

# Connotations

*A Journal for Critical Debate*



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# *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate*

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## Spenser's Monsters: A Response to Maik Goth and to John Watkins\*

MAURICE HUNT

Recently, Maik Goth has argued that Spenser's animal-human monsters in *The Faerie Queene* owe much to the poet's endorsement of Prometheus's creation of humankind from animal parts and that this aspect of an ancient myth participated in Spenser's version of Sir Philip Sidney's belief that the right poet can comprehend an alternative nature and incorporate features of its world in literary images that move a reader to virtuous action. In particular, Spenserian monstrosities such as Duessa seen as a grotesque witch—complete with fox's tail, bear's paw, and eagle's claw—and the Sphinx-like dragon of Book 5 realize the chimera aspect of Sidney's pronouncement in *An Apology for Poetry* that the inspired poet makes "things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like" (Sidney 100). While some monsters, such as Duessa and Error, are disgusting, Goth suggests that their function is positive. Goth implies that Spenser could have adopted George Chapman's opinion, expressed in *The Shadow of Night* (1594), that "*Promethean Poets [...] created men [...] [w]ith shapes of Centaurs, Harpies, Lapithes*" so that men "*[w]hen almost savage [...] growne, / Seeing them selues in those Pierean founts, / Might mend their mindes, asham'd of such accounts*" (qtd. in Goth 189-90).

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\*Reference: Maik Goth, "Spenser as Prometheus: The Monstrous and the Idea of Poetic Creation," *Connotations* 18.1-3 (2008/2009): 183-207; John Watkins, "Spenser's Monsters: A Response to Maik Goth," *Connotations* 20.2-3 (2010/2011): 201-09.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debgoth01813.htm>>.

John Watkins in “Spenser’s Monsters: A Response to Maik Goth,” claims that such creatures, rather than mending readers’ minds, reflect Spenser’s disillusionment with humankind in *The Faerie Queene*. Judged from Pico della Mirandola’s Neo-Platonic viewpoint, they register humankind’s “power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life” (qtd. in Watkins 202). Judged from a Reformation Protestant perspective, the creatures condense the will inherited from Adam, the “infected will” that Sidney refers to as the curse that prevents humankind, including the poet, from ever “reaching unto” the “perfection” that “our erected wit make[s] us know” (Sidney 101). In this context, Watkins quotes both Luther’s and Calvin’s opinion that fallen men and women are monstrous (cf. 204).

Shakespeare illuminates both Goth’s argument and Watkins’s response to it. He does so in terms of the type of monsters Sidney mentions in his account of poetic creation. Goth cites Duke Theseus’s speech at the beginning of act 5 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as an account of the creative act in which Spenser indulged, an act that closely resembles the dynamics Sidney describes:

The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (5.1.12-17)<sup>1</sup>

Several commentators on this comedy have argued that Shakespeare alludes to certain ideas in Sidney’s *Apology* and claimed that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* amounts to the playwright’s own Defense of Dramatic Poetry.<sup>2</sup> Including Theseus’s speech among their evidence proves problematic, however. Goth never mentions the fact that Theseus skeptically dismisses the poet’s activity as an imaginative illusion, similar to the lunatic’s vision of devils and the lover’s of Helen’s beauty in a swarthy complexion. Theseus, although ridiculing this activity, does not seem to refer to any function of the “things unknown” created by the poet.



And yet Shakespeare makes an otherworldly vision a dramatic reality in Oberon's eloquent remembrance of how the ravishing harmony of song once caused him to see a deity usually invisible. Oberon asks Robin Goodfellow whether he remembers that once

I sat upon a promontory  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
To hear the sea-maid's music? (2.1.148-53)

Hearing the song, Oberon sees

Flying between the cold moon and the earth  
Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took  
At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,  
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow  
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.  
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,  
And the imperial vot'ress passèd on,  
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.  
(2.1.156-64)

Oberon sees Cupid's arrow then fall upon the pansy, making it a magical agent for manipulating falling in love. This visionary capacity articulated by Oberon suggests a possibility considered neither by Goth nor by Watkins.

Surprisingly, Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* associates this capacity with the play's monster. "My mistress with a monster is in love" (3.2.6), Robin Goodfellow tells Oberon. This monster is the part-human, part-animal Bottom, an ass-headed chimera created by the poet dramatist Shakespeare. That Bottom has the capacity for—in his own words—"a most rare vision"—is suggested by his saying, upon awakening from sleep, "I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was [...] [M]an is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the



ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, nor his heart to report, what my dream was" (4.1.203-06, 208-12). When Bottom says that his dream "hath no bottom" (4.1.214), he implies that the dream is vertical; it ascends into a spiritual world, giving him a vision of a beautiful supernatural being, who loved him as he loved her. Half-awake Bottom may comically garble the senses recording his dream, but the overt allusion to 1 Corinthians 2:9, which concerns Paul's assurance that those who love God shall through their senses know his wisdom, suggests that it is a rare vision that can be taken seriously (cf. Laird 38; 42). The monster may not have the poet's capacity to give a local habitation and a name to this supernatural vision (Bottom plans to get Quince to convert the reported dream into a ballad).<sup>3</sup> But Shakespeare does depict Bottom at least half-way through the process of poetic creation conveyed most fully in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Oberon. Shakespeare thus in this play provides a rejoinder to Chapman's idea, which Goth's essay supports, that Promethean poets created monstrous men so that readers, seeing themselves in the poet's images, "[m]ight mend their mindes, asham'd of such accounts." The monster Bottom's strangely eloquent reverie generally draws admiration from audiences. In this respect, it also represents an alternative to Watkins's claim that literary monsters represent a warning concerning humankind's infected will.

The obvious monster in *The Tempest* is the harpy played by Ariel: a chimera with the upper torso and head of a woman and the body of a giant bird that appears to Alonso and his courtiers. Only the king hears the harpy's words, which sound as thunder, wind, and surf. Nonetheless, Alonso understands from them that he is being punished, mainly through the loss of his son Ferdinand, for his sins in depriving Prospero of his dukedom and then apparently of his and his infant Miranda's lives. "O, it is monstrous, monstrous!" (3.3.95), Alonso pronounces concerning his remembered crimes. His new insight partly derives from his sight of the monster who tells him of them. Shakespeare may have reinforced this sight in original performances of *The Tempest* by giving monstrous shapes to the spirits that

suddenly take away the banquet offered to Alonso and his courtiers. In this case, Shakespeare seems closer to Chapman's opinion that Promethean poets can mend readers' minds through the images of monsters. While that does not immediately happen to Alonso (he at first despairs), the ultimate effect of the harpy upon the king of Naples is beneficial, and thus in keeping with Goth's generally positive account of the effect of monstrous representation. Alonso gives up Prospero's dukedom and begs his pardon.

Regeneration also occurs within the other monster in *The Tempest*: puppy-headed, fish-finned Caliban. Trinculo and Stefano call Caliban a "monster" no fewer than thirty-one times in the play. Considered initially, monstrous Caliban appears to conform to Watkins's point that literary monsters sometimes represented severe Protestant assumptions about the depravity of humankind. Caliban's evil surfaces in his never-repenting desire to rape Miranda and in the savagery of his desire to knock a nail in sleeping Prospero's head. Luther and Calvin in Watkins's presentation emphasize the monstrousness of humankind; Shakespeare in *The Tempest* on the contrary stresses the humanness of the monster Caliban. Caliban's capacities for speech and learning (1.2.335-41, 356-61); for fertile poetic utterance (2.2.165-70); for the comprehension of beauty and for reasoning (3.2.98-103); for dream, imaginative vision, and for the appreciation of kinds of music, even refined music (3.2.136-44); and for service all mark him a man rather than a monster. In the removal of the jester Trinculo from beneath Caliban's cloak, Shakespeare stages Caliban's separation from the disruptive jesting voice heard in act 1, scene 2 of *The Tempest*. Caliban ultimately realizes his human rather than his animal nature when he says,

I'll be wise hereafter  
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
Was I to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool. (5.1.298-301)

The word “grace” here means more than “favor” or “pardon.” The word carries the spiritual overtones that Luther and Calvin would have understood.

In his essay titled “Of a Monstrous Child,” Michel de Montaigne judges that “[w]hat we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of his work the infinity of forms that he has comprised in it; and it is for us to believe that this figure that astonishes us is related and linked to some other figure of the same kind unknown to man” (538-39, esp. 539). Montaigne’s judgment suggests that, unlike Sidney for whom monstrous forms are mainly the poet’s business, he and his contemporaries believed that sometimes God’s nature produced them. Shakespeare in at least two plays provides a commentary on monstrosity that illuminates Maik Goth’s and John Watkins’s arguments. In particular, the playwright accentuates the pedagogical functions and normalcy that early modern literary monsters could represent.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Quotations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* come from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

<sup>2</sup>See Dent 128-29; Weiner 332-33, 334-35, 348; and Hunt 233.

<sup>3</sup>Bottom intends to sing this ballad at the end of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” but audiences never hear it.

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## Card and Courtship Plays at Hampton Court Palace: *The Rape of the Lock* and the Origins of Game Theory A Response to Sean R. Silver\*

OLIVER R. BAKER

My response to Sean R. Silver's article begins with a digression.<sup>1</sup> One of the great card-game movies of all time is *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965) with Steve McQueen, Edward G. Robinson and a host of Hollywood luminaries. They play Five-card stud which like many card games has its unique nomenclature and rules.<sup>2</sup> On screen, as they play out the final hand for what becomes a thirty-thousand dollar pot, the dealer and others who are watching speculate on the possible outcomes: their dialogue informs those unfamiliar with high stakes poker of what is going on. Nevertheless, those among the audience who understand poker will get much more out of the climax than those who do not.

The stakes are meaningless numbers until we realise that the story is set in depression-era New Orleans, where, for example, a brand new 1932 Model B Ford two-door coupe would sell for less than five-hundred dollars. Today these stakes sound even lower, but something else has happened. The most popular poker game is now Texas Hold'em, not Five-card stud. Fortunately, the ten rankings of five-card poker hands—from a royal flush down to a high card—are unchanged. With this context intact, anyone watching the final hand and familiar with poker can adjust for the distortion in dollar values since the 1930s. Both McQueen and Robinson start this hand with ten thousand dollars in Franklins and Clevelands. Their bets and raises range

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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; Sean R. Silver "*The Rape of the Lock* and the Origins of Game Theory," *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 203-228.

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

from five hundred to five thousand dollars. But only those who know what comprises a straight flush and know that it beats a full house will understand Robinson's quip about "making the wrong move at the right time."<sup>3</sup>

If a movie from less than fifty years ago can present interpretive challenges, we should not be surprised that an early eighteenth-century verse satire presents a few more. Except that this is mock-epic, for a contemporary audience the climax to the card game in *The Rape of the Lock* should be just as dramatic as is the showdown in *The Cincinnati Kid*. Unfortunately, *Ombre* did not evolve: it became extinct, and three centuries later we have lost all familiarity with its rules and nomenclature and, with those losses, the interpretive context. An *acid test* for satire is that you have to have some in the audience who *just don't get it*. But when no one *gets it*—it is not even funny; yet to explain humour is to snuff it. To help illustrate this loss, in his verse satire *A Session of the Poets*, John Wilmot, second earl of Rochester, ridicules a string of his contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> The stanza lampooning Aphra Behn employs an *Ombre* allusion as a power metaphor and a euphemism which never caught on sufficiently to become idiomatic in the English language<sup>5</sup>:

The Poetess Afra, next shew'd her sweet face,  
And swore by her Poetry, and her black Ace,  
The Lawrel, by a double right was her own,  
For the Plays she had writ, and the Conquests she had won:  
Apollo, acknowledg'd 'twas hard to deny her,  
Yet to deal franckly, and ingeniously by her,  
He told her were Conquests, and Charmes her pretence,  
She ought to have pleaded a Dozen years since.  
(73-80; emphasis in the original)

As Silver points out, *Ombre* is only one of many games *le beau monde* are playing with each other that afternoon, but it is fatal to mix them up. Once the card game is isolated—taken away from whatever else happens before, during, and afterward—we have a fair chance of reconstructing the three 'as played' hands. Once we have unpicked



this single *tour*, and close reading is always hard work, we can put this first mock-battle back into context—court belles and their beaux socialising at Hampton Court Palace near the end of Queen Anne’s reign—and then see whether the card game tells us anything new about the players and whether this knowledge shapes our appreciation of Pope’s verse satire, and hence the relevance of a Game Theory approach to Literature.

The necessary mathematics for this approach can get very hairy very quickly, and there is merit in keeping the decision matrices simple. My criticism of previous *Ombre* reconstructors is that, because they were not delving sufficiently into the rules of play, their ‘decision models’ were misleading. There is more to poker than knowing how to rank a five-card hand, just as there is a lot more to *Ombre* than sorting and ranking a nine-card hand. For those familiar with contract bridge, Belinda celebrates wildly after struggling to make a bid of one spade: whereas if her singleton spade deception works, and it should, she will make a grand slam in clubs—something really worth celebrating (Baker 224-25). What Belinda could have accomplished should be as dramatic as the showdown in *The Cincinnati Kid*. What she actually accomplishes is the dramatic equivalent of Robinson folding immediately after the third *up* cards are dealt and McQueen bets another three grand.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is a pleasure to respond to Sean R. Silver’s article, not because he agrees with my derivation; in fact he avoids saying so. But he recognises that my focus was on the card game somewhat enigmatically described in Canto III, and he has taken my solution as a vehicle toward using Game Theory in Literature. My solution yielded several surprises: I saw immediately that, with skilful play, a *sans prendre vole* in clubs was there for the taking. Moreover, many earlier reconstructors’ assumptions of more than one *tour* and a suppressed round of discards in this *tour* masked a number of playing alternatives that Pope’s contemporary audiences might have appreciated.



<sup>2</sup>Throughout this paper I have deliberately used terms in common, albeit informal usage which have their roots in gambling. *Showdown* is a poker term—to *show* your ‘face down card’ to your opponent when all betting on that hand is over. The *Cleveland*, which carries a likeness of President Grover Cleveland, is the one thousand dollar bill (and is no longer in circulation). The *Franklin*, which carries a likeness of Benjamin Franklin (who was never a President), is the one hundred dollar bill. Conversely, a 1932 Model B Ford two-door coupe, a favourite among hot rodders, is a *Deuce coupe*.

<sup>3</sup>Poker experts disagree on when Robinson should have folded, but many suggest after the third [face] *up* cards are dealt and McQueen’s bet is three thousand dollars.

