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Creative Imagination and Didactic Intent in Medieval Visions of the Other World: A Response to Fritz Kemmler*

JESSICA BARR

In “Painful Restoration: Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World,” Fritz Kemmler argues that we must revise some of our concepts of life and death if we are to properly understand medieval vision texts. He writes that medieval Christian writers had a “concept of a double life—the life of the body and the life of the soul; and consequently [the concept of] a double death—the death of the body and the death of the soul” (130), meaning that the life and death of the soul depend on the life and death of the body (129). These distinctive concepts of life and death are apparent in the need for the visionary’s body to undergo a “temporary death” in order for his soul to explore otherworldly regions (130)—including Hell, the portrayal of which Kemmler primarily is interested in. Using three early medieval English vision texts,¹ Kemmler explores portrayals of the torments and judgments of sinning souls, noting that these vividly imaginative descriptions significantly predate Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (141).

Kemmler’s article concisely describes some of the principal characteristics of the eschatological vision text. Indeed, many of the features that he points out are apparent in other subcategories of vision literature, including texts by or about medieval visionary women. First, the temporary death of the body that the visionary must undergo cannot

*Reference: Fritz Kemmler, “Painful Restoration: Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World,” *Connotations* 17.2-3 (2007/2008): 129-43.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkemmler01723.htm>>.

help but remind one of the partial paralysis that preceded the fourteenth-century Julian of Norwich's revelations, and illnesses and semi-conscious states are common in other women's vision texts, as well. Another parallel is the infliction of marks and wounds upon the visionary's body, such as the burn that remains on the face of Saint Fursey, whose biography by Bede Kemmler discusses. The burn acts as proof of Fursey's journey to the Other World (Kemmler 133) and is reminiscent of the embodied spiritual practice that many visionary women are said by their hagiographers to have experienced. Kemmler sees the marks upon Fursey as evidence of Bede's fear that the testimony of the visionary alone would be insufficient to prove the veracity of his spiritual experience (133); similarly, such details are frequently marshaled in the lives of holy women as evidence of sanctity and seem to have been commonly employed in the discourse of women's holiness.² Finally, Kemmler's remarks on the intended effect of these texts upon their audiences correctly underscore the importance of the outcome of the vision text: it is not enough simply to record someone else's experience; the audience itself must increase in its devotion and commitment to a holy way of life for the text to be considered a success.³

Kemmler's discussion of the presumably imaginative touches that the authors of the vision texts contribute to their descriptions of Hell focuses on how they would have added to their audiences' desire to live holier lives. Indeed, he concludes his discussion by stressing that the "primary goal" of the vision text is "to convince [its] 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" (140). While this is certainly true, such descriptions must have also engaged and even entertained their audiences. The very vivid and amusing descriptions of Hell that precede Kemmler's remark immediately raised, for me, the question, "What about the *pleasure* of these texts?" I would doubt very much that in Kemmler's view pleasure is precluded from the effects of these visions; in fact, he stresses the imaginative element of such texts, stating that they allow their authors

to utilize their “creative imagination” (140). But Kemmler ultimately steers his argument in a different direction. Without contradicting his arguments, which are quite sound, it may be instructive to consider the other purposes that a vision text might serve—the unstated, yet very likely present, desire to capture the audience’s imagination with a memorable story, a story that exceeds and may even subvert the instructive purpose to which it is being put. Drawing from the characteristics of the eschatological vision text that Kemmler describes, I aim to consider this tension between didactic intent and entertaining effect.

Unlike Kemmler, however, I will not focus on a purportedly true vision of Hell. Instead, I will write about the comic *Apocalypse of Goliath the Bishop*, a vision poem written in Latin, probably in England, in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Pairing a satirical vision text that nonetheless has a definite moral purpose with the eschatological visions that Kemmler describes, I will argue for not only the possibility of play within the genre of the otherworldly vision, but that such play may serve instructive and even subversive purposes. As a genre, visions of Purgatory and Hell are rife with opportunities for titillation, shock, and humor, i.e. for emotional responses that do not necessarily coincide with the texts’ didactic aims. *Goliath* makes a particularly fitting contrast with the visions of Fursey, Thurkill, and Owein because it reverses many of the characteristics that Kemmler describes, in effect using those characteristics to create a harshly critical indictment of the clerical orders. *Goliath*’s use of these characteristics sheds light both on the eschatological tradition as a whole and on the extradidactic effects to which descriptions of sin and torment might be put—on, in other words, the pleasure of the visionary text.

One common feature of satire is that it entertains while making a serious point, and in this poem—written at around the same time as the visions of Thurkill and Owein, both of which are treated in “Painful Restoration”—we can easily trace the connections between humorous effect and didactic intent. Like Bede’s vision of Fursey, the brevity of which suggests the centrality of its didactic aim (Fursey’s

encounter with the devil seems to serve primarily as evidence that each of our sins will remain with us), *The Apocalypse of Golias* aims to instruct, but in a rather different way. Instead of exhorting its audience to live a holier life, *Golias* is concerned to enumerate the sins of the clergy at every level, including the Pope (called Voracius), bishops, archdeacons, parish priests, abbots, and monks. Presented as a vision of the book of the seven seals, the poem provides allegorical critiques of these men's frankly outrageous sins. Golias's reading of the book of the seven seals is divinely guided: not only does the Angel who initially appears to him instruct him to read, but the seals on the later chapters are broken by—to give but three examples—a hand that descends from heaven (st. 55), a majestic woman in the sky (st. 73), and a band of clamoring Ethiopians (sts. 84-85). Finally, upon the culmination of the seventh chapter, Golias is led physically into Heaven for a vision of divine judgment—but, owing to a mishap for which he is entirely responsible, he forgets this culminating vision and can only recall the sins of the clergy, which the Angel had earlier inscribed physically into his brain. It is a scathing and very funny text, playing with words (suggesting, for example, that “Presbyter” comes from “bibo” [I drink] and “ter” [triply] in order to explain the priests' excessive drinking [st. 67]), relishing its bawdiness (such as in the example of the “cheerful prostitute” who offers herself up for the priest to “plow” [st. 70]), and revealing the visionary himself to be careless, flawed, and rather glib. A social critique on the one hand, it is also shocking and hilarious in its excesses.

Although the poem is not actually a vision of Hell, it is a revelation, and it echoes many of the characteristics of the eschatological vision text. Thus it begins as an apparently straightforward vision, employing one of the most common tropes of the vision genre, one that Kemmler pinpoints as essential to the visions that he discusses: the visionary must undergo a sort of temporary death in order to receive his revelation. Golias has lain down to rest, “stretched out in the shade” of a tree to escape the mid-day heat, when the vision overtakes him (st. 2). This ambiguous state—neither explicitly sleeping nor

waking—is reminiscent of literary visions such as Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. It also echoes Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 12:2; in fact, Golias alludes to the Biblical text when he says that he “do[es] not know” whether the revelation was “in flesh” (st. 3). While this state that could be sleeping or waking is not as surely a flight from the body as is the departure of Thurkill’s soul from his sleeping body (“Thurkill’s Vision” 220), it nonetheless suggests the separation between the body and the soul that is typical of visionary experiences.

In its usage of the other characteristics that Kemmler describes, however, the poem is more playful, subtly reworking them. *Golias* is grounded in the eschatological tradition, despite its close parallels with Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* and Revelations and its references to ancient philosophers and poets⁴; in addition to echoing many eschatological tropes, the outlandishly sinful behavior of the clergy that it describes is reminiscent of the devils tormenting suffering souls in visions such as those discussed in “Painful Restoration.” In this respect, visions of Heaven and Hell furnish the anonymous author of *Golias* with a literary and theological context for his work. The difference is that, instead of calling for the audience to recognize their own sins, *Golias* constitutes a direct attack upon a specific group—the clergy. And in order to make this attack, the poem inverts the order of things as they usually appear in Hell: the sins of the clergy are rendered, not as torments inflicted by devils upon the sinful, but as the sinners’ cruelty to the (presumably) more innocent.

Such a reversal can be seen, for example, in the Bishop’s treatment of his flock, here rendered literally as a flock of sheep. The Bishop’s own crimes lead him to torture his followers:

The Bishop likes to make his sheep his prey;
He stabs them with the horns that crown his head. [...]

If he finds some faults among his lambs,
If any lapse of faith should greet his eye,
He shears them with the scissors of the law,
And wrings their udders (that is, purses) dry. [...]

But once the lambs are fleeced, the Shepherd leaves
The bloody carcass to the wolf and crow. (Sts. 33, 35, 36)⁵

The Bishop's exaggerated violence, his bestial appearance—he is represented allegorically as an ox (st. 27)—and the suggestion that these treatments occur not just once but as ongoing torment align his actions with the punitive measures exacted by the devils upon the souls of the sinful dead. They are, in fact, not so different from the brutally violent dismemberment, burning, and cooking of flesh that the devils ritually enact upon sinners in the "Vision of Thurkill." But unlike in "Thurkill," in *Golias* the crimes of the tormented are never enumerated. The Bishop punishes them for "lapse[s] of faith" that may or may not be real, and the punishment that he inflicts—emptying their purses—is not commensurate to that sin; in fact, we are invited to imagine that he invents such lapses in order to extort more money from his flock. The implication, of course, is that the clergy torment the living in much the same way that devils torment the dead. This is an eschatology turned on its head, in which the guilty punish the relatively innocent prior to their death and without any legitimate judgment.

In another echo of the texts that Kemmler describes, *Golias* also comes away from his vision with a sort of bodily mark. While Fursey bears a scar on his face from the burning man who was flung against him during his vision (Bede 175; Kemmler 133), *Golias* emerges with an internal scar: the inscription of the clergy's vices upon his brain (sts. 103-04).⁶ The "wound" here is a wound of knowledge; he remembers these experiences—he can't help but do so—and their inscription upon his brain is a physical sign of what he has undergone. Although his mark might be invisible to others, reading *Golias* in light of the eschatological vision tradition suggests that knowledge of the clergy's sin is itself a kind of injury. The similarity works the other way, too: Fursey's scar serves as a reminder of what he has seen and, importantly, done; it is the inscription of his prior sin upon his flesh. In like manner, *Golias*'s "wound" is a reminder of sin—with the difference that it is a reminder of the sin of *others*, not his own. The

eschatological tropes that Kemmler describes are inverted in *Golias*, just as the purpose of the vision text (to recall the sinner to Christ and the Church) is replaced with criticism of the Church itself.⁷ Accordingly, while the ostensibly true vision of Heaven or Hell and its textual communication are intended to “convince [its] 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” (Kemmler 140), *The Apocalypse of Golias* cannot be said to have quite the same effect on its readers. Golias’s own sins are never discussed (although they may be inferred from his feeling hungry during the vision of heavenly judgment), and only the sins of the clergy are made apparent. The reader can hardly come away from this poem with a renewed sense of spiritual fervor; instead, the more appropriate response seems to be either outrage or amusement at the antics of the bishops, priests, and monks caricatured in the vision. Further, Golias’s omission of the vision of Heaven creates the impression that the heavenly realm offers no particular consolations. Kemmler’s remark that “the description of the forecourts of heaven” contained in the *Visio Thurkilli* is “somewhat bland” compared to its depiction of Hell (140) takes on added significance in *Golias*, where Heaven itself is literally forgettable and the rampant sinning of the clergy is given ample elaboration.

The Apocalypse of Golias is not, therefore, a text that prompts reflection or contemplation of one’s own sins; it is not a call to lead a holier life. It is, instead, an invitation to critique and laugh at representatives of spiritual authority. Like Revelations itself, it underscores the failings of this world’s authorities—even ecclesiastical authorities—and gestures towards the punishment that awaits them. In this sense, it follows in a tradition of critical apocalyptic texts designed to indicate the fallen state of human society. But the humor of the text arises from its parody of the conventions of eschatological visions—from the audience’s recognition of the genre and the author’s reversal of its usual intent. To heighten this sense of reversal, the poem uses an overblown rhetoric of revelation quite incommensurate with the absurd veniality that the vision itself depicts; for example, “the heavens

opened to reveal / A noble woman dressed in rich array. [...] At her command the next seal fell away" (st. 73). Such apocalyptic breakings of the seals lend a peculiar gravity to the revelations of a parson's usury (st. 79) or an abbot's bad influence upon his monks (st. 86). The sins of the clergy are grave; the question is whether they are made graver or more ridiculous when framed by the heightened rhetoric of the apocalyptic genre. Similar to the 'antipathetic codes' that Roland Barthes identifies as one of the pleasures of reading Sade's works (Barthes, *Plaisir* 14), such collisions of loftiness and veniality startle and shock the reader, bringing her into a conflicted engagement with the poem.⁸

At the beginning of this essay, I suggested that *The Apocalypse of Golias the Bishop* provides an example of a vision text whose excesses and extravagant descriptions of wickedness function primarily to amuse, and that this use of humor could help us to understand the entertainment value of the visions that Kemmler discusses in his article. At the same time, however, considering the ways in which the satirical poem manipulates those characteristics exposes the serious side of *Golias*—its didactic intent and sharply critical commentary. But the humorous quality of the text—the way that it invites us to make fun of figures of authority who wield considerable power, the way that it puts them in their place and robs them of all pretence to virtue—is pleasurable, is humorous, with a humor that may be equally applicable to the antics of the devils in (non-satirical) visions of Hell. In the same way that *Golias* lets us laugh at the clergy, deflecting attention from our own sinfulness by poking fun at people who are even worse, Fursey's, Owein's, and Thurkill's visions invite the audience to be entertained and distracted by the wild capering of the devils—even as the latter texts imply that the same frankly appalling punishments await us if we do not mend our ways. These two aims are, in a sense, incompatible—and yet perhaps that very tension, that incompatibility, is what makes these texts salient and enjoyable. Writes Barthes, "the [reading] subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working*

side by side"⁹: at once biting and absurd, at once earnest exhortation and silly game, the vision both educates and amuses.

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NOTES

¹It is worth noting that such highly descriptive visions of the torments of the otherworld are less prominent in English vision texts after about the twelfth century and appeared very infrequently in vernacular English religious texts (cf. Adams 37). Of 630 didactic vision texts in the vernacular that Gwenfair Adams examines, "less than two percent involved journeys to the otherworld" (Adams 37). While such texts certainly circulated in late medieval England, Adams argues that their length and complexity—precisely what makes them interesting to scholars and readers today—meant that they were less frequently employed in vernacular religious instruction (38).

²For a discussion of embodiment and medieval women's spirituality, see, e.g., Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

³Highlighting what Tom Head would later call the "pedagogic concern" of medieval hagiography (Head xiii), Ritamary Bradley writes, "Medieval writers of saints' lives [...] were not striving to be faithful to historical fact but were trying to create a narrative which would lead readers to admire and imitate the holy person" (63).

⁴Stanzas 10-13 mention Priscian, Aristotle, Tully, Ptolemy, Boethius, Euclid, Pythagoras, Lucan, Virgil, Ovid, Persius, Statius, Terence, and Hippocrates.

⁵"Ve gentis motile cornutis ducibus, / qui mulctant mutilos armatis frontibus, / dum habet quilibet fenum in cornibus, / non pastor ovium, sed pastus ovibus // [...] // Si vulgi noverit excessus pauculos, / causatur fidei lesos articulos; / trahit ius ovium in cause tribulos, / vellens exuvias et mulgens loculos. // Errantem sequitur grex errans previum, / quem pastor devius ducit per devium; / post lac et vellera dat carnes ovium / luporum dentibus et rostris avium."

⁶"His michi plenius visis et cognitiss / dux meus manibus me cepit insitis / et caput quattuor discernens digitis / solvit in quattuor compagem capitis. // Et ne misteria vidissem perperam / figens occipitis in partem teneram / rigentem stipulam, siccam et asperam / scripsit in cerebro cuncta que videram." ("When I had heard and seen all this, / My guardian seized me until I cried for pain, / And then, with delicate, angelic skill, / He split my skull and opened up my brain. // He next took out a little piece of straw, / And, lest that I forget my wondrous vision, / Inscribed the whole thing on my tender brain, / Then carefully sewed up my odd incision.")

⁷It is significant that several of the sins described in the visions of Thurkill and of Owein are sins against the church. Owein himself is guilty of "the violation of churches and invasion of ecclesiastical property" ("St. Patrick's Purgatory" 135), and he encounters church officials in the terrestrial paradise (143); Thurkill is similarly guilty of a crime against the church, having neglected his tithes ("Thurkill's Vision" 221), and he witnesses the suffering of two people who have in some way violated ecclesiastical obligations: a nobleman who died without confession (225) and a priest who did not fulfill his obligations to his congregation (228). The essential authority of the ecclesiastical structure, if not all of its representatives (e.g. the sinful priest), is taken for granted in these visions.

⁸Barthes elaborates on the pleasurable effect brought about by the clash of conflicting discourses, which he calls the "redistribution" of language: "*cette redistribution se fait toujours par coupure*. Deux bords sont tracés: un bord sage, conforme, plagiaire (il s'agit de copier la langue dans son état canonique, tel qu'il a été fixé par l'école, le bon usage, la littérature, la culture), et *un autre bord*, mobile, vide (apte à prendre n'importe quels contours), qui n'est jamais que le lieu de son effet: là où s'entrevoit la mort du langage. Ces deux bords, *le compromis qu'ils mettent en scène*, sont nécessaires" (14-15; italics in original) ("*such redistribution is always achieved by cutting*. Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed. These two edges, *the compromise they bring about*, are necessary"; trans. Miller 6-7). In the case of *Golias*, the language of revelation is the "plagiarized," canonical discourse, which runs up against the parodic portrayal of the clergy.

⁹"[L]e sujet accède à la jouissance par la cohabitation des langages, *qui travaillent côte à côte*" (10; trans. Miller 4, italics in original).

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Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World: A Response to Fritz Kemmler*

MATTHIAS GALLER

In his article, Fritz Kemmler examines three visionary accounts, originally composed in Latin, that describe journeys to the other world, i.e. to hell, purgatory and heaven, and the return to life on earth. These texts are part of a large body of visionary literature, stretching from the *Visio Sancti Pauli* (late fourth century, translated into Middle English in the twelfth century) to the *Vision of Edmund Leversedge* (1465), and have attracted scholarly attention in recent years.¹

Visions of the other world show a number of similarities throughout the centuries, striking parallels even with latter-day near-death experiences, as Carol Zaleski and Peter Dinzelbacher have shown.² Dinzelbacher compares medieval with latter-day visions and concludes that such phenomena seem to have occurred more frequently in the Middle Ages than today and that people then were far less reluctant to believe in the truth of these visions or to change their lives as a result of such experiences (*Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur* 5-6). Whereas we might expect modern society to lock people who claim to see or hear divine revelations away in mental homes, visionaries such as Hildegard von Bingen were taken seriously by their contemporaries, and their visionary accounts were distributed and discussed by prominent theologians. Comparing medieval with contemporary out-of-body experiences, Dinzelbacher recognizes identical structural

*Reference: Fritz Kemmler, "Painful Restoration: Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World," *Connotations* 17.2-3 (2007/2008): 129-43.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkemmler01723.htm>>.

elements such as the separation of body and soul, the encounter with an otherworldly guide or the transition from darkness to light. These elements are, however, experienced differently: medieval visionaries claim to have seen Jesus, the Virgin Mary or angels whereas our contemporaries speak more frequently of a divine source of light. The devil, present in most medieval visions of the other world, has by and large disappeared from modern accounts. These differences can be explained if we consider the differences in theology and iconography (*Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur* 11): spiritual truths were propagated far more vividly than today, which explains the many concrete descriptions of otherworld topography in medieval visions; the reports of visionaries, inversely, influenced the iconography of their times.

At the beginning of his article, Kemmler suggests that “the process of restoration from death is accompanied by pain on various levels” (129), which accounts for his choice of title (“Painful Restoration”). Looking at a number of medieval visions, however, it does not seem as if the visionary’s return from temporary death to life on earth was a particularly painful experience. In his discussion of the *Visio S. Fursei*, Kemmler interprets the visionary’s marks of burning to be a result of his restoration from death (133). The burning, however, does not happen as a consequence of his return, but rather is due to an offence committed during his lifetime—Fursey once accepted a gift from a dying sinner. According to Kemmler, Thurkill, another visionary, also suffers a “painful restoration” because he shows reluctance to return to his former life once he has experienced the glory of paradise (140). “Painful restoration” would have to refer to the visionary’s reclamation from sin (the “death of the soul”)³ by witnessing the tortures of purgatory and sometimes even experiencing tortures himself.

The visions written, copied and distributed throughout the Middle Ages were meant to warn people of the dangers of indulging in a life of sin. Accordingly, they do not describe an ‘other’ world in the strictest sense of the word; the visions allegedly experienced beyond the boundary of death instead reflect life *in this world*. By depicting infer-

nal 'transformations' of the lives of sinners, medieval visions accuse the mores of their times and promote spiritual reform.

A chronological and cross-cultural comparison of the way questions of death and dying are dealt with results in basically three distinct attitudes.⁴ In the first of them, philosophers in ancient Rome and Greece such as Democritus and Epicurus accepted the finality of human life and negated the possibility of life after death, which on the one hand spares us the threat of hell and damnation, but leaves us on the other hand desperate when it comes to the deeper sense of our life on earth. Reflections on the transience of life have led philosophers and poets to dedicate themselves to the joys of life on earth ("Carpe diem") as long as possible without burdensome anxieties of dreadful consequences to follow.

Cultures which believe in life after death offer a second and a third possibility, as they imagine the world beyond death either as a continuation of life on earth or as a realm which perpetuates life on earth but in changed circumstances (hence 'transformation'). Homer's underworld, where souls linger on in an unspectacular form of eternal life after drinking of Lethe, belongs to the first of these two. Concepts which found their way from Celtic mythology into medieval romance, such as the island where Sir Launfal enjoys compensation for the shortcomings of life at Arthur's court or other elfish worlds in which life after death (or abduction into fairy land) continues in eternal boredom are further examples.

Quite different is the third paradigm of transformation as presented in medieval visions. Concepts such as divine judgement, salvation and damnation, heaven or hell have, of course, a tradition reaching far back into the past.⁵ In a number of instances the gospels promise salvation and warn against damnation with relatively sparse detail about what to expect. The authors of medieval visions, by contrast, possessed, as pointed out by Kemmler, "a considerable amount of creative imagination in describing the *terra incognita* of both heaven and hell" (131). Their accounts are spiced with gruesome detail and the contrast between the two alternative regions is extreme, which

made the concept of purgatory, as a sort of bridge between the two, a medieval necessity. Life after death as described in medieval visions reflects, and in one case (*Visio Thurkilli*) even re-enacts life on earth. Such accounts are, however, transformed in ways which point to the motives of those who recorded them in writing and propagated them: members of the clergy who catered both to spiritual curiosity and who wished to promote Christian ethics.

To illustrate this point I will discuss examples of the way lives are transformed in a number of medieval visions, those presented by Kemmler and others originally written in Middle English or translated into Middle English from Latin originals. These texts are (in chronological order): The *Visio S. Fursei* (731), the *Vision of Tundale* (1149), *St. Patrick's Purgatory* (1153), the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* (1196), the *Visio Thurkilli* (1206), *A Revelation of Purgatory* (1422), and the *Vision of Edmund Leversedge* (1465).

To begin, let us have a look at the way the boundary between this world and the next is transcended in medieval visions. With the exception of the knight Owein in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, only souls can cross this border; the visionary's body remains behind in a state resembling death. The return of the visionary's soul from the other world leads to great confusion and excitement amongst bystanders.

The rather succinct report of the vision of St. Fursey simply states that the saint was "snatched from the body," returned to it two days later and taken out of it a second time.⁶ *Tundale's Vision* describes the visionary's departure as a "transynge" (l. 41)⁷: he is not at all a saintly figure but a rich man "full of trecherye, / Of pryde, [of] ire & [of] enuye" (ll. 23-24, square brackets in original). His body lies as if dead,⁸ with only a little warmth on the left side which leaves his friends in a quandary as to his state. Tundale's soul returns after a couple of days, rejoins his body and the visionary is restored to life. The Monk of Eynsham's vision occurs likewise at a time when the visionary suffers from a severe illness. His brothers find him lying prostrate in the chapter house on Good Friday as if he were dead until his body returns to life on the morning of Easter Sunday. Edmund Leversedge

also leaves his body during extreme sickness. Only Thurkill leaves this world in good health after receiving his heavenly guide as a guest in his house. The exception to the rule that only souls can cross the boundary between this world and the next, the knight Owein in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, is not at all a saintly figure, as pointed out by Kemmler (135). He enters the nether world voluntarily, in flesh and blood, as an act of penance, after fifteen days of fasting and prayer, despite all warnings of the bishop. This is in fact not a vision but a physical experience, as Owein feels the tortures of purgatory on his body, a fact which leaves us confused because it implies that death is not a precondition for entering the nether world.

The most prominent occurrence in the other world as described in medieval visions is the visionary's confrontation with sins committed during his lifetime, which entail punishment according to their gravity. Some of the visionaries are sinners, some saints, some stand in-between. Thurkill, for example, has not tithed his crop properly and is therefore punished with smelling a most foul stench which emanates from the pitch of hell. Edmund Leversedge is reproached with dressing gaudily, his punishment—temptation rather than torture—addresses only the sin of gallantry, which has led the more recent editor of the vision, Wiesje F. Nijenhuis, to judge that Leversedge's visionary account "reads much more like an ego-document than most medieval visions of the afterlife" (93). Leversedge's vision seems to owe much to contemporary *ars moriendi* literature, to sermons and devotional literature, whereas the standard *topoi* of visionary literature, conventionalised elements such as the otherworldly guide or the torments witnessed by the visionary, appear in truncated form (cf. Nijenhuis 92). In contrast, when confronted with the consequences of his sins, Tundale repents his wickedness and vows to lead a pure life after his return to earth. Apart from witnessing hellish tortures, he himself must undergo punishment for his misdeeds: he once stole a cow that he now has to lead over a long and narrow bridge, a penalty which hurts his feet and puts him at risk of falling into the mouths of nightmarish beasts below.

