

# Connotations

*A Journal for Critical Debate*



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# *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate*

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## Painful Restoration: Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World

FRITZ KEMMLER

Medieval visions of the other world require a revision of some of our current concepts pertaining to life and death so that the complex interplay of these two themes in this interesting genre can be defined precisely—hence the term “transformations” in the title of this paper.

There is a second aspect which should be raised briefly prior to the analysis of the texts chosen for this essay: in all of the three texts that will be considered here, the process of restoration from death is accompanied by pain on various levels—hence “painful restoration.”

The primary subject matter underlying most medieval visions of heaven, purgatory and hell is constituted by the events between Good Friday and Easter Sunday: the death and resurrection of Christ as the necessary precondition for the salvation of the soul and therefore its restoration from death. A closer look at the gospels which relate these events will immediately reveal a large and significant gap: no mention is made of Christ’s descent into hell and his triumphant ascent. This gap provides an ample playground for the creative imagination of later writers, intent on filling it and in their turn contributing to the salvation of the soul. Nevertheless, the gospel of John does tell us at least a little more about the resurrected Christ. And this shred of information includes a reference to bodily marks as proof of Christ’s death and resurrection or ‘restoration from death’: “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). It will be seen that this means of proof is an important constituent of the first text I have chosen for this paper.

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debkemmler01723.htm>.

But let us go back to that period of time extending from Good Friday, around 3 pm, to Easter Sunday morning and usually referred to as the 'Harrowing of Hell.' In the New Testament this hell is described only in very general terms and is associated with the gnashing of teeth, with tears, yells, burning fires, black and evil smelling smoke, bitter cold and utter darkness. Now this is the very place into which the unfaithful will be cast after the death of their bodies and where they have to suffer the everlasting damnation which will result in the perpetual death of the soul.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind this distinction, we must be aware of the fact that, in the context of the Christian religion, we are dealing with the fundamental concept of a double life—the life of the body and the life of the soul; and consequently with a double death—the death of the body and the death of the soul. The metaphorical concept of life and death, that is the life and death of the soul, is dependent on the life and death of the body. And if the life and death of the soul means both promise and damnation, then it might be useful for Christians to know more about these matters on which the Bible itself is so conspicuously and frustratingly silent.

Christian writers who felt called upon to warn their audience against the death of the soul with all its horrible consequences, and to incite them to strive for the life of the soul in the bliss of heaven, have invented a highly useful constellation for their didactic purpose: an elect human being who is granted the extraordinary favour of seeing both regions while still alive—that into which the dead souls will be cast and that to which the living souls will ascend. This elect human being, which may come from any walk of life, will then be able to give a faithful account of both bliss, that is eternal life, and damnation, which of course means everlasting death.

Since both regions, heaven and hell, cannot usually be entered by a human being still in the flesh, the body will usually have to undergo a kind of temporary death so that the soul removed from the body can be conveyed to both regions. After the soul has been restored to the body, the fully restored human being will be able to provide the



evidence necessary to attain salvation which entails the life of the soul after the death of the body. To achieve this purpose, the testimony of the visionary must be reliable, and it should also be vivid and therefore easy to remember.

As a look at even a few medieval visions of the other world will show, the authors of these texts, in most instances anonymous, indeed possessed a considerable amount of creative imagination in describing the *terra incognita* of both heaven and hell. Usually, these visions and journeys to the other world comprise both the region of the dead souls and the region of the living souls—and, I hasten to add, it can be said that the region of the dead seems to have provided a particular stimulus to the creative imagination. I will therefore concentrate on the downward journey in particular, that is, the journey into purgatory and hell. In order to demonstrate some of the literary approaches to and dimensions of these transformations of life and death and painful restorations, I have chosen three texts: one from the eighth century, a second dating from the late twelfth century, and a third that originated in the early years of the thirteenth century. All three were originally composed in the *lingua franca* of the Middle Ages, Latin; two were later translated into the vernacular.

### The Vision of St Fursey

In the early decades of the eighth century, the Venerable Bede, engaged in composing his famous *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*,<sup>2</sup> decided to include a wide range of both ancient and recent events conducive to the strengthening of public morality in the context of the new Christian faith. This strategy is clearly evident in the following quotation taken from the Preface:

Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse, and himself with greater care pur-



sue those things which he has learned to be good and pleasing in the sight of God. (3)<sup>3</sup>

Since Bede's account of the early history of the English concerns an originally pagan population in the process of being converted, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* includes several visions of the other world through which both the bliss of heaven, that is life, and damnation in hell, that is death, can be expressed quite graphically.

Bede's account of the Christianisation of East Anglia, Book III, chapter 19, contains one of the most popular visions of the Middle Ages prior to Dante's *Divine Comedy*: The Vision of Fursey. Bede expressly states the purpose of a whole series of visions granted to his saintly hero: to persist in his missionary activities by rendering a convincing and faithful account of the pains in store for those who deviate from the straight and narrow path of Christian morals. Bede's Vision of Fursey makes use of one of the important structural elements of the vision genre<sup>4</sup>: the experienced and reliable guide who is able to explain the mysteries of the other world to the visionary, as Fursey is guided by three angels.

In contrast to most of the later visions of the other world, Bede's text does not offer the wide panorama of either heaven or hell—his emphasis is on the journey to heaven and the dangers accompanying this journey. The central incident of the Vision of Fursey is a dreadful occurrence on the way towards heaven, an incident which can be compared to the singular and decisive moment which characterises the earlier tradition of the modern short story. Guided by three angels, Fursey has to go through the fire of purification and is suddenly attacked by one of the devils:

But when the man of God came to the passage opened up in the midst of the fire, the evil spirits seized one of those who were burning in the flames, hurled him at Fursa, hitting him and scorching his shoulder and jaw. Fursa recognized the man and remembered that on his death he had received some of his clothing. The angel took the man and cast him back at once into the fire. (273-75)<sup>5</sup>

Having been lectured by one of his heavenly guides about the necessity of repentance in the hour of death as a precondition for salvation, hence ensuring the life of the soul, Fursey returns to his body again. In the act of restoration to full life, Fursey's body is subjected to a highly significant transformation:

When Fursa had been restored to his body, he bore for the rest of his life the marks of the burns which he had suffered while a disembodied spirit; they were visible to all on his shoulder and his jaw. It is marvellous to think that what he suffered secretly as a disembodied spirit showed openly upon his flesh. He always took care, as he had done before, to encourage all both by his sermons and by his example to practise virtue. (275)<sup>6</sup>

It would appear that Bede did not put his entire trust into the efficacy of the testimony of the saintly visionary alone but rather relied on the means of providing additional extra-textual evidence: the marks on Fursey's body and his way of life after this dreadful experience. Moreover, as a good historian and author, Bede knew only too well that the miraculous account he had adapted from the anonymous *Vita S. Fursei* would need corroborating evidence. He therefore relies on the additional means of an eye-witness testifying to the veracity of both the visionary and the events:

An aged brother is still living in our monastery who is wont to relate that a most truthful and pious man told him that he had seen Fursa himself in the kingdom of the East Angles and had heard these visions from his own mouth. He added that although it was during a time of severe winter weather and a hard frost and though Fursa sat wearing only a thin garment, yet as he told his story, he sweated as though it were the middle of summer, either because of the terror or else the joy which his recollections aroused. (275)<sup>7</sup>

For Fursey, restoration from death resulted in bearing the marks of a frightful experience for the rest of his life. On the other hand, this frightful experience also ensured that the saintly missionary of the East Angles never again strayed from the right path and led the active life of a devout Christian, whose sanctity was proven beyond any

doubt by his still undecayed body four years after his death. The lesson to be taught by using the motif 'restored from death' is reinforced in Bede's case by material evidence, just as in the Gospel of John.

With reference to the later history of the immensely popular *Visio S. Fursei* we can say that on account of its brevity in the descriptive sections and its emphasis on extra-textual proof, it was possible to use it most effectively in sermons and catechetical writings as an *exemplum* illustrating the evil consequences arising from avarice.<sup>8</sup>

### St Patrick's Purgatory

The second text chosen for this paper is very different from Bede's Vision of Fursey. In the so-called *St Patrick's Purgatory*,<sup>9</sup> which dates back to the last decades of the twelfth century, temporary death of the body is not a necessary condition to enter the other world. St Patrick's Purgatory, shut off from the world by a heavy gate, could be entered voluntarily as an act of penance while still in the flesh. This manner of entering the nether world of St Patrick's Purgatory is the major constituent of a special process of repentance and penance in this life in order to avoid the pains of purgatory and hell in the life to come. Thus, no experienced guide is necessary to open up the nether world to the protagonist, because he enters this world still in the body and of his own accord. The body, however, had to be prepared for this difficult journey by fifteen days of fasting and prayer. Anybody who wishes to enter this very special purgatory, so the text tells us, will have to wait in the hall until the arrival of a company of thirteen men, all God's servants, who will instruct the penitent which direction is to be taken.

The hero of *St Patrick's Purgatory* is a knight called Owein, who, according to the early fourteenth-century Middle English version I will be quoting from, resided in Northumberland, "Bi Steuenes day, þe king ful riȝt" (stanza 29), and was an expert in both warfare and

sinning against his Creator. Having been instructed by the thirteen wise men to send a prayer to God when oppressed by the devils, Owein is handed over to the chief devil himself who greets our protagonist with the following words:

“Welcome, Owein!  
 Pou art ycomen to suffri pine  
 To amende þe of sinnes tine,  
 Ac alle gett þe no gain,  
  
 For þou schalt haue pine anouȝ,  
 Hard, strong, and ful touȝ,  
 For þi dedli sinne.  
 No haddestow neuer more meschaunce  
 Pan þou schal haue in our daunce,  
 When we schul play biginne.” (stanzas 55-56)<sup>10</sup>

The penitent is therefore actively engaged in the events which are unfolded carefully before our eyes, and he experiences the pains of purgatory and hell in a very direct way. However, by sending a prayer to his creator, he does not have to undergo the punishment of the various stations to the very full:

þe fendes han þe kniȝt forþ taken,  
 And bounde him swiþe hard  
 Opon þe whele þat arn about,  
 And so loþly gan to rout,  
 And cast him amidward.  
  
 Do þe hokes him torent,  
 And þe wild fer him tobrent,  
 On Ihesu Crist he þouȝt.  
 Fram þat whele an angel him bare,  
 And al þe fendes þat were þare  
 No miȝt him do riȝt nouȝt. (stanzas 88-89)<sup>11</sup>

After traversing the dangerous ground, almost drowning in the ice-cold water of a stinking river and being rescued from pits filled with boiling metal, Owein finally comes to the narrow bridge<sup>12</sup> crossing a

second stinking river (“It stank fouler þan ani hounde,” stanza 116) which separates purgatory and hell from paradise (“Þis is þe brigge of paradis,” stanza 117). Since he has repeatedly received heavenly help in his tour of the nether world, he crosses the bridge confidently and successfully, leaving the realm of death behind him and entering the region of life. Owein is granted a vision of paradise and is touched by the Holy Ghost, who tells him to return into the world again—which he does, but very reluctantly now that he has received a first and most promising impression of the bliss of heaven in the life to come. However, he does receive some kind of comfort before he has to leave paradise:

“Now kepe þe wele fram dedli sinne  
 Pat þou neuer com þerinne,  
 For nonskines nede.  
 When þou art ded, þou schalt wende  
 Into þe ioie þat haþ non ende;  
 Angels schul þe lede.” (stanza 187)<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of his first-hand impressions, the former sinner Owein is indeed restored from spiritual death, becomes a pilgrim to the Holy Land and returns to Ireland where he lives as a monk for a further seven years. When he died, so the narrator tells us, he was immediately admitted to the high joy of paradise—no wonder after such an exemplary life of warfare, sin, repentance and devotion.

In contrast to Bede’s brief account of Fursey, *St Patrick’s Purgatory* offers a wealth of descriptive detail of both heaven and hell. Whoever is prepared to accept the lesson taught by this text will indeed be restored from the everlasting death of the soul. Moreover, with its precise geographical location on Station Island in Lough Dergh, Co. Donegal in Ireland, “St Patrick’s Purgatory” is still a famous pilgrimage site in Ireland and thus a means of salvation and restoration from death on yet another level. Today, Station Island draws on a long history, dating back to the late twelfth century after the Cistercian monk Henry of Saltrey in Huntingdonshire decided to concentrate his literary activities on this journey to the nether world.

*The Visio Thurkilli*

My third and last text, the *Visio Thurkilli*,<sup>14</sup> was composed only a few years later than *St Patrick's Purgatory*—the date given in the preface is 1206. In contrast to the previous two texts, the *Vision of Thurkill* contains many references to historical people and places, and both place names and personal names mentioned in the text contribute considerably to its authenticity.

In the preface, the anonymous redactor, who emphasises that he is writing for the benefit of a Christian audience, refers to the special conditions of the vision genre, pointing out that the Bible on the whole is not very explicit as far as life after death is concerned (“de statu animarum atque earum post mortem expiatione,” 14). His detailed argument which, highly appropriately, includes the famous line 180—“segnius iritant animos demissa per aurem”<sup>15</sup>—from the *Ars poetica* of Horace that favours sight over hearing, amounts to a veritable justification of the genre, which had come under attack from various sides. The redactor further supports his argument with frequent references to a long literary tradition that includes many undisputed authorities, among them Gregory the Great, whose immensely popular *Dialogues* can be considered as highly influential in the evolution of the genre. With reference to contemporary visions, the author raises the question of probability and truth, and points out the popularity of modern visionary texts, such as *St Patrick's Purgatory*, the *Revelations of the Monk of Eynsham* and others. In doing so, he succeeds brilliantly in establishing an intertextual context for the validity of the vision he is about to relate. Indeed, a careful reading of the events related in the *Visio Thurkilli* will reveal that in order to prove a particular aspect of the doctrine, the redactor does adduce the very contextual evidence he has established so carefully in the preface.

The redactor also devotes great care to weighing the matter of credibility, and this discussion is underlined by a quotation from John 7:12: “And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he



deceiveth the people." And with its reference to Christ, the quotation at once settles this issue. Who would not be willing to embrace the argument which immediately follows this quotation from the Bible:

sed quia plurimi, quorum mens est sanior, intellectus acutior, vita religiosior, huic visioni fidem adhibent tum pro simplicitate et innocentia viri, cui hec visio contigit, tum quia plerique audientium ex relatione predictae visionis non minimum profecerunt emendatiorem vitam eligentes [...] visionem simplicis viri simplici eloquio, sicut ab eius ore audivimus, scripto summatim mandare curavi. (19-20)<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the visionary is said to have been a simple man, living close to London and, contrary to Fursey, not an exemplary character, let alone a cleric or a public figure like the renowned knight Owein in *St Patrick's Purgatory*. There are, however, a few references in the text that clearly establish that we are not dealing with a very simple and churlish character; the simple man Thurkill, a farmer by profession, leads a life of pious devotion and has even undertaken a pilgrimage. This man is granted a vision of both hell and heaven, a vision that is so terrible that he does not want to talk about it until admonished in a dream by St Julian, who had been his guide, to relate his experience in well-ordered language in church on a feast day. The visionary obeys this command and relates his experience in full on the highly appropriate feast days of All Saints and All Souls, i.e. on November 1 and 2, 1206, for the benefit of his fellow countrymen.

In addition to the features just mentioned, all of which contribute to a careful contextualisation of the vision, there are other features which significantly differentiate the contents of the *Visio Thurkilli* from other contemporary visions. Even a cursory reading of the text of the vision itself will reveal that great care has been devoted to what could be called literary detail. We can not only find most of the elements which had gradually become associated with judgment day, such as the weighing of the souls, the bridge leading to heaven, fire, the pit of hell with its boiling cauldrons and so on: compared to earlier visions, we also discover several new elements pertaining to the pains of hell.<sup>17</sup>



Several passages in the *Visio Thurkilli* reveal that the author/redactor was indeed a very good story-teller who knew exactly how to handle the expectations of his intended audience. For instance, when approaching the privities of hell, one of the devils tells Thurkill's saintly guides to leave their pupil outside a very dark and threatening building. The devil argues that if Thurkill were admitted to the privities of hell he would, on his return to the living, by his account of the secret punishments and deeds prevent many sinners from persisting in their bad deeds and therefore considerably reduce the revenue of the devil.

A further proof of the author's skill in composing a lively and at the same time awe-inspiring narrative can be found in his rather detailed account of the weighing of the souls: St Paul, when weighing the deeds of a bad priest, is disappointed that the devil's weights are heavier than his own. Trying to save the soul of the bad priest, he throws a soaking-wet aspersion onto the scales, with the result that the devil's weights are thrown up into the air by the rapid movement of the scales. In coming down, one of the weights, a black and sooty hammer, lands on the devil's foot, causing him severe pain. The devil, roaring with pain, complains to St Paul of having been cheated and produces a long list of the crimes committed by the priest.

There is even more in store for readers of the *Visio Thurkilli*. From a conversation between one of the devils and St Domninus, one of Thurkill's saintly guides, we gather that every Saturday the usual torments will have to be interrupted. This is because every Saturday the damned souls are forced to re-enact the sins they have committed in the flesh on the stage of the theatre of hell—to the great merriment of the devils watching this great spectacle. After their performance the sinners will be taken to their chairs of torture, which are in the building housing the stage. In these red-hot iron chairs of punishment, adorned with sharp spikes and glowing rings forged of iron, they will receive an extra treatment for their sins they have just re-enacted on the stage.

The presentation of the theatre of hell is one of the longest and most lively sections of the vision. In addition, the description of both sin and punishment is not restricted to the seven deadly sins, for example; it also refers to the social groups which make up a typical medieval society. To give but one example from another source: in the *General Prologue* of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the miller is described as very apt at stealing corn. Chaucer's miller would have been able to work out which torture would be prepared for him—burning flour will cover his entire body, causing the most severe pain imaginable.

Compared to these lively descriptions of the places entailing the death of the soul, the description of the forecourts of heaven with their inhabitants who have been restored to a life of the soul is somewhat bland, even though this section of the vision offers precise information on the number of masses by which a soul can be released from purgatory and the more quickly restored to life. Unlike the first two texts, the *Visio Thurkilli* ends very abruptly with the restoration of the visionary to his body—there is no reference to the visionary turning to a life of penance or seclusion after his dreadful vision. There is no mention, as in Bede relating to Fursey, that Thurkill turned to missionary work, or became a monk like Owein in *St Patrick's Purgatory*—only a brief indication that the visionary is very disappointed that he was prevented from experiencing a more detailed vision of heaven, which had been promised to him. No wonder he is very reluctant to return to his former life; his restoration from death is thus also a painful one.

Turning to the primary function of the vision genre, it would appear that the anonymous author of the *Visio Thurkilli* considered his literary product, which reveals an unusual amount of creative imagination and a loving care for detail, as sufficient to achieve his primary goal: to convince his audience of the desirability and necessity of having their souls restored from a most cruel and horrible death by leading a pious life in the flesh. It would also appear that the singular and innovative *Visio Thurkilli* was too far advanced in the development of the genre, so much so that some of its subject matter may have been

considered too 'licentious' for the ears of laymen in the early thirteenth century. We know of only four manuscripts, probably locked away for a long time in the great monastic libraries on the British Isle. There are no extant vernacular versions of the *Visio Thurkilli*, while there are 150 MSS of *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, and three vernacular adaptations: two in verse and one in prose.

*Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli*<sup>18</sup>—the words of Terentianus Maurus provide a fine closure: Medieval visions of heaven and hell prior to Dante offer a multitude of aspects worthy of further study. It is the duty of a medievalist to make modern readers familiar with a genre which certainly deserves close attention.<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" (X, 847): "This cursed synne [i.e. lechery] anoyeth grevousliche hem that it haunten. And first to hire soule, for he obligeth it to synne and to peyne of deeth that is perdurable." (Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987] 317.)

<sup>2</sup>[Beda Venerabilis] *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>"Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemorat de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuitando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur." (2)

<sup>4</sup>A wide range of important aspects and properties of the genre has been investigated by Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 23 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981); see his "Bibliographie" (267-80) for further studies. See also Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook*, Garland Medieval Bibliographies 11 (New York: Garland, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>"Sed uir Dei ubi ad patefactam usque inter flammam ianuam peruenit, arripientes inmundi spiritus unum de eis, quos in ignibus torrebant, iactauerunt in eum, et contingentes humerum maxillamque eius incenderunt; cognouitque

hominem, et quia uestimentum eius morientis acceperit, ad memoriam reduxit." (272-74)

<sup>6</sup>"Qui postmodum in corpore restitutus, omni uitae suae tempore signum incendii, quod in anima pertulit, uisibile cunctis in humero maxillaque portauit, mirumque in modum quid anima in occulto passa sit, caro palam praemonstrabat. Curabat autem semper, sicut et antea facere consuerat, omnibus opus uirtutum et exemplis ostendere et praedicare sermonibus." (274)

<sup>7</sup>"Superest adhuc frater quidam senior monasterii nostri, qui narrare solet dixisse sibi quendam multum ueracem ac religiosum hominem, quod ipsum Furseum uiderit in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum, illasque uisiones ex ipsius ore audierit, adiciens quia tempus hiemis fuerit acerrimum et glacie constrictum, cum sedens in tenui ueste uir ita inter dicendum propter magnitudinem memorati timoris uel suauitatis quasi in media aetatis caumate sudauerit." (274)

<sup>8</sup>See Frederick Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, FF Communications 204 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1969) 178: No. 2229. See also Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

<sup>9</sup>Robert Easting, ed., *St Patrick's Purgatory: Two Versions of Owayne Miles and The Vision of William of Stranton Together with the Long Text of the Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, EETS OS 298 (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

<sup>10</sup>"Welcome, Owein. You have come to suffer pain in order to amend your sins. But all this will not help you at all: You will have to suffer enough pains, hard, strong and very tough for your deadly sins. You have never experienced anything more terrible than the dance with which we will open our game with you."

<sup>11</sup>"The fiends caught the knight and tied him fast to the wheel revolving fiercely. And they were roaring terribly and cast him right into the centre. When the hooks fastened to the wheel began to tear his body and the fire to consume him he thought on Jesus Christ. An angel took him off the wheel and all fiends standing around the wheel couldn't harm him any more."

<sup>12</sup>See Peter Dinzelbacher, *Die Jenseitsbrücke im Mittelalter*, Dissertationen der Universität Wien 104 (Wien: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1973).

<sup>13</sup>"Guard yourself from now on against deadly sin so that you do not become guilty of it for whatever reason. When you are dead you will enter the joy that has no end, angels will be your guides."

<sup>14</sup>Paul Gerhard Schmidt, ed., *Die Vision des Bauern Thurkill* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987). A modern English translation of the vision (though not of the "Praefatio") is available in Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven & Hell Before Dante* (New York: Ithaca P, 1989) 219-36.

<sup>15</sup>In the translation by Philip Francis the entire sentence reads: "What we hear, / With weaker passion will affect the heart / Than when the faithful eye beholds the

part." Philip Francis, *A Poetical Translation of the Works of Horace*, 4 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1746).

<sup>16</sup>"However, since those endowed with the gift of a higher understanding, a sharper intellect and a firmer faith, will give credence to this vision considering the simplicity and innocence of this man to whom this vision was given and considering that many hearers derived great benefit from the narration of this vision by opting for a better life, I have been at pains [...] to record the most important parts of this vision of a simple man in simple language as I have heard it from his own mouth."

<sup>17</sup>A look at the Chaldon Mural, which also dates from the early years of the thirteenth century, will lead to a good first impression of the main features of purgatory, hell and heaven as described in the *Visio Thurkilli*. See for example Peter Dinzelbacher, *Himmel, Hölle, Heilige: Visionen und Kunst im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002) 84-85; Roger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English & Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge: The Boydell P, 2008) 73 and 81.

<sup>18</sup>"The fate of books depends on the discernment of the reader." Terentianus Maurus, *De litteris, syllabis et metris*, *Grammatici Latini*, ed. Heinrich Keil, 8 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961) 6: 363 [l. 1286].

<sup>19</sup>Thanks to Wendy Smith for her critical reading of the text.

## The Butterfly, the Fart and the Dwarf: the Origins of the English Laureate Micro-Epic

TOM MACFAUL

The three poets who can be considered England's first laureates—Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, and William Davenant—all wrote miniature mock epics in which they are concerned not with imperial greatness but, in various ways, with human littleness<sup>1</sup>; in so doing, they undermined to some degree the heroic, monarchic values their roles were supposed to underpin, and give the first hints of a tradition ambivalently critical of heroic values which would culminate in the great mock epics of Dryden and Pope. Spenser's "Muiopotmos," Jonson's "The Famous Voyage,"<sup>2</sup> and Davenant's "Jeffereidos" differ from the Ovidian epyllion of the 1590s in their focus on heroic, martial matters, and a more direct use of Virgilian tropes; they all attempt to reduce the heroic mode to an absurd minimum, but they also attempt to find by that reduction what is worth preserving in the mode.

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"Muiopotmos" is part of a larger collection, the volume of *Complaints* which Spenser and his publisher put together to capitalize on the success of *The Faerie Queene*. Though the volume might be seen as a 'collected shorter poems,' it is in fact remarkably coherent, its focus on the vanity of human things. This is a subject Spenser had begun his poetic career with, in his translations for Jan van der Noot's *Theatre for Worldlings*,<sup>3</sup> and which was to be a persistent remora of his epic intentions. The volume can also be seen as an extended set of laments and meditations on the death of Philip Sidney, the patron Spenser may have intended to put in the centre of his epic. Although only the

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volume's first poem, "The Ruines of Time," is explicitly dedicated to Sidney's sister, the positioning of that first dedication allows thoughts of Sidney's death to hang over all the poems.<sup>4</sup>

The poem claims to be about "deadly dolorous debate" and "open warre" "[b]etwixt two mightie ones of great estate" (lines 1, 8, 3), yet tells the story of a spider killing a butterfly.<sup>5</sup> Though it consequently seems to be a mock epic, filled with the bathos later characteristic of the genre, it ends on a note of genuine tragedy. On the other hand, as in *The Rape of the Lock*, there are continual hints of larger philosophical and political meanings which are snatched away as soon as they are offered. This *serio ludere* method is not simply a way of toying with the reader, however, for it reflects the poem's major purpose—that is, a corrective adjustment of perspective which radically questions the rights of supposedly great and powerful people to prey on the small and weak, who are in turn revalued according to new standards of judgement. The method is in some ways Erasmian, but it does not entirely do away with the Virgilian value system that it invokes as its generic structure.

The Virgilian keynote of the poem is the question "is there then/ Such rancour in the harts of mightie men?" (lines 14-15)—Virgil's anger of the *gods* (*Aeneid* I. 11) is invoked and replaced by the malice of the great ones of state, who are regarded as destroying beautiful little ones—these may be identified with the various gods of the poem, as James H. Morey points out, but this is to make the poem a little too self-contained.<sup>6</sup> It is tempting to hunt allegory here, and roll out the usual suspects of Spenser's detraction: Burghley, Philip II and even James VI of Scotland are possibilities, but all powerful individuals, even including Queen Elizabeth herself, may be invoked (the apparent exclusion of Elizabeth by the reference to "men" is qualified by the fact that Virgil is referring to the female Juno). Given that there are strong hints of topical allusion in Spenser's translation of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex* as "Virgil's Gnat"—which is clearly his major generic precedent—it is as hard to avoid the temptation as it is to make any particular allegory stick. What we can say is that both



“Virgil’s Gnat” and “Muiopotmos” address the destruction of little men by great, adumbrating a larger critique of the structures of power and their effects on those lower down the social hierarchy. Certainly, part of the effect of the poem’s miniaturization of the heroic is to suggest a general diminution and aestheticizing of heroic values at Elizabeth’s court, as Robert A. Brinkley points out,<sup>7</sup> but the idea of heroic action being vitiated and entangled by webs of power beyond a hero’s ken allows the heroic code to be both valued and treated as doomed. This kind of mock epic has considerable congruity with the attitude of the truest epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Richard McCabe argues that “[u]nder certain circumstances mock-epic may be integral to epic, a vital ‘condition’ attached to its discourse.”<sup>8</sup> In this case, mock epic is ultimately more seriously consequential than epic: Clarion’s death is more tragic than anything in *The Faerie Queene*, where no major heroes die; as Patricia Parker points out, death is out of place in a romance like *The Faerie Queene*,<sup>9</sup> but it is possible in an epic, even of the mock variety.

“Muiopotmos” is also more focussed on epic masculinity than *The Faerie Queene*’s feminine romance. The emphasis on Clarion’s paternal heritage (lines 22-24) is curious, but gives a strong sense of his masculinity and his near-regal status. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser tends to blur his heroes’ paternity, emphasizing rather their mothers’ care for them, which is frequently futile,<sup>10</sup> whereas in “Muiopotmos,” a parallel emphasis on the hero’s father’s useless prayers is introduced (lines 237-40). If the poem does invoke the loss of Sidney, the presentation of him as having some inherited royal status is significant: Sidney was lionized by continental protestants on his grand tour and embassies partly because foreigners misunderstood his father’s status as Lord Deputy of Ireland, thinking this viceregency made him somehow a prince.<sup>11</sup> Combine this with the knowledge of his position as heir to his wealthy and favoured uncle the Earl of Leicester, rumours that he was a candidate for the throne of Poland, and abortive plans to marry continental princesses, and Sidney’s kingliness starts to seem plausible. The problem for Spenser is how to represent this status, which

was illusory or at best potential, and how to present the scale of the loss when nothing definite had been lost. Rather than allegorizing Sidney, Spenser allegorizes the *idea* of the once-future king, and the fantasies that attach to such a figure.

Spenser is able to arrive at true epic seriousness through apparently absurd miniaturization, and this is most notably demonstrated in the arming of his hero Clarion. He *is* an insect, but his clothing is to be valued as much as that of Achilles:

His breastplate first, that was of substance pure,  
 Before his noble heart he firmly bound,  
 That mought his life from yron death assure,  
 And ward his gentle corpes from cruell wound:  
 For it by arte was framed, to endure  
 The bit of balefull steele and bitter stownd,  
 No lesse than that, which *Vulcane* made to sheild  
*Achilles* life from fate of *Troyan* field. (lines 57-64)

Though we might think this ironic, the irony is not present because of the hero's size, but because he like Achilles will die. Of course, Achilles' shield was really decorative rather than protective (his protection coming from being dipped—imperfectly—in the Styx),<sup>12</sup> and the armour likewise does Clarion no good; the point of the reference to Achilles (killed by a heel-wound), along with the fact that Clarion is armed everywhere but his legs, may be to remind us that Philip Sidney died because he wore no leg armour in the skirmish at Zutphen.<sup>13</sup> It also ironically raises the proverbial defencelessness of the butterfly in its journey to heaven.<sup>14</sup>

Decorative and futile though this armour may be, its substance *is* pure, the art that made it *is* at least the equal of Vulcan's—because it is God's. The next stanza's comparison of Clarion's "hairie hide" (line 66) with the pelt of the Nemean lion adorning Hercules is similarly serious: after all, close up the butterfly is fearsome. The end of the arming invokes other issues:

Lastly his shinie wings as siluer bright,  
 Painted with thousand colours, passing farre

All Painters skill, he did about him dight:  
 Not halfe so manie sundrie colours arre  
 In *Iris* bowe, ne heauen doth shine so bright,  
 Distinguished with manie a twinckling starre,  
 Nor *Iuno*es Bird in her ey-spotted traine  
 So manie goodly colours doth containe. (lines 89-96)

Asserting the beauty of the butterfly's wings is simply an aesthetic commonplace, but it raises the question of the philosophical value of beauty. It also radically feminizes such beauty, and looks forward to Pope's valuation of Fancy's "varying Rain-bows" in the *Dunciad in Four Books* (IV.632).<sup>15</sup> Mutability, traditionally feminized and condemned, is transformed into a positive, even heroic value, particularly when set—as it is by both Spenser and Pope—against nothingness.

Spenser takes pains to explore the origins of this feminine beauty. In the *action* of the butterfly's beauty, Astery prompts the jealousy of Venus's other damsels through being more "industrious" in gathering flowers (line 122) than the rest, who suggest that she has been aided by a besotted Cupid; Venus, recalling Cupid's affair with Psyche, credits this slander too easily, but punishes her rather oddly by beautifying her. The implication may be that this mighty one, whilst she may have maliciously jealous intentions ("spight," line 141), cannot actually give an inappropriate punishment: as Astery's only "pretended crime" (line 143) has been excellence in flower-picking, she and all her offspring are given permanent possession of flowers' beauty ("Since when that flie them in her wings doth beare," line 144). This immortalizing metamorphosis suggests the limits of power over the aesthetic realm, for the beautiful wings are a "memorie" as much of Venus's injustice as of the supposed crime (line 142). Industrious artistry thus transcends that of the gods—not only Juno's as in the passage above, but also that of Venus's own son:

Ne (may it be withouten perill spoken)  
 The Archer God, the sonne of *Cytheree*,  
 That ioyes on wretched louers to be wroken,  
 And heaped spoyles of bleeding harts to see,  
 Beares in his wings so manie a changefull token.

Ah my liege Lord, forgiue it vnto mee,  
 If ought against thine honour I haue tolde;  
 Yet sure those wings were fairer manifold. (lines 89-104)

Comparing Clarion to Cupid reminds us of the connection between the butterfly (Greek *psyche*) and the love-god's beloved Psyche: the neoplatonic allegorization of this myth,<sup>16</sup> in which only the love of such soul-beauty can raise one to the heavens, is clearly invoked. Don Cameron Allen argues that Spenser's poem is "an allegory of the wandering of the rational soul into error,"<sup>17</sup> but this may be to take the poem too seriously—it may rather be an allegory of reasonable, but still dangerous wandering into error. Unlike the Redcrosse Knight, Clarion has no Una to warn him of his error. As such, "Muiopotmos" is in the spirit of Apuleius's myth, of which Costas Panayotakis has argued "Psyche's limited vision neither makes her a bad character nor implies that a person whose soul is endowed with penetrating vision is necessarily good."<sup>18</sup>

Yet Clarion, being male, is not quite Psyche: he seems to be a fusion of lover and beloved, masculine and feminine, and as such is one of Spenser's most strikingly hermaphroditic figures, blending the best of male and female. Spenser's other hermaphrodites are limited by their dual nature—Error and the Dragon in *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, both being grotesques, the hermaphroditic union of Scudamour and Amoret being only worth "halfe enuying" (III.xii.46.6 [1590]).<sup>19</sup> Clarion's doubleness gives him freedom, but such freedom is also imperilled by its solitary nature. Sidney's *Arcadia* makes solitary "selfness" the prime condition of the individual's danger,<sup>20</sup> even if it is sometimes necessary for self-realization; Spenser's poem follows this idea to its logical conclusion, making the freedom of the lone individual its own heroic *aristeia*, doomed and meaningless, but also somehow beautiful.

Spenser is playing with these ideas rather seriously, not least in his apostrophe to Cupid: he is, of course, praising one who resembles that god's own beloved, but the apology also resembles his apologies to

the Queen for praising his own mistress in *Amoretti* 80, and for the praise of Colin Clout's mistress in *The Faerie Queene*:

Sunne of the world, great glory of the sky,  
 That all the earth doest lighten with thy rayes,  
 Great *Gloriana*, greatest Maiesty,  
 Pardon thy shepheard, mongst so many layes,  
 As he hath sung of thee in all his dayes,  
 To make one minime of thy poore handmayd,  
 And vnderneath thy feete to place her prayse,  
 That when thy glory shall be farre displayd  
 To future age of her this mention may be made. (VI.x.28)

What these passages have in common, with their back-handed compliments to the great, is a desire to bestow some value on private life when faced with the obligation to accord all praise to one's feudal lord or queen. The suggestion is that what is valued in the great may also be found in the small.

Correspondingly, that which is less perfect in the small may also be found in the great. The beauty of Clarion's wings is characterized by "manie a changefull token," but so is the beauty of lordly Love. Indeed, the word "token" may imply that a core integrity underlies the outward changeability. If Clarion is a changeable character, that is only because all life is such: "all that moueth, doth in *Change* delight," as Spenser puts it in the "Mutabilitie Cantos" (VII.viii.2).<sup>21</sup> Great ones may be no more or less fickle than he, but at least such caprice is appropriate for Clarion:

The woods, the riuers, and the medowes green,  
 With his aire-cutting wings he measured wide,  
 Ne did he leaue the mountaines bare vnseene,  
 Nor the ranke grassie fennes delights vntride,  
 But none of these, how euer sweete they beene,  
 Mote please his fancie, nor him cause t' abide:  
 His choicefull sense with euerie change doth flit.  
 No common things may please a wauering wit. (lines 153-60)

Clarion has a comprehensive aesthetic vision, which enables him, in measuring and trying, to value things rightly. The mild moralizing of

the couplet is undermined by the joke about these beauties not being “common,” because in a sense they are: these are things that are not subject to covetous proprietorship; Clarion himself is without jealous, possessive desires; though “all the countrey wide he did possesse” (line 150), this is possession as a non-zero-sum game, in that it is both wide country, and possessed *widely*, with room for generosity. We might wonder if Spenser is tapping here into the Elizabethan prodigal myth, of which Sidney was so fond, and which allowed youthful vagaries to be forgiven.<sup>22</sup> Clarion’s youthful sowing of wild oats, full of sweetness and light, is preferable to the self-involved jealousies and vindictiveness of the great. Spenser is as concerned as his friend and patron Raleigh with the jealous “effects of pourfull emperye” (“The 11th: and last booke of the Ocean to Scinthia,” line 200).<sup>23</sup> Spenser affirms that “all change is sweet” (line 178)—at least for Clarion, who has the highest “felicity” of a created being, “delight with libertie” (lines 209-10), which even Calvin might forgive<sup>24</sup>; his is a truly “kingly ioyounce” (208) of natural pleasure, however short-lived. Monarchs, the poem suggests, cannot enjoy this—and may even be the cause of its destruction.