<sup>4</sup>See *Poems on several occasions by the Right Honourable the E. of R*—— (Printed at Antwerp [i.e London: s.n.], 1680) 111-14. PDFs of the text can be found on Early English Books Online (Bibliographic Number: Wing / R1753). It was likely written in November or December 1676 by Rochester or his coterie. The text is also included in George de Forest Lord’s *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse 1660–1714*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1963) 352-56, and elsewhere. Any confusion with similar titles can be resolved from the first couplet: “Since the *Sons of the Muses*, grew numerous and loud, / For th’ appeasing so factious and clamo’rous a Crowd.”

<sup>5</sup>Little is known about the early life of Aphra Behn (1640-1689): widowed in her early twenties, she never remarried. Among the few surviving portraits one held by St Hilda’s College, Oxford, shows she was a stunning full-figured brunette. Supporting herself by writing she became an accomplished playwright, poet, and novelist. The moment the connection is made between ‘her black *Ace*’ and *Spadille*, the ace of spades in *Ombre*—always the top-ranked trump card whichever suit is selected; which when led forces any other *Matadors* into play; but which cannot be forced itself; and, carrying rule immunity privileges permitting a renege on a trump lead—lewd inferences arise that even the most vinegar of prudes cannot ignore.

## Close Reading versus Accretions of Dubious Scholarship: A Question of Competence A Response to Kathryn Walls\*

OLIVER R. BAKER

Three years before Alexander Pope published the five canto version of his mock-epic verse satire, these two couplets appeared in his major work, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711):

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,  
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest,  
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,  
That gives us back the Image of our Mind:  
(Pt II, 297-300)

Evidently I do not have to worry about mind-matching with Kathryn Walls. On the other hand, *Connotations* is a journal where all shrines of orthodoxy and 'settled science' are exposed to critical debate and where those found wanting are either modified or kicked over. Demonstrating that Pole, Tillotson, and Wimsatt were in error should not be heresy. I do not deny that Tillotson's "Appendix C—Ombre" has been influential. Unfortunately, that is the problem. Published in 1940 for volume two of *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, he chose to neither revise it for the second edition in 1953 nor for the third edition in 1962. For seven decades it has been misleading in terms of violating not just close reading of Pope's text, but violating

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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 Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. A Response to Oliver R. Baker," *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 229-37; Kathryn Walls, "An Addendum to 'A Question of Competence: The Card Game in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*,'" *Connotations* 20.1 (2010/2011): 34.

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the contemporary rules of *Ombre* and the fundamental tenets of good card play. Pope's enigma has a solution, provided we adopt the precept that Sherlock Holmes urges on his companion Doctor John Watson: "How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?"<sup>1</sup>

There are no differences between the 'as played' hands for the Baron and the Knight given by Tillotson in the *Twickenham editions* and those published in *Connotations*, except that I have not arbitrarily assigned values to the non-court cards. My disagreement with Tillotson, and with Walls who writes to defend his solution, involves two of the nine cards held by Belinda:

*Twickenham editions*

**Belinda**

A♠<sup>1</sup> 2♠<sup>2</sup> A♣<sup>3</sup> K♠<sup>4</sup>

K♥<sup>9</sup> Q♥<sup>8</sup>

6♦<sup>6</sup>

K♣<sup>5</sup> Q♣<sup>7</sup>

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**Belinda [Elder Hand]**

A♠<sup>1</sup> 2♠<sup>2</sup> A♣<sup>3</sup> K♠<sup>4</sup>

K♥<sup>9</sup> Q♥<sup>8</sup>

Void in ♦

K♣<sup>5</sup> Q♣<sup>7</sup> ♣<sup>6</sup>

As shown above, Tillotson gives Belinda two clubs to the queen-king and a singleton low diamond, whereas in the *Connotations* derivation Belinda has three clubs to the queen-king and a diamond void. On tricks six and seven Belinda and the Knight are sloughing *losers* on the Baron's diamond leads. But whether, in my solution, Belinda sloughs her club queen on the sixth or seventh trick is unknowable and immaterial: a *loser* is a *loser*. This part of my derivation of Belinda's hand hinges on the close reading of six couplets which apply only to the sixth and seventh tricks:

The *Baron* now his *Diamonds* pours apace;  
Th' embroider'd *King* who shows but half his Face,  
And his refulgent *Queen*, with Pow'rs combin'd,  
Of broken Troops an easie Conquest find.  
*Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts*, in wild Disorder seen,  
With Throngs promiscuous strow the level Green.  
Thus when dispers'd a routed Army runs,  
Of *Asia's* Troops, and *Africk's* Sable Sons,

With like Confusion different Nations fly,  
 Of various Habit and of various Dye,  
 The pierc'd Battalions dis-united fall,  
 In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o'erwhelms them all.  
 (iii.75–86: emphasis in the original)

My inference for tricks six and seven comes from the line, “*Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild Disorder seen*” and seems obvious—whoever is sloughing clubs on those two disordered heaps, it cannot be the Knight who only had a singleton club which we know he sloughed on the fourth trick. The Baron leads his king and then his queen of diamonds (iii.75–77) and “of broken Troops an easie Conquest find[s].” Two diamond tricks, two heaps of cards “in wild disorder [are] seen” and these cards are “clubs, diamonds, [and] hearts”—where I acknowledge Pope’s use of the plural forms. A few lines earlier Pope writes, “The *Baron* now his *Diamonds* pours apace,” from which we have no difficulty inferring that he has consecutive leads and that each is a diamond (iii.75). To try and argue that a plural is really a singular is unconvincing (Walls 231). To me it seems that Walls permits the accretions of scholarship to influence close reading (cf. Baker 211–12).

Applying Occam’s razor, my interpretation is: two heaps, two tricks, two clubs, two diamonds, and two hearts. In other words—six cards—two diamond leads from the Baron, two heart sloughs from the Knight, and two club sloughs from Belinda. Perhaps a diagram which applies only to tricks six and seven will help:



*Diamonds, hearts, and clubs*

*Diamonds, hearts, and a club*

Pope does not let these six couplets apply to the eighth trick as here we know Belinda sloughs her heart queen, and the Knight has only hearts left anyway. This is why Belinda must have three clubs to the

queen-king and why she cannot have a *plebeian* diamond to follow suit and play on the sixth trick. So, Pole (1873-74) misinterpreted these six couplets making an error that Tillotson did not correct. Consequently, Tillotson's reconstruction is incorrect (cf. Walls 231). Pope, never a pedant about scansion, and this line is particularly strained, could have written it differently, but he did not.

It is important to recognise that these two hands, Belinda's and the Knight's, must be derived simultaneously. If my interpretation of the plurals is correct—despite the irregular scansion in that line—then the only way Belinda can be playing a singleton diamond on the sixth trick is for the Knight to be playing a club on that trick, too. And that would require altering the Knight's hand, the two versions of which are shown below:

*Twickenham Editions*

**Sir Anonym [Dealer]**

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

*Connotations 2007/2008*

**Knight**

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

The major difference between these is that Tillotson follows Pole even to the extent of assigning identical numerical values to the non-court cards; for which, of course, there is neither necessity nor textual justification.<sup>2</sup> I also disagree on the seating and therefore on who is the Dealer, but these two details affect neither the derivation nor the card play, just the drama.<sup>3</sup>

In my 2007/2008 article, I argued that the Knight's non-court diamond and his club knave must be singletons unless you intend to make a very poor player of him (Baker 217-20). He may be one; but this should emerge from his play and not be taken as an assumption to aid a proposed reconstruction. On the face of it, sloughing the club was not a particularly good play; sloughing one of his four *plebeian* hearts would have made more sense, but we cannot rewrite this portion of Pope's satire.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the fifth trick, all eleven spade trumps have been played.<sup>5</sup> In the only instance of a lead being

trumped in this *tour* the Baron trumps Belinda's club king lead with his fifth-ranked spade queen to win the trick and take control. Moreover, after the fifth trick the rest of the play is no-trump—whatever is led, the other players must follow suit, or slough something else if they cannot. Tricks six to nine will be taken by the highest-ranked card played in the suit which is led. If, as I surmise, neither of the other players had any diamonds left by trick six, any diamond leads by the Baron, the three lowest non-court cards would have taken the tricks as readily as the three court cards—and for the Baron, a pity he did not have a fourth diamond.

Some confusion arises from the improper use of card game nomenclature. When Walls writes, “the trumped hearts (of the Knight) and Belinda's (also trumped) clubs” (230), she does not appear to recognize the distinction between plain trick taking and trumping—perhaps she means sloughed rather than trumped? This highlights the Baron's error in not discarding his fourth-ranked heart ace.<sup>6</sup> His spade queen is a ‘stopper’—Belinda may make her lowly *ombre* but she cannot make *vole* in spades, even if they were split six-five-nought-nought: Belinda with six, the Baron with five, the Knight with a void, and none in the *talon*. They were not. For a fee—one lesser counter—the Baron has the possibility of drawing: another heart (pity, but no harm); a club (no harm, he exchanges a club void for a heart void); another spade trump (magic, but in this case impossible, as they are all in play, although he cannot know this); or another diamond (wonderful, if he ever gets the lead after all the trumps have been drawn, he can impose Codille).

Some readers may wonder what this exchange is all about. It concerns a reconstruction I propose to replace those currently available in print and electronically. Some card games foster an understanding that rational behaviour requires reaching conclusions and making decisions by examining the available evidence. I did not label the players Nincompoop, Nymph, and Knight. In fact, I wrote, “scholars can engage whichever theoretical approach suits the needs of their literary analysis” (Baker 226-27).<sup>7</sup> If my reconstruction is in error, the resolu-



tion resides in reasoned demonstration not contradiction. To recapitulate, play is counter-clockwise and because Belinda is seated to the right of the *Dealer*—an instance of *place* being important—hers is the *Elder Hand* which has the powerful privilege of leading whomever wins the auction to declare the trump suit.<sup>8</sup> Momentarily forget the poem: pick a seat, print out Seymour, Cotton, and Cotgrave from ECCO and EEBO, and then figure out what you would do if you were Baron, Nymph, or Knight at Hampton Court Palace for a day with a pocketful of guineas and these cards.<sup>9</sup>

Knight		Belinda [Elder Hand]	
♠	♠	A♠	A♣
J♥	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥	K♠	2♠
♦		K♥	Q♥
J♣		Void in ♦	
		K♣	Q♣ ♣
Baron			
		Q♠	J♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
		A♥	
		K♦	Q♦ J♦
		Void in ♣	

Whether Belinda plays badly, perhaps deliberately bidding the ‘wrong’ suit, was always beyond the scope and intent of my reconstruction. That said, a case can be made for blaming the *Sylphs*. Lacking a reliable reconstruction, or perhaps because the significance of precedence was deemed irrelevant, critics have overlooked the following three couplets. Depending entirely on how we interpret

Soon as she spreads her Hand, th’ Aerial Guard  
 Descend, and sit on each important Card:  
 First *Ariel* perch’d upon a *Matadore*,  
 Then each, according to the Rank they bore;  
 For *Sylphs*, yet mindful of their ancient Race,  
 Are, as when Women, wondrous fond of Place.  
 (iii.31–36: emphasis in the original)



we are presented with a bizarre either / or dilemma, highlighted by the phrases “sit on each important Card” (iii.32) and “wondrous fond of Place” (iii.36). Black aces excepted, trump suit selection determines the *importance* of any card. Strangely, this *importance* is evident to the *Sylphs*, “Soon as she spreads her Hand” (iii.31). But this is seven couplets before “The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care” (iii.45), which is just before she says, “*Let Spades be Trumps!*” (iii.46). Pope might only be making the satiric point that some women were preoccupied with—*race* and *place*—pedigree and social status. But it is hard to believe that Pope creates his machinery and then gives Belinda’s *Sylphs* no significant role in the first mock-battle beyond the decorative one of perching unseen on her cards. How these preoccupations lead to a flawed evaluation of Belinda’s hand and a *sans prendre ombre* bid in the ‘wrong’ suit must, alas, be the topic of a separate full length article.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See chapter six of *The Sign of Four* (1890) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

<sup>2</sup>Curiously, Pope’s text only tells us about one of the Knight’s nine cards and when he plays it—the knave of clubs on the fourth trick; the rest are partially cloaked in mystery (Baker 216-17). We are left to derive the other eight from the rules—following suit when possible, and from a sense of good card play. We can only speculate, but it is possible the Knight’s club slough is described because a sense of good card play would dictate him sloughing something else. This is satire: Pope does not create these cantos to praise *le beau monde*, he wants to bury them. How better than to show *la belle et les beaux* playing the one card game absolutely *de rigueur* at Court very badly? There is also no point in creating an enigma of these three ‘as played’ hands and then making the puzzle too difficult if not well nigh impossible for contemporary audiences to solve.

<sup>3</sup>For the *tour* they play in spades, and for the *tour* they might have played in clubs, the drama is increased enormously by placing Belinda, the *Elder Hand*, to the right of the Baron. On the ninth trick she immediately slams her king on the Baron’s ace of hearts lead, and in the *tour* they might have played—having sloughed his spade queen on the previous trick—the Baron looks on hopelessly as she leads her plebeian deuce of spades.

<sup>4</sup>For example, the Knight's knave of hearts can only be assured of taking a trick on consecutive high heart leads if he has two *plebeians* to play on a king, followed by a queen lead. He might get lucky and see the queen fall on a king lead, in which case one *plebeian* is better 'aid' than none.

<sup>5</sup>Having nine of the eleven black trumps in play is unusual; having all eleven most unusual—about once in every 177 *tours* dealt, or once in every four or five complete games. If Belinda held the top five, she would have claimed a "lay down" before the first trick was even played. Since she made no such claim, the Knight should know that the spade knave and queen must be split between the *talon* and the Baron, but whether the split is 0-2, 1-1, or 2-0 will soon become evident.

<sup>6</sup>For those who see classical allusions everywhere, the Baron's ace of hearts is the Achilles heel of his defence, matching Turnus's fatal decision to wear Pallas's sword belt during his duel with Aeneas. This epic allusion fits Belinda's exultations (iii.99–104) which echo the battlefield dispatch of Turnus.