The above mentioned scene in the *Visio S. Fursey* is also relevant in this context. As the saint is on his way to heaven, a demon seizes one of the tortured souls and hurls it at Fursey, "hitting him and scorching his shoulder and jaw."⁹ The visionary is involved in this man's punishment because he had received some of the dying man's clothing upon his death. The fact that the saint bears the marks of burning suffered on his way to heaven *after* being restored to his body shows that not only the visionary's deeds on earth determine the state of his soul in the nether world, but that experiences in the realm beyond death likewise affect his life after he returns. Thus, whenever he recounts his vision, he sweats as if in the midst of summer.

After their return, visionaries change their ways of life (Owein, for example, departs on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and devotes the rest of his life to religion; Tundale asks to be taken under monastic order) and warn their audiences to forsake sin (e.g. Edmund of Leversedge). Thurkill at first is reluctant to share his experience, but does so after being admonished by St. Julian, revealing an eloquence rather unusual for a simple peasant. The devils, interestingly, are loathe to give Thurkill's spirit access to the infernal regions in which he could be an eyewitness to torture, arguing that this knowledge, if spread amongst mankind, would threaten the 'job security' of the infernal workforce since human beings would certainly refrain from sin if they were to learn its dreadful consequences. Some visions offer suggestions for what can be done to relieve suffering souls from their pains: the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*, for instance, promotes praying and offering masses for the dead. *A Revelation of Purgatory* gives particularly detailed instructions of what could be done to relieve the soul of a fellow nun tormented in purgatory, such as offering specified masses, psalms and hymns. The *Vision of Charles the Fat*, an earlier text composed in Latin,¹⁰ goes so far as to interfere with contemporary politics, warning against partaking in wars and announcing the succession of the Holy Roman Empire (*Visio Caroli* 112-16).

These instances point to the fact that this world and the world beyond death are interrelated, a belief which is best illustrated in the

Vision of Tundale. In this quite substantial visionary account, hell is divided into compartments for the punishments of particular sins, beginning with murderers, followed by spies and traitors, and followed by the proud, the greedy, robbers and thieves, gluttons and fornicators¹¹: Tundale is shocked to see monks amongst the tormented. This reaction, we could argue, reflects contemporary suppositions such as the repressed realities in medieval society at the time of composition. The ranking of sins into mortal or venial ones, along with the prominence of particular 'crimes' such as 'fornication'¹² is accomplished in accordance with the medieval concept of the Seven Deadly Sins or Capital Vices. Heaven is likewise subdivided, with the faithfully married on the lowest level, martyrs, virgins and the defenders and builders of churches on the upper levels.

The conditions of this world may also be reflected inversely in the nether world, as in the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*, where those who lived in worldly dignity suffer worst, especially judges and prelates,¹³ which reflects the words of the evangelist Matthew (19:30): "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." The 'other' world thus mirrors the state of this world and the eschatology of medieval visions reverses the social order of the here and now.

In his analysis of the *Visio Thurkilli*, Kemmler points us to a rather peculiar passage on the 'theatre of hell.' Here devils view a spectacle that involves sinners re-enacting their sins. At first a proud man is forced to perform gestures of pride such as stretching his neck or rising on tiptoe—to the great merriment of his infernal audience, who afterwards tear the damned soul to pieces. Next a priest who neglected his duties is mutilated by the devils. A soldier provides a particularly entertaining spectacle when he shakes his spear against the devils and drives his horse to meet them, and they gleefully dismount him and tear him up. A corrupt lawyer accepts presents and money which suddenly becomes burning hot. He has to swallow and throw up the coins before recollecting them all over again. The climax of this 'show' is undoubtedly the scene of two adulterers who perform their act of love to the amusement of the devils. Their love turns to

hatred and they begin tearing at each other in a frenzy. Kemmler believes that this may have been considered too “licentious” for the ears of laymen in the early thirteenth century (140-41), which might be the reason that the text was locked away and has been preserved in only four manuscripts. Unlike *Tundale* or the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, it was not translated into the vernacular languages or spread over Europe. This vision imagines the souls of deceased sinners stuck in their sins; their suffering in hell reflects their deeds on earth. Thus, their punishments are to be frozen in states of guilt, a nightmarish vision which reminds us of the creatures Sir Orfeo meets at the court of the king of fairies, frozen in their agonies of death.

I would like to conclude with reflections on the relationship between this world and the next and the attitude towards death as shown in the texts discussed above. In some respects, visions of the other world, often classified with saints’ lives, are similar to the Middle English death lyrics¹⁴ which likewise warn the reader against the dangers of dying in sin and eternal damnation.¹⁵ The visions give us a taste of this dreaded life after death, the quality of which depends on the life we have led on earth. If we are to live both here and there, we may ask, which of the two lives is the real one, and which the reflection? Whereas Middle English lyrics point to the transience of this life and conclude that life after death is our true existence, the visions present life after death as a reflection of life on earth.

Some visions go so far as to locate the entrance to this ‘other’ world in the west. *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, for example, names Station Island as a concrete location. With the exception of the visionary, however, no one can enter the other world while still alive on earth. One of two major differences between this world and the other is of course that in death, the dividing line, our souls leave our bodies. It may therefore strike us to read in the visions that souls are punished in a very corporeal manner, with physical tortures. The ‘bodies’ of souls (the phrase as such is paradoxical) are mutilated, torn apart or swallowed by infernal monsters, but, to the despair of the damned soul, always restored so that the torture can go on infinitely. The other difference is

that souls in hell no longer have an opportunity to change anything about the spiritual state in which they left this world. They are 'frozen' in their sinfulness and suffer eternal punishment for misdeeds committed in time.

As Kemmler has pointed out, the gospels do not mention details of life in heaven or hell. Medieval visions of the other world propose to fill these gaps with drastic images of physical pain. They are a long-lived, widespread (ca. 200 manuscript copies of the *Visio Tundali* have survived!) and highly influential medieval genre. They certainly offer more than mere evidence of the religious mindset of our ancestors; many of them are carefully crafted works of literature which address their readers' interests and needs in multiple ways and deserve a good deal more attention from modern scholarship.

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NOTES

¹I would like to mention Peter Dinzelbacher's contributions to this field. His publications include *Die Jenseitsbrücke im Mittelalter*, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* and *Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur: Eine Anthologie*.

²See Zaleski; and Dinzelbacher, "Mittelalterliche Vision und moderne Sterbeforschung." Dinzelbacher also distinguishes between singular visions of the other world (type 1), most of which date from the early centuries until 1200, and visions experienced by medieval mystics (type 2) which became prominent from the twelfth century onwards; see *Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur* 21. The precondition is usually a severe illness, which links visions of this type closely with the accounts of near-death experiences collected by psychologists such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in the twentieth century.

³Kemmler outlines this concept on 130.

⁴On this topic see Dinzelbacher, "Mentalitätsgeschichtliche Aspekte"; and Galler.

⁵See, e.g., Minois.

⁶"raptus est e corpore [...] reductus in corpore," *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* 270-71.

⁷*The Vision of Tundale*, l. 41. *The Vision of Tundale* is said to have taken place in Cork, Ireland in 1148, and was originally composed in Latin (*Visio Tnugdali*) by

Marcus, an Irish Benedictine monk, in Regensburg and translated into numerous languages including Middle English. The Middle English translation survives in five manuscripts, one of them is British Library Cotton Caligula A ii, used by Mearns for his 1985 ed. According to the online *Middle English Dictionary*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED46847>, the word “transynge” designates “an intermediate state between life and death; the passing from life to death; also, a stupefied condition, trance.” One of the manuscripts reads “travaylinge”; see Mearns’s ed. 82.

⁸“And he laye deed þer as a stane” (l. 102).

⁹See Kemmler 132-33; the incident is told in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History* on 273-75.

¹⁰The vision occurred in 885 and is recorded in the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury (c. 1095-1143); see Gardiner 247.

¹¹Gardiner points out that this description of hell is the most fully and consistently developed one before Dante’s *Inferno* (253).

¹²The *Visio Wettini* from 824 shows a particular interest in homosexuality (“sodomy”) on which the visionary blames the spread of diseases.

¹³“For Y sawe them that were clerkys, monkys, noonys, lay-men and lay-wemen, so mekyl lesse ordende and put to peynys, howe mekyl the lesse they had before of worldely dygnyte and prosperyte. In trowthe, Y sawe hem greuyd in a more specyal bittirnesse of peynys aboue other, the whyche Y knewe in my tyme were iugys and prelatys of other”; *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* ll. 696-702.

¹⁴See *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century, Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century and Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*.

¹⁵“Three Sorrowful Things” is an example of the way Middle English lyrics articulate the fear of death:

Wanne ich þenche þinges þre
ne mai neure bliþe be:
þat on is ich sal awe,
þat oþer is ich ne wot wilk day.
þat þridde is mi meste kare,
i ne woth nevre wuder i sal fare. (*English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* 19)

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The Audiences of Three English Medieval Visions: A Response to Fritz Kemmler*

COURTNAY KONSHUH

Medieval visions have the explicit purpose of teaching their audience both the importance of salvation, and also a means by which to achieve this. In his article, Fritz Kemmler looks at three different medieval visions from England, beginning with the seventh-century *Vision of Fursey*, and two visions from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* and the *Visio Thurkilli*. The protagonists undergo some sort of transformation, and inevitably, there is a painful restoration before the main message of the vision so that the "salvation of the soul" can be achieved (Kemmler 129). These visions are somewhat exceptional among medieval literature as they can be considered a product of "popular culture" (Dinzelbacher, "Way to the Other World" 70); as the Bible has no explicit descriptions of the otherworld, these visions represent "traditions current among the common people, as they never formed part of the official teaching of the church." The descriptions we find in the visions are, as Kemmler says, manifold; as I will discuss, the authors have deliberately chosen these means to transport their message depending on their goals.

By inspiring a strong emotional response, either the desire to reach the joy and beauty of heaven, or the fear of the pain and suffering of hell and purgatory, visions attempt to move their audience to actively

*Reference: Fritz Kemmler, "Painful Restoration: Transformations of Life and Death in Medieval Visions of the Other World," *Connotations* 17.2-3 (2007/2008): 129-43.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkemmler01723.htm>>.

pursue a better life. Visions can do this in a much more direct way than most didactic literature because of the creative license which the authors have when describing the horrors of hell and purgatory. The black/white depiction of good versus evil can thus be enhanced by the nuances found in the various versions of hell. Fear has obviously been judged a much stronger motivation than desire, as most of the visions concentrate (some almost exclusively) on a detailed description of hell and its horrors, whereas the depiction of heaven is much more limited.

All the visions concerned place great emphasis on believability and use the elements of pain and transformation as evidence for their claims. Who, however, are they trying to convince? Though the emotions of fear and desire are the same, by telling the vision story in varying styles, with different protagonists and resolutions, the authors have so crafted their stories to reach specific audiences. This response will look at the methods used by vision authors, and show that they have been systematically employed to reach specific audiences. While Bede's story of Fursey and the vision of Owein are both directed at the upper classes, the vision of Thurkill has been specifically crafted to be used for the ordinary people.

Vision of Fursey

The story of Saint Fursey is related by Bede in the year 633 of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The whole *Historia* is of a didactic nature, but the saints' lives are of course much more so. Bede's intentions are clearly spelled out in his preface:

For if history relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good; or if it mentions evil things of wicked persons, nevertheless the religious and pious hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and perverse, is the more earnestly excited to perform those things which he knows to be good, and worthy of God.¹

Though this may be an overly optimistic view of humankind, and is a view definitely not shared by the narrators of the visions of Owein and Thurkill, we see that Bede's main goal is to show good actions, with the expectation that a believing audience will then imitate: an *exemplum* (cf. Kemmler 134). He does not need to evoke a strong emotive response to convince his audience to do good, as he believes they will naturally be "excited to imitate" this good example. Bede only makes use of emotion to convince his audience of the veracity of his story.

At the onset of the short tale, Fursey, a monk from Ireland, is already a man "renowned both for his words and actions, and remarkable for singular virtues."² As such, Fursey is not a character who will have to repent his sins or be greatly purified; he is rather an "elect human being who is granted the extraordinary favour" (Kemmler 130) of seeing the afterlife. While Fursey is lifted by the angels to see the fires of falsehood, covetousness, discord and iniquity consuming the world, he is attacked by one of the devils. The burn marks he carries to the end of his days as a result are not a symbol of the pain he has endured, but rather evidence that this vision has taken place. As Bede says, "the flesh publicly showed, in a wonderful manner, what the soul had suffered in private."³

After his first vision (the details of which Bede does not give) Fursey erects a monastery on the land given to him by King Sigebert. He resides there only a short time, and then withdraws to the life of a hermit. After a year, he travels to France and builds another monastery there. Obviously, this is not a practical goal for most of Bede's audience, and he does not intend his readers to go out and build monasteries. Fursey's monasteries and life of seclusion is however a manifestation of the power of Christianity, and it is for this reason that the "emphasis is on the journey" (Kemmler 132) rather than Fursey's accomplishments. Bede first cements the truthfulness of the vision itself and then gives evidence for the power of the Christian church.

A need to adhere to Christian beliefs is never addressed, but rather the factual accuracy of the vision is supported with corroborating

evidence. We can see that Bede's target audience is not one that is facing the daily problems of coping with sin, but rather one that needs to be convinced of the necessity of Christian belief in general. Not only is this text a part of Bede's attempt to instill Christian values into a largely pagan England; Bede's target audience is the nobility. By focusing on Fursey's model life of solitude as well as the monasteries that he builds, Bede hopes to convince the upper class of the power of the church both for the individual and for the collective.

St. Patrick's Purgatory

*St. Patrick's Purgatory*⁴ has the same clearly defined purpose as Bede's history. The introduction tells us of St. Patrick's attempts to convert the people of Ireland; however, "non of hem wold sikerliche / Do bi his techeing, / Bot 3if he dede þat [sum] man / Into helle went þan / To bring hem tiding" (3: 2-6). The issue of believability is paramount for Patrick to be able to help the people "Out of þe fendes bond" (6: 1-3). Likewise, the story of knight Owein seeks to convince its audience of the reality of hell and heaven. The tone of this vision, nonetheless, differs significantly from that of Fursey in many respects; most obviously, the fact that it has been translated into verse entails that it is in many ways more like a romance than a vision.

Owein's vision begins by placing the knight in his desultory political context. Owein lived "Bi Steuenes day, þe king ful riȝt," who, as we know from the Peterborough Chronicle, was a king who especially enjoyed causing his subjects pain.⁵ Likewise, Owein is a knight "swiȝe sinful [...] saunfayle, / Ozain his creatour" (30: 5-6). One day, upon realising his manifold sins, Owein decides to change his character. Owein's trip to purgatory does not come unexpectedly as a gift from God, as is the case with Fursey or Thurkill; Owein deliberately chooses the harshest penance possible, and the bishop even begs him to choose "sum oȝer penaunce" (36: 5). Despite the bishop's urging, Owein is determined to journey to purgatory, and his experience,

which takes place physically rather than in a dream, is therefore much more reminiscent of a knightly quest than a vision. Though Owein's task is simple (he must "haue God in [his] hert, / And þenk upon his woundes smert" (49: 1-2), and if necessary call out God's name), he must nonetheless endure "pine anouȝ, / Hard, strong and ful touȝ" (56: 1-2) in order to pass through purgatory.

Unlike most other visionaries, who only witness the torments of hell, or Fursey, who is wounded but rather accidentally, Owein must suffer directly for his sins. Indeed, Owein has amassed a great quantity of sins throughout his time as a knight, and is punished for his lechery and gluttony (74; he is bound in iron chains), for his avarice (87-89; burning on the wheel), and finally for his great pride (90-112; he is thrown into a pit of hot lead). The story climaxes when Owein must cross the bridge to paradise. The bridge is high, narrow, and as sharp as a razor; there is a strong wind blowing, and the devils are throwing stones (121). It would be much easier to turn back, as the devils recommend, but Owein summons all his courage and continues on. After Owein has crossed the bridge, he is shown the riches that await him after the death of his body. The quest is fulfilled, and Owein is rewarded with the bliss of heaven.

Several other aspects of this vision suggest that it was designed to entertain the nobility as much as to be an instructional tale. The frame of the story is very reminiscent of a romance. In his transition from the story of Patrick to Owein, the narrator calls for his audience's attention (cf. Moll 204), "Ȝif ȝe it wil yhere" (28: 6): a typical conceit of a romance. After completing his 'quest' in purgatory, Owein does not win a beautiful woman as a knight normally would, but becomes a monk instead, reversing the ideals of the romance; essentially, however, Owein himself has become a bride of Christ. Further, by focusing on Owein's direct experiences of pain and horror in purgatory (cf. Kemmler 135), the constant references to the corresponding sin lead to an "insistence on the moral impact of the tale which is absent from the stark accounts in [the Latin original]" (Easting lii). As part of the composite Auchinleck manuscript, which contains both religious

stories (saints' lives and the life of Adam and Eve) as well as romances (including the well-known *Sir Orfeo*), this Middle English translation has been adapted to be both more entertaining as well as more didactic than the Latin original.

As with other visions, "[w]hoever is prepared to accept the lesson taught by this text will indeed be restored from the everlasting death of the soul" (Kemmler 136). However, for whom is such a lesson realisable? Most of the audience would not be able to empathise with Owein's situation; few would have had the means to sin as greatly as Owein, as only few had the opportunities offered by Owein's position as a knight. After Patrick's and Fursey's visions, they have monasteries built and then return to a life of mediation and prayer. Similarly, after Owein's return from purgatory, he goes on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (196) and then takes on a monk's habit for the last seven years of his life. For the nobility, this is a possibility; however, for the lower classes, this tale can only be an exemplum, as they would not have the means to build a monastery, and such brave feats are reserved for the knights of romances. Both the style and content of this work, as well as its very location within the Auchinleck manuscript, clearly show that it was directed towards the nobility.

Visio Thurkilli

The narrator of Thurkill's vision also justifies the need to write moralising texts in his preface; unlike Bede, however, Thurkill's narrator believes that

Human nature [...] persists towards disobedience and sin, is inflexible and has become firmly rooted in depravity; as a result, the words of God's sermon pass by their ears and their souls. Neither the threat of punishment nor the possibility of reward lead them to follow God's commandments; indeed, many are so blinded by their sins to God's righteous judgment that they do not believe the words of the saints, and do not improve themselves when they hear the holy teachings.⁶

While Fursey's example was to help people emulate the good, Bede thought it unnecessary to give people only positive examples, as negative examples would be instantly recognised. Thurkill's narrator, however, believes that customs have so degraded that this is no longer a possibility. He continues, "it is difficult for them to believe something which they have never seen in the flesh."⁷ For this reason the text is first framed as a true story, giving us the "intertextual context for the validity of the vision" (Kemmler 137), while the story is then told in a manner more conducive for the common people to follow.

The protagonist is immediately introduced as a normal peasant, living a humble but satisfied life: "he was used to working the fields; as far as his humble means allowed, he liked to give alms and shelter others."⁸ It is not within his means to live as piously as Fursey or Owein; however, it is also not possible for him to sin as extravagantly as Owein. Thurkill's greatest sin is that he withheld a part of the tithes which he should have paid his lord.⁹ This may be a fairly minor sin, but it is nonetheless a realistic sin which a relatively pious commoner could have committed. Likewise, the penance which he must undertake for this sin is much simpler: he must endure the foul stench emitting from the entryway to purgatory twice (*Thurkill* 32), after which he may ask the priest for absolution (*Thurkill* 28). Indeed, he must tell the village the whole story, not merely undertake the penance for his own sins: for Thurkill, just as for Owein and Fursey, the gift of seeing the otherworld comes with responsibility. Though Thurkill is at first reticent, for he is a rather simple peasant (*Thurkill* 20), with God's help, even the most simple can follow the path of the good.

The author of Thurkill's vision was "a very good story-teller who knew exactly how to handle the expectations of his intended audience" (Kemmler 139), as can be seen both in his treatment of his main character as well as in his treatment of purgatory and the sins punished there. In the great theatre of hell, the first sinners are punished according to their sins (beginning with pride, the worst of the seven deadly sins); however, people "of all estates"¹⁰ are present in

the theatre, and many are being punished for sins that directly affect the lower classes. Not only do we find liars, thieves, bad farmers, millers and salesmen being tormented, but also priests, knights and judges.¹¹ One of the first sinners Thurkill meets is a noble from the king's court, whose worst crime was, among many others, that he had been "hard and cruel to his subjects and had brought great trouble to them by making unreasonable demands and unnecessary legal proceedings."¹² Later, we find other nobles cooking in pots for having placed unreasonable demands upon their subjects and using violence when these demands were not met.¹³ All the injustices that peasants face will be rectified in purgatory. This has the double effect of Schadenfreude for the lower class audience, and also counsels them not to attempt to correct injustices themselves, for example by withholding tithes.

It is curious why this, the most explicit of the medieval visions, but also the most adaptable to various capacities for sin, should not have survived in a vernacular translation. It is possible that it is "too far advanced in the development of the genre" (Kemmler 140) and was very probably too licentious. On the other hand, a story in Latin could easily be expounded upon by priests of various dialects in a manner similar to sermons, whereas a story in a Middle English dialect would only be accessible to a certain number of the public.

As Kemmler mentions, the abrupt ending of the *Visio Thurkilli* leaves no room for the visionary to turn to "a life of penance or seclusion after his dreadful vision" (140). Indeed, this is not necessary; this author believes that fear is a much greater motivator than desire, but this is not an appropriate goal for his intended audience. Thurkill, like the other peasants for whom this vision is intended, would not have had the means to turn to a life of penance and seclusion. Thurkill will rather carry on living as piously as a man of his status may. The audience should now also recognise that it is not beyond their means to live such a pious life themselves.

Conclusion

Each of these texts tells a similar story: Fear the pain and torment of purgatory and hell, and be so reformed to a better life; however, each tale also shows a very clear idea of audience and authorial intention. The motifs of transformation and especially pain are used differently in each work to achieve this end. Like the twelfth-century Chaldon mural,¹⁴ which as Fritz Kemmler mentions, includes the typical elements of a vision of the otherworld (the bridge between heaven and hell, devils pulling sinners from the bridge and torturing them in various manners, but also angels waiting with open arms to receive the good), the audience has been clearly chosen. Just as the Chaldon mural was intended to inspire peasants attending church to repent, and thus depicts dishonest tradespeople as sinners,¹⁵ so too does the *Visio Thurkilli* primarily depict the suffering of peasants. Unlike the vision of Owein, a popular verse tale, or the idealised Fursey, which set goals of piety that could not be achieved by anyone other than the nobility, Thurkill's vision, as well as the Chaldon mural, can be easily understood by the lower class and allow for deeds of penitence which even the lowliest farmer could achieve.

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NOTES

¹My translation of "Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuotando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur" (Bede 2).

²My translation of "verbo et actibus clarus sed et egregiis insignis uirtutibus" (Bede III, xix).

³My translation of "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" (Bede III, xix).

⁴I also make use of the Middle English verse translation in the Auchinleck manuscript edited by Robert Easting.

⁵See particularly the entry for 1154.

⁶My translation of "sed quia humana proteruitas ad peccandum prona atque ex calle prave et inveterate consuetudinis nimis est obdurata, verba celestis predicationis *per aures* multociens inaniter *demissa segnius irritant animos*, ut nec pro comminatione suppliciorum nec ambitu premiorum divinis velint homines obtemperare mandatis, immo exigentibus culpis nonnulli iusto dei iudicio ad tantam perveniunt cordis cecitatem, ut dictis sanctorum non credant nec ex auditu celestis doctrine aliquatenus proficiant" (*Thurkill* praefatio).

⁷My translation of "ut aliquatenus vera esse credant, que coporeis optutibus non subiacent" (*Thurkill* praefatio).

⁸My translation of "rurali operi assuefactus et iuxta mediocritatem facultatis sue elemosinis atque hospitalitati deditus" (*Thurkill* 20).

⁹"De quadam basilica" (*Thurkill* 30).

¹⁰My translation of "homines diverse conditionis" (*Thurkill* 48).

¹¹"The theatre of hell is a quite lengthy section of the vision" (*Thurkill* 50-62).

¹²My translation of "precipue erga homines suos durus et crudelis existens multosque ad extremam inopiam redigens per indebitas exactiones atque iniustas calumpnias" (*Thurkill* 46).

¹³My translation of "nobilium, qui homines suos iniustis exactionibus violenter opprimebant, indesinenter bulliebat" (*Thurkill* 66).

¹⁴Cf. Rosewell 73 and 81.

¹⁵In addition to punishment according to sin, vanity, for example, we can also see various tradesmen on the bridge of nails including, according to Dinzelbacher (48), a potter, two weavers, a carpenter or mason, and a smith. A rich man is boiling in the pot, but otherwise this mural focuses on the sins of the lower class. See Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur*.

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An Addendum to
“A Question of Competence:
The Card Game in Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*”*

KATHRYN WALLS

There is a misleading sentence in my response to Oliver S. Baker: “As Baker reads it, then, the diamonds of iii.79 are the Baron’s victorious leads, lying confused with the trumped hearts (of the Knight) and Belinda’s (also trumped) clubs—the latter including the Queen of Clubs as well as the non-court club *that Baker thinks Belinda played on the sixth trick (and that Tillotson thinks she played on the seventh trick)*” (230-31; new emphasis). The italicized words should be applied to the afore-mentioned Queen of Clubs, not (as I have, inadvertently, implied) to the non-court club. As I explain in the preceding paragraph, Tillotson thought that Belinda’s non-court card here was a diamond, not (as Baker believes) a club. Furthermore (although this is a relatively insignificant point), he thought that she played the *Queen* on the seventh trick (while Baker thought that she had played it on the sixth). I apologize for this confusing (though not, I think, substantive) error.

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*Reference: Oliver R. Baker, “Pope’s *Ombre* Enigmas in *The Rape of the Lock*,” *Connotations* 17.2-3 (2007/2008): 210-37; Kathryn Walls, “A Question of Competence: The Card Game in *The Rape of the Lock*. A Response to Oliver R. Baker,” *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 229-34.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debbaker01723.htm>>.

Whose are those 'Western eyes'?

On the Identity, the Role and the Functions of the Narrator in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes**

CHRISTIANE BIMBERG

"In a very real sense, one cannot read this
novel unless one has read it before."

