyond the player's "dream of passion" to his own personal case for vengeance. The vaunting speech of revenge is focussed on Claudius the murderer:

> I should 'a' fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
> Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
> O, vengeance! (2.2.581-84)

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To the surprise of the audience (and probably of Hamlet too) he suddenly breaks off and comments disdainfully on his own overwrought style:

> Why, what an ass am I! Ay, sure, this is most brave,
> That I, the son of the dear murderèd,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
> A scullion! Fie upon't, foh! (2.2.585-90)

This is essentially parody, obviously self-parody, where Hamlet is mocking his own rodomontade. It is a very self-conscious comment on the appropriate style for "the son of a dear father murdered." "This is most brave"—"brave" is a word usually used by Shakespeare for showy and glistering apparel, as in the clothes that Caliban and his cohorts steal from Prospero in *The Tempest*. What is needed is not a "brave" style but one that is authentic and sincere.

David Mamet, an American dramatist and film maker born in Chicago in 1947, is not Shakespeare, but he too is preoccupied with matters of style. This acute, stylistic self-consciousness is what makes parody, and especially self-parody, possible. Mamet seems to be laughing at his own extravagance in such matters as macho boasting, an 'artful' use of dirty words, an avalanche of clichés with a menacing undertone, and a kind of meaningless repetition and inarticulateness with which only actors feel comfortable. Mamet began his career as an actor (as did Pinter, with whom he has many resemblances), so that he understands how insidious repetition can be handled by actors, who know how to register dramatic points.

We are helped in this discussion by David Ives's effective parody of Mamet in the short piece, *Speed-the-Play*, which is a takeoff on Mamet's *Speed the Plow* (1988). I saw *Speed-the-Play* when it was performed in an Off-Broadway theater in New York in 1998 as part of a collection of Ives's one-acts called *Mere Mortals*. The audience seemed to know Mamet well and laughed in all the right places, validating Ives's sense of what is parodiable in Mamet. The scene of the play is a

meeting hall in Chicago, with three men dressed in blue-collar garb and two women dressed as blue-collar babes. The Master of Ceremonies is a man, "but he is played by a woman in Mamet gear: a safari jacket, a baseball cap, a stubbly beard, and aviator glasses" (151). The MC enumerates the essence of Mamet's genius. First, he knows that Americans like speed. Second, he "knows that Americans don't like to pay for parking. They also don't give a shit about theatre" (151). Third, he "knows how Americans talk. Especially American men. He knows that when men go to the theatre, they want to hear familiar words, like 'asshole,' and 'jagoff'" (152). In conclusion, "David Mamet is the William Congreve of our time" (152).

Four plays are rapidly parodied: *American Buffalo*, *Oleanna*, *Speed-the-Plow*, and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. I will restrict my comments to *Oleanna*. The MC tells us that it is written in "his complex, Harry Jamesian style." There is a wordplay on Henry James, the novelist, and Harry James, the trumpet player and bandleader. Some of the things we pick up in less than two pages of text are that the characters in Mamet are inarticulate and their conversation—if you can call it that—doesn't make sense. This is the opening dialogue between John, the teacher, and Carol, the distraught student who has come to see him in his office:

JOHN So you…
CAROL I. I. I…
JOHN But.
CAROL When the…
JOHN *No. No. No.* You do *not*.

This is followed by a significant exchange:

CAROL But in your class, you—
JOHN Me like you.
CAROL But in your class you said—
JOHN No. No. No. I may have spoken, but I did not *say*…

The MC's final comment is: "I think that says it. She's wrong, he's right."

To work backwards, the short parody of *Oleanna* in *Speed-the-Play* is an excellent introduction to Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992). The play is a curious reworking of Ionesco's *The Lesson* (1951), in which the roles of inarticulate Professor and articulate student are rapidly and homicidally eroded. In Mamet, Carol the student becomes remarkably articulate by Act Three and lectures and browbeats the abashed Professor, who has lost everything including tenure and the deposit on his new house.

I would like to quote a fairly long piece from the opening engagement between John and Carol. John has been speaking on the telephone with his wife about a house they are trying to buy. He throws in the legal term "easement," and questions whether it is a "term of art" and "we are *bound* by it…" (2). Carol, the troubled student, immediately seizes on the expression "term of art":

CAROL (*Pause*) What is a "term of art"?
JOHN (*Pause*) I'm sorry …?
CAROL (*Pause*) What is a "term of art"?
JOHN Is that what you want to talk about?
CAROL … to talk about …?
JOHN Let's take the mysticism out of it, shall we? Carol? (*Pause*) Don't you think? I'll tell you: when you have some "thing." Which must be broached. (*Pause*) Don't you think …? (*Pause*)
CAROL … don't I think …?
JOHN Mmm?
CAROL … did I …?
JOHN … what?
CAROL Did … did I … did I say something wr…
JOHN (*Pause*) No. I'm sorry. No. You're right. I'm very sorry. I'm somewhat rushed. As you see. I'm sorry. You're right. (*Pause*) What is a "term of art"? It seems to mean a *term*, which has come, through its use, to mean something *more specific* than the words would, to someone *not acquainted* with them … indicate. That, I believe, is what a "term of art," would mean. (*Pause*)
CAROL You don't know what it means …?
JOHN I'm not sure that I know what it means. It's one of those things, perhaps you've had them, that, you look them up, or have someone explain them to you, and you say "aha," and, you immediately *forget* what … (2-4)

What do we gather from this blizzard of pauses, elisions (represented by three dots on the page), dashes, words in italics, repetitions, non sequitors, and incoherent discourse? It is a dialogue made for actors. Clearly we know immediately that John the Professor doesn't know what he is talking about. He is a pretentious windbag who hasn't any idea at all what "term of art" means and is trying to snow Carol. She is persistent, ragging, stubborn, irritating. She worries the preoccupied Professor, mutely accusing him of all the things that will become evident as the play progresses. We already sense her ominous power. The protagonists are both remarkably unsympathetic. The opening dialogue sounds like a parody of Pinter, especially in the excessive pauses and meaningless exchanges, but the dialogue is also very revealing about the characters. A lot of the meaning is expressed gesturally, both in sound and in movement (or lack of it). The characters are embarrassed and tentative. They size each other up. The many words in italics are cues to the actors for emphasis. Although they may have little or no meaning in themselves, they are expressed importantly. One of the salient features of Mamet's style is that he is entirely uncompromising. He pursues his dramatic points with a wild emphasis. It is overreaching, if not actually hyperbolical. This acute self-consciousness of style involves elaborate and knowing parody, if not what we may call self-parody. Mamet is always and consistently Mametesque.

It is interesting how dirty words—Mamet's trademark, stylistically—are withheld until the final, ambiguous climax. The empowered Carol's final demand that John subscribe to a list of proscribed books, including his own textbook, is the last straw that finally shakes him out of his professional style—rational, seemingly temperate but nevertheless patronizing—in which he has tried vainly to confront the angry and proto-feminist babble that Carol has been spouting. As Carol starts to leave the room, John grabs her and begins to beat her:

> JOHN You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life? (*He knocks her to the floor*.)

After how I treated you…? You should be…*Rape you*…? Are you kidding me…?
(*He picks up a chair, raises it above his head, and advances on her*.)
I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. You little *cunt*….
(*She cowers on the floor below him. Pause. He looks down at her. He lowers the chair. He moves to his desk, and arranges the papers on it. Pause. He looks over at her*.)
…well…
(*Pause. She looks at him*.)
CAROL Yes. That's right.
(*She looks away from him and lowers her head. To herself*:)
…yes. That's right. END (79-80)

Here the word games end and John finally reaches Carol, the real Carol? Is this "right" because the discourse is right? Is calling Carol a "little *cunt*" at last acknowledging her personhood and her subjectivity? Do the unattractive protagonists finally admit that underneath it all they have a sexual attraction for each other and are falling madly in love? We are being transported magically to the surprise, farcical ending of Chekov's *The Brute*, subtitled *A Joke in One Act* (1888). It is all very melodramatic but supremely ambiguous. Do we, the audience and readers, believe in the ending, or is Mamet pulling our melodramatic leg? The inability to answer these questions is what sucks us, definitively, into the morass of self-parody.

Boston Marriage (1999) is a very different kind of play from *Oleanna*. First of all, it is much more literary. It is overtly a parody of Restoration comedy of manners as filtered through Oscar Wilde's enormously influential *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), which in itself has been much parodied, as in Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw* (1969). Perhaps this is what David Ives meant when he called Mamet, in *Speed-the-Play*, "the William Congreve of our time." Mamet includes a specific Wilde signature word in the conversation of Anna and Claire, two lesbian ladies who are in a "Boston marriage," defined politely as an intimate friendship between two women often maintaining a household together. Claire asks her friend whether her male protector may withdraw his financial support:

CLAIRE Do you not find such a disposition trivial?
ANNA It is, as I understand the term, *Philosophy*. (*Pause*) How can philosophy be trivial? When have you known me to be trivial?
CLAIRE You once referred to the Crimean War as "just one of those Things." (37)

"Trivial" is the key word in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, whose subtitle is: *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*.

Mamet, often accused of a macho disregard for women, turns the tables by making this a play about women, with many snide, anti-male comments. At the very beginning, Claire is astounded by the enormous emerald necklace Anna has received from her male patron:

CLAIRE Then you have lost your virtue…?
ANNA Yes.
CLAIRE Thank God.
ANNA A man gave it to me.
CLAIRE A man.
ANNA They do have such hopes for the mercantile.
CLAIRE And those hopes so rarely disappointed.
ANNA Well, we do love shiny things.
CLAIRE In unity with our sisters the Fish.
ANNA Men …
CLAIRE What can one do with them?
ANNA Just the One Thing.
CLAIRE Though, in your case, it seems to've been effective.
ANNA In like a Lion, out like a Lamb. (*Pause.*) (4)

These gender exchanges echo a theme exploited in Mamet's early play, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974). The dialogue is designed for skillful actors, who can dwell archly on such words as "A man" (Claire) and Anna's "Men …" The three dots representing elision are translated by the actors into significant pauses, as are the many specific indications for *Pause*. In addition, Mamet delights in printing significant words with initial capitals (as in German): for example, "Just the One Thing" or "In like a Lion, out like a Lamb." Presumably, the actors will know how to render capital J, O, T and L and L.

There is constant reference throughout the play to the typical gender characteristics of men and women. Mamet seems to be amusing himself with the high-flown, literary speech, larded with clichés, mostly spoken by Anna, that is undercut by either Claire or the Maid. Anna intones portentously:

> My protector will withdraw his stipend as my love, her love, and I shall starve, the hollow percussion of my purse, a descant to that of my broken heart. But once I was young and the world before me. And once men were other than the depraved swine time and experience have revealed them to be. Once the world was to me a magic place … I was a Little Girl, O, once … (33)

Anna's kitschy musings, with "Little Girl" in capitals, are rudely interrupted by the Maid:

> D'you mind if I work while you're talkin', miss? (*Pause.*) 'Ld it disturb you, like? You needn't think, like, that I'd evade yer privacy. (*Pause.*) Cause I can't, the life o'me, tell what the fuck yer on about. (*Pause.*) (33)

There are three significant pauses in this speech as Mamet slyly slips in a curse word. The play is full of them, coming at unexpected moments and generally designed to undercut poetic speech. When Claire says, parodying Anna, "What of your Bible now? What of Forbearance, meek and mild …," Anna answers curtly, preceded, of course, by three dots of elision: "… kiss my ass." Claire is inconsolable and begins to cry: "You have fucked my life into a cocked hat" (40).

Mamet obviously ridicules his characters' literary and poetic pretensions, but when the characters make fun of each other is this self-parody by Mamet, or does Mamet the playwright exist apart, protected from the doing of his characters? This is an unanswerable question because all of *Boston Marriage* seems parodic in tone. The characters are never what we—and Oscar Wilde—would call "serious." We might want to call it "arch" in order to avoid the question of parody. For example, in an exchange towards the end of the play, Anna and Claire play mercilessly on conventional definitions of motherhood:

ANNA […] May I ask you, do you never feel that you've missed something?
CLAIRE What would that be?
ANNA Motherhood.
CLAIRE Were I to say that the joys of conception, parturition, and lactation had been vouchsafed to me I would tell a lie.
ANNA Yes. But certain women profit from it.
CLAIRE In what way?
ANNA They, they have *children*.
CLAIRE Apart from that.
ANNA No, I take your point. (65)

Anna's coy emphasis on "*children*" in italics is delicious, and Mamet is clearly making fun of his middle-aged lesbians.

The play is full of sexual innuendo that could be coded either heterosexual or homosexual. For example, at the climactic ending, Anna and Claire embrace avidly. In the very last action of the play, the Maid holds up a muff and says:

MAID Miss, your friend's forgot her muff.
ANNA (*exiting*) No—nothing in life is certain. That remains to be seen. (*Exits*)
(*Curtain*) (82)

"Muff," as well as an item of apparel, is also a slang word for the female genitalia, so that the last words of the play are definitely ambiguous. The muff figures in the action toward the beginning of Act Two, when Anna says, seemingly absent-mindedly:

ANNA … is that my muff?
CLAIRE You gave it to me *years* ago. How Dare You … do you stoop to, to, to, to *attempt* to humble me, by calling up past favors?
ANNA No.
CLAIRE Then what was the import of your mention of the muff?
ANNA I was surprised it had come back in style.
CLAIRE God damn you to hell.
ANNA I suppose if one waits long enough …
CLAIRE You look like a plate of cold stew. (36)

The gift of the muff figures in the power relations between the older and the younger woman. Aside from its bitchy sexual connotations, the muff as a love token is an item of emotional exchange.

Boston Marriage is filled with epigrams in the style of Oscar Wilde, but they are tongue-in-cheek epigrams of a pseudo-proverbial nature. Mamet seems to be enjoying himself by writing quotable lines that are exceedingly brittle in style. For example, Claire asks whether Anna's protector has a wife, and Anna snaps back: "Why would he require a mistress if he had no wife?" (6). Or, more nonsensically, Anna says: "Well, there is a time for everything. (*Pause.*) Except, of course, those things one has not time for. And what is there to be done about *that*? (*Pause.*)" (17). Mamet uses the pauses cleverly in his printed text to control the timing and to give the reader some sense of the movement of the acted play.

Finally, the role of the Maid needs to be considered separately from the two women, since she is a farcical, lower-class character, not Irish as Anna pretends, someone off whom jokes can be bounced. For example, the Maid is in a quandary because she thinks she is pregnant:

ANNA Go, go, go, go away, you sad, immoral harlot.
MAID I don't know what to *do*.
CLAIRE Well, what would your Auld Granny say?
MAID I don't know.
CLAIRE Well, go home and ask her.
MAID She's dead.
CLAIRE She should have taken better care of herself.
MAID Waal, she lived a long life.
CLAIRE Oh, good.
MAID She was forty.
ANNA … Ah ha … (50)

This sounds like a music-hall routine. Like Margaret Dumont in the Marx Brothers' films, the maid is a perfectly straight man—or straight woman—for the ladies' witty remarks.

There is still a great deal to speak about in *Boston Marriage* as a parody, more than can possibly be included in this paper. One final stylistic issue is the meaningless and pointless babble designed to conceal what one really wants to say. This is parody used for a purely

histrionic purpose. There is an excellent example in Anna and Claire's conversation about the weather toward the beginning of the play:

> ANNA […] How do you find the weather? (*Pause.*) Do you not find it is fine?
> CLAIRE I find that it is *seasonable* …
> ANNA … yes …
> CLAIRE … for this time of *year*.
> ANNA Mmm.
> CLAIRE And that is as far as I'm prepared to commit myself. (*Pause.*) But I was saying …
> ANNA Yes, you were saying that you were "in love." As you phrased it. You were, in midcareer, as it were, prating of this "Love." (11)

What are we to make of the text that we are reading, for example, Anna's "Mmm" or her "… [dot, dot, dot] yes … [dot, dot, dot]"? The talk about the weather is clearly a blind to conceal talk about love. Mamet is an expert in the artful use of prototypical clichés.

Is Mamet parodying himself? There are certain stylistic tics in all of his works that occur both in serious and in ridiculous forms, things like the macho vaunting, the sudden bursts of slang and colloquial, the overwrought literary style, the excessive pauses, silences fraught with meaning (or with emptiness), endless repetition, fragmentary and unintelligible speech and syntax. None of this is accidental. It seems to me that the author is deliberately pushing the envelope and seeing how far he can go without audience and readers rising up in protest. This may be teasing, if not infuriating, but it is also bold and artful. Mamet the author is always there hovering over his plays and films, in his safari jacket, baseball cap, stubbly beard, and aviator glasses, carrying a large, phallic cigar, as David Ives describes his Master of Ceremonies in *Speed-the-Play*. He seems amused at having us on.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

A Response to Frank J. Kearful*

BONNIE COSTELLO

Frank Kearful's essay, "Elizabeth Bishop's 'The Prodigal' as a Sympathetic Parody" provides the best close reading of the poem to date, explicating the peculiar deviations within the double sonnet form, and flushing out the subtleties of meaning that inhere in puns and syntactic ambiguities. We are reminded what mastery Bishop displays in breaking rules of form, and what linguistic reserve she brings to apparently simple word choice. Like most of Bishop's critics, Kearful sees these intricacies ultimately serving an autobiographical impulse, to create "a psychological portrayal of an alcoholic's entrapment in his addiction. […] Bishop's formal high jinks and her secular parody of the biblical parable join forces to fashion an askew, unsentimental representation of herself as an alcoholic" (16-17). In pursuit of this line of argument, one might even add "herself as an asthmatic alcoholic" since, as Kearful shows, issues of "breathing" (18) are foregrounded in the poem. (Other Bishop critics have certainly made much of the concern with "breath" as a link to her bodily suffering.) But is the soul of the poem to be found, ultimately, in the pursuit of autobiographical links? Kearful's astute reading inadvertently demonstrates the opposite. Evoking one of Western culture's best known parables, the poet moves out of the isolation of her own distress into the community formed in the space of abiding forms and narratives. In the "he" of the Prodigal, we find not an "I" but a "we." Classics carry with them the history of their use, as Kearful's comment on earlier "parodies" of this

*Reference: Frank J. Kearful, "Elizabeth Bishop's 'The Prodigal' as a Sympathetic Parody," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 14-34.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debkearful01201.htm>.

parable makes clear. If we recognize ourselves in these stories it is because they are cast in such a way as to include us.

More compelling is Kearful's notion of "sympathetic parody," and here he recognizes that Bishop has entered into a conversation not only with the Bible, but with the lyric tradition which is its afterlife. To Kearful's thoughtful annotation of Herbert, Hopkins, Frost, and Williams, I would add Wordsworth (his "Michael" is explicitly a Prodigal son story; the son's name is "Luke"). And as Bishop's story moves from the complacency of day to the inner insecurity of night, we may hear Emily Dickinson. Her fly's "Blue—uncertain—stumbling Buzz" (Dickinson no. 591) reverberates in "the bats' uncertain staggering flight" (*CP* 71). (Bishop was reading Dickinson at this time.) To Kearful's excellent suggestion of ecphrastic elements in the "two-tier nativity scene" we might add Dutch and Flemish genre painting, particular Breughel, who painted sacred scenes in a secular manner. Bishop knew as well as Auden (whom she treasured): "About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters" ("Musée des Beaux Arts" 179). But great artists, and especially artists such as Bishop who were drawn to demotic sources, respond to the culture of their own time as much as to the canonical works of the past. While we are considering allusions and echoes we might glance into the secular "sty" (22) of popular culture, and remember that *The Wizard of Oz*, one of the most talked about films in America in 1939 and after, opens with Dorothy falling into a pig pen, and ends with "there's no place like home."

Kearful's sense that "The Prodigal" deserves a prominent place in Bishop's canon, and his note that she was proud of her achievement in the poem, are borne out by the reverberations of the poem throughout her work. If she was drawing from life to create a mimetic surface of alcoholic tremors and anxieties, she was also creating a lexicon and image pool from which she would draw repeatedly, to explore a range of emotions and ideas. In the same volume as "The Prodigal" we find the title poem "A Cold Spring" (*CP* 55), where the cow "eating the after-birth" from a newborn calf certainly offers a benign version of the pig that always eats its young. Parents in Bishop are never protec-

tors; at worst they are murderers and cannibals. While the pigs here have the quality of fable, the collapsing distinction between animal and man in "In the Waiting Room" sends the child into vertigo. Is there an understated cannibal image in "long pig, the caption said" (*CP* 159)? The prodigal's reduction to the condition of animal produces an "enormous odor" (*CP* 71); the animals of "Five Flights Up" again ascribe size to the insubstantial, but this time in a redemptive "enormous morning" (*CP* 181). If the prodigal is horrified by his animal baseness, the speaker of "Five Flights Up" longs for an animal presence. The sunrise "burning puddles" and turning the barnyard mud to red in "The Prodigal" anticipates the sunsets' effect in "The Moose," producing a "red sea" and "rich mud / in burning rivulets" (*CP* 169). But if this infernal, volcanic instability pervades the landscape of experience, in "The Moose" the "loose plank rattles / but doesn't give way." We are not left walking a "slimy board" in the dark. Bishop's pigs may be "self-righteous" (*CP* 71), whereas the "towering" moose is simply "curious" (*CP* 169), but, as always, the poet reminds us how much we have to learn from the animals. In "The Prodigal," the foul smell brings the protagonist to his senses, but the bats lead him to his feelings, and feeling, for Bishop, walks ahead of the mind. Surely this poem is as much about such modes of knowledge (including self-knowledge) as it is about the poet's addiction to alcohol. In reading poetry such as Bishop's, we must distinguish the particulars that may prompt the poem and even pervade its description, from the purposes of the poem and its ultimate motivation, which is to find the spiritual in the material and the communal in the most intense private feeling. What, in an autobiographical sense, would it mean for Bishop to "make up [her] mind to go home" (*CP* 71)—"home, wherever that may be" (*CP* 94)? As her poems show us repeatedly, there is no return for the prodigal—the biographical home is full of screams and corpses and tears.