<sup>7</sup>Having derived my solution to Pope's enigma, I was surprised to see that Belinda's spade bid was an error and that with skilful play a *sans prendre vole* in clubs was there for the taking. From this surprise it was evident, to me at least, that there was only ever one *tour* and that Belinda, the Knight, and the Baron, each for differing reasons, played with their 'as dealt' hands. From this, it is also evident that Belinda's wild celebrations are ridiculous (iii.99-100, and 105-06). She celebrates a struggle to make a paltry *ombre* in spades when anyone who "o'erlooks the Cards" will see the *sans prendre vole* in clubs—a rare feat well worthy of celebration—which Belinda manages to overlook (i.54). I do not see how this observation qualifies as dubious (see Walls 231). It is the fabrication of a suppressed round of discards and values for the non-court cards, for which there is no textual evidence, that is dubious, as is arguing that a plural is a singular.

<sup>8</sup>Hint: whatever the Baron or Knight might bid they suffer *Codille*. Belinda can make her *ombre* in any suit, including diamonds, even if the others hold the *Manille*.

<sup>9</sup>Never entirely respectable because of applications to gambling, combinatorics was still in its infancy during the early eighteenth century. Nevertheless experienced gamesters had a sense of the likelihood of selected outcomes. The logic behind the arithmetic can be very tricky, excuse the pun; and, I acknowledge the patient guidance of Dr. David J. Leeming and Dr. Jill S. Simmons, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Victoria. Calculations reveal just how fantastic Belinda's hand was. The chance of having no black aces is comparatively high—about three in five, whereas the chance of being dealt a void in any one of the four suits is about one in five, but the chance of being dealt both black aces is about one in twenty-two.

## Sympathy, Superstition, and Narrative Form; Or, Why Is *Silas Marner* so Short? A Response to John Mazaheri\*

ANNA NEILL

Towards the end of his article, "On Superstition and Prejudice in the Beginning of *Silas Marner*," John H. Mazaheri asks me two questions. The first is how I justify invoking G. H. Lewes's account of science and theology in my reading of Eliot's novella: "Trying to find Lewes in her [Eliot's] works because she lived with him," he objects, "is not only belittling George Eliot's original thought, but also leads to inappropriate and confusing interpretations" (254).<sup>1</sup> The second question is why I even bring up Lewes's objections to religious thinking given that Eliot's text distinguishes so clearly between superstition and true religion. My analysis, Mazaheri suggests, collapses Eliot and Lewes in order to turn religious faith into a straw man—superstition—which I then oppose to the supposedly more sophisticated thinking associated with science and secularism. To properly grasp Eliot's approach to religion in *Silas Marner*, his article concludes, we should read it (at least initially) independently of its philosophical and biographical contexts. These include Eliot's other novels, as well as the contingencies of her personal and intellectual life.

I shall respond firstly with some corrections to Mazaheri's account of my reading that show how we partly agree about George Eliot's depiction of religious sentiment. Eliot's intellectual relationship with Lewes enhances, rather than compromises, her account of genuine spiritual feeling and its difference from superstition. Moreover, like Lewes, she credits science with the kind of imaginative vision more

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\*Reference: John H. Mazaheri, "On Superstition and Prejudice in the Beginning of *Silas Marner*," *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 238-58. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debmazaheri01913.htm>>.

usually associated with religious prophecy. I shall then propose that because it does not position the novella in Eliot's *oeuvre*, Mazaheri's highly formalist, new-critical argument for the independence of text from context necessarily ignores a very pronounced aspect of the story's *form*—namely its length. Eliot's shorter fiction, I will suggest, enacts the narrow vision and de-animation she associates with the failure of sympathy. In her longer novels, on the other hand, narrative form aims to represent as well as to activate the sympathetic fibers of a vast social organism. The characteristics of the narrowing mind—superstitious, prejudiced, inflexible, and (at its worst) cataleptic—portrayed in *Silas Marner* are best viewed against the expansive, imaginative, and spiritual vision that emerges in the dilatory, multi-layered narratives of the longer novels.

As Mazaheri rightly indicates, Eliot's concept of realism links the portrayal of "definite substantial reality" with what "compel[s] men's attention and sympathy" (Eliot, "Review of *Modern Painters*" 368-69). Artistic creation therefore involves more than the faithful reproduction of visible forms; the artist must discriminate among images and ideas to best express the complex web of human passions she seeks to represent (cf. "Notes on Form in Art" 232-34). Eliot's realism aims to reveal what many of her protagonists come to learn—namely that individual feeling is bound up with the wider social drama of which it is a part. As the narrator of *Middlemarch* puts it, "[t]here is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it" (821). In showing things as they are, literary realism has the moral task of "amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" ("Natural History" 110).

The artist's attention to the relationship between part and whole parallels the work of the empirical scientist, for whom "knowledge continues to grow by its alternating processes of distinction and combination, seeing smaller and smaller unlikenesses and then grouping or associating these under a common likeness" ("Notes on Form in Art" 232). Lewes's essay "Of Vision in Art" describes this transforma-

tion of sense perceptions into abstract knowledge as a “vision” that in both art and science “renders the invisible visible by imagination” (576), and gathers the “numerous relations of things present to the mind” (575). For Lewes, “the man of genius [...] whose sympathies are unusually wide” represents the most advanced stage of Auguste Comte’s theory of human social development: the positive stage (cf. Lewes, *Problems, First Series* 2: 122). When he predicts “the triumph of science over [...] theology” (the phrase that Mazaheri objects should not be associated with Eliot’s text), he refers to Comte’s first stage—the theological—in which imaginary beings determine human fortune (and which is therefore closer to “superstition” than it is to “religion,” in the sense that Mazaheri uses the term). Both Lewes and Eliot identify the positive stage with profound sympathy and its imaginative capacity to assemble individual concrete experiences into a portrait of the larger histories to which they belong.

In Eliot’s novels, the sympathetic mind belongs to the organizing vision of the narrator. Through the latter’s grasp both of the consciousnesses of often narrow, individual minds, and of the rich interplay of events that gathers towards a greater transformation of the social whole, she demonstrates a greater understanding of the destinies that both shape and await her characters. This larger vision enacts the moral force of art “molding and feeding the more passive life which without [it] would dwindle and shrivel into the narrow tenacity of insects unshaken by thoughts beyond the reaches of their antennae.” *Daniel Deronda*’s narrator announces that such vision is at once scientific and spiritual when she observes that the “exultation” of the prophet-seer is “not widely different from that of the experimenter, bending over the first stirrings of change that correspond to what in the fervour of concentrated prevision his thought had foreshadowed” (*Daniel Deronda* 493). Again it is helpful to turn here to Lewes, who in *Problems of Life and Mind* defines the “spiritual” as the influence of social medium on the human psyche, distinguishing it from the “material,” which refers to raw physical processes that produce a mental event (cf. Lewes, *Problems, Third Series* 1: 25). The highest powers of



sympathetic awareness, “wide-sweeping intelligence” and thus vision evolve, for Lewes, from within the collective experience and history that makes up the social medium (cf. *Problems, Third Series* 1: 27). In *Daniel Deronda*, such spiritual vision becomes a “prophetic consciousness” (529) whose

yearnings, conceptions—nay travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on unnumbered impressions. [...] [S]ometimes it may be that their natures have manifold openings, like the hundred-gated Thebes, where there may naturally be a greater and more miscellaneous inrush than through a narrow beadle-watched portal. (471)

Here religious prophecy, emerging from the body of innumerable shared events and impressions, takes the form of animation golem tales of Jewish mysticism, where the visionary mind becomes the vessel of a culture’s accumulated wisdom. Yet the capacity to compress “unnumbered impressions” into a single insight also links the religious visionary with the realist “experimenter” whose inductive vision transforms everyday experience into wider and, in Lewes’s terms, more “spiritual” truths.

Eliot’s shorter fiction, however, does not achieve this sympathetic illumination of reality out of the manifold little histories that feed it. As Mazaheri points out, the narrator of *Silas Marner* has a greater social awareness than Eliot’s Lantern Yard and Raveloe characters. Yet the sympathy that pervades the free indirect discourse of the longer novels and allows the narrator not only to penetrate the minds of her characters but also to investigate the connections between private feelings and the social movements and changes that the novels record is frequently tested and found wanting in the shorter texts. In the article Mazaheri cites, I argue that catalepsy—the state of physiological arrest that represents the inverse of sympathy—infects the very medium of the narrative: the feelings and motives that drive the characters are often as obscure to the more sophisticated narrator as the

physiological origins of catalepsy itself. In order not to repeat myself unduly, I will focus here on a slightly different obstruction of sympathy in another of Eliot's short fictions—*The Lifted Veil*. Here the focal (and viewpoint) character sees too much into the minds of others, rather than too little, but the effect again is to show the complex human world shriveling to the insect-like dimensions of the single, narrow mind.

In representing sympathy as the means by which primitive organisms become more varied and intricate, Eliot often uses the figure of animation. This figure can appear ironic or ambivalent: in *Middlemarch*, Tertius Lydgate's Frankenstein-like search for the fundamental tissue that will reveal the key of life famously is never realized; his endeavor is as moribund as Casaubon's pursuit of the key to all mythologies. Yet despite the delusory nature of great schemes, they nonetheless contribute to broader movements of sympathetic animation. Lydgate's great reductionist idea does lead to "unhistoric acts" of kindness, by whose influence lifeless ambitions give way to the "growing good of the world" (*Middlemarch* 822). In *Daniel Deronda*, the "living warmth" of sympathy animates the prophecy of Jewish nationhood as abstract ideas become living sensations for the characters who embrace that nation. Both these novels teach that the animation of ideas depends upon sympathy. They are both also *long* novels, whose scope is itself indicative of animus, since it mimics the dynamic interrelation of manifold mental and social configurations that the stories describe. As George Levine points out, a narrative in which each individual impulse must be represented in terms of its relation to the movement of the social whole must lead to the multiplot novel (cf. Levine 11).

Suspended animation represents the inverse of such organic growth. Rather than allowing for increasingly complex configurations of diverse psychological or social components into new and more 'advanced' forms, episodes of dreamy paralysis or nervous arrest point to the retreat of sympathy. In *Silas Marner*, the cataleptic Silas withdraws completely from his social environment and, as a result,



becomes less human and more thing-like. In *The Lifted Veil*, on the other hand, the protagonist has a psychic gift that ought to accompany keen sympathy and an expansive vision. Yet Latimer's very ability to see into the minds of others is an unwanted talent whose psychic effects so exhaust his nerves that he begins to flee from anyone with whom he is familiar. His isolation then becomes so acute that he eventually exchanges his capacity for insight into the souls of his fellow human beings for a heightened, visionary relation "to what we call the inanimate" (*The Lifted Veil* 55),—"strange cities, sandy plains, [and] gigantic ruins mighty shapes unknown and pitiless" (55). Where, then, the story describes retreat from the social environment rather than a recognition of the enormous web of social relations that is either joyful (for Deronda) or painful (for Gwendolen), there is less for the narrative to see and say. Without the dilatory influence of sympathy, as Latimer observes when he rejects it, a narrator is constrained to "brevity" (52).

Paradoxically, there *is* one striking episode of animation in the story: Latimer's physician friend Charles Meunier achieves a marvelous revivification of the sinister servant—Mrs. Archer—through a combination of artificial respiration and blood transfused into an artery in the dead woman's neck. However, this grotesque experiment, which replicates Frankenstein's, reinforces Latimer's emotional and psychic paralysis, provoking in him a "horror" that "was only like an old pain recurring with new circumstances" (66). Mrs. Archer's restored narrowness and vindictiveness at the moment of her return to life only confirms what Latimer's alienating clairvoyance has already taught him: by intruding into others' "frivolous ideas and emotions," his consciousness has become like "the loud activity of an imprisoned insect" (19), giving him "microscopic vision" into all the most small-minded, indolent, and capricious habits of the mind. Second sight here *prevents* him from recognizing the greater movements of human history because it alerts him to the most fundamentally selfish, petty, and thus, for Eliot, primitive qualities of human nature. At the same time, this insight suffocates his own "yearning for brotherly love"—

the very passion that fuels creative genius, making him reflect that he will “leave no work behind [...] for men to honour” (4). In his fear that sympathy might trigger an episode of insight, he resists the higher, creative work of the mind and follows the impulses of its lower functions: the “irrational instinct” and “automatic gesture” (59) that determine his emotional retreat from others.

*The Lifted Veil* is thus an aborted story, mimicking the arrest of its protagonist’s creative faculties in its form. Rather than promising new and better growths, the great web of relations threatens to de-animate the sensitive and superior mind. Like Silas, whose “face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life” (*Silas Marner* 20), Latimer turns from the world of living minds to that of inanimate things. Mazaheri cautions that we should look at Eliot’s other writings (and those of her close contemporaries) only after a “preliminary reading of the text” of *Silas Marner* if we do not want to distort her representation of religion. I have tried to show that her novels represent spiritual vision in contrast not only with superstition, but also with the associated figure of catalepsy or de-animation. The significance of this contrast in *Silas Marner* is best grasped in terms of a theory of sympathy at least partly derived from ideas Eliot shared with Lewes as well as in the context of her more lengthy fictions.

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Mazaheri is commenting on my “The Primitive Mind of *Silas Marner*.”

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## Writing Backwards—Writing Forwards: A Response to Philipp Erchinger\*

BEATRIX HESSE

It is quite true what philosophy says: that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other principle: that it must be lived forwards.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, IV A 164

In his article “Secrets Not Revealed” Philipp Erchinger investigates what he himself calls (in the subtitle) “possible stories” in *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, including both dead ends in the narrative progression and suggestions for alternative interpretations. Erchinger starts off his analysis with a discussion of the law metaphor that introduces the novel, pointing to the implicit contradiction of presenting the Law as unreliable, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, employing it as a model for the subsequent narrative, in a manner that I find perfectly persuasive. My following comments on the other sections of Erchinger’s article are also intended to complement his observations rather than to refute them.

In his second chapter, Erchinger quotes a passage from *The Woman in White* in which Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco debate the suitability of a specific landscape as a murder site. This quotation is indeed intriguing—particularly since no murder is going to take place here or (as far as we can tell) elsewhere in the story, but to my mind this passage largely serves to establish Fosco as a new type of “realistic” villain (in spite of his nationality and aristocratic rank that are clearly indebted to the Gothic tradition) by contrasting him with Sir

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\*Reference: Philipp Erchinger, “Secrets Not Revealed: Possible Stories in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*,” *Connotations* 18.1-3 (2008/2009): 48-81. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/deberchinger01813.htm>>.