(Berthoud, "Anxiety" 6)

Introduction

Under Western Eyes deals with the subjects of autocracy, democracy and revolution in Tsarist Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. Issues such as the nature of the Russian national character and the mutual perceptions of Western Europe and Russia are also thematized. The starting point of the action, the murder committed by Victor Haldin, refers to a historical event: the assassination of the Minister of the Interior, Vyacheslav Konstantinovitch Plehve, in July 1904. The setting of the novel shifts from St. Petersburg to Geneva. The characters consist of both Easterners and Westerners among whom are Russians of diverse political backgrounds living in Russia or in exile, Genevans, and the Western narrator. Their intercultural encounters and confrontations address the difficult issues of socio-cultural, political, religious, and gender identity as well as the strained relationship of West and East at large.

One of the most striking phenomena in the novel is the unnamed narrator under whose 'Western eyes' the fortunes of the Russian family Haldin, and to some extent also those of Razumov, the major protagonist, unfold. His character and his role have caused tremendous misunderstanding in literary criticism so that certain features of

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debbimberg02001.htm>.

the complex text require further clarification. This provides the starting point for the present study, which explores the following questions: Who is the narrator and does he keep his avowed narrative distance? What do those 'Western eyes' really perceive and in what way is that conveyed to the reader? How is the reader impacted by the literary representations and what does all this imply for the then contemporary Western discourse about Russia? The focus of investigation here is on the narrator's perspective, his identity, his role and his functions. References to some of Conrad's non-fictional works—the essays "Autocracy and War" (1905) and "Turgenev" (1917)—are used for further elucidation.

Contextual issues

The concrete conditions under which *Under Western Eyes* emerged are well documented. The stages of the creative process demonstrate the author struggling with the treatment of a particularly challenging, and for him especially important, subject. Since 1903, Conrad had, after a crisis, changed the direction of his creativity and turned towards a new subject-matter: more current and contemporary themes. These touched upon personal events and experiences in his life from some time before, events which had to do with his childhood and adolescence in Russian-occupied Poland.¹

The critical assessment of this special creative phase in his life and the reception history of *Under Western Eyes* lead us back to essential qualities of the novel itself. *Under Western Eyes* was Conrad's third and last political novel, after *Nostromo* and *The Secret Agent*. This phase has ambivalently been regarded both as a period of crisis and of creative culmination.² The reception of the novel changed and developed tremendously due to highly diverse assessments of the novel's position within the Conradian canon, in literary criticism and in the field of history.³ In particular, the critical assessment of Conrad's

middle phase and his late fiction became much more positive over the decades.⁴

However, even as late as 1991, Kingsley Widmer, though he presents Joseph Conrad as “now widely accepted as one of the modernist masters of serious narrative fiction” (84), considers *Under Western Eyes* by contrast to *The Secret Agent* “a poor but curious work of an unusual cast in the tradition of the English novel” (112) and “a considerably lesser work than *The Secret Agent* in style, artful ordering, subjective intensity, and insightful paradoxes” (109). As we can thus see, the assessment of the novel is still problematic though, due to various scholarly reassessments, and particularly to a number of works dealing with the linguistic self-consciousness of the novel, Greaney is able to claim in 2002 that “the critical standing of *Under Western Eyes* has never been higher” (152; with special reference to the studies by Fleishman, Kermode, and Szittyá). The novel’s thematization of linguistic, narratological and metafictional aspects began seriously to impact criticism of Conrad only from the end of the 1970s.⁵

An extended discussion of Conrad’s biography and the socio-cultural context of his work, i.e. Polish, Russian and Western European history and politics, especially of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has led to a more rewarding exploration of the novel’s Russian theme. As a result, scholars have arrived at the opinion that though *Under Western Eyes* is Conrad’s only work with a Russian setting, the Russian theme was a vital subject for Conrad indeed.⁶ Furthermore, from this point of view it is fascinating to observe the creative process of Conrad’s work on *Under Western Eyes*, which allows insights into his original intentions and conceptions and their changes over time.⁷ These aspects will be considered later in this essay.

Conrad’s motives and intentions

In a letter to John Galsworthy of 6 January 1908, Conrad explained what he had in mind: “I think that I am trying to capture the very soul

of things Russian,—Cosas de Russia. It is not an easy work but it may be rather good when it's done" (*Letters* 4: 8). Though not sure at that time about the commercial success of the story, he was convinced that he simply had to write it (9). In his letter to J. B. Pinker of 7 January 1908, he made his motivations and intentions yet clearer:

But I think that L.W. Courtney might be approached on the ground of the story's essential seriousness—a contribution to and a reading of the Russian character. [...] Here is given the very essence of things Russian. Not the mere outward manners and customs but the Russian feeling and thought. You may safely say that. And, I think, the story is effective. It is also characteristic of the present time. Nothing of the sort had been done in English. The subject has long haunted me. Now it must come out. (14)

After completion, in a letter to Pinker of 13 September 1911, Conrad spoke about the novel as a thing "so utterly unlike in subject and treatment from anything I had done before" (477). Carabine, an expert on the textual history of *Under Western Eyes* and its link to Conrad's biography, argues that "Conrad's volatile sense of both the subject and the scope of his novel, through several revisions, is inseparable from his discovery that his stated intention to capture the "very soul of things Russian" inexorably demanded an exhumation and exploration of things Polish" (Introduction xxvii-xxviii).

Conrad himself—in spite of the fact that the subject matter was of special importance to him, and that he was highly aware of the influence of history and biography on his writing—set himself the task of writing in an impartial, fair, truthful, and detached way:

My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous *impartiality*. The obligation of absolute *fairness* was imposed on me historically and hereditarily, by the peculiar experience of race and family, in addition to my primary conviction that *truth* alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art or may hope to take its place in the culture of men and women of its time. I had never been called before to a greater effort of *detachment*: detachment from all passions, prejudices and even from personal memories. ("Author's Note" viii; my emphasis)

The reception history of the novel shows that on publication in 1911, *Under Western Eyes* was a failure—or at least nearly so in England and the US, whereas in Europe and Russia it received serious attention.⁸ Remarkably enough, the following quote from Conrad's "Author's Note" seems to suggest that even as late as 1920 he believed he had kept his authorial/narrative distance and that it was precisely this that explained the lack of success of the novel in England:

"Under Western Eyes" on its first appearance in England was a failure with the public, perhaps because of that very detachment. I obtained my reward some six years later when I first heard that the book had found universal recognition in Russia and had been re-published there in many editions. ("Author's Note" viii)⁹

Irrespective of Conrad's own opinion, the fact remains that in literary criticism his success in keeping this avowed distance has been very diversely assessed. Some critics have not even noticed the collapse of detachment while others have expressed enthusiastic opinions about his passionate presentations. André Gide, for instance, who first made his acquaintance with *Under Western Eyes* in 1917, admired its "prophetic reflections about the Russian soul," saying of the theme it shares with *Lord Jim* that "there is no more pathetic subject for a novel." He found in it a reflection of his own concern with "that *irresponsible act* of the hero, to redeem which his whole life is subsequently engaged" (Zabel 118).

However, literary criticism is divided over the point of 'prejudices' which obviously imply instances of Russophilia as well as Russophobia. For M. C. Bradbrook, the 'prejudice,' i.e. Conrad's politics, especially the presentation of the conflict between autocracy and revolutionism, was exactly the reason for the unpopularity of the book in 1911, but by 1941 its premises were familiar, leading to its critical reevaluation (9). Against accusations of an unbalanced Russophobia in Conrad, E. M. Forster put forward a counter-argument:

The passions are intelligible and frank: having lived thus, thus he feels, and it is as idle to regret his account of Russians as it would be to regret Dosto-

evsky's account of Poles in *The Brothers Karamazov*. A philosopher would moderate his transports or attempt to correlate them. Conrad isn't that type: he claims the right to be unreasonable when he or those whom he respects have suffered. (139)

However, even as late as 1991, a statement by Widmer still accuses Conrad of being biased and links that to the category of the narrator:

Part of the difficulty is the use of a rather Jamesian narrator, an obtusely lofty-mannered teacher of languages and English literature. While the figure may have been psychologically desirable to Conrad *for distancing himself from the painful revolutionism*, which is almost as hopeless as that of his father, the *narrative* creaks badly and sometimes *breaks down*, as with *the sentimental old Englishman who defensively provides the entitling perspective*. This *excuses Conrad from understanding or sympathetically presenting the revolutionaries*. (109; my emphasis)

Apart from misassumptions about the narrator, narrative control and Conrad's presentations of the revolutionaries, such a judgment is all the more obsolete and absurd anyway in the light of the fact that as early as in 1947 the American critic Morton Dauwen Zabel, editor of the Viking *Portable Conrad*, "which marked the permanent recovery of Conrad's reputation" (Peters 123), had convincingly defended the collapse of narrative distance.¹⁰ Obviously the issue of narrative detachment remains a touchstone for literary criticism. Because it is closely associated with the identity and the role of the narrator, these aspects will be critically re-considered here.

Cosas de Russia

If we consider the literary representation of Russian issues more closely, the textual evidence proves that the contrast noted in literary criticism between Russophobia in Conrad's essays and letters and the Russophilia in his fiction¹¹ cannot be sustained. Rather, the novel itself is a very complex narrative, offering diverse opinions and attitudes which need to be carefully differentiated from each other. Through

the category of the narrator as a person, the action of the novel, including encounters, the speech and dialogue of the characters, and the narrative comments and descriptions Conrad uses a wide range of assessments, diverse and highly ambivalent attitudes, opinions and stances toward Russian issues which are expressed at different textual levels.

Particularly when the novel is read in close comparison with Conrad's political essay "Autocracy and War" (1905), it becomes obvious that both share a Western perspective on Russia, as well as quite a number of political observations. The negative associations of autocracy in the essay and in the novel are similar, too. The poetic images of Russia in the novel develop directly out of the political judgments in the essay, which also employs poetic imagery.¹² In other words, Conrad individually, concretely and emotionally expresses in the novel what he had presented in more abstract ways in the essay. Both texts reflect the contradictions and the ambivalences of Western discourse about Russia.¹³

The complex and heterogeneous presentation of the *Cosas de Russia* in *Under Western Eyes* results in a very dense narrative construct, a thorough understanding of the Russian subject. The narrative stances range from incomprehension, aversion, and critical distance on the one hand, to sympathy, empathy, and personal identification on the other. What the text therefore has to offer is a narrative full of tensions, contradictions, ambivalences and highly differentiated representations. In any case, Conrad cannot be accused of being biased or random. He achieves a certain objectivity and balance by juxtaposition and multiperspectivity, thus modifying and qualifying each single statement. This results in relativism and pluralism. Both the revolutionaries' and the autocrats' views and behaviours are presented in the context of their devastating effects upon Russia and its people. The irony is that both sides are revealed by Conrad simultaneously to defend themselves and attack their enemies with similar arguments. Besides, Russian characters in the novel are shown to be both agents and victims of crime. Conrad's presentations are characterized by

keen observation, penetrating insight and well-informed and well-balanced judgments. Moreover, the motives for writing the novel become more transparent after a reading of the essay: to question and challenge the inscrutability of Russia by Europe, to deconstruct the myth of 'the Russian giant' and make clear its usefulness in the current power play of European states.¹⁴

The 'Western' perspective and the 'Western' observer

All these notions are centered in the retrospective, homodiegetic, overt, and to some extent unreliable first-person narrator. His perceptions and reactions are of utmost importance because it is his explicit task to bring the perspective of a Western observer into play. Remarkably enough, the introduction of such a figure was the result of a change of Conrad's conception of his emerging work. He had been working earlier on a story named "Razumov," whose title he regarded as 'expressive' (letter to Galsworthy of 6 January 1908, *Letters* 4: 8). The later change of title for the novel, *Under Western Eyes*, reflected a significant change of focus from Razumov to the 'Western observer' and resulted in the creation of two perspectives: that of Russians about themselves, and that of the West about the East. Zabel highly appreciates the special contribution that a foreigner like Conrad could make when writing about another nationality: "His outsider's point of vantage, if sufficiently informed by knowledge and sympathy, makes it possible for him to add something of importance, in critical insight and judgment, to a native tradition" (129). In that sense he compares Conrad to Stendhal, James, Forster, Lawrence, Orwell and Koestler (129). At the same time he points out that Conrad was also a "participant and sharer in the Russian destiny" (136).

Conrad himself called the new title "awkward" (128). As Zabel observes, it expressed Conrad's "divided allegiance between East and West, between the Slavic world and the European or English" (128). It indicated "a shift of the post of observation from the hero to a disin-

terested spectator [...] and to a critical attitude alien and largely incomprehensible to the Russian" (130-31). However, it is exactly these qualities of 'disinterestedness' and 'discrimination' that need to be investigated more closely.

The narrator and 'Western observer' is presented as an aged teacher of foreign languages, who has been living in Geneva for more than twenty years. He makes the acquaintance of the two Haldin ladies because the daughter, Nathalie, plans to improve her knowledge of English literature in a reading course with him. As a result of his growing friendship with and affection for her, he becomes ever more involved in the family's hard and, for Western Europeans, strange fate. This is why he begins to support Nathalie Haldin in her effort to find out about her brother's fate. This includes the task of locating background information, making use of Razumov's diary for faithfully narrating his and Victor Haldin's story. Strictly speaking, the events watched by those 'Western eyes' relate only to one Russian family, but they are presented by the narrator in their larger political significance for Western Europe. Because what happens to the Haldins looks so strange and unfamiliar to Westerners, the narrator often emphasizes that "this is not a story of the West of Europe" (25). He is explicitly telling a story of the East for the instruction of the West: "The Western readers for whom this story is written" (112); "for this is a Russian story for Western ears" (163).

As emphasized throughout the novel, it is the narrator's function to provide an objective and detached Western perspective on events and people. The question now is, to what extent is he able to do so? The narrator often comments on his own narrative skills (cf. quotes below). Here, however, certain contradictions and ambivalences cannot be overlooked: for instance, he points out his difficulties in accessing the Russian national character and Russian problems. He particularly names matters of language (on the Russian part) as aggravating circumstances. The relative value and even the irony of the passage become fully evident only after it is disclosed to the reader at a much later point that the narrator is himself Russian by birth:

Yet I confess that I have *no comprehension of the Russian character*. The illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, the frequency of the exceptional, should present no difficulty to a student of many grammars; but there must be something else in the way, some special human trait—one of those subtle differences that are beyond the ken of mere professors. What must remain striking to a teacher of languages is *the Russians' extraordinary love of words*. They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them in their breasts; on the contrary, they are always ready to pour them out by the hour or by the night with an enthusiasm, a sweeping abundance, with such an aptness of application sometimes that, as in the case of very accomplished parrots, one can't defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say. There is a generosity in their ardour of speech which removes it as far as possible from common loquacity; and it is ever too disconnected to be classed as eloquence. (4; my emphasis)¹⁵

In this passage we do not encounter a fundamental distrust of the representational power of language as expressed in a later quote:

the thought that *because of the imperfection of language* there is always something ungracious (and even disgraceful) in the exhibition of naked truth (293; my emphasis)

but rather a special distrust of the Russians' usage, of what they express about themselves and what they thus allow to be revealed about themselves to others.

By contrast, later narrative comments reveal an astonishing capability of sensing and sensitively depicting the political, spiritual, emotional and psychological conflicts of Russians in all their frustrating subtlety.¹⁶ Integrated into the descriptions of St. Petersburg and Russia are, for instance, impressive physical-poetic images of Russia, its people, urban and rural life, and life under the political conditions of autocracy. The politically connotated renditions of Russian winter landscapes express a great deal of sympathy for the fate of the country and for the common Russian people.

Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank awaiting the record of an inconceiv-

able history. It covered the passive land with its lives of countless people like Ziemianitch and its handful of agitators like this Haldin—murdering foolishly. (33)

In addition, the narrator also conveys the Russians' emotionality, their desire for community, friendship and solidarity. The narrator's reflections on the normality, commonness, triviality, and meaninglessness of daily life and of the desperate struggle for spiritual support reveal his true understanding and empathy.

That is, the narrative artistry inherently transgresses the political reservations expressed overtly elsewhere. Through the narrator, Conrad offers differentiated presentations of complex problems, situations, and feelings (e.g. angst, the power of political seduction, the terror of being blackmailed and trapped, feelings of betrayal, guilt, and expiation). The discourse is thus characterized by psychological depth, dialectical thinking, and a careful evaluation of contrary positions and arguments (autocracy vs. revolution). The task of the narrator, as Conrad conceives it, is to *translate* Russian problems and peculiarities (because of linguistic and intercultural misunderstandings) as grasped in their larger European significance for the Western reader, in such a way that Westerners can begin to understand them before European history can be addressed and shaped together by Westerners and Easterners: "The task is [...] the rendering [...] of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, [...] till some key-word is found; [...]" (67).

The collapse of narrative and authorial distance

In the course of the novel narrative detachment does indeed break down. This happens contrary to two overt pretensions of the narrator: first, his laying claim to and hiding behind "fact," "punctilious fairness," being "unidentified with any one in this narrative where the aspects of honour and shame are remote from the ideas of the Western

world," "common humanity," "reluctance" and "naked truth" (293), and second, his pretending to face the Russian national character and Russian psychology with incomprehension and astonishment. Instead, he falls into the trap of empathy and increasingly loses his narrative distance, identifying himself ever more closely with what is narrated and/or experienced, with events and people.

A range of factors contribute to this development, from the narrator as an individual, to the surroundings to which he is exposed. Conrad subtly combines numerous historical, socio-cultural and psychological-emotional factors. He establishes an entire sequence of psychological stages which trace the transformation of the narrator from a merely relating to an experiencing subject. The presentation of Razumov's life-story through the narrator is organized climactically in the course of the narration.

A decisive clue to the collapse of narrative detachment is discerned by means of the identity of the narrator, which badly needs clarification. In the novel he is constantly presented—both by himself and by other characters—as approaching Russian affairs and concerns as a foreigner, a complete outsider. Curiously enough, a substantial part of literary criticism has not questioned either the narrator's self-fashioning or the other characters' uncritical responses to it: the narrator is consistently, but wrongly, presented as British or English here.¹⁷ Very few critics expressly note the 'British' narrator's Russian origin or call him Anglo-Russian at least.¹⁸ The only fact that can be verified indeed is that the narrator speaks English; but whether or not he is an *Englishman* cannot be proved. Two hypotheses as to his identity suggest themselves. They are bound up with the narrator's language acquisition and socialization. The first hypothesis is that Russian used to be his native tongue. The second hypothesis is that English was also his native tongue or a second tongue.

At first the reader learns only about the narrator's knowledge of the Russian language (3, 4). Later the narrator reveals that he was born "from parents settled in St. Petersburg" (187) and learned Russian as a child. The town itself he could not remember any more (which, how-

ever, is presented through narrative comments and descriptions with an astonishing level of detail) having left it aged nine, but in later years he had renewed his acquaintance with the Russian language (187). This means that Russian is not just another foreign language for him, one which he knows and teaches as an instructor of foreign languages, but may have been his native tongue (if he had at least one Russian parent) or one of his native tongues (had at least [one of] his parents been British and lived in Russia at the time). This hypothesis can, unfortunately, not be fully proved, due to the fact that the narrator remains unnamed in the novel. His first name, a family name and certainly a patronymic would have betrayed his true identity, but Conrad, tellingly, does not grant that information to the reader.

One might nonetheless speak of the narrator's early bilingual socialization. Here, gaps remain as well—there is no information about where the narrator acquired his English. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the quality of his English; there are no explicit statements about that in the novel.

What is significant, however, is that in spite of apparent Russian socialization, the narrator sees himself principally as a Westerner and a detached and critical outsider: "I felt profoundly my European remoteness, and said nothing, but made up my mind to play my part of helpless spectator to the end" (336); "And this story, too, I received without comment in my character of a mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes" (381). He seems to have forgotten or at least completely suppressed that part of his past, his former childhood self, his Russian legacy and his mixed East-Western identity, characterized by hybridity, twoness, and in-betweenness.¹⁹ Textual evidence establishes the fact that, strictly speaking, this 'Englishman,' about whose identity formation between Russia and Switzerland the reader learns nothing, is actually a former Russian living (in exile?) in Switzerland for some reason, with an Anglophone identity gained somewhere else. This constellation bears a close parallel to Conrad's own Anglicization of his former Polish identity (under Russian occupation) and of the tremendous problems

of identity associated with that.²⁰ The implication is that the narrator's 'Western' perspective is at least partially an Eastern perspective—though unacknowledged to the end—which explains the collapse of narrative detachment even more convincingly.

In subsequent stages, the narrator increasingly loses his distance: he becomes personally and politically involved with Russia and Russians, grows ever more concerned about the Haldins, and feels more and more affection for Nathalie. He takes on psychological and ethical qualities whose value he did not appreciate at first, such as sensitivity, apprehension, emotionality, friendship, loyalty, responsibility and care, which are associated in the narrative with Easterners rather than with Westerners. Eventually he comes to understand the impossibility of his position as a well-meaning, 'dense Occidental.' The reader witnesses his helplessness in light of Russian suffering, his falling prey himself to the Russian fatalism so often noticed by himself with bafflement or incomprehension (336, cf. the quote above; "[...] fated to be a spectator, I had this other glimpse behind the scenes," 339). Distance is thus replaced by empathy. The final message is therefore sobering: All of the narrator's inside knowledge about Russia and Russians of which he is so proud of is of little or no use to him. He becomes emotionally entangled in Russian problems and begins to understand the limitedness of so-called Western superiority. Being able to help, however, is beyond his opportunities and abilities.²¹

Moreover, the close intersection of theme and mode of presentation enhances the collapse of narrative detachment. For readers unacquainted with certain characteristics of Russian literature employed by Conrad, some parts of the narrative may appear challenging, but cannot be described by the epithets 'tedious' or 'exhausting' alone.²² The following narrative techniques contribute decisively to the characteristic mode of presentation:

- personal/subjective comments of the narrator and various narrative 'digressions'²³

- delayed information/belated revelation of the true facts/'delayed decoding,' 'after-stories'²⁴
- multiperspectivity (presentation of a character, a story, an information, an event) from several, at times discrepant, perspectives)²⁵
- the interpolation of various documents, accounts, reports and letters, in addition to Razumov's diary²⁶
- ambiguous clues deliberately evoking double meanings/interpretations of the same situation (double entendre)²⁷
- the use of free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness.

In their united effect these and other strategies²⁸ make the text a narrative with hindsight. Multiperspectivity results in mutual penetration and complementation of the information given and ever more precise narrative representations, which in turn produces constantly revised and ultimately highly differentiated assessments.

The narrator's misjudgements and personal failure

The collapse of detachment is accompanied by essential misjudgements of the narrator (and not of his alone).²⁹ He not only misreads Russians (mainly Razumov), their appearance, behaviour, character, motives and connections, but also documents, reports, information and events. The discernment and discrimination of which he is so proud are dimmed or blocked by complex external factors so that his view of the true facts is obscured. The reader, who is better informed, becomes a witness to his mistakes and misjudgements. The absolute climax is reached with Razumov's and Nathalie's last meeting. Ignorant of its tragic implications, the narrator misreads the very end of a potential love relationship as its promising and hopeful start. This is simultaneously the moment of greatest disillusionment and deepest insight into the limited possibilities of the narrator to master the situa-

tion and tackle the Russian dilemma—revealed at the extradiegetic level of the narrative.

To me, the silent spectator, they looked like two people becoming conscious of a spell which had been lying on them ever since they first set eyes on each other. [...] and I remained, every fear of indiscretion lost in the sense of my enormous remoteness from their captivity within the sombre horizon of Russian problems, the boundary of their eyes, of their feelings—the prison of their souls. (345)

The narrator himself, as a person, does not begin to grasp the full implication of what is happening before his eyes; he complains to Nathalie that Razumov has snatched her veil upon leaving.³⁰

A central factor in this causal chain is the misinterpretation of the nature of Razumov's diary, which Razumov had not written chiefly as a therapeutic measure, a confession for the purpose of psychic relief (5), but in order to carry out his spy mission. The reader learns about it when he meets Razumov on Rousseau's island: "The pages written over and torn out of his notebook were the first-fruit of his 'mission'" (316), "his first communication for Councillor Mikulin" (317), which "was to make him safe" (317). The misjudgement is all the more conspicuous because the narrator's blind trust in Razumov's document contrasts starkly with his negative, critical attitudes towards other accounts. The life stories of two revolutionaries, for instance, the famous Russian refugee Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S-, are treated by the narrator with disbelief, irony, contempt, and doubt. Conrad employs a double fallacy here, the intersection of the diary and the narrator's own impressions: certain entries in the diary read only later by the narrator are used retrospectively to confirm and authorize his own impressions of and opinions about Razumov (e.g. the narrator's first meeting with Razumov in the gardens of the Bastions and their later chance meeting in the Rue Mont Blanc), that is to say, for self-affirmation. These judgements, often triggered by deliberate equivocation on the part of Razumov, however, turn out to be only apparently correct because beneath the surface of the narrator's impressions lie other motives than those assumed.

The narrator's assessment and instrumentalization of Razumov's diary

All in all, the story that the narrator tells is created through diverse means—by what he learns about events and people from other characters, by his own involvement in the action, and from his insights into Razumov's secret diary. For various reasons Razumov's diary assumes a central significance in the narrative:

- it provides the major basis for the narrator's information about Razumov and his reconstruction of Razumov's life story
- it is a decisive factor in the misinterpretations and misjudgements on the narrator's part
- it shapes the narrative structure which in turn impacts the reader's interpretation
- it addresses important intercultural issues.

Let us therefore examine more closely now how the narrator instrumentalizes Razumov's document, and what purposes the diary actually serves, as well as how successful the narrator's control over his narrative really is.

First of all, the document fulfils the function of authorizing the narrator (and the narrative) and enhancing his credibility with the reader. This is bound up with the narrator's assigning it the status of "the main source of this narrative" (192). As he states, he only added his knowledge of the Russian language to it, which was sufficient for the present purposes, the telling of Razumov's story (3, 4). The reason that the narrator assigns the diary such a high status is its *documentary evidence* (3, 4, 5, 7, 24). Furthermore, he trusts the autobiographical impulse, i.e., Razumov's motives for leaving such a document. For instance, he praises the self-confessional qualities and therapeutic functions of such writing, the "wonderful soothing power in mere words" (5), the purpose of self-communion, the search for some form or formula of peace. The only thing he is not sure about yet is what

sort of peace Razumov may have expected to find through it. Last but not least the narrator regards the document as credible because it seems to be free of purpose, not meant to have readers at all.