As the poem moves from sight (the pig's eye view) to "shuddering insight" (the bats' uncertain flight), from physical world (sty) to symbolic (ark), we see Bishop reinscribing this parable with the "sus-

pended" (15) Biblical subtext (as Kearful's references to Lucifer and Noah point out). Certainly this subtext no longer carries "theological agency" (15), but is its agency therefore reduced to self-description? Modern poets are drawn repeatedly not only to this parable (we can add Derek Walcott to Kearful's list) but to the form of parable itself, precisely for its generalizing power, its way of stopping the dominant narrative and creating distance, abstraction and mystery.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

The Parody of "Parody as Cultural Memory in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*": A Response to Anca Rosu*

LARS ECKSTEIN and CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

Parody as Cultural Memory

Richard Powers's 1995 novel *Galatea 2.2* is, among other things, a latter-day version of the Pygmalion myth. As such, Anca Rosu chooses Powers's novel as a case study of 'sympathetic parody': rather than ridiculing Ovid or George Bernard Shaw, Rosu argues, "by *gently* parodying the Pygmalion myth, [*Galatea 2.2*] builds up a critique of the state of literary studies in the late twentieth century and their long-standing quarrel with the sciences" (Rosu 139, our emphasis). In what follows, however, Rosu's article hardly addresses the novel's relationship with the Pygmalion myth, but focuses entirely on its commentary on "the impasse of literary scholarship as part of a larger crisis of knowledge in the age of information" (Rosu 139).

Rosu argues that, at the heart of *Galatea 2.2*, Powers explores the divide between a scientific approach to literature (which treats literature as a "knowable object") on the one hand, and an approach typical of the humanities (which treats literature as knowledge in itself, or as "a way to know" [Rosu 145]) on the other. The novel's autodiegetic narrator—who is called Richard Powers, and resembles his creator in uncanny detail—is torn between both approaches. 'Powers-as-Hero,' as we wish to call him to separate the fictional character from the author, is the "token humanist" in the newly founded Centre for the Study of Advanced Sciences at a major Mid-Western University. He engages in the teaching of literature as a

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*Reference: Anca Rosu, "Parody as Cultural Memory in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 139-54.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debrosu01223.htm>.

knowable object by joining the cognitive neurologist Philip Lentz in feeding information routines to an artificial neural network. Lentz bets that his artificial device will end up 'knowing' enough literature to beat a student in the humanities department in a final exam. Rosu perceptively stresses that such a 'scientific' approach to literature is counterbalanced by the love of literature as an 'experience' with an emotional quality to it. Two models feature prominently here: Powers-as-Hero's father, who is able to recite his favourite popular songs and ballads from memory, and his first professor of English, who effortlessly quotes from a canon of 'great' poets in class. From this, Rosu weaves a larger argument about the role of writing in the age of information strongly reminiscent of Walter Ong and the French historian Pierre Nora's major observations (cf. Ong and Nora).[1] She associates the divide faced by Powers-as-Hero and the Literary Studies departments at large with a historical shift in the quality of cultural memory. In an age of virtually unlimited storage capacity, memory ceases to be a matter of oral performance and everyday experience, but is increasingly relegated to what Pierre Nora would call the "uninhabited" memory of data banks and libraries. Accordingly, literary scholarship faces the "paradox of the archive," as Richard Powers states in an argument supporting Rosu's approach: "Once you have a permanent medium of representation and recording, the notion of individual life gets lost in the notion of a constantly accreting history" (Powers in Tortorello, n.p.).

In Rosu's argument, it is precisely here that the importance of 'sympathetic parody' comes into play: while on the story level Powers satirises the 'crisis' of literary studies, his pervasive use of quotation on the level of discourse counter-balances the story's pessimistic thrust. The novel's narrator, as a "writer and scholar of literature, for whom speaking naturally includes the words of other writers" (Rosu 149), continually alludes to poets from Shakespeare and the Rossettis to Yeats and Eliot. Through this general application of 'sympathetic parody' beyond the specific re-writing of the Pygmalion myth, and the mingling of literary allusions with techno-talk, Rosu claims, the

novel re-negotiates the precarious dissociation of scientific and literary communication characteristic of modern culture. Moreover, by employing the realm of the intertextual as a mnemonic space,[2] Powers implicitly "connects us to that impossible-to-reach totality of knowledge-as-literature." In effect, Rosu elevates parody—at least in *Galatea 2.2*—to the ranks and "distinct honour of being the great preserver" (Rosu 152).

Anca Rosu's argument is admirably lucid and conclusive. Still, we think that a sense of discomfort prevails as her essay chooses to remain curiously focussed on the conflict between 'science' and 'humanism,' but altogether ignores a third major thrust of the novel which may be called its 'romantic' dimension. Ironically, Rosu's concluding remarks on parody as "the great preserver," by evoking Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," remind us of such 'romantic' topoi in *Galatea 2.2*. What are we to make of Powers-as-Hero's lamentations about his loss of inspiration as a creative writer, of his loneliness and inability to socially connect, of his search for a stable self? These 'romantic' aspects are particularly unsettling since *Galatea 2.2* comes in the guise of a confessional autobiography in which not only the name, but also the narrated vita of Powers-as-Hero unmistakeably correspond to the historical person Richard Powers, whom we shall refer to as Powers-as-Author in the following. Here, an altogether different level of parody comes into play, a parody perhaps much less 'sympathetic' in nature. This level of parody results from a curious intertextual oscillation between the factual and the fictional in *Galatea 2.2*.[3]

The Simulation of Autobiography as Parody

Much in *Galatea 2.2* suggests that there is little point in carefully distinguishing author and narrator. The novel's autobiographical thrust is very hard to miss, and some research into the life of Powers-as-Author does much to confirm this. The brief synopsis of his vita in Joseph Dewey's monograph (cf. Dewey 6-10) reveals a meticulous

correspondence between Powers-as-Author and Powers-as-Hero. The fictional setting of "U." is a barely disguised version of Urbana, where both hero and author studied, and to which they both eventually return as writers-in-residence; both hero and author move to Boston after completing their M.A. to take up work as freelance data processors. There is a detailed correspondence between the accounts of how both hero and author were inspired to write their first novel by encountering a photograph in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Both move to and are enchanted by Holland, and the creative geneses of Powers-as-Author's other books feature prominently in the novel. Correspondences like these go even further to include major characters in Powers-as-Hero's recollections: thus, the influential English teacher convincing Powers-as-Hero to stick to literature rather than physics, "the incomparable Taylor" (64), is a thinly veiled version of his real-life counterpart Robert Schneider ("Taylor" is simply the English translation of the German word "Schneider"), and the problematic relationship with his father corresponds with the fact that the author's father indeed "died of cancer during [Powers's] first year [in graduate school]" (Powers in Williams, n.p.).

Where, then, does the fictional element come in? After all, *Galatea 2.2* features an explicit addition to its title informing us that we are dealing with "*A Novel*" rather than anything else. Certainly, the major plotline concerning the sensational progress of the artificial neural network "Helen" is to be rated as 'fiction,' not least since the final stages of Helen's development suggest that she indeed gains consciousness, thus presenting us with an obvious element of *science*-fiction. However, the paradoxical opening phrase "It was like so, but wasn't" (3) not only refers to Powers-as-Hero's detached but increasingly obsessive involvement at the Centre for the Study of Advanced Sciences. It is also palpable with regard to the (romantic) self-fashioning of Powers-as-Hero who, at the end of the day, remains curiously suspended between fact and fiction. There certainly is an element of rather 'unsympathetic' (self-)parody in the portrayal of the writer-persona Richard Powers devoid of inspiration and purpose,

and the resulting effect is an uncomforting indeterminacy between authenticity and ironic distancing.

Powers-as-Hero's situation as a writer-in-residence and "token humanist" (Rosu 144) at the Centre for the Study of Advanced Sciences is one of elected disengagement. Waiting to be kissed again by the muse, and recovering from the painful alienation and separation from his long-time partner C. in Holland, he leads a life of self-indulgence. This is most obvious in the failures of his attempts to emotionally connect with others. His encounters with the scientist ironically called Diana Hartrick are a case in point: 'Rick' is both the hero's and the author's nickname, yet 'tricks' of the heart are closer to what is at stake here, as Rick's stabs at romance with the single mother always end in withdrawal. Powers-as-Hero is at his most pathetic in his blind crush on the graduate student A., who eventually beats Helen in the final exam. Without knowing much about her, Powers-as-Hero falls in love with a self-generated image of A., to whom he eventually confesses his love ("'A., I love you. I want to try to make a life with you. To give you mine […].'" [314]). A., of course, is disgusted: "'I don't have to listen to this,' she said, to no one. 'I trusted you. I had fun with you. People read you. I thought you know something. Total self-indulgence'" (316). A.'s verdict is sustained with regard to other characters, as Powers-as-Hero is generally the last to find out about the fates of his friends and colleagues—for instance the fact that Philip Lentz' wife had a major stroke causing mental amnesia, or that Ram Guptha, who judges the final showdown between A. and Helen, suffers from the effects of chemotherapy.

Such carefully created ironies poke fun at the 'romantic' alienation and narcissist pathos of the self-searching writer: there is a constant current of what Bakhtin refers to as "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin 324) which destabilises the alliance of author and hero. *Galatea 2.2*, therefore, is both autobiographical and it is not; it is but a 'simulation' of self-fashioning in writing which constantly parodies itself as it goes along. It is on these grounds that we would like to question the notion of 'sympathetic' parody in *Galatea 2.2* as presented

by Anca Rosu. Powers-as-Hero's pervasive use of literary allusions to canonical writers may have less to do with an act of "preservation," but presents us with a highly ironic parody of the literary universe as an escapist refuge.

The Parody of "Parody as Cultural Memory"

Anca Rosu rightfully notes that "[i]t is as if Powers could not express himself beyond literary allusion" (Rosu 150). The rationale of the constant recourse to the words of other writers and poets, however, may be an altogether different one from that which Rosu sketches. Joseph Dewey, for instance, is less charmed by the "[b]ook-fat and word-fat" Powers-as-Hero. He writes:

> His chitchat at the Centre for the Study of Advanced Sciences is polished and impersonal, self-consciously epigrammatical and allusive […]. Language has given Richard a satisfying, self-sustaining autonomy, a lifestyle of elected disengagement that has engendered only a steadying equilibrium frankly uncomplicated by intrusive others. (Dewey 97-98)

At the same time, the universe of canonical writers (including his own first novel) which Powers-as-Hero so adamantly feeds into Helen's artificial synapses provides him with a comforting wealth of secondary experiences to hide behind. 'Sympathetic' parody, therefore, for Powers-as-Hero first of all functions as a wordy protective shell with which to cover up an emotional hollowness, an inability to relate to others by means of genuine affection. The world of literature as portrayed in *Galatea 2.2* is precisely not capable of offering a totality of knowledge, but is presented as a fairly autonomous realm, opposed to, rather than interlinked with, the realm of experience. The literary world, despite Powers-as-Hero's insistence on context and the influence of his father and Taylor, remains a world beyond the "inexplicable visible" which, as Powers-as-Hero realises in a final confrontation with Diana Hartrick, he "had failed to tell Helen, and she me" (318).

This is not to imply that 'sympathetic' parody necessarily has an escapist quality to it: in fact, the novel suggests that a very different view of literature and its relationship with contextual realities is feasible. Thus, Powers-as-Hero is truly fascinated by A.'s politicised approach to literature that comprises radical questionings of gender, ethnicity and class issues; however, he hardly takes up any of her ideas, preferring to stick to a rather traditional canon in Helen's education,[4] and, by extension, in the 'sympathetic' parody marking his own conversational style. Accordingly, the employment of parody in *Galatea 2.2*—in the sense of a global intertexual thrust—altogether appears less 'sympathetic' than 'pathetic' in nature. The cultural memory of literature evoked in Powers-as-Hero's encompassing allusions retains a thoroughly narcissistic quality: it mirrors the self-indulgence and monological vanity of Powers-as-Hero, and it allows him to carefully avoid implacable affections and intimate encounters with other human beings. What is at stake in *Galatea 2.2*, then, is an ('unsympathetic') *parody* of "parody as cultural memory": the message conveyed is that there is little value in parody as cultural memory as long as the intertextual realm of literature remains aloof of negotiations with the "ineffable web" and "unmappable" (318) subtleties of real-life experience.

On these grounds, one may doubt that *Galatea 2.2* is just a "gentle" parody of the Pygmalion myth, as Anca Rosu suggests. The novel can also be read as a satirical critique of the 'romantic' notion of the reclusive artist. It dramatises the rather unsympathetic qualities of the likes of "Gepetto, Victor Frankenstein, Prospero, Pygmalion, each of whom Powers introduces into the narrative line," as Joseph Dewey observes:

> Benevolent dictators, massively competent animators, master megalomaniacs—in short, artists—they are all estranged from the vulnerabilities of the everyday. Closet misanthropes aghast over the inadequacies of experience, unavailable to the simplest pull of the heart, they exert an unnatural exercise of control, a ghastly parody of love that finds its expressions in the cozy manipulations and sterile control of the narrative/laboratory. (Dewey 102)

Indeed, the computer network 'Helen' is the only 'being' in *Galatea 2.2* whom Powers-as-Hero grows to be genuinely attached to. It is Powers-as-Hero rather than Lentz (as Rosu suggests) who is the modern day Pygmalion of the novel falling in love with his own creation. Helen, of course, is easy to love, partly because she is always at the hero's disposal in a relationship uncomplicated by the needs and inexplicable moods of human beings, and partly because she is something of a mirror image of Powers-as-Hero himself. Helen, like her creator, is pure language, fed on a representative canon of literature and consequently also revolving around a self-sustaining reliance on the 'sympathetic' parody of what she has "already read."[5] What both lack is social grounding and access to genuine feelings. Ironically, it is Helen who at the end of the tale realises that she is trapped in a world of meaningless parody. She deliberately 'fails' her final exam (on Shakespeare's *Tempest*) by answering: "You are the ones who can hear airs. Who can be frightened or encouraged. You can hold things and break them and fix them. I never felt at home here. This is an awful place to be dropped down halfway" (326).[6] Thus, Helen opens Powers-as-Hero's eyes to the fact that the cultural memory inherent in literature is fruitless when merely employed in aloof parody and self-indulgence. The rest is irony: Helen commits virtual suicide. Richard Powers writes another book.

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NOTES

[1]For a comprehensive discussion of different manifestations of cultural memory in *Galatea 2.2*, cf. Pence, who draws upon Peter Burke, Paul Connerton, Maurice Halbwachs, Andreas Huyssen, Fredric Jameson, Philip Kuberski, Jean-François Lyotard, and Pierre Nora.

[2]Considering its importance in the conclusion, the notion of 'intertextuality as memory' is given little theoretical backing in Rosu's article. The principle source to turn to here would be Renate Lachmann's seminal study *Memory and Literature* which associates the tradition of the Roman Mnemonics with theorists of

intertextuality such as M. M. Bakthin and Julia Kristeva. Lachmann argues that the memory of a text resides in "the intertextuality of its references [which] arises in the act of writing considered as a traversal of the space between texts" (Lachmann 15).

[3]N. Katherine Hayles notes that the title of the novel already hints at the importance of doublings: "*Galatea 2.2* is full of doublings, starting with the doubling of Richard Powers as author and as protagonist of this autobiographical novel. Yet the doublings are never simply mirror images. The dot separating the twin twos signifies difference as well as reflection" (Hayles 261).

[4]James Berger notes that Helen "is, in effect, a construct of 'the best that has been thought and said,' a creature—almost a parody—drawn from the shelves of contemporary conservative adherents of Matthew Arnold" (Berger 118).

[5]Helen, one could say, virtually embodies a poststructuralist notion of intertextuality as Roland Barthes defines it. Barthes conceives of intertextuality as a self-sustaining universe of texts without any need of historical or contextual grounding: "The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: […] the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*" (Barthes 160).

[6]Helen's realisation corresponds to what N. Katherine Hayles introduces as the predicament of the 'posthuman' as she understands it: "Whatever posthumans are, they will not be able to banish the loneliness that comes from the difference between writing and life, inscription and embodiment" (Hayles 272). Here, Hayles articulates the 'romantic' dimension of *Galatea 2.2* around which our reading of the novel revolves. On the posthuman in *Galatea 2.2*, see also more recently Campbell.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

A Letter in Response to "Catholic Shakespeare"*

Dear Sirs,

It was a matter of great interest for me to read Professor Honigmann's "Response to Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel" and Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel's reply "The most important subject that can possibly be," as I had studied both *Die verborgene Existenz des William Shakespeare* and *William Shakespeare: Seine Zeit—Sein Leben—Sein Werk.*

I am in the odd position of sympathizing with both professors, of agreeing and disagreeing with both. When Professor Honigmann states "While Hammerschmidt-Hummel proposes many new ideas (too many, if I may say so), these do not invalidate the theory that Shakespeare was probably brought up as a Catholic," I am in agreement. I think that Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel weakens her case by bringing to the fore much circumstantial evidence which contains unresolved ambiguities, although I note that there is substantial agreement on this particular main point among both professors.

In studying the evidence proposed for Shakespeare's attendance at the Collegium Anglicum, I could not find convincingly sufficient evidence that the term "divinity" was used exclusively at that institution to mean a theologian ("divine" in more common English parlance) as Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel maintains in her earlier book. I could not find unanimity among Shakespeare scholars that Shakespeare used the word "divinity" unambiguously in the passage she cited from *Twelfth Night*. It is a case of too many ambiguities—

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*Reference: Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, "'The most important subject that can possibly be': A Reply to E. A. J. Honigmann," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 155-66; E. A. J. Honigmann, "Catholic Shakespeare? A Response to Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 52-60; Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel, *William Shakespeare: Seine Zeit—Sein Leben—Sein Werk* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2003).

neither proof nor disproof. The word "syntax," with which Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel claims Shakespeare was familiar, does not appear in Bartlett's *A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare,* nor in an electronic search of the first edition of the Riverside Shakespeare. Where did she find his mention of the word?

Professor 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.

The positive aspects of Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel's work are the energy and vision which permit her to connect circumstantial evidence which has been overlooked or dismissed by English-speaking scholars, partly, it must be admitted and probably won't be, out of their desire to have Shakespeare as a model of national preference—in religion as in other matters. When Professor Honigmann states that "This is not evidence that one would wish to rely on in a court of law," he omits the obvious and unwelcome truth that miscarriage of justice is not an infrequent feature of courts of law—in today's society as in the past. In other words, the appeal to courts of law is a rhetorical device which sounds better than it is. Professor Honigmann is too intelligent a man not to realise this, and I suspect he is thinking of the kind of negative response which Professor Hammerschmidt-Hummel's researches have elicited from the guardians of the cult of Shakespeare in Stratford.

In conclusion, what the exchange between the two professors would seem to demonstrate is the need for extremely good nerves and cool heads in evaluating the force of evidence, all of which is far from rigorous proof.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Merriam

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Love, That Four-Letter Word: A Response to Amanpal Garcha[*]

LEONA TOKER

Amanpal Garcha's critique of my reading of *Mansfield Park* with Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* hinges on what he regards as my underestimation of sexual desire in Austen's novels. In fact Dr. Garcha often neglects to add "in Austen's novels" and formulates his sentences in an all-too extrapolable way, e.g., "In adopting Veblen's social theories, Toker thus also repeats Veblen's inability to see men and women's sexual relations in any terms other than 'inviduous emulation' that takes the form of the constant, mercenary striving for social status" (184-85). The use of a theory in so far as it affects one's reading of a novel does not amount to *adopting* that theory, but this is less important than the methodological error of extrapolating the distribution of emphases in a specific essay in the author's "inability" of envisioning that which is outside this focus. An even more cavalier statement follows half a page later: "Toker and Veblen imagine desire in only one way, as desire for power and distinction, a view that many characters in Austen's novels also put forth" (185). No one can nowadays tell what Veblen could or could not imagine (it is more relevant which concepts would or would not have been considered appropriate in the genre of sociological theory to which his book belongs). On the other hand, "Toker" can testify against such disparagements of the scope of her imagination, whether launched as a provocative deniabil-

[*]Reference: Amanpal Garcha, "Unsexing Austen: A Response to Leona Toker," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 183-93; Leona Toker, "Conspicuous Leisure and Invidious Sexuality in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*," *Connotations* 11.2-3 (2001/2002): 222-40.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debtoker01123.htm>.

ity or stemming merely, as I would like to think, from a hastiness of formulation.

The question of the tact of critical idiom aside, my notion of "invidious sexuality" is not the same as "conspicuous sexual charisma." Conflating the two is a conceptual error in Amanpal Garcha's response. Dr. Garcha suggests that I present Mary Crawford as using the former in order to pursue worldly status and esteem. When, in the second paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen notes that neighbourhood families tend to consider a wealthy newcomer as the "the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" (3), the formula "some one or other" prepares us for the young ladies' competition for the attentions, or—yes, Dr. Garcha is right—desire, of the new arrival: the dialectics of conspicuousness and modesty in this theatre of action is one of the most sophisticated of Austen's subjects. Yet "invidious sexuality," connoting "invidious emulation," is, primarily, a matter of relationships not between women and men, but *among individuals of the same sex*. It is over women that Mary Crawford needs to triumph in her own understated but nonetheless clearly evinced way; and she needs this triumph not to further any of her aims but because she has come to enjoy it for its own sake.

Mary states repeatedly that it is one's duty to do as well for oneself as one can: marriage that would be conducive to the enhancement of one's social status is clearly her goal, and sexual charisma one of the means of achieving it. And since, in the ironic language of *Mansfield Park*, there are "not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them" (5), the goal involves an early training for competition, with the concomitant reward of enjoying victories. Mary is almost ready to change her preferences when she falls in love with Edmund Bertram, who is also in love with her but has no intention to oblige her by making a figure in the capital: he sees his ordination as a matter of vocation rather than a *pis aller*. It is to her honour, moreover, that for a long time after the break-up between them she cannot settle down to marrying anyone else, though her vivacious good looks and large portion can well be expected to con-

tinue attracting suitors. One of the central points of my paper, conveniently downplayed in Dr. Garcha's response, is that the twist of the plot which turns Mary into a link in the causal chain leading to her brother's elopement with Mrs. Rushworth amounts to the following suggestion: Mary's indulging in the pleasure of watching the sexual defeat of other women, whether the victor is herself or another, is what eventually leads to her loss of the one true love in her life.

Love, rather than "sex," "desire," or, to quote Garcha quoting Joseph Litvak, "triumphant genital heterosexuality enshrined in the institution of marriage" (188), is the point at issue with Austen's heroines. And the concern with love lies in the background of my analysis; there are frequent references to this background in the paper, but the problem consists in that four-letter word, love, being more popular with the fans of the Beatles than with much recent literary criticism. This notion is not entirely barred from Amanpal Garcha's text. Yet his position on the issue, e.g.,

> With Elizabeth Bennet and her love for Darcy, Austen represents feminine sexuality in a way that shows a woman's potentially excessive erotic desires and her more mundane needs for income and status as, at least, mutually reinforcing drives if not completely and complexly entangled ones (187)

could easily (and perhaps unfairly) be attacked for reducing love (in Austen or in general?) to a combination of erotic desires and mundane needs.