Percival as a representative of another conventional type of villain, the wicked squire of melodrama. While Sir Percival argues in favour of the suitability of the lakeside landscape as an appropriate scenery for the horrors of murder, Fosco claims its unsuitability on practical grounds, since it offers no opportunity for concealment. Collins thus establishes Fosco's credibility as a fictional character at the expense of Sir Percival—and indeed Fosco should prove the prototype of the modern villain. Sir Percival, it seems, is planning to *stage* a crime with all the appropriate scenic effects; Fosco, by contrast, is trying to *hide* it. The parallels to the declining genre of melodrama and the nascent genre of detective fiction are unmistakable. Fosco's claim concerning the abundance of undetected and even unsuspected crimes, for instance, was to become a commonplace of the "Golden Age" detective fiction of the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Fosco also anticipates positions held in—and by—latter-day detective fiction in his stout refusal to consider crime from a moral point of view. This is the position held by Laura in the novel, and again Fosco's distinctive attitude is worked out and thrown into relief by contrasting him with another fictional character.

In his following subchapters III and IV, Erchinger points out several of the possible alternative readings suggested but never fully realized in *The Woman in White* and demonstrates convincingly how the narrative presents the various "roads not taken." He notes, for instance, that "it is anything but plain that it is indeed Laura rather than Anne who has been rescued from the asylum to live in London with Marian and Walter, as Walter's narrative would have us believe, and that it is Anne rather than Laura who has died in the course of the exchange" (68-69) and suspects that the unpublished part of Marian's diary might include "disreputable details about Walter that would further disparage the integrity of his character and his editing" (70). Apart from Walter, Fosco may also have interfered as an uncalled-for editor to Marian's diary: "Did Fosco modify or censor the contents of the journal, adapting them to his own needs?" (71). Even if the diary has not been tampered with, it is unreliable, because at a crucial point of

the action“an entry, headed ‘JUNE 20<sup>TH</sup>—Eight o’clock’ [...] that is meant to account for the way the writing of the foregoing passages has been accomplished [...] completely fails to do so, however, because what Marian [...] has actually noted down is only that she is completely unable to remember clearly what has happened” (71). Finally, even Fosco’s death is uncertain, as Erchinger adds in a footnote that acknowledges the final claim of Hutter’s article “Fosco Lives!” as “a legitimate possibility” (79n10).

This list is surely impressive and convincingly supports Erchinger’s point concerning the multiple loose ends and unanswered questions within the novel. Something that also needs to be considered, however, is not *how* the text presents its multiple dead (or loose) ends but *why* there should be so many unrealized stories in *The Woman in White*. It would be tempting to read the numerous unrevealed secrets and dubious resolutions in the narrative as evidence of a new aesthetics that discards the contemporary ideal of the work of art as an organic whole as postulated, for instance, by Henry James in “The Art of Fiction”: “A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts” (400). It is particularly tempting, since inconsistencies of plot would accord well with the fragmentation of narrative perspective that Collins first experimented with in *The Woman in White*.<sup>2</sup>

From a modern-day perspective his renunciation of the godlike omniscient authorial narrator seems to point in the same direction as an abandoning of plot coherence. Unfortunately, however, Collins’s revisions of *The Woman in White* show that he was aiming at a greater consistency of plot and striving to eliminate the several gaps and contradictions caused by the method of composition peculiar to serial publication. For example, a review in the *Times* of 30 October 1860 had first pointed out a severe inconsistency in the novel’s time scheme, which Collins attempted to correct in the 1861 version by setting back the relevant dates some 16 days.<sup>3</sup>



As Erchinger notes, critics and reviewers of *The Woman in White* have largely tended to stress Collins's close adherence to a preconceived plan—a myth that Collins himself was eager to perpetuate. The effect of serialization on the shape of the finished novel has already been discussed several times; but this has largely been done with respect to the necessity of creating suspense and introducing cliffhangers at regular intervals.<sup>4</sup> What I would like to argue in the following, however, is that the process of serialization of course largely prevented Collins from doing what he made Hartright do in the novel, namely revising and correcting the assembled material. As Collins's note at the head of the manuscript shows, the processes of the composition and publication of *The Woman in White* were overlapping: "I began this story on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1859, at Broadstairs, and finished it on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1860, at 12 Harley Street, London. It was first published, in weekly parts, in 1859, and ending with the number for August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1860."<sup>5</sup> At various times in his later life, Collins gave contradictory accounts of the writing process of *The Woman in White*. Weighing the evidence, Sutherland doubts Collins's claim that "every work began with 'a mass of notes' in which the most minute details of the plot were foreseen with clairvoyant precision" (651), but comes to the conclusion that, in all likelihood, the process of composition and the process of publication occurred largely simultaneously: "From the internal evidence of the manuscript, it would seem that at the point when he actually began to put pen to paper, in August 1859, Collins was two or three months ahead of publication. According to a letter of 1865, 'When I sat down to write the seventh *weekly part* of *The Woman in White* the first weekly part was being published in *All the Year Round* and *Harper's Weekly*.' And as the narrative got under way the gap evidently closed to days. In the last instalments, he was in a neck-and-neck race with Sampson Low and the printers of *All the Year Round*" (651).

In his article, Erchinger expresses a scepticism concerning the truthfulness of an edited narrative that is perhaps typical of a present-day sensibility, voicing doubts concerning a single authoritative version

that may have extinguished traces of yet other, untold stories in the interest of greater coherence (70-71). Hartright's retrospective point of view and editorial intervention make his text an example of what Dennis Porter (in *The Pursuit of Crime*, drawing on Poe's comments on Godwin's *Things as They Are; or: The Adventures of Caleb Williams*) has called "backwards construction," a technique that is considered necessary in classical detective fiction of the "puzzle" type, and also a method contributing to the impression of the "wholeness" of a narrative. In a narrative constructed backwards, the plot assumes a certain providential quality: once we know the outcome of the story, all the events leading to it seem inevitable, even preordained. Moreover, all the events narrated seem to be *leading to* the inevitable and necessary end. This type of plot construction may have suited Victorian sensibilities—a reader of the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, by contrast, may have a preference for a plot composed "forwards" with all the numerous crossroads—both literal and figurative—in the narrative where the action might take a different turn still visible in the text.

As suggested by the Kierkegaard quotation which I chose as a motto for these observations, telling a story backwards produces "meaning," whereas a story told forwards may seem more "true to life." Erchinger seems to express a preference for the latter type of narrative that does not finish with all the loose ends nicely tidied up: "In the end, fictional narratives that are read merely for the detection of a particular plot often leave their readers in a state of lingering dissatisfaction that is then typically, if only temporarily, cured by the consumption of similar stories. One reason for this dissatisfaction, I suspect, is that the establishment of a plot presupposes a constructive activity that is necessarily somewhat destructive at the same time. [...] Certainly, with *The Woman in White* such readings bereave the text of its ability to signify liveliness and zest, reducing it to a mechanical pattern, bereft of 'lungs' and 'legs' like Fairlie's disabled angels" (77).

While Erchinger locates the central tension in the narrative of *The Woman in White* between the preconceived plan or blueprint for the

novel and its execution (“the creative struggle between a single pre-conceived theoretical law—which I take as a synonym for any binding principle or plan—and the many ways in which this pre-established law may subsequently be executed, reformed and transformed in the course of time” [49]), I would argue that another central tension exists between the backwards construction carried out by Hartright and the necessity to present this construction in a narrative that Collins had to compose forwards due to the peculiarity of the publication process. As in the debate on crime sites and master criminals mentioned above, this tension is also mirrored in the text itself by means of a juxtaposition of fictional characters. While Hartright presents the art of backwards construction, Fosco is depicted as an example of the serial writer forced into a fury of composition in the final “neck-and-neck race” (to quote Sutherland’s term) of the narrative; so it is clearly no coincidence that the following passage occurs towards the end of the novel:

He dipped his pen in the ink, placed the first slip of paper before him with a thump of his hand on the desk, cleared his throat, and began. He wrote with great noise and rapidity, in so large and bold a hand, and with such wide spaces between the lines, that he reached the bottom of the slip in not more than two minutes certainly from the time when he started at the top. Each slip as he finished it was paged, and tossed over his shoulder out of his way on the floor. When his first pen was worn out, that went over his shoulder too, and he pounced on a second from the supply scattered about the table. Slip after slip, by dozens, by fifties, by hundreds, flew over his shoulders on either side of him till he had snowed himself up in paper all round his chair. Hour after hour passed—and there I sat watching, there he sat writing. He never stopped, except to sip his coffee, and when that was exhausted, to smack his forehead from time to time. One o’clock struck, two, three, four—and still the slips flew about all round him; still the untiring pen scraped its way ceaselessly from top to bottom of the page, still the white chaos of paper rose higher and higher all round his chair. At four o’clock I heard a sudden splutter of the pen, indicative of the flourish with which he signed his name. “Bravo !” he cried, springing to his feet with the activity of a young man, and looking me straight in the face with a smile of superb triumph. “Done, Mr Hartright!” (608-09)

A central operative image of the above passage obviously is the “white chaos of paper” Fosco has produced. As Erchinger demonstrates, the colour “white” is generally associated with danger and insecurity in the course of the novel. He speaks of the “metaphorical whiteness that mars the evidence and the reliability of what is deemed to be positively known” (64) and draws attention to the various blanks threatening the safety of several fictional characters. To Hartright, the woman in white Anne Catherick becomes a harbinger of danger: “After the woman in white has dramatically appeared in the middle of the road, the familiar ways of making and perceiving the world can no longer be trusted” (64). Laura’s sense of identity is threatened by “the blank in her existence” (69), and “a blank space, a marriage not entered, proves Percival’s crime” (67). It is in the passage quoted above that the fear of whiteness is finally revealed to be a special form of the *horror vacui*, the serial writer’s fear of the blank page.

I would like to close on a more general observation: right at the beginning of his article, Erchinger makes a deliberate choice to focus on the process of reception—a choice that must of course be respected, but it might be fruitfully complemented by a focus on the process of production of the literary text. And there is also a stylistic phenomenon to which I would like to draw attention. Throughout Erchinger’s article, but most conspicuously at the beginning and the end, agency is repeatedly ascribed to the literary text: “a novel [...] repeatedly exposes, questions and reverts the tacit laws and premises upon which it seems to proceed” (51); “the text itself [...] loudly and brashly answers to its unresolved function” (53); “literary fictions [...] do characteristically not attempt to eliminate or ‘reduce noise to a minimum’” (73); “the way *The Woman in White* [...] suggests itself to be read” (76); and—maybe most tellingly, in a passage already quoted above: “such readings bereave the text of its ability to signify liveliness and zest, reducing it to a mechanical pattern, bereft of ‘lungs’ and ‘legs’ like Fairlie’s disabled angels, instead of having it become invigorated by what it does not overtly say but might covertly still hold in

store" (77). It has by now of course become customary to credit literary texts with agency—I have been doing the same at various points in the course of the present response; but still this habit perhaps ought to strike us as odd. The purpose of crediting the text with possessing agency is that it allows us to avoid speaking of authorial intention—another telling phenomenon in this context is the abundant use of the passive voice. Ever since Barthes's declaration of the "death of the author," literary critics have felt a profound embarrassment about discussing authorial intention. However, as I have tried to suggest by the preceding observations, overcoming this ancient taboo may allow us to discuss not merely *how* a text is producing its specific effects but also *why* this should be so.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf., for instance, the opening discussion of Agatha Christie's "The Four Suspects" in her *The Thirteen Problems*.

<sup>2</sup>Critics, of course, were quick to contest Collins's claim that his narrative method was a genuine innovation by pointing out its similarity to the epistolary novel—see a review from the *Observer* of 27 August 1860.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Kendrick 74.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Hüttner, 29-30. See also Hüttner for further references.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Sutherland 647.

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## *The Woman in White* and the Secrets of the Sensation Novel\*

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Philipp Erchinger's densely argued essay, "Secrets Not Revealed: Possible Stories in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*", which appeared in an issue of *Connotations* devoted to the theme of "Roads Not Taken," seeks to make Collins's text yield up some of those narrative or textual secrets that, as Frank Kermode maintains in his essay "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," are concealed by an author's efforts to "'foreground' sequence and message" (Kermode 88). Such secrets, Kermode argues, remain hidden to "all but abnormally attentive scrutiny" and are only brought to light by a "reading so minute, so intense and slow that it seems to run counter to one's 'natural' sense of what a novel is" (Kermode 88).

Erchinger is clearly an attentive reader. For example, he subjects a lakeside conversation between four of the protagonists at the beginning of the novel's "Second Epoch" to a longer and closer scrutiny than it has hitherto received (Erchinger 51-60)—a reading so minute, intense and slow that it runs counter to one's sense of what the experience of reading a sensation novel is. He is also an inventive reader who suggests that there is no good reason to suppose that it is Laura rather than Anne who escapes the plotters and marries Hartright. He seems to suggest that the concealment of this fact may not simply be a consequence of Hartright's evasiveness as a narrator, but rather is one of its motivating factors. Erchinger is, moreover, a resisting reader, who resists the lures of the sensation novel by rea-

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\*Reference: Philipp Erchinger, "Secrets Not Revealed: Possible Stories in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," *Connotations* 18.1-3 (2008/2009): 48-81. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/deberchinger01813.htm>>.

ding against the plot, or more specifically, against the idea of plot as a controlling device which conceals the plenitude of a novel's potential meanings. Instead, he seeks to analyse Collins's novel as "a highly intriguing fabric of individual fictional discourses, managed, manipulated and lined up by an equally fictional editor, Walter Hartright, whose true motives [...] must [...] necessarily remain [...], despite all his declarations to the contrary, fundamentally unreliable" (Erchinger 51). This response will suggest some other roads one might take through Collins's manipulations of Hartright's manipulations of this highly intriguing fabric of individual fictional discourses.

Erchinger's starting point is his observation that the novel's chief narrator, Hartright, uses "the machinery of the Law" (Collins 5) as "an operative framework for the whole novel", a "theoretical model [...]" that has been devised to structure the practical writing and reading of the narrative text, ensuring the credibility of its statements and the economy of its effects" (Erchinger 48). Much of the essay's subsequent argument turns on what Erchinger describes as the "irresolvable tension" (49) regarding the Law which, he argues, is established in Hartright's opening justification of his narrative method and is developed throughout the novel. This tension results, Erchinger suggests, from Hartright's presentation of the Law as, on the one hand, an "authoritative system of clarification and distinction," and, on the other, as so "highly unpredictable and erratic" in its operation, as to create "an uneasy feeling of hidden secrets and unresolved cases" (Erchinger 49). Erchinger sees this ambivalence with regard to the Law as self-consciously inviting a "theoretical comparison between the conduct of a legal investigation and a reader's construction of a narrative plot" (49).