It would be idle to inquire why Mr. Razumov has left this record behind him. It is *inconceivable that he should have wished any human eye to see it*. A *mysterious impulse of human nature* comes into play here. Putting aside Samuel Pepys, who has forced in this way the door of immortality, innumerable people, criminals, saints, philosophers, young girls, statesmen, and simple imbeciles, have kept self-revealing records from vanity no doubt, but also from other more inscrutable motives. (4-5; my emphasis)

This direct, emphatic, non-utilitarian assessment is re-confirmed several times later on. The narrator does not have the least doubt about the diary's authenticity because of its apparent self-confessional character:

These sentiments stand *confessed* in Mr. Razumov's memorandum of his first interview with Madame de S-. The *very words I use* in my narrative are written where *their sincerity cannot be suspected*. The record, *which could not have been meant for any one's eyes but his own*, was not, I think, the outcome of that strange impulse of indiscretion common to men who lead *secret lives*, and accounting for the invariable existence of "*compromising documents*" in *all the plots and conspiracies of history*. Mr. Razumov looked at it, I suppose, *as a man looks at himself in a mirror*, with wonder, perhaps with anguish, with anger or despair. Yes, as a threatened man may look fearfully at his own face in the glass, formulating to himself reassuring excuses for his appearance marked by the taint of some insidious hereditary disease (214; my emphasis)

Time and again the narrator trusts the therapeutic motive and sincere autobiographical impulse in Razumov and the authentic nature of his diary. For example, when he points out Mikulin's skill in knowing what to say in his interview with Razumov: "This skill is to be inferred clearly from the *mental and psychological self-confession, self-analysis* of Mr. Razumov's written journal—the *pitiful resource* of a young man who had near him no trusted intimacy, no natural affection to turn to" (308-09; my emphasis). That is, the narrator adopts Razumov's opinions about other people as well, indirect judgements that he is in no position to test or verify himself. Phrases such as "It is

evident from Mr. Razumov's diary," (85) "The diary of Mr. Razumov testifies to" (86), "it stands confessed in his handwriting" (229) or "The materials he had on him" (290) prove his absolute trust in his source of information and his desire to authorize his own credibility through references to Razumov's report.³¹ The diary thus becomes the decisive source of reference in all questions of narrative authenticity.

Ironically, all of the purposes that the narrator does not suspect concerning Razumov's diary—the *secret life* of Razumov, the *compromising* nature of his diary, his *involvement* in the plots and conspiracies of history—are later revealed to be true indeed. In retrospect, the narrator's assumptions look naïve, uncritical, wrong, and based on weak foundations. Conrad achieves this by juxtaposing the narrator's assessments with Razumov's own statements about his diary, which he continues to write on Rousseau's island. They are subtly integrated into the narratorial commentary and reveal the true purpose and significance of Razumov's stay in Geneva and of his diary: their political usefulness for espionage in the service of the autocratic system in Russia (316, 317). For the very first time, the reader *sees* Razumov working as a spy,³² though Conrad again also integrates a cathartic element which even Razumov himself has to acknowledge: "Alone in his room after having posted his secret letter, he had regained a certain measure of composure by writing in his secret diary" (339). That is, the function of the diary changes over time, even for Razumov. The full therapeutic and confessional nature of the document for Razumov is revealed only later—after Razumov has made his self-confession and has left the Haldins' flat.

His diary now fully becomes one of those 'compromising documents' the narrator had alluded to before (214; cf. above). Thus, at the very end, a therapeutic motive is verified, but, even more importantly, a conspiratorial motive is revealed. The narrator must also correct his former judgement that Razumov did not mean the diary to be read by anyone:

The book of his *compromising record* was kept in a locked drawer [...]. In this queer pedantism of a man who had read, thought, lived, pen in hand, there

is the sincerity of the attempt to grapple by the same means with another profounder knowledge. After some passages which have been already made use of in the building up of this narrative, or add nothing new to the psychological side of this *disclosure* [...], comes a page and a half of incoherent writing where his expression is baffled by the novelty and the mysteriousness of that side of our emotional life to which his solitary existence had been a stranger. Then only he *begins to address directly the reader he had in his mind*, trying to express in broken sentences, full of wonder and awe, the sovereign (he uses that very word) power of her person [Nathalie Haldin] over his imagination, in which lay the dormant seed of her brother's words. (357-58; my emphasis)

For the critical reader, therefore, the assessment of Razumov's document and its instrumentalization by the narrator turn out to be a much more sophisticated affair than expected. The narrator originally resorted to the diary to be able to faithfully narrate Haldin's and Razumov's story. But the diary was only handed on to him by Nathalie Haldin after Razumov had long been back in Russia (it was sent to her as a parcel). This means that the insights gained from the diary are belated insights: "The perplexities and the complex terrors—I may say—of this [Razumov's] sleeplessness are recorded in the document I was to see later [...]" (192). The use of the document therefore has several narratological consequences: first, the complete puzzle of Razumov's life and story only gradually reveals itself and, second, due to the narrator's blind trust in the diary's authenticity, several 'facts' will need to be corrected later on. That is to say, the narrative will have to be 're-written.' Conrad uses dramatic irony, juxtaposing different levels of information and differentiating between the more limited state of consciousness of the narrator as a person and witness, with the broader state of consciousness implied at the extradiegetic level (e.g. the knowledge about St. Petersburg or Russian problems). The ensuing better information known to the reader (such as Razumov's activities as a spy for the police [316, 317] or the fact that the last meeting of Nathalie and Razumov is a farewell-scene [356]) fully unmasks the narrator's naïveté.

The narrator's appropriation of Razumov's diary:
issues of narratology

As demonstrated above, the narrative is purported by the narrator to have been created predominantly on the basis of Razumov's diary. However, over the course of time Razumov's original account undergoes drastic transformations at the hands of the narrator.

First of all, a shift of focus can be observed: at the outset, the narrative relates the story of Nathalie's brother, Victor Haldin, an anarchist involved in Plehve's assassination and subsequently betrayed to the Russian police by the student Razumov, who feels threatened by Haldin's seeking his help. The centre of attention is Victor Haldin and, due only to his connection with Razumov (which is at first difficult to account for), Razumov as well. Later the focus shifts to Razumov as a major clue in understanding Victor Haldin's fate and finally, that of Razumov as well. Eventually, because of both the narrator's increasing emotional involvement and his growing personal appropriation of Razumov's life and diary, the narrative becomes the narrator's own story of personal failure. Szittyá uses the term 'double narration' for this technique of integrating Razumov's narrative into that of the narrator's.³³

Doubtless this narrative makes a gripping story. Yet more importantly, the narrator's use and appropriation of the diary triggers a number of significant reflections that go far beyond the immediate needs of (re-)telling the story: thematized in the narrative are a number of significant aspects of narratology and literary theory, especially issues of metanarration and metafiction:

- the construction of the narrator/the narrator's identity/ narrative authority
- the limits of narrative representation
- the truthfulness of fiction
- fictionalization of history and biography
- the moral truth of fiction.

The reader is allowed to watch the narrator as he constructs his identity. As a person, he is a teacher of foreign languages. From this angle of his special professional background—somebody who professionally works with words and, consequently, is highly alert to matters of language³⁴—he often critically addresses questions about his own skills of narrating, the presuppositions he brings along to the narrative task, and the re-telling of Razumov's life story, which includes uncertainties about his own skills of characterization.

At first the narrator actually seems to disparage and undermine his own narrative authority:

To begin with I wish to *disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression* which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself [...] Razumov. If I have ever had these gifts in any sort of living form they have been smothered out of existence a long time ago under a wilderness of words. (3; my emphasis)³⁵

Yet immediately afterward he drops the problem of his personal presuppositions, calling words 'the great foes of reality' and emphasizing the general inability of language to adequately reflect reality, which is to acknowledge the limits of narrative representation. Returning then to his own skills, he describes his professional activity as a teacher of languages as having fatal effects upon imagination, observation and insight. And finishing off with a general observation again, he describes the world as nothing "but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot" (3).³⁶

Observations like these evoke poststructuralist notions about the instability and unreliability of (the meaning of) words and texts.³⁷ These are complemented by discussions of the truthfulness of fiction. The narrator shows his awareness of producing his own account of Razumov's story, but at the same time he emphasizes his indebtedness to Razumov's account, the closeness of his own narrative to the documentary evidence provided by Razumov's diary (and elsewhere also to other people's accounts and reports, e.g. Nathalie's or that of

the Russian wife of his friend the professor etc.). He compares the diary favourably to his own narrative deficits (lacking skills of fictionalizing and imagination, lacking ambition as a novelist/writer of fiction).³⁸ Fact is made to appear superior to fiction. These reflections parallel various discourses in literary history about the relationship between fact and fiction in special genres (e.g. the eighteenth-century novel and autobiography). Into this discussion, an intercultural component is integrated: in addition to warning the reader of his own incompetencies, the narrator warns the reader of misjudgements due to the fundamental differences between Western and Eastern European conditions and perceptions:

If to the Western reader they [the thoughts assailing Razumov] appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that as to the first this may be the effect of my crude statement. For the rest I will only remark here that this is not a story of the West of Europe. (25; my emphasis)

If, however, one checks these statements critically and examines more closely the usefulness of Razumov's diary for the narrator, one cannot but note a shift: at first it seems as if the narrator profits tremendously from the diary and is therefore much obliged to it. It (apparently) helps him to gain insights into the chronological and factual course of action of Razumov's life story, and, more importantly, into his attitudes and convictions, as well as into the difficult political and psychological questions troubling him, along with his moral conflicts. On the other hand, the alert reader notices that the narrator's role in re-telling Razumov's story and in appropriating it for his own purposes shifts and increases continually. The narrator transgresses factuality; very cleverly he selects and integrates single parts of the diary into his narrative according to his own taste and liking. This also includes decisions as to when and where in the narrative to integrate which passages or pieces of information from the diary.³⁹

When it comes to Razumov's interview by Mikulin, the process of narrative transformation proper—of Razumov's document into a narrative, into fiction, or the process of fictionalization—is explicitly

thematized. There are in fact several parallels between the narrator's observations on this and Conrad's own creative method in the appropriation of history and biography in his fiction.⁴⁰ In the foreground are issues of narrative transmission, literary quality, narrative strategies and their effects on readers. The narrator reasons about how clearness and effect can best be achieved in an invented story: "In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect" (100). Again he pretends to factuality, pointing out his own deficits in approaching such an ambitious task which does *not* require imagination, inventiveness or art, but, on the contrary, artlessness:

A man of imagination, however inexperienced in the art of narrative, has his instinct to guide him in the choice of his words, and in the development of the action. A grain of talent excuses many mistakes. But this is *not a work of imagination*; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its *artlessness*. *Aware of my limitations* and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, *I would not try* (were I able) *to invent anything*. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition. (100; my emphasis)

The end of the novel will fully reveal the narrator's deceptive artlessness. This is why, in retrospect, this passage has to be regarded as a great understatement.

The increasing constructedness of the story becomes ever more apparent to the reader demonstrating the difference between 'story' and 'discourse.' This happens, for instance, in the moment when the narrator returns to Razumov's document after he has informed the Haldins about the assassination of Mr de P-: "Mr. Razumov's record, like the open book of fate, revives for me the memory of that day as something startlingly pitiless in its freedom from all forebodings" (105). The narrator brings in his own later knowledge from Razumov's diary at a time when Victor Haldin's mother and sister do not yet know anything about their son's/brother's death, still hoping to see him alive. His narrative is therefore a narrative with hindsight: "Victor Haldin was still with the living, but with the living whose only contact with life is the expectation of death" (105).

So it becomes increasingly evident that—in spite of protestations of artlessness—the narrator rather skilfully filters, selects, arranges, links and interprets events, information and observations, directing the attention of the reader and steering and impacting his/her responses. Conrad juxtaposes apparent artlessness with the real artistry of the narrator, thus demonstrating his increasing influence on the narration and his manipulation of the reader, which is counterbalanced by the reader's superior information at the same time.⁴¹ The narrator increasingly appropriates and shapes the evidence accessible by him, not just re-constructing, but virtually constructing Razumov's life story. He uses the methods of a biographer, mingling fact and fiction, imposing his own pattern onto another person's life, making it a *life* and transforming it into his own narrative. In other words, the narrator becomes an editor.⁴²

The narrator makes the reader a witness of these processes, very much enjoying his power to do so. This is revealed, for example, through his treatment of Nathalie's oral account of her very first meeting with Razumov at the Château Borel. Again (as above), the thrust of the scene changes from emphasis on fact to greater fictional freedom, that is, through narrative digressions, paradoxically for the sake of greater narrative credibility. Here, the narrator interrupts Nathalie's report. He admits that his rendition of the events is based on her account, which he has not dramatized as much as might be supposed. He pays Nathalie her due, acknowledging that "she had rendered, with extraordinary feeling and animation, the very accent almost of the disciple of the old apple-woman, the irreconcilable hater of Minist[er]ies, the voluntary servant of the poor" (161). At the same time the narrator shows himself to be in the know. He smugly reveals himself as someone who has his own reliable sources of information (e.g. about Madame de S-); informants who in turn fully trust their own sources.⁴³

It is on occasions like these that the reader notes the narrator's growing pride in his many new and detailed insights into other people's emotions, motives and opinions, such as those of Nathalie

Haldin, insights gained through various meetings and encounters. In addition, he expresses increasingly overt judgements about people, including contemptuous ones about Madame de S-. Once more, he professes his own position of artlessness—contrary to the position of a novelist—which he presents as more difficult to achieve than the imagination of the novelist, who only has to generate the credibility of his imaginative products through linguistic means. And because the narrator has no art and did not invent Madame de S-, he feels “bound to explain how I came to know so much about her. My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University” (162).

However, shortly afterwards the narrator admits to having *digressed* (163). His motive, as he states with an air of personal vanity and superiority, was to use his impressive background knowledge about Russian political affairs in order to enhance his own narrative credibility and to lower the limits of comprehension for Westerners:

The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin’s relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Château Borel, was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor’s wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov’s presence in Geneva, *a little more credible*—for *this is a Russian story for Western ears*, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. (163-64; my emphasis)

That is, other people’s reports (Razumov’s, the professor’s wife’s, Nathalie Haldin’s etc.) are explicitly used by the narrator for the sake of enhancing his own narrative authority and his authenticity at large, but he uses means of his own invention, such as narrative digressions, as well, to underpin them.

In addition to coping with the difference between story time and discourse time, with selecting, arranging and digressing, the narrator deliberately and high-handedly leaves gaps in his renditions. There are two main reasons for this: first, the narrator’s pleading narrative incompetence as an excuse, and second, his awareness of the different

presuppositions for judgement and the different reactions of Eastern and Western readers. A fine such example is the narrator's description of the reasons for his decision to reduce the presentation of Razumov's moral conflicts on the evening when Victor Haldin entered his life. At the same time the passage exemplifies his absolute trust in the diary once more:

The words and events of that evening must have been graven as if with a steel tool on Mr. Razumov's brain since he was able *to write his relation with such fullness and precision* a good many months afterwards. *The record of the thoughts* which assailed him in the street is even more *minute and abundant*. They seem to have rushed upon him [...].

The more adequate description would be a tumult of thoughts—the *faithful reflection of the state of his feelings*. The thoughts in themselves were not numerous—[...] but *they cannot be reproduced here in all their exclamatory repetitions* which went on in an endless and weary turmoil—for *the walk was long*.

If *to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper*, it must be remembered that as to the first *this may be the effect of my crude statement*. For the rest I will only remark here that *this is not a story of the West of Europe*.

Nations it may be have fashioned their Governments, but the Governments have paid them back in the same coin. It is *unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's situation*. This being so *it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think*. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. He would *not have an hereditary and personal knowledge* of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence. [...]

This is but *a crude and obvious example of the different conditions of Western thought*. (24-25; my emphasis)⁴⁴

All these instances clearly demonstrate the narrator's skill in selecting, assigning meaning and importance, and directing readers' responses. In particular, the way in which Razumov manages to keep going on that fatal evening, desperately wishing to get rid of Haldin's presence, may, as the narrator admits, seem like a marvel to someone reading Razumov's narrative (27). This is why the narrator feels compelled (as elsewhere in the narrative) to act as a mediator of those Russian feelings so difficult to understand for Westerners which are at times

naively and misleadingly termed 'Russian simplicity,' and yet are, in fact, more complex than that.⁴⁵ However, exactly at this point in the narrative, after Haldin has left Razumov's rooms, the narrator falls into a crisis. For the very first time he grows conscious of his difficult task, the narrative mission that he had assumed at first to be the faithful rendition of somebody else's document. Here he becomes aware of his own active, creatively shaping, non-neutral role as a reporter of someone else's fortunes, conscious of his own moral responsibility. He grasps the limits of narrative representation, the difficult accessibility of the subject matter for the reader, moral truth as the only justification of fiction, and the political implications of his narrative mission. Approaching this part of Razumov's story, he senses that "the decent mind of an old teacher of foreign languages feels more and more the difficulty of the task":

The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a précis of a strange human document, but the rendering—I perceive it now clearly—of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale. (67; my emphasis)⁴⁶

The role and the functions of the narrator

This leads us to the question of the real role and the functions of the narrator. Greaney notes that

he is nothing more than a sounding-board for Natalia, who values his company more than his conversation. Similarly, he disregards the semantic content of her words to dwell on their aesthetic-erotic pleasures. It would be hard to find a better microcosm of the cultural 'stalemate' between east and west than these asymmetrical dialogues between teacher and pupil. [...] for the 'impartial' English narrator the whole affair [about Haldin] is further confirmation of Russian barbarity. (158-59)

This assessment does not do sufficient justice to the narrator because it emphasizes linguistic concerns at the neglect of more complex and truly intercultural ones in his relationship with Nathalie Haldin.

Tanner demonstrates just that potential:

the introduction of a narrator makes possible the challenging interplay of two forms of references, two schemes of values, two worlds of experience. [...] the narrator who tries to impress on us the remoteness, the alienness, the regrettable primitiveness of his material [...]. To make such a reasonable man recount to us some deeply irrational occurrence, to make the nightmarish material pass through the complacent filter, to make the western eye strive to get into focus some seemingly unwestern form of experience—this is to achieve a double irony. (198)

In truth, the narrator adopts multiple functions and exerts a very complex role in the novel. He is at the centre of everything substantial in the novel. Plot, structure and setting—the contrasting locations of St. Petersburg and Geneva—are bound up with and realized through him.⁴⁷ Additionally he provides character constellation and characterization. The literary representations include social characteristics of living, housing, feeding, dressing, and speaking. Dress, face, looks, voice, speech/language, expressions, gestures, walk, and body language are referred to in detail. Portraying the personalities of autocrats and revolutionaries, the narrator fashions whole biographies including social details and *Weltanschauung*. The reader is impacted by these descriptions, begins to see events from different perspectives, is better able to look into the individual motivations of people as conditioned by their socio-political backgrounds. He/she is let in on how they arrive at certain decisions, how they act accordingly and how their lives subsequently take special turns. Conrad in fact regarded his characters not as “the product of the exceptional but of the general—of the normality of their place, and time, and race. [...] The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together [...]” (“Author’s Note” x).

All in all, the narrator is not only in charge of the story (intradiegetic level), but also of the discourse (extradiegetic level). Events, people,

meetings, conversations, and information are presented from his perspective, but these impressions are modified through other characters' perspectives and insights from the diary. The narrator performs the function of the reader's guide and orientor. He steers and manipulates the mode of presentation. Last but not least, he becomes instrumental in presenting, interpreting and assessing the *Cosas de Russia* for the reader. That is, he functions as a linguist, poststructuralist, narratologist, translator/interpreter, mediator and communicator of the 'moral discovery' of the story/narrative, the comprehension of the 'moral conditions of Russia' to Western readers. The major difficulty that the text provides for the reader consists in the tension between the narrator's apparent Russophobia, obtuseness and personal defeat on the one hand, and his empathy for Russian affairs, his true grasp of the 'moral conditions of Russia' and his moral victory. The narrator (as a person, and as a narrative category) has thus been shaped by Conrad into a very tricky tool that only very few critics have indeed managed to recognize to its full extent.⁴⁸ "*Under Western Eyes* has baffled its readers from the moment it was published" is Carabine's comment on the early and on later responses to the novel and its narrator ("Narrative and Narrator" 209).

With hindsight we can see that Conrad's earliest reviewers were puzzled by complex issues of authority, interpretation, and meaning that have continued to (greatly) bemuse and preoccupy subsequent critics and theorists [...]. They include: the evident gaps in the double narrative between "the actual facts" of Razumov's Russian diary and the western explanations of the professor of languages and between the latter's "story" and "Mr. Conrad's" multilayered "book"; and the sheer difficulty posed by a novel that employs a bemused narrator who combines favourable and unfavourable characteristics and whose judgments, norms and perceptions are so variable that they do not "as might be expected" enable the reader to establish a stable relationship with the author ("implied" or "career") that would suggest "an interpretation" of which the narrator "is unconscious." ("Narrative and Narrator" 209)

Moreover, Carabine has demonstrated the interrelatedness of the narrator's functions with Conrad's shifting conception of the nature

and length of his work on its way from the short story “Razumov” to the novel *Under Western Eyes*. Discussing the multiple and competing roles of Conrad’s teller (“Construing ‘Secrets’” 193, 207) as the editor and transcriber of Razumov’s text (189), “as eye witness, actor, teller and commentator in relation to the Geneva transactions” (193) he sees them as the product of the “long, stop-start composition of the novel, during which the old teacher *accumulated* many competing uses, functions, roles and characteristics, in three narratives—his own, Razumov’s and Conrad’s” (209n10). Precisely for these reasons *Under Western Eyes* is “one of Conrad’s finest narratives” (188) for him, “perhaps the most quixotic, enthralling and heroic narrative in modern English fiction” (207). “[...] it generates a multi-layered, multi-voiced, multi-perspectival novel built upon an extraordinary cycle of interpretative demands and failures, embracing tellers, characters and readers (‘debauch’), while striving for coherence and ‘truth’ through its intricate collaboration with, and manipulation of its readers (‘proprieties’)” (188).⁴⁹

Summing up, one can say that the narrator certainly fulfils the functions that Conrad envisaged for him. He found him *useful to the reader*—because of his comments, his role in the development of the story, his supplying actuality as an eye-witness, and his giving credibility to Nathalie Haldin’s position as a sympathetic friend (“Author’s Note” ix). The latter observation is the more remarkable because the narrative also conveys the contrary/complementary impression that the narrator uses Nathalie to enhance his own credibility.

Conclusion

The present study has brought about a number of modifications and clarifications:

1. The contrast stated in literary criticism between Russophobia in Conrad’s essays and letters vs. Russophilia in his fiction cannot be sustained. Rather, the narrative presents the ambivalences and com-

plexities of the contemporary Western discourse about Russia. In that sense, Conrad has successfully conducted the business of “cultural translation,”⁵⁰ has done the work of a modern ethnographer by producing a text expressive of the conflicting ethnographic subjectivities of his time.⁵¹

2. The central task of the narrator, to bring in the perspective of critical distance as a ‘Western’ observer, remains unfulfilled. He is neither a real foreigner for the Russians, nor a total outsider, nor ‘a disinterested spectator,’ but rather an insider. The reader witnesses the personal failure of a man who is half an Easterner himself and who can no longer deny his Russian legacy, although to the end he never openly acknowledges it.

3. A more critical reading of the novel discloses various contradictions about the narrator, who suffers several defeats: in spite of all his knowledge, skills and experiences in his relationship to Russia and Russians, he falls into the trap of various misjudgements. Contrary to his supposed superiority and ‘Western critical’ detachment, he loses his narrative distance and cannot but act out the part of a helpless spectator of the Russian drama.

4. Yet however much he pretends to narrative artlessness, he is, in fact, very skilful in the appropriation and personal rendition of Razumov’s story. This also means that the narrator *does* keep control over his narrative. There is no collapse of control (cf. Zabel 131, Widmer 109; Kermode 268), but only a collapse of narrative and authorial distance. On the author’s part, this is not a matter of personal sentimentality, but the result of a conscious narrative strategy, i.e., a controlled collapse, which Conrad found himself justified in practising due to his origins, socialization, and biographical and historical conditioning. And he was indeed entitled to do so because of his substantial knowledge and experiences, as often as he may have played them down in public.⁵² This is why his statement from 1920 that he did not notice the collapse of detachment rather reveals the self-defensive mechanism operating within him. Just as the narrator seems at times to throw sand in the reader’s eyes, so too does Conrad the writer.⁵³

5. According to Zabel, these factors—collapse of detachment, replacement by empathy and sympathy—simultaneously constitute the radical power of the novel (131). In other words: failure is success or defeat is victory because of the moral grandeur implied—a typical theme of the classical Russian literature of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ The reasons for this seeming paradox are various: only thus can empathy and humanity really succeed in the novel (cf. also Zabel, 128, 129, 131, 136, 144)—a sober, unemotional style could never have achieved this. These are also the qualities that Conrad (and also Virginia Woolf)⁵⁵ appreciated so much in Russian literature, especially in Turgenev (cf. “Turgenev” 46-47), whose traditions he made ample and intelligent use of in the novel. The collapse of detachment is the presupposition for the true faculty of judgement—not of the intellect, but of the heart (cf. “Author’s Note” viii). The fact that Conrad took up Russian themes at the beginning of the twentieth century and presented them in his own inimitable way, is a remarkable stance at a time when Russian literature was only just beginning to achieve (full) artistic acknowledgment in the West, supported also by English translations (“Turgenev” 45).⁵⁶

6. In its complexity Conrad’s text is indeed able to add to the Western discourse about Russia current at that time and to correct it through his presentation of Russian sensibility versus Western incomprehension and ignorance. Conrad offers a true intercultural psychology (cf. “the psychology of Russia itself,” [“Author’s Note” vii]) and perspective which paves the way for a deepened intercultural understanding. His special position and presuppositions as someone who was ‘Easterner’ and ‘Westerner’ at the same time, outsider and insider, pay off advantageously here. Conrad adds knowledge, understanding and sympathy, but also criticism, bringing in enlightened positions of which the West was in bitter need then, though it did not always recognize that fact or fully appreciate his efforts. Western discourse about Russia does indeed reach a new quality through Conrad’s presentations.