The reason why I have left "love" more or less in the lexical background of my paper is that explicitly and repeatedly insisting upon the importance of love in Austen's novels (not just in the religious but in the romantic sense) would be, to borrow a simile from a Nabokovian context, "like looking for allusions to aquatic mammals in *Moby Dick*" (Nabokov 304). Austen stages the process through which desire is channeled, in the course of the novels, into the right slots,[1] but the rightness of the slots is determined not only by social eligibility. Fanny's and Edmund's shared "attitudes to labor and leisure" (Toker 231; Garcha 190) are not my exclusive concern in discussing their

companionate marriage: in Austen shared moral/ideological attitudes are needed for the transformation of desire into love. Desire is, indeed, one of the main motivating forces of Austen's heroines, and, as Nancy Armstrong has pointed out, their ideology of self-perfection works to domesticate desire. Armstrong shows that the eponymous protagonist of Austen's *Emma* achieves the required standard of civility only when she has become conscious of her desire for Mr Knightley (153-54), but one could equally argue that it is at this point of rising into consciousness, the point where fulfillment seems endangered, that, in *Emma*, desire is shaken into love.

Not to devote textual space to love "in any erotic sense" (Garcha 190) does not amount to a denial of the sexual tensions that are subtly evoked in Austen's novels, unmistakably enough to undermine the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century ideological doctrine of women's "passionlessness" (see Cott) but not explicitly enough to offer to refute it.

As far as I know, the causal chain in which Mary's almost voyeuristic wish to observe Henry's meeting with Mrs. Rushworth in London (after he has declared his intention to marry Fanny) is conducive to their adulterous affair, has not been previously noted in Austen criticism. It is often difficult to determine precisely why we notice what we do: I believe that my thinking about Veblen's "invidious emulation" as complemented by "invidious sexuality" is what drew my attention to that detail and placed it within a network of associated textual links. Though other paths could have arrived at the same destination, one reason why enlisting Veblen in the study of Austen's novels seems useful is that it lays out one such path. Another reason is that Veblen's approach to social stratification leads to conclusions about the possibility of converting the best achievements of what he regards as leisure-class traditions to the non-predatory (peaceable) culture, whether of Austen's lower-rung gentry or of modern intelligentsia. Such a middle-way agenda is close to the principles reflected, fine-tuned, and disseminated in Austen's novels. This does not mean that the whole package of Veblen's positive and negative historically

determined values[2] is integrated into the analysis of Austen's text. Veblen's 1899 notion of "invidious emulation," comprising "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure," is no less a legitimate analytic tool than the notions of desire and sexuality derived from conceptual systems such as those of Freud's, René Girard's, or Nancy Armstrong's, rooted in the cultural history of the century that began one year after the publication of Veblen's book.

The pragmatic benefit of the use of any theoretical or historical contexts in the discussion of a novel can be judged by its contribution to the system of significances for which the novel has created the conditions. Amanpal Garcha's conceptual structure has its own validity if only because it has yielded the following remark, which I quote at length:

> If [Mary Crawford] did not desire Edmund in his own right, she could easily give him up to focus on a wealthier eligible mate, yet cannot rid herself of her strong erotic attachment to Edmund. *Instead, she can only hope that Tom dies so that her erotic desire and her calculations no longer have to stand in opposition to one another.* The very inappropriateness and extremity of the quasi-murderous wish, moreover, signifies the irrational nature of this non-predatory affection. (187; italics mine)

The conceptualization of Mary's attitude to Tom's illness as her hope of settling her own inner conflict is a very valuable point. Even though the ensuing redescription of it in terms of a "quasi-murderous wish" is rather overstated, one might wish that the sensitivity to the literary text that the italicized sentence displays might also extend to Dr. Garcha's reading of rival critical discussions, especially those that can make do with the old-fashioned four-letter word, *love*, instead of operating with euphemistic synecdoches such as sex, desire, eroticism, or genital heterosexuality.

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NOTES

[1]It must, however, be noted that this is one of the numerous possible descriptions and redescriptions of the main pattern of Austen's plots. For a recent narratological redescription, see Phelan 67-68.

[2]See Amanpal Garcha's useful discussion of their historical context (190-91).

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

"… and the long secret extravaganza was played out": *The Great Gatsby* and Carnival in a Bakhtinian Perspective

WINIFRED FARRANT BEVILACQUA

> *The supreme ruse of power is to allow itself to be contested ritually in order to consolidate itself more effectively.* Georges Balandier[1]

From antiquity, Mikhail Bakhtin argues, literary history has been shaped both by "serious" genres such as tragedy and epic and by serio-comic genres like Menippean satire which constitute the carnivalistic line in Western literature. Petronius' *Satyricon* is a foundational text in the carnival tradition of the novel for its disenchanted portrayal of a changing contemporary society, its use of laughter to defamiliarize approved ideologies and ideas, and its roots in folklore and festive rituals. Behind its scenes and events, "there glimmers more or less distinctly the carnival square with its specific carnivalistic logic of familiar contacts, mésalliances, disguises and mystifications, contrasting paired images, scandals, crownings/decrownings, and so forth. […] in fact the very plot of the *Satyricon* is thoroughly carnivalized" (*PDP* 133-34).[2]

Fitzgerald entitled a late version of his novel *Trimalchio* and in the published work he retained Nick's observation that after Gatsby realized Daisy did not enjoy his parties, "his career as Trimalchio was over." Various elements link these two works.[3] Both Trimalchio and Gatsby are *nouveaux riches* and invent elements of their own biographies. Each has a luxurious home, owns an impressive library, gives lavish parties attended by socially heterogeneous groups. Their festivities, where food is a form of play and often disguised so that its original nature is unrecognizable, unfold against a musical background and are so well-staged that Trimalchio is described as the "director, producer, main actor"[4] of his party while Gatsby is termed

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"a regular Belasco." Both are obsessed by the passage of time. An astrologist has revealed to Trimalchio the exact length of his life so he installs a big clepsydra in his dining room and has a uniformed bugler blow a horn every hour to remind him of how long he has left to live. Gatsby's story contains a myriad of references to time, and details such as the broken clock that almost falls off the mantelpiece during his reunion with Daisy symbolize his desire to stop or even reverse the flow of time. Crucially, each work reproduces versions of the primary carnivalistic act at the very core of the carnival sense of the world—the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king.[5]

Petronius was innovative in using a first-person narrator, Encolpius, who is also a character in the story, something not done in any example of epic or fiction known to him.[6] This narrator's education and prior experiences have not prepared him for a world dominated by arrogant social climbing, unscrupulous business dealing, the trading of sexual favors for power, extreme materialism—a mysterious social universe which both attracts and disconcerts him.[7] Fitzgerald's narrator/protagonist Nick likewise finds himself in a social world he does not fully understand, where he feels "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (*TGG* 30).[8] Another link between the narrators regards their connection to the carnivalistic "notion of bisexuality […] as a release from the burden of socially imposed sexual roles."[9] Encolpius' bisexuality is presented openly and exuberantly while Nick's possible erotic attraction to men is treated in a veiled manner.[10]

Most fundamentally, there are affinities between the implied ethical stances of the authors. The *Satyricon* has been read "as a depiction of a degenerate society, whose individuals are haunted by anguish" and where there is "economical, sexual and culinary […] satiety without spiritual fulfillment."[11] Petronius has been seen as a moralist "preoccupied to the point of nausea and despair by the hopelessness of a culture corrupted by *luxuria*, a culture which turns men into the living dead, which degrades, desecrates and finally annuls, a culture with-

out joy, without hope, […]."[12] Although they ultimately evaluate their heroes in different ways, with Petronius offering a blanket condemnation and Fitzgerald insisting on Gatsby's essential "greatness," Fitzgerald describes the decadence, amorality, violence, and confusion of the Jazz Age, as he sees it, in terms which Petronius would understand.[13]

* * *

Even if *The Great Gatsby* is not thoroughly carnivalized, the influence of a carnivalistic masterpiece on it is evidence of its deep kinship with carnival as a sense of the world and as a form of artistic visualization. In point of fact, in Fitzgerald's literary practice, carnival forms become

> a *powerful means* for comprehending life in art, […] a special language whose words and forms possess an extraordinary capacity for *symbolic* generalization, that is, for *generalization in depth*. Many essential sides of life, or more precisely its *layers* (and often the most profound), can be located, comprehended, and expressed only with the help of this language. (*PDP* 157)

Specifically, in representing Gatsby's parties and in certain other episodes, Fitzgerald conceives of time, space and value in terms of the carnival chronotope, fuses carnivalesque elements from folkloric and literary traditions such as the feast and the grotesque body with the specific features of his own time and place, and makes profoundly significant use of symbolic inversions as the defining image of climactic moments in his narrative.[14]

Chronotopically speaking, the essential characteristic of carnival is "carnival time," a temporary, atypical removal from the normal progression of biographical or historical time which flows according to its own laws and during which life is shaped according to a certain pattern of play. The natural setting is the public square and the streets adjoining it, an area where people with a range of social identities can come together and intermingle. But, "to be sure, carnival also invaded the home; in essence it was limited in time only and not in space" (*PDP* 128).

Gatsby's residence, compared to a Hôtel de Ville, an elaborate roadhouse, and a World's Fair, with its enormous gardens lit up like a Christmas tree, where his guests are free to conduct themselves "according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks," fully qualifies as carnival space (*TGG* 34). This public arena attracts people who do not know each other or even the host: "People were not invited—they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door" where they hoped to find all sorts of people mixed together in a communal performance (*TGG* 34). Carnival is not set in motion by an order given by a directive figure but opens simply with some kind of signal to mark the beginning of merriment and foolery. Fitzgerald signals the start of Gatsby's parties with a stunning periphrasis for nightfall and a hint that this "time outside time" will open up a new dimension of experience where, for example, music is visually perceived and laughter is a material substance: "The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier, minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word" (*TGG* 34).

The dominant motif of carnival is transgression of conventions and prohibitions, of hierarchical boundaries and of all the rules which determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life. Everyone abandons daily routines to dance and sing in the streets, consume large quantities of food and drink, enjoy a world where disorder prevails and ordinarily inappropriate behavior is not only permitted but encouraged and expected. In this new realm of existence, the participants are released from their usual alienation from each other, enter into new forms of interrelationships, and enjoy freedom "not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor" (*RW* 94).[15]

At Gatsby's, up-and-coming Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, and East European immigrants rub shoulders with guests who belong to New York's social register as well as with new-money people from silent

films, theater and business and there is even a yoking together of the upstanding and the disreputable. This heterogeneous crowd offers an image of some of the centrifugal forces which, during the 1920s, were transforming American society by developing new cultural forms, introducing new ethnic groups, upsetting the existing hierarchy, and shortening the distance between legal and illicit activities.

The forms of liberation offered by carnival do not remain abstract concepts but are concretely acted out in the physical experience of the festivities. The closeness of the revellers as they move through the carnival spaces has the power to make each one feel that he or she is "an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body" (*RW* 255). These spaces thus become the locus for oceanic feelings of unity with one another. Fitzgerald acutely exemplifies the visceral sense of community and the crowd's multiform nature through his sea imagery:

> The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath—already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the center of a group and then excited with triumph glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light. (*TGG* 34)

Seemingly, the fragmented nature of society has been temporarily overcome, a sense of the primordial mass of pre-class society has been reestablished, and individuals have the illusion of being able to transcend their habitual roles.

Entering into a larger fellowship is also expressed by playful actions that disrupt the traditional distinction between those who produce a spectacle and those who watch it. Urged on by a sense of *communitas* as well as by the music, the alcohol, and the sheer magic of the time and place, the guests turn into performers who engage in "stunts" all over the garden, dance out alone on the canvas platform, momentarily relieve the musicians "of the burden of the banjo or the traps" or offer their heads for the formation of a singing quartet (*TGG* 39). Playacting like this permits an escape from delimiting expectations of behavior—

another form of crossing a borderline—and further allows for transcendence of one's own identity and the assumption, perhaps the embodiment, of another.

In keeping with such ambivalence, costumes and masks destabilize fixed identities and help produce an atmosphere of relativity. Masked revellers either give free reign to their imagination or pretend to be what they are not by donning costumes that hide the truth about their social standing, profession, gender, and so on. Although few of Gatsby's guests "dress up,"[16] the idea of a masquerade is introduced in the list of names Nick jots down on his railroad timetable, many of which recall Bakhtin's association of the mask with "transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, mockery and familiar nicknames" (*RW* 40). Some guests bear the names of animals, flowers, vegetables, trees, and minerals, such as Cecil Roebuck, Clarence Endive, Henry Palmetto and the Chromes or of heroes from the past like Stonewall Jackson Abrams, Mrs. Claud Roosevelt, and Willie Voltaire. Other names allude to the principle of grotesque degradation, that is, "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract […] to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" as is the case with Claudia Hip and with Belcher, Swett and the Smirkes (*RW* 19-20). Yet other names associate the bearer with negative character traits like an excess of predatory instincts, as in the Leeches, or duplicity, as in the man reputed to be a chauffeur and a prince of something but "whom we called Duke" (*TGG* 51).

In the temporary transfer to a world of pleasure and abundance permitted by carnival, the topos of the banquet is an important element since it brings people together and opens their spirits to play and merriment. Eating and drinking are among the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body because during these actions we experience an interaction with the world that gives us an illusory triumph over our usual sense of alienation from it: "man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, […] devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage" (*RW* 281). Moreover, the joyful consumption of

food in collective feasts has the connotation of accessible happiness for all. The suppers offered by Gatsby at nightfall and at midnight contribute significantly to the lavishness and conviviality of his parties. Fitzgerald depicts them in imagery suggesting masks, jokes, illusionist transformations. Salads of "harlequin design," turkeys "bewitched to a dark gold," and, in honor of the carnival animal *par excellence*, some "pastry pigs" magically take on a life of their own so that the edibles crowd together on the buffet tables while "floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside" and provoke a spontaneous surge of "chatter and laughter" (*TGG* 33, 34).

Bakhtin sees an organic bond between feasting and discourse—"bread and wine […] disperse fear and liberate the word"—pointing to the symposium, ancient "table talks," the gay speech of medieval banquets, and even the old adage *in vino veritas* (*RW* 284-86). As drink releases Gatsby's guests from the restraints of etiquette, their language is altered to allow a familiarity not permissible at other times, and some of them even appear to adopt marketplace speech in which "there are no neutral epithets and forms; there are either polite, laudatory, flattering, cordial words, or contemptuous, debasing, abusive ones […] the more unofficial and familiar the speech, the more often and substantially are those tones combined, the less distinct is the line dividing praise and abuse" (*RW* 420). Gatsby is invariably the subject of "romantic speculation" (*TGG* 37) and "bizarre accusations" (*TGG* 52) presented with the ironic ambivalence which turns praise into an insult and abuse into a gesture of admiration. Nick conveys these remarks in a crescendo of overheard fragments of conversation culminating in a delightfully surreal bit of dialogue about Gatsby's background, activities and even his ontological status in which mockery and exaltation are simultaneously expressed.

> "He's a bootlegger," said the young ladies, moving somewhere between his cocktails and his flowers. "One time he killed a man who had found out that he was a nephew to von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil. Reach me a rose, honey, and pour me a last drop into that there crystal glass." (*TGG* 49)

Through contradictory definitions like this, carnival speech calls into question the values through which praise and blame are assigned and confounds the notion of truth on which their assignment is based.

Most importantly, Fitzgerald's narrative can be illuminated by the social and economic observations underlying Bakhtin's theories, especially his conviction that in the modern novel carnival "proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into 'rotten cords'" (*PDP* 166). Nick comments on how lust for money permeates the atmosphere at Gatsby's parties:

> I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry and all talking in low earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were all selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were, at least, agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key. (*TGG* 35)

At the time, bond-selling was becoming a common profession yet it still retained an aura of suspicion because of a perceived difficulty in distinguishing the line separating legitimate from illicit sales. Also, in that period, in order to possess an automobile, many people willingly went into debt or, as one commentator harshly put it, got involved in "the crime of installment selling […] that is causing manufacturers, advertisers, merchants and consumers to go more madly after material things to the neglect of the things of the spirit."[17] Laws were passed to regulate consumer credit, converting "loan sharks […] into respectable businessmen" as another commentator quipped, but this did not placate worries that purchasing without first having accumulated the necessary funds was a dangerous practice.[18]

A related indictment regards gambling which is "by nature carnivalistic" and "always a part of the image system of carnival symbols" because it brings together people from various positions in life (*mésalliances*) in an activity that in no way corresponds to the roles they ordinarily play (*à l'envers*) and because its atmosphere is one of sud-

den and quick changes of fate in which the lowly can reach new economic heights and the wealthy can take a step down (the turnabout).[19] Fitzgerald uses this symbol to highlight similarities between gambling and stockbroking, both aimed at getting the greatest possible return on an investment, to the extent that they become parodic images of each other:

> Da Fontano the promoter came there and Ed Legros and James B. ('Rot-gut') Ferret and the de Jongs and Ernest Lilly—they came to gamble and when Ferret wandered into the garden it meant he was cleaned out and Associated Traction would have to fluctuate profitably next day. (*TGG* 50)

Although Bakhtin makes it clear that carnival's mirthful inversions offer only a temporary alternative to official culture, he ascribes to them a deep philosophical significance. He speaks of carnival as constituting a "second life of the people" where humanity for a moment can fully realize its potential and experiment with the utopian realm of abundance, freedom, and equality (*RW* 255). In this context, "utopian" refers not to some future state of perfection but to an ideal world achieved in the here and now. The laughter that is an integral part of this utopia has emotional and cognitive value in that it "demolishes fear and piety […] thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation."[20] It is liberating also because it grasps phenomena not as immutably fixed but in the process of change and transition. Carnival is ephemeral but the 'unofficial truths' regarding the "gay relativity" (*RW* 11) of all things that it reveals remain in the participants' minds and hearts and, Bakhtin believes, have the potential to transform their inner relationship to the conditions of everyday life.

Aside from a common interest in flirting, gossiping, and enjoying the commodities that fill his playground, Gatsby's guests have no ties, no shared beliefs, nothing that draws them together in a meaningful community. Out of touch with the primitive magic of carnival which transforms a crowd into "the people as a whole […] organized *in their own way*," (*RW* 255) these guests' external gestures express only the desperate hilarity of alienated individuals. Their absence of hope in the possibility of redefining their lives is revealed by how, even dur-

ing their most festive moments, they never forget the "too obtrusive fate" which "herded [them] along a short cut from nothing to nothing" (*TGG* 84). Instead of an affirmative celebration of "the feast of becoming, change, and renewal," (*RW* 10) they are imitating models whose naïve confidence they can never replicate. Most pointedly, the last minutes of the parties link back to noncarnival life to highlight its aimlessness, violence, and lack of stable relationships. If, at the start, there was music in the "blue gardens" and "men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (*TGG* 33), at the end, the gaiety degenerates into chaos as women have arguments with "men said to be their husbands" (*TGG* 42), the playfulness disappears as the departing guests create a traffic jam in the driveway, and the laughter dissipates into "the harsh, discordant din" (*TGG* 44) of a car crash.

* * *

Myrtle Wilson's party occurs in an ambience that seems to point us toward Bakhtin's description of "rococo carnivalesque" where

> the gay positive tone of laughter is preserved. But everything is reduced to "chamber" lightness and intimacy. The frankness of the marketplace is turned into privacy, the indecency of the lower stratum is transformed into erotic frivolity, and gay relativity becomes skepticism and wantonness. And yet, in the hedonistic "boudoir" atmosphere a few sparks of the carnival fires which burn up "hell" have been preserved. (*RW* 119)[21]

Seen in this light, the party is a miniature, mock version of an eighteenth-century French *salon* culture gathering during which elegantly dressed aristocratic ladies and men would meet in a richly furnished rococo style salon to discuss an artwork or literature as well as to express their wit through storytelling and where the hostess' learning and ability to stimulate conversation were critical to the success of the event. An emblematic *maîtresse de salon* and icon of the Rococo period was Madame Pompadour. This beautiful, refined and elegant woman, trained from girlhood to believe in her superiority, rose beyond her

class status and entered the ranks of the aristocracy, being pronounced the Marquise de Pompadour, the official mistress of Louis XV. She became the patroness of eminent painters, writers, philosophers and architects like Boucher, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Lassurance. Her proud, regal figure was immortalized in many splendid portraits by painters of the stature of Boucher, La Tour, and Drouais.

For Myrtle, represented as a parodic double of Madame Pompadour, her apartment is a lavishly-appointed estate where she can assume the identity of a woman of the leisure class, high above the life she leads at the garage in the Valley of Ashes. She has decorated it in a *nouveau riche* attempt at elegance, filling it with oversized furniture upholstered in fabric depicting "scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles," a typical subject for Rococo painters who specialized in scenes of aristocratic leisure and of love and seduction in a natural setting (*TGG* 25). Myrtle, whose face "contain[s] no facet or gleam of beauty," whose dresses "stretch[…] tight over her rather wide hips," and who "carr[y] her surplus flesh sensuously," gets her ideas about gentility from gossip magazines and has no special talents or artistic interests (*TGG* 23). Her group of guests includes Nick who "was rather literary in college" (*TGG* 7), Chester McKee who says he is in the "artistic game" (*TGG* 26) and would like to become a sort of official photographer of Long Island if only he could "get the entry" (*TGG* 28), Mrs. McKee, a "shrill, languid, handsome and horrible" (*TGG* 26) woman with strong opinions on everything, and Myrtle's sister Catherine whose sticky bob of red hair, complexion powdered milky-white and innumerable pottery bracelets jangling up and down her arms give her a distinctly clownish appearance. The only 'conversation pieces' available are McKee's overenlarged photograph of Myrtle's mother that "hover[s] like an ectoplasm on the wall" and an ignored copy of the 1921 bestselling novel *Simon Called Peter* (*TGG* 26). Myrtle leads her guests in banal chatter about topics like getting more ice and problems with feet or in pretentious talk of unfortunate experiences at the gaming tables in Monte Carlo. Far from being refined and polite, her speech is sprinkled with mispronunciations and mis-

usage of words and sometimes descends into the "violent and obscene" (*TGG* 29). Considering her efforts at self-fashioning, it is curious that she fails to pick up on Mrs. McKee's hint that her husband be given a commission to do her portrait—"If Chester could only get you in that pose […]"(*TGG* 27).