The Law is not the only locus of tension or ambivalence introduced in Hartright's opening remarks on the narratives which constitute the text of *The Woman in White* (cf. "Preamble," Collins 5). Collins's chief narrator and self-appointed editor's justification of his narrative method also establishes a tension regarding the process of narration. Hartright insists that his chosen narrative method offers maximum

veracity and clarity: "No circumstance of importance, from the beginning to the end of the disclosure, shall be related on hearsay evidence"; the task of narrator will be carried out by those "who can speak to the circumstances under notice from their own knowledge [...] clearly and positively"; the purpose being to "present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect" and "to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word" (Collins 5-6). While Hartright appears to offer the ultimate in fictional realism as well as the forensic objectivity which is appropriate to a legal investigation or a "Court of Justice," the narratives that follow are, in fact, all limited and subjective. Moreover, while Hartright insists that his ordering of the narratives is designed to "trace the course of one complete series of events" as clearly as possible, Collins's construction and ordering of the narratives is designed to create and perpetuate the narrative secrets for as long as possible and to maximise the sensational effects of the sensation novel—"the whole interest of which consists in the gradual unravelling of some carefully prepared enigma," as one early commentator on the genre put it (*Spectator* 1428). Indeed, as U. C. Knoepfelmacher pointed out in his 1975 essay on *The Woman in White* and the "Counterworld of Victorian Fiction," Hartright's comparison of his method of assembling the narratives with the operations of a Court of Law is patently a false analogy. A trial in a Court of Law involves both "the knowledge of the offence and the offender" and "a detached, ex post facto analysis of events" (Knoepfelmacher 62). On the contrary, the "narrative strips" (Knoepfelmacher 62) assembled by Hartright draw readers into a shared time scheme with the characters who are involved in those events, and, for much of the narrative, readers share the ignorance of several of the narrating characters about the precise nature of the offence to which Hartright refers in his opening remarks. In other words, both readers and (for the most part) characters are "engaged in the narrative, not as impartial and objective judges but as subjective participants in a mystery," a mystery,

moreover, which is “based on the irrational suspicions of the [...] figure who has posed ... [in his introductory remarks] as a rational accuser before a rational court of law” (Knoepflmacher 62).

One might argue that the central tension in the novel is not, in fact, an “irresolvable tension” regarding the operations of the Law, but rather a tension between the Law—which is consistently presented as being compromised by “the money question,” as the lawyer Kyrle puts it (Collins 454)—and Justice. Crucially Hartright repeatedly presents himself as a fighter for Justice in the face of the unreliability of “the machinery of the Law.” Thus, for example, Hartright assures Kyrle that there “shall be no money-motive [...] no idea of personal advantage, in the service I mean to render to Lady Glyde,” and asserts that her persecutors “shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them” (Collins 454). Moreover, one of the lessons that Hartright presents himself as having learned in the course of the events narrated is that sometimes Justice can only be obtained outside of the operations of the Law. As he reflects towards the end of the narrative: “The Law would never have obtained me my interview with Mrs Catherick. The Law would never have made Pesca the means of forcing a confession from the Count” (Collins 636).

Like the ambivalence concerning the process of narration noted above, the tension between Law and Justice is established in the opening paragraphs of the novel in Hartright’s juxtaposition of the unreliable “machinery of the Law”—too often “the pre-engaged servant of the long purse” (Collins 5)—with the “Court of Justice.” It is, in fact the “Court of Justice” rather than, as Erchinger suggests, the operations of the “machinery of the Law” which Hartright invokes as an analogy for his narrative method. The narratives which he has gathered together are presented to readers who are to act as judge (and also, perhaps, as jurors). This type of legal analogy, as Jonathan Grossman notes in *The Art of Alibi*, was common in Victorian novels, which frequently “incorporated self-reflecting and self-defining analogies to the law courts” (Grossman 5). George Eliot, for example,

notably compared the form of the novel to a mirror, whose deflected and refracted reflections were to be described by the narrator “as precisely” as possible, “as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath” (Eliot 175). For Eliot, as for many of her contemporaries, “the law courts, understood as a containing structure for retelling stories, provided a constitutive way of imagining [the] novel’s form” (Grossman 4). Erchinger, on the other hand, interprets Hartright’s references to the “machinery of the Law” and the “Court of Justice” in the opening paragraphs of *The Woman in White* as referring to a “legal enquiry.” Such a process, he argues “is typically [...] carried out in order to reduce all the information to a single, unequivocal interpretation [...] [and is] conducted for the sole purpose of discovering a coherent plot yielding a clear-cut decision on whether a given case conforms to a prefigured law or whether it does not” (50). Does this really describe the process of a Court of Law or Justice? In England a Court of Law is adversarial and involves advocacy. Forensic skills are used to interrogate evidence and witnesses, to find gaps in the stories they tell, to advocate alternative readings of the evidence and to tell alternative stories. This is an aspect of the operations of a Court of Justice on which Hartright does not dwell—yet another example of his narratorial evasiveness.

Hartright is, of course, as Erchinger notes, a notoriously unreliable narrator. Indeed, as Kermode reminds us in “Secrets and Narrative Sequence,” all narrators are unreliable, what is remarkable is that we should have “endorsed the fiction of the ‘reliable’ narrator” (Kermode 90). One of the most recent among the numerous critics to have explored Hartright’s unreliability is Maria Bachman, who sees his narrative manipulations, concealments and control of information as central both to the novel’s obsession with secrecy and to the way in which it keeps its secrets “hidden deep under the surface” (Collins 482). Bachman argues that Walter’s narrative method, which presents us with a series of narratives that “conceal far more than they reveal” (Bachman 90), is a metaphor for the way that all novels work: “the logic of novels is analogous to the logic of disclosing secrets” (Bach-



man 76). This is certainly the “logic” of the sensation novel. From its inception readers and reviewers of sensation fiction recognised that secrecy was not only the driver of its plots, but that it was also its theme or subject, and its fundamental “enabling condition” (Showalter 104). Indeed, one might argue that, particularly as practiced by Collins, the sensation novel goes out of its way to foreground the interconnectedness of its use of secrecy as a narrative device (to capture and keep the attention of readers) and its exploration of secrecy as a broader cultural phenomenon.

If the unreliable Hartright presents us with a series of narratives that conceal as much, if not more, than they reveal, he is nevertheless curiously open about his secretiveness. He frequently calls attention to his concealments and manipulations. Often the ostensible reason for the omission or editing of information is narrative clarity. Thus at the beginning of “The Third Epoch,” Hartright resumes his narrative one week after the sensational scene in which Laura appeared to him beside her own gravestone, noting that he must leave “unrecorded” the “history of the interval,” whose recollection makes his mind sink “in darkness and confusion” (Collins 420). Such emotion must be suppressed “if the clue that leads through the windings of the Story is to remain, from end to end, untangled in my hands” (Collins 420). Similarly, notwithstanding his opening claims about letting everyone “relate their own experience, word for word” (Collins 6), Hartright reveals his editing of the words of Laura and Marian, an act which he justifies in the interests of clarity: “I shall relate both narratives not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own guidance, and for the guidance of my legal adviser. So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled” (Collins 422).

In short, throughout, Walter openly suppresses details which he deems irrelevant to “this process of inquiry” (Collins 5), or “the Story” (Collins 5), often using the argument of clarity and rationality to justify his exclusions. But what is “the Story”? Is it the “plain narrative



of the conspiracy" (Collins 633) against Laura which Hartright carefully writes out for delivery to the tenants of the Limmeridge Estate towards the end of the novel? Or is "the Story" the one referred to in the novel's opening paragraph: "this is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve" (Collins 5)? Walter is the author of both stories, and both have their own concealments. The "plain narrative" (Collins 633), the result of the supposedly forensic untangling of the clues that lead through the windings of the labyrinth of the conspiracy, is merely reported to—rather than shared with—the readers. It is also self-confessedly partial, as it dwells "only on the pecuniary motive for [the conspiracy] in order to avoid complicating my statement by unnecessary reference to Sir Percival's secret," which would, Hartright notes, "confer advantage on no one" (Collins 634). The "plain narrative" is Laura's story. Its purpose is to re-establish her legal identity and restore her to her social position. Hartright's omissions, concealments and editing have the effect of making "the Story" his story. This story is not the forensic untangling of clues, but something altogether different. It is a story of providential transformation by sensational events. Thus, for example, Hartright's recording of the fact that he must leave unrecorded the events of the week following the sensational reunion at Laura's graveside, is followed by this proclamation: "A life suddenly changed—its whole purpose created afresh; its hopes and fears, its struggles, its interests, and its sacrifices, all turned at once and for ever into a new direction—this is the prospect which now opens up before me" (Collins 420).

In this declaration one of the textual secrets which Ann Cvetkovich has detected in *The Woman in White* erupts onto its narrative surface. This is the secret of the way in which many of the novel's more sensational moments "enable the more materially determined narrative of Walter's accession to power to be represented as though it were the product of chance occurrences, uncanny repetitions, and fated events" (Cvetkovich 111). Walter's ordering of his own and others' narratives is designed to tell the story of what "a Man's resolution can achieve"

in the form of a quest for Justice. However, this quest story masks (or is written over) another story, a Victorian story of self-help in which the quest for Justice serves also as a route to power, which allows the art teacher to marry the lady, despite the difference in their class status. As Cvetkovich argues, Hartright's presentation of his own and the other narratives that make up *The Woman in White* works to conceal the fact that his "pursuit of justice allows him to further his own interest" (Cvetkovich 111). Hartright's protestations about the Law's inadequacies thus act as a cover for the fact that it is precisely the inadequacies of "the machinery of the Law" which set him on a particular road. The road taken is the road of "opportunity" on which the uncovering of the secrets and crimes of aristocratic men such as Sir Percival and Laura's father allows him to ascend to the social position of which they proved themselves unworthy, and, in Glyde's case, occupied illegitimately.

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## Thickening the Description: A Response to John R. Reed and Efraim Sicher<sup>\*1</sup>

LEONA TOKER

It is with gratitude that I read John R. Reed's letter of response, which concludes by saying that the main concern of my article on *Our Mutual Friend* is the artistic achievement of the novel. Indeed, I see one of the constituents of the aesthetic merit of the novel in the mastery with which narrative details that pertain to what Benjamin Harshav has called "External Field of Reference" are transformed when they enter patterns of new significance in the "Internal Frame of Reference," turning, as it were, from issues into motifs, especially motifs of decline and regeneration. Reed's letter, as well as Efraim Sicher's informative response essay, have stimulated further thinking about the aesthetic feat accomplished in that novel. This can be seen as what in *The Company We Keep* Wayne Booth has described as *coduction* (72-73)—changing one's attitude or opinion under the influence of strongly held views of other readers. In the present case, *coduction* is not a matter of altering my reading of *Our Mutual Friend*; rather it is a matter of further developing the thought started in the 2006/2007 article upon the input of the ideas and observations of others.

Timely input has also come from the doctoral work-in-progress by Nurit Kerner, who studies Dickens's novels, especially *Little Dorrit*, in terms of what in *The Production of Presence* Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has called "meaning effects" and "presence effects" (104-11). To paraph-

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<sup>\*Reference:</sup> Leona Toker, "Decadence and Renewal in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*," *Connotations* 16.1-3 (2006/2007): 47-59; John R. Reed, "A Letter of Response to Leona Toker," *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 34-35; Efraim Sicher, "Reanimation, Regeneration, Re-evaluation: Rereading *Our Mutual Friend*," *Connotations* 19.1-3 (2009/2010): 36-44.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debtoker01613.htm>>.

rase Gumbrecht's argument all too briefly, aesthetic effects of a work of art may be associated with our perceptual response to the features of the work's presence. This is, predominantly, the case with music and with visual arts. But the aesthetic effect of a work also extends to our intellectual response, a response to the meanings, and especially to the coherent patterns of meaning, to which the work gives rise. The literary work creates the conditions for our construction of meaning—as well as for our enjoyment of the process and, in particular, our joy at its success.<sup>2</sup> The aesthetic response to literary works is dominated by meaning effects,<sup>3</sup> but it also involves presence effects, such as enjoyment of the style, of the material texture of the work (especially when it is read out loud), as well as enjoyment of whatever the text elicits in our cooperative imagination—images, scenes and dialogues, portraits, ekphrastic landscapes, and, as is often the case with Dickens, the mysterious sense of the characters' presence. Whereas it is not possible to foresee or objectively assess the nature and intensity of such effects in each individual reading, it is possible to note the conditions that the text creates for these effects, irrespective of whether or not such conditions are actualized by every reader.

What seems to specifically characterize the aesthetic effect of *Our Mutual Friend* is that, while the effects of Dickens's style are here as infallible as those in his other major novels, *the imaginary-presence effects tend to be aversive* (a large proportion of the images conjured up are ugly, jarring, disgusting), *but their cumulative impact is either cancelled, redeemed, lightened, or compensated by meaning effects.*

Since Aristotle, it has been recognized that what is monstrous in nature can be beautiful in a work of art. In a work that belongs to what in *Laokoon* Lessing discussed as time-arts, the succession of images can prevent the gelling of an ugly moment in our minds. In *Our Mutual Friend*, however, long chains of images such as the river sequences, the sequences in Venus's shop, around the dust-mounds, in the Wilfers' dwelling, or at Wegg's stall, conjure up presences that, unless tempered by meaning effects, can hurt our senses, even if, following Dickens's own curiosity, we experience them in the mode of "the

attraction of repulsion" (Baumgarten 228-29).<sup>4</sup> *Our Mutual Friend* is a novel without a hero: the role of Eugene ("well-born") Wrayburn as a *jeune premier* is largely subverted by his wryness, and the ill-starred John Harmon is too deliberately self-effacing to constitute a strong and aesthetically appealing presence; though not repulsive themselves, these two characters do not suffice to offset the aversive potential of most other male characters, not even with the help of Mortimer Lightwood and Mrs. Boffin. Lizzie Hexam, one of the heroines, is consistently presented as a jewel amidst mud, but the mud often successfully competes with the jewel for our attention—as it also does in the case of the other beautiful heroine, Bella Wilfer. Broad generalizations are vulnerable to counterexamples, but in *Our Mutual Friend* one will be hard put to find a lengthy strand of images that would give pleasure unmixed with disgust. Moreover, repulsive presence is often merely implied—which may sometimes enhance rather than reduce its effect because it entails eliciting an even more active participation of the initiated reader in concretizing the import of the words on the page. As John Reed notes, "Dickens can convey to a knowing audience that he is including human and animal waste in the general term 'dust,' without having to say it" (34), linking the prototype of Betty Higden in Mayhew's pure-finder (see Nelson) to a foreign gentleman's reading horse-dung in Podsnap's remark about what can be found in London streets (Podsnap means prosperity). "Another sign," adds Reed, "is when Sloppy throws Wegg into the dust cart, creating a splash. Dust does not splash" (35). The reader is thus asked to cooperate with the text in conjuring up images whose presence effects tend to be aversive.