NOTES

¹See Berthoud "Anxiety"; Carabine, "Conrad, Pinker," "Eating Dog," "Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski," "Introduction," "The Composition," "Under Western Eyes"; Jones; Karl; Knowles; Lothe, "Involuntary"; Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*; Smith, "The Hidden Narrative"; Szittyá; Zabel.

²The 'achievement and decline thesis' was first formulated by Thomas C. Moser (1957). He saw Conrad's major works as belonging to the years 1897-1911 (Knowles 17), but admitted mistakes in some of his earlier critical assessments (Moser in Higdon, ed. 12-13). For the theory and its more recent assessments see Carabine, "The Composition" 60n125; Kermode 264; Hampson 140. Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, modifies the theory (362). "It works as a hypothetical explanation of a generally lower evaluation of Conrad's later (after 1910) pieces. But it must not be understood as a theory on the basis of which we can predicate or predict any judgment" (Najder, "My Half a Century" 4).

³Cf. on criticism and sales figures: Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 372-73; Peters 13; Watts, *Joseph Conrad* 36; on the reception history: Peters 119-34, Watts, *Preface* 44-45, *Joseph Conrad* 46-53, Zabel 115-19, 129; on Conrad's place in literary history: Watts, *Preface* 171-74.

⁴See Berthoud, "Anxiety" 1; Greaney 98, 152; Hampson 140; Moser in Higdon, ed. 12; Peters 13, 52, 73, 88, 99; Watts, *Preface* 34, *Joseph Conrad* 16, 36; Zabel 116, 118.

⁵Szittyá comments: "Only within the last three or four years have critics begun to speak of the concern of the novel with language, writing, and fiction, [...]" (838n3). The study pays attention to the concentric fictions in the novel, to meta-fiction, double narration, and structural and aesthetic doubleness.

⁶See Peters 1-36; Watt 112-25; Watts, *Preface* 7-30, 54, *Joseph Conrad* xi, 1-7; Widmer 85; Zabel 111-15, 120-44.

⁷See Conrad's letter to John Galsworthy of 6 January 1908 (*Letters* 4: 8-9); his "Author's Note" vii-x; Carabine, "From Razumov [...] Peter Ivanovitch," "Conrad, Pinker," "The Composition," "From Razumov [...] The Dwindling," "Conrad at Work"; Higdon, "Complete But Uncorrected," "Under Western Eyes"; Higdon and Sheard, "Conrad's Unkindest Cut," "The End is the Devil"; Karl 164-67; Kermode 265-66; Peters 11-13; Zabel 118-44.

⁸See Zabel 116-17.

⁹Najder corrects the second part of this statement: Conrad's claim "that 'six years' after its original publication he 'heard that the book had found universal recognition in Russia and had been re-published there in many editions', cannot be substantiated" (*Conrad in Perspective* 119n).

¹⁰Cf. Zabel. Hay ("Under Western Eyes" 152n4) refers to Zabel's "Introduction to Under Western Eyes." Peters (123) gives as the date for Zabel's introduction to *The Portable Conrad* the year 1947.

¹¹The contrast in literary criticism is stated by Tanner (198-99), Watts (*Preface* 57-58) and Zabel (136, 139) who, at the same time, see Conrad's more complex positions. Gillon stresses Conrad's (political) Russophobia more and denies him such ambiguity in his statements about Russians or Russian literature (685-87, 694). Najder seems to regard Conrad predominantly as a Russophobe largely because of his political attitudes as expressed in "Autocracy and War," but also in *Under Western Eyes*, due also to some extent to his hostility towards Dostoevsky. However, he attests him broader and more positive *opinions* (*Conrad in Perspective* 119-38) Crankshaw and Carabine ("Under Western Eyes" 125-26) offer very well-balanced assessments of the narrative complexities and Conrad's respective attitudes. Carey emphasizes the distance created by Conrad to the chaotic Russian experience of autocrats and anarchists and the excessiveness of the Russians, especially through his use of ironic detachment and a complex point of view, through refracting Razumov's mind through a journal and in filtering the Russian experience through a self-conscious narrator.

¹²See also Busza: "[...] even in a political essay Conrad presents his argument through visual images" (114).

¹³Cf. on the discourse of Western Europe about Russia: Bimberg, "Deutsche und Russen."

¹⁴Cf. Conrad, "Autocracy and War."

¹⁵Cf. also: "That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian" (104).

¹⁶On the contradiction between the narrator's apparent inaptness and his true capabilities see also Armstrong. He describes "the discrepancy between the narrator's obtuseness as an ethnographer of Russia and the intimate knowledge he offers of Razumov's and Nathalie's thoughts, feelings and actions. One effect of this contradiction, however, is to move the reader back and forth between the two sides of identity (as being-for-others and being-for-oneself) in a way that dramatizes its intrinsic doubleness and challenges us to do justice to the characters better than the narrator does. [...] The reader experiences this back-and-forth movement by oscillating between involvement in the stories of the characters and observation of the inadequacy of the narrator's characterizations" (44-45).

¹⁷Cf. Carabine, "From *Razumov* [...] The Dwindling" 142, "The Composition" 7, "Under Western Eyes" 123; Carey; Eagleton 253-54; Fleishman 121; Gillon 690; Hawthorn, "Under Western Eyes" 127; Lucas 116; Najder, *Joseph Conrad* 359; Peters 88; Szittyá 819; Widmer 109; Zabel 130, 136.

¹⁸Greaney describes him as British, but Russian-born (155, 159) and Carabine calls him alternately "Anglo-Russian" and "English" ("Narrative and Narrator" 215, 247, "Under Western Eyes" 123, 125). Najder terms him "English-Swiss" (*Conrad in Perspective* 121). Kirschner describes him as "This so-called Englishman, who lived in Petersburg as a child and speaks French and Russian" ("Revolution" 16). Hay frequently calls him "English" or "Englishman" but mentions his birth in Russia to parents of British citizenship ("Under Western Eyes" 125), though the latter fact is not expressly mentioned in the published novel.

¹⁹He is proud of his extensive connections to the Russian quarter of Geneva where he has been living for a long time (4), taking special pride in his heightened reputation due to the Haldins (103), but without ever once regarding himself as part of that community. In the light of this closeness to Russians and their affairs, his statements about the Russians' inadequate usage of language (4, cf. above) appear like the heartless gaze of a scientist studying an utterly alien phenomenon. In retrospect they look unconvincing. Later on he even admits that one has to be a Russian oneself in order to comprehend all this (104), excluding the fact that he is one himself by birth.

²⁰For Conrad's problematical Anglo-Polish identity, often bound up with linguistic issues, see Carabine, "Introduction" xv, xviii, xxii, xxv, "Narrative and Narrator" 215n15; Greaney 59-60, 154-55; Hay, *"Under Western Eyes"* 125; Kermode 268; Knowles 1-4, 15, 16; Kocówna 195-96; Morf 83-84, 91, 96, 112, 125, 204, 220-21; Najder, *Joseph Conrad, "Conrad's Polish Background," "Joseph Conrad: A European Writer," Conrad in Perspective, "Conrad and Ukraine," "Meditations on Conrad's Territoriality"*; Szitty 828, 835, 837-38.

²¹For more details about the collapse of narrative detachment see Bimberg, "Dialog mit Hindernissen" 156-58.

²²For details see Zabel's predominantly positive assessment which, however, also mentions narrative deficits (118-19, 133-34).

²³The digressions do not only relate to details of plot and background, but offer substantial political-philosophical reflections, e.g. about the Russian national character or autocracy and revolution, and thus aim at facilitating comprehension for Western readers.

²⁴Delayed information is, for example, that the new arrival from St. Petersburg is Razumov, that a parcel with Razumov's book was sent to Nathalie, that Haldin had talked about Razumov during his police interviews or that Mikulin discovered Razumov's political theses when searching his rooms. 'After-stories' disclose what happened to people afterwards, e.g. Ziemianitch's suicide or Razumov's life following his interview by Mikulin.

²⁵Multiperspectivity or multiple re-narrations relate to Razumov's character and opinions, the assassination, Victor Haldin's betrayal by Ziemianitch, Razumov's meeting with Haldin and Nathalie, Razumov's walk with the narrator, Razumov's talk to Haldin's mother, and Razumov's accident.

²⁶Consequently, Fleishman describes the textual construction of the novel by differentiating between four texts: an A-text, the fiction written by Conrad; a B-text, the document prepared by the narrator, which is a fictional construct, too (B-text-within-A-text), "a 'useful' arrangement in an artist's effort to create an illusion"; a C-Text, the language teacher's report as based on written documents (e.g. the newspaper report of Haldin's arrest, Peter Ivanovitch's autobiography, sources relating to Mr de P-, the primary source: Razumov's notebook, Razumov's letter to Nathalie Haldin) and direct observation of the action; and a D-Text, Haldin's written letters to Nathalie and his spoken words to Razumov (120-23).

²⁷Cf. e.g. the narrator's first meeting with Razumov in the gardens of the Bastions and their later chance meeting in the Rue Mont Blanc.

²⁸Cf. also the intertwining of temporal and spatial aspects of narrative; modulations of time and space; chronological distortions; chronological and perspectival shifts; the co-existence of various voices and perspectives; epistemological breaks; narrative variations of distance, sympathy, and reliability (Hawthorn, "Breaking Loose" 20, 25-27 and Lothe, "Involuntary" 229, 231, 234).

²⁹Cf. also Szittyá about "this widening circle of interpretative failure" (830) and Hawthorn: "Almost every text that has to be read in the novel—whether it be a face or a newspaper report—is misread, and yet the teacher of languages, who passes on these misreading to us, time and again expresses confidence in the ability of Western readers to interpret and decode correctly" ("Joseph Conrad's Theory of Reading" 103).

³⁰The change of plot from an initially happy love story (cf. Conrad's letter to Galsworthy of 6 January 1908, and also Zabel 121, 131-32) to this tragic ending is decisive here. In the case of the first plan, there would have been no need at all for a last parting scene, i.e. the occasion for the narrator's misjudgement would have been absent. The new plot therefore afforded Conrad a much better occasion to create failure and defeat, complexity, and catharsis—narrative artistry. In his "Author's Note" from 1920 Conrad admitted that only after he had finished writing the first part did "the whole story reveal[ed] itself to me in its tragic character and in the march of its events as unavoidable and sufficiently ample in its outline to give free play to my creative instinct and to the dramatic possibilities of the subject" (vii).

³¹Other examples of the narrator's trust in the self-confessional character of his diary are Razumov's notes of his first meeting with Nathalie Haldin: "It stands recorded in the pages of his *self-confession*, that it nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay [...]" (167; my emphasis). In another instance, the narrator uses quotes from the diary to demonstrate Razumov's confessions about Victor and Nathalie Haldin's roles in his life and to elaborate on his conflicts, motives, decisions and changes (358-62).

³²On the deceptive dramaturgy of the novel and the whole complexity of narrative representation see Carabine, "Under Western Eyes" 123-25, 130-31, and Lothe, "Conradian Narrative" 174-76.

³³On the technique of double narration (by the language teacher and by Razumov) and the aesthetic double structure of the novel see Szittyá 818, 821, 835.

³⁴Greaney is of the opinion that "Our narrator and guide in this word-obsessed text is himself a man of words, a teacher whose expertise in matters of language and translation has an obvious bearing on the novel's central themes" (153). This looks like an understatement rather. It would be truer to say that the narrator has been constructed by Conrad in such a way to serve the purposes of the narrative.

³⁵The narrator's undermining his own narrative skills is also evident in the remark: "this may be the effect of my crude statement" (25).

³⁶Humorously enough, if we compare this statement likening human beings to talking animals to the later quote (quoted above) comparing Russians to “very accomplished parrots” (4), the linguistic status of Russians retrospectively looks even better than that of mankind at large.

³⁷Cf. also Billy about the distrust in the representational power of language (focusing on *An Outcast of the Islands*, but also making references to *Under Western Eyes*); Bonney about the semiotic indeterminacy in various pieces of Conrad’s fiction; Greaney about the skepticism about language in *Under Western Eyes* (153) and Stape about the connection between the cultural and linguistic dislocations of Conrad’s youth and the instability of the narrator/the undermining of narrative authority (67; largely relating to *Lord Jim*, but also addressing Conrad’s fiction at large).

³⁸Kirschner locates as an important source for these issues of the imperfection and unreliability of language, the pitfalls of narration, and the consequent insistence on factual accuracy and attempt at verisimilitude: Dostoevsky’s novel *Podrostok* that Conrad read in its condensed French version of *Un Adolescent* (“The French Face” 163, 169-71).

³⁹Examples are the passages where, at the beginning of Part II, after Mikulin’s ominous question “Where to?” the narrator leaves the diary and turns to his own acquaintance with the Haldins (100). After a long interruption, the narrator resumes that strand of the narrative at the beginning of Part Four: “But the time has come when Councillor of State Mikulin can no longer be ignored. His simple question ‘Where to?’ on which we left Mr. Razumov in St. Petersburg, throws a light on the general meaning of this individual case” (293).

⁴⁰In yet another way the reader is made aware of those various processes of the fictionalization of lives when Razumov, in his talks to Peter Ivanovitch and Sophia S-, regrets “not having composed a perfect story for use abroad, in which his fatal connexion with the house might have been owned up to” (280).

⁴¹Greaney offers an interpretation that does the complexity of the narrator’s identity, the scepticism over language and the linguistic deceptiveness of the novel more justice than many other critics (152-66). This is why his claim that “Many readers have remarked that the teacher’s pedestrian intellect and obtuse moral commentary are profoundly at odds with the structural ingenuity of the novel he narrates” (153; my emphasis) is self-contradictory. This is confirmed later when he states that “One of the few critics to credit the professor with any intelligence is Jacques Berthoud” (183n8; my emphasis). Moore, when commenting on the instrumentalization of Razumov’s diary by the narrator, interprets the double authority of their voices in terms of Bakhtin’s dialogic relationship. He analyzes the differences between the St. Petersburg and the Genevan chronotopes and points out their temporal distortions and impossibilities (9-25).

⁴²See also Paccaud on Conrad’s hypertextual practice, i.e. the manner in which a text may generate another (73-82).

⁴³This is actually an odd parallel to a similar system, though entertained for different purposes and practised with different methods, by both Russian autocrats and revolutionaries.

⁴⁴Other examples for deliberately leaving gaps, e.g. because the descriptions are likely to produce a fairy-tale effect on Western readers, are Councillor Mikulin's interview with Razumov (294), the further course of action and the subsequent interrogations of Razumov by Mikulin (304-05), how Mikulin kept Razumov's meeting with the oculist secret and of how—to the outside—an effect of innocence was produced (309).

⁴⁵Russian 'simplicity' is one of the negative Western European stereotypes about Russians that is made extensive use of in the narrative and lastly revealed to be a telling misjudgement, too.

⁴⁶This quote about moral truth as the only justification of great fiction echoes Conrad's statement in the "Author's Note" (viii) quoted above.

⁴⁷On the interrelatedness of the St. Petersburg and the Geneva chronotopes and the diverse intercultural experiences associated with them see Bimberg, "A glimpse behind the scenes'" 49-65.

⁴⁸Here are a few exemplary positions: due to his passivity, contemplative stance, lacking involvement, observation of other people's lives, his invisibility, impotence, masochism, marginality and social disengagement, the character-narrator is seen by Hawthorn as a voyeur; he speaks of his "reduction to a pair of observing eyes" ("Voyeurism" 150), representing "the impotence of a West that observes with power but without intimacy" (151). Voyeurism is a function of both the writer and reader of the novel (151). Kirschner discusses the multiplicity of meanings of the narrator in literary criticism ("Revolution" 16). He refers to Hawthorn, but prefers "the analogy of a pair of spectacles, which the implied author can slip on or off at will" (24n25). Higdon characterizes the narrator's ambivalent roles in an aggressive text that makes the reader a co-creator and co-protagonist ("His Helpless Prey"). Hay points out a number of inconsistencies in the construction of the narrator. Her position is that the "missing center" or missing point of view in the novel has to be supplied by the reader ("*Under Western Eyes*"). Unlike other critics, Fincham cannot find Conrad's creation of the language teacher narrator either inept or duplicitous, but rather argues "that the narrator's mediation is essential to the reader's understanding of this novel of ideas" (60-61). She points out the functions of the language teacher as both external and internal focalizer (76). Lothe, in spite of his otherwise brilliant analysis, involves himself in a few contradictions as to the problems of distance between author, narrator and characters. He emphasizes that Conrad "often seems to need a first-person narrator interposed between himself as author and the fictional characters" for psychological reasons, i.e. distance ("Repetition" 124, cf. also 125). "[I]t also enables Conrad to establish an increasing gap between the narrator's pronounced views and the thematic implications of the progressing narrative transmitted through him" (124). This argument of the use of the narrator as a screen for Conrad's Russophobia, his personal involvement or his Polish preju-

dices is also used by Carabine ("Construing" 209n10, "*Under Western Eyes*" 123, 137n8). However, in the light of such a motive of a carefully erected defence wall the collapse of authorial and narrative distance would be completely counterproductive. Furthermore, Lothe claims that the function of the narrator "is more diverse than either Conrad or the language teacher seems to think" ("Repetition" 125). The truth is, that though the narrator may not be fully aware of all of his conflicting roles, his creator, the author Conrad, surely is. It is exactly this playful irony that is so demanding and at the same time so enjoyable for the reader.

⁴⁹Cf. Carabine: "This use of a persona alerts the reader to the author ('the figure behind' the mask) who clearly knows far more about 'things Russian' and is more deeply involved in the 'real subject,' than his cannily chosen teller" ("The Figure" 27n3); see also "The Composition" 17, 29-30, 48-49, "Conrad at Work" 174-76, 208, "*Under Western Eyes*" 123-26, 137n8.

⁵⁰Cf. Asad, who defines "cultural translation" as a central task of social anthropology, which is less a translation of language, but of culture, involving the construction of cultural discourse and its translation and of identifying unconscious meanings also (141-42, 149, 160-62).

⁵¹Cf. Clifford: "[...] ethnographic texts are orchestrations of multivocal exchanges occurring in politically charged situations. The subjectivities produced in these often unequal exchanges [...] are constructed domains of truth, serious fictions" (10).

⁵²Cf. Conrad in the "Author's Note": "The course of action need not be explained. It has suggested itself more as a matter of feeling than a matter of thinking. It is *the result not of a special experience but of general knowledge*, fortified by earnest meditation" (viii; my emphasis). "The various figures playing their part in the story also owe their existence to *no special experience but to the general knowledge of the condition of Russia* and of the moral and emotional reactions of the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness [...]" (viii; my emphasis). Cf. also Conrad in "Turgenev": "Frankly, I don't want to appear as qualified to judge of things Russian. It wouldn't be true. I know nothing of them. But I am aware of a few general truths" (47).

⁵³Forster comments on these qualities in Conrad, his "dread of intimacy," the "smoke screen of his reticence," his never giving himself away, his "central obscurity," (137-39). Berthoud terms it 'defensive note' and 'obsessive defensiveness' and analyzes Conrad's true motives behind it, among them his retaining his political independence ("*The Secret Agent*" 100, 105-06).

⁵⁴Morf refers the theme to "the very Polish aphorism of Pilsudski: *être vaincu et ne pas se soumettre est la vraie victoire*" (221). However, because of the interrelatedness of Conrad's concern with Russian themes and his Polish background and, besides, the parallels between Russian and Polish literature it is impossible to assign the theme to one of the two literatures and cultures only (cf. also Gillon 694; Carabine "The Composition" 15-16; Kermode 268).

⁵⁵Cf. Woolf's appreciative remarks about Russian literature in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1998-99).

⁵⁶On the new historical and political interest in Russia, the publication of popular English literature on Russian themes, and Conrad's own attitudes towards Russian literature see: Andersen 61, 62; Busza 107-16; Carabine, "Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski," "The Composition" 3, 14-15, 28, "Conrad at Work" 178-81; Hay, "Nostromo" 81-82; Najder, *Joseph Conrad* 373.

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Evelyn Waugh's *Edmund Campion* and "Lady Southwell's Letter"*

DONAT GALLAGHER

In the "Author's Note" to the first edition of *Edmund Campion: A Biography*,¹ Evelyn Waugh wrote: "Father Watts of Stonyhurst lent me a copy of Lady Southwell's letter, preserved in the library there, describing the death of Queen Elizabeth" (1st ed. ix). And the biography opens with four vivid pages portraying the Queen as "an old perjured woman, dying without comfort" (6). Intriguingly, the reference to "Lady Southwell's letter" is omitted from all later editions. Nor do the "Notes" or the "List of Books Consulted" (which appear in the First and Second editions) mention Southwell. Nor did Waugh alter the first four pages after he dropped the reference.

In 1996, Catherine Loomis edited the manuscript of "A True Relation of what succeeded at the Sickness and Death of Queen Elizabeth" written by Lady Elizabeth Southwell. This was the 'letter preserved in the library of Stonyhurst' among the papers of Father Robert Persons, S.J. that Father Watts made available to Waugh. Professor Loomis provides a scholarly commentary on the provenance of the "True Relation," on the use made of it by polemicists (like Father Persons, S. J.) and on the extent to which the events it records are corroborated. As will emerge, a number of historians have quoted from the "True Relation," some silently. But Professor J. E. Neale launched a set-piece attack on Southwell in 1925 ("Sayings" 230-32), and E. E. Reynolds, in his biography of Campion and Persons, claims that "Waugh's well-written short account [of Campion] is vitiated for the historian be-

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debgallagher02001.htm>>.

cause it opens by accepting as true a legend of Queen Elizabeth's last days for which there is no positive evidence" (ix).

Does Waugh use the "True Relation" as a source for his account of the dying Queen—or does he draw on historians who have quoted from it? And if he does quote Southwell, which incidents does he use, which does he reject, and how far does he tone down or 'improve' what he borrowed? Is the Southwell story mere 'legend'? But it is much more important to ask why Waugh began a biography of Edmund Campion, executed twenty-two years before Elizabeth's death, with a gruesome portrait of the dying Queen. And why he followed that portrait with a vision of the zestful young Elizabeth, fluent in Greek and Latin, visiting Oxford and meeting the brilliant young Campion, when, as Waugh says, "it had been in her hands to make [another England]" (6).

Before attempting to answer these questions, some discussion is needed of the features of the biography that might help explain Waugh's use of the "True Relation" and its function within the biography. These features comprise literary characteristics, the level of historical accuracy aimed at (with the attacks made on real and imagined inaccuracies), and the boldly tendentious Bellocian and Ultramontane viewpoints which contextualize the central narrative. Could it be that the contrasting portraits of a youthful and a dying Elizabeth are, not merely Lytton Strachey-ish drama, but also the opening salvo of a 'modern Catholic history' assault on the then established view of Reformation England?

It goes without saying that *Edmund Campion* is a distinguished biography.² Critics of all persuasions have noted the lucid, compelling narrative; the rapid cutting from scene to scene; the power to move (Elizabeth Pakenham experienced "the first [...] really strong emotional feeling from Catholicism" (122) on reading this book, and many others have had similar reactions). And of course, this was a new way to write hagiography: the saint is described in normal literary language as nonchalantly brave, witty and eloquent, a man attractive to those of his own faith and also worthy of "a high place in the gallery

of great Elizabethans" (Black 145). But the only literary aspect of the biography to which fuller attention can be drawn here is that most relevant to Waugh's use of Southwell: viz. the reliance on scenes that mingle fact with imagined detail.

A typical dramatic scene occurs when Campion is brought from the Tower to meet the Earls of Leicester and Bedford and the Queen (156-57). Richard Simpson's biography of Campion, Waugh's principal source, records various questions put to Campion by Leicester and Bedford and his answers; he then adds: "at the trial it came out that the Queen herself was present; that she asked Campion if he thought her really Queen of England? to which he replied, as he relates in his trial" (Simpson 338). Waugh, by contrast, makes Elizabeth the centre of attention. As Campion approaches the meeting, his guards "stiffen [...] they [are] in the presence of the Queen" (156). Elizabeth's "vast red wig nod[s]" as she interrogates Campion in "harsh, peremptory tones" as to whether he "acknowledge[d] her as his Queen or not" (157). The Queen's question comes directly from the transcript of the trial via Simpson (Simpson 338, 418-19); but the colourful details are Waugh's. Campion's answer to the Queen, which explains at great length the uncertainty of the Canon Law governing the Pope's power to excommunicate a monarch, also comes from the transcript; but the Queen's abrupt silencing of Campion is Waugh's. Thus the scene is based on fact but shaped for dramatic effect and coloured with vivid detail.

Marion Colthorpe dismisses this "confrontation between the Queen and the Jesuit" as "no more than a figment of the imaginations of Campion's biographers" (199); but her argument is not convincing. Professor Colthorpe refers to an instruction sent by the Council to the Commissioners interrogating Campion in the Tower to ask whether he acknowledged Elizabeth to be Queen; and she claims that Campion's words at his trial merely reflect the Council's question. But at the trial Campion makes three statements: (a) "it pleased her Majesty to demand of me whether I did acknowledge her to be my queen or no" (Simpson 418); (b) "being further required of her Majesty whether

I thought the Pope might lawfully excommunicate her" (Simpson 418); and (c) "the selfsame articles were required of me by the Commissioners" (Simpson 419; cf. Colthorpe 197-200). Thus, the Queen asked two questions and the Commissioners asked "the selfsame" questions.

As for historical accuracy, when E. E. Reynolds claims that *Edmund Campion* "is vitiated for the historian" because it makes use of the "True Relation," he is arguing, not only that the "True Relation" is "a legend [...] for which there is no positive evidence," (IX) but also that Waugh's history is generally unreliable. Many other critics have been equally condemning. Are they right?