Amorous intrigues in the apartment replicate, at a lower level, the action represented in Jean-Honoré Fragonard's quintessentially Rococo masterpiece, "The Swing" (1767). This painting depicts, in a lush pastoral setting with statues of cupids, a flirtatious young woman in a frilly pink dress being pulled on a swing by an older man in cleric's clothes (her husband, a servant, a bishop?) while her lover, strategically positioned on a bed of roses, looks up her skirt and she teases him by kicking off her shoe in his direction. Myrtle, whose eroticism is overt rather than playful, exchanges sexual favors with Tom and he evokes the figure of her cuckolded and perhaps impotent husband by suggesting that Chester do a photographic study of "George B. Wilson at the Gasoline Pump" (*TGG* 28). Another episode of seduction and dalliance involves the triangle made up of Nick, Mrs. McKee, and Chester whom Nick describes as "a pale feminine man" (*TGG* 26). She lets Nick accompany Chester back to their apartment and the men have a sexually-charged exchange of words in the elevator. After an ellipsis, the narration finds the two of them in the McKees' bedroom where Chester, clad in his underwear, is showing Nick his portfolio of photographs.

Myrtle intends her party as her apotheosis as royal mistress. Her path from low to high began when she encountered Tom in a "railway car [which in literature] […] is a substitute for the *public square*, where people from various positions find themselves in familiar contact with one another. Thus there is the coming together of the *beggar prince* and the *merchant millionaire.* The carnivalistic contrast is emphasized even in their clothing" (*PDP* 174). The sight of Tom in his dress suit, patent leather shoes, and starched white shirt took her breath away, so, repeating to herself "You can't live forever, you can't live forever," she headed off with him to become his mistress (*TGG* 31).

On the day of her party, Myrtle carefully selects a new lavender-colored taxi cab with grey upholstery for her triumphant drive across New York—somewhat like the coronation parade along the city streets of a *roi-pour-rire* on the "hell." Along the way, there is the farcical scene of the acquisition of a royal gift in the form of a puppy of uncertain breed. Myrtle makes a ceremonial entrance into the apartment building "[t]hrowing a regal homecoming glance around the neighborhood" (*TGG* 25) and then sweeps into the kitchen as if "a dozen chefs awaited her orders there" (*TGG* 27). At the height of the festivities, she disappears into the bedroom to array herself in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream colored chiffon which gives out a continual rustle. How such a masquerade can confer an identity at odds with the wearer's stable sense of self and express the joy of change and reincarnation, is highlighted by Nick: "With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur" (*TGG* 26). With carnivalesque ambivalence, her regal air mingles with grotesque exaggeration until

> [h]er laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air. (*TGG* 26-27)

Myrtle does not realize that her period of false privilege as a travesty queen is limited to the temporary and atypical moment of carnival, and that she can be punished if she steps out of line or in any other way displeases the king. Her pose is tolerated until she attempts to extend her sway beyond the permitted limits at which point she is forced into "the ceremonial of the ritual of decrowning [which] is counterposed to the ritual of crowning: regal vestments are stripped off the decrowned king, his crown is removed, the other symbols of authority are taken away, he is ridiculed and beaten" (*PDP* 125). As the evening draws to a close, Myrtle attempts to violate the sacredness of her rival by chanting her name:

> "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" shouted Mrs. Wilson. "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai—"
>
> Making a short deft movement Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand.
>
> Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor and women's voices scolding, and high over the confusion a long broken wail of pain. (*TGG* 41)

The party ends with the despairing figure of Myrtle on the couch, stripped of her illusions, bleeding profusely, and trying to spread a copy of *Town Tattle* over the tapestried scenes of Versailles.

* * *

As with Myrtle, in those parts of Gatsby's story governed by the carnival chronotope, "the carnivalistic act of crowning/decrowning is, of course, permeated with carnivalistic categories (with the logic of the carnival world): free and familiar contact (this is clearly manifest in decrowning), carnivalistic mésalliances (slave-king), profanation (playing with the symbols of higher authority)" (*PDP* 125). An indispensable element in Fitzgerald's representation of Gatsby is the carnival topos of the renewal of clothes and the social image. Gatsby is almost always in disguise not only for the joy of changing identities but also to hide something, to keep a secret, to deceive. After disassociating himself from his family origins and the provincial territory of his birth, he begins to fashion a new self-image modelled on the nature of the world he wishes to enter not as Jimmie Gatz but as Jay Gatsby. At eighteen, he eagerly exchanges his torn green jersey and pair of canvas pants for the blue jacket and white duck trousers given him by Dan Cody in which he looks like a millionaire's dashing son. While he courts Daisy in Louisville, he conceals his status as "a penniless young man without a past" under "the invisible cloak of his uniform" as an army officer (*TGG* 116). Only through this disguise can he overcome the socioeconomic barrier separating him from Daisy, and gain access to her world. When not actually in masquerade, he paints exaggerated verbal self-portraits. For instance, he tells Nick he

is the last surviving member of a wealthy Midwestern family and that he once lived "like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe" (*TGG* 52).

Gatsby, however, wants more than to play at what he is not. His deepest desire is a shift of position and destiny from a poor farm boy to a prince worthy of marrying "the king's daughter" (*TGG* 94). He feels this metamorphosis is at hand when he is finally reunited with Daisy. Wrapped in his golden aura, assuming the air of a monarch showing his realm to his beloved, and arrayed in his white suit, silver shirt and gold colored tie—the apparel he has chosen for his period of misrule—he escorts her through his shining, palatial home and revalues everything "according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes" (*TGG* 72). Their tour reaches its climax in his bedroom where, as surrogate emblems of a high familial lineage, he keeps photographs of Cody and of himself in a yachting outfit. Here, he opens his wardrobe and ritualistically displays his piles of custom-made imported shirts as a sign of his rank and as a tribute to her. In this emotional moment, she symbolically accepts him as her royal suitor. Having successfully drawn Daisy into his masquerade, he enjoys a taste of intense life set, as Klipspringer's song reminds us, in a very carnivalesque "*In between time*" (*TGG* 75). But already, at the height of his glory, Gatsby seems to have forebodings of his downfall and of Daisy's change of heart as if he somehow sensed that crowning and decrowning are inseparably dualistic, one invariably passing into the other. As Nick takes leave of the lovers he notices that "the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness" (*TGG* 75).

Gatsby feels he is on the verge of crowning his dream on the day he encounters Daisy and Tom and they transfer from the Buchanans' mansion to the Plaza Hotel, a public setting implicitly associated with the carnival square by its very name and rendered even more appropriate by the sounds of merrymaking at a large wedding downstairs which filter into the suite where the confrontation between Tom and

Gatsby takes place. Gatsby believes he has reached the moment of absolute reversal when Daisy will leave Tom and marry him. Tom, who has wearily tolerated Gatsby because he has seen him only as a clownish parvenu, finally realizes that he has become a true threat to his marriage and determines to put an end to his attempt at profanation, namely, "his presumptuous little flirtation" (*TGG* 105). What ensues is a "scene of the scandal and decrowning of the prince—the carnival king, or more accurately of the carnival bridegroom" when "the 'rotten cords' of the official and personal lie are snapped […] and human souls are laid bare" (*PDP* 161, 145). Launching into verbal violence aimed at stripping away Gatsby's public image, Tom makes fun of his pink suit, ridicules his "circus wagon" (*TGG* 94) of a car, renames him "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (*TGG* 101), and reveals the illegitimacy of his fortune, thereby unveiling his total lack of social respectability.

For an instant during this scene of scandal, when Tom recalls tender intimacies with Daisy and she confesses that she loved him while loving Gatsby too, and Gatsby struggles to "touch what was no longer tangible […] that lost voice across the room," the three of them let their masks drop and show their emotional vulnerability (*TGG* 105). The pathos of the moment is compounded by Gatsby's blindness to the truth, so evident to Nick, that Daisy "never intended doing anything at all" (*TGG* 108). The relative ease of Tom's victory reveals the fragility of the identity Gatsby has fashioned out of illusions and built on insubstantial hopes. Indeed, his painstakingly constructed persona "'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice and the long secret extravaganza was played out" (*TGG* 115-16).

It is quite telling that both decrownings are followed by the ritual of dismemberment for, in carnival, the king "is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter or of the dying year is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or drowned even in our time" (*RW* 197). Myrtle, "her life violently extinguished" by the car Daisy was driving, lies dead and mutilated in the road "her left breast […] swinging loose like a flap," her "mouth wide open and

ripped at the corners," her blood mingling with the dust (*TGG* 107). Tom escapes Wilson's wrath by directing him toward Gatsby. The next day, when Nick finds Gatsby's body floating in the pool, "his blood tracing […] a thin red circle in the water," and sees Wilson's corpse lying in the grass, he realizes "the holocaust was complete" (*TGG* 128). With this burning of the "hell," the carnival truly comes to an end and the ruling authorities reascend the throne. The customary order has been restored and further consolidated through the kind of social control by which members of the upper classes eliminate opponents of the lower classes.

In Bakhtin's theory, the brief reign of a travesty king or queen symbolizes the relativity of human structure and order as well as a temporary victory "over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death" (*RW* 92). The carnival monarch's divestment of power while being ridiculed, beaten, or even killed is indissolubly linked to rebirth and the possibility of renewal. The concluding episodes of Fitzgerald's novel work in ways antithetical to these premises. Myrtle's and Gatsby's carnivalesque adventures are crushed from without rather than ceding of their own accord to an appointed limit. Their tragic destinies are not charged with any kind of dialogical significance vis-à-vis Tom and Daisy, who do not allow their lives to be affected by the deaths they cause but go on living as if nothing had happened.

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NOTES

[1]Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970) 41.

[2]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984). Cited in the text as *PDP*. It is worth reiterating Bakhtin's emphasis on how, during carnival, the festive crowd assigns powerful officials inferior positions while simultaneously conferring high status on individuals heretofore on the margins of society. The lowly subject who is elected to office enjoys, in an outrageous manner, the prerogatives of sovereignty

for the duration of carnival, at the end of which he or she is ignominiously or savagely deposed. Nonetheless, the crowning of the mock king or queen is a potentially subversive attack on authority since it allows for "a concretely sensuous, half-real, half-play-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life" (*PDP* 123).

[3]Without reference to carnival, Paul L. MacKendrick, a classicist, pointed out a number of important links in "*The Great Gatsby* and *Trimalchio*," *The Classical Journal* 45.7 (April 1950): 307-14.

[4]Costas Panayotakis, *Theatrum arbitri: Theatrical Elements in the Satyrica of Petronious* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1995) 63.

[5]An important analysis from a Bakhtinian perspective of carnival in the *Satyricon* is R. Bracht Branham, "A Truer Story of the Novel?" *Bakhtin and the Classics*, ed. Branham (Evaston: Northwestern UP, 2002) 175-80.

[6]"Introduction" to Petronius' *Satyrica*, ed. and trans. R. Bracht Branham and Daniel Kinney (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) xxi-xxii.

[7]Mariangela Scarsi, "Il maestro 'dai piedi di vento,'" Gaio Petronio, *Satyricon*, ed. and trans. Scarsi (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1996) xxxii-xxxiv.

[8]F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925). All quotations come from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli, 1991. Cited in the text as *TGG.*

[9]Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 93.

[10]For this aspect of Fitzgerald's characterization of Nick and its relationship to the characterization of Encolpius, see Keath Fraser, "Another Reading of *The Great Gatsby*," *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's* The Great Gatsby, ed. Scott Donaldson (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company, 1984) 140-53.

[11]Maria Plaza, *Laughter and Derision in Petronius'* Satyrica*: A Literary Study*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000) 46.

[12]William Arrowsmith, "Luxury and Death in the *Satyricon*," *Arion* 5.3 (1966): 304-31; 324.

[13]MacKendrick 308. In contrast, William Frohock, in *Strangers to This Ground: Cultural Diversity in Contemporary American Writing* (Dallas: Dallas Southern Methodist UP, 1961) 60, asserts that "Scott Fitzgerald was no Petronius."

[14]Much valid criticism has centered on parties in *The Great Gatsby* and a few critics have examined this fundamental aspect from a perspective that includes the idea of carnival. For example, in *Candles and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: New York UP, 1978) 111-16, written before Bakhtin's theories were available in English, Joan M. Allen discusses carnival imagery in the context of her specific interest in Fitzgerald's "Catholic

sensibility"; although Christopher Ames uses Bakhtin's ideas as part of his theoretical approach in *The Life of the Party: Festive Vision in Modern Fiction* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1991) 139-50, his reading differs from mine because it is based on the conviction that "parties, though structurally and stylistically important in *The Great Gatsby* are, finally, thematically insignificant" (41); Philip McGowan's interest in *American Carnival: Seeing and Reading American Culture* (London: Greenwood P, 2001) 68-78, is in contrasting the colorful gaudiness of Gatsby's parties with the concept of "whiteness" represented by the Buchanans.

[15]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984). Cited in the text as *RW*.

[16]The gathering at Gatsby's in Chapter Six was originally conceived of as a costume party with the theme of the harvest dance; guests who did not arrive in costume were given bonnets or straw hats. See Trimalchio*: An Early Version of* The Great Gatsby, ed. James L. W. West (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 80-81.

[17]Roger W. Babson, *The Folly of Installment Buying* (New York: Ayer Co. Reprint ed., 1976), quoted in Michael Tratner, *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) 73.

[18]Walter S. Hilborn, *Philosophy of the Uniform Small Loan Law* (New York: Division of Remedial Loans, Russell Sage Foundation, 1923), quoted in Tratner 73.

[19]See *PDP* 171 for Bakhtin's brief remarks on gambling.

[20]Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 23.

[21]Bakhtin notes that "in European carnivals there was almost always a special structure (usually a vehicle adorned with all possible sorts of gaudy carnival trash) called 'hell' and at the close of carnival this 'hell' was triumphantly set on fire" (*PDP* 126).

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust*

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A Handful of Dust (1934), Evelyn Waugh's fourth novel, occupies a pivotal place in his work. Though it includes many of the comic and satiric elements that made his first novels so popular, *A Handful of Dust* is generally considered Waugh's first serious novel, a fact which the author acknowledged wryly in his 1963 "Preface": "This book found favour with the critics, who often date my decline from it."[1] One of the features of the book which made some critics uncomfortable was what they perceived as an uneasy mixture of realism and symbolism in the book.[2] I would like to suggest that many of these difficulties disappear when *A Handful of Dust* is read in terms of its cultural allusions and references to other writers, particularly Conrad and Eliot. The novel's allusiveness is apparent even before we begin reading it: the title and epigraph are from Eliot's *Waste Land*, and two of the chapter titles ("Du Côté de Chez Beaver" and "Du Côté de Chez Todd") invoke Proust. In different ways, both Eliot's poem and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* give us pictures of entire societies, and Waugh's allusions to them suggest that he has similar ambitions.

Waugh's picture of society employs a simple story and focuses on one couple, Tony and Brenda Last. Tony is devoted to his country house, Hetton Abbey, and to traditional social values; Brenda longs for the excitement of London and begins an affair with a worthless young man named John Beaver. When the Lasts' young son, their only child, is killed in a hunting accident, Brenda demands a divorce. Tony at first agrees, but changes his mind when he realizes that the settlement would require him to sell Hetton. He joins an expedition to

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find a lost city in Brazil, and, when the expedition goes disastrously wrong, is rescued and captured by the illiterate Mr. Todd, who forces him to read aloud the novels of Dickens over and over. Tony is presumed dead, Brenda marries an old friend, and a cadet branch of the Last family inherits Hetton.

This summary gives no sense of the quality of Waugh's narrative or style, but it does suggest some of his characteristic themes, particularly the fate of traditional values in the twentieth century. Like *The Good Soldier* and *The Great Gatsby*, *A Handful of Dust* is about the cost of idealism and the futility of nostalgia; like Ford and Fitzgerald, Waugh gives us a central character who is in some ways admirable but seriously flawed and often oblivious to everyday reality. The reader initially sympathizes with Tony as the wronged husband, but comes to realize that Tony has an "adulterous" relationship of his own—his obsession with Hetton, which causes him to neglect his wife and son and thus contributes to Brenda's decision to have an affair.

The architecture of Hetton tells us a good deal about Tony's values. The description of it in the county guidebook is dismissive:

> *Between the villages of Hetton and Compton Last lies the extensive park of Hetton Abbey. This, formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest. The grounds are open to the public daily until sunset and the house may be viewed on application by writing.* (17)

Since the original house was an abbey, it was built before Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and was therefore Gothic in style. It was this house which Tony's great-grandfather tore down to build a new house in Victorian Gothic, the synthetic revivalist style popularized by A. N. W. Pugin; the best-known example is the Parliament Buildings in London. No-one would mistake Victorian Gothic for the original: it is rather an affectionate imitation in which certain features of the original are exaggerated. The unauthentic style of Tony's house reflects his unreal way of life. Pugin's architecture was an expression of his revulsion from the realities of Victorian life, including industrialism, but it could never be more than escapism. Tony Last's rever-

ence for traditional country life is similarly reactionary; the estate barely supports itself financially and the Lasts are effectively poor, but Tony's romanticism is based on a refusal to face facts. His obtuseness regarding Brenda's affair is consistent with the rest of his life.

If Hetton exposes in architectural terms the falseness of Tony's life, his dislike of London evokes literary tropes of which Tony is similarly unaware. He subscribes, unconsciously, to one of the oldest dichotomies in European literature—the opposition of town and country, in which the town represents corruption and the country a simple virtuous life in harmony with nature. This opposition is subverted in the novel in several ways. If the country is isolated from the temptations of city life, it is also closer to the dangers of nature. Tony's son will be killed by a kicking horse, and Tony himself will come close to death twice in the wilds of Brazil. When Tony leaves on his expedition, Brenda asks Jock Grant-Menzies if he will be safe, and Jock answers, "Oh, I imagine so. The whole world is civilized now, isn't it—charabancs and Cook's offices everywhere" (198). Waugh's irony cuts both ways: the whole world is not civilized in the way Jock means, as Tony is about to discover, and "civilization" in the twentieth century is an increasingly problematic term.

This brings us to Joseph Conrad, whose dismantling of "civilization" in *Heart of Darkness* resonates through all of twentieth-century literature. Tony's adventures in Brazil and his capture by the grotesque Mr. Todd have long been recognized as an extended reference to *Heart of Darkness*.[3] The surface parallels are obvious enough: a dangerous river journey, an encounter with a sinister, possibly mad European who tyrannizes over the natives, and a revelation. It is the differences between the two narratives, however, which reveal Waugh's themes and the reason for the allusions. In Conrad, the heart of darkness—Kurtz's "horror"—is the black hole at the centre of the universe, the recognition that all values are human constructions, that good and evil are mere words, that there is no standard by which to say that Kurtz's acts were atrocities. Waugh, the Catholic convert, could not endorse Conrad's vision of nothingness, but the two writers

share a belief in the bankruptcy of what Waugh called "humanism"—the system of social restraints and secular moral codes severed from the Judeo-Christian tradition which gave rise to them. In a famous passage in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow addresses the question of how we can avoid stepping into the abyss. Force of habit, fear of public opinion and the law, and mere obliviousness will keep most people in line;[4] for those who see the artificiality and ultimate impotence of such restraints, however, there are only two possibilities: Kurtz's murderous nihilism, or complicity in a conscious lie like the one Marlow tells to Kurtz's "Intended."

With this in mind, our interest in the final section of Waugh's novel focuses on how Tony will react to his own encounter with the radical disorder of the jungle. He is neither religious nor very bright; he has been one of those who believe that moral values are self-evident. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow summarizes such people contemptuously, and perhaps enviously, in terms which suggest Waugh's depiction of Tony: "Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness" (54). In the early part of the novel, Tony's naive idea of the good is embodied in Hetton, where the bedrooms are named after characters in Malory—Lancelot, Percival, Yseult, Elaine, Galahad, and so on. If Tony were a reader, he might realize the implications of the fact that his wife's bedroom is Guinevere, but even when his personal Camelot falls he learns nothing and attempts, unconsciously, to find another perfect City—the lost city of the Pie-Wie Indians, the Eldorado of Dr. Messinger's expedition. Finally, feverish and out of his mind, Tony seems to realize that all human societies are corrupt; all are versions of the London house which Mrs. Beaver, John Beaver's mother, split up into flats and decorated in the latest style for the use of casual adulterers like Brenda:

> Listen to me. I know I am not clever but that is no reason why we should forget all courtesy. Let us kill in the gentlest manner. I will tell you what I have learned in the forest, where time is different. There is no City. Mrs. Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats.

> Three guineas a week, each with a separate bathroom. Very suitable for base love. And Polly will be there. She and Mrs. Beaver under the fallen battlements … (238)

In Conrad's terms, Tony has moved from obliviousness to insight; he has seen the heart of darkness ("There is no City") and the question is how he will respond to it. He realizes soon enough that he cannot find his own way out of the jungle and that Mr. Todd will not help him. He is trapped in a mini-society as vicious as the one he fled.

Even the first reviewers of the novel were uneasy about this surreal episode in what is generally a realistic novel, and critics since have been divided on its appropriateness and effectiveness. The most trenchant criticism was put by Waugh's friend Henry Yorke (the novelist Henry Green) in a letter to the author.

> The book was entirely spoilt for me by the end—the end is so fantastic that it throws the rest out of proportion. Aren't you mixing two things together? The first part of the book is convincing, a real picture of people one has met and may at any moment meet again. […] But then to let Tony be detained by some madman introduces an entirely fresh note & we are in phantasy with a ph at once.[5]

Waugh acknowledged the fantastic element but defended the ending:

> You must remember that to me the savages come into the category of "people one has met and may at any moment meet again." I think they appear fake to you largely because you don't really believe they exist … […] All that quest for a city seems to me justifiable symbolism.[6]

The symbolism is justified, I would argue, largely by the way in which Waugh uses Dickens to contrast Tony's response to the abyss with Marlow's.