Clarion’s enemy and nemesis is his opposite: associated with jealousy, vengeance, and possessiveness, the spider Aragnoll is the caricature of a “tyrant” (line 433), who is also “The foe of faire things, th’ author of confusion,/ The shame of Nature, the bondslaue of spight” (lines 244-45); such a tyrant is as unfree as the kingly Clarion is free. The cause of his enmity is aesthetic competitiveness; in this, he anticipates Iago’s resentment of Cassio who has “a daily beauty in his life/ That makes me ugly.”<sup>25</sup> The origin of Aragnoll’s resentments was his mother Arachne’s weaving competition with Minerva. In this version of the famous story, Arachne pictures the rape of Europa and Minerva her own competition with Neptune over possession of Athens, clearly alluding to Queen Elizabeth’s supposedly providential victory over Philip II’s Armada. Both stories are images of possessiveness; Minerva even rather vainly depicts herself (lines 321-28). We might wonder if the competition represents in some way the competition between



Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots, whose execution in 1587 partly prompted the Armada. However, it is not Minerva's self-portrayal that wins the day, but the pure beauty of the butterfly the goddess "made" (line 329)—a key Sidneian word,<sup>26</sup> signifying divine artistry, and therefore perhaps underlining the way in which the arts, purely considered, underpin the Queen's success. Though Spenser may be suggesting that the arts of court are too simply mimetic,<sup>27</sup> they nonetheless are beautiful and worthwhile; it is this triumphal image that has caused Aragnoll to fester in resentment and which makes him kill Clarion. It would be too much to suggest that Aragnoll has to be James VI of Scotland<sup>28</sup>; he represents rather all those who resent or deface the Elizabethan creative culture at whose centre Spenser wanted to place himself.

The death of Clarion is the death of beauty and potential. It resembles the death of Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*, but whereas Turnus goes with a groan down to the shades beneath, Clarion's "deepe groning sprite/ In bloodie streames foorth fled into the aire" (lines 438-39). The butterfly is strikingly humanized here—for an insect would hardly produce such groans or such streams of blood. There is a hint, then, of heaven resuming its own (as Pope would have it with Belinda's lock), but the poem also ends with a humanized focus on "His bodie left the spectacle of care" (line 440): unsouled beauty can only provoke lamentation; as a mere spectacle it is not truly beautiful, having lost its papilionaceous qualities, such as wings. Spenser often attributes "care" to jealous lovers, as when Scudamore meets a blacksmith of that name (*The Faerie Queene*, IV.v). Aragnoll kills Clarion in a way that suggests sexual possessiveness: his web is likened to that used by Vulcan to trap Mars and Venus, an image Spenser also invokes during the capture and ruination of false beauty in the Bower of Bliss (*The Faerie Queene*, II.xii.81-82). Unlike Guyon, Aragnoll proceeds from binding to murderous penetration, striking Clarion in the heart (a penetration that may remind us of Busirane's possession of Amoret—*The Faerie Queene*, III.xii.38). The invocation of such destructive desire in what amounts to a scene of someone catching a butterfly



suggests a serious resonance which is a major part of the epic tradition, reminding us that the heroic impulse to possess beauty tends to destroy it. The sense of loss is as powerful in its way as any death in serious epic, all the more so for the sudden invocation of human categories on the moment of the butterfly's death.

"Muiopotmos" attacks the self-involved jealousies of the great, and shows how valuable, beautiful, even heroic individuals can be crushed by them. Clarion is not a direct representation of Sidney, but if Spenser had that generous patron, beautiful poet, and hopeful hero in mind as he meditated on the waste caused by lordly competition, the miniature epic would then reflect on the failures of his own aspirations in *The Faerie Queene* to fashion a hero who could combine the masculine and the feminine, the poet and the king. The poem's apparent triviality probes deeply at our sense of what really matters. It gently insists on a shift of perspective and valuation so that normative values of greatness and pettiness are fundamentally shifted. Beauty, all this implies, needs to be valued on its own terms, not as part of a quest for power.

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Ben Jonson's Jacobean mock epic engages in a similar kind of assessment of public value systems and the human waste they incur, but in a very different context. The dangers and absurdities inherent in the heroizing of commercial competition are at the heart of "The Famous Voyage." Positioned at the end of his "Epigrams" in the 1616 *Works*, the poem is perhaps meant to stand alone between the "Epigrams" and the higher-style poems of *The Forest*, marked off as an important poetic achievement in its own right.<sup>29</sup> As a mock epic of London life, it anticipates Pope's *Dunciads*, but it has its own vision of the heroic which makes it more than an important influence or an enjoyable *jeu d'esprit*.

The miniaturization here is not in the size of the heroes as it is in "Muiopotmos" and "Jeffereidos," but in the size of the heroic task: the voyage is both petty—two men travelling to a bawdy ale-house—and

in a confined space—the Fleet River or Ditch, which was used as a sewer. The poem’s claustrophobic properties give it a genuine frisson, even though we know the journey to be both pointless and undignified. Although it is a world apart from the delicate rural transvaluation of ideals in “Muiopotmos,” “The Famous Voyage” has important things of its own to say about the heroic mode.

The heroes are virtual non-entities, (possibly) Sir Ralph Shelton and an unidentified “Heyden.”<sup>30</sup> Jonson says of these heroes, “pitty ’tis, I cannot call ’hem knights” (line 22), though “[o]ne was” (line 23). Some critique of James’s revenue-raising knighting policy seems likely (Shelton had been knighted in 1607), given Jonson’s attitude in *Eastward Ho!* Crisp distinctions between heroic and mock-heroic are not allowed: inflected by reality, the sentiment is along the lines, ‘imagine if these two were knights! that would be fun—but hang on, one of them *is* a knight.’ The poem is about the inability to make the kinds of distinctions that underpin the heroic and mock-heroic attitudes, as the epigram “On the Famous Voyage” announces: “what was there [i.e. in the classical underworld]/ Subtly distinguish’d, was confused here” (lines 9-10). Jonson resists this confusion even as he revels in it, and in doing so creates a mode of heroic irony.

In Jonson’s modesty formula which ends the introductory epigram—“let the former age, with this content her,/ Shee brought the Poets forth, but ours th’ aduenter” (lines 19-20)—the irony is complex: on the one hand Jonson could be operating by simple inversion, suggesting that though there is no heroism, there is at least the possibility of heroic writing; on the other, he may be saying that his mode, though low, is at least *appropriate* to the kind of adventure he has to celebrate. The word “aduenter” is loaded: full of its due heroic weight, it is ironized not only by its direct referent (the narrative poem that follows), but by the wider contemporary cultural significance of the idea of adventuring—capitalistic and colonial projects of the kind Jonson mocks in his plays (notably *Eastward Ho!*, *The Alchemist* and *The Devil Is an Ass*). Such activities are both faintly despicable and worthy of a reluctant kind of admiration. The heroes here feel

worthy scorne

Of those, that put out moneyes, on returne  
 From *Venice, Paris*, or some in-land passage  
 Of sixe times to, and fro, without embassage,  
 Or him that backward went to *Berwicke*, or which  
 Did dance the famous *Morrisse*, vnto *Norwich*. (lines 31-36)

To put all adventuring, whether commercial or populist (such as Kemp's jig) to Norwich, on the same basis suggests a refusal of hierarchical values, yet *this* voyage, however ironically, is put above these: it is not undertaken for gain, but for the sheer bravery of it; however absurd it may be, it really does partake of the heroic value-system. David Riggs has adduced psychosexual and biographical reasons for Jonson's cloacal obsessions,<sup>31</sup> but the main point seems to be the audacity in entering the "wombe" (line 66) of the Fleet Ditch, an alternative model of urban space, as Andrew Macrae conceives it.<sup>32</sup> The feminine mystery is fearlessly penetrated, but pointlessly; in the end, the brothel they seek is closed. The heroes' scorn is, in some senses, worthy, for they adventure for adventuring's sake, like Clarion. In doing so, they create their own system of value.

The poem is based on the *nekuias* of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, episodes that provide their heroes with validation and the strength to continue, founded on what has been lost in their lives.<sup>33</sup> Whereas Odysseus and Aeneas encounter the likes of Achilles and Dido, seeing the waste of human potential that has been part of the cost of their own success, the only waste Jonson's heroes meet is the city's waste-products. If one of Virgil's key themes is the human price of founding the city of Rome, Jonson's is the mess created by London's civilization, right in its midst. The city's digestive entropy is punningly emphasized: "All was to them the same, they were to passe" (line 140). Turds, urine, dead cats and "plaisters" (line 170) strew the heroes' way, and the mock-heroic method tries to make something of all these. The farting they hear overhead is compared to the voice of Mercury, with a digression on quacks' misuse of this "god of eloquence" (line 99); as in *The Alchemist* (probably written in the same year as "The Famous Voyage"), verbal skills are recognized as the true

core of the arts, and their abuse attacked, yet not without an ironic sense that the poet himself is at this moment misusing his skill. The “loud/ Crack” (lines 93-94) is also compared to “the graue fart, late let in parliament” (line 108), referring to story of Henry Ludlow answering the Sergeant of the House of Commons with such a preposterous report. The story’s humour works because we assume the dignity of parliament, and therefore there is something heroic about this—the fart is made grave by its context. However, it also plays on Jonson’s great fear, that discriminating language might give way to mere noise, an excessive assumption of inherited dignity when real dignity is absent in the present. The danger of the heroic mode is that it also rests excessively on the past; the true poet must engage it with the present, farts and all.

Just as *The Alchemist’s* bravura farce (which begins with a fart) is deepened by a recognition of surrounding death from the plague, which may in itself motivate the characters’ desperate grasping for supernatural structures of meaning, the sense of blight in “The Famous Voyage” is genuine. When Jonson describes “famine, wants, and sorrowes many a dosen,/ The least of which was to the plague a cosen” (lines 71-72), he needs no irony. Far from the orderly world of “To Penshurst,” which commences on the page after “The Famous Voyage,” this grim place and its implicit sufferings are as much a part of Jonson’s vision of England as Robert Sidney’s estate. Jonson’s laureate project is to speak of the nation as a whole.

Jonson’s “braue worke” (line 57) is inspired by Hercules, heroic stable-cleaner, proves the “vn-vsed valour of a nose” (line 132) and ends by allying his work to “his, that sung A-IAX” (line 176).<sup>34</sup> The poet thereby creates cloacal precedents, yet demonstrates that he is trying something unattempted in prose or rhyme. He even gains a sense of decorum for his work, in the sense that it is appropriate to its subject. We may still have doubts about Jonson’s attitude to his heroes’ *acte gratuit*: they simply make their way up river, get witnesses of their action, and go (“brauely” [line 92]) back. There was, in fact, no need for them to go by river: as Katherine Duncan-Jones points out “Even

quite drunk young men could stagger to Holborn from the Mermaid [...] in about twenty minutes.”<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, along the way we have encountered images so monstrous that they rather transcend the heroic tropes to which they are compared than pale next to them. Nothing may have been accomplished, but the act of representation is itself of value. Poets like Spenser may have valorized the Thames as nationally unifying river, but Jonson can make the Fleet more representative. Whereas, at the end of *Prothalamion*, Spenser could come to the house of the Earl of Essex, hinting at future national heroism, Jonson sees a truer heroism in inspecting the city’s drains. He turns to Harington, perhaps in the belief that what the nation needs is plumbers, not imperial promoters. In searching for the sources of disease within—both the sewer and the brothel—one may be more public-spirited than in finding out new lands.

\* \* \*

If Spenser and Jonson, in very different ways, offer wider perspectives which undermine the heroic tradition, their laureate successor Davenant is more straightforwardly ironic in his unfinished “Epick Ode” “Jeffereidos, Or the Captivitie of Jeffery.” Celebrating the escape of Queen Henrietta Maria’s dwarf Jeffery Hudson from captivity by pirates is a sufficiently amusing subject-matter to require only adequate treatment from the poet, and the fact of Jeffery’s size is the centre of most of the poem’s jokes, but the poem has its serious implications. Given Charles I’s own diminutive and non-heroic stature, the poem may also glance at the King. Charles saw himself as a rather grand and chivalric figure—and this would be a major component of the nation’s difficulties in the 1640s. The poem reflects on such values as essentially small-minded.

Jeffery is described as “[t]he truest Servant to a state that cou’d/ Be giv’n to a Nation out of flesh and bloud” (Canto I.17-18).<sup>36</sup> The irony here is quite subtle, as Hudson was clearly only a court-servant to the Queen, having no value to the state at large. Such courtly entertainers



were increasingly an anachronism, as perhaps was the heroic attitude displayed in this poem. Christopher Hill associates the possession of court fools with an outdated element in Stuart kingship, observing that “[t]he Stuarts were the last English kings to employ a court fool; the last fool known to have been kept by an English landed family died in Durham in 1746, the year when the last attempt to restore the Stuart line was defeated.”<sup>37</sup> Yet Davenant cannot be unambivalent about this relic of traditional court life: the possession of a pet poet like himself was part of the same system. Though Jeffery Hudson was captured by pirates in 1630, and some form of the poem seems to have existed at this time, it may have been revised later, when Davenant came to be a servant of the Queen. In any case, it was published in *Madagascar* (1638), the collection which celebrates Davenant’s new status as laureate, and it is therefore presented as part of a new vision of what laureate poetry should be. It is the comic counterpart to the projected imperialism of the title poem (which urges Prince Rupert of Bohemia to colonize the island). The concern of “Jeffereidos” with public matters is therefore not entirely comical.

Davenant is modest about his poem (with some reason), saying that any third part he was to write would be produced with “[a] little help from Nature, lesse from Art” (II.107). In the “Author’s Preface” to *Gondibert*, he would repudiate “all those hasty digestions of thought which were publish’d in my youth,” presumably including “Jeffereidos.”<sup>38</sup> Both statements imply that the very truth of his subject puts constraints on the poem, reality being too little transformed by art. A half-hearted effort is made to provide ironic underpinning to his tale by appeals to a fictional Dutch “Originall” he claims to be translating (II.104). Nonetheless, a certain ironic force and political interest is imbued by the poem’s apparent truthfulness.

The most straightforward joke of the poem is Jeffery’s size, allowing an ironic and punning use of chivalric language: “hee tall *Jeff’ry* height!” (I.19). The Spenserian archaism “hight” (385) is mocked as much as Jeffery in the pun, and the detachment of chivalric language (“tall” meaning something like “brave”) from real standards is called

into question. We might wonder if there is anything less absurd in this phraseology than in grand heroic portraiture of the diminutive Charles I such as van Dyck's.<sup>39</sup> Davenant pushes his point to absurd lengths, however, having Jeffery hide "behind a spick/ And almost span-new-pewter-Candlestick" (I.27-28), trip over a beard-hair, and fight with a turkey. It does, however, seem that Hudson was an irascible man (he fought a duel with an English courtier in exile in 1644, and killed his man). The mock-epic tropes are therefore not as fanciful as they at first appear.

Similarly, the pirates' suggestion that Jeffery "May prove the gen'rall Spie of Christendome" (I.36) is not so ludicrous as it may seem. In a world of international intrigue, trusted intimates such as Hudson might well be used for espionage purposes: that Hudson was only eleven years old in 1630 may make the idea of him as a spy seem unlikely, but such intimations may have had more force a few years later when the poem was published. Hudson was in fact, many years later, paid a total of £70 from Charles II's secret service fund,<sup>40</sup> which gives a certain plausibility to the idea of him as a spy. In the poem, the pirates ask him if he knows of Cardinal Richelieu's intentions regarding a potential invasion of Italy, but Jeffery is discreet:

(Most noble *Jeff'ry* still!) hee seemes to know  
 Nought of that point; though divers think, when there,  
 The Cardinall did whisper in his eare  
 The Scheame of all his plots. (I.82-85)

This may be ironic, but it may also be a kind of kidding on the level; after all, it is possible that he did know "[s]ome secrets that concern the English State," though he would "not one word/ Reveale, that he had heard at Councell-bord" (I.72-74). Davenant taps into a certain paranoia about favourites and their access to secrets of state.<sup>41</sup> When he is tied up by the pirates (who are Spanish), Jeffery wishes "[h]e had long since contriv'd a truce with Spaine" (I.40), and such contrivances of courtiers were exactly what the opposition to Charles I feared, particularly from the pro-Spanish party of Thomas Wentworth.



The opposition to Charles's personal rule may also be reflected absurdly in Jeffery's fight with the turkey:

this Foule (halfe blinde)  
 At *Jeff'ry* pecks, and with intent to eat  
 Him up, in stead of a large graine of Wheat:  
*Jeff'ry* (in duell nice) ne're thinks upon't  
 As the Turkeys hunger, but an affront. (II.56-60)

This could be an allegory of Charles's blindness to the genuine hungers and grievances of the people, seeing their resistance as only an affront to his kingly honour.<sup>42</sup> The poem ends with the dwarf crying for help from the midwife (Hudson had gone to France to get a midwife for Henrietta Maria). As he wittily puts it "Thou that deliver'd hast so many, be/ So kinde of nature to deliver me!" (II.97-98). The idea of rescue by a midwife suggests optimism about an heir to the throne (who would be a reliable focus for opposition to the monarch). In addition, the whole story of a hero being pecked at by a bird may hint at the hen-pecked condition of the King.

Jeffery is associated with the King insofar as he is influenced by the Queen. In fact, the Queen's own provocations to Charles's honour may have been the final spark that kindled the powder-keg of the first Civil War: she is supposed to have prompted him to arrest Pym, Hampden, Mandeville and others by saying "Go, you coward, and pull these rogues out by the ears, or never see my face more."<sup>43</sup> Whatever the truth of this, it is clear that the French Queen's active encouragement of Charles's heroic self-image brought a dangerous element into English court politics. Davenant's poem may be reflecting in advance on the perils of this, even as he produces a light piece for courtly amusement. Although he was dependent on her favour, Davenant may well be suggesting that the lack of proportion her values brought to the Court and nation could create their own problems. Davenant would later end his serious "Heroick Poem," *Gondibert*, with the warning that

They look but wrong on Courts who can derive  
 No great Effects from outward Littleness;

Thro Foolish Scorn they turn the Prospective,  
And so contract Courts little things to less.

Man's little Heart in narrow space does hide  
Great Thoughts, such as have spacious Empire sway'd  
The little Needle does vast Carricks guide,  
And of small Atoms were the Mountains made. (III.vii.106-07)

The potentially great effect of little things is central to all three laureate micro-epics; the correct perspective is everything.

All three poems, then, are brilliant and bravura performances in their own distinctive ways, but they also served serious purposes. They allowed poets whose laureate status associated them with the court and its values to engage in a serious (but safely ignorable) critique of the heroic visions associated with their monarchs. The little poem, like the little person, may be amusing and can be easily overlooked, but it may also know more than it lets on.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For Spenser's claims on the laureateship, see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983)—the official title, of course, (as opposed to a pension or royal grant) was first conferred on Dryden. Skelton might also claim to have been the first laureate.

<sup>2</sup>I refer to this poem as "The Famous Voyage" as it is only the epigram prefaced to it that is called "On the Famous Voyage" (*Epigrams CXXXIII*), the narrative being titled "The Voyage It Selfe"; references to Ben Jonson, *Works*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1925-52).

<sup>3</sup>For the continuity between the *Theatre* and *Complaints*, see Carl J. Rasmussen, "'Quietnesse of Minde': A *Theatre* for *Worldlings* as a Protestant Poetics," *Spenser Studies* 1 (1980): 3-27.

<sup>4</sup>For Spenser's belated response to Sidney's death, and its difficulties see Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney 1586-1640* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 68-70.

<sup>5</sup>References to Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>6</sup>See James H. Morey, "Spenser's Mythic Adaptations in *Muiopotmos*," *Spenser Studies* 9 (1988): 49-59.

<sup>7</sup>Robert A. Brinkley, "Spenser's *Muiopotmos* and the Politics of Metamorphosis," *ELH* 48 (1981): 668-76.

<sup>8</sup>Richard A. McCabe, "Parody, Sympathy and Self: A Response to Donald Cheney," *Connotations* 13.1 (2003/2004): 5-22, 7.

<sup>9</sup>Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) 35.

<sup>10</sup>See my discussion in *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson*, forthcoming, chapter four.

<sup>11</sup>See Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000) 185-87.

<sup>12</sup>This is a post-Homeric tradition, the first extant mention being by Statius—see *Achilleid*, I. 134, 269. References to Statius, *Thebais* 8-12; *Achilleid*, ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003).

<sup>13</sup>See Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991).

<sup>14</sup>See Dante, *Purgatorio*, X.124-26:

non v' accorgete voi che noi siam vermi  
nati a formar l' angelica farfalla,  
che vola alla giustizia senza schermi?

(do you not perceive that we are worms born to form the angelic butterfly that soars to judgement without defence?). References to *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. John D. Sinclair, 3 vols. (New York: OUP, 1939).

<sup>15</sup>References to *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Longman, 1989).

<sup>16</sup>See Apuleius, *Cupid and Psyche*, ed. E. J. Kenney (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

<sup>17</sup>See Don Cameron Allen, *Image and Meaning: Metaphoric Traditions in Renaissance Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1960) 31.

<sup>18</sup>Costas Panayotakis, "Vision and Light in Apuleius's Tale of Psyche and her Mysterious Husband," *Classical Quarterly* 51 (2001): 576-83, 580.

<sup>19</sup>See MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity*, chapter four. References to Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton; text ed. Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Longman, 2001).

<sup>20</sup>See Tom MacFaul, "Friendship in Sidney's *Arcadias*," *SEL* 49 (2009): 17-33.

<sup>21</sup>Spenser elsewhere signals a sense of integrity beneath outward changeability in making Proteus, who is "ambiguum" for Ovid (*Metamorphoses* II.9), into a compassionate (if somewhat ambivalent) "aged sire" (*The Faerie Queene* III.viii.30.3).

<sup>22</sup>For the myth, see Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976); for Sidney's presentation of himself as childish, see Tom

MacFaul, "The Childish Love of Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville," *Sidney Journal* 24 (2006): 37-65. The chief prodigality in his works is of course the main narrative of the *Old Arcadia*.

<sup>23</sup>*The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Agnes M. C. Latham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951).

<sup>24</sup>See Andrew D. Weiner, "Spenser's *Muiopotmos* and the Fates of Butterflies and Men," *JEGP* 84 (1985): 203-20; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Library of Christian Classics, 1960) Book I.5.5.

<sup>25</sup>*Othello* V.i.19-20. References to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

<sup>26</sup>See *The Defence of Poesy*: "The Greeks called him a 'poet which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word ποιέιν, which is, to make: wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker: which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by any partial allegation'"—references to *The Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1973) 77.

<sup>27</sup>See Craig Rustici, "Muiopotmos: Spenser's 'Complaint' against Aesthetics," *Spenser Studies* 13 (1999): 165-77.

<sup>28</sup>For Spenser's problems with James, which would come later, after the 1596 *Faerie Queene*, see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983) chapter 1.

<sup>29</sup>Sara J. van den Berg, *The Action of Ben Jonson's Poetry* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1987) 104, calls it a "palinode" to the *Epigrams*; it may be, but I think it is also something more.

<sup>30</sup>Peter E. Medine, "Object and Intent in Jonson's 'Famous Voyage,'" *SEL* 15 (1975): 97-110, argues that Shelton is Thomas Shelton, translator of Cervantes, mainly on the grounds that Jonson would not praise and blame Sir Ralph Shelton in the same volume; he also identifies Heyden as Sir Christopher Heydon. Neither case seems proved.

<sup>31</sup>David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989).

<sup>32</sup>See Andrew McRae, "'On the Famous Voyage': Ben Jonson and Civic Space," *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 3 (September 1998): 8.1-31. 26 Oct. 2009. <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04-2/mcraonth.htm>>.

<sup>33</sup>Bruce Boehrer, "Horatian Satire in Jonson's 'On the Famous Voyage,'" *Criticism* 44 (2002): 9-26 also valuably points out Jonson's use of Horace's *Satires* 1.5 in the poem.

<sup>34</sup>The reference is to Sir John Harington (1560-1612), godson of Queen Elizabeth, translator of Ariosto, and author of *New Discourse of a Stale Subject, called the Metamorphosis of Ajax* (1596).

<sup>35</sup>Katherine Duncan-Jones, "City Limits: Nashe's 'Choise of Valentines' and Jonson's 'Famous Voyage,'" *RES* 56 (2005): 246-62, 258.

<sup>36</sup>References to Sir William Davenant, *The Shorter Poems, and Songs from the Plays and Masques*, ed. A. M. Gibbs (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1972).

<sup>37</sup>Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Pelican, 1975) 277.

<sup>38</sup>References to Sir William Davenant, *Gondibert*, ed. David F. Gladish (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 20, lines 686-87.

<sup>39</sup>Anthony van Dyck, *Equestrian Portrait of Charles I., 1637-38*, The National Gallery London.

<sup>40</sup>For this, and other details of Hudson's life, see R. Malcolm Smuts, "Jeffery Hudson" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003). The event of 1630 to which the poem refers was not the last time Hudson would be captured by pirates (on the second occasion, he grew taller; cf. Smuts).

<sup>41</sup>On this paranoia, see Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006).

<sup>42</sup>See e.g. Hill 24.

<sup>43</sup>See John Adamson, *The Noble Revolt: The Overthrow of Charles I* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007) 496.

## Ambiguities of Honour: A Response to Carrie Pestritto's "Outlooks on Honor in *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*"\*

THOMAS KULLMANN

"Caesar was ambitious, and Brutus is an honourable man" (*Julius Caesar* 3.2.78-100).<sup>1</sup> Are things really as simple as that? If we follow Carrie Pestritto's arguments in her contribution on the concepts of honour as manifested in two Shakespearean plays, Mark Antony's ironical words should be taken at face value. According to Pestritto, Brutus's honour gives him "an almost Christ-like aura" (64), as Shakespeare's characterization follows Plutarch's "Christ-like, pure image of Brutus" (66). This concept of honour, Pestritto argues, contrasts with that of King Henry in *Henry V*, who "is of dubious morality" (63). Brutus, she says, "will only rigidly adhere to the straightforward, virtuous path," while "Henry V does not care what methods he must use to gain honor: sinful or ethical" (66).

As far as *Henry V* is concerned, Pestritto's argumentation is quite convincing. Honour, as it is understood in his Agincourt speech (4.3.18-67; 22, 28, 31), is indeed "something that one must fight others to win" (65) and is therefore highly ambiguous from a moral point of view. The negative aspects of war and bloodshed are given ample scope in this play. Henry's admonition to the archbishop of Canterbury (1.2.13-32) shows that he is aware of the "waste in brief mortality" (1.2.28) brought about by war, as are his night-time reflections after having assumed a disguise and talked to his soldiers in scene 4.1. In his Harfleur speech the King emphasizes the cruel aspects of fighting, e.g. when asking his soldiers to "close the wall up with our English dead" (3.1.2). War crimes appear to be inevitable, such as the

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\*Reference: Carrie Pestritto, "Outlooks on Honor in *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*," *Connotations* 17.1 (2007/2008): 61-67.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debpestritto01701.htm>>.



killing of the boys guarding the luggage, “expressly against the law of arms” (4.7.1-2).<sup>2</sup> Most notably, the play does not end with the English gaining honour on the battlefield: it may well be the King’s bad conscience which makes him forbid his soldiers to “boast” of their victory (4.8.116) and to give thanks to—or shift responsibility to—God instead (4.8.112-24). These restrictions on celebrating leave room to the final act which is devoted to reconciliation and peace.<sup>3</sup>

Pestritto’s point can also be strengthened by an examination of the term “honour” as used in the play. It is amazing how often honour is spoken of in contexts where dramatic irony is apparent: At the very beginning of the play the archbishop of Canterbury complains about a bill which would appropriate church funds to the maintenance of many earls, knights and esquires “to the King’s honour” (1.1.12). After the discovery of a conspiracy against him, the King reminds his followers that he was prepared “to furnish him,” i.e. the chief conspirator, the Earl of Cambridge, “with all appertinents/ Belonging to his honour” (2.2.87-88). The French “constable” exhorts his compatriots “for honour of our land,/ Let us not hang like roping icicles/ Upon our houses’ thatch” (3.5.22-24), as the French soldiers were obviously prone to. The French King’s exhortation to his princes to “with spirit of honour edged/ More sharper than your swords hie to the field” (3.5.38-39) will obviously prove fruitless. After the battle of Agincourt Pistol, not distinguished for valiant fighting, complains about getting old: “Old I do wax, and from my weary limbs/ Honour is cudgelled” (5.1.85-86). Even the words of the Chorus, usually taken to be unambiguously ‘pro-war,’ could provoke second thoughts about honour as an end in itself: “[...] honour’s thought/ Reigns solely in the breast of every man” (2.ch.3-4). Is it really a sensible course of action to “sell the pasture now to buy the horse” (2.ch.5); will all of Henry’s followers be able to win “crowns and coronets” (2.ch.10)? Henry’s Agincourt speech is about the only other instance where honour is given as a motive for fighting; and it could be argued that Henry only resorts to this motive because he has to make the best of the situation: the num-

ber of troops appears inadequate, so that only the King's appeal to the surplus of honour to be won can restore his officers' confidence.

Honour as a value is obviously outdated. It belongs to the discourse of chivalry which Shakespeare, in *Henry V* as elsewhere, obviously rejects.<sup>4</sup> The concept of going to war in order to achieve honour has become, at least, a highly ambivalent one. I cannot go along with Pestrutto, however, in ascribing this ambivalence to King Henry himself. When he states that "to covet honour" might be a sin (4.3.28), he is obviously being playfully ironical. Pestrutto's comparison to "an Easter egg hunt" (65) is quite pertinent: Henry tries to belittle the dangers inherent in entering battle with an insufficient force. After victory is achieved, however, the King displays both his personal humility and political shrewdness in not making a point of having won honour.

In presenting the character of King Henry V as ambivalent, Pestrutto follows a time-honoured interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Her most decisive argument, however, is her appeal to Shakespeare's source, Holinshed's *Chronicles* (62). Pestrutto rightly points out that the *Chronicles* include "conflicting evidence or interpretations from different primary sources in their compilation" (62). In juxtaposing incompatible sources, Holinshed does not just show his intention "to present an unbiased history" (62) but also demonstrates a Renaissance love for paradox, which Shakespeare was to make ample use of in his "histories."<sup>6</sup> To look for "ambiguities and ironies" is not just a fad of "modern criticism," as T. W. Craik suggests ("Introduction" 75), but is based in Renaissance cultural practice.

Let's turn to *Julius Caesar* and its sources. Plutarch's "Life of Brutus" certainly concentrates on the 'noble' qualities of his hero (just like his "Life of Caesar" and, generally, his other lives) and gives voice to sympathies with the republican cause, but does not depict him as blameless. In the passage quoted by Pestrutto, Plutarch does not "idealize" Brutus "as the personification of righteousness" (64) but only records that Brutus was considered as such by his Roman contemporaries. Plutarch also mentions opinions dissenting from those of the

conspirators. Faonius, a philosopher, for example tells Brutus (in Thomas North's translation, published 1579 and used by Shakespeare) "that civill warre was worse then tyrannicall government usurped against the lawe" (336).<sup>7</sup> Few Elizabethans would have disagreed. In Plutarch's *Lives* Brutus as a Roman is set against Dion, a Greek, who was also a tyrannicide. In his "Comparison of Dion with Brutus" there are quite a few aspects according to which Brutus does not appear the more noble of the two: "[Brutus and Cassius] were driven to hazard them selves in warre, more for there owne safetie, then for the libertie of their contrie men. Whereas Dion [...]" (364). Another point is that Caesar was not really a tyrant:

[...] he rather had the name and opinion onely of a tyranne, then otherwise that he was so in deede. For there never followed any tyrannicall nor cruell act, but contrarilie, it seemed that he was a mercifull Phisition, whom God had ordeyned of speciall grace to be Governor of the Empire of Rome, and to set all thinges againe at quiet stay, the which required the counsell and authoritie of an absolute Prince. And therefore the Romanes were marvelous sorie for Caesar after he was slaine, and afterwardes would never pardon them that had slaine him. (364-65)

Caesar rather appears to be a monarch fitting into the "Elizabethan world picture": God-ordained, restoring order, loved by the people.

Lastly, Plutarch records that Brutus was personally indebted to Caesar:

Furthermore, the greatest reproache they could object against Brutus, was: that Julius Caesar having saved his life, and pardoned all the prisoners also taken in battell, as many as he had made request for, taking him for his frende, and honoring him above all his other frends: Brutus notwithstanding had imbrued his hands in his blood, wherewith they could never reprove Dion. (365)

It is true that Plutarch's emphasis is on his praise for Brutus's sincerity (365) and "marvelous noble minde" (366); Brutus killed Caesar "onely to set his contrie againe at libertie" (365) and "to restore the Empire of Rome againe, to her former state & government" (366). The fact, however, that Plutarch also records contrary arguments is striking. It is

this ambiguity which makes debates possible, debates on politics as well as personal morality; and this ambiguity is certainly an important aspect of the legacy of Plutarch to the Renaissance and to Shakespeare.

Concerning “honour,” we should note that in North’s Plutarch this term is not used. Brutus’s qualities are his “vertue” (333), “good name” (333), “estimacion” (335), “great calling” (337) and honesty (see 335 and 342). In Shakespeare’s play, however, “honour” is part of Brutus’s conception of himself. As he tells Cassius he “love[s] the name of honour more than [he] fear[s] death” (1.2.89). Pestrutto rightly points out that Brutus’s concept of honour is more sophisticated than King Henry’s, being “something that a man possesses inside of him” (66) rather than “a material possession to collect and hoard” (66). Brutus’s honour corresponds to definition 2.a. in the *OED*: “Personal title to high respect and esteem; honourableness; elevation of character; ‘nobleness of mind, scorn of meanness, magnanimity’ (J.); a fine sense of and strict allegiance to what is due or right”; whereas Henry only understands the term in the sense of definition 1.: “High respect, esteem or reverence, accorded to exalted worth or rank; deferential admiration or approbation [...] c. As received, firmly held or enjoyed: Glory, renown, fame; credit, reputation, good name.” Honour, according to definition 1., is certainly connected to chivalric discourse: Knights set out to achieve honour, in the sense of personal reputation or esteem, usually by fighting and overcoming antagonists who are less strong and valiant than themselves. Definition 2., first recorded in 1548 (in Edward Hall’s *Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*), could be considered to belong to the discourse of Renaissance humanism. The *locus classicus* is perhaps Erasmus’s pronouncement in his “*Institutio Principis Christiani*” (1515): “[puer] discat istos non veros esse honores, qui vulgo vocentur. Verum honorem decus esse, quod virtutem et recte facta suapte sponte consequatur [...]” (130-32).

If Brutus is (or considers himself) an honourable man in the modern, humanistic sense, we should note that honour according to other

definitions is also present in *Julius Caesar*, and that different kinds of honour are juxtaposed in a tantalizing way. When Brutus tells Cassius about his honour, Cassius takes up the thread, referring to honour according to definition 1.: "honour is the subject of my story" (1.2.92).<sup>8</sup> What he means is no inside quality but the fact that he, being a free man, is no longer esteemed as highly as another free man, Caesar (1.2.93-118), that he has become "a wretched creature, and must bend his body/ If Caesar carelessly but nod on him" (1.2.117-18). While Brutus and Cassius are having their conversation, "new honours" are being "heaped on Caesar" (1.2.133); this is an instance of yet another definition in the *OED*: "Something conferred or done as a token of respect or distinction; a mark or manifestation of high regard; *esp.* a position or title of rank, a degree of nobility, a dignity" (5.a.). In his speech to the Romans after the assassination Brutus makes an appeal to his honour:

Believe me for mine honour and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe [...] As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him: but as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears, for his love; joy, for his fortune; honour, for his valour; and death, for his ambition. (3.2.14-28)

Brutus's argument is quite simple: being an honourable man he declares that Caesar was ambitious; this is why Caesar had to die. In establishing this connection he inadvertently admits that Caesar is also entitled to "honour," if only in the chivalrous sense of reward for his valour. Since Brutus's audience did not have access to the *OED* or to the virtual dictionary in Brutus's mind, they could not be expected to notice these fine distinctions; and members of Shakespeare's audiences might have asked themselves if Brutus's honour was really superior to Caesar's. This ambiguity is the central weakness of Brutus's argument, and an opening for Mark Antony to tear Brutus's honour to pieces. Mark Antony is an unscrupulous demagogue, but his ironies could not be so effective if they were wholly baseless. In trying to act according to his notions of honour, which force him to suppress ambition in others, Brutus unconsciously displays his own ambition, i.e., he



assumes a role which—according to Elizabethan concepts of cosmic law—is not, and should not be his.<sup>9</sup> The effects of his honourable deed are disastrous: while Caesar could be accused of having banished one person unjustly (3.1.33-57), the new incumbents of power will draw up long lists of people who are to be executed immediately (4.1.1-17). The disturbance of the natural order caused by the murder of Caesar of course culminates in a civil war—the ‘horror of horrors’ to Shakespeare and many of his contemporaries.<sup>10</sup>

Is Brutus really represented as acting according to the demands of honour? His reputation is essential to the conspirators’ purpose because, as Caska remarks to Cassius, “that which would appear offence in us/ His countenance, like richest alchemy,/ Will change to virtue and to worthiness” (1.3.158-60). In other words, alchemy is needed to render a black deed a white one. This alchemy is to be provided by Brutus’s honour (*OED* 1.). In his subsequent soliloquy Brutus is also aware that a change of colour is needed to justify the killing of Caesar:

And since the quarrel  
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,  
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,  
Would run to these and these extremities. (2.1.28-31)

In order to be justified, the deed in question needs re-fashioning, re-colouring. In Brutus’s case, this is a process going on in his own mind, not (as with Caska and Cassius) in the public opinion of Rome. His honour (*OED* 2.) is obviously involved. However, while his honour appeared to guarantee the qualities of calmness and “patience” (1.2.168), so central to Stoicism (the school of philosophy which to Shakespeare’s contemporaries obviously epitomizes Roman virtues), at the time of his conversation with Cassius, his mind has since lost its balance.<sup>11</sup> This can be seen from the contorted syntax of his soliloquy as well as from his subsequent admission:

Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar  
I have not slept.  
Between the acting of a dreadful thing



And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream: [...] (2.1.61-65)

His torment of mind foreshadows that of later tragic Shakespearean heroes about to go wrong, most notably Macbeth (see, e.g., *Macbeth* 1.3.134-42 and 2.2.34-42).<sup>12</sup> The natural order of Brutus's mind rebels against killing Caesar, no matter what his honour (def. 2) may tell him. Even if understood in the 'modern' and humanist way, 'honour' appears to be ultimately meaningless.