Waugh repeatedly protested that *Edmund Campion* was a "short, popular life" with "no pretension to be a work of scholarship" (1st ed. x). He also highlights his reliance on secondary sources—"Simpson's strong foundation supports my structure" (2nd ed. viii)—indeed, he borrows extensively from his authorities: the account of the printing of Campion's *Decem Rationes* is a virtual reprint of John Hungerford Pollen's detective work into how the clandestine printers overcame shortages of type (136-37).³ Nevertheless, Waugh writes like a student of his subject. He attends to "the many particulars" in which later scholarship has "corrected Simpson" (2nd ed. vii); and he takes a very different line from Simpson on crucially important matters. He also acknowledges "a very full collection of [...] manuscript notes, copies of documents etc." put at his disposal by Father Leo Hicks, the Historiographer of the English Jesuit Province (1st ed. ix). "Notes" in the First and Second Editions expand evidence and a "List of Books Consulted" attests to solid reading in each aspect of Campion's career. Waugh may fairly be judged on whether or not he lives up to the expectations these practices create.

The first test of Waugh's history came immediately on publication of *Edmund Campion* when the Hon. Secretary of the United Protestant Council of Great Britain, J. A. Kensit, challenged Waugh's contention that Campion was innocent of the charges on which he was tried, insisting instead that he was "righteously executed under the laws"

(Kensit, Letter 221).⁴ To anticipate a common misunderstanding, the English government could have charged Campion under any one of the sections of the penal code that made it treason to “persuade [English subjects] from the religion now established” or “to move the said subjects [...] to promise obedience to the pretended authority of the Roman See” (Simpson 393-94). On any such charge Campion might plausibly have been found guilty (although in strict legality his mission was restricted to existing Catholics). Instead, the Council—to avoid the odium of persecuting “differences in point of conscience” and to stigmatize the priests as hateful enemies of England—charged Campion and fourteen others, many of whom had never met, with “conspiring [...] to depose and kill the Queen [and] to call in foreign enemies” (National Archives).⁵

The burden of Kensit’s argument was that “recently discovered” letters between the Papal Nuncio to Spain, Bishop Sega, and the Pope’s Secretary of State, Cardinal Como, proved that in February 1580, two months before Fathers Campion, S.J. and Persons, S.J. set off from Rome for England, Pope Gregory XIII, the Duke of Florence and the King of Spain had signed a treaty to invade England in collaboration with rebellious English Catholics and the Jesuits: consequently, Campion was guilty of treason, and Waugh was negligent, or worse, for failing to mention the incriminating letters. Bishop Sega wrote to Cardinal Como:

Among other things Humphrey Ely tells me, one is a great secret of some Island noblemen and of the Jesuit Fathers themselves. It was that the said nobles are determined to try to kill the Queen with their own hands if they are assured, at least verbally, by His Holiness that in so doing they would not fall into sin.

Cardinal Como replied on behalf of the Pope:

And so if those English nobles decide actually to undertake so glorious a work, your lordship can assure them that they do not commit any sin. (qtd. in MacCarthy 222)

On the basis of these passages Kensit unwisely stated, as fact, that “Pope Gregory XIII gave sanction to the plot against Elizabeth by the

Jesuits Persons and Campion" (Letter 221). Clearly, the Sega letter does not name Campion and Persons, and the Como letter does not mention Jesuits. It is therefore a considerable stretch to convict the two men of being plotters for no better reason than that, before they left for England, a treaty against England had allegedly been concluded by the Pope, Florence and Spain, some "Island noblemen" and "the Jesuit Fathers." Kensit quite failed to connect the two men to the alleged plot, and Father Leo Hicks, S. J., echoing earlier scholars, produced evidence that the purported treaty was a forgery of the English Secret Service (Letter 4 March 1936).⁶

To Kensit's charge that he had negligently failed to take into account the Como-Sega correspondence, Waugh replied that he "knew all about" it but "did not mention it because it seemed [...] irrelevant to the subject about which [he] was writing" (Letter). That Waugh knew the correspondence seems certain, for Arnold Oskar Meyer discusses it fully in *England and the Catholic Church under Queen Elizabeth* (151-53), a work on which Waugh heavily relied. Moreover, the substance of the letter had been known since 1895 and had been published in the *The Month* in 1902 (Meyer 270). Waugh's mentor, Father Hicks, also possessed "a correct copy" of the letters (Letter).⁷ As for substance, Waugh several times discusses rumoured Papal-Spanish invasions and the moral dilemmas they created for English Catholics (112), especially for those facing interrogation (177-78, 185, 196). And he twice directly mentions an alleged Pope-Florence-Spain treaty (196, 185).

This writer is not competent to judge Waugh's conclusion that Campion was innocent as charged but relies on the opinion of standard historians. Hallam stated in 1854: "[T]he prosecution was as unfairly conducted, and supported by as slender evidence, as any perhaps that can be found in our books" (1: 143).⁸ Meyer, the Lutheran authority referred to above, explains that "the injustice of the charge is now universally admitted." He asserts that "the endeavour to prove the plot failed completely, and was bound to fail because there was no plot." He labels many of the executions of priests "judicial murders"

(Meyer 151-53). J. B. Black, another non-Catholic historian, argues that “Campion spoke the simple truth [...] when [...] he disclaimed all participation in politics” (146). Conyers Read avers: “Although there was ample evidence to suggest plots were being hatched against the Crown, no sound evidence was produced to show that Campion had been a party to them. Under the terms of this indictment he should have been acquitted” (Read 250). Professor J. E. Neale—who astutely likens the conflict between Protestant and Catholic blocs to the recent Cold War—writes: “Holy and peaceable these men doubtless were [...] None the less their activities must be reckoned a stratagem of ideological warfare” (*Parliaments* 14). While professional historians confirm Campion’s innocence, there are still those who feel that Waugh arrives at that verdict by fudging the evidence.⁹

In 1946 Rose Macaulay, a notable critic, disparaged *Edmund Campion* both in broad terms—lack of “objectiveness and truth to fact” (368)—and in detail. Macaulay was demonstrably wrong, as discussion of three specific charges will show, but nevertheless has been widely influential. **Macaulay:** “Waugh shows no signs throughout his book [...] of familiarity with the unceasing plots [...] that went on” (368). **Fact:** *Edmund Campion* makes frequent reference to Catholic plots, “many of them real enough [...] some the inventions of forgers and informers” (5). More to the point, one of Waugh’s central themes is that, in a desperate community where conspiracy was rife, Campion rejected conspiracy and chose instead “the way of sacrifice.” Catholics had three choices: “apostasy,” “conspiracy” or a “supernatural solution [to follow] holiness though it led them through bitter ways to poverty, disgrace, exile, imprisonment and death” (105). For Waugh to revere Campion because, surrounded by plots, he embraced the “supernatural solution” does not mean that he denied the prevalence of plots. **Macaulay:** Waugh did not know that “English Catholics were absolved from their allegiance [to the Queen] [...] by a [Papal] Bull” (368). **Fact:** Since the Council used *Regnans in Excelsis* as an excuse drastically to tighten the penal laws, and made it the basis of the “bloody question” put to Catholics—whether in the event of invasion

by a Catholic power they would be loyal to their sovereign or go over to the invaders—it would have been damning indeed if Waugh had not known it. In fact, he devotes four pages to its publication by Pius V in 1570 (39-42) and three pages to its re-interpretation under Gregory XIII in 1580 (80-82) and makes briefer references to it throughout the book. **Macaulay:** Waugh "calls [the Anglican Church] 'crazy, fashionable Calvinism' [...] and relegates it to the outer darkness of the Protestant left wing" (369). **Fact:** Waugh continually refers to Protestant "extremists," for whom Elizabeth and Cecil "had no more taste [...] than they had for the Catholics" (16); and he several times details Elizabeth's "personal inclinations [...] towards [...] cross and candles [...] ministers celibate [...] and suitably vested" (16), "inclinations" anathema to the "Protestant left wing," which suffered cruelly for resisting the surplice.

Thus Macaulay twice accuses Waugh of suppressing information embarrassing to his 'side,' viz. about Catholic conspiracy and the Bull releasing the English from their allegiance, when in fact he discusses both matters at length. In the third instance Macaulay reverses Waugh's clear meaning, claiming that he identifies Anglicanism with "the Protestant left wing," although Waugh regularly distinguishes between Anglicanism and Protestant "extremism." Thus Macaulay's claims that *Edmund Campion* lacks "objectivity," "truth" and "accuracy" (369-70) are contradicted by what Waugh actually wrote. But even Waughists, who typically do not pay close attention to *Campion* or to the history of the period, repeat Macaulay as authoritative. Malcolm Bradbury writes: "Rose Macaulay is right to say that [Waugh] seriously underestimates the atmosphere of conspiracy in Catholic quarters in the Elizabethan period" (23). She is *not* right.

Fortunately, scholarly reviewers of the biography on its first appearance, though combative, were fair (McCoog xiv).¹⁰ *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer, who wrote as a Protestant and corrected several real mistakes, allowed Waugh to be "pretty well read in the proper authorities, better versed than most writers on the period in its religious dialectic." And Father Chadwick, S. J., who also exposed

errors, wrote: "[*Edmund Campion*] holds a wealth of sifted learning" (332).

The religious history in *Edmund Campion*, however, is idiosyncratically pro-Papal and Ultramontane. The "Author's Note" to the first edition remarks that "Simpson's admirable *Life* [contains] Cis-Alpine [anti-Papal] pleading which [...] may well prove tedious to modern readers" (ix-x), a surprising difference because in some respects young Evelyn Waugh was Simpson's twin. Cardinal Newman describes Simpson as "always flicking his whip at Bishops and discharging pea-shooters at Cardinals who happen by bad luck to look out of the window." Moreover, "to the despair of his friends," Simpson had a "talent for seeing the comic side of serious problems."¹¹ In the 1930s Waugh also affronted Church authorities by criticizing Church opposition to divorce laws reform¹² and by publishing what they deemed 'immoral' novels. When *The Tablet* (then owned by Cardinal Bourne) savaged *Black Mischief*, Waugh printed (but did not sell) an "Open Letter" rejecting the criticism. He was also willing to shock the pious, as when he reveals that Father Robert Persons, S.J. was reputed to be the son of his parish priest (1st ed. 83) and that Saint Pius V ordered a "drove of harlots" to be "massacred by bandits on the Campagna" (60). But Waugh and Simpson differed spectacularly about Papal policy towards England.

Simpson blames the Popes and Cardinal William Allen, the leader of the large body of English Catholic exiles on the Continent, for the near extinction of English Catholicism. The Papacy's treaties with various states to invade England, its meddling in Ireland and even its despatching waves of young priests—including "a sort of hypocrites, naming themselves Jesuits" (Neale, *Parliaments* 383)—stirred the Government into extreme measures against Catholics. Simpson damns both the Papacy and England for "passions" that left no room "for moderate counsels" (83).

The Papal Bull of 1570, which excommunicated Elizabeth and released her Catholic subjects from "obedience to her laws and commands," seems to Simpson the primary cause of "the sanguinary code

which [...] nearly effaced the Catholic Church from this island." And he argues that the Popes had "sacrificed the Catholics of this country to their desire of maintaining [...] all the temporal prerogatives exercised or claimed by their predecessors" (Simpson 88). Blinded by "the English exiles in Rome" to the true situation in England (how similar the Catholic exiles seem to the émigrés who encouraged an American invasion of Iraq), "ignorant of the teachings of history, and forgetful of the principles which the Canon Law lays down [...] for the excommunication of mighty delinquents," the Popes "[lost] England to the faith" (Simpson 90).

In sharp contrast to Simpson, Waugh justifies the Bull of 1570. Of course he admits the force of the criticisms made of it by statesmen and historians: "That is the verdict of sober criticism, both Catholic and Protestant" (41). But for Waugh, Pius V is not the "disastrous figure" of most historians. Rather he is an object of "pride and slight embarrassment [...] a saint" (39), and he issues the Papal Bull for reasons beyond the reach of "sober criticism":

had he, perhaps [...] learned something that was hidden from the statesmen of his time and the succeeding generations of historians; seen through and beyond the present and the immediate future; understood that there was to be no easy way of reconciliation, but that it was only through blood and hatred and derision that the faith was one day to return to England? (42)

Thus, where Simpson construes Pius V as a counter-productive enforcer of Papal prerogative, Waugh portrays him as a far-sighted visionary. Where Simpson laments that Campion's sacrifices were wasted defending an anachronism, Waugh sees the "blood and hatred and derision" embraced by Campion as the "only" way "the faith might one day return to England." Unimpressed by the Jesuit General, Aquaviva, who questioned the wisdom of sending missionaries to England "in order to give edification by their patience under torture," Waugh embraces Cardinal Allen, who "knew that the devotion of his seminarists, so gallantly squandered [...] in a few weeks of ministry, was of more value than a lifetime of discreet industry" (52).

This endorsement of *Regnans in Excelsis* and of Cardinal Allen foreshadows Waugh's tacit approval of the message from the Pope that Fathers Robert Persons and Edmund Campion, S.J. carried to the clergy gathered at Southwark (108-12). The message was devastating: Catholic attendance at Church of England services was now "the highest iniquity" because it implied assent to "the spiritual supremacy of the State" (109). Thus ended twenty years of eerie silence on the part of the Papacy, and of ingenious Catholic adaptation to the penal code, under which mere physical presence at Morning Service gave immunity from prosecution. Some Catholics had taken care to be recorded as present at the service before going to Mass, or resorted to one of the more complex shifts that Waugh describes (23). Now, after Southwark, subterfuge was impossible: only massive fines, prison and a traitor's death awaited those who remained faithful. Some see the Jesuits as "shock troops" sent to draw clear battle lines between Catholic and Protestant (Knox 137). Waugh implies as much by eulogizing the "uncompromising zeal of the counter-Reformation" they embodied (121).

The Jesuits were "men of new light, equipped in every Continental art [...] bringing a new kind of intellect, new knowledge, new holiness" to a world "tremulous with expectation" (121); and, "they came among a people where hope was dead" with "the chivalry of Lepanto and the poetry of La Mancha, light, tender, generous and ardent" (105). But this well warranted praise distracts attention from differences between the Jesuits and the existing clergy, many of whom still hoped to reach a *modus vivendi* with the Government. "At this early date," writes Waugh, "these seculars [at Southwark] had no quarrel with the Fathers of the Society. The Jesuits, fresh from Rome [...] were as welcome to them as to their flocks [...]" (125). In reality, some seculars at Southwark asked the Jesuits to leave England, for "upon [their] entrance [...] many proclamations were read in every province against them, and many gentlemen [...] suspected to be Catholics were [...] committed to prison upon pretence that they had the doing with Jesuits" (qtd. in McCoog xxiv). Later, the secular priests peti-

tioned Rome for a bishop so that they "might [...] be more widely separated from these men," whom they blamed for making them "objects of suspicion to the queen" (Lingard 8: 390-93). Waugh patronizes the "Marian priests" (those working before the reign of Elizabeth) as "simple, unambitious figure[s] pottering about the parish" (121) and fails to give credit to those of them whose refusal to conform kept the Church alive:

They were comparatively few [...] but dauntless in their determination to preserve at least a remnant of the Church. Without their labours, Catholicism would have died out in England as it did in the Scandinavian countries. (Reynolds 12)

Waugh's focus on his Jesuit hero was structurally essential in a short gripping book. But it also reflects an identification with Roman, as opposed to English Catholic, interests.

Waugh's Ultramontaniam merges seamlessly into the 'modern Catholic history' he also espoused, and these two tendencies best explain Waugh's use of the "True Relation." For many years scholars such as John Lingard, Cardinal Gasquet, Father John H. Pollen, S. J., and the members of the Catholic Record Society had been trying to correct the idealized picture of the Elizabethan period that dominated English history writing and the public mind: viz. Gloriana reigning in dazzling (and sometimes attractively earthy) majesty over an exciting new age of national unity, bold discovery, economic advance, literary brilliance and naval victory; an age of religious Reformation in which a willing people threw off the tyranny of Rome—"the most intolerable the world has ever seen" (Froude 5). Waugh's immediate mentor was Father Leo Hicks, S. J., who was eminent in the history profession¹³ and a trenchant critic of the received version of the Elizabethan period. In "Wanted: A New and True History of Queen Elizabeth," Father Hicks declares the history of the period "buried deep in many layers of falsehood." He also sets out several areas in which "knowledge [of the period] was deficient": e.g. (1) the Elizabethan government's aim "from the start" to extirpate the Old Faith; (2) the savage

repression it employed to that end; and (3) the aims of “crafty subordinates” who “duped” the Queen. *Edmund Campion* seeks, in part, to peel back the “layers of falsehood” and supply the areas of knowledge that Hicks identified. For example, Hicks sought to demolish the myth that Elizabeth’s treatment of Catholics was unusually enlightened; Waugh explains the severity of her penal laws, in detail (99-105).

Alan Gordon Smith, on whom Waugh heavily depends,¹⁴ describes the English Reformation as a “revolution” engineered by William Cecil (Lord Burghley), who “served and controlled the Queen” and imposed a “national conversion on a reluctant people” (Smith ix-xi). *Edmund Campion* follows Smith in attributing all major decisions about religion, not to the people, but to the “revolutionaries.” Cecil staffs the new church, not with the “fanatical Puritans” who were “later to wreck the monarchy,” but with “sober, decently educated men [...] who could see where their advantage lay (16-17). Cecil decides that in the event of war “the Catholics constituted a grave menace” (27). Cecil finds the Bull deposing Elizabeth “opportune” to work up anti-Catholic feeling and he compels Elizabeth to agree to “his imposition of the Thirty-nine Articles” (42). And it is Cecil who “with tact and patience” persuades Elizabeth to execute Mary Queen of Scots (95). This estimate of Cecil closely accords with that of Father Hicks. Most professional historians would not use the same language; but, while allowing that the English Reformation “owed something to the spiritual needs of the people,” they insist that it originated “in a political revolution,” a fact that “only the wilfully blind would deny” (Elton 80-81). It was an “an act of State” (Powicke 1).¹⁵

Hilaire Belloc was the most prolific and polemical Catholic historian of the 1930s, and *Edmund Campion* subsumes the three key elements of so-called “Bellocianism.” According to Belloc, the Roman Empire and the Christian religion, both Mediterranean, created Europe. It followed that the major informing elements in English life from the fourth to the sixteenth century were Roman and Norman. This belief emerges in *Edmund Campion* in Waugh’s enthusiasm for the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation, both essentially Latin; and in his

lament that the English Reformation had "canalized the vast exuberance of the Renaissance," the source of her potential development (5). Twenty years later Waugh spelled out his meaning in a way best calculated to provoke outrage: "It may seem to us now that for the fullest development of our national genius we required a third conquest, by Philip of Spain" (Foreword vii). Regret at the Spanish Armada's failure to conquer England seemed so out of touch with reality that readers passed it off as "bizarre" (Quennell). And far from believing that Spain (identified with the Inquisition and the Conquistadors) would have brought progress like that inspired by Rome in 54 BC and the Norman Conquest of 1066, they assumed that a Spanish Catholic victory meant regress—as in Keith Roberts's *Pavane*.¹⁶ But "bizarre" opinions aside, *Edmund Campion* expresses a deeply held belief that England would have developed better if she had been closer to the Renaissance and part of the Counter-Reformation.

In a famously sour summary of modern English history Waugh presents the new nation state created under the Tudor dynasty, not as the birth of an empire that will bring industry, capital, civilization and freedom to the world, but as the beginning of a culturally and spiritually limited—an "insular"—England:

In three generations [the Tudor dynasty] had changed the aspect and temper of England. They left a new aristocracy, a new religion, a new system of government; the generation was already in its childhood that was to send King Charles to the scaffold; the new, rich families who were to introduce the House of Hanover were already in the second stage of their metamorphosis from the freebooters of Edward VI's reign to the conspirators of 1688 and the sceptical, cultured oligarchs of the eighteenth century. The vast exuberance of the Renaissance had been canalized. England was secure, independent, insular; the course of her history lay plain ahead; competitive nationalism, competitive industrialism, competitive imperialism, the looms and coal mines and counting houses, the joint-stock companies and the cantonments; the power and weakness of great possessions. (5)

Waugh's emphasis on the "new aristocracy," "new religion" and "new system of government" of course reflects Hicks, Belloc and Smith's contention that the Reformers had severed links with the past:

they had imposed an unpopular novel religion and social system. But the paradoxical label of “insular” clearly derives from Father David Mathew’s *The Celtic Peoples and Renaissance Europe*. Mathew argues that England’s “national consciousness, so much increased [under the Tudors], gave a definitely insular impress to all parts of [the new modern state].” He also argued that the religious changes had made “the English Channel a spiritual barrier” matching “the insular tone of trade conditions” (459). The “politics of the country” would be shaped by “the ideal of a purely national unity,” a nationalism eclipsing the “ancient spiritual unity [...] of an united Christendom” (459).

In short, *Edmund Campion* endorses Papal policy towards England, the excommunication of Elizabeth, the Jesuit mission and the prohibition of Catholics attending Anglican services. It also embraces Catholic revisionist attacks on conventional Tudor history. To an Ultramontanist Bellocian wishing to demythologize the Elizabethan Age, Southwell’s unflattering depiction of Gloriana’s last days must have appeared irresistible. But is Southwell’s story fact or fiction?

First, it must be said that many of the graphic details in the portrait are not exclusive to Southwell but are found in the standard authorities. Even J. E. Neale, who savaged the “True Relation,” describes the dying Elizabeth’s “deep-rooted melancholy,” her refusal “to take physic [and] to eat,” her sitting “pensive and silent [...] miserable and forlorn.” She was “tired of life [and] wanted to die” because she knew that her reign was over and her closest confidants were already “worshipping the rising sun” (Neale, *Queen Elizabeth* 385-90). A relative of the Queen who was present, Robert Carey—famous for remarking that “there have been many false lies reported of the end [...] of that good lady” (60, ll. 1537-38)—confirms that Elizabeth “grew worse and worse, because she would be so” (59, ll. 1499-1500). Thus, in regard to Elizabeth’s melancholy, her sitting on the floor silent and despairing, obstinately refusing to eat or to go to bed or to take physic, the Southwell-Waugh account is fully corroborated.

Again, Waugh is not the only historian-biographer to cite the “True Relation.” So, too, do historians such as John Lingard, *A History of*

England (1847); Edward Spenser Beesly, *Queen Elizabeth* (1892); Lytton Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), and Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great* (1958). Each of these diverse historians (and no doubt many more) makes selective use of Southwell. I shall therefore set out the main elements of the "True Relation," noting any contemporary corroboration, and ask how Waugh's use compares with that of the four historians.

Lady (or Mistress) Elizabeth Southwell's "A True Relation of what succeeded at the Sickness and Death of Queen Elizabeth" is about 1200 words long (Loomis 484-87). Southwell's credentials as a witness are strong. Aged seventeen, she was at Court as a maid of honour while the Queen lay dying (no one disputes this). More important, her mother was Lady of the Bedchamber while her grandfather was Lord Admiral Howard, who ministered closely to the Queen throughout her illness. Southwell could have learned much of what she relates directly or indirectly from them. On the other side of the ledger, the "True Relation" is dated 1607, four years after the Queen died; and it was written for Father Robert Persons, S. J., an enemy of the Queen. Again, by the time she came to write the "True Relation," Southwell, a renowned beauty, had eloped to Italy with Robert Dudley, who had a wife and five children. Both had become Catholics and married. Suspicions of bias therefore arise.

The gist of the "True Relation," with comments on each item, follows:

1. Gold Talisman. *Early in March 1603, Elizabeth was in "verie good health." But "Cecil's [...] familiar" presented her with a an engraved piece of gold, allegedly bequeathed by an old woman who lived to 120 years, claiming, ambiguously, that as long as "she" wore it, the Queen could not die. But in fifteen days the Queen "fell down right sick" (ll. 1-16).*

Waugh mentions the "piece of gold," the promise "that as long as [Elizabeth] wore [it] she could not die" and Elizabeth's belief that she had "no need yet for doctors, lawyers, statesmen or clergy" (3). The other historians ignore the "piece of gold."

2. Vision of "bodie in fire." *The Queen told Lady Philadelphia Scrope, her "neare kinswoman," that "she saw one night in her bed her bodie exceeding leane and fearfull in a light of fire" (ll. 18-21).*

Waugh mentions this vision as "a cause of [the Queen's] melancholy," whereas seventeenth-century readers would have seen it as a premonition of Hell. Lingard refers to the Queen's "alarm [at] the frightful phantasms conjured up by her imagination" (396). The other historians ignore the vision.

3. "True Loking Glass." *The Queen asked for a "true loking glass" instead of the one that had "the purpos to deceive her sight." She rails against her flatterers (ll. 22-24).*

Waugh re-tells this story in full. The other historians ignore it. But the first part is corroborated by John Clapham (a contemporary diarist) and Bishop Godfrey Goodman, both of whom had sources at court. Neither records Elizabeth's fury (Loomis 489).

4. Hallucinations. *"[M]y lord Admirall [Howard]" persuaded [Elizabeth] to take some broth, but he could not induce her to go to bed because "yf he knew what she had sene in her bed he would not perswade her as he did" (ll. 31-34).*

Waugh records the broth and the refusal to go to bed but improves the Queen's words: "If you were in the habit of seeing such things in your bed as I do in mine you would not persuade me to go there" (4). Lingard has the Queen "obstinately refusing to return to her bed" and replying to Lord Howard in words very close to Southwell's (396).

5. "Spirits." *Apropos the previous conversation, "Secretarie Cecill [...] asked yf her majestie had seen anie spirits. to which she saie she scorned to answer him to so ydle a question" (ll. 35-37).*

Waugh and three historians ignore this episode, but Lingard records it in full (396).

6. "The word must was not to be used to princes." *"Then [Cecil] told her how to content the people her majestie must go to bed: To which she smiled wonderfully contemning him saing the word must was not be used to princes [...] little man. little man [Cecil was short and hunchback; the Queen called him 'Pygmy'] yf your father had lived ye durst not have said*

so much: but thou knowest I must die and that maketh thee so presumptuous" (ll. 37-42).

Waugh does not refer to this, by far the most famous passage in the "True Relation." It is repeated in full by Lingard (396-97), Beesly (ch. 12), Jenkins (323), and Strachey (279). A variant occurs in the diarist, John Manningham, who says of the Queen's refusal to "accept physic" that "shee would not be persuaded, and princes must not be forced" (qtd. in Loomis 490). Neale repeats Manningham (Neale, *Elizabeth* 390).