The obvious irony in Tony's reading-aloud is that Dickens is the great chronicler of the corruption of London, so that Tony will be forced to face the reality he has avoided or ignored throughout his life, but the irony goes deeper than that. During his travels in what was then called British Guiana, which inspired the story of Mr. Todd, Waugh had read Dickens with great pleasure. This pleasure did not

alter his belief that Dickens represented "the fatuous optimism of Victorian humanism";[7] he wrote later of Dickens's "impermeable insular smugness" and the fact that "he celebrated Christmas—indeed appointed himself the special patron of the feast—while privately proclaiming disbelief in the event which it commemorates."[8]

Dickens's morality is, in Waugh's view, a sentimental and hypocritical nonsense—an attempt to enjoy the certainties of Christian moral standards without belief in what gave rise to them. It is, quite simply, a lie, and as such exactly analogous to Marlow's lie in *Heart of Darkness*. Jerome Meckier, in his detailed study of Waugh's treatment of Dickens and Conrad,[9] argues that Waugh saw the two earlier writers as essentially the same. Having discovered that "religious feelings survive religious beliefs," Dickens "invested secular events with a sacred aura to which they were not logically entitled" (179); feasts become sacraments, good women become angels, and sentimental repentance becomes salvation. Despite Conrad's pessimism, Meckier argues, he is engaged in a similar enterprise, at least as Waugh sees it:

> Conrad and the Edwardians do not surpass Dickens and the Victorians because they are still looking for humanistic ways to feel religious about life, as if art, utilizing religious metaphors, might restore value to a purely secular existence. […] Waugh loathes the surviving romantic belief that, despite the collapse of orthodoxy, the transcendent remains somehow accessible in the earthly, that going down far enough means eventually going upward. (183)

In this reading, Marlow's reliance on what he calls "inborn strength" is "the stoical pessimist's version of the secular virtues the humanists substituted for grace" (183), and his lie to Kurtz's "Intended" is "an act of old-fashioned, humanistic benevolence" in the manner of Mr. Pickwick (186). In more general terms, of course, Marlow's lie represents the West's attempt to live *as if* its values were still solidly based in belief.

All of this is well-argued, and Meckier is persuasive on the parallels. But a crucial difference remains: while Dickens's humanistic ethics—in Waugh's view—obscure the loss of belief in a fog of pseudo-Christian sentiment, Conrad squarely faces the fact that any attempt

to evade the consequences of lost belief can only be based on a lie, and lies are fragile. The illusions of all Conrad's major protagonists sooner or later come to grief, with catastrophic results, and the prophetic aspect of *Heart of Darkness* in particular is its clear-eyed recognition that the twentieth century could not long maintain the fiction of moral values without a basis in belief. It is this aspect of Conrad that Waugh could respect and even admire despite the differences in their metaphysics, and it is this, I would argue, which makes the extended reference to *Heart of Darkness* in *A Handful of Dust* largely sympathetic.

In Waugh's view, the Conradian alternatives—nihilism or the lie—are responses to the loss of religious faith. Nihilism, conscious lying (such as Marlow's), and faith all prompt us to action of one sort or another, but the *unconscious* lie (Dickensian sentiment and/or the belief that moral values are self-evident) encourages passivity and drift. Throughout Waugh's novel, Tony is a patient rather than an agent; his one apparently decisive action—repudiating the divorce settlement—is only a reaction to the threat he perceives to Hetton, and his expedition with Dr. Messinger is merely an attempt to escape, at least temporarily, from the complications of his life. Emotionally and mentally incapable of nihilism or of real faith, Tony moves, in literary terms, backward in time: he ignores the Conradian meaning of his river journey, and his reading of Dickens is a reversion to Victorian sentimentality. His reading returns him, ironically, to Hetton, which was built during Dickens's lifetime and represents the same problem—appearance without reality, the sentiment of an earlier period without the ethos.[10] Mr. Todd weeps at affecting scenes in Dickens, but has no intention of letting Tony go.

Waugh makes his point clear in the stages of Tony's delirium. At the height of his fever, he believes that he sees the Lost City of the Pie-Wie Indians:

> […] Tony saw beyond the trees the ramparts and battlements of the City; it was quite near him. From the turret of the gatehouse a heraldic banner floated in the tropic breeze. He struggled into an upright position and threw aside his blankets. He was stronger and steadier when the fever was on him

> […] [T]he sound of music rose from the glittering walls; some procession or pageant was passing along them. He lurched into tree trunks and became caught up in roots and hanging tendrils of bush-vine; but he pressed forward unconscious of pain and fatigue.
>
> At last he came into the open. The gates were before him and trumpets were sounding along the walls, saluting his arrival; from bastion to bastion the message ran to the four points of the compass; petals of almond and apple blossom were in the air; they carpeted the way, as, after a summer storm, they lay in the orchards at Hetton. Gilded cupolas and spires of alabaster shone in the sunlight. (233-34)

This is a pretty, Pre-Raphaelite dream—Hetton without problems, Camelot without adultery, the City of God without doctrine, all imposed on an alien culture about which Tony knows nothing.[11] The sacred is mixed with the profane, the familiar with the exotic, and belief is irrelevant in this sentimental vision of the ideal. When he is rescued by Mr. Todd, Tony does have the revelation I have already cited ("There is no city"), but this Conradian moment occurs while he is still delirious and there is nothing to suggest that he remembers it later, when he has recovered. He relapses into the baseless post-Christian morality with which he grew up, and when Mr. Todd asks him if he believes in God, he says, "I suppose so. I've never really thought about it much" (240).[12] Tony comes close to an awareness of the bankruptcy of humanism, but unlike Marlow he cannot complete the journey; he retreats to the comfort of childhood, but without real faith, and his constant re-reading of Dickens is, in Waugh's terms, wholly appropriate: they are kindred spirits. Like Kafka's baffled protagonists, Tony undergoes his trials without any sense of their meaning.

Heart of Darkness and *A Handful of Dust* are both quest narratives, and the same can be said of Eliot's *Waste Land*, the other Modernist work echoed in Waugh's novel. As Meckier points out in a footnote, "One of Waugh's subsidiary aims in *A Handful of Dust* is to separate Eliot, whom he accepts as a religious writer, from Conrad, whom he dislikes as a humanist" (180). In the Grail legends which Eliot employs, the King has been injured and the land, identified with him, has become infertile. The questing knight travels to the Chapel Perilous

and asks a series of questions; the King's wound is healed and the land is restored. In Eliot's poem, as in the original myth, the waste land is obviously spiritual—the result of loss of belief in the divine and the significance of human actions—and the solution is implied by allusions in the poem to Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu scriptures. When he wrote the poem, Eliot himself was in the spiritual wilderness (he joined the Anglican communion a few years later), but he had no doubt about the alternatives. There is no middle ground in *The Waste Land* between faith and despair, no sentimental Dickensian morality, no conscious or unconscious lie. In *A Handful of Dust*, Tony is in some ways like the knight of the Grail legends. He rightly avoids the waste land of London, affirms traditional values, and eventually goes on a quest for the "City"; but, as I have already suggested, Tony's obliviousness means that his quest can never be more than an ironic and abortive one. As Jeffrey Heath notes, "Unlike the pure knight of legend, who is guided by faith, Tony does not seek the right goal, and he does not know the right questions. Rather than freeing the maimed king, he becomes one of the denizens of the waste land, waiting for a release that never comes."[13]

Thematically, then, *A Handful of Dust* is sympathetic to Eliot's depiction of spiritual quest but blackly comic in its depiction of the protagonist and his fate. As Heath implies, Tony is ill-equipped to be the questing knight; he is in fact more like the impotent king in *The Waste Land*. This figure is implied in the title of Part II of Eliot's poem, "A Game of Chess." As virtually all commentaries on the poem note, the king in chess is an "impotent" piece, capable of little and in constant need of protection, while the queen is the most powerful piece on the board. The two scenes of married life in "A Game of Chess," one involving the affluent, the other the working class, deal with women manipulating their husbands in different ways, and it seems likely that the relationship of Brenda and Tony throughout *A Handful of Dust* is intended to refer thematically to the impotent-king motif and dramatically to the weak husband/strong wife scenes in *The Waste Land*. It is interesting, in this regard, that there is no bedroom named "Ar-

thur" at Hetton: Tony sleeps in "Morgan le Fay" (18-19), a reference to Arthur's sister, a powerful sorceress, and, in keeping with his passivity, he goes from one sort of thraldom to another.

In addition to his burlesque of the questing-knight theme, Waugh provides sardonic versions of some of the incidents and characters in *The Waste Land*. The fortune-teller Madame Sosostris, in Part I of Eliot's poem, is a "famous clairvoyante, / […] known to be the wisest woman in Europe, / With a wicked pack of cards."[14] This figure of debased religion, herself borrowed from Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, tells fortunes with a set of Tarot cards; she is transformed in *A Handful of Dust* into Mrs. Rattery, a house-guest at Hetton during the time John Andrew is killed, who passes the time playing elaborate games of solitaire:

> Mrs. Rattery sat intent over her game, moving little groups of cards adroitly backwards and forwards about the table like shuttles across a loom; under her fingers order grew out of chaos; she established sequence and precedence; the symbols before her became coherent, interrelated. (127)[15]

The order she creates is of course meaningless, the result of an arbitrary set of rules for the game; this may well be Waugh's symbol of the modern secular order. Mrs. Rattery is nevertheless in some ways an impressive figure, one of the few truth-tellers in Tony's artificial world. Because she is at home in the modern world and has no illusions, she becomes at times, paradoxically, a figure analogous to the Sybil and Tiresias, the all-seeing figures in Eliot's poem.[16] When Tony imagines Brenda's grief when she hears the news of John Andrew's death, Mrs. Rattery suggests tactfully that "You can't ever tell what's going to hurt people" (126); when Tony confesses that he finds it "hard to believe" that John Andrew has died—attempting again, it seems, to take refuge in illusion—Mrs. Rattery replies bluntly, "It happened all right" (125).[17]

Having presented his readers with the alternatives, Eliot ends *The Waste Land* inconclusively: images of desolation and fragments of the European past are mixed with signs of hope and benedictions.

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?
> London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
> *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*
> *Quando fiam uti chelidon*—O swallow swallow
> *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
> These fragments I have shored against my ruins
> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
> Shantih shantih shantih (ll. 423-33)

The reason for this inconclusiveness (note the lack of a final period) is not simply the modern avoidance of closed or definite endings, but Eliot's awareness that each reader must decide for himself or herself how the knight's quest will end. Waugh ends *A Handful of Dust* in similarly equivocal fashion: Tony's poor cousins have inherited Hetton, and Teddy Last, the son of the family, goes out to feed the silver foxes the family raises to increase the estate income.

> They ran up to the doors when they saw Teddy come with the rabbits. The vixen who had lost her brush seemed little the worse for her accident.
>
> Teddy surveyed his charges with pride and affection. It was by means of them that he hoped one day to restore Hetton to the glory that it had enjoyed in the days of his cousin Tony. (254)

One of Brenda's friends referred to Tony throughout her visit as "Teddy," and there is a sense in which cousin Teddy is Tony reborn, complete with illusions and devotion to Hetton; the cycle is set to begin again. But the poor cousins are more enterprising than Tony, and Teddy has chosen the famously uncomfortable "Galahad" as his bedroom (253). Perhaps, like his namesake, he will be a faithful questing knight and find the Grail; perhaps Last will be a verb, not an adjective, and the family will endure. As in Eliot, the reader's decision about the ending says much about his or her spiritual outlook.

A Handful of Dust invokes *The Waste Land* in other ways which cannot be tied to particular passages. These are *hommages* rather than specific allusions, but they draw attention to profound similarities of

theme and mood between the two works. Both Eliot and Waugh, for example, depict the pervasive boredom of the characters' lives and their futile pursuit of momentary transcendence in meaningless sex, and both societies seem devoid of real emotion: Brenda describes John Beaver as "cold as a fish" (59), and neither Tony nor Brenda reacts appropriately to the death of their only child. The casual brutality of most of the characters, notably Mrs. Beaver and Jock Grant-Menzies, is matched only by their refusal to learn anything from their own or other people's experiences. The possibility of knowledge or self-awareness through the arts is foreclosed by the characters' absolute lack of interest in such pursuits, and here again Waugh seems to echo Eliot. In *The Waste Land*, history and the arts have become a "heap of broken images" (l. 22) or "withered stumps of time" (l. 104), and the past is continually re-lived, the old myths re-enacted, because people refuse to read and learn: "And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed" (ll. 243-44). The meagre bookshelves in Tony's bedroom contain mostly books he read as a boy (19), and his ignorance of the meaning of Hetton's Arthurian room-names leads him to re-enact the fall of Camelot unconsciously. Waugh provides a compelling image of cultural amnesia and incoherence in his description of the London flat rented by Brenda's friend Jenny Abdul Akbar, a princess by virtue of her marriage to an Arab sheikh:

> The Princess's single room was furnished promiscuously and with truly Eastern disregard of the right properties of things; swords meant to adorn the state robes of a Moorish caid were swung from the picture rail; mats made for prayer were strewn on the divan; the carpet on the floor had been made in Bokhara as a wall covering; while over the dressing-table was draped a shawl made in Yokohama for sale to cruise-passengers; an octagonal table from Port Said held a Tibetan Buddha of pale soapstone; six ivory elephants from Bombay stood along the top of the radiator. Other cultures, too, were represented by a set of Lalique bottles and powder boxes, a phallic fetish from Senegal, a Dutch copper bowl, a waste-paper basket made of varnished aquatints, a golliwog presented at the gala dinner of a seaside hotel, a dozen or so framed photographs of the Princess, a garden scene ingeniously constructed in pieces of coloured wood, and a radio set in fumed oak, Tudor style. In so small a room the effect was distracting. (131)[18]

In its mixing of sacred and secular, this scene echoes Part II of *The Waste Land*, in which "sevenbranched candelabra" are used profanely to illuminate a woman's dressing-table (ll. 77-85); in its embrace of high and low from various cultures, the deracinated jumble of "fragments […] shored against my ruins" looks back to the macaronic concluding lines of *The Waste Land* and forward to Tony's culturally and morally incoherent vision of the City. Waugh acknowledges, with Eliot, that most people's visions of the City, of the good, are now necessarily subjective and in flux:

> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal (*The Waste Land*, ll. 371-76)

Other *hommages* to Eliot occur in the fifth chapter of Waugh's novel, "In Search of a City." Where Eliot uses vegetation myth and ritual to show the primitive patterns that underlie civilization, Waugh alternates scenes in the jungle and in London to draw ironic parallels between different societies' food, entertainment, and brutalities. Where the various characters of *The Waste Land* embody the same dilemma and are in many ways interchangeable, those of *A Handful of Dust* reflect each other in similarly uncanny and unsettling ways. John Andrew has a double in the equally childish (but less endearing) John Beaver, and another in Winnie, Milly's daughter, who, like John Andrew, asks awkward questions. Tony's role as squire finds its shadow-double in Mr. Todd's tyranny over the natives, and Hetton itself is mirrored in Todd's meagre estate; after Tony is reported dead, he is "reborn" as Teddy. Many of the female characters—Brenda and Marjorie, Polly and Mrs. Beaver—speak almost identically and share the same round of activities.

Twelve years after the publication of *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh wrote that the novel was "humanist, and contained all I had to say about humanism."[19] In its analysis of the bankruptcy of a humanism

cut off from its religious roots, Waugh's novel takes its place in the pessimistic modern tradition of cultural analysis of which Conrad and Eliot were the most brilliant representatives, and establishes its *bona fides* through cultural and literary allusion. Tony's fate in the jungles of Brazil is not, as Henry Yorke thought, an aberration in an otherwise realistic novel,[20] but a macabre and allusive image of humanism's dead end and a tribute to two of Waugh's literary fathers. Like its great predecessors, *A Handful of Dust* conflates past and present, myth and history, the primitive and the civilized, and uses the protagonist's quest to show us a heart of darkness.

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NOTES

[1]Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964) 7. All subsequent references are to this edition, the last Waugh saw through the press.

[2]See the early reviews collected in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Stannard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 333-45.

[3]See, e.g., Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983) 119: "Tony's relationship with Todd resembles that of Marlow and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*"; and Terry Eagleton, "Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-Class Novel," *Critical Essays on Evelyn Waugh*, ed. James F. Carens (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987) 112: "Tony stumbles on Mr. Todd at the heart of darkness."

[4]See, *The Complete Short Fiction of Joseph Conrad,* ed. Samuel Hynes, vol. 3 (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco P, 1992) 53-54. The passage, too long to quote here, occurs in section II of *Heart of Darkness*, and begins with Marlow's words, "You can't understand. How could you?" Subsequent references are to this edition.

[5]Selena Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994) 314.

[6]Hastings 314.

[7]Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years, 1903-1939* (New York: Norton, 1987) 329. Stannard notes that Waugh's father Arthur edited the Nonesuch edition of Dickens.

[8]"Apotheosis of an Unhappy Hypocrite" (1953), *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh,* ed. Donat Gallagher (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) 445, 446.

[9]"Why the Man Who Loved Dickens Reads Dickens Instead of Conrad: Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*," *Novel* 13.2 (Winter 1980): 171-87. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically.

[10]Hetton is associated with Dickens early in the novel; Tony's Aunt Frances "remarked that the plans of the house must have been adapted by Mr. Pecksniff from one of his pupils' designs for an orphanage" (17).

[11]Waugh wrote a book on the Pre-Raphaelites (1926), and the resemblance of this imagined scene to the pseudo-medieval landscapes of the school is not accidental.

[12]Tony has already shown his indifference to religion: he plans improvements to the house during Sunday service, and remarks to an acquaintance after John Andrew's death, "the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion" (133).

[13]Heath 120.

[14]T. S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969) 62; *The Waste Land*, Part I, ll. 43, 45-46. Subsequent line or page references are to this edition.

[15]There are two other fortune-tellers in the novel: John Beaver, who pretends to tell Brenda's fortune with a conventional pack of cards (40), and Mrs. Northcote, who "told fortunes in a new way, by reading the soles of the feet" (133).

[16]Mrs. Rattery's contrary roles as Madame Sosostris and the Sybil, the fraudulent and the genuine seer, are not contradictory. As Eliot says in one of his notes to *The Waste Land*, "all the women [in the poem] are one woman" (78), and many of the figures in the poem therefore embody ambiguous or contrary meanings.

[17]In keeping with her modernity, Mrs. Rattery arrives by airplane—as does Lina Szczepanowska, the "new woman" in Shaw's *Misalliance*.

[18]The larger pattern of misplaced values and cultural incoherence in the novel is traced in Ann Pasternak Slater, "Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*: Right Things in Wrong Places," *Essays in Criticism* 32.1 (1982): 48-68.

[19]"Fan-Fare" (1946), in Gallagher 304.

[20]As the poet William Plomer noted in his review, "it would be a mistake to regard Mr. Waugh's more surprising situations as farcical or far-fetched; they are on the whole extremely realistic, and charged with the irony that belongs to the commonplace but is not always perceived." See Stannard, *Critical Heritage* 154.

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Jane Austen Meets Dickens: A Response to Thierry Labica*

JEAN-JACQUES LECERCLE

In Thierry Labica's "War, Conversation, and Context in Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude*" I find myself, through direct interpellation, incited to justify a passing thought (that "Patrick Hamilton was a Marxist alcoholic Jane Austen"[75]) and to turn a post-prandial joke into a critical statement.

That Patrick Hamilton was both a Marxist and an alcoholic is a matter of empirical fact, even if, as Labica demonstrates in the first section of his paper, in the realm of literary criticism, there are no such things as empirical facts, only cultural constructions. The advantage of my construction of Patrick Hamilton is that it maintains an aura of unrespectability, which is our only chance of keeping his texts alive, and of saving them from the ideological bowdlerisation of the media (of which the fate of Jane Austen at the hands of the BBC is a prime example), thus making them available for new readings.

But the most contentious part of my three word characterisation is undoubtedly the name "Jane Austen": a chasm seems to separate the two authors, which forbids including them in a common tradition. We could express this as a systematic contrast, what philosophers call a correlation: woman vs. man; early nineteenth century vs. mid twentieth century; village vs. city; discreet historical context vs. overwhelming historical context. For what can the world of a war novel dealing with World War II have in common with the peaceful world of a Jane Austen novel?

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*Reference: Thierry Labica, "War, Conversation, and Context in Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude*," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 72-82.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/deblabica01201.htm>.

But one of the strong points of Labica's essay is that it questions the description of *The Slaves of Solitude* as a war novel: it concentrates on aspects of the novel, such as the conceptions of language that are put to work in it, which are not strictly context-bound. So there may be a link after all between Hamilton and Austen. Let me offer two suggestions. The first is that they have in common an interest in celibacy. And here we do have a literary tradition, the tradition of the spinster or maiden aunt. In a non-trivial way, Miss Roach is a descendant of Miss Bates in *Emma*, who in my view is the origin of a long tradition, which flourished with Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford*, and which enjoyed a revival (with due transformations) after the first World War, when the historical conjuncture produced a generation of spinsters, by the wholesale massacre of the corresponding generation of young men. Versions of the tradition can be found in the novels of F. M. Mayor (*The Third Miss Symons*, *The Rector's Daughter*), Edith Olivier (*The Love Child*) and in Sylvia Townsend Warner's first novel, *Lolly Willowes*.

But this is very much a feminine, and perhaps even feminist tradition: in their very exploitation of the tradition those novelists are much closer to the Jane Austen line of the correlation than to the Patrick Hamilton line. For instance, the natural habitat of the spinster is the village, with its three mile radius of acquaintance. So a masculine pendant to that feminine tradition must be found. And it *is* to be found, of course, in Dickens, in whose novels we have not merely a fine array of bachelors, but, a much rarer species, the male spinster, e.g. Mr Wemmick in *Great Expectations*. The opening of *The Slaves of Solitude*, that unforgettable description of London as a crouching monster, is in the style of Dickens (we remember the name given to the metropolis in *Bleak House*: "the great wen"). And the mention of the train on the same page may remind us of the use made of trains in *Dombey and Son*. If Miss Roach is an Austenian character, to be treated with the customary irony, sometimes gentle and sometimes sharp, Mr Thwaites is a Dickensian character, savaged with the same verve as some of Dickens's great comic creations, especially in that he is, like them, linguistically characterised. For this is the most striking aspect

of Dickens's verve: language, the inimitable idiolect of the character, is a quasi physical feature, or non-discardable item of clothing, allowing instant recognition. I should therefore improve on my description of Patrick Hamilton by offering a description of *The Slaves of Solitude* as "Jane Austen meets Dickens," even as, in Hollywood, Frankenstein inevitably meets Dracula.

There is one adjective in my initial description, however, which is still unaccounted for: the word "Marxist." For I take it that I can ascribe to Patrick Hamilton's "alcoholism" the slightly demented and extraordinarily powerful linguistic verve of the text (and I notice that Labica applies the word "dementia" to Mr Thwaites' behaviour; 80). Patrick Hamilton, like Dickens, knows how to let language speak his character, how to release him (and himself) from the constraints of propriety and common sense—to extraordinary effect. Such a gift is notoriously enhanced by a taste for alcohol. But where is the Marxism in this meeting between an ironic Jane Austen and an alcoholic Dickens?