No, Brutus is not Christ-like. His noble self-sacrifice does not have any redemptive power. He is—a Roman, embodying Roman qualities and faults: nobleness of mind and disregard for his personal safety and welfare as well as pride and excessive trust in his own virtues.<sup>13</sup> When in his later quarrel with Cassius Brutus remarks that he is "armed so strong in honesty" (4.3.67) that Cassius's threats do not impress him, his "priggish claim to self-sufficiency [...] is reminiscent of Caesar in 2.2 and 3.1," as David Daniell quotes Richard Proudfoot.<sup>14</sup>

As a Roman, Brutus is an instance of fallible humanity. His noble qualities and good intentions cannot save him from his responsibility for the death and suffering of many fellow-Romans nor from his own tragic fate. It is through the means of ambiguity and paradox that Shakespeare constructs (if not 'invents,' as Harold Bloom seems to contend) "the human," and it is the ambiguities and paradoxes of his sources, Holinshed as well as Plutarch, which provided Shakespeare with the material for this construction.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>References are to the Arden editions of Shakespeare's works, see "Works Cited."

<sup>2</sup>Cf., e.g., Morse, esp. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Kullmann, "Shakespeare and Peace" 47.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Kullmann, "Chivalry and Courtesy" 300-01.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. e.g. Bradley 254-60; Rabkin; Leggatt 114-38; Greenblatt 56-65; Kullmann, *William Shakespeare* 134-42.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Kullmann, "Biographische Geschichtsschreibung."

<sup>7</sup>Quotations from North's Plutarch are taken from the Appendix to the Arden edition of *Julius Caesar*.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell, 1.2.85-9 and 92, notes, and Miles 136-37.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Traversi's assessment: "'Honour' is in the way of becoming a trap set for those who, like Brutus, fail to temper idealism with a proper measure of self-awareness" (25).

<sup>10</sup>Cf., e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, "Prologue," 3-4; *Richard III* 5.5.35-39; *Richard II* 1.3.127-28; *Henry IV, Part 1* 1.1.9-13 etc.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Kullmann, *William Shakespeare* 151-55.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. *Julius Caesar* 2.1.63-65, note.

<sup>13</sup>On the 'Roman' qualities of Brutus's suicide cf. Miles 144-48.

<sup>14</sup>*Julius Caesar* 4.3.67, note; Proudfoot is quoted from a private conversation.

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## Ironic Oppositions and the Articulation of Dissent in Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller*

DAVID LAIRD

Burying of wives—  
As stale as shifting shirts—or for some servants  
To flout and gull their masters.  
*The English Traveller* (V.i.220-22)

Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller* gains a special urgency from the ironic oppositions that puzzle and provoke its audience. They are hinted at in the play's title, inscribed in its language and discursive strategies and, again, in the details of its narrative.<sup>1</sup> They find expression in a variety of ways, including the brutal sarcasm and ironic jibs that minor characters launch against those in power, in the ironic mismatch between what characters make of the situations in which they are embedded and the broader, less parochial view the audience is encouraged to take, and in the destabilizing effects of a narrative that is expected to head in one direction and ends up somewhere else. There is a discomfiting uncertainty about how characters will perform in spite of their confident bluster. Doubts expressed by some characters promote skepticism, even scorn, and distance the audience from what is happening on stage. These carefully crafted ironic devices, whether verbal, dramatic, or sequential, release a storm of ambiguous, competing responses and valuations.

One such device turns on the layering of meanings within a single utterance. A bit of linguistic wizardry brings the utterance into conversation with itself, as if one layer of meaning were conversing with or disputing against another, rippling the surface, as it were, and signifying what might otherwise have been left unsaid. And, repeatedly,

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there is an enveloping buzz or hum of irony to qualify whatever else a particular utterance manages to convey.

It is the aim of this paper to show that irony is the rhetorical mode that refines and extends the play's meanings even as it locates the play within identifiable genre boundaries, in effect, marking the play as satire. Among targets of attack are those domestic and social practices and attitudes that, in the playwright's view, pose a serious threat to the society to which he belongs. The play also takes aim at various dramatic conventions familiar to the theater of the day. The objects of satire are both societal and theatrical. Weapons of attack include mockery and ridicule as employed chiefly by minor characters who are less anxious than others about their social standing and able to voice more freely their amused disdain at the antics of those they serve. Their insistent and sustained commentary must have struck home with at least some members of the Cockpit audience when the play was first performed in what is likely to have been 1624 or soon after.<sup>2</sup> The audience, too, may have been amused, perhaps even saddened, by what characters in both plot and subplot are willing to undertake in blind pursuit of position and property. The display of callousness and hypocrisy as they close ranks in the final scene cannot have gone unnoticed. The climactic celebration of a same-sex marriage and the imagined succession by parthenogenesis would, perhaps, have had a special appeal to those in the audience with a taste for irony.

In the thematic structure of both plot and subplot, the notion of the house, the private domain, is crucial and informing. The leading issues, at least from the point of view of the house holding gentry, are the protection of the honor and integrity of the house and the orderly transfer of property. The play focuses on three households, the stability of each threatened, in the first instance by an unfaithful wife, in the second by a rebellious son, and in the third, by a jealous and demanding father. Women are implicated and eventually held accountable. The consoling, self-serving notion is advanced that their elimination,

either by death or banishment, restores domestic tranquility and insures the survival of all that is at risk.

Such, then, in broad outline is the progress the play charts, stripped of the tensions and controversies that enlarge its scope. The play is open-ended, so to speak, resistant to summary statement or resolution. Voices and behaviors compete for dominance and control in a space where events are insistently viewed from different perspectives and appealed to in support of different loyalties and allegiances. The resulting dialectic suggests that Heywood is less committed to defending social attitudes and practices than he is to making them accessible to analysis and dissection.

To stress Heywood's role as a social critic is to take exception to what is usually said about the play. And for most of the last century very little was said, the play relatively free from critical scrutiny. The exceptions are early and late. Norman Rabkin broke the silence in 1961. And in 1994, Lena Cowen Orlin devoted a chapter to *The English Traveller* in *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*. 1994 also saw the publication of Richard Rowland's illuminating essay on the play's historical and theatrical context and on its relationship to Plautine comedy. Each account bears the unmistakable imprint of critical practices and preoccupations favored in the academy at the time of composition; each reflects a prevailing critical temper or period style.

Rabkin focuses on the struggle of an especially benighted, ill-equipped, and untried character to rid himself of his illusions and to deal with things as they are. It is his experience in the world and, in particular, his several encounters with Mistress Wincott who functions in much the way that Spenser's Duessa does in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, though admittedly she does so in the very different environment of a domestic drama. In a series of episodes that recall the trials of the Redcrosse Knight, the hero learns to distinguish what seems to be from what is and thereby completes his "moral education" (Rabkin 3). Rabkin subscribes to a mode of literary study devoted to the elucidation of moral and humanistic values and fairly



representative of how literature was studied and taught in English Departments at least in America in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Against that background, it is not surprising that he should be less concerned with the formal or historical features of the play than with its thematic content and the trials of its leading character in his journey toward enlightenment. It is no less surprising that the essay is silent on issues of class and gender. In pursuit of what amounts to a singleness of purpose, Rabkin seems ready enough to desert the play or at least to limit his response to it. He leaves little doubt about how we are to think about it or about the ideology to which it conforms.<sup>3</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the studies by Orlin and Rowland. They focus on the social and historical environment and on issues of class and gender. Within a limited historical register, they explore a variety of interests under the direction of new historicism, feminist criticism, and, in Rowland's case, theater history. They track the work the play does to record and challenge prevailing social attitudes and behavior. Though the conclusions they reach could not be more dissimilar, their efforts must be credited with the re-direction of critical focus and energy, expanding, if not altogether erasing, more traditional boundaries of inquiry and inviting a crowd of new issues and valuations to take the field.

The effort to site a particular text in a social landscape is admirably carried forward in Orlin's *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*. She is primarily concerned with domestic relations in the period and, in particular, with questions of power and authority in the private sphere. Central to her thesis is the idea that house holding, property and possessions are key indexes to male identity. She contends that domestic life is rigged according to patterns of patriarchal authority and male privilege, that a man's home is his castle, and that women are often viewed as a threat to order and tranquility. *The English Traveller* plays a key role in her study, offering what she regards as unambiguous testimony in support of her thesis.

Orlin has no trouble in finding evidence of gender prejudice and bigotry in the play. There is no denying that the presiding male char-

acters treat women as either disruptive and troublesome or with such casual indifference and neglect that they fade into the background, ceasing to count in life or death. Attitudes expressed by Heywood's men rise to a level of misogyny too blatant to be denied. Orlin goes further: refusing to distance the playwright from his characters, she argues that the play is slanted in favor of male exclusivity and privilege, that it constitutes an uncontested denial of anything approaching gender equality. "The aim of this text," Orlin writes, "is its arduous reclamation of the domestic sphere from the intrusive female," an aim realized at the end of the play in what she describes as "Heywood's gynephobic closing fantasy" (252; 268).

For all their differences, Rabkin and Orlin agree in identifying Heywood as a defender of the status quo, a proponent, according to Rabkin, of traditional moral values, according to Orlin, of patriarchy and male privilege. Rabkin finds that the play comes down on the side of conventional morality. Orlin holds much the same view but argues that the morality in question is the product of a beleaguered, gender-insensitive, repressive society struggling against the forces of social change. Neither critic is prepared to discuss strategies or valuations beyond those that conform to what they regard as the ideological thrust of the play. Rowland, on the other hand, takes a more open, less reductive approach. He refuses to brand Heywood as a defender of the status quo, presenting him instead as a concerned witness to what is loathsome and disabling in his society. Rowland finds the gentry and, by implication, the codes of conduct to which they subscribe to be deeply flawed and deserving of the audience's contempt. He believes that Heywood, while seeking the audience's concurrence in that assessment, is at pains to exempt two characters of a different social class, holding them separate and making of them the comic heroes of the play. The characters in question are Roger, the good natured and companionable servant in the Wincott household, and Reignald, the witty and resourceful servant-protector of the dissolute and extravagant Young Lionel. Their presence leads Rowland to conclude that the comic spirit, though severely strained—particularly in the final

scene—manages somehow to weather the storm and to bring the play into conformity with the conventions of Plautine comedy. Thus he settles the question of genre, even as he concedes that within the comic closure there remain those “pretenders to wit whose sense of comedy [...] is governed by the drive for gain, people who are cultured but complacent or vicious” (Rowland 154).

My purpose is less to argue for or against one reading or another but rather to claim that, while the play may support such focused readings, it is not exhausted by them, that it invites a more complex, multilayered response. At the very least I hope to counter a tendency in recent criticism to downgrade the play as a single-minded defense of patriarchy and male privilege. I hope as well to show that genre properties play a crucial role in directing and qualifying our response.

Two English travelers, Young Geraldine and Old Lionel, returning from abroad, stir up their respective neighborhoods and trigger much of what follows. Old Lionel’s problem is to reclaim his house from a riotous crew who has occupied it during his absence and is now given entirely to drink and sex. Young Geraldine’s arrival poses a different sort of problem. His relationship with his father is severely strained when he becomes a frequent visitor in the house of neighbor Wincott, who embraces him as a prospective son and heir. That he enjoys Wincott’s favor and that of Wincott’s wife causes a rift between father and son. The father fears a scandal and takes steps to protect the family’s reputation. It appears that Young Geraldine’s involvement with the Wincotts will threaten the peace and tranquility of both households. Instead, the role he plays is that of an angry avenger, performing a surgical strike intended to rid the Wincott household of the corruption that lies hidden within. In due course, he regains his father’s approval and, at the same time, takes title as heir to the Wincott estate. The adulterous wife, having been discovered with her lover in the innermost recesses of the house, is brought forth, displayed, and carried away with the alarming and sanctimonious instruction that she seek redemption in death: “Die, and die soon [...] / But prithee, die repentant” (V.i.172-73).

The first scene introduces Young Geraldine and his friend Dalavill bound for the Wincotts where they join members of the family, the master and his young wife. Geraldine, recently returned from abroad, renews his acquaintance with the family and with Mistress Wincott whom he had known before her marriage and who, a servant reports, is now trapped in a January/ May marriage. It had once been assumed that she and Geraldine would marry. His decision to travel abroad put an end to the rumor and was a factor in her decision to marry Wincott. In their first private meeting after his return, Mistress Wincott declares that her marriage was "never wished nor sought" (II.i.231). At the same time she professes her respect for her "dear husband" (II.i.248) and that she does not regret her marriage (II.i.231-32). This is the more surprising because in her response to Geraldine it becomes clear that she would like to resume the intimacy she shared with him before her marriage. Geraldine is understandably nervous and embarrassed at this first meeting, declaring what is perfectly obvious to them both: "We now are left alone" (II.i.200). Mistress Wincott dismisses his concern: "[w]hy, say we be; who should be jealous of us?" and rather paradoxically adds that "[t]his is not first of many hundred nights/ That we two have been private; from the first of our acquaintance [...] We knew each other" (II.i.201-06). In the exchange that follows, she is clearly the more forthcoming, more venturesome, urging Geraldine to take up where he had left off and asking if he does not mean "to stretch it further" (II.i.251). This exercise in gamesmanship has a humorous side; there is Mistress Wincott boldly pressing ahead and Geraldine in demurral and retreat. His refusal to be drawn into what Mistress Wincott is broadly hinting at may spring from his sense of obligation to his host but it also suggests a reluctance to renew a relationship from which he had earlier fled. What happens now is in line with what we know of the earlier break and, at the same time, anticipates a second flight for which Geraldine prepares later in the play. At this juncture, his escape route lies through metaphor. The text he spins casts Mistress Wincott in the role of his exchequer, the keeper of all the treasures of his hopes and love which,

he adds, “were stored in” her and would have continued to be held in reserve were it not for his “unfortunate travel” (II.i.234 and 235). This excursion into a world of trade and commerce is followed by an even more unsettling proposal to refigure and interpret their relationship as that of brother and sister, at least until Wincott die and Mistress Wincott is free to confer her widowhood on him. The ingenuity with which these maneuvers are undertaken fails to obscure the harder truths of Geraldine’s performance. His reluctance to become involved suggests at the very least an abiding fear of intimacy and a failure of erotic energy, aspects of behavior even more pronounced later in the play.

A clue about how we are to regard Geraldine and his circle is inscribed in what they say and in the distinctive tones and rhythms of their speech. There is, for example, the extravagant, sometimes overbearing language of power. We know from the outset that Old Geraldine is disposed to think the worst of Mistress Wincott. Dalavil, Iago-like and for reasons of his own, feeds the fire of suspicion when he confides to Old Geraldine that the wife could hardly be blamed “hugging so weak an old man in her arms,/ To make a new choice of an equal youth/ Being in him so perfect” (III.i.61-63). He hastens to add that, of course, he thinks her honest. Old Geraldine becomes even more suspicious when Wincott and his wife beg him to allow Young Geraldine to return with them after their visit. The father refuses and Young Geraldine, after seeing the guests on their way, rejoins his father and is treated to a heavy dose of fatherly advice. The twin themes are the ruinous consequences of an adulterous relationship and the general untrustworthiness of women.

The speech is remarkably revealing of the habits of mind that identify the character and the ironic misfirings and abuses to which they contribute:

How men are born  
To woo their own disasters. [...]  
This second motion makes it palpable.  
To note a woman’s cunning: make her husband







ever be the cause of scandal, he would willingly endure “the greatest implacable mischief/ Adultery can threaten” (III.i.221-22). He continues to speak in his own behalf by providing a catalogue of Mistress Wincott’s virtues. The idealizing portrait is no less stereotypical than was his father’s misogynistic one. The two portraits attempt to present a common subject and that neither comes close to the mark should not go unnoticed:

For that lady,  
 As she is beauty’s mirror, so I hold her  
 For chastity’s examples: from her tongue  
 Never came language that arrived my ear  
 That even censorious Cato, lived he now,  
 Could misinterpret; never from her lips  
 Came unchaste kiss; or from her constant eye  
 Look savouring of the least immodesty.  
 Further—

(III.i.224-32)<sup>4</sup>

Old Geraldine cries “Enough.” (III.i.232). He refuses to hear more of this wonderfully inflated and artful rehearsal of chastity’s examples. For all the detail, it remains strikingly impersonal, generalized, insubstantial, a fleeting reflection in beauty’s mirror, unrivalled, hyperbolic, absolute, unimpeachable, and as far as any human sitter is concerned, totally unrecognizable. Old Geraldine, unimpressed by the spinning rhetoric, returns to the matter at hand and extracts from his son a promise to have no more dealings with the Wincotts.

Rabkin has alerted us to the deployment of familiar stereotypes, but I cannot agree that the result is simply to reinforce them. The introduction in this scene of opposing sexual stereotypes suggests that there is more at stake than their vindication. What occurs hardly spells victory for one or the other, but rather shows what trouble follows from their uncritical deployment. Throughout the play characters have trouble with stereotypes and categories of thought. The mental world in which they stumble is severely narrowed and constrained.

They also, not surprisingly, have trouble with their vocabulary. Heywood is extraordinarily adept at exploiting the comic vulnerability that erupts from the mismatch between word and idiom on the one

hand and the non-verbal world on the other. Early in the play Dalavil steps out of the frame of the narrative to remark on the absurd distortions and betrayals to which language contributes. His observation is casual enough but its import becomes less so as the metaphors in question work their way through the entire text. His aside is prompted by a rush of sustained wordplay in which Old Geraldine's generosity in "lending" his son is likened to the practice of "moneyed men" who would ordinarily charge interest but for friends charge nothing. Mistress Wincott picks up the figure, saying that such friends incur a debt they cannot pay. Her sister chimes in with the notion that the longer the debt is allowed to run the greater the indebtedness. Old Geraldine is not to be outdone in dueling courtesies. He tells them they are a good risk because the return of principal is reckoned in "such large use of thanks" (III.i.23). This yoking together of commerce and courtesy is too much for Dalavil: "What strange felicity these rich men take/ to talk of borrowing, lending and of use,/ The usurer's language right" (III.i.24-26).

The introduction of the commercial idiom here and elsewhere in the play opens a gap between what characters say and what the audience hears them say. Thus what is presumed to be the intended or literal meaning is set against a context where the words do not fit, where they jar and produce friction. The invasion of financial metaphors into a sphere of discourse where they are not expected, where they remain somehow foreign and unfamiliar, constitutes a violation of decorum and, at the very least, raises the level of critical awareness.<sup>5</sup> Instances of this linguistic crossing or philandering are too numerous to be ignored.

Old Geraldine falls into a commercial idiom when he enumerates the possible consequences of what he mistakenly understands his son to be proposing: "Forfeit thy reputation here below/ And th'interest that thy soul might claim above/ In yon blest city" (III.ii.198-200). The verb "forfeit" would seem to ring true enough. There is Isabella's example in *Measure for Measure* where she reminds Angelo that "All the souls that were were forfeit once" (II.ii.73). But the notion of ac-

crued interest paid out in the next world invites a more complex response. The suggestion is that Young Geraldine's lease on both reputation and eternal life would expire were he to proceed as his father thinks he will. The conjunction of worldly reputation and eternal life, implying that they are somehow equal and complementary, strikes a discordant note.

Imagery of bookkeeping and banking shows up again when Young Geraldine confronts Mistress Wincott with the goods; proof, that is, of her adultery, what he calls an "ear-witness" account. To her lament "I am undone," Geraldine admonishes her: "But think what thou hast lost/ To forfeit me" (V.i.159-60). It is an extraordinary utterance suggesting among other things that she has made a bad bargain, losing what was "fixed [...] and unalterable" (V.i.161) so as to forfeit him, to give him up, more literally, to venture beyond him. A second meaning suggests that she has paid a price to make a mockery of him, to put him down as trivial, so much small change, and a penalty that might be paid as in a game of forfeits. It offers some measure of Geraldine's character that at this climatic meeting he should dwell on his own grievances to the exclusion of everyone and everything else. His language from here to the end of the play some hundred lines later carries with it this subversive or ironic component. Take, for example, the arraignment of Mistress Wincott that is as hyperbolic and extravagant as was his earlier blazon of praise. He likens her first to a Siren drawing men to their destruction and then takes his ammunition from a biblical and theological registry:

O, thou mankind's seducer.  
     [...] thou adulteress,  
 That hast more poison in thee than the serpent  
 Who was the first that did corrupt thy sex,  
 The devil! (V.i.122-27)

The denunciation parades the traditional weapons of a misogynistic attack but collapses of its own weight. The rhetorical overkill cannot pass unnoticed. Geraldine's hostility is boundless; it is as if he were to adapt that long-discredited and politically incorrect adage to proclaim

that the only good woman is a dead woman: "Die, and die soon; acquit me of my oath,/ But prithee, die repentant" (V.i.172-73). His outburst is far in excess of what the situation calls for and distressingly self-serving.

The action of the play is set initially at the margin, so to speak, and moves progressively closer to the core or center of the Wincott house through what are identified as its public rooms, then its hallways and corridors, advancing even to the door of the master bedroom. The movement reverses that of the subplot where the inside is turned outside. Here the outside is penetrated and peeled away. Young Geraldine believes that he has reclaimed the site from evil, exorcised the corruption that lay within. For all the commendation he receives in the final scene, the audience is likely to be outraged by his flagrant insensitivity and indifference to the suffering of others. That assessment is not altogether eclipsed by the play's final, festive celebration. The characters gather for what was to have been Geraldine's second leave-taking. What they are treated to, instead, is a homecoming, a wedding feast, and, at least for the male survivors, a ceremony of ritual bonding.

The subplot provides a skillful parody of the main action. In both, the secrets of the house are laid bare. Old Lionel's household is quite literally dismantled, its contents carried to the street and hauled away. Old Lionel is temporarily out of the country. In his absence, Young Lionel, a drunken, fun-loving layabout, together with the courtesan Blanda and assorted hangers-on are in possession of the house. Their activities are reported by Young Geraldine who delights his auditors with a detailed account of what he has seen from the street. The occupants of the house, we are told, having drunk more than they should, are convinced that the house is a ship in the midst of a great storm and about to sink. A lookout

Reports a turbulent sea and tempest towards,  
And wills them, if they'll save their ship and lives,  
To cast their lading overboard. At this  
All fall to work, and hoist into the street,

As to the sea, what next come to their hand:  
 Stools, tables, trestles, trenchers, bedsteads,  
 cups, pots, plate and glasses. (II.i.146-52)

The house is literally being unpacked, its contents tossed out. A crowd gathers to claim the lucky find. The situation is the more ironic when we consider that even as Young Lionel and his mates are dismantling the house, his father struggles through the world to add to its store:

the one greys

His head with care, endures the parching heat  
 And biting cold, the terrors of the lands  
 And fears at sea in travel, only to gain  
 Some competent estate to leave his son.  
 Whiles all that merchandise through gulfs, cross-tides,  
 Pirates and storms he brings so far, the other  
 Here shipwracks in the harbour. (II.i.93-100)

Predictably the father returns. An all too capable servant Reignald is enlisted to save his young master from discovery. When the father does show up, Reignald dissuades him from entering the house by convincing him that an angry ghost is in residence following the commission of a crime. He, for a time at least, fails to penetrate the crime scene. Both he and the audience are denied access.

Having managed one hurdle, Reignald is called upon to scale another. He must explain the disappearance of some £500 that Young Lionel has borrowed in his father's absence and squandered, on food, drink, and entertainment. The loan plus interest is due. Reignald invents a tale of shrewd dealing. The money was invested in property on which Young Lionel has made a killing. His father is delighted and asks to inspect the property. He is delighted to discover that it is the house of his neighbor Ricott. It then falls to Reignald to inform the neighbor that Old Lionel wishes to visit the house without, of course, revealing to Ricott that Lionel believes the house to be his. A visit is arranged and a hilarious scene follows in which the dialogue moves on parallel tracks, a brilliant exchange in which each speaker is deaf to

the other's meaning. In addition to its display of Reignald's dazzling ingenuity, the scene illustrates a desire on the part of Old Lionel to think well of his son, indeed a willingness to put himself at risk in order to sustain the illusion that his son is blameless and above reproach. It comes as no surprise, then, that Lionel finds it in his heart to forgive his son when the extent of his waywardness is revealed. There is, however, one condition that Young Lionel must meet. His father demands that the woman with whom his son is living be sent packing. It is all too characteristic of the social world depicted in the play that it is a woman whose removal restores domestic order and tranquility. To accommodate his father and, perhaps more to the point, to insure his financial future, Young Lionel conforms. He abandons the woman for whom he had declared "an affection fixed and permanent" (I.ii.200). He dismisses the affair as "mere shadows, toys and dreams, / now hated more than erst I doted on" (IV.vi.263-64). Young Lionel's performance is that of a grubby hypocrite. The implication is that Blanda, homeless and deserted, deserves much better than she gets. Father and son join a final gathering to which they have been invited by Wincott.

Dissenting voices continue to be raised by the servants, more alert to what goes on around them than their masters. As household spies and brief chroniclers, they register their disenchantment, their comments being often condescending and sardonic.<sup>6</sup> Typically, the servant Bess tries to warn the uncomprehending Geraldine:

You bear the name of landlord, but another  
Enjoys the rent; you dote upon the shadow,  
But another he bears away the substance. (III.iii.70-72)

Geraldine can only ask her to "be more plain" (III.iii.73). Again, when he comes to the defense of his friend, Bess speaks her wisdom against his empty-headedness: "Come, come, he is what he is, / And that the end will prove" (III.iii.51-52).

The servant Reignald is similarly outspoken when it suits him to be so. He concludes his elaborate intrigue with the proviso that, unless he is assured of his pardon, he will stand:



Like a statue in the forefront of your house  
 For ever, like the picture of Dame Fortune  
 Before the Fortune playhouse. (IV.vi.296-98)

An appropriate image, certainly, in view of his efforts to direct the lives of others. About his performance, Old Lionel is moved to say "Counselled well;/ Thou teachest me humanity" (IV.i.94-95). That this remark comes in response to prudent business advice that Reignald has seen fit to offer is, to say the least, ironic. That Old Lionel construes the advice to be a lesson in humanity tells us that his pursuit of gain is both all consuming and humorless. The context frames the remark as an ironic joke, the import of which is lost on him. Here again a character is heard to say more than he means. His conduct later in the play shows no sign that he has learned humanity or anything else that would significantly affect his dealings with others.

If this exchange fails to enhance Reignald's role as moral tutor, it does confirm his success as playwright and satirist even as he announces his retirement:

I was the fox,  
 But I from henceforth will no more the cox-  
 Comb put upon your pate. (IV.vi.327-29)

In the final scene, whatever sympathy gets expressed for Mistress Wincott comes from the servants. When she asks to be carried from the stage, it is Roger who is moved to exclaim "My sweet mistress" (V.i.206), but the best Young Lionel can do is to rationalize her distress by turning to a sexual stereotype in what Richard Rowland so aptly describes as a piece of fatuous misogyny (153):

A woman's qualm,  
 Frailties that are inherent to her sex,  
 Soon sick, and soon recovered. (V.i.211-13)

And it is Reignald who delivers the final, ironic summing-up. Wincott declares that the loss of his wife would leave him more wretched than were he to forfeit life and estate. Old Geraldine muses that "I the like/

Suffered when I my wife brought unto her grave" (V.i.216-17). Neighbor Ricott, in response to Geraldine, reminds him that such losses "are not new, but common" (V.i.220). The complacency of the observation triggers Reignald's cynical aside. He is clearly abashed by the callous indifference of those around him:

Burying of wives  
as stale as shifting shirts—or for some servants  
To flout and gull their masters. (V.i.220-22)

The lines suggest that the burying of wives is as "stale" in the sense of being as trite, hackneyed, unremarkable as is the act of changing a piece of clothing that one puts on or takes off at will, or, in a different register, something as predictable as for servants to scoff at and cheat their masters, activities alike in being unexceptional, run-of-the-mill, commonplace. The speech shares in that generalizing impulse encountered elsewhere in the play, particularly in the pronouncements of the Geraldines, father and son. Whereas their utterances sputtered out like unplugged balloons, what Reignald says, though no less encompassing, has more staying power and thrust. The audience is alert to the sarcasm, knows he does not mean what he says, is in control of his discourse where the other speakers are not. The analogies he offers identify the behavior in question as unremarkable, when, of course, it constitutes a monstrous travesty of accepted social practice. The speech gains added authority by virtue of its colloquial and proverbial style. Paradoxically, it claims a universality even as it signals a rootedness in history. Behind the image of shifting shirts lurks a proverb that does, in fact, have a history. Tilley, for example, cites versions beginning in 1596 and continuing well into the next century (600); its meaning is a matter of local usage, acquired over time and native to a particular place and culture.<sup>7</sup> Its down-home, street-smart domesticity lends credibility to Reignald's attempt to capture a sense of outrage at what is happening.

No sooner has he voiced his concern than a character identified in the cast list only as "the owner of the house supposed to be pos-

essed" breaks in to remind the gathering that Mistress Wincott may still be among the living: "Best to send/ And see how her fit holds her" (V.i.222-23). His auditors, having already resigned themselves to the idea of her death, have moved on to commiserate with each other. It is striking that it should fall to this minor player, an aggrieved victim of a slander perpetrated in Young Lionel's defense, to remind the group of what they have seemingly forgotten. His concern is immediately answered when Prudentilla and Roger enter with word that Mistress Wincott is dead. They are in possession of a letter from her. It is perhaps the more ironic that, having been exiled from this final scene, Mistress Wincott is now represented by proxy. Young Geraldine answers the news of her death with an almost instantaneous cost-benefit analysis. In an aside, he reckons that by dying she gives him "a free release/ Of all the debts I owed her" (V.i.229-30). The audience seems likely to conclude that Mistress Wincott, having so recently been bedded by Dalavill, is now violated a second time. Wincott's concluding lines hardly redress the balance. An initial insult is embedded in his declaration that the sequence of events which the occasion would seem to require will be reversed, the celebratory banquet to come before the funeral rites. No less demeaning is his curiously contrived endorsement of the duplicity with which "gallants" celebrate the deaths of "thrifty fathers":

First feast, and after mourn; we'll, like some gallants  
That bury thrifty fathers, think't no sin  
To wear blacks without, but other thoughts within. (V.i.261-63)

If, as Fredric Bogel has recently written, "satire works to produce a kind of defamiliarization of the object that is also a recovery of our own capacity for disapproval and rejection," then what transpires here fills the bill, so to speak, jarring the audience and securing its disapproval (51).

The play invites an ironic response, particularly with respect to the exclusivity that prevails in the last scene. What was to have been a matter of leave-taking and farewell turns to marriage:

This meeting that was made  
Only to take of you a parting leave  
Shall now be made a marriage of our love  
Which none save only death shall separate. (V.i.253-56)

Even as the characters gather in celebration, the theater audience is reminded of what has been excluded. Closets have been cleared, private chambers emptied out, possessions distributed in a fury of general housecleaning that creates a space without women, a second, sanitized Eden. The adulterers have been dealt with. Dalavil, like Wendell in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, takes up life as an English traveler and Mistress Wincott is conveniently dispatched. The housecleaning has been more extensive than in the earlier play, generally conceded to have furnished a model for *The English Traveller*. The plays have much in common; both are, of course, dramas of adultery, both feature the death of an errant woman, the escape into exile of her lover, and the necessary adjustment in domestic relationships occasioned by her death. But the differences are even more striking, not surprising in view of some twenty years between their first performances. The earlier play falls within the domain of domestic tragedy; the later play enlists quite different genre conventions.<sup>8</sup> One can only speculate but it seems likely that, in reshaping the material of the earlier play, Heywood was mindful of the changing tastes of his audience and not altogether supportive of them. While acceding to the popularity of tragicomedy, he seems anxious to draw attention to the moral ambiguities that come to light in the negotiations required to reach a safe harbor and the joy and appeasement of all parties. The careful artfulness by which tragicomedy gains its comic reprieve seems to have sparked Heywood's displeasure, that is, if we reckon with the moral lapses for which the surviving characters in the last scene of *The English Traveller* may still be held accountable. The unchecked complacency with which they divide the spoils is overlaid by an aching awareness of the exclusivity and unfairness of the proceedings. In a word, the scene strikes a note of protest and turns a satirical gaze as much on a fashionable theatrical convention as on codes of

domestic behavior. The convention is observed, parodied, and freighted with an irony that touches theatrical practice even as it skewers male vanity and narrow-mindedness. In that respect, *The English Traveller* approaches what Heywood in *An Apology for Actors* holds to be the purpose of comedy: “to show others their slovenly and unhandsome behavior, that they may reform that simplicity in themselves, which others make their sport ” (F3v-F4f).<sup>9</sup>

The articulation of forms of resistance, including a series of ironic disclosures, transports the audience beyond the misogynistic fog that surrounds the leading characters to a broader vista where they appear as objects of satire, if not as something more sinister. Heywood is not best known as a satirist, but, if his aim is to turn the sweep of irony against the hypocrisies and preconceptions that outfit the domestic world to which the play takes title, then there may be reason to look again at the nature and scope of his achievement.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Richard Rowland for the suggestion that the title carries a double meaning: “the title of the play may have suggested another (misleading) clue as to Young Geraldine’s intentions; ‘traveller,’ with a pun on ‘travailer,’ commonly indicates someone engaged in (usually illicit) sexual activity [...]” Rowland remarks that Young Geraldine—the returned traveler—“appears to be singularly unsuitable for the mandatory role of seducer” (141 and 156n13).

<sup>2</sup>Paul Merchant in his introduction to *Three Marriage Plays* believes that *The English Traveller* and *The Captives* were both written to be performed at the *Cockpit*. The similarities between the two plays and the probable dating of *The Captives* in 1624 suggest that *The English Traveller* was composed before 1624 and performed not long after: “not only are both plots from both plays retold in *Gunaikeion*, both also contain companion plots derived from Plautus” (14). He concludes by saying that more specific evidence of the date of performance would be welcome. Heywood chose to publish the play in 1633. The publication of Heywood’s *Gunaikeion: or Nine Bookes of Various History, Concerning Women*, in 1624 is important for a number of reasons including its link to *The English Traveller*. In so far as it consti-



tutes an impassioned defense of women, it would seem a burden to those who present Heywood as a misogynist.

<sup>3</sup>Heywood's aim, according to Rabkin, is to show how perilous it is to proceed without benefit of what is tried and true, of what conforms to custom and usage, whether in the theater or beyond. Social conventions and stereotypes are introduced, then fractured, and eventually shown to be, in some respects at least, indispensable. There emerges a caution that resists novelty and innovation and is prepared to defend the familiar and consensual.

<sup>4</sup>See Karen Bamford for a consideration of the changing definitions of virginity and chastity in Protestant England (131-32; 157). Bamford writes that "married chastity rather than 'nunnish virginity' became the ideal state for women" (31).

<sup>5</sup>The best discussion of financial imagery is provided by Rowland (148-49). He comes to the topic by way of an extended and illuminating analysis of *Mostellaria* and Plautine comic structure. He finds that "financial imagery is pervasive in Plautus and so it is in Heywood's adaptation for the subplot; in the main plot it is, and will continue to be obsessive" (148).

<sup>6</sup>Rowland makes a telling point about class difference: "the separation of 'low' comedy from 'high' seriousness has been deliberately overturned. The Aristotelian equation of elevated social rank with moral stature [...] had never had much appeal for Heywood the dramatist; in this play he relinquishes it for good" (154).