Why, then, does the novel please its audiences? "Attraction of repulsion" is only part of the answer; many readers are fascinated not *by* but *despite* the aversive presences in *Our Mutual Friend*. In a recent issue of *Partial Answers* different but complementary answers are suggested: Sally Ledger's, Angelika Zirker's, Jeffrey Wallen's, and Bernard Harrison's articles demonstrate, among other things, the inseparability of Dickens's sociopolitical and scientific interests from



the artistic felicity and philosophical seriousness of this novel. In reference to *Great Expectations*, Adina Ciugureanu suggests that some of the pleasures of reading stem from darker psychological sources. This may also be partly true of *Our Mutual Friend*—there might, for instance, be a touch of *Schadenfreude* in our response to the treacherous intriguer Wegg's being disposed of like a piece of garbage. This type of readerly pleasure is not, however, a presence effect. The aesthetic touch in it is limited to the appreciation of the aptness with which the metaphor of garbage removal is literalized; Wegg's downfall (literal and figurative) taking the shape of a "splash" in the garbage cart is in keeping with the dominant feature of the novel's city-scape, as well as with the macrometaphors clustering around the idea of what today we call recycling.

The meaning effects of *Our Mutual Friend* do not so much complement as compensate for this novel's problematic presence effects. They are particularly abundant and ample in this novel—no wonder its echoes reach as far as Joyce's *Ulysses*. What my article "Decadence and Renewal" was working up to (but stopped half-way) was a discussion of this novel with the help of the semiological triad: *semantics* / *syntactics* / *pragmatics* (see Morris: 217-20). In literary analysis (see also Toker, "The Semiological Model" and "Syntactics—Semantics—Pragmatics") *semantics* stands for the relationship of the constituents of the text with referents, specific or generalized, outside the text—the dictionary meanings of words and expressions, the import of historical and geographical references, the link of textual details with "External Fields of Reference" (EFR). *Syntactics* (not to be confused with "syntax") is a matter of the interrelationship among textual details within the text itself—their interconnections in "Internal Fields of Reference" (IFR). These interconnections often modify the meanings that words or narrative details trail in from the External Fields of Reference: if the knowledge of the EFR can enrich our understanding of IFR, the latter can affect our ideas about the extra-textual reality in unexpected ways. *Pragmatics* is a matter of the interface between the author and his/her target and "hurdle" audiences,<sup>5</sup> as well as of the

interface between the text and the different “interpretive communities” (cf. Fish), communities that may include new target audiences and unforeseen hurdle readerships.<sup>6</sup>

Scholarly as well as classroom reading of a literary text in accordance with this semiological model would be analogous to what, after Gilbert Ryle (482-83) and Clifford Geertz, has been called a “thick description,” which would take into account the intersections of numerous planes of context. It would include supplying relevant information about extra-textual realities which textual details may trail in (and in the light of which the meaning of those details as understood by a century and a half after the composition of the novel may be modified), tracing the intratextual interconnections between those details and offering observations, usually hypothetical, about the way in which different features of the narrative enter a communication with the target and the hurdle audiences, as well as the general reader.

It is only in the most general way that the above scholarly operations pertain to the aesthetic effects of the text. The aesthetic meaning effects are mainly a matter of syntactics—the collocation and interplay of the novel’s images, motifs, themes. However, watching how semantic details, such as dust mounds and dust carts from the EFR are transformed into building blocks of the IFR (with sanitation, for instance, turning from issue into theme), may also be a source of aesthetic pleasure. There may, of course, be a touch of self-congratulation in our finding a piece of historical information that suddenly enriches our understanding of the novel’s setting. Nevertheless, sudden understanding of the way a narrative detail is illumined by external information, and sudden perception of its new links with other narrative details are part of the aesthetic response—a condition for an exhilarating moment of disinterested admiration.

John Reed’s observations thicken the description of the syntactics of *Our Mutual Friend*, whether by the intratextual links of the “splash” or by supplementing the thematic patterns of decline, recycling, and renewal by the recurrent motif of paralyzing dependence (35). Efraim

Sicher's contribution mainly thickens the contexts, the EFR, by remarks about the urban sanitation and planning (and lack of the latter) as reflected in the novel and as elided in it,<sup>7</sup> by relevant motifs from Dickens's journalistic writings, and by the thoughts of his contemporaries such as John Ruskin. Sicher's remarks, belonging to the agenda of semantics rather than syntactics, do not lend support to Reed's reading of Wegg's "splash": he reminds us that human waste was mainly disposed of by Night-Soil Men (38). One could object that not all the citizens of London could afford the nocturnal visits of these sanitation workers; therefore part of the so-called Night Soil would, indeed, have ended up in Mr. Harmon's dust carts; and the provenance of the liquid substance might, in any case, be heterogeneous. However that may be, the intratextual congruence of the "splash" with the novel's other "dust" motifs can be a source of precisely the kind of meaning effects that reduce the negative-presence quality of the images that carry them.

Where Sicher's suggestions conflict with mine is on a question that belongs to pragmatics. My essay suggested, among other things, that Dickens's representing Betty Hidgen as involved in laundry work rather than in pure-finding (the occupation of her prototype in Mayhew's book) is largely an audience-oriented euphemistic option, even though not unconnected to the novel's other motifs. By contrast, Sicher notes that "Victorian readers would not have been too prudish to explore the sewers in *London Labour and the London Poor*" (39). This, indeed, is true for large parts of Dickens's audience, but not for the part that Dickens emblemized by "the young person" whose tender ears have to be protected from whatever is deemed destabilizing or repulsive. Dickens's satire is aimed not so much at this "young person" herself as at her Podsnappian would-be protectors, his hurdle audience that objects to representations of anything that would "bring a blush into the cheek of the young person" (I.11.129). Yet, a joke usually contains a grain of truth, and in this case Mr. Podsnap may be a caricature of Dickens's own cautiousness. To thicken our account of Wegg's "splash," one may note that the word addresses different

parts of the audience at once: those who hear its referential implications and those who are genuinely not aware of them, or can pretend to be so, or who can be diverted from them by the meaning-effects of the text, or feel pleased by the emblematic removal of the abject from the field of their attention.

The interaction between semantics and syntactics may well involve theoretical works that were written even a long time after the novels on which they provide indirect retroactive comment. Such work can be seen as an External Field of *ex post-facto* Reference. Sicher's essay makes a very useful suggestion of one of such sources, Lewis Mumford's *The City in History*. Sicher's contribution to the syntactics of *Our Mutual Friend* is his application of Mumford's notion of *Abbau*, "a process of destruction necessary to urban development" (41), to the novel's motifs of decline, degeneration, and misguided accretions.<sup>8</sup> *Abbau* can, indeed, be seen as another macrometaphor of the novel, supplied through hindsight to connect value shifts and sea changes with renewal. Yet *Abbau*, partial demolition for the sake of renovation, is an uneasy value. Eugene Wrayburn must, like Charlotte Brontë's Rochester, endure bodily damage in order to understand (or make his family understand) that the social conventions which mattered once need not matter any more. But the bodily integrity that has been placed on the altar of spiritual renewal is a painful sacrifice. When the dilapidated, deteriorating, rotting, or ill-advised is demolished in order to erect a rational new setting for improved social relations, who knows what underappreciated meanings may be destroyed in the process—witness the cases of the modernizing Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone, or that of the Veneerings whose leitmotif is "brand new." It is telling that the saintly Riah wears his anachronistic gabardines and that it is among the chaos of rooftops that Jenny Wren finds her paradise. The slow patient work of recycling and piecemeal renovation pursued throughout *Our Mutual Friend* may perhaps be pitted not only against the processes of degradation and decline but also against the option of a cavalier dismantling of the old for the sake

of the streamlined new. The latter dilemma is still with us, and may be one of the reasons for the continued resonance of *Our Mutual Friend*.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Work on this rejoinder has been supported by a grant (1465/10) from the Israel Science Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>See also Toker, *Towards the Ethics of Form in Fiction* 5, 42n14, 209.

<sup>3</sup>Meaning effects are difficult to distinguish from the suspense fed by the detective and romantic interests of the plot, but suspense, though part and parcel of aesthetic response, does not, in itself, grant genuine aesthetic experience. It entails the reader's power struggle with the text for the processing of information: wanting to know how things are going to work out is not disinterested. What is largely at stake in the cases of suspense is our expectations and the prospects of their being fulfilled or thwarted.

<sup>4</sup>On Dickens's use of the phrase see also Sicher's essay, esp. 54-56.

<sup>5</sup>"Hurdle audience" (see Toker, "Target Audience") is the part of the public that stands between the work and its target audience; it may be an official censorship agency, or the directors of a lending library, or heads of families who might not allow certain books into the house. Paradoxically, the hurdle audience is sometimes a part of the readership, one that rejects a work but not without examining it, rejects it despite—or because of—the pleasure received.

<sup>6</sup>Spanning all the three terms of this model is the intertextual dimension of a work—a matter of semantics (by way of meaning-enhancing allusion), of syntactics (by way of subversion), or of pragmatics (by way of the author's self-positioning in respect to a literary tradition).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Sicher's remarks in his response (43) on Joseph Bazalgette's sewage reconstruction project.

<sup>8</sup>One of such accretions is the chaotic new neighbourhood where Headstone's school is located (cf. II.1.218—see Sicher's response (42)).



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## Hopkins and Home<sup>\*1</sup>

ADRIAN GRAFE

I remember a house where all were good  
To me, God knows, deserving no such thing:  
Comforting smell breathed at very entering,  
Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood.<sup>2</sup>

In the sonnet “In the Valley of the Elwy,” of which the first quatrain is given above, we find Hopkins, or his speaker, meditating on the memory of a house, the home of family friends, in which, as the quatrain makes clear, he was welcomed, and made to feel at home. Hopkins wrote “In the Valley of the Elwy” at the time of his most joyous poems, of often intense spiritual consolation, a time he would call “my Welsh days, [...] my salad days” (*Letters to R. Bridges* 163); indeed, Hopkins’s home when he wrote the poem was St Beuno’s, a Jesuit seminary on the Welsh coast. Yet, for Hopkins, the poem is uncharacteristically wistful, nostalgic even. Hopkins had felt at home in a house not his home; and the inhabitants of the house “loved him very dearly,” according to the mother of the family who lived in it.<sup>3</sup> From the biographical perspective, this poem suggests a dual dynamic with regard to home: the home of the people in the house of the first line of the poem; and the temporary home provided by St Beuno’s. Indeed, from the moment he joined the Jesuits, all homes, in the sense of houses in which he resided, were temporary for Hopkins—if, that is, there is such a thing as a temporary home: the *OED* calls home “a *fixed* residence” (my italics). Hopkins’s religious conversion and frequent changes of posting within the Company of Jesus heightened his sense of belonging or not belonging, geographically and spiritually. In his mature poetry, “Hopkins in a way typical of him changes the

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<sup>\*</sup>For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debgrafe02011.htm>>.

general and worldly concept for the spiritual and religious one. Home becomes not where his parents are but where his God is, not where his worldly father but where his heavenly father is" (Thornton 138). It is a powerful metamorphosis. As soon as Hopkins leaves home in familial and religious terms, the whole concept broadens out in his poetry and prose, acquiring a multiplicity of meanings and taking on expressive force. And there are still senses in which Hopkins was at home in the world.

This article, then, aims to answer the question: what was home for Hopkins? House or dwelling-place, home, hospitality—of the kind, for instance, which the poet received at the house he celebrates in "In the Valley of the Elwy," though the concept has philosophical and critical resonances to be discussed below—are all intrinsic to Hopkins's poetic imagery, to the grammar of his poetic thought. I take the notion of hospitality as being connected to that of home, to the extent that hospitality involves a host receiving a guest or—more often than not—a person at home receiving a person from outside that home (but ideally making him feel as though he belonged there). Equally intrinsic to the problematic of home is the home/non-home dialectic. One main example of non-home is exile. Hopkins was deeply sensitive to exile, whether it be his own (in various forms, as discussed below), or that of the German nuns elegized in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," "exiles by the Falck laws"<sup>4</sup> as the poem's epigraph has it, or the social and psychological exile of the unemployed, as in "Tom's Garland" (see below).

In a sense, the home/non-home dialectic lies behind all the poems Hopkins wrote in Ireland, the country in which he spent the last five years of his life (February 1884—June 8, 1889). To illustrate this dialectic straight off, just over a single line from "To seem the stranger" will serve: "I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third / Remove." It is difficult to be quite sure exactly what the three "remove[s]" are. One could be taken as distance from the other members of his family due to religious differences; another to the fact that, as he is in Ireland, he is geographically remote from his family and friends in England and

from his home land itself; and the third might have been the fact that, although Hopkins lived and worked with Catholics, they were against England, the English, and English sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Hopkins drew poetic energy from the feelings and the idea of home, just as he did from being away from home. Hopkins's poems, both of his early, pre-conversion days, and those of his maturity exploit the verbal potential of house and home: this shows that the theme of home was one which, in different guises, remained with Hopkins throughout his writing life.