I think it lies precisely where Labica has found it: in a conception of language—or rather in a conception of ideology as emerging from the clash between two conceptions, or two types, of language (conversational vs. strategic [77-78]; intentional—I speak language—vs. glossolalic—language speaks me [80-81]). In Althusserian terms, what Patrick Hamilton accounts for is the ideological process of subjectivation through interpellation, with the never entirely successful but always renewed attempts at counter-interpellation by the interpellated subject. The clash between the two concepts of language, which is also the clash between the two literary traditions of the sharply ironic and the bibulously vehement, illustrates the social process of subject creation through the Althusserian chain of interpellation: institution → ritual → practice → speech-act → subject. The Rosamund Tea Room, the symbolic embodiment of a State Ideological Apparatus, is the fitting locus for a number of rituals (not least what the other fellow called "the ceremony known as afternoon tea"—you have recognised the opening of *Portrait of a Lady*). Those rituals in turn give rise to prac-

tices, first among which is the linguistic practice of conversation, and to the production of speech-acts. The problem is that, in order to think language in this context, we need not a Chomskyan or a Habermassian, but a Marxist concept of language. "Patrick Hamilton," aka the Marxist alcoholic Jane Austen, is merely a name for that collective conception of language.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Translating English: Youth, Race and Nation in Colin MacInnes's *City of Spades* and *Absolute Beginners*

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Introduction

The 1950s represent a key decade in the formation of an English national identity based on multicultural and multiethnic principles. This process was informed by the intersection of a number of factors operating during the period including the break up of empire, the Windrush generation of immigrants to Britain, and the emergence of distinct youth subcultures that negotiated black and American popular culture. Colin MacInnes was especially attuned to the relationship between these social and cultural factors and his fifties novels are conducive to an understanding of the period in terms of the emergence of this new model of English identity. MacInnes was interested in exploring the submerged worlds of 1950s London that engaged both black and youth subcultures. In his fiction, he achieved this by presenting idiosyncratic first-person narrators that purported to be from these worlds, and whose purpose it was to communicate their marginalized and hidden experiences to the reader. This involved a certain amount of textual ventriloquism and fluid transference between identities. The individuals he creates are, of course, constructed out of writing, and since the rise of post-structuralism readers have become wary of such textual representations of identity. Nevertheless, MacInnes's characters create the effect of exposing the reader to what appear to be authentic subaltern voices that are allowed to speak their own experiences and concerns (Spivak).[1]

However, MacInnes remains largely overlooked in critical analyses of the postwar novel. Blake Morrison (1986), Harry Ritchie (1988),

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debbentley01312.htm>.

Deborah Philips and Ian Haywood (1998) all exclude MacInnes in their otherwise informative books on the literature of the 1950s, and he fails to get a mention in recent critical surveys of the postwar British novel (Gasiorek; Head; Brannigan). Two exceptions are Alan Sinfield and Steven Connor who both offer short but perceptive analyses of *Absolute Beginners* (Sinfield 169-71; Connor 89-94). One of the aims of this article, therefore, is to recover the importance of MacInnes as a writer who was particularly sensitive to shifts in British culture and society in the 1950s. In what follows, I discuss two novels of his *London Trilogy* (although there will be cross-reference to his journalism) in three sections. The first analyzes the deployment of narrative techniques in *City of Spades* and *Absolute Beginners*, the second explores the construction of Englishness in *Absolute Beginners*, and the third focuses on the representation of black immigrant identity in *City of Spades*.

Free Form: MacInnes's Narrative Strategies

The impulse behind MacInnes's fiction is a desire to represent marginalized voices, as a response to what he considered to be a misrepresentation of youth and black subcultures in the mainstream media. His narratives are driven by an imperative to record previously unrepresented voices, lest they "disappear irretrievably" (Benjamin 247).[2] In a 1959 review of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, MacInnes writes:

> As one skips through contemporary novels, or scans the acreage of fish-and-chip dailies and the very square footage of the very predictable weeklies, as one blinks unbelievingly at 'British' films and stares boss-eyed at the frantic race against time that constitutes telly, it is amazing—it really is—how very little one can learn about life in England here and now. (MacInnes, *England* 206)

He goes on to stress how little 'we' have learned, through the cultural sites he refers to above, of:

> working-class child mothers, ageing semi-professional whores, the authentic agonies of homosexual love, and the new race of English born coloured boys […] the millions of teenagers […] the Teds […] the multitudinous Commonwealth minorities in our midst […]. (206)

Responding, therefore, to this lack of representation, MacInnes, in his novels, aims to fill the gap he identifies in contemporary literature and journalism concerning these alternative lifestyles.

In terms of narrative technique, MacInnes achieves his aim by producing first person narratives from individuals placed within the subcultures. In *Absolute Beginners*, the narrative is provided by an unnamed white teenager who acts as a guide through the subcultural world the novel describes. This teenager communicates in an idiosyncratic language that situates him outside the mainstream English culture:

> He didn't wig this, so giving me a kindly smile, he stepped away to make himself respectable again. I put a disc on to his hi-fi, my choice being Billie H., who sends me even more than Ella does, but only when, as now, I'm tired, and also, what with seeing Suze again, and working hard with my Rolleiflex and then this moronic conversation, graveyard gloomy. But Lady Day has suffered so much in her life she carries it all for you, and soon I was quite a cheerful cat again. (27-28)

Here, the incorporation of unofficial and unlicensed language, ("wig," "sends," "cat") and references to the insider's knowledge of a specific subcultural interpretive community ("Billie H.," "Ella," "Lady Day") acts as a performative statement of opposition to dominant culture. The style announces itself as distinct from Standard English and operates as a statement or proclamation of rejection and critique of dominant cultural values. Although this does not necessarily reproduce the authentic voice of actual teenagers in an ethnographic sense, it does reproduce the ideological function of style in youth subcultures. As Dick Hebdige argues: "The communication of a significant difference, then (and the parallel communication of a group identity), is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures" (Hebdige 102). The construction of the teenager's voice in MacInnes's novel is a

textual representation of the function of subcultures to distance themselves from the adult mainstream, and operates as a process of identity-forming empowerment. This can be seen in the conversation the teenage has with his mother:

> "You made us minors with your parliamentary whatsits," I told her patiently. "You thought, 'That'll keep the little bastards in their places, no legal rights, and so on,' and you made us minors. Righty-o. That also freed us from responsibility, didn't it? […] And then came the gay-time boom and all the spending money, and suddenly you oldos found that though we minors had no rights, we'd got the money power." […] This left me quite exhausted. Why do I *explain* it to them, talking like some Method number […]. (43)

Here, the linguistic deviations from Standard English ("whatsits", "Righty-o," "oldos," "Method number") are part of the teenager establishing his cultural distance from the parent('s) culture. However, MacInnes is careful to maintain clarity within his writing; the style is clearly accessible to a mainstream readership despite the inclusion of the non-standard forms.

In presenting this alternative linguistic style, the text produces a dual narrative address, as it internally constructs a dual set of 'implied' readers.[3] Firstly, a 'reader' who is part of the teenage subculture and will recognize the situations, characters and world of the text; this reader will feel included by the narrative address. Secondly, a 'reader' who is excluded; this reader is part of the dominant culture to which the text is simultaneously addressed as a revelatory discourse of the culture of a specific subcultural 'other' (Connor 8-13).[4]

This dual narrative address is also evident in *City of Spades*. In this text, this is more overtly identified by the split first-person homodiegetic[5] narration of the two central characters, Montgomery Pew, a white middle-class civil servant working for the Colonial Department, and Johnny Fortune, a black Nigerian student studying in London. Pew's language represents Standard English:

> Primed by my brief study of the welfare dossiers, I awaited, in my office, the arrival of the first colonials. With some trepidation: because for one who,

> like myself, has always felt great need of sober counsel, to offer it to others […] seemed intimidating. (16)

Johnny Fortune's style is quite different from Pew's official language:

> In the Circus overhead I looked around more closely at my new city. And I must say it was a bad disappointment: so small, poky, dirty, not magnificent! Red buses, like shown to us on the cinema, certainly, and greater scurrying of the population than at home. But people with glum clothes and shut-in faces. Of course, I have not seen yet the Parliament Houses, or many historic palaces […]. (13)

Slight idiosyncrasies in linguistic style ("a bad disappointment," "like shown to us" and "Parliament Houses") mark off Fortune as an ethnic outsider to dominant British culture, and establish his position of difference. The outsider narrative also acts as a defamiliarization of English culture for a reader from that culture—a kind of reversed travel narrative. Again, though, MacInnes chooses to incorporate the linguistic deviations within a reasonably accessible style that would be familiar to a mainstream English readership.

The dual narrative structure of this novel allows MacInnes to represent the voice of a particular minority subculture (through Fortune's narrative), that of the black immigrant living in London in the 1950s, but also to depict dominant white middle-class culture (albeit a 'liberal' representative in Pew). It attempts to represent black subcultures through the construction of a non-Standard English voice that signifies ethnic difference through linguistic difference, and which serves to articulate the case of the marginalized group, whilst at the same time alerting dominant white society to the actualities of racism in Britain in the 1950s.

The subversion of Standard English in Fortune's narrative in *City of Spades* represents an ideological challenge to dominant culture. It is through language and the disruption of 'Standard' English that the emergent culture constructs its own separate identity. The subversion of language thus becomes emblematic of a wider agenda against a range of cultural positions *vis-à-vis* the dominant culture. As Mikhail

Bakhtin has identified, a nation's language and national identity are ideologically linked, and this connection is negotiated through the literature produced by a specific national culture. Bakhtin argues that the novel form is highly conducive to the processes of decentralization and disruption of the attempts by dominant cultural forces to standardize and unify the language of a nation. He suggests that whilst there are "centripetal" forces acting on a national language that attempt to unify the forms of public discourse and place it under the control of dominant ideological forces, there are always corresponding "centrifugal" forces which resist the process of centralization.[6] For MacInnes, as for Bakhtin, this process is fundamentally ideological and is represented in the attempt of marginal groups to challenge the ideology of dominant power frameworks.

The representative function of the teenager's voice in *Absolute Beginners* and Johnny Fortune's narrative in *City of Spades*, therefore, exceeds the portrayal of individual characters. Their narratives are a representation of collective subcultural identities that attempt to articulate a discourse of empowerment for particular marginalized groups in 1950s society. This technique of producing a collective narrative corresponds to the ideological function identified by Deleuze and Guattari, in what they call "minor literature," as the political representation of marginalized discourses in a fictional form. This collective narrative is produced specifically through the deployment of alternative linguistic styles.

In the texts analyzed here, MacInnes deploys two 'foreign' appropriations of the 'national' language that function as centripetal forces undermining 'Standard' English. These two 'foreign' interruptions of English intersect with contemporary anxieties around national identity, namely in terms of Americanization and the immigration of black and Asian groups from Britain's former colonies.

When it was first published, several contemporary critics and reviewers compared *Absolute Beginners* to J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, mainly because of the similarity in subject matter and the narrative address of the two texts (Gould xiii). This comparison with

Salinger indicates wider debates about the Americanization of English culture in the 1950s, and especially the role of youth subcultures in this process. Although MacInnes maintains that English youth culture retains its own specific national identity,[7] the deployment of an appropriation of American forms, accents and modes of expression becomes a narrative strategy in *Absolute Beginners* in the formation of a distinct youth identity that challenges the traditional and dominant constructions of Englishness: "I swore by Elvis and all the saints that this last teenage year of mine was going to be a real rave. Yes, man, come whatever, this last year of the teenage dream I was out for kicks and fantasy" (11). This passage includes many words, or distinct uses of words, that are imported from 1950s America ("teenage," "rave," "man," "kicks"). As Hebdige has argued, this process represents youth subcultures challenging the dominant forms of the English establishment through the expression and appropriation of 'foreign' styles (46-51). However, MacInnes holds that American culture, as consumed by the English youth, is not portrayed as an experiential connection between the two cultures. It is rather a strategic form of escape from, and resistance to, dominant adult culture (*England* 11-19).

This process is articulated through the narrative voice in *Absolute Beginners*. The hybridized style, register and word choice of the teenager represent a form that incorporates Standard English, working-class slang, and an American youth idiom similar to that produced by the American Beat writers of the fifties. The teenager's narrative voice represents the distancing of youth from mainstream culture through an engagement with contemporary anxieties about the Americanization of English culture. This fear was acknowledged not only in mainstream cultural discourse, but also in the New Left writing of the period, especially in Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes creates a linguistic style that corresponds to his reading of the popular English rock'n'roll and skiffle forms of Tommy Steele and Lonnie Donegan. In a 1958 article for *The Twentieth Century*, MacInnes writes:

> English singers have gradually captured a place in the pop market […] by learning to sing the American pop style in a manner quite indistinguishable from the real thing, so that we have the paradox that teenagers like, increasingly, songs by Englishmen in American. (*England* 49)

In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes attempts to translate this hybridized singing style into the narrative voice of the teenager, a form that is addressed to an English audience and is specifically concerned with English culture, but is presented through the appropriation of American forms. MacInnes's attempt to create this subcultural, hybrid language style is, therefore, part of his project to challenge dominant constructions of Englishness in terms of both language and culture.[8]

In *City of Spades*, Johnny Fortune's narration represents a similar hybridized language form. Fortune's style is presented as an appropriation, disruption and dislocation of Standard English that operates thematically and ideologically to represent an emergent national identity that includes rather than excludes members from Britain's commonwealth. The representation of Fortune's language functions in a similar way to the 'Creolization' of English in many Caribbean texts. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue:

> Writers in this continuum employ highly developed strategies of code-switching and vernacular transcription, which achieve the dual result of abrogating the Standard English and appropriating an english [sic] as a culturally significant discourse. (46)

Although Fortune is from Nigeria, and not the Caribbean, his discourse functions in a similar way by transforming Standard English.

In summary, the experimentation with linguistic forms in the intersection of Standard English, Americanization and Creolization in MacInnes's novels foreground his central concern in the contemporary construction of English national identity.

Cool Britannia: Reconstructing Englishness

The 1950s represent a decade in which the construction of English national identity was undergoing radical reappraisal and re-

negotiation due to the break-up of Empire, increased immigration and the perceived threat of the Americanization of British culture.[9] This historical context is articulated in MacInnes's novels by contradictory attitudes towards constructions of national identity.[10] The novels produce a double perspective that, on the one hand, offers a critique of, yet on the other, is openly nostalgic for, traditional representations of Englishness. In Raymond Williams's terms, the texts reveal both a nostalgic longing for the "residual" *and* a celebration of the "emergent" in relation to constructions of Englishness (37-45).

In *Absolute Beginners*, the contradictory attitude towards the nature of English national identity is registered through the central consciousness of the teenager, who is unclear about which aspects of national identity he can support as reflecting his individual identity, and which he wants to reject in favour of new forms. This 'undecidability' of association with the nation is articulated in the conversation the teenager has with a South American diplomat who is in the process of writing a report on "British-folk ways": "'So you've not much to tell me of Britain and her position.' […] '[O]nly,' I said, 'that her position is that she hasn't found her position'" (25-27). This description of national identity as fluid and unstable is informed by the contemporary 'crisis' of Britain's loss of colonial and international power, and foregrounds a moment of transition in English national identity by observing and commenting on both residual and emergent forms of Englishness. However, it is not the case that MacInnes's teenager simply rejects the residual and celebrates the emergent aspects of the contemporary national culture, rather, a more complex and contradictory attitude is presented by means of a reconstruction of the nation through a re-negotiation of traditional and new cultural forms and practices. As the teenager comments: "'You bet I'm a patriot!' I exclaimed. 'It's because I'm a patriot, that I can't bear our country'" (59).

There *is* plenty of invective about traditional forms of Englishness in the novel, especially in relation to out-of-date colonial attitudes that retain the pretence that Britain is still a major world power. For

example, the teenager tells the South American diplomat, referring to the English:

> If they'd stick to their housekeeping, which is the only back-yard they can move freely in to any purpose, and stopped playing Winston Churchill and the Great Armada when there's no tin soldiers left to play with any more, then no one would despise them, because no one would even notice them. (26)

This passage reveals the text's critique of the residual forms of colonial power, which are also identified by the teenager in Britain's recent failures in international power broking:

> "The war," said Vern [the teenager's elder half-brother], "was Britain's finest hour."
> "What war? You mean Cyprus, boy? Or Suez? Or Korea?"
> "No, stupid. I mean the *real* war, you don't remember."
> "Well Vernon," I said, "please believe me I'm glad I don't. All of you oldies certainly seem to try to keep it well in mind, because every time I open a newspaper, or pick up a paperback, or go to the Odeon, I hear nothing but war, war, war. You pensioners certainly seem to love that old struggle." (35)

MacInnes and the teenager base their critique on the fact that residual forms of Englishness fail to accommodate the nation's declined status in the post-colonial world.

In addition, the text argues that England has failed to take responsibility for its colonial heritage, or to recognize that it is implicated in its colonial history precisely because the exploitation of subject peoples has taken place *elsewhere*, away from the colonial centre:

> For centuries […] the English have been rich, and the price of riches is that you export reality to where it is you get your money from. And now that the market-places overseas are closing one by one, reality comes home again to roost, but no one notices it, although it's settled in to stay beside them. (98)

The failure to respond to the changing contemporary situation evidenced in dominant English society's failure to accept responsibility for past colonial exploitation is represented in *Absolute Beginners* by the presentation of racial violence in the passages describing the

Notting Hill riots. This eruption of violence is represented as a spontaneous and collective psychological reaction to contemporary anxieties about national identity amongst the dominant white population, and leads the teenager to reject the entrenched forms of Englishness:

> Because in this moment, I must tell you, I'd fallen right out of love with England. And even with London, which I'd loved like my mother, in a way. As far as I was concerned, the whole dam [sic] group of islands could sink under the sea, and all I wanted was to shake my feet off of them, and take off somewhere and get naturalized, and settle. (228)

However, parallel to this critique, the text simultaneously offers a celebration of other traditional forms of national identity, which appear to be under threat from the new social and cultural forces. For example, as a contrast to the text's focus on the emergent musical form of jazz, the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan are celebrated as a cultural expression of an older and yet still important element of a residual Englishness (132-33). Gilbert and Sullivan function in the text as a cultural signifier of a traditional construction of 'liberal' England as an honest, ordered and gentle society. In the section where the teenager goes on a boat trip with his father (who represents a gentle, quietly spoken, but solid English character), he celebrates older narratives of Englishness by appropriating royalist and pastoral images:

> Up there behind us, was the enormous castle, just as you see it on screen when they play "the Queen" […] and there out in front of us were fields and trees and cows and things and sunlight, and a huge big sky filled with acres of fresh air, and I thought my heavens! if this is the country, why haven't I shaken hands with it before—it's glorious! (172)

This nostalgic celebration of a residual English pastoral seems at odds with the teenager's encounters with the new forms of teenage and black subcultures that pervade most of the text. However, this aspect represents an attempt to reconstruct a positive, emergent national identity that is acceptable not only to the new subcultural identities the novel records, but also to the mainstream culture. This ambiva-

lence in terms of national identity serves to envisage a reconstruction of Englishness that will incorporate mainstream *and* the new identities of youth and black subcultures. The novel, therefore, attempts to appropriate these new cultures by representing them to an audience that has come to perceive them as wholly threatening to traditional national values. If MacInnes's teenager can respond to the implicit worth of certain aspects of an older English identity, then it is more palatable for dominant English culture to include these new subcultural forces into an emergent reconstruction of Englishness. It thus anticipates later discourses of a 'Cool Britannia' that appropriates youth and black subcultures in a vibrant and forward-looking construction of the nation. It is for this reason that the text ends with the poignant image of a new group of immigrants landing in England, full of hope and a reliance on the very English myths that the teenager has reproduced:

> They all looked so dam [sic] pleased to be in England, at the end of their long journey, that I was heartbroken at all the disappointments that were in store for them […] "Welcome to London! Greetings from England! Meet your first teenager! We're all going up to Napoli to have a ball!" (234-35)

This contradictory attitude to the construction of Englishness reveals the novel's engagement with contemporaneous debates on the social and political experience of Britain in the post-war period. The text enters a cultural debate concerned with defining a national identity that has been loosened from its traditional certainties, one that is no longer the property of the dominant cultural institutions, but is in the process of being reconstructed from below. Homi Bhabha, following Tom Nairn's description of the nation as "the modern Janus" (Nairn 348), identifies the "Janus-faced" ambivalence of the discourse and the language of the nation. He writes:

> The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in rela-

> tion to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. (Bhabha 4)

In this passage, Bhabha identifies the fluid construction of the 'nation' that suggests that national identity is never fixed but is in a constant process of reconstruction and re-negotiation. A similar model of the nation is also assumed in *Absolute Beginners*. MacInnes's novel attempts to generate the "other sites" identified by Bhabha both in terms of meaning and through the construction of identities that engage in the ideological construction of an emergent Englishness. However, the text is also concerned to retain certain aspects of a residual Englishness. The position of the narrative voice as simultaneously inside and outside in relation to youth subcultures corresponds to this negotiated construction of the nation. The narrative occupies a space on the boundary between inside and outside: a liminal position from which it attempts to reconstruct a new national identity by repositioning the narrative, and the reader, in relation to a moral judgement on the site of Englishness in relation to the other 'geographies' of youth and race.

Cruel Britannia: Race and Identity in *City of Spades*

MacInnes's contradictory representations of English national identity and youth are also reproduced in his representation of black subcultures. In *City of Spades*, MacInnes attempts to record faithfully the culture, concerns and experiences of emergent black communities in fifties London. In part, the text attempts to re-address the misrepresentation of these identities in the media and in the mainstream 'structure of feeling' amongst the white population towards ethnic minorities from commonwealth and decolonized countries (Williams, *Revolution* 48).

In the final section of *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes represents mainstream attitudes to 'race' through the discussion of an article in what the teenager calls "Mrs Dale's Daily," by the fictional journalist

Ambrose Drove, representative of dominant cultural attitudes towards immigrant and black individuals (193-97). The Ambrose Drove article serves to highlight several specific racial prejudices and misrepresentations, such as: the dangerous irresponsibility of unrestricted immigration; the positioning of immigrant cultures as underdeveloped, and lacking in ethical and moral frameworks comparable to the (white) British population; anti-social and excessive behaviour; sexual promiscuity; and criminality, especially in the practice of "living off the immoral earnings of white prostitutes" (195). The fictional article places the responsibility for the incidents of racial violence in the Nottingham and Notting Hill riots in 1958 on the immigrants, implying that the racist reaction of the 'Teds' is understandable though "entirely alien to our way of life" (196). The representation of these widespread cultural beliefs corresponds to what Edward Said has defined as the "orientalism" of Western conceptions of "other" non-Western cultures. Black immigrant culture in fifties Britain is thus represented in such a cultural discourse as revealing what Said calls a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of relationships with the Orient [in this case read the African/Caribbean immigrant] without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (7).