<sup>7</sup>Among the versions cited by Tilley (S356) is one drawn from Thomas Lodge, *A Margarite of America* (1595) 69: "Close fits my shirt but closer my skin"; and one from William Camden, *Certaine Prouerbs, Poems, or Poesies, Epigrams, Rythmes, and Epitaphs* from *Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britain* (1614): "Close sitteth my shirt, but closer my skinne" (305). Reignald's "shifting" means to change or replace, as, for example, in *Cymbeline* when a member of the court advises Cloten to "shift a shirt" and Cloten replies: "If my shirt were bloody, then to shift it" (I.ii.1-5).

<sup>8</sup>Heywood's problem in reshaping the material of the earlier play must have been to devise a strategy that would accommodate a tragicomic ending. His solution is an ingenious one. The adultery trio of the earlier play, wife, husband, and lover, is transformed into a quartet. The advantage is that by doubling the role of the lover, one character is expendable and his counterpart can remain on hand to facilitate the happy ending. The audience first sees Young Geraldine in the role of the lover. When the surrogate Dalavil succeeds him, the audience responds accordingly and a quartet begins to form. Mistress Wincott pairs with Dalavil and Young Geraldine with Wincott. The adulterous pair is dismissed and the remaining pair is allowed to celebrate a same-sex marriage at the play's conclusion, thereby effecting a tragicomic resolution to what in the earlier play developed into tragedy.

<sup>9</sup>Qtd. by Rowland 154. When in the *Apology*, Heywood assigns to the clown the task of showing others "their slovenly and unhandsome behavior," it is as if he



were anticipating the job of work performed by Reignald and Roger in *The English Traveller*.

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## Feminine Agency and Feminine Values in *Venice Preserved*: A Response to Elizabeth Gruber\*

KATHARINE M. ROGERS

It appears to me that Elizabeth Gruber's "'Betray'd to Shame': *Venice Preserved* and the Paradox of She-Tragedy" diminishes Thomas Otway's play by reducing it to a she-tragedy that focuses on a female protagonist in order to display her victimization. This genre was promoted by the appearance of actresses after the Restoration, although it should be remembered that one of its finest examples, John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, appeared long before there was an actress to play the leading role. And it is true that *Venice Preserved* offers its audience the spectacle of the sufferings of a beautiful woman. However, it rises far above the limitations of that genre as practiced by writers like John Banks and Thomas Southerne. Belvidera is not a passive victim. Confident that her feminine values of love, tenderness, attachment to family, and abhorrence of bloodshed are superior to the masculine political goals of the conspirators, she actively advances her values by pressuring Jaffeir into revealing the rebels' conspiracy to the Senate. She is responsible for her fate in that this action precipitates her destruction, as well as that of Jaffeir and Pierre. Her death scene does not merely evoke pity for a suffering woman character, but makes us painfully aware that the indispensable values she represents—love, compassion, humanity—are constantly destroyed in a man's world. To emphasize this point, Otway concluded his play with her totally bleak death. There is a tragic resolution in the death of the two men, as Pierre dies with his values intact and Jaffeir redeems himself as a man by saving his friend from

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\*Reference: Elizabeth Gruber, "'Betray'd to Shame': *Venice Preserved* and the Paradox of She-Tragedy," *Connotations* 16.1-3 (2006/2007): 158-71.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debgruber01613.htm>>.

being debased by torture and then killing himself. Masculine values are thrillingly affirmed, and John Dryden or Nathaniel Lee would have dropped the curtain there. Otway, however, not accepting that comforting resolution, went on to show us what has been lost. Belvidera, the only character untainted by selfishness and cruelty, cannot have an uplifting death, because the values which give meaning to Jaffeir's and Pierre's deaths have none for her, and the values she advocates cannot survive in a patriarchal society. The final words of the play express Priuli's recognition, too late, of the harm done by "cruel fathers"—or patriarchy. Masculine values triumph in *Venice Preserved*, but Otway makes clear that they triumph at the expense of equally important feminine values; thus he does not reassert "tragedy as a masculine space" (Gruber 159).

Gruber's reading of *Venice Preserved* "as an adaptation of *Othello*" (159) further distracts from Otway's main theme: the conflict between two incompatible sets of values, both of which are valid and both limited. The plot element of a heroine marrying a man unacceptable to her father is too common to constitute a significant similarity. Venice in Shakespeare's play is an exotic setting where a Moor might plausibly command the armies of the state. In Otway's, it has powerful significance as an ancient republic where ideals of liberty and equality were still resonant. Political concerns are fundamental in *Venice Preserved*, while the tragedy in *Othello* is personal, despite the hero's public importance. The leading characters are strikingly different: unlike Desdemona, Othello, and Iago, Belvidera is an active agent, Jaffeir is torn between conflicting ideals, and, most important, Pierre is not a villain. He fights and is ready to die for worthy masculine values—loyalty between male friends, patriotism, liberty, and justice. The conflict in *Othello* is clearly between good and evil; that in *Venice Preserved* has good and evil on both sides—peace and established order versus revolution against corrupt, oppressive government. It is fitting that Othello kills himself, because he is expiating his guilt; but Belvidera's death is surely not a poetically just punishment "for encroaching upon Jaffeir and Pierre's relationship and muddying

political waters with the force of her desire" (168). She was right to encroach, for Pierre misleads Jaffeir from his true nature and a revolution led by obviously flawed men ought to be averted. Nor is she an "unwitting victim," who is "never fully a participant in the action" (169); for she is responsible for the revelation of the plot.

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## Unmanning the Self: The Troublesome Effects of Sympathy in Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*. A Response to Elizabeth Gruber\*

ROLAND WEIDLE

In her essay "'Betray'd to Shame': *Venice Preserved* and the Paradox of She-Tragedy" Elizabeth Gruber reads Otway's play as a deliberate adaptation of *Othello*. She argues that the "she-tragedy" paradoxically reasserts tragedy as a male space and as a site of male privilege by presenting the heroine Belvidera as a threat to male bonds. Viewing the play along these lines is plausible and corresponds to other readings of *Venice Preserv'd* which focus on the tension between male public sphere and female private space.<sup>1</sup> I would like to argue, however, that Belvidera as representative of her sex is not "a means of disrupting political machinations" (Gruber 163) in the male realm and thus does not in herself pose a threat to the men in the play. Instead, the threat to male bonding lies inside the male protagonist Jaffeir, who in the course of the play is confronted with two mutually exclusive models of self-perception.

Derek Hughes has convincingly shown that *Venice Preserv'd* radically questions the concept of a stable personal identity and that it instead offers a Hobbesian perspective on the self:

[...] the self offers no stability, for its essence is incoherence and dislocation, and the characters are subject to uncontrollable shifts of intention and outlook in which reason is revealed as the slave and creation of material desires.  
(300)

He even views Jaffeir as "a precursor of the case later postulated by Locke" (301), referring to Locke's famous *fission examples* in his *Essay*

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\*Reference: Elizabeth Gruber, "'Betray'd to Shame': *Venice Preserved* and the Paradox of She-Tragedy," *Connotations* 16.1-3 (2006): 158-71.

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*Concerning Human Understanding*, where the philosopher argues that theoretically one body could contain two consciousnesses.<sup>2</sup> Hughes concludes that Jaffeir is a Lockean subject illustrating that the “shifts between the irreconcilable claims of competing memories reveal human character to be an unstable, fluctuating complex of discrete, externally derived sensations” (302). Although I agree with Hughes in his assessment of Jaffeir as an illustration of the unstable nature of the human self, I disagree with him as to the precise nature of that instability. Rather than viewing it in Lockean terms as the result of consciousness and memory, I see it connected to the discourse on sympathy that emerged in the late seventeenth century.

At a first glance Jaffeir, as the central figure in the play, is characterized by the traditional conflict of loyalties: on the one side to his friend Pierre, who demands that he join the rebellion against the senate, on the other side to his wife Belvidera, the senator’s daughter, who begs him to reveal the plot and betray his friends. Under closer scrutiny, however, the conflict turns out to be less between competing alliances and more between different modes of self-perception. Belvidera in this sense threatens Jaffeir’s self but she does so through his imagination and his perception of himself and her, as can be seen in the following lines where he reflects on the fate of his banished wife:

Ah *Pierre!* I have a Heart, that could have born  
 The roughest Wrong my Fortune could have done me:  
 But when I think what *Belvidera* feels,  
 The bitterness her tender spirit tastes of,  
 I own my self a Coward: Bear my weakness,  
 If throwing thus my Arms about thy Neck,  
 I play the boy, and blubber in thy bosome.  
 Oh! I shall drown thee with my Sorrows! (1.270-77)<sup>3</sup>

Imagination plays a vital role in Adam Smith’s understanding of sympathy, as expressed in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It not only enables us to become social beings but it also affects our sense of identity. For Smith, the ability to imagine to ourselves the feelings and



thoughts of others comes close to transgressing the boundaries of our self:

It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, *we enter as it were into his body*, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensation, and even feel something, which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.<sup>4</sup>

Smith's notion of sympathy has been repeatedly viewed as a precursor of George Herbert Mead's interactional concept of the self<sup>5</sup> which needs others to come into being, a claim supported by the following passage in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where the author stresses the importance of exchange and communication in identity formation:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. [...] Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before.<sup>6</sup>

But sympathy also has its downside, it not only constitutes but also endangers the self. Smith's concept requires a precarious balance between transgressing and fortifying the boundaries of identity.<sup>7</sup> If the "spectator" and the "actor" (terms repeatedly used by Smith to denote the sympathetic onlooker and the sufferer) are not able to exercise a certain degree of restraint in their "fellow-feeling"<sup>8</sup> and suffering, sympathetic communication and a successful formation of the self will fail.

It is Jaffeir's propensity to sympathize with his wife and her plight, to think himself into her mind, or, as Adam Smith writes, to put himself in her "case,"<sup>9</sup> that weakens his resolve and makes him adopt a sentimental mode of communication ("throwing my Arms about thy Neck," "blubber in thy bosome," "drown thee with my Sorrows"), which throughout the play is described as effeminate and dangerous

to the male self. Jaffeir himself repeatedly reflects on the effeminizing influence of sympathy on his self<sup>10</sup> and is particularly susceptible to Belvidera's non-verbal, kinetic forms of interaction that undermine his masculinity:

*Jaff.* Nay, *Belvidera*, do not fear my cruelty,  
 Nor let the thoughts of death perplex thy fancy,  
 But answer me to what I shall demand,  
 With a firm temper and unshaken spirit.  
*Belv.* I will when I've done weeping—  
*Jaff.* Fie, no more on't—  
 How long is't since the miserable day  
 We wedded first—  
*Belv.* Oh h h.  
*Jaff.* Nay, keep in thy tears,  
 Lest they unman me too.  
*Belv.* Heaven knows I cannot;  
 The words you utter sound so very sadly,  
 These streams will follow [...] (5.251-60)<sup>11</sup>

Jaffeir's propensity to emulate his wife's sympathetic code of interaction is also noticed and commented upon by Pierre, who equally defines it as unmanly and detrimental to their plot:

[...] what, hunt  
 A Wife on the dull foil! sure a stanch Husband  
 Of all Hounds is the dullest? wilt thou never,  
 Never be wean'd from Caudles and Confections?  
 What feminine Tale hast thou been listening to,  
 Of unayr'd shirts; Catharrs and Tooth Ache got  
 By thin-sol'd shoos? (3.2.219-25)

Assessing the textual evidence so far it does indeed seem—as Gruber and others have indicated—that women or rather, as argued above, their particular form of emotionally charged, sympathetic interaction, pose a threat to the male community and that, as Pat Gill states, men in the play can only arrive at an acceptable sense of (male) selfhood through “the objectification of women” (“Pathetic Passions” 199). But Jaffeir does not succeed in objectifying Belvidera and resolving his conflict. This has to do with the fact that he is subjected to yet another

mode of sympathetic interaction represented by his friend Pierre, and it is the oscillation between these two competing interactional modes that accounts for Jaffeir's destabilized self.

Julie Ellison has convincingly argued that sensibility as cultural paradigm and attitude already existed in the late seventeenth century and that it was employed by a male, politically oriented group:

Late seventeenth-century sensibility manifested itself in the civic prestige and mutual friendship practiced by men of equally high social status. The dilemmas of Whig masculinity turned on the problem of negotiating between the power of indifference, or emotional discipline, and the power of sensibility. Sensibility as a cultural ethos took shape in England significantly earlier than we once thought, as part of the culture of elite men with an affinity for republican narratives and parliamentary opposition. (9)<sup>12</sup>

For Ellison, the political environment of the late seventeenth century was a fertile ground for male bonding that was practised as sensibility within "affectionate communities" (25). The nature of this bond, however, is asymmetrical and characterized by a "dignified upper-class sufferer whose very self-control provokes his friends to vicarious tears" (10). Ellison draws attention to the fact that in *Venice Preserv'd* it is Pierre who represents the stoical, self-controlled part whereas Jaffeir stands for the passionate other half displaying sympathy and emotion.<sup>13</sup> Jaffeir engages in two sympathetic relationships at the same time, which poses a problem for him. On the one hand, his vivid imagination leads him to sympathize with his wife and her fate, a propensity that he reflects upon and views as dangerous to his sense of (masculine) self, on the other hand, he is a member of the affectionate male community of the conspirators and sympathizes with his friend Pierre, thus doing what is expected of him and what is meant to strengthen his male identity.<sup>14</sup> Therefore sympathetic interaction poses a double-bind for Jaffeir: it constitutes and at the same time undermines identity.

The threat to Jaffeir's self therefore does not, as Gruber argues, solely emanate from "Belvidera who functions as the evil that must be contained" (169). Moreover, a clear cut dichotomy between male

public realm on the one hand and female private sphere on the other, equally suggested by Gruber, does not exist. The feminizing effects of both sympathetic relationships in which Jaffeir engages blur gender boundaries. As Debra Leissner has argued, Jaffeir is situated between homoerotic and “hermaphroditic” relationships (27), and Gill concludes, “gender issues are far from resolved. While wallowing, fawning, and begging are regarded as effeminate maneuvers, in Jaffeir they simultaneously become strangely ennobling masculine exercises” (“Revolutionary Identity” 249).

Jaffeir’s counterpart, Pierre, on the other hand succeeds in acquiring a stable sense of self by distancing himself from a sentimental code of interaction. After Pierre relates Belvidera’s fate to Jaffeir, the latter throws himself around his friend’s neck and wants to “drown thee with my Sorrows!” (1.277). Pierre, however, rebukes his friend and urges him to forego sorrow and instead revenge Belvidera’s punishment like a “man”:

Burn!

First burn, and level *Venice* to thy Ruin!  
 What starve like Beggars Brats in frosty weather,  
 Under a hedge, and whine our selves to Death!  
 [...]  
 Man knows a braver Remedy for sorrow:  
 Revenge! the Attribute of Gods, they stamp it  
 With their great Image on our Natures; dye! (1.277-88)

Pierre keeps reminding Jaffeir of the male bond that unites their souls.<sup>15</sup> Eventually he has to invoke the symbol of the dagger (a recurring motif in the play representing a patriarchal order) to persuade Jaffeir to join the rebellion:

[*Jaff.*]                Senators should rot  
 Like Dogs on Dunghills; but their Wives and Daughters  
 Dye of their own diseases. Oh for a Curse  
 To kill with!  
*Pierr.*                Daggers, Daggers, are much better!  
*Jaff.* Ha!  
*Pierr.*    Daggers.

*Jaff.* But where are they?  
*Pierr.* Oh, a Thousand  
 May be dispos'd in honest hands in *Venice*. (2.120-25)

By ritualistically invoking the dagger as phallic symbol Pierre entreats Jaffeir to take part in a masculine form of interaction.<sup>16</sup> In this manner the circulating dagger on stage becomes an expression of a specific kind of sexual but also political identity that Pierre provides his friend with in the latter's attempt to stabilize his self.<sup>17</sup> Jaffeir is aware of the dagger's constitutive role for his identity. When the disappointed Pierre reproaches his friend for having betrayed their holy "communion" (4.365) and hands Jaffeir his dagger back as a "worthless pledge" (4.362), Jaffeir realizes that through Pierre's rejection of the offered dagger he has also forfeited the possibility of acquiring an alternative mode of self-perception:

He's gone, my father, friend, preserver,  
 and here's the portion he has left me. [*Holds the dagger up.*]  
 This dagger, well remembred, with this dagger  
 I gave a solemn vow of dire importance,  
 Parted with this and *Belvidera* together [...] (4.376-80)

Significantly, even the final reconciliation of the two friends is brought about by the dagger: Jaffer stabs first his friend and then himself to death, thus achieving exclusive entry to the realm of male sensibility, at the cost, however, of the ultimate annihilation of identity, death.

While Pierre in his self-perception remains true to the ideals of the male community until the end, Jaffeir constantly oscillates between the alternative modes of masculine and feminine sensibility, the latter of which he views as both desirable and a threat to his self.<sup>18</sup> Jaffeir's sensitive disposition is therefore a double-edged sword. In undermining traditional patriarchal value systems of courage, honour and manliness, it presents "a revolutionary conception of masculine self-evaluation" (Gill, "Revolutionary Identity" 252). But Jaffeir's position between Pierre and Belvidera also shows that the transition from an old to a new interactional and perceptual paradigm has not been achieved yet. Jaffeir's ability, or rather desire, to take part in the

emotional lives of others by means of his imagination and empathy is therefore not only responsible for his ambivalent character but also a constituent feature of the tragedy. Sensibility, sympathy and sympathetic imagination thus represent both the problem and the solution for the sensitive protagonist Jaffeir. Jaffeir's wish to "melt" with Pierre as well as with Belvidera, to "partake the troubles of thy bosom" (1.223) is not only a conflict of loyalties, but also a transgression of identity boundaries that eventually leads to the 'liquidation' of his self.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Munns, and Gill, "Pathetic Passions."

<sup>2</sup>Cf. chapter 27 in the third book of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

<sup>3</sup>Ghosh's edition of the play, which I used for this essay, does not provide scene divisions for acts 1, 2, 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup>Smith 10 (I.i.1.2); my italics.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. for example Seigel 145 and Schwalm 11.

<sup>6</sup>Smith 110 (III.1.3).

<sup>7</sup>For a more detailed discussion of this ambivalence cf. Wegmann 52.

<sup>8</sup>Smith 10 (I.i.1.3).

<sup>9</sup>Smith 12 (I.i.1.10).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. for example where he condemns his compassion for his wife: "Rather, Remember him, who after all/ The sacred Bonds of Oaths and holyer Friendship,/ In fond compassion to a Womans tears/ Forgot his Manhood, Vertue, truth and honour,/ To sacrifice the Bosom that reliev'd him" (4.14-18). See also his urge to hold back his tears when parting from Belvidera (2.382) and his decision "Yes, I will be a Man,/ [...] for from this hour I chase/ All little thoughts, all tender humane Follies/ Out of my bosom" (2.188-94).

<sup>11</sup>Cf also 4.495-97, 528-29.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. also Owen (158) who has located the "rise of the sentimental" in the late 1670s.

<sup>13</sup>"The relationship between Jaffeir and the soldierly Pierre is the crux of manly affection in the play. Their friendship exhibits the standard republican preoccupa-



tion with the interdependence of sensibility and stoicism" (Ellison 42). Ellison's view of sympathetic interaction as operating between a self-controlled sufferer and a sympathetic fellow sufferer is based on Adam Smith's understanding of sympathy formulated in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (see particularly 21-22 [I.i.4.6-8]).

<sup>14</sup>There is abundant evidence in the play for close male bonding between Pierre and Jaffeir. Cf. for example Pierre calling Jaffeir the "honest Partner of my Heart" (1.121), his "hearts Jewel" (3.2.472), but also Jaffeir's wish "Let me partake the trouble of thy bosom" (1.223) and his declaration of love for Pierre (4.99).

<sup>15</sup>"When last we parted, we had no qualms like these,/ But entertain'd each others thoughts like Men,/ Whose Souls were well acquainted" (2.104-06).

<sup>16</sup>For a Lacanian reading of the play cf. Leissner.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Munns 184-86.

<sup>18</sup>In the play Otway employs imagery of tears, fluids and water to draw attention to the threatening quality of a sensitive disposition that can 'dissolve' male identity. Pierre imputes contagious and harmful qualities to Belvidera's tears: "Hadst thou but seen, as I did, how at last/ Thy Beauteous *Belvidera*, like A Wretch/ That's doom'd to Banishment, came weeping forth,/ Shining through Tears, like *April* Sun's in showers/ That labour to orecome the cloud that loads 'm,/ Whilst two young Virgins, on whose Arms she lean'd,/ Kindly lookt up, and at her Grief grew sad,/ As if they catch't the sorrows that fell from her:/ Even the lewd Rabble that were gather'd round/ To see the sight, stood mute when they beheld her;/ Govern'd their roaring throats, and grumbled pity" (1.256-65). Cf. also Jaffeir's disdain and contempt for Belvidera's tears (3.2.27-37).

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## Pope's *Ombre* Enigmas in *The Rape of the Lock*<sup>1</sup>

OLIVER R. BAKER

To appreciate the *Ombre* allusions in *The Rape of the Lock* a modern audience must first understand how this complicated and counter-intuitive card game is played. Successive editors have exhaustively glossed Pope's many allusions to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century literature and the classics, but they have largely neglected to provide similarly comprehensive glosses to this long-obsolete card game.<sup>2</sup> Without a credible reconstruction of the three hands, informed readings of the card game Pope carefully describes in Canto III of his satire are not possible. Pope's correspondence, collected and re-edited by George Sherburn, gives no evidence that he withheld or revealed the reconstruction he had in mind; although common sense tells us that Pope must have had one.<sup>3</sup> Only when we know which cards were dealt can we evaluate how skilfully, or unskilfully, the players enacted the first mock-battle at Hampton Court that afternoon. That the combatants might be bewilderingly inept, but also defy Fate and foil one combatant's "Thirst of Fame" (iii.25) is consistent with contemporary recipes for mock-epic. Whether one or more of the players violate the tenets of good card play is a seldom asked, but important question: and one that can be addressed only after obtaining a reliable reconstruction.

It is astonishing that after almost three centuries no one has published an entirely satisfactory reconstruction. All are inconsistent with Pope's text, or the rules of the game, or both.<sup>4</sup> Over a half-century ago, William K. Wimsatt cautioned that by the extent to which any hypothetical reconstruction exceeded the evidence given it could have no critical bearing on the poem.<sup>5</sup> Wimsatt might also have pointed out

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For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debbaker01723.htm>.

the corollary, that by the extent to which any reconstruction falls short of all the evidence given—that is, it does not take full account of several somewhat opaque lines in the poem—it, too, must have diminished critical bearing. It is important to fully account for the content of Pope's forty couplets (iii.25-104). Some lines may serve several purposes. None are meaningless metrical fillers: Pope was far too skilled for that. For example, "At *Ombre* singly to decide their Doom," the adverb "singly" may mean Belinda will be *L'Hombre* for this *tour*, or that this contest will entail only one *tour*, or both (iii.27). Wimsatt concluded that a complete reconstruction was impossible, but he did not point out that such was unnecessary—indeed there is no unique solution.<sup>6</sup> The solution, like that to many enigmas, is ridiculously simple; unfortunately, given our distance from its early eighteenth-century interpretive context, the derivation of this solution is lengthy and tedious. The information not given directly by Pope must be inferred from close reading of his text, together with an understanding of the rules of the game, and knowledge of the tenets of good card play—the only reliable tools available: but tools readily available to Pope's contemporary audience. Outlines of the more important rules and a glossary of terms unique to the game are appended to this paper.

At least eight reconstructions have been published. The earliest was by William Pole in 1874,<sup>7</sup> followed by Henry Hucks Gibbs in 1878,<sup>8</sup> and George Holden in 1909.<sup>9</sup> Edward Fletcher published two in 1935,<sup>10</sup> and in 1940, Geoffrey Tillotson appended a modification of Pole's reconstruction to *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*.<sup>11</sup> This reconstruction, which he did not revise through the second and third *Twickenham Editions* of 1952 and 1962, remains that most commonly cited in the literature. Arthur E. Case published his own in 1944,<sup>12</sup> and Wimsatt, recanting his impossibility pronouncement, published a partial reconstruction in 1973.<sup>13</sup> Why these reconstructors, spanning a century from Pole to Wimsatt, five of whom were distinguished scholars, failed to untangle Pope's enigma would make a separate study. I believe that this is an extreme example of the accre-

tions of scholarship conflicting with the evidence of unbiased close reading, with the latter being ignored.

Only Holden and Case recognise that the values of the *plebeian* cards are of no consequence—in the game described by Pope only the *Mata-dores* and court cards take any of the nine tricks.<sup>14</sup> Fletcher, Case, and Tillotson recognise that all twelve court cards must be in play. However, all three violate close reading of Pope's text inasmuch as only Case lets Belinda play *sans prendre*. All, except Holden, follow Pole and assume that several, if not all, of the players discard and take-in new cards immediately after Belinda's *Ombre* bid. They claim that for poetic economy Pope suppresses the description of these discards and supply these 'suppressed' details. Only Pole lets the Knight recognise that attempting to 'improve' his 'as dealt' hand is not worthwhile.

It is unfortunate that Pole's speculation about a suppressed round of discarding and taking-in—for which there is no textual evidence—remained unchallenged by scholars, as it masks a number of playing alternatives the poet's contemporary audience might have seen and evaluated for themselves. Such an evaluation presents an opportunity for a reassessment of this portion of Pope's poem. In addition, no one has satisfactorily explained why Pope only describes one *tour* of the game. Most scholars have assumed that for poetic economy Pope also suppresses description of the earlier hands and that he only describes the last of many *tours* played that afternoon. Close reading of Pope's poem supports none of these 'suppression' assumptions. Occam's razor applies: when reconstructing the hands any assumptions must be the minimum necessary and be clearly stated. Most reconstructors are cavalier about seating and dealing.<sup>15</sup> As events turn out, where the players sit and who deals is inconsequential, but this should be a conclusion from a careful reconstruction, not an assumption. One clue that it is the Baron who deals is the order of play during the last trick.<sup>16</sup> None note that under most rule variants discarding and taking-in is not a bagatelle and will cost the player one counter per card exchanged.<sup>17</sup>

Tillotson speculates that Pope laboriously constructed one *tour* of this game for his poem.<sup>18</sup> But no matter how the three hands originated, Pope describes a simplified single *tour* of this game where, except for the deuce of spades, the numerical value of every non-court card—but not the suit—is inconsequential. If the game is to appear as a duel between Belinda and the Baron, the Knight's cards do not matter. Whatever the extent of Pope's 'as dealt' card simplifications, common sense tells us that he started with three real hands, "Each Band the number of the Sacred Nine" (iii.30). Whereas omitting the values and often the suits of the non-court cards results in descriptive economy, these omissions make any reconstruction more difficult, especially when it is not immediately apparent that a unique solution is unobtainable. Reconstructing the hands is further complicated by the devious provision of at least three playing options beyond the one played in the poem: but these are options Pope's contemporary audience would have readily discerned for themselves. These include: an alternative play in spades by Belinda, an alternative spades defence by the Baron, and a surprising game-ending *Vole* in clubs by Belinda.

The reconstruction developed below rejects Pole's suppressed discard assumptions, and uses Pope's text to support several critically important observations. There was only one deal; the entire game comprises one single *tour*; Belinda elects to play *sans prendre*; and, each for differing reasons, her opponents elect not to discard and take-in new cards, but were able to do so, if they wished. I adopt Holden's observation that Pope does not give the values of the *plebeian* cards, and Fletcher's observation that all twelve court cards must be in play. By happenstance this reconstruction is similar to the second of two proposed by Fletcher in 1935; but unlike his reconstruction, absolute values are not arbitrarily assigned to the *plebeian* cards. A close reading of Pope's text supports four critically important, but enormously simplifying inferences:

- All twelve *court* cards are in play,
- The numerical value of any *plebeian* card is unimportant,



- Belinda plays *sans prendre*—that is, she plays with her ‘as-dealt’ hand, and,
- Neither the Knight nor the Baron attempts to ‘improve’ his ‘as-dealt’ hand by discarding and then taking-in, that is, purchasing, new cards from the *talon*, although they are free to do so.

Pope gives detailed descriptions of the four full-length, kings, queens, and knaves, but notably only after the deal with the players seated (iii.29-30). From the following three couplets we infer that all twelve *court* cards are in play:

Behold, four *Kings* in Majesty rever'd,  
 With hoary Whiskers and a forky Beard;  
 And four fair *Queens* whose hands sustain a Flow'r,  
 Th' expressive Emblem of their softer Pow'r;  
 Four *Knaves* in Garbs succinct, a trusty Band,  
 Caps on their heads, and Halberds in their hand;           (iii.37-42)

No court cards are left in the *talon*. Since ten are identified in the text, two are ‘missing’—the knave of hearts and the queen of clubs—but they are in play.

*Plebeian* card values remain unassigned because Pope’s text simply does not give them. All that he ever says about them is:

And Particolour'd Troops, a shining Train,  
 Draw forth to Combat on the Velvet Plain.                   (iii.43-44)

Pope’s text does not support a round of discards after Belinda’s bid. Quite the contrary, as play commences immediately following Belinda’s assessment of her cards and her pre-emptive declaration of the trump suit.

The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care;  
*Let Spades be Trumps!* she said, and Trumps they were.  
 Now move to War her Sable *Matadores*,                   (iii.45-47)

It is greatly to Belinda’s financial advantage—provided her bid is successful—to play *sans prendre*; whereas, should she decide to dis-

card any cards, it will cost her one counter for every replacement card she elects to draw. Moreover, while I believe that Pope's text indicates that Belinda does not draw new cards—once Pope's audience have reconstructed her hand, inevitably, they will assess whether she should, or should not have, and thereby judge for themselves whether or not she is a "skilful Nymph" when playing *Ombre* (iii.45).

A similar textual argument applies to the hands held by the Knight and the Baron. Once Belinda has declared the trump suit, each of these players—now defending and quasi-partners for this *tour* only—must independently decide whether the chance of improving his hand to impose *Remise* or possibly *Codille* is worth the risk. Each new card will cost one small counter, but the player must discard before drawing from the *talon* and there is the risk that he will make his hand worse. Although temporary partners, depending upon the strength of their hands, the two defenders may be in very different positions. Only when Pope's audience have reconstructed the two defenders' hands for themselves are they in a position to determine whether one or other of the defenders should have drawn new cards, while knowing that they did not, and thus assess individual playing skills. Play is anti-clockwise: that is, sitting at a triangular table, the Baron deals, with Belinda to his right. As the *Elder Hand* she leads to the Knight on her right, but in the simplified single *tour* of the game Pope describes even this seating detail does not matter.

The first logical step in any reconstruction attempt is to examine the whole forty-card Spanish deck, without regard to the three hands.

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠, A♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦  
 K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣, A♣

All twelve court cards are in play; as are at least three of the four aces; but only one of the twenty-four non-court cards is named by Pope. Since only sixteen of the twenty-seven cards in play are known in terms of both suit and rank with complete certainty, the 'simplified'

forty-card deck—comprising twelve court cards, four aces and twenty-four non-court cards—back into which the reconstructed hands must fit, will look as shown below. The values of the other eleven cards in play, and the thirteen in the *talon*, cannot be determined from Pope's text and these values must not be arbitrarily assigned:

K♠,	Q♠,	J♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	2♠,	A♠
K♥,	Q♥,	J♥,	A♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥
K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦,	♦
K♣,	Q♣,	J♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	♣,	A♣

The non-court cards are losers. Nine tricks are to be won, and these tricks are taken by nine of the sixteen cards identified by suit and rank in Pope's text. The reconstructive challenge is two-fold: what is the suit and, if important, the rank of the eleven other cards; and, who holds them.

Starting with Belinda's hand, we already know a lot about her cards, and on which trick they are played. The suit and rank of only two of her cards are not given by Pope:

<b>Belinda:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	A♠,	2♠,	A♣,	K♠,	K♣,	X,	X,	Q♥,	K♥	card played

We know even more about the Baron's hand. He has a void in clubs, but Pope's text gives the rank of only one of his five spades:

<b>Baron:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	Q♠,	K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	A♥	card played

Initially, and this may be part of Pope's design to keep the Knight out of the picture, we know pitifully little about the nine cards in his hand. But we do know when all six of these completely 'unknown' cards are played:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	X,	J♣,	X,	X,	X,	X,	X	card played

One of the two named, non-court cards is the deuce of spades, and Belinda holds it (iii.51). We also know that the Baron holds the other named, non-court card, the ace of hearts (iii.95). Belinda holds both black aces (iii.49 and 53). Knowing that there are twelve court cards, three aces, and the spade deuce in play, this leaves only eleven *plebeian* cards, one of which might be the diamond ace, partially cloaked in mystery. Whether we can infer which cards Belinda and the Knight hold, and whether they have a void in some particular suit is another interpretive challenge.

We know that the Knight plays losing spades on the first two tricks, and the Baron plays losing spades on the first four tricks. Thus the suit of only five of these eleven *plebeian* cards remains to be identified, along with who holds them, plus, of course, who holds the two 'missing' court cards—the queen of clubs and knave of hearts. It cannot be the Baron. He has a void in clubs—because on the fifth trick he trumps-in on Belinda's king of clubs lead. In fact, we know that the Baron does not hold the 'missing' knave either, because, in addition to knowing the suit and rank of five of his nine cards, we know that his four unranked cards are losing *plebeian* spades. Thus Pope's text gives us everything that we need to know about the Baron's hand, which looks like this:

<b>Baron:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♠,	♠,	Q♠,	K♦,	Q♦,	J♦,	A♥	card played

As for the Knight's hand, initially we know the suit and rank of only one of his nine cards—the knave of clubs. But we also know he holds two trumps, and, from the play, that the rank of these *plebeian* spades is unimportant—they, like four of the Baron's spades, are losers. This leaves us to infer the suit and rank, if important, of the Knight's six remaining cards. We are certain only that they cannot be spades, and that they cannot be cards known to be held either by Belinda or the Baron. Although the text does not say that the Knight follows suit on the ninth trick, we can infer that when the Baron leads his ace of hearts, and the trick is taken by Belinda's king, the Knight follows suit

and plays his last card—which can only be the ‘missing’ knave of hearts. The alternative, assigning the knave of hearts to Belinda, raises a problem—when does she play it? So far, the Knight’s hand must look like this:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	X,	J♣,	X,	X,	X,	X,	J♥	card played

The Knight does not follow suit on Belinda’s third spade trick. He sloughs “one *Plebeian Card*” (iii.54), but Pope’s text enigmatically does not reveal which suit. On the fourth trick, when Belinda leads her king of spades, the Knight sloughs his knave of clubs (iii.59-64). Logically, on the fourth trick, if he still holds a lower club, he would play that card instead. More importantly, if the Knight were to hold the queen of clubs as well as the knave of clubs, he will slough some suit other than clubs on the third trick to protect these second- and third-ranked clubs. This strongly suggests that his slough on the third trick is not a club, and furthermore that his sloughs on the third and fourth tricks are both losing singletons. Case argues that the lines:

Ev’n mighty *Pam* [knave of clubs] that Kings and Queens o’erthrew,  
 And mow’d down Armies in the Fights of *Lu*,  
 Sad Chance of War! now, destitute of Aid,  
 Falls undistinguish’d by the Victor *Spade!* (iii.61-64)

and in particular the phrase “now, destitute of Aid” must mean that the Knight holds more than one club.<sup>19</sup> Case’s argument ignores both text and context. *Pam* is the most powerful trump in the game of Loo, a different fight. In *Ombre*, this fight, *Pam* is merely the third-ranked knave of clubs, and for the Knight—a loser. The Knight would have to hold two *plebeian* clubs to protect or “Aid” his knave. From this, we can infer that the Knight’s slough on the third trick is either a heart, or a diamond: it is not a club.

If we believe that the Knight indeed plays the third-ranked knave of hearts on the ninth trick, he can only keep that card for so long if he also holds sufficient lower-ranked *plebeian* hearts to protect it—at least

two. This suggests that his slough on the third trick is a singleton diamond, not a heart. Consequently, we can infer that it is Belinda, and not the Knight, who holds the 'missing' queen of clubs. From this, we can see that, so far, the Knight's hand must look like this:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♦,	J♣,	X,	X,	♥,	♥,	J♥	card played

While inferring that the Knight holds at least three hearts to the knave, in addition to a singleton diamond, two spades, and a singleton club—the knave—this still leaves us to deduce the suit of his remaining two cards. Enigmatically, perhaps deliberately, Pope's text does not indicate whether the Knight follows suit with a club on the fifth trick, but we can deduce that he does not. We know that his remaining two cards are not court cards, and so they must be *plebeians* and can only be *plebeian* hearts. If we interpret Pope's text literally, when on the sixth and seventh tricks the Baron leads his king and queen of diamonds, we must infer that the twelve lines—

The *Baron* now his *Diamonds* pours apace;  
 Th' embroider'd *King* who shows but half his Face,  
 And his refulgent *Queen*, with Pow'rs combin'd,  
 Of broken Troops an easie Conquest find.  
*Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts*, in wild Disorder seen,  
 With Throngs promiscuous strow the level Green.  
 Thus when dispers'd a routed Army runs,  
 Of *Asia's* Troops, and *Afrik's* Sable Sons,  
 With like Confusion different Nations fly,  
 Of various Habit and of various Dye,  
 The pierc'd Battalions dis-united fall,  
 In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o'erwhelms them all. (iii.75-86)

mean simply that Belinda and the Knight slough their losing clubs and hearts on the Baron's two diamond leads—a second disordered heap of Belinda's clubs and the Knight's hearts on top of the first—"Heaps on Heaps" (iii.86) indeed.