The English word "home" is cognate with German "heim" and Old Icelandic "heimr," which means both "dwelling" and "world" (cf. *OED*). Therefore to say one is at home in the world is tautological, since to be in the world is already to be in one's "dwelling," that is, at home. To be alive in the world is to be at home. Although this particular sentiment is not found explicitly in Hopkins's poetry, it is implicit in much of the poetry he wrote until his final, less happy, Irish period. It is implicit, for instance, in such lines as:

I kiss my hand  
To the stars, lovely-asunder  
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
Glow, glory in thunder;  
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:  
(*"The Wreck of the Deutschland"*, stanza 5)

This is Hopkins's beautiful tribute to God as immanent in His creation. But it is also a tribute to the poet's feeling of at-home-ness in the universe, at least when he finds the divine presence within it. As Rilke wrote to the young poet Franz Xaver Kappus: "We have been put into life as into the element we most accord with [...]. We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world [...]" (*Letters* 91).<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed at various points in this article, the poet became spiritually distanced from his Anglican family's home by his conversion to Roman Catholicism and his decision to join the Jesuits. Nevertheless, Hopkins's warm and loving celebration of all creation, and of what he

perceives as God's presence within it, enable one to suggest that he made the whole world his home.<sup>7</sup>

The word "home" can be, amongst other verbal categories, a noun, a verb, and an adverb. Grammatically versatile as the word is, it threads its way through Hopkins's poetry and prose,<sup>8</sup> as does the idea of home even when the word itself is not mentioned. To give one example from Hopkins's poetry of the word itself: in "Inversnaid," of the stream or "burn" which is the subject of the poem, Hopkins says: "In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam / Flutes and low to the lake falls home." The word "home" here clearly means the place the downhill flow of the stream is intended to reach; but it also chimes in perfectly with the personification of the stream and its metamorphosis into an animal ("his"), and stresses the idea of the watercourse as a journey, begun in the second line of the poem with the word "high-road."

The following well-known diary note provides not one but two instances of Hopkins's use of the term "home," each quite different to the other: "As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home" (*Journals* 254). When the word first appears here ("drove home") its usage is apparently prosaic (I say "apparently," as its particular grammatical and semantic malleability means that it is used, in a context of motion towards it, without a preposition or article). After leaning back, Hopkins gives up all agency to the beauty of the night sky; he does not praise God for all that beauty: in synecdochal fashion, his heart does. His own nature and his spiritual practices have combined in hospitably responding to beauty, and in associating it spontaneously with God. The beauty Hopkins contemplates is already at home because it is "in" God—because, as Saint Augustine says, it owes its existence to Him<sup>9</sup>; but it also "comes home" "to" God, meaning not only that its home is in Him but even that He is particularly moved by it, since "to come home to" can mean "to be moved by" (cf. *OED*). Above all, He is intimate with and to it. Because he is so sensitive to what he perceives

as God's presence within creation, Hopkins dwells in what Emily Merriman calls a "providential universe" (Merriman 155). At the same time, Heidegger's claim is relevant for Hopkins: "Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell" (Heidegger 239). Hopkins—though he is not the only poet to do so—brings together 'at'-'home'-ness in the universe and in language.

In "The Habit of Perfection" the poet tells his hands that they shall "unhouse and house the Lord"—an allusion to the tabernacle as the home of the Host, a topic to which we shall return. Hopkins himself, after joining the Jesuits, was continually being unhoused and housed, or rehoused, over the course of his professional life. As he himself wrote about one posting: "I am, as far as I know, permanently here, but permanence with us is ginger-bread permanence; cobweb, soap-sud, and frost-feather permanence" (*Letters to R. Bridges* 55). Permanence is part of the notion of home, since the latter implies, as previously stated, fixed residence. By converting to Catholicism and then joining the Jesuits, Hopkins was clearly courting tension with his family and those friends and acquaintances of his who could not follow him. This tension and a certain kind of ostracism were things that, equally clearly, Hopkins consciously or unconsciously sought, however painful the situation was to him, however painful the terms in which he writes about them in the late sonnet beginning "To seem the stranger" for which, here, some contextualization may be useful.

Hopkins's conversion has to be read as an estrangement from home: the word "estrangement" is indeed Hopkins's own, though he apparently takes it up from his father's using it to describe Hopkins's proposed conversion: "You ask me if I have had no thought of the estrangement [...] the prayers of this Holy Family wd. in a few days put an end to estrangements [...]" (*Further Letters* 94). This poem, written in Dublin, where he had been posted, is central to the question of home in Hopkins. On the one hand, the speaker claims to feel unrecognized, out of place, not at home, where he is, as well he might do given his status as a (very) English man in Ireland at a time when the Home Rule movement was in full swing. On the other hand, as a

Catholic and a Jesuit, living in another country in obedience to his calling, Hopkins felt remote in relation to his family, whether it be spiritually or geographically or even emotionally. He was thus both cut off from his first, or family, home, and his home land, in these different senses, and in addition unable to be or to feel at home where his Order had posted him. This is, at least, the way in which the poet dramatizes his situation:

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life  
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,  
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near  
And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife.  
England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife  
To my creating thought, would neither hear  
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: [...]

The speaker feels “imprisoned” (12)—and therefore not at home, that is, homeless—by other people’s gaze upon him.

The poem, then, draws both on his conversion (in 1866) and his time in Ireland (from 1884). One biographer writes: “To the agnostic, writing a century later, [his conversion] seems an inevitable decision—an act of individuation whereby he stepped into a new territory of his own choice and separated himself from the compass of his parents” (Kitchen 95). Here Hopkins’s conversion is described in spatial terms: the leaving of home and entering the unknown “territory.” Nevertheless, what he himself actually said about it was: “I have no power in fact to stir a finger: it is God Who makes the decision and not I” (*Correspondence Hopkins and Dixon* 95). Hopkins aligned himself with what Jean-Louis Chrétien calls “the Abrahamic movement of leaving behind the place where you were, and also of leaving *who* you were behind” (Chrétien 10). Hopkins’s poetry is exodic. As soon as Hopkins came to feel at home with himself, he ceased to be at home with his family and vice versa. The question of the accessibility or not of his family home quickly arises in his correspondence with his father: “You are so kind as not to forbid me your house [...]” (*Further Letters* 94): Hopkins’s conversion caused huge tension between the



poet and his parents, especially his father, and brought out the poet's pugnacious streak, so that one senses he might have been glad, somewhat perversely, had his father banned him from the family home altogether.

When home features in Hopkins's poetry, it is rarely without a home/non-home dialectic. We find exactly this pattern: harsh outside world, protective indoor space, or simply outdoors/indoors, in several poems, including "The Wreck of the Deutschland." "Part the first" mainly relates to the speaker. "Part the second" focuses on the shipwreck and the drowning of the five nuns. There are incidentally several Biblical types for accounts of storms and shipwrecking including Paul's shipwreck along the Maltese coastline.<sup>10</sup>

The speaker addresses the first stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" to God; the second, to Christ and to God. The speaker steps back in the third stanza, transforming the vocative of the two previous stanzas into a third person "he." In the last four lines of the stanza, Hopkins communes with his own heart, congratulating it on its spiritual intelligence. The second half of the third stanza reads:

I whirled out wings that spell  
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.—  
My heart, but you were dovewinged, I can tell,  
Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,  
To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace to  
the grace.

The terms "Host" and "Carrier-witted" both allude to home. To be a host is to be at home to, to receive someone at one's home; the slightly indirect answer given to the question posed in the third line of the stanza, "where was a place?," is "the Host." Hopkins not only becomes the guest of the Host; he makes the Host his home. This is a possible echo of George Herbert's "Love (III)," in which the poet is the "guest" (1.7), and therefore the Lord is the Host: the Eucharistic dimension of the poem, and therefore of the Lord as Host in the sense of the sacrament of bread and wine, is confirmed in the third and last

stanza: "You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat: / So I did sit and eat."

As for "Carrier-witted," the phrase refers to the homing pigeon, which is innately capable of flying home over long distances, sometimes 'carrying' a message. The poet is saying here that his heart, using its wits, was able to fly home to the Host—home because, as I say, the image is derived from the homing or carrier pigeon; and this connects "The Wreck of the Deutschland" to the later poem, "The Handsome Heart," discussed below, in which the heart is similarly characterized. Hopkins finds his home, his "place," in the Real Presence: "The great aid to belief and object of belief is the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Religion without that is somber, dangerous, illogical, with that it is—not to speak of its grand consistency and certainty—*loveable*" (*Correspondence Hopkins and Dixon* 17). Hopkins's poetry is home to Real Presence. In that sense, incidentally, because it is Incarnational it is Marian. Domesticity was traditionally a feminine space in Hopkins's day, and, while his institutional homes were by definition masculine, Hopkins's poetry contains many examples of hyperdulia: "World-mothering air, air wild, / Wound with thee, in thee isled, / Fold home, fold fast thy child." The prayerful last lines of "The Blessed Virgin compared to the air we breathe" form a tender self-consecration of the speaker to the Mother of God, as necessary to life as air. The word "home," especially collocated with the unusual verb "fold," as used here denotes desired filial intimacy with the Virgin.

The image of the speaker's heart, or self, as a homing pigeon clinches the notion that henceforth Hopkins's home is the Host. This is the main image underpinning the first part of the "Wreck."<sup>11</sup> In "The Handsome Heart," the poet exclaims of the child who would not be persuaded to accept any other present than what the priest-speaker chooses for him: "What the heart is! Like carriers let fly— / Doff darkness: homing nature knows the rest—." The idea expressed here is that, once the bird's hood has been removed (doffed), it will know by nature exactly where to go to return home; metaphorically it means

that if the spirit is enlightened and sinless, it will naturally be attracted to God its home, selflessness and the things of God. Hopkins makes a verbal adjective out of the verb “to home” and applies it to “nature” as a whole, taking the image he had already used in “The Wreck” a step further.

“Part the second” of the “Wreck,” as previously stated, centers mainly on the shipwreck itself and the drowning nuns. Suddenly, however, the speaker returns to himself for only the third time in thirteen stanzas, in the apocalyptic stanza 24. The speaker brings into synchronicity his own situation and the nun’s:

Away in the loveable west,  
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,  
I was under a roof here, I was at rest,  
And they the prey of the gales;  
She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly  
Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails,  
Was calling ‘O Christ, Christ, come quickly’:  
The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst  
Best.

Within our context, it can be seen that the poet sets up a dramatic contrast between his own, literally protected situation at home—“I was under a roof here, I was at rest”—while the nun is exposed to ‘life-threatening’ weather conditions. The deictic “here” breaks the synchronicity by creating a link with the speaker’s present. This is developed in stanza 28 in which the speaker focuses on his own composition process as he tries to articulate the experience the nun has as she approaches death, and as Christ approaches her:

But how shall I ... Make me room there;  
Reach me a ... Fancy, come faster—  
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,  
Thing that she ... There then! the Master,  
*Iipse*, the only one, Christ, King, Head:

The poet's apostrophe to Fancy stands in parallel to the nun's call to Christ in her agony. It is followed by a short present-tense section in which the poet actualizes the theophany. In each case, the utterance is an insistent invitation, a going-out of oneself.

However, one Derridean critic argues that "[t]he home is a site that allows for self-enclosure, the shutting in of oneself that constitutes individuation" (Wyschogrod 54). This idea would at best be but 'half-true' for Hopkins, since individuation in Hopkins involves a going-out of or from the self. The interiority of home, and the idea of home as interiority or the inner world in Hopkins's poetry is more than matched by exteriority: "only the heart, being hard / at bay, // Is out with it!" ("The Wreck", stanzas 7-8); "Each mortal thing [...] / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells" (the "Kingfishers" sonnet). Here, the dynamic of individuation is literally expressed, and the act of selving is movement from home outwards. Hopkins's poems are not self-enclosed beings—stay-at-home types. They become themselves in the wide world, and are at home in that world.

Nevertheless, it is true that inwardness is home, too, and this is a further dimension of the concept in Hopkins—the dwelling-place as a protected interior space, be it a building or what Hopkins refers to in another poem, "To his watch," as his "world within." The sonnet "The Candle Indoors" is a perfect meditation on home by a religiously devout speaker. It first stages the speaker in the street, on the outside of a home looking in, wondering what the inmates are doing by candlelight and hoping that their activity is glorifying God. In the sestet he rounds on himself, accusing himself of having taken a judgmental attitude towards the inmates illuminated by candle-light to the neglect of his own spiritual state:

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire  
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault;  
You there are master, do your own desire; ("The Candle Indoors")

While the first candle in the poem burns within the home of strangers, the second one, introduced in the sestet, burns within the poet's home:

his heart, soul and inner world. The fact that the speaker has to call himself home here twice (“Come you indoors, / come home”) suggests uncertainty as to how far he really inhabited his inner world even then: was he in what John O’Donohue calls “exile from true inner belonging”? (O’Donohue 154). Be that as it may, Hopkins’s poems then are full of invitations: “Christ, come quickly” (“The Wreck,” stanza 24), “Fancy, come faster—” (“The Wreck,” stanza 28), “Come you indoors, come home” (“The Candle Indoors”).

To expand briefly on a previously mentioned topic, that of hospitality, we can find the obverse of such invitations as the ones just quoted in the poetic equivalent of Derrida’s “pure hospitality”: “For pure hospitality [...] to occur, [...] there must be an absolute surprise. The other, like the Messiah, must arrive whenever he or she wants. I must be unprepared, or prepared to be unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of *any* other. If [...] there is pure hospitality [...], it should consist in this opening without horizon, without horizon of expectation” (Derrida 70). Hopkins manifests this pure hospitality. The last line of stanza 5 of “The Wreck” reads: “For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand” (“The Wreck”). The line suggests that the poet is able to discern and welcome the presence of Christ, the “him” of the line, within “the world’s splendour and wonder” (“The Wreck,” stanza 5). A similar notion appears in the last lines of the sonnet beginning “My own heart let me more have pity on”:

[...] let joy size  
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile  
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather—as skies  
Betweenpie mountains—lights a lovely mile.

Here the poet reminds himself that the much-desired presence of God is something that cannot be forced (His “smile” cannot be “wrung” from Him); rather, it can only be welcomed whenever it manifests itself.

A last example of Hopkins’s own poetic hospitality—making a home for poetic phenomena—is his famous description, in a letter to

Bridges, of some his later sonnets: "I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will" (*Letters to R. Bridges* 221). These sonnets are gate-crashers: uninvited guests, which just "come"—and, however unwanted, are received once they have arrived, and then sent on to Bridges. Whether Hopkins considered them as divine inspirations is another matter: in the context of the Ignatian spirituality to which the poet subscribed, such "inspirations" would normally require discernment, notably with the help of another Jesuit. There is no record of such help being solicited or given. One critic writes, relevantly to Hopkins's position, of "what Derrida calls 'l'invention de l'autre,' the in-coming of the other, of what we did not see coming, opening us up to the coming of something wholly other [...], something that is none of our doing, that delimits our subjective autonomy" (Caputo 86). Hopkins's sense of God's and poetry's absolute unpredictability—a Hopkins poem is itself inexhaustible in its novelty, strangeness and ability to surprise—is linked to what this critic calls the delimitation of subjective autonomy. Hopkins is the most objectively autonomous of poets, this quality enabling him to be the explorer of reality that he applauded his cherished scholastic Duns Scotus so enthusiastically for being.