City of Spades opens up a range of issues that engage with this dominant (mis)construction and stereotyping of black identity. For example, the text foregrounds the misreading of 'black' immigrants as a unified homogenous group by identifying the distinctions between separate black cultural identities resident in Britain in the 1950s, especially in the cultural differences between Caribbean, African and African American identities, and also in distinctions within those categories such as Gambian, Nigerian, and so on. Each sub-group is given its own specific identity in the text that is representative of specific national/cultural identities. The novel is also concerned with redressing the dominant (white) cultural belief that black individuals are culturally, morally, and intellectually inferior. This is achieved in two ways: firstly, through the narrative strategy of delivering half of

the narrative from the perspective and internal monologue of Johnny Fortune; and secondly, through characterization, which establishes a moral and ethical equality in terms of the practices and actions of individual characters, irrespective of cultural history and skin colour.

As Paul Gilroy has argued, discourses of the nation and 'race' have been articulated together in post-war Britain (56). Therefore, anxieties about the declining status of the nation are presented through discourses of racial prejudice that serve to focus the blame of national decline on 'alien' individuals and cultures. As Gilroy writes: "Alien cultures come to embody a threat which, in turn, invites the conclusion that national decline and weakness have been precipitated by the arrival of blacks" (46). In the fifties, the impact of decolonization and the Suez crisis intensified this racial discourse, and *City of Spades* foregrounds the contemporary expression of these anxieties about national identity.

Gilroy also posits that this connection of race and nation was specifically articulated in the 1950s through a discourse of criminality in which "issues of sexuality and miscegenation were often uppermost" (79). *City of Spades* attempts to emphasize, contextualize and contest these discourses of criminality and sexuality. The dominant cultural charge of excessive criminality among black immigrant cultures is foregrounded through the representation of the underworld activities of Billy Whispers and his followers. The emphasis throughout the text is on the sociological causes of the reliance on criminal activity among black subcultures, representing a survival strategy in response to an institutionally racist culture that limits the economic opportunities for black individuals. This position challenges the view that criminality is an intrinsic racial characteristic of immigrant lifestyle, as suggested in the Ambrose Drove article in *Absolute Beginners*. This is evidenced in the trajectory of Fortune's progress in the novel. He arrives in London as an optimistic and ambitious student but through his encounters with the racist attitudes of the 'landladies,' employers, and the police, he ultimately quits college and resorts to illicit gambling and selling 'weed' to make a living.

MacInnes also engages with the trope of miscegenation as identified by Gilroy in discourses of race and nation in the fifties. In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes records this fear of miscegenation in the Ambrose Drove article:

> To begin with, he [Ambrose Drove] said, mixed marriages—as responsible coloured persons would be the very first to agree themselves—were most undesirable. They led to a mongrel race, inferior physically and mentally, and rejected by both of the unadulterated communities. (194-95)

This cultural anxiety is represented in *City of Spades* through the various sexual relationships Johnny Fortune has with white women. This can be seen, for example, in one of the 'interludes' included in the text, where Fortune and his white lover Muriel take a boat trip on the Thames.[11] The possibility of a 'mixed marriage' between the two characters is proposed, and the idyllic surroundings of this episode make this anticipated future a tangible possibility. The escape from central London in this section thus represents an escape from the dominant social and cultural mores that would make any such marriage difficult. This escape, however, is only temporary as it becomes clear that the pleasure steamer is on a non-stop round trip jettisoning the couple back into the very social and cultural environment that would oppose their relationship:

> Muriel called out to the helmsman. "Can't we get off?"
> "Get off, miss? No, we don't stop."
> "But it said it was an excursion to Greenwich Palace."
> "This is the excursion, miss. We take you there and back, to see it, but you get off where you came from in the City." (106)

This journey represents a tantalizing glimpse of the possibility of a non-racist future that is, nevertheless, prohibited for the two lovers in the present. The text goes on to describe how the pressures of society gradually and stealthily undermine the possibility of this 'mixed-race' relationship. This aspect of the novel represents a negotiation of the cultural anxieties of dominant white society through the perspective of a heterosexual 'mixed-race' couple. The narrative thus reflects these anxieties back towards the culture from which they are produced,

'denaturalizing' concerns of miscegenation prevalent in dominant cultural discourse. The text also challenges the dominant cultural stereotype of black individuals as sexually promiscuous by projecting sexual desire onto the white female characters of the text, in particular Theodora Pace, Dorothy, and Muriel, and away from Fortune himself.

However, despite the attempts to redress the misconceptions and prejudices observed in dominant white culture towards marginalized immigrant cultures, the text also engages in a discourse of 're-orientalizing' black identity through the process of exoticizing and eroticizing black individuals, revealing an ambivalent attitude to constructions of a black 'other.' In this sense, the text reinforces rather than challenges the Euro-centric cultural practice of projecting white exotic and erotic desire onto the imagined bodies of oriental and black individuals. This process, although on the surface challenged by the novel, is re-inscribed through a double move it makes in relation to the representation of black identity.

The description of the discrete subcultural world of the immigrants is exoticized in the text through the perspective of Montgomery Pew's exploration of the 'dangerous' spaces of this subculture. For example, Pew's decision to visit the "Moorhen Public House, the Cosmopolitan dance hall, or the Moonbeam club" that represent the spaces of black subcultural existence, is initially prohibited by the governmental department's guidelines on "Bad People and Places to Avoid" (11). Pew's visit to these prohibited spaces is therefore represented as a transgression from the homogeneous forces of dominant society into the heterogeneous world of London's black subcultures. This transgression is celebrated in the text, but the implication that black culture inherently represents transgression is maintained rather than challenged, reinforcing, rather than negating, the process of orientalizing black identity from the perspective of the white observer. Black subcultural practice is re-inscribed in the text as a representation of a white desire to engage in the exotic/erotic world of the black 'other.'

As with the representation of youth subcultures and national identity in *Absolute Beginners*, *City of Spades* represents a Janus-faced

construction of black identity, which reveals both the anxieties and desires of fifties culture in relation to the construction of the racial other. Therefore, MacInnes's text constitutes a double perspective of representation. On the one hand, it provides an attempt to record or 'speak' in the authentic voice of a 1950s London black subcultural identity, removing the 'silence' of this group in dominant cultural discourses. On the other hand, this representation stems from a white cultural perspective, resulting in a paradoxical artificial construction of an 'authentic' black voice. Perhaps this is as far as MacInnes could go in terms of the representation of a culture that remains 'other' to the projected implied readership or interpretive community of the text, which would have been predominantly white. Despite its shortcomings, however, the text (and *Absolute Beginners*) represents a celebration of the possibility of an emergent form of national identity that is plural, multicultural and heterogeneous, rejecting univocal constructions of Englishness based on past myths of English imperial greatness.

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NOTES

[1]There are complexities involved in the construction of 'authentic' subcultural voices in literary texts. Both *Absolute Beginners* and *City of Spades* produce a paradoxical verification of the authenticity and authority of marginalized narrative perspectives through the construction of stylized linguistic registers. The novels do not transparently 'reflect' the language styles used by fifties teenage and black subcultures, rather they produce, in a linguistic form, the *function* of style as difference, through the use of unofficial language that positions subcultural identity as distinct from dominant culture. The voices used in the text, therefore, are not authentic in an ethnographic sense, but are an attempt to represent an 'authentic' sense of difference between the subculture and the dominant or parent culture.

[2]I quote Walter Benjamin here because there is a similarity with MacInnes's aim to represent marginal or subcultural voices that are in danger of being overlooked by dominant society. This is, in Benjamin's words, to "[…] seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 247).

[3]Here, I am using 'implied reader' in the narratological sense: as the text's internally constructed projection of the social or cultural group it is addressing. Of course the novel has no control over 'real' readers and how they might receive and interpret the text. For useful definitions of 'implied' and 'real' readers see Rimmon-Kenan 86-89.

[4]The narrative structure thereby produces a dual narrative of inclusion and exclusion in relation to Steven Connor's model of "addressivity" (Connor 8-13).

[5]I refer to Gerard Genette's use of the terms heterodiegetic and homodiegetic in relation to his typology of narrators (Genette 255-56).

[6]Bakhtin writes: "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work: alongside verbal-ideological-centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Bakhtin 272).

[7]For a discussion of the relationship between English youth and American pop influences in the 1950s, see MacInnes's essays "Young England, Half English" and "Pop Songs and Teenagers," *England* 11-18; 45-59.

[8]The multiple perspective of the narrative voice in the novel has a corresponding effect in the characterization, as the main characters are given hybridized national identities, which foregrounds inconsistencies in the dominant construction of a unified Englishness based on racial 'purity.' Both the teenage hero and "Crepe Suzette," the main female character in the novel, represent a celebration of hybridized identity, "So you realize Suze is a sharp gal, and no doubt this is because she's not English, but part Gibraltarian, partly Scotch and partly Jewish, which is perhaps why I get along with her, as I'm supposed to have a bit of Jewish blood from my mother's veins as well […]" (16-17). MacInnes deploys these hybrid identities to strategically place their perspectival view on the margins of dominant English society.

[9]The specific relationship between Britain and England, in geographical and political terms, problematizes the construction of identity in terms of the nation. This confusion of terms is also registered in MacInnes's treatment of them in the novel.

[10]MacInnes's position as a 'post-colonial' writer appears to contribute to his fascination with English national identity. MacInnes, son of author Angela Thirkell, was born in London in 1914, but was brought up in Australia from 1919 onwards, returning to London in 1936. Tony Gould's biography provides a good account of MacInnes's life and works.

[11]There are two 'interludes' in the *City of Spades*, both of which are presented in a third person, heterodiegetic narrative that claims an external position to the first person narratives of Pew and Fortune.

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Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

Who Shot the Hare in Stoppard's *Arcadia*? A Reply to Anja Müller-Muth[*]

BURKHARD NIEDERHOFF

In my recent essay on Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* I claim that the epistemology of the play is not sceptical. This is not a fashionable claim. The current academic climate favours sceptical arguments. Critics prefer undermining to confirming, aporias to solutions, open-endedness to closure—*in dubio pro dubio* is their motto. To a certain degree, these preferences are healthy ones; scepticism is an essential part of a literary critic's methodological equipment. But at the present time, scepticism frequently hardens into dogma; indeterminacy and uncertainty are simply taken for granted and imposed on a text regardless of what the text itself has to say. This being my impression, I am ready to take up the cudgels over the issue of scepticism, on which Anja Müller-Muth and I have rather different views. "While I wholeheartedly agree," she writes, "that *Arcadia* is primarily concerned with epistemological processes and that the misunderstandings in the play are creative rather than disruptive, I part company with Niederhoff when he tries to invalidate sceptical readings" (282).

To make her case for the play's scepticism, Müller-Muth insists that the play does not answer all of the questions that it raises. "[S]everal uncertainties still remain unresolved at the end of the play for both

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[*]Reference: Anja Müller-Muth, "'It's wanting to know that makes us matter': Scepticism or Affirmation in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*. A Response to Burkhard Niederhoff," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 281-91; Burkhard Niederhoff, "'Fortuitous Wit': Dialogue and Epistemology in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*," *Connotations* 11.1 (2001/2002): 42-59. Subsequent references to my essay and to Müller-Muth's response will be made parenthetically. I would like to thank Roger Clark, Sven Wagner and the *Connotations* reviewers for their comments on the present essay; thanks are also due to Heike Buschmann, Vicki Harris and Sandra Wenzel for their help in tracking down the radiographical information in note 4.

characters and audience, who still do not know, for instance, why Byron left England, or who shot the hare. *Arcadia* also remains painstakingly vague about Septimus's precise motivations and occupations as hermit of Sidley Park" (286-87). To my mind, the question why Byron left England is hardly more relevant to *Arcadia* than the number of Lady Macbeth's children is to Shakespeare's tragedy. By contrast, the motivations and occupations of the hermit are central to the play, but they would require an extensive discussion too long for this brief reply. Thus I will focus on the more manageable question of who shot the hare, to which the play does give an answer. The deadly shot comes from the rifle of Augustus, the son of the Croom family, as I mentioned in my article and will attempt to substantiate in the following discussion.[1] This discussion will also show that the shooting of the hare is not quite as irrelevant as it might seem at first sight. It is linked to some of the major themes and episodes of the play by significant connections and parallels.

Let us review the evidence, beginning with an entry in a game book: "April 10th 1809 [...]. Self—Augustus—Lord Byron. Fourteen pigeon, one hare (Lord B.)."[2] In his trial lecture, the researcher Bernard cites this entry in a triumphant manner; he regards it as a crucial piece of evidence for his theory that Byron killed a fellow poet in a duel while he was visiting the Croom family. At a later stage, when this theory has been refuted, Bernard still insists that "Byron […] shot that hare" (89). But at this point, we can be reasonably certain that Byron no more killed the hare than he killed the poet, and that the game book's attribution of the animal to him was either a mistake or a gesture of politeness to a visitor. We are repeatedly told that Byron is a poor shot, for instance in the opening scene, in which Lady Croom spots the hunting party through the schoolroom windows:

> *Lady Croom*. [...] Ah!—your friend has got down a pigeon, Mr Hodge. (*Calls out*.) Bravo, sir!
> *Septimus*. The pigeon, I am sure, fell to your husband or to your son, your ladyship—my schoolfriend was never a sportsman.
> *Brice*. (*Looking out*) Yes, to Augustus!—bravo, lad! (13)

Our doubts about Byron's skill with firearms are confirmed when Lady Croom, in a later scene, commands Septimus, her daughter's tutor, to take Byron's pistols away from him. "He is not safe with them. His lameness, he confessed to me, is entirely the result of his shooting himself in the foot" (41). Finally, Augustus tells his sister and Septimus that it was he who shot the hare, not the visiting poet. "Lord Byron?!—he claimed my hare, although my shot was the earlier! He said I missed by a hare's breadth. His conversation was very facetious" (79). This remark indicates that, on his hunt with Lord Croom and Augustus, Byron was too busy scoring rhetorical hits to concentrate on aiming his gun at small and fast-moving targets. Byron's claim to the hare rests on nothing more than a pun.

Müller-Muth attempts to invalidate the evidence just quoted on the grounds that those who impugn Byron's marksmanship are not reliable. "Septimus," she writes, "is envious of his more famous and successful friend" (290). This may be true, yet Septimus shows sufficient loyalty to Byron to give credit where credit is due, for instance when he assures the butler that his friend would have left a coin for the servants if he had had one (68). Augustus, in his turn, is not a "boastful macho" (291), as Müller-Muth claims. Judging by the scant evidence that we have, he seems to be a fairly ordinary teenager displaying the volatility to be expected from a fifteen-year-old: one moment he defies Septimus' wishes, leaving the room and almost slamming the door (80), the next he humbly apologises and asks the tutor to enlighten him about "[c]arnal things" (88). Analysing Augustus' statement about Lord Byron, Müller-Muth writes that it "only tells us who shot first, not who hit and who missed" (291). Here she is splitting hares, displaying a juridical subtlety that is more appropriate to a cross-examination than to a play. Admittedly, the evidence that I have adduced might not be sufficient to convict Augustus of the killing of the hare beyond reasonable doubt in the eyes of a jury. But a play is not a trial; the principle of aesthetic economy obtaining in drama requires that two or three hints suffice to establish a point for which a court of law requires much larger quantities of evidence.

Byron's claim to the hare is also weakened by the contextual symbolism of the hunting episode, that is, the way in which it is connected with some of the major themes and episodes of the play. There is, for instance, a parallel between the game book entry quoted above—"Fourteen pigeon, one hare (Lord B.)"—and Bernard's ideas about Byron. The entry contrasts a large number of ordinary animals, the pigeons, with a single and more interesting one, the hare, the latter being associated with Byron. This contrast fits Bernard's image of Byron as a solitary and flamboyant genius who dwarves the ordinary mortals around him. Now this is precisely the image that leads Bernard into error in his reconstruction of the events at Sidley Park. The real story at Sidley Park, the one that merits reconstruction, is not about Byron but about Thomasina, the daughter of the Croom family, and Septimus Hodge, her tutor. Thus the special status that the entry accords to Byron is denied to him in the rest of the play, a fact that weakens the validity of the entry and the poet's claim to the hare. A second parallel that also weakens Byron's claim consists in a similarity between the hunting episode and the duel that Bernard believes Byron to have fought. According to Bernard, Byron shot both a hare and a man.[3] But since Byron does not fight a duel, let alone kill a man, analogy suggests that he does not kill the hare either. A third parallel exists between the hunting episode and the various sexual conquests in the play. When Lady Croom says that Byron "has got down a pigeon" and Septimus retorts that the bird "fell to" the other hunters, there is a suggestion of a sexual chase, of men causing women to fall. Again, the parallel works against Byron, who fails to make any extraordinary sexual conquests. Admittedly, he enjoys the favours of Mrs Chater but, given her nymphomania, this is hardly a proof of his seductive skill. To remain within the metaphorical scheme of the play, Mrs Chater is not a hare that needs to be hunted, but a pigeon that presents an easy target. The more difficult and attractive sexual conquest, that of Lady Croom, remains for Septimus.

A final parallel is the one between the hunting episode and intellectual discovery, between hitting or missing the hare and hitting or

missing the truth. Again, it is not Byron who makes any discoveries in the play. Nor is it Bernard, his fan and representative in the 20th-century plot. On the contrary, Bernard misses the truth about the events at Sidley Park by much more than a hare's breadth. The most important discoveries in the play are made by the teenager Thomasina, which suggests that it is another teenager, her brother Augustus, who shoots the hare. Thus the contextual symbolism of the hunting episode confirms the conclusions drawn from the more direct evidence analysed above. Critics who are inclined to read *Arcadia* as a sceptical play will have to look for other prey than the hare, whose death does not remain shrouded in mystery and uncertainty.

While Müller-Muth disagrees with me on the issue of scepticism, she endorses my claim that the play focuses on the *process* of intellectual discovery, that it emphasizes the activity of research rather than its result. Given that Müller-Muth considers this my most "valuable insight" (287), it is puzzling that she so strongly disagrees with my observation that, in the opening scene, Thomasina learns about the facts of life, in other words, that we see her in the *process* of making a momentous discovery. Müller-Muth considers this one of the instances where "he [Niederhoff] clearly misreads *Arcadia*" (283). In her view, Thomasina already knows about sexual intercourse when the play begins. Thus Müller-Muth's Thomasina is a tease, whose opening question—"Septimus, what is carnal embrace?" (1)—is not a genuine one but rather a mischievous attempt to put her tutor in a tight spot. This disagreement is not trivial; the different readings have a bearing upon the epistemological significance of the play. My view that Thomasina learns about "carnal embrace" in the opening scene fits in much better with the play's focus on the process of discovery. Furthermore, if this view is correct, the first minutes of the play establish an immediate link between making discoveries and making love, a link that plays a significant part in *Arcadia*. Sexuality, "[t]he attraction that Newton left out" (74), is a metaphor for the chaotic, irregular and unpredictable forces which are such crucial factors in bringing about intellectual discoveries in Stoppard's play.

All the evidence that I can find suggests that Thomasina's opening question is a genuine one.[4] The other characters, for instance, assume that she ought to be ignorant about "carnal embrace." It is by accident that she hears the phrase, and the butler who inadvertently utters it in her presence is hushed immediately (3). When she asks her tutor about the meaning of the butler's words, he tries to fob her off with evasive answers, informing her, for instance, that "[c]arnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef" (1). Thomasina's mother is scandalised when she hears the phrase from her daughter's mouth; the girl's uncle indignantly tells Septimus, "As her tutor you have a duty to keep her in ignorance" (11). More importantly, Thomasina's brother Augustus only learns about the facts of life when he is fifteen (88), i.e. two years later than Thomasina, who is thirteen years old in the first scene. The way in which Thomasina responds to Septimus' utterances also suggests her ignorance. When she tells him that Mrs Chater was discovered in carnal embrace in the gazebo, he replies, "With whom, did Jellaby happen to say?" (2)—a question that does not quite square with his earlier reference to "throwing one's arms around a side of beef." The tease envisioned by Müller-Muth would surely greet this lapse with a knowing smirk. The stage direction, however, tells us that Thomasina "*considers this with a puzzled frown*" before she retorts, "What do you mean, with whom?" (2). The most conclusive evidence for Thomasina's ignorance is the "Eurghhh!" elicited by the definition of carnal embrace that Septimus finally gives her after his earlier evasions:

> *Septimus*. [...] Carnal embrace is sexual congress, which is the insertion of the male genital organ into the female genital organ for purposes of procreation and pleasure. Fermat's last theorem, by contrast, asserts that when x, y and z are whole numbers each raised to power of n, the sum of the first two can never equal the third when n is greater than 2.
> (*Pause.*)
> *Thomasina*. Eurghhh!
> *Septimus*. Nevertheless, that is the theorem.
> *Thomasina*. It is disgusting and incomprehensible. (3)

By using his trademark technique of simultaneously juggling two or more topics, Stoppard here creates a joke about the mechanics of sexual intercourse, which, to the innocent mind at least, seem as puzzling and strange as a recondite mathematical problem. More importantly in the present context, Thomasina's bewilderment shows that she hears about the mechanics in question for the first time.

In my essay I did not merely claim that in *Arcadia* the focus is on the process of research; I also made a claim about how the process operates. As pointed out above, in the remark on sexuality as an epistemological metaphor, chaos and chance play an important part in this process. Discoveries are made and meanings are created as a result of accidents or mistakes—a principle that is succinctly described in Lady Croom's phrase "fortuitous wit" (11). By way of conclusion, I would like to analyse a further example of "fortuitous wit," which Müller-Muth discusses, in rather different terms, both in her response to my essay (283) and in her book on *Arcadia*:[5]

> *Lady Croom*. But Sidley Park is already a picture [...]—in short, it is nature as God intended, and I can say with the painter, '*Et in Arcadia ego*!' 'Here I am in Arcadia,' Thomasina.
> *Thomasina*. Yes, mama, if you would have it so.
> *Lady Croom*. Is she correcting my taste or my translation? (12)

Müller-Muth points out that the reference is not merely to the two paintings by Poussin in which a group of Arcadian shepherds contemplates a tomb bearing the inscription *Et in Arcadia ego*; Stoppard also alludes to Erwin Panofsky's admirable article on the history of this phrase.[6] The original meaning of *Et in Arcadia ego*, which is obvious in a picture by Guercino and the first of the two paintings by Poussin, is a *memento mori*, a warning about the ubiquity of death. This interpretation of the phrase presupposes that *ego* refers to death and that *et* goes with *in Arcadia*. It is Death himself who warns the shepherds, 'Even in Arcadia, there am I.' A later, rather different interpretation of the phrase was introduced, according to Panofsky, by Poussin's second painting. This work suggests that the shepherds around the tomb are not thinking about death but about the dead

shepherd lying in the tomb. Thus the translation of the phrase is changed in a way that takes some liberties with the grammar of elliptic Latin phrases; Panofsky goes so far as to call it a "mistranslation" (318). The implied verb is in the past, *et* goes with *ego*, and *ego* refers to the dead shepherd. 'I, too, once lived in Arcadia,' the deceased reminds his fellow shepherds. The meaning is no longer a stark warning, but a nostalgic, half-melancholy, half-pleasurable evocation of a happy past. At an even later stage, death vanishes from the meaning of the phrase altogether. It simply states that a person once was, or still is, a carefree member of the Arcadian community.