Pope might have made it easier for his contemporary and future reconstructors if line 79 were to read "*Diamonds, Clubs, Hearts*, in wild



Disorder seen," but that would have spoiled the metre. Consequently, the Knight's hand is as shown below: two spades; a singleton diamond; a singleton knave of clubs, and five hearts to the knave:

<b>Knight:</b>	1,	2,	3,	4,	5,	6,	7,	8,	9	trick number
	♠,	♠,	♦,	J♣,	♥,	♥,	♥,	♥,	J♥	card played

Because Pope's text says so little about the Knight's hand, it is possible that the Knight's *plebeian* slough on the third trick, as argued by Case, might be another club—certainly it is not the queen of clubs—but it might be any low club, including the deuce.<sup>20</sup> If so, this makes no difference to the play, and however unlikely, both the Knight and Belinda would have a void in diamonds. One could speculate further that the Knight holds three clubs, the deuce to the knave-queen. But such a speculation would turn the Knight into a very poor player, as he should slough a heart on the third trick, and certainly not slough his knave of clubs on the fourth trick—which we know that he does (iii.59).

The suit and rank of seven of the nine cards held by Belinda are given by Pope, but we must infer what the other two cards might be. For a start, we know that these two unknown cards are not spades, as all eleven spade trumps are in play and accounted for in Pope's text. Furthermore, since the two 'missing' court cards are both in play and the Knight holds only one of them, Belinda must hold the other one. We can demonstrate that her two unknown cards are both clubs, and include this 'missing' queen.

During the sixth, seventh, and eighth tricks, Belinda and the Knight slough their losers on the Baron's diamonds, and we have already deduced that Belinda sloughs losing clubs on the sixth and seventh tricks. Pope tells us that on the eighth trick Belinda sloughs her queen of hearts on the Baron's third diamond lead (iii.87-88). Both Belinda and the Knight are void in diamonds by the sixth trick, which means that Belinda always had a diamond void. Belinda's hand looks like this:

**Belinda:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9      trick number  
 A♠, 2♠, A♣, K♠, K♣, Q♣, ♣, Q♥, K♥      card played

The hands held by the three players, just before Belinda makes her pre-emptive *Ombre* bid, are shown below. They are as complete as possible except that the values of all but one of the *plebeian* cards are unknowable. Given the popularity of *Ombre*, I believe that Pope's contemporary audience will have made this same reconstruction easily and quickly.<sup>21</sup>

<p><b>Knight</b>                  ♠, ♠                  J♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥                  ♦                  J♣                  [no voids]</p>	<p><b>Belinda [Elder Hand]</b>                  K♠                  K♥, Q♥                  Void in ♦                  K♣, Q♣, ♣                  A♠, A♣      [Matadores]                  2♠      [potentially a <i>Matadore</i>]</p>
	<p><b>Baron [Dealer]</b>                  Q♠, J♠, ♠, ♠, ♠                  A♥                  K♦, Q♦, J♦                  Void in ♣</p>

With this reconstruction we can now evaluate, rather than speculate about, Belinda's card playing skills and those of her two opponents. Just before she makes her bid, the Knight is already out of the picture. He has: two spades; two singletons; no voids; and five hearts to the knave, but no black aces. The Baron has: a singleton heart; five spades to the knave-queen; a club void; and three diamonds to the knave-queen-king, but no black aces. He cannot bid *Ombre*, but he is well-placed to defend against an *Ombre* bid—with or without help. Belinda has: three clubs to the queen-king; two hearts to the queen-king; a diamond void; two spades to the king, and both black aces. Recognising that if spades were trumps, her 2♠ becomes *Manille*, she then has all three *Matadors*, and her consecutive K♠ is promotable to *faux-*

*matador* status for payment purposes, Belinda makes her pre-emptive declaration, “*Let Spades be Trumps!*” (iii.46).

We can also re-evaluate the individual player’s skills immediately after Belinda’s bid, but before any cards are played. Although her bid is *sans prendre*, which, if successful, will enhance her winnings, her declaration does not preclude the two defenders from taking-in new cards, although it will cost them one counter per card exchanged. The Knight’s hand is dreadful. Wisely, he elects not to throw good money after bad by discarding and purchasing replacement cards. At best, the Knight can expect to win one trick and, with the Baron’s help, impose *Remise*. Conversely, since the Baron holds five of the eleven spade trumps, he should suspect that Belinda has bid the ‘wrong’ suit. Should there be a bizarre trump split with Belinda holding other six, her *Ombre* win is a *lay down* and there is no defence. The odds are against this. The Baron holds four certain winners. With help from the Knight, they can impose *Remise*; but with a lucky take-in—one more spade or a diamond—he can impose *Codille*.<sup>22</sup> Pope’s contemporary audience will see that the Baron must discard his fourth-ranked singleton heart. An almost certain loser, it is a liability. There is no chance that by doing so he will spoil his hand. By not doing so, the Baron demonstrates that he is either a novice or a nincompoop, or both.<sup>23</sup> Belinda has a fabulous hand, but she only holds four of the eleven spades she has declared as trumps; seven are out and may be in play. As the *Elder Hand*, she has the powerful privilege of leading. If she cannot draw all the trumps in play over her first four tricks, she risks losing control of the game on the fifth trick, whereafter her diamond void becomes a liability.<sup>24</sup> She plays with an eight-card hand—having inadvertently, perhaps while sorting and heading-up her cards, pushed her king of hearts ‘unseen’ behind her queen (iii.95-98). These are errors typical of a novice.<sup>25</sup> The actual card play is well known and is shown below, with Belinda’s hand rearranged for her spades bid. For clarity, the number of the trick on which a particular card is played is marked with a superscript:

**Knight**

♠<sup>2</sup>, ♠<sup>1</sup>  
 J♥<sup>9</sup>, ♥<sup>8</sup>, ♥<sup>7</sup>, ♥<sup>6</sup>, ♥<sup>5</sup>  
 ♦<sup>3</sup>  
 J♣<sup>4</sup>

**Belinda [Elder Hand]**

A♠<sup>1</sup>, 2♠<sup>2</sup>, A♣<sup>3</sup>, K♠<sup>4</sup>  
 K♥<sup>9</sup>, Q♥<sup>8</sup>  
 Void in ♦  
 K♣<sup>5</sup>, Q♣<sup>7</sup>, ♣<sup>6</sup>

**Baron [Dealer]**

Q♠<sup>5</sup>, J♠<sup>4</sup>, ♠<sup>3</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>, ♠<sup>1</sup>  
 A♥<sup>9</sup>  
 K♦<sup>6</sup>, Q♦<sup>7</sup>, J♦<sup>8</sup>  
 Void in ♣

From Pope's text alone, we can see there would have been no drama at all, if on the fifth trick Belinda had led her 'unseen' king of hearts. Having won her bid, the remaining cards would not have been played out; her *sans-prendre Ombre* and *consecutive Matador* winnings would have been claimed and the cards gathered in and shuffled for the next *tour*.

As a poet, Pope is perfectly at liberty to simplify the game he describes in Canto III, but he does not presume to simplify the rules that govern the game: rules his audience must use to reconstruct the hands. Fortunately, the simplified and abbreviated *game* he describes is straightforward, comprising a single *tour*, with *L'Hombre* (Belinda) playing *sans prendre*. In fact, although each for rather different reasons, neither of the two defenders attempts to improve his 'as-dealt' hand either. One outcome of this reconstruction is that it is obvious that "*Let Spades be Trumps!*" is not her 'best' *Ombre* bid at all (iii.46). Hearts is better, but she has misplaced her king.<sup>26</sup> Clubs is even more attractive: she holds three clubs to the queen-king.<sup>27</sup> By not bidding her strongest suit Belinda demonstrates that she is a novice and Pope's line, "The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care" is wickedly ironic (iii.45). How Belinda might better have played her hand in clubs with a game-ending *Vole* is explored next.

The following card play is entirely hypothetical. Belinda's 'as dealt' hand, with her two black aces and one potential *Matadore* held separately looks like this:

K♠  
 K♥, Q♥  
 Void in ♦  
 K♣, Q♣, ♣  
 A♠, A♣ [Matadores]  
 2♠ [potentially a *Matadore*]

Adopting Wimsatt's caution not to exceed the evidence given, this alternative play utilises several *Ombre* allusions in couplets previously ignored by critics. Any audience familiar with *Ombre* will recognise that adding the two *Matadores* to Belinda's three clubs to the queen-king gives her a powerful five-card trump suit which—depending on the club split—is almost a *lay down* for *Ombre*.<sup>28</sup> Belinda will hold five of the eleven club trumps, including four of the top five, missing only *Manille*—the second-ranked *Matadore*.

Because the *Manille* is missing from her hand, such a trump selection means that her club king and queen cannot be promoted to *faux matadore* status for payment purposes. But her nominally less illustrious hand is powerful, if not unbeatable. Rearranging her hand as shown below, Belinda can bid clubs, play *sans prendre*, and consider a *Vole* amendment after the fourth trick:

A♠, A♣, K♣, Q♣, ♣  
 K♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥  
 Void in ♦

Missing the second-ranked *Matadore*—in this case the 2♣—does not matter, as under the rules the *Manille* is 'forced' by a *Spadille* lead. It is absolutely useless to whoever happens to hold it, assuming that it is even in play. With any but a bizarre distribution of clubs, an *Ombre* win is trivial. Depending upon how play develops, her deuce of spades—no longer *Manille*, as clubs are now trumps—may be a loser, leaving her one trick short of *Vole*. Play is anti-clockwise; Belinda leads, and the trick in which each card is played is superscripted:

**Knight**

J♣<sup>1</sup>  
 ♠<sup>6</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>  
 J♥<sup>9</sup>, ♥<sup>8</sup>, ♥<sup>7</sup>, ♥<sup>4</sup>, ♥<sup>3</sup>  
 ♦<sup>5</sup>

**Belinda [Elder Hand]**

A♠<sup>1</sup>, A♣<sup>5</sup>, K♣<sup>6</sup>, Q♣<sup>7</sup>, ♣<sup>8</sup>  
 K♠<sup>2</sup>, 2♠<sup>9</sup>  
 K♥<sup>3</sup>, Q♥<sup>4</sup>  
 Void in ♦

**Baron [Dealer]**

Void in ♣  
 Q♠<sup>8</sup>, J♠<sup>5</sup>, ♠<sup>4</sup>, ♠<sup>3</sup>, ♠<sup>2</sup>  
 A♥<sup>1</sup>  
 K♦<sup>9</sup>, Q♦<sup>7</sup>, J♦<sup>6</sup>

By the eighth trick the Baron will realise that the Knight's earlier diamond slough was a singleton, and that Belinda has yet to play a diamond. Paradoxically, it is his absolutely correct play that ensures Belinda's *Vole* triumph. Her lowly, off-suit, *plebeian* deuce of spades takes a king and a knave on the last trick. Both court cards fall "undistinguish'd by the Victor *Spade!*" (iii.64). Good manners demand that Belinda suppresses any urge to crow; but a well-concealed gloat and silent cackle, while exchanging the counters to line her pockets with their guineas, would be understandable.

To digress, the earlier concession—that it is just possible that the Knight does not have a singleton diamond, but a second, or perhaps a third club—makes no difference to Belinda's *Vole* attempt. Even if his second club is the 2♣ (*Manille*), the outcome in this hypothetical *tour* is unchanged, as his *Manille* is 'forced' on the first trick. Furthermore, even if the Knight holds both the *Manille* and the 'missing' queen of clubs—a reconstruction which violates both Pope's text and the tenets of good card play—the result is unchanged. Belinda should ensure that all trumps are drawn—and she can tell by the sloughs—before she tries to deceive her opponents into believing that her king of spades is a singleton.

In some playing agreements *Vole* is deemed so rare that it *Sweeps the Board*: no more *tours* can be played because all the stakes on the board, not just those in the *pool*, go to the winner. Unlike the paltry winnings for a five-trick *Ombre* win, Belinda, should she play this *tour* in clubs, *sans prendre*, then bid and make *Vole*, will safely pocket her initial



stake plus one hundred and ten counters from each opponent for a total of two hundred and twenty counters, thereby ending the game and fulfilling those wishful lines:

Belinda now, whom Thirst of Fame invites,  
Burns to encounter two adventurous Knights,  
At *Ombre* singly to decide their Doom; (iii.25-27)

Of course, this is not the *tour* they played: far from it. But Belinda celebrates her clumsy *Ombre* win as if it were a game-ending *Vole*.

The Nymph exulting fills with Shouts the Sky,  
The Walls, the Woods, and long Canals reply. (iii.99-100)

All card play ceases and coffee is served (iii.105). The *Vole* opportunity this reconstruction reveals might be dismissed as mere coincidence, but coincidences are often just explanations waiting to happen. Pope's heroi-comical poem is partly a caustic satire on contemporary high society, and the role which the privileged *beau monde* presume they are entitled to play at court. Pope's satire includes the hint that they cannot even play this *de rigueur* card game properly.<sup>29</sup> There are many other explanations, but these are beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly out of scope, and not supported by close reading of the whole poem, is the notion that Belinda and the Baron are exceedingly skilful players—she sees the *Vole* opportunity, but not wishing to humiliate the Baron, deliberately bids *Ombre* in the 'wrong' suit; while the Baron, in turn, aware that she must be in the 'wrong' suit elects not to strengthen his hand to inflict a humiliating *Codille*.

Using this reconstruction, in the literal sense, it is evident that each player was presented with a number of playing options, whereas Pope's satire describes only the playing options they took. Eighteenth-century English Literature scholars can further evaluate the individual players' *Ombre* skills and speculate about their possible motives for not pursuing obvious alternative plays. Beyond this evidence of close reading, scholars can engage whichever theoretical approach suits the

needs of their literary analysis of the characters, motives, and social context of Pope's poem; although readings that claim Belinda is a "skilful Nymph" will be somewhat harder to defend.

### *Ombre* Rules

The rules for playing *Ombre* at Hampton Court during the first two decades of the eighteenth century cannot be known with certainty. The game came to Restoration England from Spain via France with Catharine of Braganza. As Tillotson and Holden note, *The Court Gamester*, written by Richard Seymour in 1718, was based on a French handbook from the previous century, but both scholars claim that Seymour's "Game of Hombre" chapter is a verbatim translation of the earlier French work.<sup>30</sup> Seymour's 120 page octavo volume, which covers three games, *Ombre*, *Picquet*, and *Chess*, devotes 72 pages and over 16,000 words to *Ombre*. A 1710 edition of *The Compleat Gamester*, written by Charles Cotton, was also available.

It is fair to argue that these two works reflect rather than dictate fashionable gaming practices in London, and that these rules and conventions are close to those in effect in 1712 and 1713 at Hampton Court. But Cotton and Seymour caution that their works are not absolute, and they are aware of other conventions, some of which they do not favour. These other conventions may well apply, provided they are mutually agreed upon before the players commence their game.<sup>31</sup> The object of each *tour* is to win more tricks than either of your opponents, preferably five; or, to win all nine, if your cards are absolutely fantastic. One counter-intuitive feature of this frustrating and complicated game is that it is often more 'rewarding' to successfully defend against an *Ombre* bid, than it is to successfully make that bid.

The game is played with the forty-card Spanish deck. To make this, take a conventional fifty-two card French-suited deck and remove the four 10's, 9's, and 8's. Three of the most confusing aspects of *Ombre*, at least for those familiar with modern card games, are that the red aces

rank below the knave except when one of the red suits is declared the trump suit, when the ace ranks above the king; the two black aces are always trump cards irrespective of which suit is declared trump; and, the rank of the non-court card depends on the colour of the suit—black or red. The ranked *Ombre* deck with the two black aces separated is shown below:

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠	A♠
K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥	
K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦	
K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣	A♣

Card ranking is fixed only after the trump suit is chosen. The highest-ranked cards (*Matadores*) enjoy special rule breaking, or rule immunity privileges. The two black aces, A♠ and A♣, are invariably the first- and the third-ranked trumps, regardless of which colour suit—red or black—is declared trump.

If a red suit is declared trump, then the seven of that suit 7♥, or 7♦, also becomes a *Matadore* and is the second-ranked trump. In addition, the ace of that suit A♥, or A♦, also becomes a *Matadore*, and is the fourth-ranked trump, ranking higher than the corresponding red king. If a black suit is declared trump, then the deuce of that suit, 2♠, or 2♣, becomes a *Matadore* and is the second-ranked trump. Consequently, when players are sorting and ranking their hands, it is important to initially separate the cards into the four suits, plus a fifth category of *Matadores* and potential *Matadores*—black aces, black deuces, red sevens, and red aces.

In the single *tour* of this game described in Canto III of *The Rape of the Lock*, Belinda declares a black suit—spades—as trumps. The eleven cards in that suit will rank—highest to lowest—as follows:

A♠, 2♠, A♣, K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠

Should clubs be declared trump, that eleven-card suit will rank as follows:

A♠, 2♣, A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣

Should hearts or diamonds be declared trump, those twelve red trump cards—noting that the five non-court cards are in reverse numerical order—rank as follows:

A♠, 7♥, A♣, A♥, K♥, Q♥, J♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥

or,

A♠, 7♦, A♣, A♦, K♦, Q♦, J♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦

When either spades or clubs are declared trump, the ten hearts and ten diamonds rank as follows:

K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥

or,

K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦

Note that the red aces rank below the knave, and that the six non-court cards—seven if the aces are treated as ones—rank in reverse numerical order.

When either hearts or diamonds are declared trump, the nine spades and nine clubs rank—highest to lowest—as follows:

K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠

or,

K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣

Note that both black aces are 'missing' but that the six non-court cards rank in the usual numerical order. The card ordering is confusing, and the complicated rules of the game even provide for forfeits—paying extra stakes into the *pool*—whenever players are *beasted*, that is, they are caught committing any one of a number of playing errors.

After the deal any player holding one or both black aces—*Matadores*—should quickly scan their hand for a potential second-ranked *Matadore*, either a black deuce, or a red seven, and then decide if their hand is strong enough to warrant a bid, or whether they can more effectively defend against another's bid. If no one believes that they have a winning hand, that is, everyone *passes*, then each player enhances the *pool* stakes with an additional wager, the cards are col-

lected, shuffled, and re-dealt. If necessary, this process is repeated and the stakes increased for each new deal until one of the three players believes their hand warrants a bid.

## Nomenclature

*Ombre* has its own nomenclature for both the cards and the rules, which Pope uses freely in Canto III of his poem, confident that his readers are familiar with it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the myriad rules and conventions of this long-obsolete card game. Fortunately for the single *tour* the poet describes, there are only a few terms to learn. Unfortunately they are anglicised seventeenth-century French words, some of which are based on earlier Spanish terms, and others are special French words used only in card games. Previous editors have glossed some of these for modern readers, but have either omitted or incorrectly glossed several critical terms, thereby obscuring, if not defeating, Pope's contemporary allusions. For metrical reasons, Pope slightly alters the spellings given in Cotton and Seymour, but the more important terms, several of which are found in Pope's text in italics and others that must be inferred from the context, are glossed as follows:

***Basto*** — The ace of clubs is invariably the third-ranked trump card.

***Beasted*** — *L'Hombre* is *beasted* [rhyming with *pasted*], or suffers *Remise*, when he or she fails to win, but none of the other players wins more tricks than they. A player is also *beasted*, when he or she makes one of a number of rule or etiquette violations, and forfeits to the *pool* at least one counter for each transgression.

***Codille*** — There are several ways that *L'Hombre* can lose his or her bid. Should one of the other players win five tricks instead of *L'Hombre* doing so, *L'Hombre* has suffered *Codille*. Should *L'Hombre* win no more tricks than another player, this is called *Remise*, or *Repuesta*, or *Reposte*.

***Elder Hand*** — The player to the right of the dealer. It is this player who has the privilege of bidding first, and leading—not *L'Hombre*—that is, playing the first card. Bidding and play is anti-clockwise, so the dealer will bid last, if at all.

*Forced* — One of the privileges of a *Matador*, in a rule probably unique to *Ombre*, is that if a *Matador* is led, the other players are obliged to play their lower-ranked *Matadores* on that trick. Thus a *Spadille* lead will 'force' both of the other players to play their *Manille*, or their *Basto*, and, if applicable, their *Punto*, if they hold them. Similarly a *Manille* lead will 'force' *Basto* and, if applicable, *Punto*, but not the *Spadille*.

*L'Hombre* — The player, or challenger, who selects the trump suit, and who will attempt to win five of the nine tricks against the other two players, or at least more tricks than any of the other players: the latter, now defenders, will become quasi-partners for this *tour* only.

*Manille* — The second-ranked trump: it is either a black deuce or a red seven in the trump suit, depending upon which colour suit is selected by *L'Hombre* as trump.

*Matadores* — The top three (or four) trump cards are called *Matadores*, or *Mats*. But if *L'Hombre* holds consecutively ranked trump cards plus all the *Matadores*, those lower than *Basto* (or *Punto*, if a red suit is trump), the king, queen, knave, and so on, are promoted to *Matadore* status for payment purposes, in which case they are called *Faux Matadores*.

*Ombre* — This is either the name of the card game [rhyming with number], or the bid for five tricks, or somewhat confusingly, another name for *L'Hombre*—the player who makes the bid. *L'Hombre* wins his or her *Ombre* bid by taking five tricks, but can also win by taking only four tricks, when the other five are split three-two among the two defenders (see Seymour 24, C6<sup>v</sup>).

*Punto* — The ace of the red suit which is declared trump; it becomes the fourth-ranked *Matadore*, ranked below *Basto*, but above the red king.

*Remise* — This is when *L'Hombre* is *beasted*, but when *Codille* is not imposed by one of the other players. *Remise*, *Repuesta*, and *Reposte* all mean the same thing. For a *Remise* to apply, *L'Hombre* must fail to win more tricks than either opponent. If *L'Hombre* wins fewer tricks than one opponent, then that is *Codille*.

*Sans Prendre* — This is a pre-emptive bid. *L'Hombre* plays the *tour* 'as dealt' without first discarding and then taking-in replacement cards from the *talon*. If successful, the challenger will receive three additional counters from each defender: making it greatly to the challenger's financial advantage not to discard. Should this bid fail, *L'Hombre* must pay the defenders directly three counters each for his or her arrogance. But the '*sans prendre*' option does not preclude either defender electing to discard and take-in new cards if they wish.

*Spadille* — The ace of spades which is invariably the top-ranked trump card.

*Swept the Board* — This expression is reserved for *L'Hombre* whose *Vole* bid is successful. Depending upon the rules in effect, the winnings can be several times the total *pool* stakes, and in some cases a *Vole* 'sweeps all of the stakes from the board' not just those in the *pool*, and ends the game. As in all gam-



bling, when all but one player, or the house, has been cleaned out—the game is over.

*Talon* — Thirteen cards are left over after twenty-seven have been dealt to the players, from the French *le talon*, meaning [card] stock. It is from this *talon* that replacement cards are drawn. Under most rule variants these must be paid for by contributions to the *pool* (from the French *la poule*, meaning pool or pot), thereby increasing the stakes for that particular *tour*. The players' discards do not go back into the *talon*, but are held out until that *tour* has been completed.

*Tour* — One deal or hand in the game, from the French *le tour* meaning turn or revolution. A complete game comprises ten, twenty, or more *tours*, the number is agreed upon before play begins and may depend on how much time the players have available for play.

*Vole* — The bid for all nine tricks is from the French word used in card play *la vole*, which means 'all the tricks.' This declaration is made by *L'Hombre* just before the fifth trick in the *tour* is played.

Sloughing, discarding, and taking-in are terms not used in Pope's poem. When playing out the hand, if a player cannot follow suit, he or she may take that opportunity to get rid of, or slough, whatever they perceive as a 'losing' card. I have used 'slough' to indicate when a player is tossing a certain 'loser' onto a trick they cannot possibly win to avoid confusion with discarding—the attempt to enhance one's hand by exchanging cards before play begins. To speed up play, a *lay down* is permitted, if not encouraged by the rules. The challenger simply shows his or her cards to the two defenders and claims the *Ombre* or *Vole* win. Pope uses the term *plebeian* to denote any non-court, or numbered card; I have retained his usage.

### Gambling at Court

*Ombre* is a card game with both stakes and forfeits dependent on the options selected for play and the error committed. These are not *friendly games* and the stakes will be "guineas."<sup>32</sup> The losers will not be ruined, but if they play twenty, thirty, or more *tours*, continually draw dreadful cards, or play badly, never imposing *Remise*, let alone never winning a *tour*, the cost of covering their losses will be enough to

sting. The stakes are marked with special counters, the Queen Anne equivalent of poker chips. There is a greater counter—called a 'fish' from the French *la fiche*—and a lesser counter—usually just called a 'counter'; the 'fish' is worth ten 'counters' or whatever the players agree before play begins.

The card game commences by distributing the stakes to each player, usually comprising nine fish and twenty counters, with the three players agreeing beforehand on the monetary value of the counters and to how many *tours* will be played to make a complete game. When the agreed number of *tours* has been played the game ends, and any player holding fewer than one hundred and ten counters must 'buy back' the required number from those opponents who hold more than their starting stakes. Depending upon their agreed monetary value, there could be a considerable sum 'on the board.'

Before the first *tour* is dealt, each player will place one fish in the *pool*. If a player later enhances their hand by drawing replacement cards, each new card will 'cost' one additional counter. During the play, should a player make a rule or etiquette blunder, that too, will 'cost' at least one counter, depending upon the infraction. If all three players *pass* on one particular deal, that *tour* is neither played nor counted toward the agreed number of *tours* to be played. In this case, the initial stakes and any rule violation 'forfeits' will remain in the *pool*, with more counters added to enhance the total stakes in the *pool* before the next *tour* is dealt.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>If the genesis of this article was under Mr. W. E. Markham, the revelation was during a hilarious seminar conducted by Dr. T. R. Cleary. The author also acknowledges the guidance of Dr. J. E. Foss, Dr. G. D. Fulton, Dr. D. J. Leeming, and Dr. E. Miller. Whereas all of the aforementioned may virtuously claim to possess not even the faintest clue about cards or card games, any such pious claims by either Dr. Foss or Dr. Leeming—the unwary be warned—should be disregarded.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Seymour, Esq., *The Court Gamester: or, full and easy instructions for playing the games now in vogue [...]* Written for the Young Princesses (London: Printed for E. Curll in Fleet-street, first ed. 1719 [1718]). His "Of Hombre" chapter is found on pp. 1-70 (B<sup>r</sup>-G5<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ESTC Number N002071).

<sup>3</sup>See George Sherburn, ed., *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols., vol. 1, 1704-1718 (Oxford: OUP, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>All quotations and line numbers are to the Twickenham Edition *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 11 vols., gen. ed. John Butt, vol. 2, *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen; New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1962).

<sup>5</sup>William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Review of English Studies* 1 (1950): 136-43, 137.

<sup>6</sup>Wimsatt ("The Game of Ombre") 141. As Wimsatt points out, without knowing the numerical values (ranks) of the eleven non-court cards in play (ignoring the thirteen left in the talon), a complete and therefore unique reconstruction of the three hands is impossible. However, for the *tour* they play, these unknowable values are irrelevant and a simplified generic, rather than a unique reconstruction is entirely possible.

#### Forty-card Spanish *Ombre* deck

A♠, K♠, Q♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 4♠, 3♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, 2♥, 3♥, 4♥, 5♥, 6♥, 7♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, A♦, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, 5♦, 6♦, 7♦  
 A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, 7♣, 6♣, 5♣, 4♣, 3♣, 2♣

#### Pope's simplified *Ombre* deck

A♠, K♠, Q♠, J♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, ♠, 2♠  
 K♥, Q♥, J♥, A♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥, ♥  
 K♦, Q♦, J♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦, ♦  
 A♣, K♣, Q♣, J♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣, ♣

Pope's poem gives insufficient information for a complete solution that will fit back into the Spanish card deck, where all forty cards are known by suit and rank. Many reconstructors have failed to recognise that their solutions need only fit into Pope's simplified *Ombre* deck, where twenty-four of the forty cards are known only by suit.

<sup>7</sup>[Dr. William Pole], "Pope's Game of Ombre," *MacMillan's Magazine* 39 (Nov. 1873 – Apr. 1874): 262-67.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Hucks Gibbs (first baron Aldenham), *The Game of Ombre*, 2nd ed., printed privately (London: Chiswick, 1878).

<sup>9</sup>George Holden, ed., "Appendix: The Game of Ombre," *Pope's Rape of the Lock* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1909) 93-98.

<sup>10</sup>Edward G. Fletcher, "Belinda's Game of Ombre," *Texas University Studies in English* 15 (1935): 28–38; and "'Belinda's Game of Ombre': Some Corrections." *Texas University Studies in English* 16 (1936): 138.

<sup>11</sup>Tillotson, "Appendix C," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 2: 383-92.

<sup>12</sup>Arthur E. Case, "The Game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Texas University Studies in English* 24 (1944): 191-96.

<sup>13</sup>William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "Belinda Ludens: Strife and Play in *The Rape of the Lock*," *New Literary History* 4 (1973): 357-74.

<sup>14</sup>Those unfamiliar with *Ombre* should refer to the nomenclature section of this paper for full explanations for seventeen of the more important, if not unique terms used in this card game. Their use is convenient shorthand, so the terms will always appear italicised.

<sup>15</sup>Belinda leads (iii.47-50) not because she is *L'Hombre*, but because hers is the *Elder Hand*, and she therefore sits to the right of the dealer—see Seymour 21-22 (C5<sup>r</sup>-C5<sup>v</sup>). Leading gives her initial control of the game—an enormous advantage.

<sup>16</sup>The Baron plays his ace, and the next card mentioned is Belinda's winner, her king—the unknown card played by the Knight is obviously a loser (iii.95-98). Since play is anti-clockwise, the Knight must be to Belinda's right. As *Elder Hand* she bids first, but since her bid was pre-emptive, the Baron who sits to her left must have been the dealer.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester: or, instructions how to play at all manner of usual and most gentile games, either on cards, dice, billiards, trucks [...]* (London, 1709). His short chapter "L'Ombre, a Spanish Game" is found on pp. 71-77 (F4<sup>v</sup>-F7<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ESTC Number T064307). The payment rule for discarding and taking-in is on pp. 74-75 (F6<sup>r</sup>-F6<sup>v</sup>). See also John Cotgrave, *Wits Interpreter; The English Parnassus, or the sure guide [...]* (London, 1662). His short chapter "The Noble Spanish Game, called L'Ombre" is found on pp. 353-357 (Bb<sup>v</sup>-Bb3<sup>v</sup>) of the PDF which is available on Early English Books Online (Wing / C6371). Cotgrave's payment rule reads, "Of the greater Counters, each man stakes one for the Game, and one of the lesser for passing, and for the hand when Eldest, and one for taking in, that is for every card taken in one Counter."

<sup>18</sup>See Tillotson 120 and 388. More plausibly, Pope started with a real *tour* where *L'Hombre* failed to bid a fantastic hand correctly and Pope simplified this *tour* for his poem. The enormity of the task attendant with Tillotson's speculation, where the poet must create three hands, makes it most unlikely—the number of different situations is an astronomical thirty-three digit number. The mathematics of combinations tells us that there are hundreds of millions of ways to select just one nine-card hand from the forty-card Spanish deck. The expression is  $nCr$  which expands into  $n! \div r! (n - r)!$  and equals 273,438,880 when we set  $n = 40$  and  $r = 9$ . Even if the numerical values but not the suits of the twenty *plebeian* cards (two to seven inclusive, excluding the black two's and red seven's) are ignored, there are over three million different nine-card hands—the algebra and arithmetic to derive

this number (3,149,800) is messy—and if we stipulate that both black aces are included, there are still hundreds of thousands of different hands.

<sup>19</sup>Case 194-95.

<sup>20</sup>Case 194-95.

<sup>21</sup>Scholars may never know why none of Pope's contemporaries ever formally published their reconstructions. Perhaps they elected not to spoil the enigma for others; perhaps they decided that those who did not *get it* would not appreciate their solution or its surprising implications.

<sup>22</sup>Pope's audience can work out the contents of the *talon*: no spades; two hearts; five clubs; and six diamonds—possibly including the ace. Should the Baron discard his singleton ace of hearts, he cannot make his hand worse, even though he will not know that all of the spades are in play and there are none left in the *talon*. If he takes in a club then he has a heart void instead of a club void; if he takes in another [losing] heart he still has his club void; and (we know), he has a 6 in 13 (or an almost even) chance of taking in a fourth [winning] diamond.

<sup>23</sup>Alternatively, we might surmise that the Baron is a very skilful player. Recognising that his queen of spades, the fifth-ranked trump, precludes any successful game-ending *Vole* attempt by Belinda, for any number of reasons, he deliberately makes no attempt to improve his hand. Although a bit unfair to his partner, perhaps he decides to 'let' her win this one *tour*—if she can—although such patronising 'gallantry' is inconsistent with his subsequent behaviour, and inconsistent with the rest of Pope's satire about *le beau monde*.

<sup>24</sup>From Pope's text (iii.66-70) we know that the Baron's queen of spades—the eleventh and last trump, if Belinda was counting—takes the fifth trick on her king of clubs lead. Pope's text leaves his audience to infer that her 'unknown' cards are both clubs, including the 'missing' queen of clubs; and, that she must have a diamond void.

<sup>25</sup>"The *King* unseen / Lurked in her hand" (iii.95-96) is difficult to reconcile with the line "The skilful *Nymph* reviews her *Force* with care" (iii.45). Eighteenth-century playing cards are full length and must be 'headed up' while being sorted in the hand into ranked suits. Belinda has pushed the king behind her queen, and failed to fan out or count her cards properly. All are a novice's mistakes, even if she was flustered by her proximity to the Baron.

<sup>26</sup>Here the reasoning is tricky and depends on higher-ranked *Matadors* being able to 'force' lower-ranked *Matadors*. Should she bid hearts, she will hold four of the top six: A♠, A♣, K♥, Q♥, missing the 7♥ (*Manille*) and the A♥ (*Punto*)—the second and fourth ranked *Matadors*. Given the 'as dealt' hands, both will be 'forced' (the Baron's A♥, and the Knight's 7♥, if he holds it) by her top-ranked A♠ (*Spadille*) lead.

<sup>27</sup>See Fletcher (1935) 32. The reconstruction presented in *Macmillan's Magazine* by Pole in the late nineteenth century was rejected by scholars because it made Belinda's hand too strong in clubs. Unfortunately, Fletcher, whose second reconstruction contains precisely this same 'error' and matches the one derived in this

paper, does not give further scholarly consideration to what this card distribution and apparent bidding anomaly might imply.

<sup>28</sup>Seymour appends lines iii.25-100 to his "Of Hombre" chapter in *The Court Gamester*, but gives no reconstruction of the hands (67-70, G4<sup>r</sup>-G5<sup>v</sup>). His expository text includes over forty minimum-strength examples of 'ombre biddable' hands and explanations, but he gives no examples of likely *Vole* hands (34-43, D5<sup>v</sup>-E4<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>29</sup>See Seymour iii, A3<sup>r</sup>. He opens his Preface by stating that "Gameing is become so much the fashion among the *beau monde*, that he who in company should appear ignorant of the games in vogue, would be reckoned to be low bred, and hardly fit for conversation."

<sup>30</sup>See Tillotson 383, and Holden 94.

<sup>31</sup>Seymour 32, D4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Pole 269.



## Strangely Surpriz'd by Robinson Crusoe: A Response to David Fishelov\*

MAXIMILLIAN E. NOVAK

In treating Defoe's *Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, most critics have focused on the first word, "Life"—the fictional work as creating a real world in which characters learn, experience feelings, and live in an environment that is at least partly recognizable. Crusoe tells us in his first sentence: "I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull."<sup>1</sup> The modern reader recognizes that the narrative will involve someone from England at a particular period of time. A reader of 1719 would also have been aware on encountering this sentence, with its details about time and place, that he/she was unlikely to encounter the kind of romantic "novel" that composed the bulk of fictions written at the time. And if, as Susan Feagin suggests, the reader at the beginning of a work of fiction is always ready to "shift gears" rapidly, the seeming contradiction between a real "Life," "Written by Himself," and a life filled with "Strange Surprising Adventures" might lead to the expectation that this was to be one of the many false memoirs of the type produced by Gatién Courtilz and others.<sup>2</sup> If 1632 is not as visitable a past (to use Henry James's term) for us as it was for the first readers of Defoe's novel, nevertheless even for them, an historical period was being invoked—one that was filled with strange, surprising changes. What will most surprise the reader is that the bulk of the novel will treat the experiences of an isolated figure on an island in the Caribbean Sea.

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\*Reference: David Fishelov, "Robinson Crusoe, 'The Other' and the Poetics of Surprise," *Connotations* 14.1-3 (2004/2005): 1-18.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debfishelov01413.htm>>.