7. "I am tied with a chaine of yron about my neck." "[W]illing my lord admirall [Howard] to staie [the Queen] with a pitifull voice said my lord I am tied with a chaine of yron about my neck. [H]e allaging her wonted courage to her, she replied I am tied and the case is altered with me" (ll. 43-47).

Waugh repeats Southwell, as do Jenkins (323), Beesly (ch. 12) and Lingard (397). This incident fits Waugh's thesis that the Queen had violated her coronation oath to uphold the Catholic Church (ch. 1n9, 1st and 2nd editions), a situation from which she now could find no release.

8. Witchcraft and ghosts. "[T]ow Ladies waiting on [the Queen] discovered in the bottom of her chaire the queene of harts with a nail [...] knockt through the forehead [...] the ladie [...] then wayting on the queene and leaving her asleep [...] met her [...] 3 or 4 chambers off [...] came towards her to excuse herself and she vanished away [...]" (ll. 47-57).

Only Lytton Strachey reports this incident: it reflects "an atmosphere of hysterical nightmare [that] descended on the Court" before the passing of the Queen (Strachey 278).

9. Elizabeth "rates" the Archbishop. "Councell sent to her the bishop of Canterburie and other of her prelates. upon sight of whom she was much offended // cholericklie rating them bidding them be packing. saing she was no atheist, but knew full well that they were [...] hedge priests and tok yt for an yndignitie that they should speak to her" (ll. 62-66).

This incident, if true, would imply that Elizabeth lacked confidence in the Church she founded—which chimes with Waugh's hints that

Elizabeth, personally, would have preferred England to remain Catholic. Beesly judges that the passage “betrays a Catholic bias, which may cast some doubt on [Southwell’s] testimony” (ch. 12).

10. Succession. *The Council came to ask “whom she would have king.” Unable to speak because of an infected throat, the Queen was to hold up a finger as names were offered. At “the K of france the K of Scotland [...] she never stirred” but at “my lord Beaucham” she said: “I will have no raskalls son in my seat [...] Hereupon ynstantlie she died” (ll. 71-77).*

Waugh merely says that the Queen “had done nothing to recognize her successor” (3). But Lingard places more weight on the testimony of “the young faire Mrs Southwell”—who says that the Queen did not stir at “the K of Scotland”—than on the “report circulated by [...] partisans” that the Queen made a “favourable answer” to “the king of Scots.” “Beaucham” had a claim to the throne because he was descended from a “furtive marriage between lord Hertford and the lady Catherine Grey,” sister of Henry VIII (Lingard 396-97). Beesly repeats Southwell in full. Most witnesses say that the Queen did not die “ynstantlie,” as Southwell says, but some hours later.

11. Bursting Corpse. *The most controversial passage in the “True Relation” claims that, in defiance of Elizabeth’s wishes, but on the secret order of Cecil, the Queen was embalmed. But that, in spite of the precaution, while lying in state the Queen’s head and body burst open (ll. 80-89).*

Neither Waugh nor the other historians mentions this episode.

In 1925 J. E. Neale, as mentioned above, made the truth of the bursting head and body story critical to the truth of the whole document. The gist of his argument was that an incident as sensational as this could not have been kept secret; but no other contemporary observer recorded it; therefore it did not happen, and the whole “True Relation” must consequently be “scorned as worthless” (Neale, “Sayings” 231).

Catherine Loomis challenges this sweeping dismissal. She points to two incidents related by Southwell (Numbers 3 and 6 above) that are independently corroborated (488-93). Loomis also balances Southwell’s assumed Catholic bias against the equally probable Protestant

bias of the contemporaries who differ from her (509); and she sets against the fact that Southwell wrote in 1607, four years after the Queen's death, the fact that some other well reputed accounts appeared much later: Carey's *Memoir*, judged credible by Neale, was written between 1626 and 1632, at least twenty-two years after the Queen died (Loomis 482). Loomis concludes: "it is clear that Neale's arguments are not a sufficient basis for rejecting Southwell's manuscript" outright (508). And she goes on to argue that "there is a sufficient basis for treating [it] [...] as a subjective account with biases that should be noted when the manuscript is cited" (Loomis 509).

The upshot of the above analysis and of Loomis's commentary is that Southwell's "True Relation" is sufficiently credible to be used selectively and with caution. That Waugh was cautious is evident from the fact that he repeats only six of Southwell's less sensational incidents, two allusions being very brief indeed. He also tones down some incidents: for Southwell, the "gold piece" is a ploy by Cecil to kill the Queen; for Waugh, it is a talisman that convinces Elizabeth that she has no need, yet, of doctor or clergyman. Moreover, a scholar as notable as Lingard—a pioneer of "scientific history" who was criticized by other Catholic historians for being too kind to Elizabeth¹⁷—quotes Southwell more freely than does Waugh. In short, it is reasonable to argue that Waugh's use of Southwell does not "vitate [*Edmund Campion*] for the historian" (Reynolds ix).

As for Waugh's dropping all reference to "Lady Southwell's letter," one can only surmise that, having become aware of hostile criticism, he decided to distance his book from it. But if that is the case he acted incorrectly, because as long as the events quoted remained in the text, he was obliged to identify their source. The fact that the source was controversial made the obligation even more pressing.

And finally it is possible to return to the questions with which this essay began: Why did Waugh introduce a biography of a Jesuit martyr, executed twenty-two years before Elizabeth's death, with a gruesome portrait of her last days? And why did he follow that portrait

with a vision of the brilliant young monarch visiting Oxford, when she still “had it in her hands to make [another England]” (6)?

In purely literary terms, the startling scene based on Southwell that opens *Edmund Campion* promises a frank, modern biography in the Lytton Strachey mode. The spare and compelling narrative, the dramatic scenes coloured with imagined speech and detail, lead swiftly towards Campion’s execution. In marked contrast to the febrile and embittered Queen, Campion dies as a man of blindingly clear faith and glowing eloquence, the epitome of early-Jesuit élan; he is fearless and full of charity. Contrary to a perception that *Edmund Campion* is “well-written” (Reynolds IX) (meaning otherwise negligible), scholars agree that the account of Campion’s life and career is reliable and as comprehensive as was possible within a short book. Father Thomas McCoog’s excellent recent collection, *The Reckoned Expense*, explores much more deeply than could Waugh Campion’s activities within the places and institutions in which he worked. But, while greatly extending knowledge, it casts no serious doubt on Waugh’s narrative.

The religious stance of *Edmund Campion* is Ultramontane, but idiosyncratically so. The widely condemned Bull excommunicating Elizabeth and the English mission, which sent waves of young priests to almost certain torture and death, are not defended in political terms. Instead, Waugh invokes a semi-mystical conviction that the survival of English Catholicism depended on “sacrifice” (105), on “blood and hatred and derision” (42)—an insight he believes he shares with Pius V and Cardinal Allen. In all this, Waugh differs markedly from Richard Simpson, who believed that the heroism and holiness of the missionaries was wasted in an attempt to perpetuate the purely temporal powers of the Papacy. Some have asked whether the sacrifice of the missionaries did anything to slow the advance of Protestantism. But the strangely emotive power of *Edmund Campion* arises from Waugh’s total identification with the missionaries and his vibrant faith in the efficacy of martyrdom.

In 1935 deep divisions about English history still existed between Protestants and conventional historians on one side and Roman

Catholics on the other. It was then unimaginable that by the end of the century objective analyses of the transition from Catholic to Protestant England would be favourably reviewed in the mainstream press, and even Bloody Mary reassessed.¹⁸ A biography of a "seditious Jesuit" executed for treason was then certain to arouse partisan feeling. Predictably Waugh was attacked for allegedly concealing damning evidence against Campion and for bias that supposedly led him to exclude any information harmful to the Catholic case. On examination, these attacks prove to be not only false but baseless; but they have helped create an impression, still alive today, that *Edmund Campion* is inferior history. I prefer the view of the severe, scholarly Protestant reviewer who castigated several genuine mistakes but nevertheless acknowledged Waugh to be "well read in the proper authorities, better versed than most writers on the period in its religious dialectic" (*TLS* 3 Oct. 1935: 606).

But *Edmund Campion* is also wilfully revisionist. Conventionally minded reviewers naturally, therefore, accused Waugh of "repeating too facilely the modern Catholic account of [the effect of the] Reformation upon English society and culture" (*Listener* 13 Nov. 1935). Catholics, however, welcomed *Edmund Campion* for the "further knowledge of the Elizabethan era" it contributed, and for the "blow" it struck "to the toppling myth" of the Elizabethan Age that "has so shamelessly possessed our text books" ("Short Notices"). The sharply etched picture of a wilful, obstinate Queen, racked by hallucinations, misery and despair that opens *Edmund Campion* is a dramatic prelude to the paradoxical perspectives that the biography presents: a righteous Pope; a "perjured" Queen who broke her Coronation Oath to uphold the Catholic Church¹⁹; an England rightfully Catholic; and a Tudor dynasty that set England on an economically and imperially dominant, but wrong, course. By contrast, the vision of the radiant young Queen visiting Oxford is full of promise. The distance between the portraits of the youthful and the dying Queen—so "economically drawn, so full of repressed emotion" (Martindale)—suggests how far

Elizabeth, and by extension England, has strayed during her reign. There was a better way to take, and England did not take it.

Ironically, Waugh seems to have fallen out of love with the 'modern Catholic history' embodied in *Edmund Campion*. He had never employed the "Elizabeth-Jezebel" rhetoric indulged in by contemporaries like Christopher Hollis. And in 1937, when reviewing *Thomas Platter's Travels in England*, a 1599 travelogue, he expressed doubt about the view put forward by Belloc, Strachey and the "Left Wing boys"—the view he had subsumed into his biography:

the old Queen, obscene, unprincipled and superstitious; a cut-throat court [...] an intelligentsia shrouded in the black despairs of Webster; a cranky and jealous bourgeoisie preparing the overthrow of the monarchy; a dispossessed and oppressed peasantry helpless under the upstart landowners [...].

Waugh sees "more truth" in the revisionists than in the "unscrupulous liberal historians of the Kingsley-Froude school" that still held sway in the public mind and in the text books. He agrees that the Belloc-Strachey-Left Wing view had "needed emphasizing"; but by 1937 "the time has come for more sober reflection," and he finds that Thomas Platter "makes one question the bases of one's assumptions" ("A Teuton"). All this amounts to a partial retraction of the history enshrined in *Edmund Campion* and suggests that Waugh, having modified his assumptions, hoped that in more eirenic times the biography would be read as a non-polemical "perfectly true story of heroism and holiness" (2nd ed. viii).

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NOTES

¹Five editions of *Edmund Campion* appeared in Waugh's lifetime: **First Edition:** Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, 1935), contains Chapter Notes and a List of Works Consulted; **American Edition:** *Edmund Campion* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1946), no Notes or List of Works Consulted;

Second [British] **Edition:** *Edmund Campion* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1947), contains Notes and List of Works Consulted; **Penguin:** *Edmund Campion* (London: Penguin, 1953), no Notes but contains List of Works Consulted; **Third Edition:** *Edmund Campion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1961), no Notes or List of Works Consulted. NB: Waugh made textual changes to each new edition, which will be discussed in a forthcoming article. References will be made parenthetically to the Third Edition unless otherwise specified.

²A very good statement of the "traditional" view of *Edmund Campion* is found in Patey. A less sanguine view appears in Bossy who turns Campion's nonchalance in the face of danger into "heroics" linked to "self-glorification" (155-56); his glowing rhetoric into "a way of turning a mission into a melodrama" (141).

³Pollen gives a detailed technical explanation of how the difficulties involved in printing *Rationes Decem* with the limited type available were solved (14-15), which Waugh follows very closely (136-37). Waugh refers to this book as *Decem Rationes*.

⁴Kensit was responding to Desmond MacCarthy who had reviewed *Edmund Campion* on the BBC. Waugh and Leo Hicks, S.J. entered the controversy. The whole exchange was reprinted as a pamphlet: *The Campion-Parsons Invasion Plot*, ed. J. A. Kensit.

⁵National Archives, Coram Rege Roll KB 27/1279.2

⁶See also J. H. Pollen, "The Fictitious Papal League" (xxvi).

⁷"[S]ix or seven weeks ago I personally inspected the copy of Sega's despatch [at the Public Record Office] though I had a correct copy myself."

⁸Hallam's vivid description of the way in which state trials were conducted at this time—judges who acted like prosecutors, violent haranguing of the accused, the rarity of not-guilty verdicts in treason trials—makes pertinent reading.

⁹An incredulous Professor of History, Catholic in origin, flatly refused to believe this writer's assertion that Meyer, Black, Conyers Read and Neale declared Campion innocent. Until he had read the passages, he insisted I must have misunderstood them.

¹⁰Without specifying errors, Father McCoog writes: "Although [Waugh] received assistance from Father Leo Hicks, S. J., there are still a number of irritating historical errors [in *Edmund Campion*]."

¹¹Qtd. in McElrath 150-63.

¹²Cf. "Home Life is So Dull" and "Tell the Truth about Marriage," *Essays, Articles and Reviews* 94-96.

¹³Black twice describes Hicks's work as "admirable" (*Reign of Elizabeth* 179 and 503).

¹⁴Waugh was dependent to the point of silent quotations: **Smith** 191: "Elizabeth was enraptured [by her French suitor the Duke of Anjou]. She patted and fondled him in the sight of all, addressed him endearingly as 'her little frog.'" **Waugh** 99: "She was enchanted with him, played with him by the hour, fondled him and

called him her little frog." See also descriptions of the Queen (Smith 190; Waugh 99) and of Drake's return after three years of plunder (Smith 186; Waugh 97).

¹⁵"The one definite thing that can be said about the Reformation in England is that it was an act of State."

¹⁶This novel envisages a world in which the Spanish Armada is successful and the Catholic Church dominates Europe. This blocks industrial progress (e.g. electricity is forbidden). Some critics offer a more subtle reading of the novel, but most readers understand it in the way outlined.

¹⁷Joseph Bernard Code set out a range of Catholic opinions about Elizabeth, from the vituperation of the English exiles, to the uncritical views of the Cisalpinists, to Lingard who tried to write "objectively," and so earned the displeasure of both Protestant and militant Catholic writers.

¹⁸E.g. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; The Voices of Morebath; Fires of Faith*; Judith M. Richards, *Mary Tudor*; Anna Whitelock, *Mary Tudor*; Linda Porter, *Mary Tudor*.

¹⁹Cf. Waugh, *Campion*, 1st ed., ch. 1 n9 and n10 (50). These Notes trenchantly argue that Elizabeth was illegitimate in law on two counts, and therefore not entitled to the throne; and perjured, because she broke her solemn Coronation Oath (quoted at length) to uphold the Catholic Church.

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Artists as Parents in A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Iris Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice**

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Near the beginning of her long career as a novelist and critic, A. S. Byatt published *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (1965), which she wrote, as she was to say later,

out of a passionate curiosity about how Iris Murdoch's novels *worked*, what the ideas were behind them, how the ideas related to the forms she chose, how her world was put together [...]. It is not too much to say that I was morally changed, for the better, I think [by writing this study]. And I had learned a great deal about writing and thinking. (*Degrees of Freedom* viii)¹

It is not surprising if such an early and thorough absorption in the older novelist's work reverberates through even Byatt's most recent fiction. Certainly one fruitful approach to the richness, denseness, and complexity of Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009) is to examine it as in part a response to Murdoch's writing and more specifically to her late novel, *The Good Apprentice* (1985). My concern in examining the relation between these two texts is not with the unsurprising fact that Byatt uses Murdoch,² but with the way in which she uses one particular Murdoch narrative, intensifying it and darkening it so as to forward her own literary concerns. My approach to this subject is three-fold, as outlined below.

The most obvious comparison between the two novels relates to Byatt's pervasive treatment throughout *The Children's Book* of the artist as parent, and it is with that topic that I begin. One strand of her interwoven narrative is so close to Murdoch's version of the artist as

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsturrock02001.htm>>.

father that the differences of detail and emphasis are all the more striking and significant. Another thread in the texture of *The Children's Book* is the interaction between realist and non-realist narrative modes. Again, Murdoch's treatment of the artist-as-father in *The Good Apprentice* also illuminates Byatt's handling of this interaction, as I go on to show. I end with a related question, the significance of the interweaving of numerous stories in Byatt's fiction. Even more than Byatt's former novels, *The Children's Book* works through a complex of multiple narratives (many concerned with parental failure). Such a structure greatly develops one element of Murdoch's fictional treatment in her later works, including *The Good Apprentice*. More importantly, perhaps, it builds on ideas of the self and society discussed in Murdoch's philosophical writings and implicit in her fiction in its multiple explorations of the moral responsibility of the artist.

* * *

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (1).³

The Good Apprentice, Murdoch's twenty-second novel, begins with the words of the biblical Prodigal Son. Edward Baltram, the son in question here, is a bright young student at the University of London, who has unintentionally brought about the death of a beloved friend by feeding him LSD and then leaving him alone—as it happens, to fall, or perhaps, jump from a high window. Edward's guilt and misery immobilize him until, partly through the prompting of his psychiatrist uncle, he leaves London to find his natural father, Jesse Baltram, a well-known painter, whom he has not seen for years, in the strange house, Seegard, which Jesse has built in the marshes not far from the sea. The aging Jesse is protected, or perhaps imprisoned, by three women, his wife "Mother May" and his two adult daughters, Bettina and Ilona, who weave their own clothes, treat every meal as a sacrament (104) and live based on their own rituals in accordance with

Jesse's desire to create "the good society on the basis of simplicity" (160).⁴ "We stand for creativity and peace, continuity and cherishing," asserts Mother May (161). But Jesse is ill, mentally and physically, the women are isolated and frustrated, and soon after Jesse's death by drowning—whether by suicide, murder, or accident the reader never knows—Seegard begins to crumble: "the enchanter's palace was already beginning to fall to pieces" (484).

The Children's Book has its own version of the establishment at Seegard. The artist-enchanter here is the distinguished potter, Benedict Fludd, who like Jesse Baltram lives in an isolated and decrepit house in the marshes near the sea,⁵ with a wife, and two daughters, all three strangely beautiful, as are the Baltram women. The life of the household revolves entirely around the father and his ideas, his uncertain moods, and his art, as at Seegard, where the artist's daughter asserts: "[h]e is the source of everything we do'" (*The Good Apprentice* 163). Fludd's own son, Geraint, longs to leave his father's house, but just as Edward needs and seeks for Jesse, so the aspiring young potter, Philip Warren, half-consciously seeks for the father-in-art that Fludd will become. Both households are represented as potential centres for the arts and crafts, for workshops and summer camps (GA 161; CB 42, 217). And, more significantly, like the Baltram women, whose life at Seegard retains only the shell of their aspirations to "creativity and cherishing" as they become increasingly demoralized and apathetic, so the women of the Fludd family live in a state of paralysis and squalor, which changes after Fludd's suicide, like Jesse's a death by water.

Both Byatt's Benedict Fludd and Murdoch's Jesse Baltram have been likened severally to Eric Gill, the sculptor, stone-worker and print-maker, another indication of the similarity of the two artists within their narratives.⁶ Their households resemble Gill's in certain respects: a visitor noted that his was "more than somewhat arty-crafty" (MacCarthy 153). Like Jesse Baltram, Gill had aspirations towards the simple life, "making useful things by hand" (MacCarthy 60); like Jesse, who designed Seegard himself, his preference in architecture

was for “spareness, purity, blatant honesty of structure” (MacCarthy 93). It is Fludd, however, whose work more closely resembles Gill’s, for like the stone-worker’s the potter’s art is tactile, and for both men this tactile quality is directly and obsessively sexual, far more so than Jesse’s paintings, though these have their own “erotic force” (181). Gill, while he was waiting to be received into the Roman Catholic church, was at work on a life-size marble phallus: his biographer, Fiona MacCarthy comments, “it was his own, a perfect copy with dimensions meticulously taken” (MacCarthy 115).⁷ In *The Children's Book* Philip, Fludd’s apprentice, and his sister Elsie laugh over the discovery of “a larger-than-life, extremely detailed, evenly glazed model of an erect cock and balls, every wrinkle, every fold, every glabrous surface gleaming” (188), presumably made by Fludd as a bizarre self-portrait. (Jesse too has his phallic monument, a lingam stone in a clearing at Seegard, but rather than making it, like Gill and Fludd, he has merely set it up, and it is a symbol rather than a representation).

A more sinister parallel between the historical and the fictitious artist also involves tactility and sexuality. Gill sexually molested his own two teenage daughters and also used them as models for erotic life-drawings (MacCarthy 157). As for Benedict Fludd, he has a sort of Bluebeard’s chamber,⁸ which Elsie unlocks in his absence, to find to her distress shelves full of “obscene chimaeras, half vessel, half human. They had a purity and clarity of line, and were contorted into every shape of human sexual display and congress” (279). The female figures have the faces of Fludd’s daughters, Imogen and Pomona, and they represent the two girls at all ages, going back into childhood. (The male participants are “faceless fantasms” [279]). In addition, both Jesse Baltram and Benedict Fludd have the “sexually possessive attitude towards [their] own daughters,” that Gill’s biographer, Fiona MacCarthy has noted (xi, 203-04), and that caused all three to resist their daughters’ marriage. Byatt, in using Gill’s extraordinary life, draws more heavily on its disturbing elements than Murdoch does.

For if Byatt is engaged in retelling the Seegard narrative—and I think she is—she is also concerned both to intensify and to darken it,

so that it is characteristic that, while Jesse drowns in calm inland water, Fludd kills himself in the wild and treacherous sea off Dungeness point. Byatt imagines more fully the implications of such a household as Seegard, not just for the male members of the household but also for its abused women. Edward and Philip may be liberated through their father figures, but the women experience this contact as paralysing. Murdoch's narrative indicates Jesse's capacity for exploitation and tyranny: Ilona complains that he refused either to let her train as a dancer or to allow Bettina to go to a university and made Bettina's relationship with her "'young man'" impossible so that they end up diminished, as "'just bad painters, pretend artists'" (200), while Bettina asserts that they do not let Ilona go near her father because "'[h]e lusts after her'" (197). However, Murdoch is not concerned to represent in any detail the damage Jesse does to his family. Though Bettina and her mother both resent their position, this resentment in itself has a kind of energy that Fludd has drained away from the women of his household. Byatt shows Fludd's family, more particularly the women, as unquestionably harmed by his obsession with his art and by his terrifying anger and his sexual aggressions, though she never directly shows the process of wounding. The few people who know them all comment on "the curious lifelessness and inhibition of the three female members of the Purchase House family [...] as though they had sleeping sickness or are under a spell" (111). Philip Warren's first impressions of Purchase House are of "the watchful fear, or at least anxiety, in the curiously inert female members of the family" (129). The daughters gradually take on "their mother's vacant look" (207), and in the mother that vacancy is partly the effect of the alcohol and laudanum that dull the pain of her marriage. Pomona, the younger daughter, sleepwalks naked to Philip's bed. Imogen, once she has escaped from her father's house, becomes hysterical at the thought of returning to it (421): "'I can't sleep in that house. I can't, I can't, I can't,'" she weeps (421). For the women of his family Fludd's suicide liberates them and gives them a chance for recovery. Fludd's wife soon seems "relieved and released by her

husband's death" (462). Imogen marries, happily. Pomona, who will also eventually marry,⁹ is shown to have known about the existence of the Bluebeard's closet full of indecent pots, and, while she feels unable to smash them, she finds some sort of comfort in burying them. Murdoch represents Jesse as an artist of questionable achievement¹⁰ and a selfish father: Byatt's Fludd is a great artist and a near-ruinous parent. "He had genius. He was excessive in everything he did," says his oldest friend after Fludd's death (459). Byatt both shows the genius of his work (ecphrastically and through other characters' responses to it) and the damage caused by his excess. This intense connection between art and parental failure is an important element in the complex of parental failures in this novel.

The potential of the artist for social or moral destructiveness has been a concern of Byatt's throughout her career, as she acknowledges. She has described *The Children's Book* as involving "one of the steady themes of my writing that I don't understand [...]. I don't understand why, in my work, writing is always so dangerous. It's very destructive. People who write books are destroyers" (Leith interview). Elsewhere she writes, "my early attempts at fiction were, formally, very concerned with its dangers [...]. I saw novelists as consumers" (*Passions* 22).¹¹ Through her re-imagining of the Jesse Baltram narrative in *The Good Apprentice* she enlarges her vision of the moral and social dangers involved in the production of art to include the visual arts.

If Benedict Fludd abuses his position as parent, so do other artists—and other, non-artist, parents—in this novel. The family is a place of danger, both individual and, at this period, international. These are the years before the First World War, and Byatt not only repeatedly comments on the close relations between Europe's royal houses, but also shows us a puppet play with "the crowned heads of Europe as a gang of squabbling children, quarrelling over toys" (386). Again she reminds us of the internecine violence to come through her allusion to the first Covent Garden performance of Richard Strauss's *Elektra* in 1910, "a drama of royal families stirring violently in bloody passion, matricide and revenge" (544). But it is most notably the writers who

damage their families. The nature of the abuse relates to the nature of the art. As I have said, the potter, who works with his hands, abuses largely through touch. The storytellers abuse by spinning stories out of other people to the neglect of their individual reality.¹² Olive Wellwood, who is, ostensibly at least, the mother of seven children,¹³ is a fantasy writer of some distinction, working mainly for children. Her obsession with her craft leads to repeated failures in human interactions, blinding her to other people's vulnerabilities and responses. Olive's daughter Dorothy watches her mother with the young Philip Warren: "Mother thinks his home is unhappy and his family are cruel—that's one of her favourite stories. She ought to see—I can see—he doesn't like that" (26). Olive's reaction to Philip's sister is the same—"witchy," Elsie thinks resentfully (160), as she observes Olive spinning stories out of a hard reality.