While I fully agree with Müller-Muth that the various meanings distinguished by Panofsky "resonate in the first scene of Stoppard's *Arcadia*" (283), I am hesitant to follow her when she claims that the allusion brings about a dissolution of meaning, that it opens the door to a labyrinth of ambiguities or that it amounts to an infinite *mise en abyme*.[7] To my mind, the allusion is an excellent example of "fortuitous wit"; it adds another *felix culpa* to the many mistakes and misunderstandings that, in the opening scene of the play, create the most interesting meanings. Lady Croom's translation of *Et in Arcadia ego* is a blunder; she misconstrues the Latin and uses the phrase in its most bland and innocuous sense. But when she addresses her translation specifically to Thomasina, who will die a premature death at the age of sixteen, she also utters an inadvertent but fully pertinent *memento mori*, thus creating one of the most powerful moments of the play. In a later scene, Lady Croom's request that Septimus take command of Lord Byron's pistols makes her brother exlaim, "Now! If that was not God speaking through Lady Croom, he never spoke through anyone!" (41). In the opening scene, Death speaks through Lady Croom, warning Thomasina that he will soon come to take her.

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NOTES

[1]For Müller-Muth's attempt to refute this claim, see note 15 of her article (290-91).

[2]Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 54. All further references will be to this edition.

[3]This parallel is strengthened by another episode. When Septimus shows up for his duel with Ezra Chater, he does not find his opponent, who has already left Sidley Park. Instead of shooting Chater, he shoots a rabbit and takes it along to the schoolroom. Enter Lady Croom, who confuses hares with rabbits but is not in the habit of suffering contradiction: "*Lady Croom*. All this to shoot a hare? / *Septimus*. A rabbit. (*She gives him one of her looks*.) No, indeed, a hare, though very rabbit-like" (68). This mistake about the shooting of a hare is another hint that Lord Croom (or whoever wrote the entry in the game book) made a similar mistake when he attributed the hare to Byron.

[4]I stand corrected, however, on a minor point. In my essay, I state that Thomasina re-enters the opening scene with the question "What is the topic?" on her lips (46). Müller-Muth points out that she cannot find this sentence in the 1993 edition of *Arcadia*. This is only too true. The question "What is the topic?" is uttered in the radio version that was made with the cast of the original production at the National Theatre: *Arcadia*, by Tom Stoppard, dir. David Benedictus, BBC, Radio 3, 26 Dec. 1993 and 3 April 1994. I own a tape of this version, whose text occasionally differs from that of the printed edition. Needless to say, this is merely an explanation of my misquotation, not a justification.

[5]*Repräsentationen: Eine Studie des intertextuellen und intermedialen Spiels in Tom Stoppard's* Arcadia (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001) 206-08. This book, which came to my notice too late to be acknowledged in my original essay, analyses three fields of allusion in Stoppard's play: the Arcadia myth, the landscape garden, and chaos theory; first and foremost, however, it is a highly theoretical study of representation, intertextuality and intermediality.

[6]"*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955) 295-320.

[7]I am paraphrasing the German text of *Repräsentationen* (207-08). Müller-Muth's view of intertextuality is based on deconstructionist premises; she argues that the allusions in the play evoke undecidable alternatives or create infinite chains of signification.

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A Letter in Response to Lara Narcisi*

I like your understanding and appreciation of Tripmaster Wittman and his journeys. It's been my standard for a good book that the characters change, not just their fortunes but their very souls. I had to work hard to push Wittman to change. Though Monkey's motto is "Be-e-en!"—"Change!"—his transformation was hard won. I'm glad that you saw that he did change, and that his changes are natural, and came about through language. I mean to help build the American language.

Calling the book *His Fake Book*, I meant to suggest a jazz score for improv. I would tell some Monkey stories that trip the reader out; the reader invents more stories. Yes, Wittman becomes a very different person in The Fifth Book of Peace. I'm very interested to know what you think happened between the time of Wittman the Alienated Ranter and Wittman the Family Man. I am gratified that you do not seem to think that I have totally contradicted myself.

I'm happy that you see that I am not just playing around with form. There's content! There's story.

It's good to hear you laugh at the relationship between Zeppelin and Wittman. But you are so serious about the rest of the book. Am I not funny throughout?

You affirm that I was able to pull off what I wanted to pull off. I can include everything—and everybody—I know.

Right now, I'm writing Wittman at 60 years of age. He's aging. I'm looking forward to your reading of that big continuous change that we have no control over.

Thank you! We communicated.

Maxine Hong Kingston

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*Reference: Lara Narcisi, "From Lone Monkey to Family Man: Wittman's Evolving Inclusion in *Tripmaster Monkey*," *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 249-80.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debnarcisi01223.htm>.

Connotations
Vol. 13.1-2 (2003/2004)

A. S. Byatt and the Life of the Mind: A Response to June Sturrock*

SUE SORENSEN

June Sturrock's admirable and admiring piece on A. S. Byatt was helpful in clarifying the shifts in Byatt's style and intentions that have happened in the past decade. Byatt is one of the greatest living novelists exploring the life of the mind, but the manner of that exploration has changed. Byatt's most successful novel, *Possession: A Romance*, published in 1990, could not have been more aptly named. A knowing but benevolent exploration of romantic love, biographical hunger, and the questing instinct, it was also a book that possessed readers' minds and hearts for a time. Academics read it for the sly digs at pedantry; romantics read it for the rejuvenating force of its love story. (Sometimes both readers were one.) Byatt has produced many books, both criticism and fiction, since 1990, but none of them has *Possession*'s impact and loveableness. "Possession" is something you cannot help, something marvelous or terrible that captures and rivets your emotional and intellectual attention. Her watchword now might be "obsession."

Byatt's major fiction works in the past ten years—*Babel Tower* (1996), *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), and *A Whistling Woman* (2002)—have all been unmistakably cerebral affairs, fixated on more and more obscure conundrums, and their particular brand of erudition has frightened away the large readership Byatt briefly commanded in the early 1990s. The obsessive tracing of the lives of Carl Linnaeus, Henrik Ibsen, and Francis Galton, three of the many lines of inquiry that criss-cross throughout *The Biographer's Tale*, feels nothing like the gripping poetic

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*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>.

detective work that characters and readers must perform in *Possession*. Of course, Byatt's fiction has always been erudite. Therein does not lie the problem. The problem is that she is now driven by obsessions that are almost wholly intellectual, while once she was possessed by notions that were both emotionally (or spiritually) suggestive *and* mentally stimulating.

Sturrock's essay on Byatt's use of analogy in the novella "Morpho Eugenia" (which was paired with "The Conjugial Angel" in the 1992 volume *Angels and Insects*) prompted, for me, the realization that Byatt's superior writing is driven not by analogy, but by metaphor. Compared to the plenitude that a good metaphor can provide a novelist (the word "possession" in Byatt's most famous novel is a case in point), an analogy feels restricted. Metaphors provide a moving and human framework for ideas, partly because they are full of contradictions and may even be illogic. Analogies keep to the straight and narrow; a good one may have depth, but it will rarely have hidden depths.

Of course metaphor and analogy are closely related, and to some extent metaphor may be subsumed in the larger category of analogy (although Aristotle says the opposite), but, in my view, a metaphor is (largely) a poetic device, while an analogy is argumentative. A metaphor must work on our senses and emotions as well as our minds; an original metaphor vibrates with significance because it works by difference, as well as similarity. As Northrop Frye et al. say in the *Harper Handbook to Literature*, a metaphor "treats something as if it were something else." Analogy, with its etymological meaning of "equality of ratios" or "proportion" (it is originally a mathematical term), is much more insistent on equivalency, parallel reasoning, imitative thinking, and so on, as the *OED* indicates.

Analogy in Byatt has been much noted by critics of late. For example, her discussion of ants and butterflies in "Morpho Eugenia" parallels ideas about human aggression and sexuality. Sturrock's assessment of these methods is a positive one:

> Through the interaction of these different kinds of knowledge Byatt frees herself to explore both the intellectual potential and the limitations of reasoning by analogy. The crossing of borders between disciplines, that is, enables her to question the intellectual processes on which human beings base their thoughts and actions. (94)

Sturrock rightly emphasises Byatt's commendable interdisciplinarity, but not what its analogical manifestation has cost the novels in terms of their ability to embody characters in all their idiosyncrasy. Jane Campbell notes in her recent excellent book on Byatt that the "principle of analogy, invoked in *Angels and Insects* to explain the human relationship to the lower animals, or, alternatively, to link the human and the supernatural, takes us only so far" (150). Yet, as Sturrock does, Campbell sees Byatt's analogies as generally enhancing. Of *The Biographer's Tale*, Campbell says: "It plays with analogies—the epigraph quotes Goethe on the pleasure of 'charming and entertaining' similitudes—and invites the reader to share the fun" (217). Of the novellas in *Angels and Insects*, Campbell has a different but still complimentary conviction: Byatt does not allow the analogies the upper hand and instead "both texts end by celebrating mystery, surprise, and contingency" (168).

Byatt may free "herself" in this exploration of analogy, as Sturrock says, but the effect for the reader is less liberating. Although *Angels and Insects* is in many respects a fascinating book (with an excellent film adaptation by Philip Haas in 1995), contrary to Campbell's opinion, I see the atmosphere as conspicuously artificial, the author's controlling hand all too evident. In *The Biographer's Tale* the problem is so intense that the characters struggle for air and, finally, expire. Sturrock writes: "Increasingly her writing is concerned with the actual operations of the mind, the brain, whether physical or metaphysical" (101). Once, Byatt was also intensely involved with the body and the heart.

Michael Levenson is the other critic who has turned his eye toward Byatt's analogies, and his judgement is more complex. He writes with insight about her books of the 1980s, when Byatt thought, as he puts it, that "we might overcome the weak temptations of analogic think-

ing. We could love a world unredeemed by concepts" (167). At that time she defined herself as a follower of "self-conscious realism" (*Passions of the Mind* 4) and she assessed herself acutely. That tag fittingly unites human contingency, depth of thought, and commitment to verisimilitude—the hallmarks of Byatt's middle period fiction, such as *Possession* and *Still Life* (1985). But even Levenson is seduced by Byatt's authoritative, almost authoritarian, voice and the overwhelming array of ideas presented in later works like *Angels and Insects*. "The sharpest challenge to cozy analogy," he says, "is not the sharp shock of fact, but the lush production of *many* analogies" (170, emphasis in original). Byatt's abundance, he says, short-circuits the problems inherent in analogical thinking.

But such emphasis on analogies, whether they come singly or in Byattian throngs, drains the lifeblood out of a work of fiction. In *A Whistling Woman*, the romantic triangle enclosing the characters Luk, Jacqueline, and Marcus is made actual during field research into snails and reported dispassionately: "Marcus lifted his head and noticed it was briefly equilateral, before Jacqueline moved away, attenuating the connections" (67). Sturrock writes approvingly of Byatt's novels as being full of a sense of "the variety, complexity, fascination, and interrelatedness of human knowledge" (93). I agree with all but one term here: "human." Knowledge has overwhelmed the human part of that equation.

This is unfortunate, because Byatt can write moving, sometimes heartbreaking, fiction. Even in *Babel Tower* such haunting scenes still exist. When Frederica Potter flees her abusive husband, she intends to abandon her son Leo, but the child pursues her, leaping into her arms and gripping her in a stranglehold. Leo is, we are told later,

> a person who makes her life difficult at every turn, who appears sometimes to be eating her life and drinking her life-blood, a person who fits into no pattern of social behaviour or ordering of thought that she would ever have chosen for herself freely—and yet, the one creature to whose movements of body and emotions all her own nerves, all her own antennae, are fine-tuned, the person whose approach along a pavement, stamping angrily, running eagerly, lifts her heart, the person whose smile fills her with warmth like a

> solid and gleaming fire, the person whose sleeping face moves her to tears, to catch the imperceptible air of whose sleeping breath she will crouch, breathless herself, for timeless moments in the half-dark. (476)

Compare this impassioned realization of the unpredictable pain and joy of human love to a more typical passage from *Babel Tower*, one coolly establishing and confirming patterns. The tortuously-named Luk Lysgaard-Peacock has been asked if the study of genetic science has changed his attitude toward human behaviour.

> [W]hen you begin to understand how we are constructed by the coded sequences of the DNA—hermaphrodite slugs, sexed slugs, *Cepaea hortensis* and ourselves—when you realise all the things that go on busily in your cells all the time in which your language-consciousness appears to have nothing to do—I think it does change you, yes. (464-65)

The tumble of images and emotions in the passage about Frederica and Leo is not devoid of cliché, but it has heart.

Byatt's best book, containing both poignant moments and intellectual inquiry, is *Still Life*, the second book in her tetralogy about the intellectually formidable Potter family. In many respects, *Possession* is her most pleasing novel, but *Still Life* is her finest. In that novel a profoundly personal investigation that had been developing for years reached a kind of apotheosis. In the 1950s Byatt worked at Oxford on a doctoral dissertation (never finished) about religious metaphor in Renaissance poetry. Over the years she frequently expressed her fascination with the visual qualities of metaphors; for example in 1986 she wrote: "I see any projected piece of writing or work as a geometric structure: various colours and patterns. I *see* other people's metaphors" (*Passions* 14, emphasis in original). Yet in *Still Life*, Byatt initially intended to write without metaphors. She called the project her "bare book" (*Passions* 12). Byatt herself (not a narrator) steps into the action of *Still Life* and draws attention to this: "I had the idea that this novel could be written innocently, without recourse to other people's thoughts, without, as far as possible, recourse to simile or metaphor. This turned out to be impossible […]" (108).

That it did not work, oddly enough, is one of the reasons why *Still Life* is such a rewarding book. The narrator's struggle with metaphors reveals how vital and necessary they are. They provide solace: the troubled, perhaps partly autistic Marcus Potter derives comfort from meditating on the manifold meanings of trees, "mapping" an elm, seeing its inner and outer geometry, contemplating its ability to fertilise itself, and seeing it as "a kind of single eternity" (242). Metaphors give pleasure: there is a lovely section where Stephanie Potter Orton's newborn son sees light, and the narrator delights in imagining the similes of flames, flower petals, quills, and fish scales that the baby might use to describe the light, if "he had been capable of simile, which he was not" (107). Imagery is inescapable, lying in wait in physical objects, as the character Alexander Wedderburn notes: "Metaphor lay coiled in the name sunflower" (2). But in this striving to write a "bare book," and especially to record sense impressions (particularly sight) as directly as possible, Byatt creates the most vibrant novel of her career. In the effort to articulate their knowledge plainly, the characters become painfully and beautifully real. True Byatt progeny, they are thinking, thinking, thinking all the time. But they are also full of yearning, frustrating emotions that are more moving than anything else she has written.

The titles of many of Byatt's works are metaphorical, flickering with suggestive and multiple meanings. *Still Life*, for example, is profoundly involved with Van Gogh's paintings, asking whether it is possible to transfer the power of his vision into words. But one of the characters points out that in French "still life" translates as "nature morte," and indeed the book is steeped in mortality. When a major character dies in an accident, the survivors must decide if they want to go on with "life still," if you will. In the short story "The Chinese Lobster" (from *The Matisse Stories*, 1993) two academics discuss troubled students, sexual harassment, visual art, and despair, and, at the end, contemplate a lobster slowly dying in a tank in a Chinese restaurant. Byatt does not drive the point too forcefully, but allows the reader to contemplate not only the relation of the trapped lobster to

the academics, but also their explicit feelings of indifference to, and separation from, the creature. The metaphor is both enigmatic and illuminating.

> "I find that *absolutely appalling*, you know," says Perry Diss. "And at the same time, exactly at the same time, I don't give a damn? D'you know?"
>
> "I know," says Gerda Himmelblau. She does know. Cruelly, imperfectly, voluptuously, clearly. (134)

Byatt's characters, in the fiction since the mid-1990s, lack three dimensions. They exist as conduits for concepts. *Angels and Insects* sits on the border between Byatt's middle period and her recent analogical style. William and Matty in "Morpho Eugenia" and Sophy and Lilias in "The Conjugial Angel" are still memorable, although less so than Ash and LaMotte in *Possession* or (even more markedly) Stephanie, who dies so tragically at the conclusion of *Still Life*. The last hurrah of the middle period is *The Matisse Stories*, with its close attention to visual detail and use of narrative surprise. The characters in *Angels and Insects* remain intriguing partly because they are engaged so explicitly with the attractions and repulsions of analogy. For example, the protagonist William Adamson states that "analogy is a slippery tool" (100) but, nevertheless, finds analogical examples from natural science eminently useful to explain his anthill-like home, Bredely Hall, and his marriage, which appears to involve his sexual servitude as a drone for Eugenia Alabaster. These names—Adamson, Eugenia, Bredely—strike one immediately and obviously, but do not reverberate any great distance. They explain, readily and neatly. Luk and Jacqueline in *A Whistling Woman* or Phineas in *The Biographer's Tale* are even more remote. They never come to life, smothered in their author's ideas about them.

Whereas Byatt's metaphors flow from many sources, particularly religion and visual art, the analogies often involve science and mathematics. This laboratory atmosphere can be sterile, even suffocating. Possibly the most frequently used analogy in her recent books is the snail: her characters are always studying snails, whose spirals are perfect living illustrations of Fibonacci numbers. The snails have

genetic and environmental stories clearly embedded in their shells: "They carry their history on their outsides," says Luk in *Babel Tower* (358). It follows that Byatt's characters wonder whether they too are predetermined—to want children, for example. This is intriguing, but limited compared to the involved play of metaphor in *Still Life* when Alexander searches for comparisons for the colour of a plum and notices, ominously, that the purple he is reaching for comes closest to a bruise.

> [Y]ou cannot exclude from the busy automatically-connecting mind possible metaphors, human flesh for fruit flesh, flower-bloom, skin bloom, bloom of ripe youth for this powdery haze, human clefts, declivities, cleavages for that plain noun. (164)

Alexander's metaphoric discourse on the colour of plums, which goes on for several pages, is, for me, more memorable than the recurring references to Fibonacci sequences. What is the reaction of most readers when, in *A Whistling Woman*, Luk notices that his lover's genitalia remind him of the shell of a snail he is studying, *Helix pomatia*, to be exact (178)?

It can be difficult to decide which of these demonstrations of Byatt's need to create order are metaphors, and which analogies. Some sit in the middle. But, in the main, the analogies can be recognised by their limitations. They name, but do not sing. Frederica, for example, throughout the Potter tetralogy is working out a theory that her life is best described not in terms of unity or wholeness, but as a "lamination" or a series of separate but overlapping units. At one point, it was possible that these laminations might rewardingly suggest musical counterpoint, a weaving or mosaic, but in the final analysis one is reminded instead of the scales of a snake. The effect is off-putting, and Byatt does not appear to realise that "lamination" has more commonplace connotations, at least to North American readers: a plastic coating, on a menu for example, or an inexpensive wooden floor.

In *Still Life*, there is a vibrant moment when Stephanie names her newborn son as simply as she can, and Byatt's embattled project of writing a plain book without imagery briefly seems possible:

> But now in the sun she recognised him, and recognised that she did not know, and had never seen him, and loved him, in the bright new air with a simplicity she had never expected to know. "You," she said to him, skin for the first time on skin in the outside air, which was warm and shining, "you." (94)

This simplicity, this ability to capture quotidian reality, is difficult to sustain, but is perhaps Byatt's greatest gift. Byatt once subscribed to Iris Murdoch's principle, as stated in the 1961 essay "Against Dryness," that novelists require "a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons" (20). In her middle period Byatt expended tremendous effort to write plainly but fully about particular and unpredictable individuals, without systematising them. Eventually the imagery returned. Both metaphors and analogies of course tend to organise and systematise, but at least metaphors allow for more mystery and opacity. A metaphor in a novel often demonstrates a provocative tension between character and idea. More often than not, an analogy dissipates that tension, in its insistence on resemblance. *Babel Tower*, *A Whistling Woman*, and *The Biographer's Tale* have the preserving dryness of the museum. Her characters, even the once-lively Frederica, wriggle only a little as the author pins them, for comparative purposes, beside her snails and butterflies.

In a telling comment from the essay "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction," first given as a lecture in the early 1990s, Byatt says of *Angels and Insects*: "I see insects as the not-human, in some sense the Other, and I believe that we *ought to* think about the not-human, in order to be fully human" (*On Histories and Stories* 115, emphasis mine). June Sturrock quotes this sentence in her essay, but it does not seem to give her the chill it provides me. There is no doubt that Byatt is among the most intellectually engaged and fiercely curious living novelists. Michael Levenson in his inquiry into Byatt is twice driven, rather delightfully, to use the word "brazen" to describe her independence of mind (161, 169). But it is disturbing that she feels the need to command that we "ought to" think about the non-human in order to be

fully human. Once a penetrating writer about the life of the mind, she now writes more restrictively about the life of *her* mind.

On the last page of her essay, Sturrock mentions the writer who serves as a model for the way forward: Byatt "is acutely aware of the interplay between intellectual and emotional life—perhaps it is for this reason that she so often expresses admiration for the writing of George Eliot" (101). *Middlemarch* springs to mind as a useful point of comparison when considering Byatt's use of natural science, and the way her characters and narrators obsessively ask how to find the right conceptual language for their thoughts. But while Casaubon, for example, is representative of certain notions under severe scrutiny (spiritual sterility, the futility of an over-reaching taxonomy), he is also memorably human, sad and rather touching in his pathetic jealousy. A. S. Byatt could have been our century's George Eliot. *Still Life*, *Possession*, *The Matisse Stories* and, to a lesser extent, *Angels and Insects* hint at that same richly human but restlessly questioning intelligence. Sturrock notes that Byatt these days is busy "question[ing] … intellectual processes" (94), and that is true. But Byatt also has a tendency to impose intellectual processes that are less compelling than she thinks they are. George Eliot, at her best, liberated readers into living more fully their own life of the mind.

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