To my mind, David Fishelov's "*Robinson Crusoe, 'The Other' and the Poetics of Surprise*" achieves its most significant insight when it examines Crusoe's being "strangely surpriz'd" (158) by Friday's theological question about the existence of evil in the world, about God's having unlimited power while permitting the Devil and evil to exist. Crusoe, who confesses to being but a fledgling theologian, does not have an answer to such a question and pretending not to have heard Friday, asks him to repeat his query—a query that Crusoe cannot answer with any skill. Despite Crusoe's attempt at an evasion, Friday knows exactly the import of his question:

But he was too earnest for an Answer to forget his Question, so that he repeated it in the very same broken Words, as above. By this time I had recovered my self a little, and I said, *God will at last punish him severely he is reserv'd for the Judgment, and is to be cast into the Bottomless-Pit, to dwell with everlasting Fire;* This did not satisfie *Friday*, but he returns upon me, repeating my Words, *RESERVE, AT LAST, me no understand; but, why not kill the Devil now, not kill great ago? You may as well ask me said I, Why God does not kill you and I, when we do wicked Things here that offend him? We are preserv'd to repent and be pardon'd.* (158)

With this, Friday, perhaps seeing the stress he has caused Crusoe, replies "affectionately," that he understands, "*that well; so you, I, Devil, all wicked, all preserve, repent, God pardon all*" (158). Now Friday's generosity includes a pardon for all those who repent including the Devil, an idea that Crusoe rejects as false doctrine, and his creator, Defoe, would almost certainly have considered heretical.<sup>3</sup> Crusoe then speaks of the necessity for "divine Revelation" for a proper understanding of Christian doctrine.

Thus, as Crusoe explains, the "meer Notions of Nature" can guide a savage such as Friday to a "Knowledge of God" (158), but not to a true understanding of Christianity. Or is Friday's generous concept of a universal salvation that even includes the Devil an idea thrown out for the reader's consideration? The second part of *Robinson Crusoe*, titled *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe Being the Second and Last Part of his Life and the Strange Surprising Accounts of his Travels Round Three Parts of the Globe*, published just a few months after the first part

and until the beginning of the twentieth century read as an essential part of the work,<sup>4</sup> has an admirable Catholic priest who, in converting the inhabitants of Crusoe's island, preaches a broad concept of Christianity, closer in some ways to Friday's notions than to Crusoe's. Crusoe appears to adhere to a strict concept of salvation, probably Presbyterian in nature—a concept that would not only exclude the Devil but also many repentant Christians.

The question of Crusoe's surprise, then, is extremely complicated. In the first place, he clearly did not expect Friday to come up with an extremely difficult question about the nature of evil in the world. As Fishelov remarks, Crusoe is unsure of what exactly he is searching for when he decides that it would be a good thing to capture one or more of the natives. He thinks such persons might be made into "Slaves" (145) or if just one, a "Servant, and perhaps a Companion, or Assistant" (146), and he is close to having a "Feaver" because of "the extraordinary Fervour of [his] Mind about it" (143). At that point, he has a dream in which he envisions himself rescuing a savage whom the cannibals were about to kill, a savage who would not only be his "Servant" but also a "Pilot" (144) who would help him to escape from the island. The dream is so vivid that he awakes with a feeling of disappointment and depression, the wish fulfillment of the dream being so much more desirable than his isolated condition. He decides to act upon what his dream tells him. Yet it is clear that he has not considered with any clarity what the coming of Friday will mean to him. The dream has the putative Friday escaping from the Cannibals, but there is no violence. The fleeing native asks his help, and he gives it. In his dream, the native will be the ideal pilot to take him off the island. He will know how to avoid the cannibals and lead him to a successful escape.

The real rescue of Friday is far messier. Crusoe is forced to kill several of the savages; some escape. Friday, in Crusoe's imagination, is eternally grateful and swears to serve him forever, but all we see is an ambiguous gesture involving the placing of Crusoe's foot on the kneeling Friday's head. Friday is interested in eating the dead canni-

bals, and Crusoe has to indicate his displeasure at such a prospect by violent gestures. Friday proves to be grateful toward the man who saved his life, and to have an affectionate nature. He willingly does all the work asked of him. When Crusoe decides later to attack a group of cannibals who are preparing to kill and devour those who turn out to be the Spanish Captain and Friday's father, Friday joins Crusoe in assault. And when Friday discovers that one of those rescued is his father, he dances wildly up and down, embracing his father with complete abandon. Crusoe finds this display of affection somewhat disturbing and wonders if it may indicate a certain loss of Friday's allegiance to him. But Friday remains the good-natured servant and companion until his death in *The Farther Adventures*.

Fishelov tries to distinguish varieties of surprise in the Crusoe-Friday relationship, indicating some cases in which both Crusoe and the reader are surprised and some in which the readers find themselves distanced from Crusoe. The case with which I began, that of Friday's question concerning the existence of the Devil and of evil in the world despite God's seeming power to remove it, is strange and surprising to Crusoe. He did not expect such a complex question from someone whom he clearly regards as inferior in knowledge. His eventual answer leaves Friday unsatisfied and with what Crusoe considers a heresy. But Defoe knew that many of his readers would be surprised in a different way—delighted with Friday's "natural" response. In some sense, although there were many attempts at theodicies during this period, the question of the existence of evil in the world was usually answered by the "argument from ignorance." Human beings, limited in their powers of understanding, are incapable of answering such questions and should be humble about their abilities.<sup>5</sup> As Fishelov remarks, there appear to be echoes of the biblical book of Job in this section, and while Job's visitors present arguments to the effect that his punishment must result from his having committed some sin, God himself does not provide such an answer. Many, perhaps most, eighteenth-century readers, were likely to conclude that this was an area of knowledge that God had withheld from humankind and to be

both surprised and delighted with Friday's response and amused at Crusoe's bewilderment.

An even more obvious example of this separation between the surprise of the reader and Crusoe's surprise occurs with Friday's joy at discovering that the native he has rescued is indeed his father. Crusoe had already some suspicions of Friday's loyalty to him after observing what he thought to be a momentary longing for his home when he showed Friday a distant view of some land to be seen from the island. Crusoe tests Friday's devotion to him and brings him to tears, and he is convinced of Friday's "settled Affection" (164). Yet Friday's ecstatic response to finding his father exceeds any previous display of emotion. Crusoe regards it with surprise and with good reason. He had quarreled with his father before leaving home and in departing from his home, showed no filial emotion but merely the curiosity of the adventurer. While Crusoe's surprise is complicated by his experiences with his father, the readers are asked to be delighted by the uncomplicated love displayed by Friday. While the readers identify in part with Crusoe, the young Englishman seeking adventures, they are asked to be surprised and amazed by the emotions of Friday, the "natural man." The 'other,' as represented by Friday, is not merely to be accepted as human, he is seen as capable of the kind of familial love that the "civilized" world can only barely remember.<sup>6</sup>

Fishelov suggests that the reader is surprised by Crusoe's sale of Xury, the boy with whom he escaped from slavery among the Moors, arguing that this is an example of the reader feeling some separation from Defoe's protagonist. Crusoe has experienced slavery for two years. In addition, Xury has shown great affection for Crusoe. But the reader is surprised because he/she has not been paying attention. Like his two brothers, Crusoe rejected the advice of his father and ran away from home to pursue his adventures. He was involved in the trade to Africa, which usually meant engaging in the slave trade. The reader should have remarked how much Crusoe was delighted at the money he made in his first voyage. In the sale of Xury, we learn something about Crusoe's character. He is a venture capitalist at heart, ex-



cited by taking risks and careless of the lives of those around him. In Brazil, the planting of sugar was a labor intensive venture. As Fishelov points out, he regrets that he did not have Xury with him in Brazil, not from affection but because he needed his labor, and it is on a venture to Africa as a slave trader that he finds himself wrecked on the island. We don't empathize less with Crusoe because of this part of his character. The egotism of the protagonist is almost a given in tales of adventure, but the contrast between the scheming Crusoe and Friday is no accident. Friday embodies the generosity, loyalty, and affection that may be found deep down in all human beings, even a former cannibal; Crusoe, while admirable in his determination to survive on the island, is a problematic character, willing to use others for his advantage. He is something of a religious enthusiast, and certainly not the most trustworthy of companions. In reading *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures*, we may be surprised by some of the ironies, but our moments of surprise are also moments of knowledge.

The great moment of surprise for all readers of Crusoe comes with the discovery of the single footprint in the sand. As Fishelov suggests, Defoe pulls out all the stops at this moment to enable the readers to feel the astonishment that Crusoe feels. Since this is a realist text, Crusoe's initial notion that somehow it might be the workings of the Devil does indeed seem to create a separation between the readers' surprise and Crusoe's. Meir Sternberg remarks that "every writer may be permitted to deal as much in the wonderful as he pleases; nay, the more he can surprise the reader, if he thus keeps within the rules of credibility, the more he will engage his attention and the more he will charm him."<sup>7</sup> This is maybe true of the Fieldingesque novel, but even this type of fiction risks coming close to parody.<sup>8</sup> As Alexander Welsh has suggested, Crusoe subjects the experience of the footprint to a kind of empirical examination that might be expected in the investigation of a crime scene.<sup>9</sup> Crusoe looks to see if there is anyone in sight, measures it, and tests the possibility that it is indeed a print of his foot (it is not). But the evidence as Crusoe presents it, leads to a horrifying conclusion. The footprint has to be that of a native who has come to the is-



land, and that native is likely, in Crusoe's mind, to be a cannibal. Crusoe, who has been longing for a companion to relieve his loneliness, is horrified by the presence of the 'other,' in the form of the enemy. Crusoe's narrative does not stress this irony, but the reader who has empathized with Crusoe's loneliness should be fully aware of it. Thus, as Feagin would suggest at this point, our feeling is closer to "sympathy." We can understand Crusoe's nearly hysterical reaction, we are concerned with his plight, but the dramatic irony and our judgments separate us somewhat from Crusoe's terror.

It would seem as if Crusoe might simply resolve to be more cautious. Instead he destroys all evidence of his agricultural and pastoral labors and spends two years living in fear. Only after such a time has elapsed does he come to terms with the cannibals who visit the island and with their terrible feasts. The reader has to see his fantasies about rushing among the cannibals and killing them as extreme. Only after arriving at the position of Montaigne and others to the effect that cannibalism is an aspect of their culture is Crusoe capable of rational thought. He still finds them frightening, but he rejects the slaughter made among the natives by the conquering Spaniards as barbaric and exceeding the bounds of civilized conduct. Following Crusoe's line of reasoning, the reader has to conclude that even the terrifying cannibals are part of the human race.

Such moments in Defoe's novel are truly transformational, but there are also some set pieces involving surprise, particularly at the end, when Crusoe at last finds the opportunity to escape from his island and when he takes so large a part in recovering a ship from mutineers who plan to become pirates. Similarly, the adventure in the snows of the Pyrenees, when Crusoe and his fellow travelers find themselves charged by a band of ferocious wolves, comes as a surprise after Crusoe appears to have escaped all the dangers of the island. These are mainly the surprises we expect of adventure stories, and while they involve suspense, they don't teach the reader very much.<sup>10</sup>

But there are also surprises in Defoe's descriptive techniques. The two storms involving shipwrecks, the one when he first departs from

home to voyage from Hull to the seashore near London, and the other when he goes on his venture to trade for slaves in Africa, present descriptions of a vividness unknown outside of the amazing Dutch paintings of seascapes. It would be naïve to suggest that the Dutch paintings are not in motion and do not extend themselves in time, but Defoe's descriptive powers had to strike the readers as amazing—as something never encountered before in fiction. Even we who read Defoe through the veil that the realists and naturalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have created are surprised by the power of his descriptions.

And there are always surprises at the rhetorical moments of Crusoe's discovery of money and its uses. One involves Crusoe's surprise at finding himself amazingly rich from the wealth accrued from his plantations in Brazil while he was on the island. Crusoe's reaction to his newly discovered wealth almost kills him as he finds himself barely able to contain his emotions. It constitutes a minor theme involving the ways in which excess joy can be almost as destructive as sorrow. And it comes long after a more famous moment: Defoe's set piece on Crusoe's discovery of gold on the wreck. It was a passage that caught the eyes of the reviewer for the *Journal des sçavans* in 1720 and of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his notebooks. Crusoe delivers an oration on the uselessness of money on the island as he decides what objects will be useful to him there:

I smil'd to my self at the Sight of this Money, O Drug! Said I aloud, what art thou good for, Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the Ground, of those Knives is worth all this Heap, I have no matter of use for thee, e'en remain where thou art, and go to the Bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving. However, upon Second Thoughts I took it away [...]. (43)

Crusoe, who has left the safety of his plantation in Brazil to pursue what might have been an opportunity to become wealthy, has a moment of awareness. Money, he sees, is an artificial thing—a mode of exchange that cannot help him in his attempt to survive on the island. Certainly the reader can understand such a concept, though to those

who had not thought very much about the principles of economics, it may have come as a surprise. That Crusoe should, after posturing in this manner, gather the 36 Pounds together and take the money from the wreck is a wonderful surprise for the reader. After being convinced by Crusoe's rhetoric, he/she suddenly discovers that the eminently "civilized" Crusoe cannot resist taking the money that has so much worth in Crusoe's former world. Perhaps, as Fishelov suggests, the reader feels superior to Crusoe as he contradicts himself, but the moment of surprise involves a recognition of certain truths. Yes, money is valueless on the island, but who knows what may happen: A ship might come to the island, and he might find himself rescued with the money so esteemed by society. It is all very well to theorize about money as an artificial form of exchange, but who would not succumb to the wish to have a bit of it? For Crusoe, such reactions are merely "Second Thoughts." For the reader they are a revelation.

Both Noël Carroll and Susan Feagin maintain that surprise need not involve any great intellectual effort,<sup>11</sup> but Fishelov is right to point to the ways in which Defoe surprises the reader into seeing something new. This is not only true about Crusoe's discovery of the complex reasoning of the 'other' in Friday's question about God's willingness to allow the Devil to live. It is also true of that way in which Defoe uses the dream—one of the realist's ways of introducing fantastic elements into a narrative. Both dreams are understandable on a realistic level.<sup>12</sup> The first comes after Crusoe has been literally feverish, the second after his desire to capture one of the natives as a possible guide to reaching the mainland. The first dream is truly horrific, a figure "bright as a Flame" (64) advances toward him with a lance threatening to kill him for his wicked life. It is a double nightmare—of the kind in which one thinks one has awakened only to experience the horror of the dream over again: "I mean, that even while it was a Dream, I even dreamed of those Horrors" (65). The surprise, the "Horrors" (65), leads Crusoe to change his life and become a repentant Christian. Even for the reader who is unwilling to follow Crusoe in his conversion, the scene is vivid. The second dream, involving

events similar to Crusoe's rescue of Friday and which I have already discussed, is less dramatic but still surprising in the working out of the problem that "agitated" (143) his mind and produced a kind of "Feaver" (143). Unlike his previous dream, he wants to cling to this one and is dejected when he awakens. Yet it is a dream that he is able to put into action, and it sets up the surprise of repetition when much of it comes true. Yet the coming of Friday is different in one particular way. Crusoe's dream arose from his desire to escape the island. After he has attained the companionship of Friday, he finds a kind of contentment. It turns out that what he really wanted was not a slave who would help him escape but a companion who would relieve his loneliness. He continues to dream of escaping from the island, but once he has Friday, the "Feaver," the overwhelming desire to escape vanishes.

What Fishelov remarks about surprise in *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures*, then, is entirely correct and provides a new way of approaching Defoe's novel. The reader is surprised into knowledge. The cannibals are envisaged as a possibility when Crusoe first lands on the island in the connection with his fear of "being devour'd by wild Beasts" (36), foreshadowed by his earlier account of wild beasts on the shore of Africa. Crusoe's surprisingly good experience with these African natives—evoking the myth of the virtuous natural man—might serve as a preparation for the arrival of Friday, but Defoe plays Crusoe's horror at the cannibals to arouse the basic fears of the reader. They are not merely the 'other.' They are first represented as monstrous, or as Noël Carroll puts it, "something that defies cultural categories" (185), arousing curiosity and disgust. When he finally gets to examine a cannibal feast, he asks the reader to share his feelings:

I was so astonish'd with the Sight of these Things, that I entertain'd no Notions of any Danger to my self from it for a long while; All my Apprehensions were bury'd in the thoughts of such a Pitch of inhuman, hellish Brutality, and the Horror of the Degeneracy of Humane Nature; which though I had heard of often, yet I never had so near a View of before; in short, I turn'd away my Face from the horrid Spectacle; my Stomach grew sick, and I was just at the Point of Fainting, when Nature discharg'd the Dis-

order from my Stomach; and having vomited with an uncommon Violence, I was a little reliev'd. (133)

The point is that Defoe makes us feel how strange and alienating the concept of cannibalism is. Montaigne does not have a scene of this kind in defending cannibalism as little different from European warfare. Defoe, on the other hand, wants us to feel with Crusoe his revulsion, his horror, and his fear of these "Savage Wretches." It is only after such a moment that Crusoe's acceptance of the behavior of the cannibals—of the 'other'—can achieve its surprise and force.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994) 1. Subsequent citations from this first part of *Robinson Crusoe* will be included in my text within parentheses.

<sup>2</sup>See Susan Feagin, *Reading with Feeling: The Aesthetics of Appreciation* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996) 63-74; and Gatién Courtitz, *The French Spy: or the Memoirs of John Baptist De la Fontaine* (London, 1700) 2.

<sup>3</sup>Friday's belief is usually associated with "universalism," a doctrine that was common in the early Christian church but condemned by the Catholic Church in 543 AD. The idea seems to be contrary to Revelations 2:7-10, which has the devils tormented forever. This doctrine experienced a revival among some Christian mystics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See J. R. Willis, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Detroit: Thomson; Gale, 2003) 14: 321-22.

<sup>4</sup>See Melissa Free, "Un-Erasing Crusoe: Farther Adventures in the Nineteenth Century," *Book History* 9 (2006): 89-130.

<sup>5</sup>Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* preached such humility. The accompanying argument concerning this being "the best of all possible worlds" was derided by Samuel Johnson and Voltaire.

<sup>6</sup>Ian Watt suggested that Crusoe's attempt at mastering all the trades of his contemporary world represented an evocation of primitivism—the notion of an earlier, simpler, and better world—at a time when most Londoners went to the local shop to buy bread, meat, and furniture instead of producing things at home; according to Watt, this can be read as expressive of "the deprivations involved by

economic specialisation." *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Hogarth P, 1957) 71-74, 71. The representation of Friday's emotions has a very similar function.

<sup>7</sup>*Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 262.

<sup>8</sup>The discoveries of the various identities and origins of the characters at the end of *Joseph Andrews* compromises the reader's sense that he/she has been experiencing a fairly detailed and convincing account of eighteenth-century life in England. Sternberg argues that Ian Watt faults Fielding merely for not being Richardson (264), but it is notable that by the time Fielding came to write *Amelia*, he had left behind this kind of playful abandonment of the real. It may also be noted that critical fashions change. At the time Sternberg was writing, self-conscious narrative was particularly valued in critical circles and Watt's admiration for the real may have seemed quaint. Some modern writers now regard the playfulness of a Henry Fielding, a Laurence Sterne, or a Vladimir Nabokov less favorably.

<sup>9</sup>Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) 3-8.

<sup>10</sup>It should be noted that, in presenting these hungry wolves as having the ability to attack in the manner of a European army, Defoe humanizes them. Crusoe's real battle with the army of cannibals is thus transposed to the battle with the more genuinely carnivorous wolves.

<sup>11</sup>See Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 12, 65-68, 196-203; and Feagin 128.

<sup>12</sup>In *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, volume three of the *Crusoe* trilogy, Crusoe tells of a third dream—a classic nightmare involving a weight on his body that he at first ascribes to some supernatural force. In recalling the experience, Crusoe states that he first ascribed the dream to physiological causes—perhaps a kind of stroke.



## A Reply to Maximillian E. Novak\*

DAVID FISHELOV

I am delighted that Maximillian E. Novak, an authority on Defoe, has found my discussion of surprise in *Robinson Crusoe* useful, and am grateful for the opportunity to offer further observation on the way that Defoe's classic invites its readers to re-think the opposition of nature and culture. Novak's highly informed, attentive readings of several passages from *Robinson Crusoe* not only highlight the different shades of surprise evident in the novel, but also demonstrate how this aspect of the reading experience is sometimes related to the cognitive and ideological implications of a seemingly simple adventure story, a point aptly encapsulated in Novak's formulation: "The reader is surprised into knowledge" (247).

Novak's discussion of the encounter between Friday and his father is exemplary in this context. Everyone, including the reader, is surprised to find out that the man rescued from the hands (or rather teeth...) of the cannibals is in fact Friday's father. Friday's spontaneous burst of joy during that scene may echo representations of encounters between natives in contemporary accounts of desert islands.<sup>1</sup> What is even more important, however, is that this affectionate, heartwarming meeting of father and son indirectly references the cold, alienated relationship Crusoe had with his own father. Thus, in Novak's words, "[t]he 'other,' as represented by Friday, is not merely to be accepted as human, he is seen as capable of the kind of familial love that the 'civilized' world can only barely remember" (242). Defoe

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\*Reference: Maximillian E. Novak, "Strangely Surpriz'd by Robinson Crusoe: A Response to David Fishelov," *Connotations* 17.2-3 (2007/2008): 238-49; David Fishelov, "*Robinson Crusoe*, 'The Other' and the Poetics of Surprise," *Connotations* 14.1-3 (2004/2005): 1-18.

suggests that when it comes to familial relationships and the ability to express genuine feelings, the 'other' is closer to nature and to "the law of nature."<sup>2</sup>

In some points Novak's readings offer a slightly different emphasis than my own, especially when it comes to the question of the 'correct' distance that the reader should adopt vis-à-vis Crusoe, the character and narrator. Such differences in emphasis are not surprising and result from Defoe's art of putting on fictional masks. Defoe's chameleon-like use of his personae is not only an important part of his art of realism, presenting story and narrator as a *tranche de vie*, but also contributes to his works' rhetorical complexity: it fosters an active reader who constantly tries to decide whether, and to what extent, Defoe-the-author should be identified with his invented personae. In some cases the fictional mask serves as Defoe's mouthpiece, in others there is a huge gap between the two, and in still others, it creates an unstable irony, mixing identification and distance, agreement and discord; readers know that they should not take the speaker's words at their face value, but it is difficult to determine what they should adopt instead.<sup>3</sup> When this art of playful masking and irony touched upon sensitive contemporary political nerves, it had some painful consequences for the author, as the incident of *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* illustrates.<sup>4</sup>

The famous scene in which Crusoe relates the finding of the money on the wrecked ship may illustrate the active role of the reader in determining the correct distance that they should adopt vis-à-vis Crusoe-the-narrator. After making an impressive speech about the uselessness of money on a desert island, Crusoe tells us that "upon Second Thought" (43) he decided to pick it up. Is Crusoe-the-narrator aware of the ironic implications of the contrast between speech and action performed by Crusoe-the-character? And if not, as I perhaps too hastily suggested, are we to feel superior to the narrator, imagining Defoe smiling behind his back? Novak convincingly argues that such a superior position—adopted towards character and narrator alike—is quickly transformed into sympathy and understanding,

because, “who knows what may happen: A ship might come to the island, and he might find himself rescued with the money so esteemed by society” (246). Furthermore, Novak shows how the reader’s surprise in witnessing Crusoe’s change of heart goes beyond a local, rhetorical effect, teaching us something deep about our attitude towards money.

There is, however, one point where Novak seems to dismiss too quickly Defoe’s poetics of surprise as a springboard for attaining valuable insights. According to Novak, alongside “transformational moments” there are also

some set pieces involving surprise, particularly at the end, when Crusoe at last finds the opportunity to escape from his island and when he takes so large a part in recovering a ship from mutineers who plan to become pirates. Similarly, the adventure in the snows of the Pyrenees, when Crusoe and his fellow travelers find themselves charged by a band of ferocious wolves, comes as a surprise after Crusoe appears to have escaped all the dangers of the island. These are mainly the surprises we expect of adventure stories and while they involve suspense, they don’t teach the reader very much. (244)

Granting that recovering a ship from mutineers is a set piece, I would like to argue that some events of the Pyrenees go beyond the horizons of a simple adventure story, not only because they shake up certain narrative expectations but also because they make us re-think a few accepted ideas. If by ‘teaching the reader’ we understand a specific set of didactic statements, then perhaps Novak is right. But when we adopt a broader understanding of the term, including a tacit invitation to question and contemplate certain categories, then the surprising adventure in the Pyrenees may bear important cognitive and ideological import.

What makes this adventure surprising is, as Novak rightly points out, that it occurs when we have every reason to believe that now, when Crusoe is safely back in the civilized world, time has come for him to enjoy some peace and quiet. Defoe’s idea to present Crusoe struggling against the dangerous forces of nature (snow, wild beasts) in the Pyrenees has, however, additional ramifications. The decision

to locate perhaps the most 'primitive' fighting scene in the story—man against ferocious beasts struggling for survival—in Europe, the heart of civilization, is not only surprising but also instructive. After all, it would have been more 'natural' to set such a scene in the wilderness of a desert island or on the shores of Africa. True, on the shores of Africa Crusoe and Xury face and kill "a most curious Leopard" (24), but the scene there is quite short, lacking the detailed, graphic elements of brutality used in the Pyrenees, and can be described as a relatively pale prelude to the later episode.

By locating a primeval struggle for survival in the heart of Europe Defoe is unexpectedly confronting two opposing notions, that of wild nature and that of civilized Europe, inviting the reader to question the clear-cut division between the two, suggesting that brutal struggle for survival is not the monopoly of extra-European territory but can also be found where we would expect a tranquil, bourgeois existence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, just after the encounter with the "monstrous wolves," the next developed memorable scene, in which Friday fights a bear, involves a surprising, grotesque mixture of wildness and refined civilization. The scene is first introduced by Crusoe as follows: "the Fight manag'd so hardily, and in such a surprising Manner [...] between *Friday* and the Bear, which gave us all (though at first we were surpriz'd and afraid for him) the greatest Diversion imaginable" (211). There is a double surprise here, referring both to the manner by which Friday chooses to fight the bear as well as to the effect it had on his audience. When the travelers perceive "a vast monstrous" bear, they are all "a little surpriz'd" but what makes Crusoe truly "surpriz'd" is Friday's reaction: he does not seem frightened but rather pleased. In response to Crusoe's warning that the bear will "*eat you up*," Friday jokingly says that "*Me eatee him up*" (212),<sup>6</sup> volunteering to handle the situation with the bear, accompanied by a promise: "*Me make you good laugh*" (212).

Friday performs his 'show' by teasing the bear, luring the animal to follow him in climbing a tree, and when the bear reaches a point where the branch of the tree is weaker, Friday addresses his audience:

"*Ha, says he to us, now you see me teachee the Bear dance*" (213). From here on, we witness a strange sequence of movements:

the Bear began to totter, but stood still, and begun to look behind him, to see how he should get back [...] when he sees him stand still, he calls out to him again, as if he had suppo'd the Bear could speak *English; What you no come farther, pray you come farther*; so he left jumping and shaking the Bough; and the Bear, just as if he had understood what he said, did come a little further, then he fell a jumping again, and the Bear stopp'd again. (213)

Finally, just before the bear "could set his hind Feet upon the Ground, *Friday* stept close to him, clapt the Muzzle of his Piece into his Ear, and shot him dead as a Stone" (213-14). Thus, Crusoe and the travelers, as well as the reader, all expecting a dangerous, violent confrontation with a wild beast, are instead invited to imagine a genteel ballet-duet of Friday (as performer and choreographer) and the bear. To add irony to irony, it is Friday, the 'brute' equipped with garbled English, who is staging the dance-like performance, addressing the bear with genteel expressions ("pray you come farther").

Defoe's achievement in *Robinson Crusoe* lies not only in creating an enthralling story of a man on a desert island, but also in implanting in some minor but memorable scenes a major theme of the book: the unexpected juxtapositions of nature and culture. This theme is evident in several macro-elements: the author's basic idea to place a civilized man in a primordial situation, and in orchestrating an encounter with a cannibal whose religion resembles, surprisingly enough, some aspects of the Roman Catholic Church (157); and also in micro-elements, like Crusoe's description of his clothing on the island: a bizarre mixture of civilized and wild elements (breeches and wild skins) that, if seen by people in England, "must either have frightened them, or rais'd a great deal of Laughter" (108); and the grotesque mixture also includes elements borrowed from foreign cultures (whiskers in a shape "seen worn by some *Turks*," 109), making him the ultimate hybrid. The oscillation between fear and laughter, the hallmark of the grotesque, characterizes not only the self-portrayal of Crusoe's clothing



but also Friday's killing of the bear (although I suspect most of us today would not laugh at witnessing the killing of an animal).

Thus, the minor, almost negligible, scene in the Pyrenees, tagged as part of a simple adventure story can, upon second thoughts, reveal the author's innermost sensibilities and thematic concerns. And, as with various other episodes in *Robinson Crusoe*, narrative surprise may trigger some serious reflections about man as a complex, sometimes inharmonious meeting ground of nature and culture.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Friday kiss'd him, embrace'd him hugg'd him, cry'd, laugh'd, hollow'd, jump'd about, danc'd, sung, then cry'd again, wrung his Hands, beat his own Face, and Head, and then sung, and jump'd about again, like a distracted Creature [...] It is not easy for me to express how it mov'd me to see what Extasy and filial Affection had work'ed in this poor *Savage*, at the Sight of his Father" (172); and see also William Dampier's description of an encounter between two Moskito Indians: "a Moskito Indian, named Robin, first leap'd ashore, and running to his Brother Moskito Man, threw himself flat on his face at his feet, who helping him up, and embracing him, fell flat with his face on the Ground at Robin's feet, and was by him taken up also. We stood with pleasure to behold the surprise and tenderness, and solemnity of this interview, which was exceedingly affectionate on both sides" (228). Quotations, followed by page number, are from Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of "the law of nature" as the implicit standard underlying Defoe's oeuvre, see Maximillian E. Novak's seminal study *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford: OUP, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>See Maximillian E. Novak, "Defoe's Use of Irony," *The Uses of Irony, Papers on Defoe and Swift* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1966): 7-38. The essay convincingly argues for the ubiquity of irony ("we must always expect irony of Defoe," 36) and its versatile use in Defoe's writings. For the term 'unstable irony,' see Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1974) especially 240-45.

<sup>4</sup>For details of this incident, in which some contemporary readers were unable to tell exactly where the irony starts or stops, see Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions* (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 178.



<sup>5</sup>Cf. the cruel struggle for survival that Moll Flanders has to go through in the “jungle” of the streets of London.

<sup>6</sup>The talk of eating/being eaten may remind us of Crusoe’s and Xury’s state of mind on the shores of Africa as well as the motif of cannibalism in the entire work.

## Response to Elena Anastasaki's "The Trials and Tribulations of the *revenants*"\*

CLAIRE RAYMOND

The *revenant* presents an insolvable figure in discourse, disturbing boundaries, disrupting and confusing the difference between the dead and the living, even the difference between death and life. Elena Anastasaki's engaging paper, "The Trials and Tribulations of the *revenants*," contends with this ineluctable, irresolvable boundary disturbance that attends the *revenant*, and unearths the psychic rupture within the *revenant* him or herself. Anastasaki refreshingly is concerned not with the apparent effect of the *revenant*, her/his role as disruptor of boundaries, but rather with the internal grief and psychic dislocation that the *revenant* bears because of his/her position as always out of bounds. In a nicely original move, Anastasaki considers the fragmentation and fracture *within* the *revenant*.

Comparing and differentiating Mary Shelley's from Théophile Gautier's handling of the *revenant* is an inspired choice on Anastasaki's part. Shelley and Gautier, though roughly contemporaneous, wrote from importantly different traditions and positions: Gautier a celebrated Parisian journalist and Shelley the once scandalous mistress, and later wife and widow, of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, Shelley and Gautier shared in common a most salient position *vis a vis* literature.<sup>1</sup> Both earned their livings by their pens, Shelley cranking out short shorts for the annuals and Gautier producing journalism. Writing prose, with its propensity towards coherent narrative and,

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\*Reference: Elena Anastasaki, "The Trials and Tribulations of the *revenants*: Narrative Techniques and the Fragmented Hero in Mary Shelley and Théophile Gautier," *Connotations* 16.1-3 (2006/2007): 26-46.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debanastasaki01613.htm>>.

moreover, its structuring principle that does *not* depend on line breaks, was financially necessary for these late Romantics.

Anastasaki eloquently describes the narrative technique of fragmentation, signifying internal disruption, shared by Shelley's and Gautier's *revenant* tales. I would like to extend her insight to suggest that these writers embed within prose the poetic fragment revived and that this gesture shapes and informs the character of the *revenant*. In Shelley and Gautier, the *revenant* becomes a privileged sign for the poem lost within prose. For example, Gautier describes the face of the *revenant* courtesan Clarimonde as reflective not just of poetry but most specifically of poetry that has been lost, her expression like that of "a poet who has let the sole manuscript of his finest work tumble down into the fire" (21). Along similar lines, in Gautier's "The Opium Smoker" the female *revenant* "speak(s) in a marvelous form of verse that no poet alive will ever equal" (99).<sup>2</sup> Notably, Shelley and Gautier had close bonds with Romantic poets. Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Gautier's great friend, Gerard de Nerval, influenced the prose of their survivors, generating that fragmentary figure, the *revenant*. Importantly, Anastasaki emphasizes the *revenant's* fragmented characteristics and reminds us that Schlegel offers a paradigmatic notion of the poem as participatory in the aesthetic of the fragment. The *revenant*, then, can be interpreted in Shelley and Gautier as a prose gesture that signifies poetry. The figure of the dead returned to life and the attempt to regain a lost poet or poem entwine and strategically are embedded in both Gautier's and Shelley's tales of *revenants*.

In Shelley's "The Mortal Immortal" the half immortal Winzy may be read as a figure for the poet, whose work, as Percy and Mary believed, aspired to immortality but whose body, as Mary plainly saw upon claiming the drowned body of her spouse, was mortal. Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Mary's idealized vision, is a fragmented figure, split into the immortality that she interpreted as his soul's flight in the language of his verse and the body drowned and burned. In Shelley's "The Mortal Immortal," not only is poetry's ability to reach beyond the

mortal claims of the body figured as a kind of magic potion, it is positioned as a dangerous, not entirely effective, and painful magic. Shelley's half immortal hero, as Anastasaki points out, suffers a fragmented interiority because of his dual status: he has drunk only half a draught of the elixir, earning only half immortality. He remains apparently youthful but evacuated internally, a fact that Anastasaki rightly links to fragmentation not *between* the *revenant* self and the living other but rather *within* the *revenant* himself. Poetry, in the Shelleys' idealization of it, became a signifier for flight and release, free of the logical trappings of prose. But Mary Shelley used prose to explore and expose the risks of the Romantic poem, risks indicated by tropes of fragmentation.

Similarly, Gautier's "The Priest" depicts adult responsibility—the job of shepherding a congregation—as a force of entombment. Anastasaki insightfully points to the fragmentary quality of the young priest's dreamed encounters with Clarimonde, his *revenant* mistress, by noting that dreams always have a fragmentary form. This trope of fragmentation within the story plays on the motif of the erotic dream and signifies links between the fragmentary qualities of the dream and the Romantic poem. Like dreams, the poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley and the poems of Gautier's dear friend Gerard de Nerval are fueled by vivid imagery and tend to tropes of release. Indeed, describing Nerval, Gautier writes that "his winged spirit carried his body forward and he seemed to skim over the surface of the earth. One could almost say that he soared above reality itself, sustained by his dreams" (152-53). Likewise, the fragmentary nature of the dream in Gautier's tales of *revenants* reminds us that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue for the fragment's importance to Romanticism: "The fragment is the Romantic genre *par excellence*" (40). Moreover, Agamben conceives of the poem as definitively fragmented, asking "what is left of the poem after its ruin" and answering that after its end the poem "joins itself [...] to pass definitively into prose" (114). For Agamben the poem is shaped by its difference from prose: its ruin is the return to prose.

Concini Palace, the ruined edifice that stages the erotic dream to which Gautier's young priest nightly returns, is an elaborately gorgeous domain—an ancient palace in which sonnets have been built into pretty, indeed beautiful, rooms (22). In “The Priest,” prose, which carries us through the story's narrative, also functions as a kind of verbal vestment enclosing the fragmentary freedom of the erotic dream, that dream alone within which the young priest feels he is alive. Prose, then, is set in a position analogous to that of the responsible life that the pious priest at last chooses to lead. Prose, which definitively is *not* shaped by line breaks, renders the diegetic content of the story accessible. But only the fragmentary erotic dream brings the young priest pleasure. The erotic dream functions as the young priest's great desire, and as that which fragments him, that which he ultimately sacrifices for the prosaic wish to sleep at night.

Here it is important to return to Anastasaki's invocation of Schlegel's emphasis on the fragment as verbal strategy. For Gautier and Shelley, tending the ashes of Romanticism, the aesthetics of the poem and of the fragment merge powerfully. Meanwhile, devalued tropes of prose—continuity, closure—permit us to follow the story lines of “The Priest” and “The Mortal Immortal.” The poem is pointed to by the figure of the *revenant* as that which disrupts the temporality of prose. In poetry, time is fragmented by line breaks and enjambment. Likewise, the *revenants* in Shelley's and Gautier's stories represent fragmented time and a kind of temporal enjambment, each *revenant* inhabiting a time not his or her own. By the figure of the *revenant* ironically standing for a desire for life so vivid as to overcome death, the Romantic poem is signified in Shelley's and Gautier's short stories. The *revenant*, that vulnerable, valorized fragment of life-force, cloaked in prose, figures Shelley's and Gautier's struggle with Romantic poetry and poets, the poetry they did not successfully write, the poets who pre-deceased them—Shelley's beloved husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Gautier's lifelong friend, Gerard de Nerval.