Olive's worst failures, though, are inevitably with those to whom her obligations are strongest, that is with her own children. For each of them she creates a growing and changing narrative, their "secret tales" (143), but Dorothy comes to understand that Olive really writes "the children's books" for herself (316). Olive's preoccupation with her storytelling means that her greatest fault as a parent is "abstraction—a want of attention" (313), and this lack of attention is also a lack of imagination, so that she does not notice the harm that her art does to her best-loved child, Tom. Byatt uses Elizabeth Barrett Browning's extraordinary poem "A Musical Instrument" to suggest Tom's half-knowledge of the irreparable damage done to him. It is his favourite poem, one which he often recites to himself, implying his half-articulated grief at the "cost and pain" of his mother's art:

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river. (239)

As Isobel Armstrong says, “[the] extravagant manipulation of Tom’s emotions” by the narrative of “Tom Underground,” which his mother has created for him, “is partly what destroys him” (4). And when Olive, without warning, turns this story into a West End play, all Tom can do is walk away, and keep on walking until he reaches the end of land, and then walk on into the sea.¹⁴ His sister, preparing her own act of vengeance against her mother, comes to sense that Tom’s suicide is a response to Olive as mother and writer: “Tom had meant to be revenged on Olive, evade Olive, free himself from Olive and being written about” (569-70). Olive herself comes to recognise that she has killed her son (542). As with Fludd and his daughters, she has damaged her children by turning them to art, by putting them to the service of herself and her art.

In Byatt’s concern with the destructive potential of the artist, she draws into her narrative Murdoch’s fictional Baltram family and Eric Gill’s actual family, as I have shown. Her novel’s temporal setting in the later years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, the “Golden Age” of English children’s books, is also part of this intertextual weaving. In an interview about this novel, she comments on this period:

I started with the idea that writing children’s books isn’t good for the writers’ own children. There are some dreadful stories. Christopher Robin at least lived. Kenneth Grahame’s son put himself across a railway line and waited for the train. Then there’s JM Barrie. One of the boys that Barrie adopted almost certainly drowned himself. This struck me as something that needed investigating. And the second thing was, I was interested in the structure of E Nesbit’s family—how they all seemed to be Fabians and fairy-story writers. (Leith interview)¹⁵

Just as Fludd resembles Jesse, so Byatt represents Olive as resembling Nesbit in a dozen ways,¹⁶ not so much as a writer—she lacks Nesbit’s determined facetiousness and political touches—but in relation to her family. For my purposes—and, I assume, for Byatt’s—the most important of these relate to her children. While, like Nesbit, Olive accepts as her own her husband’s children by another woman and supports the

whole family by her writing, she allows, again like Nesbit, the other woman (her own sister) to play the traditional maternal role. Nesbit's stepdaughter Rosamund said: "Auntie [that is, her own natural mother] was the only mother we ever knew. Mother [Nesbit] was always too busy to attend to us" (Briggs 211-12). Moreover Olive resembles Nesbit in concealing from her children throughout the years of their childhood their actual parentage so that when they find out they are disturbed and resentful (Carpenter 130).¹⁷ Dorothy, one of the children in question, when she discovers her actual parentage, complains bitterly to Humphry, for years her putative father: "'All of you, you and both of *them* have made this muddle"—both of *them* being Olive and her natural father (346; Byatt's emphasis). And in Olive's household Dorothy is vulnerable to the sexual attentions of Olive's husband, just as Nesbit's stepdaughter was allegedly sexually pursued by her own father.¹⁸ Byatt uses the narrative of Nesbit's life just as she uses Murdoch's Baltram family in her exploration of the failures of the artist as parent.

All parents fail. Olive's story "The Shrubbery" is about a totally understandable maternal failure—overworked, she tells her mischievous son to go into the shrubbery and not come back (95-102). And, chillingly, he obeys her. And all the parents in this book, artist or not, fail in one way or another, whether through distraction or ill-health or poverty. Yet the focus is on the artist's failure. Any consideration of the artist as parent in this novel, however, should be read in the context of two important elements in *The Children's Book* and indeed in Byatt's work as a whole. Firstly, if Byatt represents parental failure she also insists on parental passion. Olive's lethal stupidity about Tom is all the more disturbing in that she loves him more than any of her children. The various babies, wanted or unwanted, born into the novel are greeted with triumph by their mothers. And when Dorothy finally meets her biological father, Byatt's narrative voice insists not only that "she was not happy now except when she was with him" (376) but also that he needs her just as much, so that his son complains that his father is "bewitched" by this newly discovered daughter

(379). This passion is important elsewhere in Byatt's work, in all four novels of her tetralogy, in *Possession*, and in the short story "Body Art," for instance.¹⁹ Secondly, whatever the moral and aesthetic failures of individual artists, art itself is supremely important in this novel; as Louisa Hadley notes, her studies of the artist are "a key feature of her work" (5). Byatt presents half-a-dozen varieties of art here—lyric poetry, fantasy literature, realist literature, pottery, puppetry, conventional theatre, jewellery. She also shows the social operations of the arts through exhibitions, art galleries, and museums. One recurrent thread is her representation of the early difficulties of the Victoria and Albert Museum, while an important and prolonged episode involves the 1900 Paris exhibition. Byatt illustrates the response to art as well as its production, showing not only Tom's extreme reaction to his mother's play but also the strong if less kinetic responses of the audience to performances of *Cinderella*, a puppet version of *The Sandman* and the historical first run of *Peter Pan*. Byatt's language here underlines her interest in the reality of art production, especially her obvious delight in the technical language of the potter—for instance, "grog," "a glost firing" (105), the colours "sang de boeuf," "Iznik red" (106), "wedging the clay," "engobe," "pin-dust" (128). In *The Children's Book* Byatt contemplates parenthood and art as they are, as central to human life. If she takes the figure of the artist as father in *The Good Apprentice* and intensifies it, she does so because of her concern with the dual responsibilities of the artist, to art and to "life"—that is to human contacts and more especially to the child.

* * *

As Sam Leith points out, "*The Children's Book* is on one level a work of careful social and psychological realism [...]. On another level, it is stuffed with the motifs of fairy stories: doubles, changelings, locked rooms, underground journeys, boys who refuse to grow up." In a different way—and again the difference is significant—*The Good Apprentice* also works on the two levels of realism and fairy tale. Mur-

doch treats the London parts of her novel realistically enough. When the narrative moves to Seegard, however, it approaches the conventions of fairy tales or allegory. Peter Conradi describes Seegard as “half real, half belonging to the world of art and magic” (*The Saint and the Artist* 334), and by contrast it is the world of art and magic that is more striking. Byatt herself, in writing about *The Good Apprentice*, describes it as “a comedy, in places a fairy tale, about horrible and unbearable things” (*Degrees of Freedom* 291; my emphasis). She writes of Edward’s time at Seegard, with its “enchanted castle,” its enchanter-father, its three beautiful and mysterious women, as “a healing brush with old myths” (*Degrees of Freedom* 330).²⁰ Edward needs both to encounter this enchantment and to recognise it as enchantment so that he can question its meaning and its power and finally witness the crumbling of the “enchanted palace” (484). When he first meets Jesse and perceives his father’s mental and physical affliction, Edward sees Seegard as a place of myth and danger: “Is this a holy place where pure women tend a wounded monster, a mystical crippled minotaur? Or have I been lured into a trap, into a plot which will end with my death?” (201). He sees Ilona and Bettina as “elf maidens” (480) and fears that what he eats at Seegard is “fairy food, not fit for humans” (261). In such an atmosphere the normal relations between cause and effect become blurred, so that magical thinking replaces science. Ilona makes a love potion for Edward, Mother May comes to believe that she can kill just through the power of her own hatred, and Edward has a vision of his father under the water long before Jesse is actually drowned. And though Murdoch’s narrative never leaves the bounds of the physically possible—Edward’s vision could be the result of “that awful drug I used to take,” as he acknowledges (307)—all the Seegard scenes are coloured with an air of enchantment. And when Edward and the narrative return to London, they return to the conventions of realism—to tube stations and football.

Byatt like Murdoch associates art with the fairy tale. In *The Children’s Book*, however, the world of the fairy tale is not located in one place. It is everywhere. The novel involves performances of *A Mid-*

summer Night's Dream, *Cinderella*, Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (in Kent), *Peter Pan* and Olive's *Tom Underground* (in London), and *Thora and the Lindwurm* (in Munich). Virtually all of the artists in the book are involved in the creation of the fantastic. Fludd's pots are not simply experiments in significant form but are covered with slightly sinister beasts, water-creatures or "Black Widow spiders [...] their spinnakers busy, their multitude of eyes glittering opal" (209). Anselm Stern, the puppet master, produces plays based on Hoffmann and the Brothers Grimm. (Indeed Byatt involves Germany so strongly in the narrative at least as much because of Hoffmann and Grimm as because of the harsh political realities of the period.) Olive's stories are fantastic. And Byatt insists that we the readers experience this art. Her protracted descriptions allow us as readers to be present at the performances. We read Olive's stories, we look through the narrator's and the various characters' eyes at Fludd's pots. Byatt provides her readers with a variety of fantastic narratives that they can use and abuse hermeneutically within her texts and that her characters use and abuse in understanding themselves and each other. Fairy tales provide a means of groping towards understanding. *The Sandman* enables Griselda, the carefully reared daughter of a rich banker, to perceive that "there were better things in the world than she was being offered" (75). Philip learns to read through a book of fairy stories and these tales provide him with ways of interpreting his life at Purchase House and the people around him—"for better or worse, for insight or danger," as Byatt's narrator says (133). Olive's underground fantasies glamorize the darkness and danger of life underground, which as a miner's daughter she can apparently neither face nor forget. As Isobel Armstrong remarks in an important brief comment on the novel, "such failures [as Olive's] to confront the underground of the self, failures that culminate in the literal underground trenches of the 1914-18 War, result in the unthinking destruction by parents of their children, of which the war was a terrifying example." Byatt implies that fairy tales and art are inevitable, and both necessary and dangerous to human interactions.

"I can't say how important it was to me when Angela Carter said 'I grew up on fairy stories—they're much more important to me than realist narratives.' I hadn't had the nerve to think that until she said it, and I owe her a great deal." (Leith interview)

The importance of fairy tales is apparent in Byatt's work at least from *Possession* onwards. In *The Children's Book* Byatt is concerned not to mingle the fairy tale and the realistic as she so brilliantly does in "The Djinn in The Nightingale's Eye," where a genie and a television set can comfortably inhabit the same hotel room. She also eschews the mode of *The Good Apprentice*, where the fantastic and the realist narrative coexist but are physically separated. In *The Children's Book*, the fantastic is everywhere because art is everywhere in the world of this novel. Yet it operates only within the works of art the novel evokes, and, less tangibly, through the various myths and legends she touches on—her Pomona could be and is not the goddess Pomona, her Prospero could be and is not a Prospero figure. Byatt carefully grounds these fantastic elements in the world of ordinary cause and effect. Murdoch's narrative allows Jesse Baltram a sort of license, so that he is not judged by the same criteria that Edward in his guilt uses to judge himself or that his stepbrother Stuart uses in his aspirations towards the good. At Seegard moral perception works differently, so that to Jesse, the enchanter, the "good" Stuart represents "an alien magic" (478).

Byatt indicates that Purchase House is just imaginable in these terms: the etymology of its name we are informed is "an old word for a meeting place of pucceles, little Pucks" (531). Pomona feels that Fludd's family is enchanted: "'I feel we're under a spell. You know, behind one of those thickets in stories [...]. We sew. That's part of the spell. We have to sew things or something dreadful will happen'" (338). Once her father is dead and she has left Purchase, she comes to remember it "like two dreams—one full of beautiful things—pots and paintings and tapestries and embroideries and flowers and apples in the orchard—you know—and one full of interminable boredom and waste, and—things that were not *right* but were all that happened"

(583). Yet the narrative insists from the beginning on Purchase House as a place of contingency—of dirt and incompetence, fear and anger. It is not an enchanted castle and Fludd is no enchanter. The same ethical criteria operate here as in the rest of the novel.

Byatt collects many of her characters at the Paris Exhibition of 1900 in front of “The Puppets”—“Les Fantoques”—by the little-known Jean Weber, a curious and repellent painting, which indeed caused some sensation in 1900. It represents an artist’s garret, in which

the naked body of a woman [...] lay diagonally across most of the canvas. Her head lay at an awkward angle. [...] She looked both very uncomfortable and completely inert, her flesh like putty. Behind her sat a bearded, handsome man, his face intent on a delicate doll, or puppet, whose waist was circled by his two hands—the two seemed to be conversing. (267)

(“Inert,” the word Byatt applies to the naked woman, she also uses of the Fludd women [129].) According to the art historian Philippe Julian, the painting was “intended as a warning of the dangers facing the young generation of poetic painters, whose work did not bear the stamp of the *École des Beaux Arts*” (128). Byatt’s characters explain it in different terms. Her theatrical producer, August Steyning, comments: “It’s about the borders between the real and the imagined. And the imagined has more life than the real—much more—but it is the artist who gives the figures life.” But Anselm Stern, the German puppet master and one of the more sympathetic artists in this novel responds more thoughtfully:

“What one gives to one’s art [...] is taken away out of the life, this is so. One gives the energy to the figures. It is one’s own energy, but also kinetic. Who is more real to me, the figures in the box in my head or the figures in the street?” (268)

He goes on to remark, “[t]he message is [...] that art is more lively than life but not always the artist pays” (268). The novel repeatedly insists on the “lively” quality of art but also on the danger for those associated both with artists and with their art.

Towards the end of *The Good Apprentice*, Stuart, walking alone along Oxford Street, suddenly has a mental image of himself that disgusts him with its thoughtless egotism:

[A] tall man, among the people, swerving and tacking to avoid touching them, looking over their heads, walking like (he suddenly felt, and it was a terrible image) a man seen in a film, when the star is seen walking alone in the crowded streets of New York [...] filled with the magical significance of his role, happy or unhappy, an image of power, of the envied life, surrounded by other actors who are, by contrast, devoid of being; and it is all false. (446)

Stuart's dedication to his concept of the good drives him to reject this instinctive sense of oneself as "the star" of one's own life. In this passage, as he walks through London, Stuart is miserably thinking of the difficulties of the dedicated life that he has chosen and remembering his painful encounter with a crazed Jesse, who denounced him as a "dead man" (292). Much of Murdoch's philosophical writing explores ethics as involving the discussion of "the fat relentless ego" (*Sovereignty of Good* 52) and this is the concern at issue here. The "collision of forces" (*Good Apprentice* 478) between Stuart and Jesse is largely connected with their attitudes towards the ego. Stuart is bent on freeing himself from its claims and its mechanisms, while Jesse has for years exploited the strength of his own ego and lives at Seegard as very much "the star" of his own life. The contrast between the two men embodies a concern that works not only through Murdoch's philosophical writings and her fiction, but also through her literary criticism. Her literary heroes are Shakespeare and Tolstoy largely because their writing avoids the egotistical: "[w]ith what exhilaration do we experience the absence of self in the work of Tolstoy, in the work of Shakespeare," she writes ("The Sublime and the Good" 218). She would agree with the Tolstoy scholar, Gary Saul Morson, who writes "I like to paraphrase Tolstoy's thought in this way: we are all natural egoists who see life as a story in which we are the hero or heroine, but morality begins when we see ourselves as a minor character in someone else's story" (145).

Murdoch explores this concern through the structure of her novels as well as through the thoughts and interactions of their characters. Much of her later fiction involves a number of interwoven narratives, and, in addition, in some novels—notably *An Accidental Man* (1971) and *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980)—a number of otherwise peripheral characters make their voices heard through letters or through haphazard party conversations. *The Good Apprentice* is not merely the story of the two possible contenders for the title role, Edward and Stuart. It also involves the middle-aged love triangle of Harry, Stuart's father, and Edward's aunt, Midge and her psychiatrist husband, Thomas McCaskerville. It also touches on the broken lives of the Seegard women, and, to a lesser extent, the dead Mark's grieving mother and his sister, Brownie Wilsden, on Sarah Plowmain, a girl-friend of Edward's, and on Harry's family friends, the Brightwaltons. Murdoch does not treat these lesser characters as mere walk-ons in the lives of the major characters. She jolts her readers by suddenly alerting us to their independent concerns—to Sarah's pregnancy scare, to Brownie's engagement to Giles Brightwalton, for instance. She felt, however, that she never fully explored this kind of structure. Conradi, in his biography of Murdoch, comments that occasionally she would "lament lacking the courage at a late stage to take out the central characters and leave only peripheral ones, as if this could open up the book and liberate the characters from her puppet-mastering" (*A Life* 432-33). Indeed, after the success of the first-person novel *The Sea*, *The Sea* (1978), she spoke at a conference at Caen in 1978 claiming that

[m]y ideal novel—I mean the novel I should like to write and haven't yet written—would not be written in the first person, because I'd rather write a novel which is more scattered, with many different centres. I've often thought that the best way to write a novel would be to invent the story, and then to remove the hero and heroine and write about the peripheral people—because one wants to extend one's sympathy and divide one's interests. (Chevalier, *Rencontres* 81)

Byatt, who quotes this passage in *Degrees of Freedom* (328), sympathizes with this approach to fiction and with the urge to create a mul-

multiple-centred novel. She compares Murdoch with another of her own great literary models, George Eliot, in this regard:

she has a world so full of so many characters, so some of them are seen as simply perceived by other people wandering away at the very edge of the narrative [...]. One thing I love about Iris Murdoch is that she knows that, because egocentricity as a writer is alien to her, and it's against her principles as much as it was against George Eliot's. And of course what they both do is switch the centre of sympathy to the reader, frequently enough for the reader actually to go through the moral process of realising the different people are real to each other in different ways, which is very moving. (*Imagining Characters* 184)

"[E]gocentricity as a writer" is alien to Byatt, too. She rejects what she called "me-books" (Kelly interview) and informed Jean-Louis Chevalier: "I did not start as some writers would say they did, with the desire to describe their own lives [...]. It is very important to be nobody, rather like the reader inhabiting the book" ("Speaking of Sources" 7). Byatt's fiction has, over the years, increasingly worked towards Murdoch's ambition of multiple centres. My own discomfort with the tendency to label Byatt's tetralogy as "The Frederica Quartet" relates to this sense of her work, for it seems to misdirect readers, to provide them with a mistaken focus. *The Children's Book* certainly has multiple focal points. In an interview, Byatt spoke of Olive as the heroine and quickly corrected herself, referring to Murdoch as she did so:

I think there isn't a main character ... Iris Murdoch once said the world has enormously more people in it than you can ever imagine. She said whenever she finished a novel she wanted to start again and write it from the point of view of all the minor characters. In a sense I felt I was able to do that, because the minor characters became major characters when the book turned its gaze on them. (Leith interview)

Olive is indeed a major character, but so are her children (or two or three of them), and so are Fludd, and Philip, and his sister Elsie, and a dozen others. The orbits of their narratives intersect and then swing away from each other. In addition, the careful historical placing of the

novel gives a sense of a mass of unexplored lives. When, at the end of the novel, in May 1919, some of the survivors—of the war and of the narrative—are reunited, Byatt communicates both a sense of a possible future—for Philip and Dorothy, for Griselda and Wolfgang, for Elsie, Charles/Karl and their family—and a shadowing of the darkness of that future: Dorothy's father, Anselm Stern, has left Munich for Berlin "because Munich was not now a good place for Jews" (614). She is also able to communicate the mixture of relief at survival and grief at their losses that most families must have felt in 1919. Her readers, that is, share in the sense of relief and loss: they have lost Julian, Geraint, and all of Olive's sons, but Philip, Charles/Karl and Wolfgang survive. Such a communication is possible because of Byatt's multiple narrative; because some narratives can be imagined as continuing but more are completely broken off.

* * *

No browser, idly opening *The Children's Book* and reading a couple of pages, would imagine herself for half a moment to be in the world of Iris Murdoch. Byatt and Murdoch are obviously quite different novelists. The differences between the two writers are, no doubt, largely those unaccountable differences between person and person, but they surely are in part generational, in part a matter of the disciplines from which they have emerged, as Byatt notes:

I don't think she [Murdoch] cared as much as I do about the textual web of language partly because she didn't really come out of English Literature. She came out of philosophy and her linguistic preoccupations were always with truth and precision and dialogue. Mine are really with poetic resonance and with the kind of intensely thickly woven mat of linguistic crisscrossings. Iris was a story teller. I have learned to be a story teller. I wasn't born one." (Chevalier, "Speaking of Sources" 23)

Something the two writers undeniably share, however, is a passionate sense of the importance of literature and its complex ethical function, and it is this shared passion that has been my focus in this paper.

Byatt, in reimagining the Seegard episode of *The Good Apprentice*, questions more forcefully the moral status of the artist not just in relation to art but also in regard to the world of other people. She can do this with even greater intensity through her rethinking of the relation between the fantastic and the realist modes in fiction, a rethinking that is, as I have argued, enabled in part by her close knowledge of Murdoch's handling of this interaction. In addition, her understanding and furthering of Murdoch's use of the multiple-centred novel helps communicate that central concern of both artists—"the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real" ("The Sublime and the Good" 215).

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NOTES

¹Levenson writes that Murdoch has been Byatt's "literary mother" (338). Byatt said that as a young writer she used to listen to Iris Murdoch like a disciple (Chevalier, "Speaking of Sources" 25). More recently, she has expressed doubts, not about Murdoch's quality but about her continuing reputation, saying that readers now wonder "whether they overvalued her [...]. A guess I have is that the 'charm' of her world has worn off and people are not always prepared to consider her tougher thinking" (Turner, quoting a private email from Byatt, 115). Such qualifications do not necessarily seem to reflect any diminution of Byatt's respect for Murdoch, either as novelist or thinker. Murdoch's novels seem to be out of fashion at the moment, as often happens in the decades following a novelist's death. Wendy Lesser in the *TLS*'s "Freelance" column writes of "the complete Iris Murdoch" as one of "the semi-doubtful remnants of my reading past" (16).

²In *Babel Tower*, Byatt actually borrows a character, Anthea Barlow, from Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* (1966).

³Luke 15:18-19.

⁴Spear notes the "William Morris type of life" at Seegard and compares it with Imber Court in *The Bell* (103).

⁵The Fludds live in Kent, the setting for much of the novel, near Romney Marsh and Dungeness; the location of Seegard is more vague.

⁶Sam Leith notes that Byatt's "manic-depressive master potter, Fludd, in certain aspects resembles Eric Gill"; Peter Conradi in his Murdoch biography says that

Jesse Baltram "like the earlier priapic Otto in *The Italian Girl* owes something to Iris's reading of Eric Gill's life" (559).

⁷MacCarthy also notes that Gill's drawings included dozens of penis studies (205).

⁸Lowry writes of Fludd as "Bluebeard-like" (19) and, within the novel, Philip thinks of Bluebeard's chamber when Fludd warns him off the locked pantry (134). Fiander notes that Nigel Reiver's stash of pornographic magazines is compared to "Bluebeard's cupboard" (75).

⁹In the First World War she becomes a nurse and marries one of her severely wounded patients. There seems to be some suggestion that such a marriage shows Pomona as never fully recovering from her early experience, though she is said to be "truly happy" (606).

¹⁰Rowe writes: "Jesse's paintings are a surrealist mixture of depraved fantasy and intense realism, an unstructured indulgence of egoism and erotic, violent fantasies of power and the subjugation and degradation of women" (52).

¹¹She goes on to note the destructive nature of the storyteller in her second novel, *The Game* (1967). Even in her first novel, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), the distinguished novelist Henry Severell, who "writes about people without understanding or liking them in real life," as Schuhmann observes (77). Lowry points out the parallel between Olive in *The Children's Book* and Julia in *The Game* (20).

¹²Byatt's writers also include Herbert Methley, whose life, if not his art, resembles that of D. H. Lawrence. Methley prefers to ignore his own and other people's offspring: "Herbert Methley did not like to talk about children, anyone's children" (352). Byatt speaks of Methley as "horrible" in the Wachtel interview, and most readers would agree with her.

¹³Two of her family are her husband's children by her sister. The father of her daughter Dorothy is the puppeteer, Anselm Stern.

¹⁴Byatt represents Tom as being damaged by bullying at school. This bullying is connected with his mother's story-telling, as he tries to hide in order to read the latest installment of "Tom Underground." Olive's response is to write an anti-school book, *Dark Doings at Blacktowers*. One of Tom's friends thinks, "if he were Tom he would find the book unforgivable" (204).

¹⁵Byatt makes similar comments in the Wachtel interview.

¹⁶For instance, Nesbit married when seven months pregnant as Olive does (Carpenter 127). In both fictional and historical families a stillborn baby was buried in their garden (Carpenter 130). Both families are "founder members of the Fabian Society" (Briggs xii). Nesbit's husband, Hubert Bland, like Olive's husband, Humphry Wellwood, was a well-known journalist (Briggs xvi). Both Nesbit and Olive are associated with the Kent coast (Briggs 171). Nesbit consults the Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in search of Egyptian ideas for a story, just as Olive consults the Victoria and Albert Museum's Prosper Cain. He finds her "a charming figure" (Briggs 245-46), much as Prosper finds Olive.

¹⁷Another parallel is the case of Angelica Garnett, who was in her teens before she discovered that Duncan Grant was her biological father. She writes of the distress this caused her in *Deceived with Kindness* (1985).

¹⁸H. G. Wells justifies his attempted seduction of Nesbit's young stepdaughter, Rosamund: "her father's attentions to her were becoming unfatherly. I conceived a great disapproval of incest, and an urgent desire to put Rosamund beyond its reach" (Briggs 313).

¹⁹Steveker discusses this element in relation to gender and points out the images of physical attachment that underline the connection between mother and child in *Still Life* and *Babel Tower* (54). "Body Art" evokes paternal as well as maternal passion for a newborn child.

²⁰Byatt is always sensitive to the frequent non-realist, fairy-tale elements in Murdoch's fiction. For instance, she sees two of the characters of *An Unofficial Rose* in terms of Rapunzel and the witch and also talks about the rose nursery where much of the action is set as a version of the garden of the Sleeping Beauty (*Imagining Characters* 180), while elsewhere she notes the recurrence of the "captive princess" in *The Time of the Angels*, *The Unicorn*, and *The Sea, The Sea* (*Degrees of Freedom* 282). Many critics have discussed Byatt's own use of the fairy-tale; see, for instance, Fiander, Flegel, Harries, Sanchez, and Sellers.

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