Ambivalence is reflected in the *revenant's* position as that which it is impossible to stop mourning but also that which if wholly mourned

will consume the life of the living speaker. Importantly, Anastasaki compares a male and a female writer, and Gautier and Shelley in their turn emphasize gender as that boundary across which the desire that motivates *revenants* is enacted. For Gautier, the dream is not only a fragment within prose but also it evokes the erotic, the dreamed female body revived because it is desired. Different and the same, Shelley envisions her male *revenants* as either given meaning, in the case of Valerius, or deprived of meaning, in the case of Winzy, by the presence or absence, respectively, of the female beloved. Both Gautier and Shelley conceive of *revenge* as inextricably bound up with erotic desire, and gender division, and each envisions *revenge* as a condition attributable to the other sex—for Gautier *revenge* is a womanly quality, for Shelley it adheres to male characters. Gautier's *revenants* trouble the ideal of the female muse. He deploys the *revenant* muse as ambiguously destructive. Clarimonde's dreamed body offers the only earthly joy the priest experiences but also Gautier draws her with marks of the Satanic, ambiguously ironic. His exquisite prose framing the *revenant* as poetic fragment, Gautier figures the Romantic poem as the beautiful and damned body of the *revenant*.

Gender, the body, and the fragment come together in Gautier's *revenant* Arria Marcella whose excessively fragmented remains—preserved in the outline of volcanic stone—call forth Octavian's desire. Here, the body of the *revenant* at once is evoked and evacuated in the emblem of volcanic ash molded around the woman's literally sublime form. For Gautier, the formal perfection of the woman's body mirrors the desired formal perfection of poetry and also mirrors his sense of the complete poem as unattainable.

Anastasaki rightly contends that only the open-ended fragmentary gesture with which Shelley closes "The Mortal Immortal" permits the idea that Winzy may bring good to the world. Only by shattering prose, by fragmenting narrative closure, does the revivifying possibility of poetry reassert itself. But the representative of poetry, the *revenant*, in Gautier and Shelley is deeply ambivalent, at once signifying supreme erotic pleasure (Winzy thinks he is drinking a love-potion



when he consumes Agrippa's unhappy gift) and the collapse of all pleasure. Anastasaki brilliantly alerts us to the way that these late Romantic *revenants* play through the aesthetic of the fragment. As coda, I add to Anastasaki's interpretation of the *revenant* the idea that within Shelley's and Gautier's belated Romantic prose pieces the *revenant* as fragmentary poem, or the fragment as poetic *revenant*, is buried.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Throughout my response, Shelley indicates Mary Shelley unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup>In referencing Gautier's stories, I am referring to the titles that Richard Holmes offers in his 2008 translation of Gautier's work, entitled *My Fantoms*.

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## Emerson and Milton: Allusion and Theodicy\*

RICHARD F. HARDIN

In Frances M. Malpezzi's explication, richly evocative of Milton's presence in Emerson's poem, I acquired a new appreciation of the American poet. As a newcomer to "Uriel," but a veteran Milton reader, I found the two poets traveling the same road but in different directions.

In some ways, Milton's narrative resembles Emerson's: both proceed, like Raphael in telling of the war in heaven, "[b]y likening spiritual to corporal forms" (*Paradise Lost* V.573).<sup>1</sup> "Uriel," too, is metaphorical, a fable, achieving that form's necessary mystery and distance by using a frame narrator to introduce something that "[s]eyd overheard."<sup>2</sup> So Malpezzi does well to locate in Emerson's poem "Milton's metaphoric use of visible forms to mirror inward reality" (167). The classicism of Milton's form requires pagan trappings, especially the mythology so offensive to Dr. Johnson<sup>3</sup>; Emerson similarly infuses Christian heaven with Pythagoras, Plotinus, and Fate (ll. 39-40, 51, 31). Malpezzi's note on the image of myrtle in the two poems is strengthened by two other appearances of Venus's tree (I dare not say bush) in Book IV, first in the description of Paradise. There, a lake whose "fringed bank with myrtle crowned/ Her crystal mirror holds" (IV.262-63) anticipates, in its image of self-gazing, Eve's narrated Narcissus episode in her first hours of life. But not until after the Fall can Venus's myrtle and Narcissus's reflection acquire their fallen significance. Later in the same episode, Milton reports that Adam and Eve's bower is shaded by "[l]aurel and myrtle" (IV.694), so that the

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\*Reference: Frances M. Malpezzi, "Emerson's Allusive Art: A Transcendental Angel in Miltonic Myrtle Beds," *Connotations* 14.1-3 (2004/2005): 162-72.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debmalpezzi01413.htm>>.

plants sacred to Apollo and Venus enter into a rich complex of both pre- and postlapsarian meaning (male/female, fame/love, aggression/lust). It is not quite the case that Emerson's poem is "[s]et in the 'myrtle beds' (l. 28) of Paradise" (163); those beds are specifically domiciles from which "[t]he seraphs frowned" (l. 28). Since the mid-eighteenth century "seraphic" meant "characterized by ecstatic fervor or devotion" (*OED*); thus, to associate the plant of sexual love with unquestioning devotion would seem to indicate a surrender of the critical mind to the complacencies of mere admiration. The seraphs behave like intellectual voluptuaries frowning at the prospect of having to get out of bed.

Another image from pagan antiquity that Emerson shares with Milton is the weighing scales of divine justice, as when, in the *Iliad*, Zeus's scales weigh the destiny of the Greeks against that of Troy, or, later, those of Achilles and Hector. In *Paradise Lost* God hangs his golden scales in heaven, "[w]herein all things created first he weighed" (IV.999), at the critical moment when it appears there will be another horrendous battle, this time between Satan and the angels guarding Paradise. On one side God puts parting, on the other, fighting—" [t]he latter quick up flew, and kicked the beam" (IV.1004). In "Uriel," because of Uriel's radical pronouncement, "[t]he balance-beam of Fate was bent" (l. 31). Of course "bent" can mean inclined, but I wonder if Emerson does not mean that the scale itself is broken, since once the cross-piece from which hang the two weights is bent all weighing will be inaccurate. This is in keeping with the next line, "[t]he bounds of good and ill were rent." In that scene at the end of Book IV Milton says that if an angelic battle had ensued,

the starry cope  
Of heaven perhaps, or all the elements  
At least had gone to wrack, disturbed and torn  
With violence of this conflict [...] (IV.992-95)

It is interesting that Emerson goes back to the pagan epic in giving the scales to Fate, whereas Milton's God—who declares, "what I will is

Fate" (VII.173)—is characteristically unsharing in His power. Finally one wonders if the "forgetting wind" that "[s]tole over the celestial kind" (43-44) originates in the "windy sea of land" that is Milton's Paradise of Fools (III.440), or if the "fruit of chemic force," whence "[c]ame Uriel's voice of cherub scorn" (50, 54), originates in the disastrous fruit of Genesis and Milton.

In further supplementing Malpezzi's inventory of Miltonic parallels, I would point out that both the long and short poems are theodicies, attempts to explain the ways of God to man. But I would say that they differ significantly in their temporal vision. Milton follows the conjoined paths of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation in seeing a time of perfection in the remote past. Creation, Fall, and Redemption are the only points that matter in history (see Michael on history—"so shall the world go on"—in XII.537). We know that Milton's fellow "rebels" avoided the taint of that name by arguing that the royalists were the rebels in that they overthrew the ancient English rights of parliament by trying to invent an absolute monarchy. Emerson, by contrast, appears in sympathy with the romantic revolutionary spirit anticipating the overthrow of the old order. Or, perhaps, he anticipates a new cycle, *saeculum*, in a round universe where "all rays return" (23)—meaning a geometric ray, or seemingly straight line proceeding from a point—, something like Yeats's gyres. "Uriel" seems to refer in part to Emerson's break with conventional Harvard religion. As a keen-sighted but stoically suffering prophet of Unitarianism, or of a system of belief more in keeping with the true nature of the universe, Emerson-Uriel removed himself from the scene.<sup>4</sup>

A final comment is due on how we are to read Milton's poem, if not Emerson's. Malpezzi claims that Milton is "dramatizing the moment change occurred" (169) in creation, and that this moment is an act of choosing. She sees some difference between the two poems here in that "Uriel does not act; rather, he speaks" (169) when he utters his anti-straight-line heresy. Because I recognize how thoroughly traditions of drama underlie Milton's epic, I want to agree with her. However, I have recently encountered this, by Stanley Fish:

Drama is a vehicle of idolatry [...]: it nominates moments of crisis (will she or won't she? What shall he do now?) and therefore presents a picture of the moral life in which crisis occurs only at special times rather than at every and all times. Like narrative and plot (which are its constituents), drama insists that some moments are different from others, whereas in Milton's vision all moments are the same.<sup>5</sup>

If this is what Milton believed, that there is only *chronos*, no *kairos*, that "[t]o everything there is *not* a season," *pace* Ecclesiastes, it probably would not have sat well with Emerson, for whom his crisis with the Divinity School was one of the great dramatic moments of his life.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1979). All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Uriel," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols., vol. 9, *Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918) 13-15. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup>"With these trifling fictions [of "the heathen deities"]," Johnson writes, "are mingled the most awful and sacred truths [...]." "The mythological allusions have been justly censured, as not being always used with notice of their vanity." *Lives of the English Poets*, Everyman's Library (London: Charles Tilt, 1840) 48; 52.

<sup>4</sup>Emerson's biographer John McAleer informatively discusses the links between "Uriel" and the Harvard and Boston ministers' quarrel with Emerson, in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984) 264-66.

<sup>5</sup>Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001) 492. This is from chap. 14, "Gently Raised," one of the new parts of this collection of old and new Fish. Some of the concerns in this passage are elaborated in the chapters on "The Temptation to Action" and "The Temptation of Plot" (307-25; 349-90).

## (Un)Surprisingly Natural: A Response to Angelika Zirker\*

JENNIFER GEER

Surprise is an integral part of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, and Angelika Zirker's analysis of "what is surprising to [Alice] and what is not" (19) is an insightful one. After all, even the title of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* contains a popular synonym for surprise: wonder. Alice constantly wonders at the strange worlds she encounters and then wonders at her own wonder, or lack thereof. As Zirker points out, she is curious about her surroundings, but also about herself; she wants to understand her own reactions as well as the occasions that prompt them (21-22). Critics have long noticed Alice's interest in rational observation and self-observation, and also in the tension Carroll sets up between this trait and the fantastic (and endlessly surprising) worlds of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Country. In 1935, William Empson characterized Alice as "the most reasonable and responsible person in the book," while remarking on Carroll's ambivalence about those perhaps-too-eminently-respectable traits (362). Alice's attempts to discover logical, rational reasons for her behavior and surroundings—and the ways in which Wonderland and Looking-Glass Country often frustrate these attempts—have intrigued a variety of Carroll scholars from many different ideological backgrounds, including Donald Rackin, Kathleen Blake, Daniel Bivona, and Ann Lawson Lucas.

In this context, Zirker's concept of "surprising unsurprise," which "add[s] a note of unexpectedness to the expected" and vice versa, is very useful because it seems to be the conceptual balance that Alice

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\*Reference: Angelika Zirker, "'Alice was not surprised': (Un)Surprises in Lewis Carroll's *Alice-Books*," *Connotations* 14.1-3 (2004/2005): 19-37.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debzirker01413.htm>>.



prefers and that Carroll endorses for his implied readers (29; 21). Alice delights in surprising or unexpected things; her first reaction to seeing a talking rabbit with a waistcoat and watch is to follow it. She finds the White Rabbit much more intriguing than her sister's book, and the alacrity with which Carroll allows her to escape into Wonderland suggests that he agrees. At the same time, however, Alice has "an abiding interest in rules" of reason and behavior, and in their application to the new worlds she is exploring (Blake 109). She may become frustrated and unhappy when her curiosity is not satisfied, but she often becomes openly angry if she believes other characters are being unreasonable or behaving incorrectly, particularly if their behavior puts her at a disadvantage. Her moments of most intense anger are reserved for the Queen of Hearts and the Red Queen, who completely disregard what Alice considers the proper rules of justice and dinner parties. Alice is much more comfortable in situations that combine surprise with familiarity and disorder with order. She thus accepts the White Knight rather easily. He is surprising, to be sure—a knight who cannot ride a horse, carries a mouse-trap on his saddle, and once invented a blotting-paper pudding—but in a larger sense he still behaves as Alice expects a knight would, fighting off challengers, treating her courteously, and escorting her through the forest. This mixture of qualities, along with his kindness, inspire her to like him. Indeed, he is the character that she apparently remembers most vividly from her adventures in Looking-Glass Country. Although he is "strange-looking" and highly eccentric, Alice's later memories place the Knight in a dazzlingly-lit tableaux similar to those in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings that Carroll so admired, incorporating his fantastic nonsense into an established artistic style (*Alice* 181).

The novels' tendency to place potentially nonsensical, surprising incidents within familiar conceptual frameworks also includes their framing devices. The frames soften the adventures' surprises by employing images and poetic conventions that would have been familiar to Carroll's nineteenth-century readers. The prefatory and closing poems rely on "conventional diction, metrics, and syntax of the main

English poetic tradition” practiced by Wordsworth and Tennyson (Madden 362), while the prose descriptions of Alice’s above-ground surroundings evoke the pastoral and domestic settings generally associated with proper middle-class Victorian girls. These frames guide readers “into and back out of” the nonsense worlds, allowing them to move from the relatively familiar to the unfamiliar and back again (Madden 365). Thus, while Alice’s apparent familiarity with talking-beast tales lessens her surprise at the White Rabbit, *Wonderland*’s prefatory poem performs this function for Carroll’s implied readers. It relates the origin of the Wonderland tale and places the forthcoming nonsense within a familiar context, that of an indulgent adult telling stories to enthusiastic children. Although the poem is tantalizingly vague about the “wonders wild and new” that Alice will encounter, it does specify that they will include “friendly chat[s] with bird or beast” (3). Like Alice, Carroll’s implied readers have already been introduced to the concept of talking animals by the time they encounter the White Rabbit—though the silence of the prefatory poem on the subject of watches and waistcoats ensures that readers will be as surprised as she is when the White Rabbit actually appears.

The closing paragraphs of *Wonderland* replicate this process, repositioning Alice’s chaotic adventures within familiar contexts. The narrator reveals that Alice has been dreaming, then concludes with her sister’s dream that a grown Alice will delight her own children by retelling her adventures. The peaceful rural setting, the sister’s solicitude, the tempting offer of tea (which Alice never managed to get at the Mad Tea-Party) and the final vision of an adult Alice at the center of her own happy family all work to familiarize the fantastic events and reduce the reader’s surprise. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the framing poems and the scenes of Alice in the drawing room with her kittens have a more elegiac tone than their *Wonderland* counterparts, but in spite of the winter setting and references to vanished past pleasures, they also place Alice’s adventures within familiar contexts. The scenes of Alice in the drawing room establish a safe, cozy point of departure for her adventures, while the opening and closing poems

promise a story, connect it with readers' presumed memories of *Wonderland*, and express the hope that this tale will be remembered and appreciated in its turn.

At the same time, these framing devices also inject a bit of surprise into the familiar. Alice's waking world may seem ordinary, but Carroll suggests that extraordinary creatures and places can appear on its lawns or in its mirrors, visible to anyone who is willing to imagine them. Although both novels conclude by revealing that Alice has dreamed her adventures, they take dreams seriously and suggest that dreaming and imagination are important to everyday life. In fact, *Through the Looking-Glass* deliberately undermines sharp distinctions between dreaming and waking. At the end of the novel, Alice is still uncertain "'who it was that dreamed it all'" (208); was the Red King in her dream, or was she in his? Carroll's narrator playfully refuses to resolve the question, turning instead to his implied readers and asking, "Which do *you* think it was?" (208). The poem that follows raises another possible answer to Alice's question: life itself might be a dream that confounds easy distinctions between past and present, real and imaginary, sense and nonsense. *Wonderland's* conclusion does not go quite so far, but even it allows Alice's sister to escape into a dream that, though only "half believed," transforms "dull reality" into exciting fantasy (98). Carroll's framing devices, like Alice's adventures, encourage readers to familiarize unfamiliar things, defamiliarize ordinary ones, and enjoy the process.

As Zirker suggests, this mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar ultimately invites us to question the nature of surprise itself. The *Alice* books implicitly ask not only why Alice is surprised, but what it means for one to be surprised in the first place (Zirker 21). Given the characteristics of nonsense as a genre, such philosophical questioning is unsurprising. Nonsense does not abandon familiar structures or situations; instead, it inverts, alters, and plays with them (Stewart 51; 4). It manipulates the categories and conventions normally associated with common sense, "juxtapos[ing] [...] perfectly ordinary but incongruous ideas or objects," literalizing figurative language, "taking

ideas or situations to absurd lengths [...] and using logic as a base for illogical events" (Anderson and Apseloff 5). As a cognitive activity, nonsense allows children to place familiar concepts and idioms into a play world where they can be rearranged and reframed. It encourages audiences to think about what constitutes seemingly commonsensical concepts, such as surprise, to explore how they work in practice (and in absurd situations where common sense breaks down), and to investigate the boundaries between familiar and unfamiliar uses of these concepts (Stewart 200-06; Anderson and Apseloff 61-79). At its most philosophical, nonsense also invites speculation "about the nature of reality and knowing and communication," inviting audiences to consider how they perceive, construct, and discuss the worlds in which they live (Anderson and Apseloff 82).

Given these characteristics of nonsense, it follows that surprise is not the only concept whose "very notion [...] becomes [...] rather doubtful" in the *Alice* books (Zirker 21). One of these notions strikes me as especially pertinent in light of Zirker's argument: the question of what is natural. Zirker argues convincingly that Alice's degree of surprise often depends on whether she thinks the situation is "natural" or not (19). Alice appears to define the natural in terms of the familiar; she "is mostly surprised at herself when she does not recall things or when something does not seem natural, i.e. when something occurs that is not part of the world she is accustomed to, including the world of fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and beast fables" (Zirker 31). Zirker further suggests that Alice's tendency to conflate the world of fairy tales, rhymes, and fables with the so-called real world is an innately—that is, naturally—childlike tendency (28-31). These two points rely on rather different definitions of nature, however. Alice's working definition of the natural as something that is "part of the world she is accustomed to" ties it to her cultural and social experience as an upper-middle-class Victorian girl. For her, a natural situation is one that conforms to some aspect of this experience. On the other hand, Zirker also argues—and Carroll himself almost certainly believed—that Alice is able to accept the fantastic because she is a

child, with a “child’s perception of the world” (31).<sup>1</sup> This argument rests on a conception of nature that is far more essentialist than Alice’s working definition; it assumes that children have an affinity for the fantastic that is independent of social and cultural variations. Technically speaking, this is a contradiction in Zirker’s argument, but it reflects the books’ own shifting definitions of what is natural. Like many common terms, “natural” may mean several things, and ordinary usage tends to overlook the differences between them. In everyday conversation, something natural may be something to which one is accustomed, something innate, something that depends on a biological process, such as growth or hunger, or something found in the plant or animal world. Carroll’s nonsense, like nonsense more generally, manipulates these definitions and plays them off against each other in ways that “make apparent [the] paradoxes that common sense smoothes over in everyday life” (Stewart 200). By placing Alice and her expectations in nonsense worlds where her definitions of the natural do not apply or are shown to be logically inconsistent, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* question the nature of nature and of natural behavior. Alice’s adventures reveal limitations that are inherent in her definition of the natural-as-expected but usually remain unacknowledged in ordinary discourse.

Soon after she enters Wonderland, Alice begins to discover that the expectations upon which she bases her idea of the natural are less stable than she supposes. She is not surprised when the bottle marked “DRINK ME” appears in the underground hall; her reading of fairy tales apparently has familiarized her with helpful objects that materialize when needed (Zirker 20). Because the bottle satisfies her predictive notion of expected behavior—what she thinks will happen based on her understanding of events—she remains unsurprised and is willing to drink from it. She does not do so immediately, however, because her experience also includes warnings about the dangers of drinking poisonous liquids. Alice checks the bottle against another common definition of expected behavior, the prescriptive notion of behavior that one is expected to do: she inspects the label to ensure



that it is “*not* marked ‘poison’” (11). Then, after satisfying herself that the bottle meets both these conditions of expected behavior, she accepts it as drinkable and implicitly as part of the natural order of things in Wonderland.

At this point, Alice retains a relatively uncomplicated faith in her expectations and experience; she assumes that they are predictable and universally applicable, even in Wonderland. She is startled when the contents of the bottle cause her to shrink and dismayed when she realizes that she cannot reach the key to the little door, but she is happy to try again by eating the cakes. Her reading of fairy tales has taught her that objects appear for the purpose of helping the protagonist, and her experience with the little bottle has suggested that Wonderland foods cause size changes, so she believes that eating the cakes will help her attain the correct size to get through the little door. Unfortunately for Alice, these assumptions are incorrect. It does not logically follow that one can get through a closed door merely because one is the proper size; furthermore, her expectation that the cakes and bottle will help her attain this goal is based on above-ground experiences that do not hold in Wonderland. As it turns out, the cakes and bottle look like the helpful objects found in fairy tales but do not function like them; they cause changes in size but are completely irrelevant to the door’s operation.

After she eats the cakes, Alice also discovers to her dismay that expectations drawn from experience are context-specific and do not necessarily hold true in different contexts. Carroll exposes the logical flaws in Alice’s thinking by delaying the cakes’ effects; for a few moments, she does not change size at all. The narrator dryly notes that “this is what generally happens when one eats cake,” but Alice, who has gotten “into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen,” is surprised and disappointed (12). Although she often behaves as if her expectations will remain universal, she actually changes them according to circumstances, and in this case her new-found expectations of what will happen when she eats cake in Wonderland flatly contradict the ones she formed above ground. Carroll



then reveals how quickly experience can alter expectations; just as Alice and readers are lulled into thinking that the cakes will have no effect after all, she starts “opening out like the largest telescope that ever was” (13). After this second sudden size-change, Alice begins to doubt her own identity, wondering “who in the world am I?” (15). Her question indicates a larger problem in her definition of the natural. She would like to assume that her own nature and identity are predictable and constant, but this assumption is logically incompatible with her broader tendency to define the natural in terms of the expected; if expectations change as experiences and contexts do, it follows that the natural, including her own identity, will change as well. This possibility frightens and frustrates Alice. Although she enjoys discovering that familiar worlds might include unfamiliar and exciting things, she is deeply unsettled to discover that supposedly familiar and reliable concepts might be less familiar and more unreliable than she presumes.

This questioning of the-natural-as-the-expected continues during Alice’s encounters with the inhabitants of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Country. The creatures also tend to understand the natural in terms of the expected—but they do so according to their own expectations and experiences, which are not at all the same as Alice’s. They therefore have very different ideas about natural identities and behaviors than she does. The Pigeon is convinced that Alice is a serpent, because all of the long-necked, sinuous creatures it has experienced apparently have been serpents. The talking flowers criticize Alice’s “awkward shape” and her hair, which they call petals; her appearance is as odd to them as their ability to speak is to her (123). Perhaps the clearest illustration of the ways in which different experiences can generate different conceptions of the natural occurs when Alice meets the Unicorn. To the Unicorn, a living, talking child is as fantastic a creature as a living, talking unicorn is to Alice. The Unicorn exclaims that he “always thought [children] were fabulous monsters,” to which Alice responds, “I always thought Unicorns were fabulous

monsters, too!’” (175). Finally, they agree to believe in each other, leaving their respective realities firmly unresolved.

The Unicorn offers a mirror image of Alice’s view of nature, an alternate perspective in which unicorns are perfectly ordinary and children are fabulous monsters. Alice is curious but does not feel threatened in this case, because the Unicorn’s perspective reverses her conceptual framework rather than challenging its basic premises. Her encounters with some of the other creatures do question these premises, however, and thus are more unsettling to her. The Pigeon accuses Alice of being a type of fabulous monster—a serpent that has “‘come wriggling down from the sky’” to eat her eggs—but this encounter challenges Alice’s sense of the natural to a greater extent than her conversation with the Unicorn does (43). Alice is first surprised and then stymied by the Pigeon’s accusation. She knows that she is a little girl and not a serpent, but the Pigeon exploits the internal contradictions in her definition of the natural in ways that make it very difficult for Alice to defend herself. Because Alice defines the natural in terms of what she expects or has experienced, she automatically includes herself as part of that category. The unnatural, on the other hand, is reserved for that which she has not expected or experienced: implicitly, things that are *not* Alice. The fact that her neck is now long enough to become tangled in trees causes this categorization to begin to break down. Although Alice still believes that she should remain in the natural category, her unexpected shape-shifting threatens to place her in the unnatural one and thus to undermine her own sense of identity. Once again, Carroll shows the natural—and Alice’s place in it—to be less stable than she would like to admit.

Alice’s predicament with the Pigeon also reveals some of the tensions between sociocultural and biological understandings of nature. Alice seems to view herself as harmless and tries to engage in a polite conversation with the Pigeon, as she might with an agitated adult in her ordinary world above ground. Still, the Pigeon has some right to be protective of her eggs; Alice is an omnivore who eats eggs. Alice is surprised at the Pigeon’s accusations because she tends to define the

natural in terms of social and cultural expectations rather than biological ones. A talking White Rabbit does not surprise her because she expects him to act like a character in a fairy tale rather than a biological rabbit. As the narrator points out, the idea of a talking rabbit initially “seem[s] quite natural to Alice” (7). It does later “occu[r] to her that she ought to have wondered at this” large departure from biological rabbit behavior, but her default assumption is not to wonder (7). Alice generally considers biological nature only as an afterthought; what she views as natural is constituted by her social world, with its pets, servants, chess games, and fantastic tales. Thus, when the Rabbit mistakes her for his housemaid and orders her to find his gloves, Alice automatically obeys him, as if he were the Victorian gentleman that his waistcoat and watch indicate. Only after she has entered his house does she think “[h]ow queer it seems [...] to be going messages for a rabbit” (27). Still, the appearance of the Rabbit’s house, which is not a rabbit hole but “a neat little house” with two storeys and a brass plate on the door, reassures her that her initial assumption was correct (27). For the moment, Alice’s desire to see herself and her surroundings in social terms rather than biological ones remains unchallenged.

As the episode with the Pigeon suggests, however, Alice has a closer affinity with biological nature—particularly with its competitive, predatory, Darwinian aspects—than she is prepared to admit. What Tennyson famously called “nature, red in tooth and claw” pervades the nonsense worlds of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Country; their creatures are continually eating, being eaten, and competing with each other and with Alice for status and prizes.<sup>2</sup> She does attain a briefly harmonious rapport with the Fawn in the wood where things have no names, but this is an exception to the normal order in these worlds. Once she and the Fawn emerge from the wood, it becomes alarmed and bounds away, fearing her. It has some reason to do so; as Nina Auerbach has argued, Alice’s persistent interest in food, her frequent references to her pet cats, and her tendency to transform moralistic poems such as Isaac Watts’s into vignettes about crocodiles

and panthers suggests that she is fundamentally a predator (35-38). She does not see herself as such, of course; she criticizes the Walrus and the Carpenter for tricking and eating the Oysters, and she seems dismayed when the Gnat points out that the Bread-and-butter-fly “always” dies if it cannot find its preferred food (134). Still, even her politeness carries predatory overtones. She offends the mice and birds in the Pool of Tears by talking about her cat Dinah and has to correct herself quickly when the Mock Turtle asks her where she has seen whiting; Dinah’s hunting prowess and breaded fish at dinner are harmless topics in Alice’s above-ground world, but become more ominous when her conversational partners are a mouse and a Mock Turtle. To the creatures, with their very different expectations and experiences of the natural, Alice’s attempts at polite conversation are frankly threatening.

Alice’s misguided attempts to be polite inadvertently reveal the extent to which “a serene acceptance of predation” pervades her middle-class social world (Kincaid 93). In her experience, it is perfectly natural for a child to eat eggs and whiting and to keep predators such as cats and dogs as pets; indeed, she seems never to have seen a live whiting. Furthermore, Alice accepts and participates wholeheartedly in social orders based on competition, in which larger, higher-status inhabitants dominate smaller, lower-status ones.<sup>3</sup> While in Wonderland, Alice tends to be frightened or deferential to creatures who are larger or of higher status than she, to be polite (if perhaps a bit impatient or annoyed) with those she considers the same size or status as herself, and to dominate smaller creatures or those lower in status. Thus, the puppy terrifies her when she is only three inches tall. On the other hand, although she obeys the Rabbit’s initial order to find his gloves, she becomes much less respectful after she grows too large to fit in his house. She is understandably alarmed at being trapped, but her fear manifests itself as aggression rather than deference; she snatches at the Rabbit when he approaches the window and kicks Bill the Lizard up the chimney. Similarly, Alice is far more willing to challenge the Queen of Hearts after she has grown to her full size and begun to

view the Queen as a playing card rather than a royal tyrant. This pattern continues in the opening chapters of *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which a large Alice forcibly guides the White King's pencil and threatens to pick the daisies. Because the later book is based around a game of chess, it also foregrounds the element of competition; Alice is willing to begin the game as a Pawn, but she very much wants to win so that she can become Queen.

Of course, Carroll's nonsense exaggerates these elements of competition, predation, and hierarchy for comic effect, as when impeccably pious and moralistic poems become verses about crocodiles, panthers, and old men threatening to kick younger ones downstairs. Still, these nonsense worlds imply that Alice and the social world she ordinarily inhabits are not so far removed from a Darwinian view of competitive nature as middle-class Victorian ideals of innocent girlhood and middle-class propriety might suggest. The human and the animal frequently merge in these novels. Animals and birds speak, wear human clothes, and have human characteristics, while the Pigeon confuses Alice with a serpent and the Lion asks whether Alice is "animal—or vegetable—or mineral" (176). The distinctions between animate and inanimate objects also break down here, particularly toward the end of her adventures. Playing cards hold court (and courtroom trials) in Wonderland; the dishware stalks across the table during the Looking-Glass feast, while the White Queen begins to dissolve into the soup. The ease with which social rituals such as croquet, court trials, and dinner parties move from the merely awkward to the openly violent suggests that these rituals occupy the same turbulent natural world they purport to defend against. Ironically, Alice ends her dreams and restores the peaceful order of her life above ground through her own acts of violence and domination, shouting at the Queen of Hearts and shaking the Red Queen.

Once Alice wakes up, the books' final scenes return her to a position in which common sense smoothes over these unsettling aspects of the natural. Still, like the question of who dreamed the world through the looking-glass, the questions about what the natural might be, whether

it is a universally applicable concept or not, and what place human beings have in it remain. As nonsense tends to do, Carroll's *Alice* books suggest that the familiar is perhaps more unfamiliar than we might imagine. The natural—whatever that might be—becomes another surprising unsurprise in these novels, something commonplace to which Carroll adds “a note of unexpectedness” (Zirker 21).

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In an article about Savile Clark's 1887 stage adaptation of the *Alice* books, for instance, Carroll remarked on “the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names” (“‘Alice’ On the Stage” 181).

<sup>2</sup>Carroll admired Tennyson's work and would have been familiar with this phrase. For more discussion of Darwinism and natural history in Carroll's work, see Knoepfmacher 176 and Lovell-Smith.

<sup>3</sup>For critical studies that address Alice's competitive or predatory desires, see Auerbach, Blake, Kincaid, and Knoepfmacher.

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## Response to “Alice was not surprised”\*

JEAN-JACQUES LECERCLE

I entirely agree with the opening and closing remarks of Angelika Zirker’s article: “Alice often is not surprised although things happen that might be regarded as ‘unexpected’” (19) and “[i]n *Alice*, Carroll shows that being surprised and not being surprised are not mutually exclusive states but easily go together” (31). It seems to me that the dialectics of surprise and unsurprise provide an excellent point of entry into the world of the two *Alices*. It is indeed surprising that Alice is so often not surprised or that when she is surprised, she is not *that* surprised. Often, we have the impression that, imitating Queen Victoria, she would like to say: “We are not surprised.” But I am not so sure that this mixture of surprise and unsurprise, this possibility of a mild form of schizophrenia, is to be ascribed solely to the psychology, or to the social position, of the child: my contention is that such mild schizophrenia is not confined to the character, but has something to do with the genre of the text, with its relation to language and even with the processes of subjectivation which concern every human subject, and not only the child or infant.

Let us start by moving from ‘surprised’ to ‘curious.’ The word, in the lexicon and in Carroll’s text, is ambiguous between a subjective and an objective meaning. Hence the celebrated pun at the end of the first chapter of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, when the narrator makes one of his few comments on the character of Alice: “and once she remembered trying to box her ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child

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\*Reference: Angelika Zirker, “‘Alice was not surprised’: (Un)Surprises in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice-Books*,” *Connotations* 14.1-3 (2004/2005): 19-37.

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was very fond of pretending to be two people" (15). And we duly note that the pun occurs in a context where the mild schizophrenia I have diagnosed is hinted at. Indeed, the world of Wonderland is an objectively curious world ("What a curious feeling!" said Alice; 'I must be shutting up like a telescope'" [14]), and Alice herself, who is both surprised and unsurprised, is a subjectively curious child: curiosity may have killed the cat, but it is what propels Alice into her adventures. You have to be a curious child (in the objective sense) to see a white rabbit taking a watch out of its waistcoat pocket and muttering to himself; and you have to be a curious child (in the subjective sense) to follow it down the rabbit hole. The first, objective, meaning of the adjective is faintly disapproving. Alice is morally constrained by her position as a little girl and by her education, she has interiorised the maxims inculcated by her governess concerning decent language and decent behaviour, so finding herself in the middle of a fairy tale is an odd and slightly unbecoming experience for a well-bred young lady. But she obviously welcomes, nay actively seeks out, the experience, as the second, subjective sense of the adjective is positive and liberating. By following the Rabbit down the rabbit-hole, Alice frees herself from social and family constraints and leads her own life, a (temporary) life of adventures: she becomes, in a mild and fairly respectable way, a young adventuress. In her first, morally and socially constrained, persona, she is surprised (at the characters' unusual and untoward behaviour) and unsurprised (because she knows what's right and normal: her governess has told her where the antipodes, or is it the antipathies, lie). In her second, liberated, persona, she is unsurprised (she is prepared to accept anything out of the ordinary as 'natural,' as Zirker points out) and surprised (she experiences the delight of the new, the pleasure of the encounter with the unexpected, whether man, beast or event).

The question, therefore, is the following: is the dialectics of surprise and unsurprise a psychological one, to be ascribed to the mind of a child still under the sway of the pleasure principle and whose mental world contains as an integral part the world of fairy tales? I would like

to suggest that if such psychological dialectics is apparent on the surface of the text, it has a deeper source and deeper significance. And the first answer to my question will note that the dialectics is also a generic one: it rules the text as well as the mind of the child protagonist. In its generic form, this dialectics is the dialectics of the teleology of the text, where there is no surprise, as the end of the text is programmed from the very beginning, and of the liberation of the text in the form of unpredictable happenings, which delay the inevitable end and blur its necessity. In *AAW*, the teleology is inscribed in the framing of the tale by the dream, which means that every incident tends towards the inevitable moment when Alice will wake up, so that the text has the structure of a complete story as defined in Aristotle's *Poetics*, that is a story that has a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order. This definition, an apparent tautology, but one that has considerable narratological significance, is famously parodied in the King of Hearts's advice to the White Rabbit in chapter twelve of *AAW*: "'Begin at the beginning,' the King said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end; then stop'" (106).

But within that framework, the narrative drifts from scene to scene, in a form of *fuite en avant*, the emblem of which is Alice tumbling down the rabbit-hole, following the White Rabbit without further thought, forgetting the rules of decorum and the constraints of right behaviour ("A good little girl never follows a stranger down a dark passage" is as good an injunction as "a good little girl never drinks out of a bottle marked 'Poison'"). So, when she does exclaim "Curiouser and curiouser!" (16), forgetting the rules of grammatical decorum, we understand the illicit comparatives as markers of the *fuite en avant* of adventurousness. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the dialectics is even more explicit as the roadmap precedes the text, in the shape of the chessboard and the game of chess that maximally constrain Alice's progress, in so far as her aim is to go to queen, while the characters are even madder than in the first tale and their assaults on Alice's well-behaved certainties even more violent (witness her agonistic bouts

with the talking flowers, which Zirker mentions, or her verbal intercourse with Humpty-Dumpty).

Zirker situates the dialectics of surprise and unsurprise in the “codes of interaction” (26; 28) and in the “playful treatment of language” (23). I could not agree more. And this enables me to attempt to go a little further than the psychological or narratological accounts of the dialectics. For surprise and unsurprise and all things nice are what little girls are made of, and surprise and unsurprise are what good tales are made of, because they are what all human subjects, in so far as they are speaking subjects, are made of. In other words, I would like to argue that the context of the “Curiouser and curiouser!” incident, when the narrator notes that “She was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English” (16) is relevant, as it expresses the dialectics of subjectivation through language. This dialectics tells us how the young speaker enters the maximally constrained system of language (which means both the grammatical system of Saussurean *langue* and the pragmatic conventions of linguistic behaviour or decorum), where surprise there is none, and how she learns to appropriate it and find her own voice by being surprised at what she can utter beyond and against the rules of language, whereby she not only acquires a voice, but establishes her personality and becomes a subject. But in order to explain this, I need a theoretical language and a philosophical detour.

It is often objected to structuralist philosophies that they ignore history and change by concentrating on the synchronic system and that they downplay the role of human freedom, subjectivity and agency by concentrating on the determinations of the structure. Thus, Althusser’s ‘structural’ version of Marxism makes it difficult, it would seem, to understand the contingency of the revolutionary moment, when the structure is temporarily dislocated in order to make way for social and political change, as it makes it difficult to understand the agency and freedom of the subject, her capacity to revolt, interpellated as she is at her place in the social structure by the dominant ideology. This is, of course, a superficial reading of Althusser’s texts, of their co-

herence and of their evolution. There is a sense in which his contribution to the Marxist tradition precisely consists in an attempt to think the moment of revolutionary change beyond the determinism and teleology of classical Marxism: the concept of overdetermination in *Pour Marx*, which he borrowed from Freud, does precisely this. And if the individual is interpellated into a subject by ideology, a process that concerns all individuals and never fails, it leaves open a space for counter-interpellation (of the dominant ideology by the interpellated subject), a process described by Judith Butler in *The Psychic life of Power and Excitable Speech*. This double dialectics of determination by the structure and resistance in the shape of the revolutionary conjuncture (an overdetermined conjunction of elements of the structure, contingently joined at a particular historical moment), and of interpellation by ideology, the workings of which are as eternal as the Freudian unconscious, and counter-interpellation by a speaking subject that has appropriated the language that constrains and places her, is the source and rationale for the literary dialectics of surprise and unsurprise, in both its generic and psychological forms. Indeed, in Althusser, especially in his late texts (e.g. *Sur la philosophie*), where he develops what he calls an aleatory materialism, based on Lucretius's concept of *clinamen* or deviation, we find the concepts we need to account for our dialectics: deviation, contingency, conjuncture, counter-interpellation, all concepts that seek to express the moment of the encounter with the radically new, the encounter with the event, be it the event of revolution or the event of seeing a white rabbit take a watch out of its waistcoat pocket.

The dialectics of surprise and unsurprise expresses the fact that, in the course of her adventures, Alice becomes a subject. She is, of course, already a subject as she tumbles down the rabbit-hole: the individual is always-already interpellated by the dominant ideology. So our Alice is unsurprised, in the slightly disapproving sense of the term: she knows what's what, and when rules are being broken—"You should learn not to make personal remarks," she tells the Hatter in chapter seven of *AAW* (60): she knows her place in the Ideological



State Apparatus of the family, she knows its rituals and she is surprised when its practices are not conformed to. So she is surprised at the characters' strange behaviour, and at the strange behaviour of the world she finds herself in: "The most curious part of the thing was, that the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything" (145): In chapter two of *TLG*, Alice learns that in the looking-glass world, you must run very very fast in order to stay in the same place. But she is also surprised at her own reaction, as she soon learns how to hold her own in an indifferent or even hostile world: "'How should I know?' said Alice, surprised at her own courage; 'it's no business of mine.' The Queen turned crimson with fury" (72). In other words, she is learning the art of counter-interpellation: she makes use of the language that interpellates her into a subjected subject in order to counter-interpellate the authority (of the dominant ideology) and become a subject in the full sense of the term, endowed with freedom and agency. After which, of course, she is no longer surprised at the strangeness of the world of Wonderland, which she has integrated as she has appropriated the language that structures it. As a token of appreciation of Angelika Zirker's excellent article, I would like to end by reformulating her last sentence: Alice's linguistic adventures in Wonderland enable the child, that emblem of all human subjects, to react with both surprise and unsurprise at the most fantastic things and occurrences.

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## The Phenomenology of Deep Surprise in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*\*

MICHAEL MENDELSON

On the one hand, we can think of surprise as a premonition of significance. I am surprised because some new idea or experience unexpectedly promises to be meaningful. I may not know what that meaning is at present, but my surprise is in itself a phenomenological herald that the ordinary has been eclipsed and discovery is possible.

On the other hand, we can also be surprised by recognitions that are simply unanticipated, something for which there is no apparent cause or precedent, which doesn't 'fit,' and as such, doesn't command more than passing attention. In "Circles," Emerson argues that life is so filled with these quotidian surprises and that we filter most of them out because they disturb our equilibrium, our desire not to be unsettled by too much "newness" (Emerson 319).

There is a difference, then, between surprise that is "fleet [...] unforeseen [...] [and] momentous" (Grahame 41)—such as the experience of Mr. Toad in his first encounter with a motor car—and surprise that quickly passes because we find a way to accommodate its unfamiliarity—as Colin Craven does shortly after Dickon walks into Misselthwaite Manor with his retinue of wild creatures.<sup>1</sup> We can mark this distinction between 'deep surprise' that presages something potentially meaningful and the evanescent nature of the merely unexpected by reference to the force and duration of our engagement. Instead of another item in the "blooming, buzzing" (James 462) pageant of impressions, deep surprise commands our attention, mobilizes our enthusiasm, and refuses to be filed away and forgotten as a small

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spike in the standard algorithm.<sup>2</sup> With the only unexpected, I am a spectator; when deeply surprised, I am called upon to act.

Between these 'antipodes' of surprise, there are naturally degrees of intensity. I can glimpse and forget a wrinkle in the otherwise ordinary; I can reflect briefly on the possibilities of mild incongruence; I can be intrigued enough to track the footsteps of surprise around the next corner; or, I can be so fully possessed by the impression of newness that I follow it to the edge and jump in. In the later case, we assume that surprise is prophetic: the startling appearance of what we could never have imagined seems to promise something special to come. And yet, to follow in the wake of deep surprise is also a risk, precisely because we are in pursuit of what we don't understand. Ali Baba is surprised by the chance discovery of a magic mantra; a discovery that could easily prove disastrous; but risk is overwhelmed by the intuition that surprise has signalled more than meets the eye or can be counted. Marley's surprising arrival announces the immanence of doom at the same time it provides Scrooge with a motive for change.

In the canon of children's fiction, deep surprise is only partly a response to something 'outside over there.' Surprise is also an internal event, a signal that the percipient is prepared to accommodate possibilities beyond the horizon of prior expectations. Put another way, surprise doesn't simply announce a change in the world as perceived by the hero, but also a change in the status of the hero's perception. Beauty is surprised by the Beast's civility, and her surprise initiates a reevaluation of prior allegiances that results in the transformation of her own vision as well as the Beast's form. Wilbur the pig is surprised by a friendly voice in the rafters; and, in the course of his friendship with Charlotte, the humble runt comes to see himself as, in fact, "radiant" (White 114).

Nor is the meta-narrative of children's fiction content with modest change; it assumes instead that the outcome of adventure is nothing short of metamorphosis, fundamental and unimagined change in the deep structure of one's nature and expectations. Geppetto is startled

to hear a voice calling him from inside a pine log; and, as things turn out, the log becomes a puppet and the puppet becomes a real boy. Typically, the role of surprise at the outset of children's fiction is to announce the onset of events that ultimately achieve a quantum leap of character. Russell Hoban's "mouse and his child" are surprised to learn that all the windups in the toy shop can communicate with one another, but this first discovery presages a remarkable series of transformations to follow: the windups become self-winding, their enemy becomes an uncle, scattered allies form a strong social community, and an outlandish prophecy is ultimately fulfilled.

*And yet*, in the magnum opus of children's fiction, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the subject of change in the nature of the heroine's character has been either a matter of dispute or the subject of only passing interest.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the capacity of the *Alice* books to excite hermeneutical speculation on so many complex topics has diverted attention from growth and change as 'master tropes' of the text. Perhaps the coda of *Alice's Adventures*, in which Alice's sister substitutes her second-hand nostalgia for Alice's own revelations, signals a reversal of the diverse insights gained en route and a return to the status quo. Or perhaps the conventions of dream allegory render the adventures "an idle song for a summer's day" with no more transformative power than any other daydream.<sup>4</sup> In any case, the nature and extent of Alice's own development has been routinely supplanted in the critical tradition (if not in pedagogical presentation) by considerations external to the heroine's own experience.

In this critical context, Angelika Zirker reminds us that surprise and its opposite have considerable presence in the *Alice* books and merit renewed attention. My own interest is in outbursts of deep surprise at critical moments in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that not only eclipse the ordinary but may also motivate the quantum leap of character that is the cherished outcome of children's fiction. In the analysis that follows, I will concentrate on two pivotal moments: one at the beginning of the text when surprise sets events in motion, the other near the end when transformation is most evident. In the process, I hope to

contribute to the contested question of Alice's growth: does her initial surprise provide sustained incentive for the process of personal change? And, to what extent can we claim substantive change as the outcome of Alice's personal adventure? Of course, the *Alice* books continually raise complexities that confound determinate response and resist undue reaching after closure. Whatever the outcome of these investigations, my own thinking about these questions has been catalyzed by the concept of surprise, and I am grateful for the opportunity to approach this "never-to-be-exhausted" (Zimmer 4) text in what I hope is a new and productive way.<sup>5</sup>

### Surprise as Catalyst

Zirker makes an important point in calling attention to two kinds of surprise in the opening episode of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice initially registers the talking rabbit as a generic convention of children's fiction who is consequently "(un)surprising" (19). This initial response is quickly supplanted by genuine surprise when Alice realizes that the same rabbit is outfitted in a waistcoat with a pocket watch. In brief, Alice is truly surprised only when what she perceives transcends existing assumptions in unprecedented ways. The distinction is more complex than it might appear because Alice's assumptions about the world include fictive conventions inherited from children's stories as well as the experience accumulated through the first-hand encounters of daily life. As a result, a talking rabbit is routine because recognizable, while the novelty of a rabbit with a waistcoat and a watch calls up an entirely different response. The distinction between the unsurprising and unprecedented is of particular interest because it forecasts the intermingling of the real and the imaginative that is characteristic of Lewis Carroll's narrative practice.

That is, we know waistcoats and pocket watches from practical experience, but we don't know them in connection with talking rabbits that, unlike pocket watches, are a purely imaginative construct. So, in

this first example of Wonderland poetics, a talking rabbit that Alice initially accepts as conventional turns out to surprise because he looks and behaves like a middle-class gentleman that Alice Liddell of Christ Church, Oxford might well have known. On the one hand, what is actually familiar (waistcoats and watches) has been “defamiliarized” by its association with a talking rabbit; on the other, the talking rabbit seems somehow familiar because he appears in the attire of Alice’s own world.<sup>6</sup> The general confusion confounding the status of the White Rabbit not only startles Alice into a state of full-blown surprise, it also anticipates the intricacies that will collect around the subject of Alice’s own development.

By way of a prelude to Wonderland’s convoluted thematics, an additional example should suffice. Alice knows that tea parties are a routine afternoon ritual, but she is unfamiliar with tea parties where time has stopped, discourse is disjointed, stories are incomplete, and etiquette is abandoned. How does one behave when custom (which is rule-driven) is observed primarily though contradiction? What does it mean when ritual (the cornerstone of culture) is so thoroughly subverted? Such puzzles are conventional in Wonderland, where what should be familiar—puppies and well-known poems, the placement of doormen and norms of domesticity, croquet and school curricula, riddles and royal protocol—all become indeterminate because they have been relocated and reconceived though, at the same time, they seem to retain some semblance of things we think we recognize.

Given an uncertain admixture of recognizable oddity that is *de rigueur* in the aesthetics of Wonderland, it is incredible that Alice is so seldom astonished by what she encounters in the course of her adventures. For the most part, Alice is demure, inquisitive, and respectful, which seems a considerable accomplishment for a young girl who is constantly confronted with the enigmatic. It is precisely because Alice so often responds with some measure of equanimity to events so fully ambiguous that readers interested in Alice’s character have every reason to pay particular attention to the infrequent moments when the heroine abandons her famous aplomb, rejects her habitual recourse to



polite curiosity, and surrenders instead to a state of deep and unequivocal surprise, as is the case in the first episode.

When we first meet Alice, she is “beginning to get very tired” of sitting with her sister, feeling “very sleepy and stupid” in the heat of the day, and lazy enough to resist the minimal demands of making a daisy chain (7). The “sudden” appearance of the White Rabbit mumbling to himself within earshot of Alice is not “remarkable” enough to offset her present languor. However, as soon as the Rabbit “actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket,” Alice is all energy (7).

Once alert to the oddity of a middle-class rabbit with temporal anxieties, Alice instantly abandons her lassitude, she “start[s] to her feet,” ideas “flashing across her mind,” and “burning with curiosity” she swiftly pursues a character unlike any she knows from fairy tale (7). To repeat the previous point, Alice is intrigued by the curious blend of her own Oxonian world with the imaginative world of children’s stories where animals can talk and wear waistcoats by Savile Row tailors. On the one hand, the real world of Victorian attire has been incorporated into the fictional world of talking animals; on the other, the anxious gentleman in his fashionable outfit appears as a figure out of beast fable.<sup>7</sup> The conflation of these separate but strangely synonymous domains so catalyzes Alice’s curiosity that she jumps up, runs headlong after the rabbit, and throws herself into his hole “never once considering how in the world she was to get out again” (8). Such are the wages of deep surprise, which compel Alice to leap before she looks, regardless of consequences.

The point of entry into the other world is always a critical moment, and the peculiarity of Alice’s descent prompts careful consideration (see Patch). When Alice glances without interest at the nervous but vocal rabbit, she already possesses a narrative framework that accommodates talking animals and the conventions of children’s fiction. But when these conventions are disturbed by a rabbit in gentleman’s attire, the surprise augurs a story with unpredictable dimensions. Still, why jump off the deep end in response? Perhaps the premonition of

significance called up by deep surprise is too profound to resist. But what is it that is so profound?

The map of children's fiction, inherited principally from fairy tale, leads inexorably into the woods; and for all the risk that lurks there, this path is ultimately the only route to individual growth. Because almost all readers and listeners, children and adults are intimately familiar with the landmarks that mark this map, we tend to identify the dimensions of this fictional terrain by reference to coordinates from our own personal narrative. It is hardly a surprise, for example, that Jim Hawkins, John Silver, and Dr. Livesey all view the map of Treasure Island as an image of their private destinies. In the common template of the fairy tale experience, the thread of continuity through the labyrinth is customarily provided by substituting the self for the central figure, which is why the main character of children's stories is so often a cipher whose nature invites identification.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, if we know the plot and have assumed the role of the hero, substantive surprises in recognizable conventions call our own fortunes into question because our representative has departed from the path. Nor is the otherworld journey exclusively a children's story; to paraphrase Dante: at this early point in my journey, I found myself in the *selva oscura*, astray, gone from the path direct (*Inferno* ll. 1-3). *De te fabula*; the story we are about to enter may be imaginary, but the integrity of our personhood is nonetheless at issue. In Alice's case, the deep surprise excited by the anxious rabbit motivates a quick change in attitude from lethargic familiarity to unexpected engagement, then to abandonment. The encounters that result from Alice's impetuosity and that fill out the adventures in Wonderland have become a matter of public mythology. These adventures remain compelling not simply because of the unrivaled curiosity of the events themselves, but because the map of Alice's personal adventure continues to connect itself to our own journey, despite, or perhaps because of, its unpredictability, confusion, and ambiguity.

In the midst of her fall, Alice is both attentive to her surroundings and undismayed by the prolonged descent into the uncommonly deep

hole. She examines the paradoxical familiarity of each passing item and “wonders” repeatedly what might happen next. Carroll’s genius for juxtaposition is at work in the decoration of the tunnel with trappings of Victorian domesticity.<sup>9</sup> Alice responds by misapplying classroom geography and invoking conventions of proper etiquette, all in an attempt to accommodate the inconceivable by reference to her best guess at a comprehensible scenario. Donald Rackin argues that during her fall Alice struggles to assert her existing belief in regular causal relations, an observation that accurately captures Alice’s rational reaction to the irrationality of her circumstances (393). But we should also acknowledge Alice’s emotional response to these events, which, in comparison to her earlier lassitude, is energetic and motivated. Alice is prompted into engagement by surprise, and she is prepared for discovery by her receptivity to the unprecedented.

The attentiveness activated by even the most exhilarating surprise is not, however, easily sustained. Indeed, surprise is by definition fleeting. In the process of her protracted fall, Alice’s engagement with the novelty of the experience soon enough gives way to reverie, as she begins to overlay the incomprehensibility of her descent with reflections that redesign the experience in a context already familiar if not quite accurate. While floating down the mysterious tunnel, Alice’s thoughts turn not only to geography, but to the vaguely analogous experience of “falling down stairs,” to assumptions that she will be praised for her bravery, and eventually to recollections of her cat, Dinah, who reinforces the pull of the real world because Dinah was the name of the actual cat of the Liddell family.<sup>10</sup> This assimilation of the bizarre to the familiar serves to attenuate the impact of Alice’s initial surprise to the point that (in a direct paraphrase of the novel’s first sentence) Alice “began to get rather sleepy” (9). We can read “sleepiness” as the opposite of the attentiveness prompted by her original surprise, and we might assume that the potential significance introduced at the appearance of the first surprise is eluded as an experience easily familiarized, one of Emerson’s evanescent moments whose

newness is promptly absorbed as routine. Or so the case may be outside of Wonderland, or with someone besides Alice.<sup>11</sup>

But in fact, Wonderland has other surprises in store, and we can admire Alice not only for her tenacity throughout, but also for her willingness to avoid the constant temptation to assimilate the inexplicable into the comfortable assumptions of a recognizable narrative. With the help of another jolt of surprise, Alice is able to evade the pull of the past and commit herself again to the phenomenological present. As soon as she thumps down in the "long, low hall," (9) a setting reminiscent of the interiors at Christ Church, Alice is once again energized and alert. She "jumps" up immediately on spotting the White Rabbit and "without a moment to be lost," she is after him "like the wind" (9). And, as her adventures proceed, Alice's engagement with the novelty of her circumstances continues to overcome the gravitational pull of familiarity: "Alice had got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid to go on in the common way" (12). It may be impossible for creatures of reason to sustain the sense of surprise, but Alice nonetheless maintains the intuition that when the familiar is eclipsed, discovery is at hand. What Alice and readers soon learn is that discovery is not necessarily pleasant, or even fulfilling; but for all that, it remains potentially transformative.

In short order, Alice will discover the golden key, uncover the door to the garden, identify the "great puzzle" of personal identity, and—realizing perhaps that this puzzle may resist solutions—she transfers her attention to "the great question(s)" of how best to manage her growth and where in Wonderland she should be heading (33-34). The episodic progress of Alice's adventures takes us beyond the phenomenology of surprise—and the scope of this response—to the dynamics of Alice's growth (cf. Mendelson). In order to realize that deep surprise not only galvanizes attention but also sets in motion the process of transformation we must turn to Alice's second profound surprise.

## Surprise Ending

Of course, prior to the climactic ending, Alice experiences the almost constant surprises that make Wonderland a monument of creative intellectual invention. My argument, however, is that deep surprise stimulates decisive change; and as a prelude to this conclusion, I cite some preliminary evidence. Most notably, after learning to control her early erratic growth with the help of the Caterpillar's mushroom, Alice makes a deliberate effort to adjust her size to the requirements of her ensuing encounters.<sup>12</sup> Rhetoricians refer to the mature capacity to adjust to the demands of the moment as *kairos*, an ability that transcends a facility for finding the right word at the right time (cf. Kinneavy). Alice's growing awareness of the needs of those around her is *kairotic* in contrast to her self-absorption during such early encounters as those with the mouse, the Caterpillar, and the members of the caucus race.

Once inside the garden, Alice routinely displays a knack for appropriate action by apt responses to ever-new variations of social chaos. Alice's ability to adjust to the changing nature of her environment, without undue surprise at Wonderland's ambiguities, is a transformation in its own right. However, her "growing" maturity and self-control are mostly a prelude to the final surprise. In chapter 11, Alice has been sitting with the Gryphon observing the business of the trial with a good deal more accuracy than she displayed in her earlier geographical speculations. "Imagine her surprise," says the narrator, when the Rabbit reads out the name "Alice!" in the last line and as last word of the penultimate chapter (91). Polite accommodation to a new example of nonsense will not suffice in this instance. Alice is now the principal actor in her eponymous adventures, a now-public participant in the legal procedures that epitomize cultural values, even in Wonderland.

If Alice is energized and attentive as the result of her first surprise, this final surprise prompts her to feel indignant and aggressive, feelings she is now prepared to express. Moments before being called as a



witness, Alice feels herself beginning to grow. At first, she thinks she should leave the court; "but on second thoughts she decided to remain where she was as long as there was room for her" (88). The situation is reminiscent of her confinement in the Rabbit's house, where she *outgrows* her ability to move and so must stay and submit to the Rabbit's assaults (29). In the courtroom, however, she realizes that she has *grown into* her own and can act as she thinks best. The scene also oddly foreshadows a similar moment in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), when the respected doctor is sitting on a bench in Regent's Park and, without recourse to his "salts," he devolves into the heinous Mr. Hyde (91). Jekyll's metamorphosis is a nightmare that shrinks his body and corrupts his spirit. Alice's change is progressive, the development of a bolder, more assertive person, someone prepared to respond with resolve when opportunity appears. But, for the first time, her change in size comes without cakes or "drink me." So, natural development as well as recent experience are contributing to something approaching transformation.

Well before this dramatic growth spurt, Alice had already expressed her disgust at the protocols of the royal party: she speaks back to the Queen, dismisses her threats as "nonsense," and saves the gardeners from unjust punishment (64-65). So, when Alice is ultimately called as a witness, it is not out of character for her to respond without either hesitation or reticence. She had reacted with similar dispatch to the White Rabbit's first appearance, but this time her readiness is tempered with reason and sympathy. When she upsets the jurors' box, she is solicitous in returning them to their places, in a manner very different from her indifference to the feelings of her partners in the caucus race or her first encounter with Bill the Lizard.

But the central feature of Alice's behavior after being called to the witness stand is her intrepid defense of reason in the face of the court's blatant injustice. When asked by the King what she knows "about this business," she declares "nothing" (94). When accused of breaking rule number 42 (being a mile high and refusing to leave court), she argues adroitly that if this is the first rule "it ought to be



Number One" (94). She rebuts the claim that the lack of a signature on the verses proves the Knave's guilt, and she is uninhibited in referring to the King's response to the verses as 'meaningless' (cf. 95). Her most demonstrative action, however, is a rejoinder to the most serious breach of jurisprudence. When the Queen makes her famous demand for the "Sentence first—verdict afterwards" (96), Alice (who has continued to grow during the trial) answers "loudly" that the Queen's comment is "stuff and nonsense" (97). And when the Queen responds by demanding that she hold her tongue, Alice exclaims "I won't!" (97). This is not the demure, anemic Alice who routinely deferred to the cruelty of the adults around her. When Alice first meets the royal entourage, she politely introduces herself, though she adds under her breath that "they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them!" (63). By the time she is in court, and after she had "grown to her full size," Alice responds directly to the Queen's shouting with an unequivocal *ad hominem*: "Who cares for *you*? [...] You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (97).

The difference in her demeanor is as dramatic. Alice has been surprised into adopting a new, more mature, more aggressive, even more responsible role. The decisive heroine who exits Wonderland in rebellion is a different person than the attenuated young girl given to sulking and self-doubt. I would not want to claim too much for deep surprise as the initiating agency of this change, because Alice herself deserves full credit as the agent of her own transformation. But if the distinguishing feature of deep surprise is its premonition of impending significance, then Alice finds that meaning by coming into her own as an independent agent of common sense and justice. Empson saw Alice as a passive heroine in the mode of the Cheshire Cat who endures the lack of ethics in Wonderland by standing aside. Surprise in itself cannot reverse Alice's earlier compliance because surprise is something that happens *to us*. But deep surprise is a different matter. Alice is ultimately able to negotiate the distortions and chaos of Wonderland and to learn to function with confidence despite being surrounded by indifference, ill will, ambiguity, and disorder. She does so

because surprise prompts her to realize something *in herself*. Her example has inspired generations, and there is every reason that Alice should continue to do so amidst the chaos and surprise of the twenty-first century.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, Ch. 19.

<sup>2</sup>On "deep" surprise, see Jane Hirshfield 41-42.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief review of criticism of the *Alice* books, see Will Booker 77-104. For commentary on Alice's character, see *Alternative Alices*, as well as essays by Kathleen Blake, Michael Mendelson, and in Robert J. Phillips.

<sup>4</sup>William Morris's *Earthly Paradise* begins with a prologue by the "idle singer of a summer's day."

<sup>5</sup>My personal appreciation to Professor Matthias Bauer for suggesting this inquiry.

<sup>6</sup>*Ostranenie*, or "defamiliarization," was coined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky.

<sup>7</sup>See Tenniel's picture on page 7.

<sup>8</sup>See Thiele 201-74.

<sup>9</sup>Of special interest is the contrast of the tunnel's commonplace accoutrement with the metaphysical "downness" of Alice's *fall*. See Mendelson 41-42.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Gray 9n3.

<sup>11</sup>Compare the different descents of the two siblings in Grimms' "Mother Holle" (no. 12).

<sup>12</sup>Alice ends chapters 5, 6, and 7 (prior to her visits with the Duchess, the Hatter, and the royal party, respectively) by adjusting her size to the proportions of her hosts. Carroll's placement of these deliberate adjustments at the end of successive chapters is clearly designed for thematic emphasis.

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## Maintaining Plurality: A Response to Susan Ang\*

ANNEGRET MAACK

“Does an author signify his meaning for the idle or incurious? No, but it is stored up in time for those who approach it with care and patience.” (221)

Ang's complex and comprehensive interpretation of Ackroyd's *English Music* takes as its starting point the year 1922 when Timothy as a boy assisted in his father's public performances. She interprets this as a reference to the publication date of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which is alluded to in Ackroyd's text in many ways. Thus Bunyan's Christian is seen walking through waste land; such references are present in the Dickensian dreamscape as well as in Hogarthian London. While Ang posits *The Waste Land* as a decisive literary reference, she is well aware that 1922 is not only the publication date of Eliot's poem but also of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and she deliberately defers commenting on the relationship between Ackroyd and Joyce, and of that between the novels of the two authors, to another essay (cf. 239). Though in no way anticipating that essay, I would like to point out some parallels between Ackroyd's novel and the one of his grand predecessor.

It is Ackroyd himself who sees a link between these 1922 publications. He discusses Eliot and Joyce in two chapters of his *Notes for a New Culture*, and both times confronts an Eliot text with one of Joyce's. In “The Uses of Language” he focuses on Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses*; in “The Uses of Humanism” he compares Eliot's *Four Quartets* to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, both published “during the last War” (94). At the same time Ackroyd's summary of Joyce's achieve-

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\*Reference: Susan Ang. “OOOO that Eliot-Joycean Rag': A Fantasia upon Reading *English Music*,” *Connotations* 15.1-3 (2005/2006): 215-42.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the Connotations website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debang01513.htm>>.

ment can be read as referring to his own attempts at creating a world out of language:

Joyce's *Ulysses* unfolds language in a comic transformation of what was once fixed stylistically and called the 'real' world; it is now within the power of the written language to create a world out of itself, and Joyce returns to patristic sources in his evocation of language, myth and human experience as parts of that opaque λόγος which establishes the world. (94)

Ackroyd again comments on *Ulysses* and its relationship to Eliot's *Waste Land* in his biography of T. S. Eliot:

Eliot found his own voice by first reproducing that of others—as if it was only through his reading of, and response to, literature that he could find anything to hold onto, anything 'real'. That is why *Ulysses* struck him so forcibly, in a way no other novel ever did. Joyce had created a world which exists only in, and through, the multiple uses of language—through voices, through parodies of style. The novel is, in that sense, the dramatic epic of the word. Its range encompasses the whole literary tradition which begins with Homer, and presumably, ends with Joyce; just as he will place the same scene in the perspectives of late romantic prose, scientific description or conventional journalese, so he also parodies the history of prose style from Anglo-Saxon to Romantic narrative. (118)

Ackroyd's assessment of the impact of *Ulysses* on Eliot can be read as a description of the impact of Joyce's novel on his own work. Both *Ulysses* and *English Music* make excessive use of parody and pastiche, realism as well as a mixture of different literary styles, language games and allusions to literature and myths; both present a literary tradition from its very beginnings—in *English Music* from Cædmon's and Cynewulf's time to roughly the end of the nineteenth century; the structure of both has been compared to music, in Joyce's case as a fugue, in Ackroyd's as a fantasia<sup>1</sup>; in both we find the juxtaposition of past and present and the problematic father-son relationship in a sustained world of language.

In her essay, Ang decides to concentrate on "a reading of *English Music* as a work whose enquiry into the nature and interpretation of texts, [...] and whose contemplations upon the state of art and culture



draw on the Grail legend and Frazerian vegetation myths which underpin *The Waste Land*" (215). Though repeatedly formulating a caveat about the provisionality of any act of reading or interpretation, Ang ultimately suggests the possibility of a "humanist reading" of *English Music* (216; 222). While looking for the "key" to an understanding of the novel, a trope that recurs like a red herring throughout the book, Ang is at the same time conscious of the danger to "'pin down'" a text, "to limit the scope of its signifying activities, to impoverish it" (232). She thus raises the issue of "interpretation as a form of coercion (even rape)" and the question "of whether all critical approaches to, or means of entry into, a text [...] are equally justified, or licensed" (235).

Reviewers and critics have indeed differed in their interpretations of *English Music*. Catherine Bernard understands the novel's end as "an elegiac prayer for the dead [which] seems to deny replenishment" (179), whereas for Janik "the further realization that time is a continuum that transcends individual consciousness turns it into liberation" (177). One argument which recurs in critical assessments is the difficulty of reconciling Ackroyd's presentation of a literary tradition with his critique of aesthetic realism as formulated in his *Notes for a New Culture*, where he finds fault with Leavis's general humanism (cf. 117-18). Thus Lezard calls *English Music* "sloppy enough to make a bigoted reading possible." Schnackertz sees "the convergence of personal development and cultural initiation" as a "structural fault of the book" (500). Roessner observes an "incongruity between its postmodern tactics and the conservative ideal of British identity it celebrates," a "disparity between style and ideology" (104). Galster argues in a similar vein (cf. 194).<sup>2</sup> Ang is aware of this problem and proposes the "viability of various critical approaches" (238), among them the possibility of a humanist interpretation of the novel, though this seems to contradict Ackroyd's critique of the Leavisite 'Great Tradition' in *Notes for a New Culture*.<sup>3</sup> Ang finally stresses "the freedom of the text to signify plurally" (238).

As Ang states, the reading and understanding of texts is indeed a central concern of Ackroyd's book. Already the novel's first epigraph, taken from St Augustine's interpretation of Genesis, stresses the role of interpretation: "... he who can interpret what has been seen is a greater prophet than he who has simply seen it."<sup>4</sup> According to my reading, *English Music* not only allows a plurality of interpretations, but is deliberately constructed to encourage such plurality, and even seemingly mutually exclusive interpretations. I am not convinced of the author's "abdication of control," but rather of his insistence to allow his book "to signify plurally" (238).

One need not be the "alert" reader whom Ackroyd addresses in his "Acknowledgments" to arrive at contradictory interpretations of *English Music*. A reading based on the odd-numbered chapters of the novel leads to a different interpretation than one mainly considering the even-numbered ones. In the odd chapters the life story of Timothy Harcombe is told by himself, and from the vantage point of old age, in a realistic style, which can be read as a rather conventional *Bildungsroman* following Timothy's development to maturity. The even chapters contain the trance-like dream-sequences in which Timothy enters books from the English canon, interacts with their characters or authors, steps into paintings of famous English artists, and confers with notable English composers. In these chapters, which are presented by an impersonal heterodiegetic narrator, Tim moves in a world that is literally made of words, in which "meaning" is either difficult to construct or merely a linguistic game. Thus in Chapter Two, Timothy sees a house with "chimneys in the shape of words" (27), he meets characters out of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* who play with the literal and the figurative meaning of words and with homonyms, like the Red Queen, who "must have pages. Just as a book must have royalties" (34), where a dead metaphor is indeed a corpse and "Figures of speech" run around (35). In the Dickensian dreamscape Timothy feels a breeze upon his face, "but it was no ordinary passage of air [...]. It was a stream of words" (75). Robinson Crusoe's island is "in the shape of a man's hand" and the

waters around it resemble “good writing ink” (160). Also in the chapters establishing an English tradition of music and painting, Timothy enters a world of words. Accordingly, Ackroyd quotes from Morley’s *A Plain and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (chapter 10) and from Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty* (chapter 12). While Timothy listens to Byrd’s lecture on the composition of music, he learns that “words have their own secret power” (213), and while walking with Hogarth he is—from the height of the Monument—able to “read” the city’s “graceful lines and masses [...]. We become masters of the meaning of the city” (257).

Juxtapositions of seemingly irreconcilable worldviews occur throughout the book, including “the visionary and specifically mesmeristic and mediumistic worldview” and “the anti-visionary rationalism of Cartesian logic” (Onega 100), the didactic literary tradition represented by Bunyan and the subversive carnevalesque world of Lewis Carroll, the oppositional poles of metropolitan London and the landscape of Wiltshire, “the nostalgic urge to return to the heroic past and a desire to escape its oppressive influence” (Roessner 122), “a profusion of textual matter or corporeality [...] and a hypothetical probing into its opposite” (Ganteau 36), a cyclical and a linear concept of time, time “rushing forward from event to event [...] but always circling around [Timothy]” (84); the list of such juxtapositions could even be longer. In his dream Timothy is determined “to find some meaning in all of this,” and he is not content with two stories (42; 35). This is also true of the reader. The text, however, provides a number of hints how to understand these oppositions in the structure of the novel as well as in its ideas—not as mutually exclusive but as coexistent, as “the symmetry of opposing forces” (261), linked by “that thread which unites all its parts together” (262).

Though Ang suspects that the significance of Ackroyd’s “over-obvious tropes”—Ganteau even speaks of “tropic overkill” (27)—is either “on surface display, so deeply buried as to remain inaccessible, or utterly absent” (234), one of his favourite tropes (not only in this book) might be read as central and as an image including all contra-

dictory interpretations. The pattern that Timothy looks for and that is most often referred to is that of a circle. In *Albion*, Ackroyd's English cultural history, the author begins and ends the book by comparing the English cultural tradition to a circle: "The English imagination takes the form of a ring or circle. [...] And so the English imagination takes the form of an endless enchanted circle, or shining ring, moving backwards as well as forwards" (xix, 448). Since by the term "'English music'" Timothy's father means "not only music itself but also English history, English literature and English painting" (21), the circle may be seen as an apt and central image for the novel. Early in the book, while wandering with Pip through London's labyrinthine streets, Timothy begins to understand what the circle means:

it seemed to him that they were moving in a circle—that all these contrasting and bewildering scenes were part of one another. [...] Each thing meant nothing by itself but, when it was seen in contrast or opposition to the next thing, the pattern began to emerge. (88)

Thus the frequently repeated request to go back to the beginning indicates a circle, and the book starts with the old Timothy's return to his origins.<sup>5</sup> The circle-line recurs in variations, as a "serpentine line" (264),<sup>6</sup> as "an undulating motion like a wave or moving landscape" (251), as "the line of beauty" (195; 221; 269), "the graceful double curve" (308), or in the travelling circus, itself a symbol of continuity and change.

Critics have suggested variations of a circle as a visual image of the book's structure; Onega compares the structure to a "double-loop arrangement of the major arcana of the Tarot," to "a Möbius-strip" (102), Ganteau speaks of a "structural double helix" and insists on the "'both ... and' logic" of Ackroyd's novel, "the paradox of a conjunctive opposition or coincidence between two poles" (36). Questioned by Julian Wolfreys whether he favours a cyclical rather than a linear model of time, Ackroyd himself opts for "a spiral" (Gibson and Wolfreys 255), which can be seen as a combination of the circle and a straight line, and thus as a 'both ... and' answer. And it is finally possible for Timothy, the protagonist of the rather conventional Bil-

dungsroman who has been trying to ““find out who I am?”” (32) in a world composed of language, to understand himself as scripted by “a grand English artistic tradition.”<sup>7</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Galster 214-20.

<sup>2</sup>Critics also find fault with Ackroyd's artistic tradition which is almost exclusively male (cf. Roessner 105). The exception is a brief mention of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (cf. Lurie). None of the critics I have read so far have noticed the quote from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (““Wandering Spirits””), which Timothy comments: ““This reminds me of a story, of which the meaning has never been understood”” (318-19).

<sup>3</sup>In his preface to the revised edition, Ackroyd states that the book's central argument is “still broadly correct.” He is also convinced that “the concerns, or obsessions, of *Notes for a New Culture*” could be found in all of his later books (8).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. vol. 2, book 12, chap. 9. St Augustine seems to favour a plurality of interpretations: “in interpreting words that have been written obscurely for the purpose of stimulating our thought, I have not rashly taken my stand on one side against a rival interpretation which might possibly be better. I have thought that each one, in keeping with his power of understanding, should choose the interpretation he can grasp” (vol. 1, book 1, chap. 20).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. *First Light*: “Everything is part of the pattern. We carry our origin within us, and we can never rest until we have returned” (318). This can be read as a reference to Eliot's “East Coker”: “In my beginning is my end. [...] In my end is my beginning” (177-83).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Hawksmoor*: “Truly, Time is a vast Denful of Horror, round about which a Serpent winds and in the winding bites itself by the Tail” (62).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Roessner 111.

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