Through his adhesion to objective autonomy, in his troubled Irish years Hopkins was occasionally able to turn away from the inward focus on his baffling relationship with God and the vagaries of his own poetic inspiration, and look outward. Hopkins's sense of home and of exile endows him with keen sensitivity to the plight of those exiled among the exiled—the unemployed. He enacts a sense of personal exile in "To seem the stranger" and, in a different way, in his invitation to himself to "come home" in "The Candle Indoors." But his poetry proves hospitable to a de-centered version of exile in "Tom's Garland: on the Unemployed," written at a time of economic depression and crisis when unemployment had risen in some sectors from 4% in 1850 to between 14% and 22% in 1886.<sup>12</sup> In the poem, the unemployed are:



Undenized, beyond bound  
Of earth's glory, earth's ease, all; noone, nowhere,  
In wide the world's weal; [...]

With perfect empathy, Hopkins depicts the unemployed as “Undenized,” a denizen being an inhabitant or occupant, someone who is in his home space, be it a village or town, or a country; the unemployed are physically present within the country and the state but outcasts from the commonwealth, with no home and no identity, no access to the splendor and comfort, “ease,” that the earth can provide. This ability to receive the other's discomfort is the de-centered social echo of the Sonnets of Desolation in which the speaker is himself presented as homeless and comfortless. In “No worst, there is none,” the speaker in the midst of religious and mental desolation addresses himself: “Here! Creep, / Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind”: though where exactly “here” is, the place which “serves” as shelter from the storm, is not specified.

To conclude: in attempting to answer the question with which I began—“What was home for Hopkins?”—I have demonstrated that no one answer is possible, and that it is necessary to understand what was *not* home for Hopkins in order to understand his sense of home. I have tried to show some of the various ways in which both the word “home,” and a wide range of significations attributable to the notion of home, can shed light on Hopkins's poetry, as well as several of its connotations. These include the idea of the inner world as home; hospitality: being the host (or Host) or guest at home, and receiving the Other (be the Other God, or Christ, a person, or even a poem itself); feeling comfortable—“at home”—in a place, or indeed the entire universe; and home as a fixed, permanent dwelling. The notion has also been considered in relation to its opposite: exile in various forms, the poet's own or that of others, geographical, social, psychological or spiritual exile. As in the early part of this article an exterior, geographical example of Hopkins's use of the word “home” was given, taken from the poem “Inversnaid,” I will conclude with a more inward one, from “To what serves Mortal Beauty?” The poem, inci-

dentally, is yet another example of the poet's sensitivity to being away from home—to exile. It recalls Pope Gregory's first sight in a Rome marketplace of some young English boy-slaves up for sale: having asked who they were and heard the reply, so struck by their beauty was he that he responded: "Not Angles but angels."<sup>13</sup> Hopkins celebrates mortal (not only human) beauty in the poem, concluding that the most beautiful thing in the world is "men's selves." He then goes on to wonder how to "meet" such beauty, and his answer is: "Merely meet it; own, / Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift." The grammatical function of the word "home" here is not evident, and it is almost as though the preposition "at" does double duty, as it were, for both "home" (as in the expression "at home") and "heart" (as in "at heart"). The word "Home" slant-rhymes with "own"; and alliterates with heart and heaven, contributing to the harmony of the phrase "own [...] gift." "[O]wn, / Home at heart" seems to mean: "take to heart" or rather, "take to heart, welcome to your inner home." Hopkins's reader is thus invited to "own, / Home at heart" the "sweet gift" of his poetry.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It gives me great pleasure to thank Matthias Bauer and Angelika Zirker for encouraging me to submit this piece to *Connotations*. The essay was originally delivered as an oral presentation at the Hospitable Text conference in London in July 2011, to the organizers of which my thanks are also due. I am grateful to Emily Taylor Merriman for informing me of that conference and, as ever, to René Gallet for his unfailing support.

<sup>2</sup>For all quotations from Hopkins's poems, the reader is referred to Norman H. Mackenzie's standard 1992 edition. Hopkins diacritical markings have not been reproduced.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Poetical Works* 376.

<sup>4</sup>The nuns, who drowned in the Thames estuary when their ship was knocked off course in the storm related in the poem, were fleeing Germany, on their way to the USA. Robert Bridges later wrote to the poet's sister Kate: "I wish those nuns had stayed at home" (letter of March 15, 1918; *Selected Letters of Robert Bridges* 2: 726).

<sup>5</sup>The three removes developed here correspond to Catherine Phillips's interpretation of the phrase in her Oxford Authors edition of Gerard Manley Hopkins, (373n166); Norman MacKenzie differs as to the second remove, which he calls the "second barrier." The latter was, he says, Hopkins's "style, the 'strangenesses' of which, by preventing his publication, left him little part in the campaign to win England back to the Faith, or increase the fame of her literature" (*Poetical Works* 446).

<sup>6</sup>The German original reads: "Wir sind ins Leben gesetzt, als in das Element, dem wir am meisten entsprechen [...]. Wir haben keinen Grund gegen unsere Welt Misstrauen zu haben [...]" (Rilke 45).

<sup>7</sup>Hopkins's first editor, Robert Bridges, may have more or less consciously picked up on the notions of home and homelessness at work in Hopkins's poetry. Bridges spontaneously used images of home and hospitality when introducing the first volume of Hopkins's poetry to the public in 1918: certain lines contain "some homeless monosyllable," the reader may have trouble looking for "any meaning he can welcome" and, above all, the great ode of 1875, "stands [...] in the front of his book, like a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance." (Hopkins, *Poems*, ed. Bridges 98, 104).

<sup>8</sup>Merely as regards the poetry (our main concern), the concordance lists 24 instances of poems including the word "home." Poems that include "home" (from the concordance): "The Escorial," "The Nightingale," "Rosa Mystica," "Penmaen Pool," "The Starlight Night," "The Loss of Eurydice," "The Candle Indoors," "The Bugler's First Communion," "Inversnaid," "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe," "To what serves Moral Beauty?," "A Voice from the World," "The Queens Crowning," "In the staring darkness," "St. Winifred's Well," "Horace: Odi profanum volgus et arcea," "Jesu Dulcis Memoria." There are ten instances of the word in Hopkins's sermons (cf. *Concordance* 124).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Confessions* X.xxvii.38. Latin quote: "sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi! et ecce intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quaerebam, et in ista formosa quae fecisti deformis inruebam. mecum eras, et tecum non eram. ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam; coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam; fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelum tibi; gustavi et esurio et sitio; tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam" (ed. O'Donnell). English translation by Chadwick: "Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours."

<sup>10</sup>See Acts 27: 33-44.

<sup>11</sup>The third edition of the *OED* (Sept. 2011) records the first appearance of the verb “to home” to describe the return of a pigeon to its loft for 1854. The second edition of the *OED* (1989) gives 1875 (*Live Stock Journal* 23 April) as the first instance of this use as a verb: “Pigeons home by sight and instinct.”

<sup>12</sup>See *Poetical Works* 486.

<sup>13</sup>This anecdote about Gregory (he had not yet become Pope) is related by Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, Vol. II, Ch.1, and given in full, including a translation of the relevant passage in Bede, by Norman MacKenzie in his *Reader's Guide* 165-66.

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## Turning the Corner of Interpretation: A Response to Elena Anastasaki\*

SHALYN CLAGGETT

He had bought a large map representing  
the sea,  
Without the least vestige of land:  
And the crew were much pleased when  
they found it to be  
A map they could all understand.  
(Lewis Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark")

Since the 1960s, Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" has repeatedly inspired critical responses of a particular type: what might be called 'solve the riddle' readings, in which critics try to identify the ambiguously figured ghost Spencer Brydon conjures, stalks, and encounters in his attempt to know "what he personally might have been, how he might have led his life and 'turned out,' if he had not so, at the outset, given it up" (James 735).<sup>1</sup> Among other things, the ghost has been identified as the shadow of capitalism, the victim of capitalism, an embodiment of analogy, the effect of prosopopeia, a cuckolded relative, Brydon's hidden biracial self, and his closeted homosexual identity.<sup>2</sup> Recently, however, the trend has shifted away from naming the ghost and toward interpretations that examine how James structured the narrative. Such readings include Lee Clark Mitchell's analysis of the narrator's use of scare quotes, Lynda Marie Zwinger's study of tense and syntax, and my own reading, which focuses on the story as a rewriting of the Narcissus myth.

Elena Anastasaki's incisive and provocative essay participates in, and usefully extends, this most recent wave of scholarship. Unlike

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\*Reference: Elena Anastasaki, "Henry James's Double-Bind: Chasing Possibilities in 'The Jolly Corner,'" *Connotations* 18.1-3 (2008/2009): 82-103. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debanastasaki01813.htm>>.



Zwinger and Mitchell's detail-oriented approach, which focuses on such specific stylistic features as James's nuanced use of punctuation or tense, Anastasaki's reading investigates the larger process of narrative selection and its inevitable limitations. She sidesteps identifying the ghost by self-consciously shifting her attention away "from the apparition's interpretation" and toward "the process of that construction and to the puzzlement of the unexpected outcome" (86-87). In other words, the story is not really about the ghost, but about the way Brydon creates and perceives the ghost. All that can really be known about the alter ego is that it is a "product of a consciousness that refuses to be fixed" because it "refute[s] its very principle and basic function, that of selection" (87). To elucidate this selective process, she uses a number of wide-ranging analogies, including William James's theory of consciousness, Schrödinger's ideas on quantum law, and Umberto Eco's understanding of the *fabula*. These equivalent theories of paradox, she argues, operate like the story insofar as each attempts to articulate, not the particularities of the object of study, but rather, the structures that make possible the object's appearance. Anastasaki likens this, in turn, to James's approach to fictional possibility as explained in his famous metaphor of the "house of fiction" (*Critical Prefaces* 46). According to her, the completely empty house on the jolly corner "is the 'house of fiction' where nothing is decided yet, since the story is lingering on the threshold (95). Ultimately, then, the story operates as an elliptical parable about the conditions and constraints of narrative construction in the face of the limitless possibilities fiction offers.

Anastasaki's reading, along with Zwinger and Mitchell's, takes a step in the right direction by warily avoiding the temptation to identify a ghost that is so ambiguously figured that it can be all things to all readers. Such interpretations, however, (and I include my own) are ultimately a more subtle version of 'riddle' readings insofar as they reinscribe the ghost at a further remove through abstract analogies. Although these readings do not, properly speaking, 'name' the other ghost, they draw a connection between a feature of the story and an

extratextual idea, and then name the ghost's correlate in that other, parallel world. For Zwinger, an analysis of personal pronouns and indirect discourse eventually gives way to a reading that equates Brydon's encounter with a Kristevan confrontation between the deject and an the abject (i.e., the ghost is *like* the abject) (9). For Mitchell, scare quotes function to underline a clash between Brydon's literal and figurative status (i.e., the ghost is *like* literal meaning) (229). For Anastasaki, the house on the jolly corner is similar to "the house of fiction" in which the writer hunts "Form" (i.e., the ghost is *like* narrative form) (95). In my own essay, despite claiming that my "reading eschews naming the 'other Brydon,'" I nevertheless compare the encounter to the internal drama brought about during the mirror stage (i.e., the ghost is *like* the Lacanian Real) (191).

It appears that "The Jolly Corner" has worked a bit of magic, not unlike Brydon's ability to make a specter appear simply by thinking it into existence. This is not so much magic, however, as a magic *trick* that works by making audiences believe there is a determinate figure to figure out. I would like to suggest, here, that the story is perhaps best understood as a clever narrative machine that generates a specific type of reading by destabilizing the relationship between reference and expression (i.e., between the story and how it gets expressed in the narrative). What I wish to further interrogate, then, is not the ghost or Brydon's perception of it, but rather how the narrative produces the illusion of something that both is and is not there. Rather than trying to identify the *what* of the story, we should perhaps turn our attention to *how* it encodes and ensures these effects. How exactly does James get us to turn the crank (or screw? or corner?) in prose that consistently refuses to "tell"?<sup>3</sup>

The work "The Jolly Corner" most resembles in terms of the character of its critical reception is *The Turn of the Screw*, to which it is frequently compared. As Shoshana Felman famously pointed out about the latter, interpretations tend to focus solely on whether or not the ghosts the governess sees are real or hallucinations (98). The lengthy debate, as she suggests, may be evidence of the effectiveness of what

James identified in the New York Preface as the novella's "trap": "it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught" (xviii). Later, in the New York Preface to the volume containing "The Jolly Corner," James introduces the story in relation to this work, by way of mentioning, again, a "critical challenge":

The apparitions of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, in [*The Turn of the Screw*], the elusive presence nightly 'stalked' through the New York house by the poor gentleman in ["The Jolly Corner"], are matters as to which in themselves, really, the critical challenge (essentially nothing ever but the spirit of fine attention) may take a hundred forms—and a hundred felt or possibly proved infirmities is too great a number. Our friends' respective minds about them, on the other hand, are a different matter—challengeable, and repeatedly, if you like, but never challengeable without some consequent further stiffening of the whole texture. Which proposition involves, I think, a moral. The moving accident, the rare conjunction, whatever it be, doesn't make the story [...]; the human emotion and the human attestation, the clustering human conditions we expect presented, only make it. (xx)

In the passage, James suspects (rightly) that the ghosts themselves will engage the critical faculties of readers, but then he directs attention away from the more basic elements of the narrative (the ghosts as characters, events) and toward his characters' perception of these things. In this respect, Anastasaki's interpretation is in line with James's "moral" since she works from the assumption that the "story's center is indisputably the character's consciousness, and the third-person narrator giving the account of Brydon's 'adventure' as he experiences it" (94). At this point in the essay, she briefly focuses on the third-person narrator's aside at the moment when Brydon experiences a "duplication of consciousness":

There came to him, as I say—but determined by an influence beyond my notation!—the acuteness of this certainty; under which however the next moment he had broken into a sweat that he would as little have consented to attribute to fear as he would have dared immediately to act upon it for enterprise. It marked, none the less a prodigious thrill, a thrill that represented sudden dismay, no doubt, but also represented, and with the self-same

throb, the strangest, the most joyous, possibly the next minute almost the proudest, duplication of consciousness. (744-45)

Anastasaki observes that in this passage Brydon “feel[s] the fluid limits of his identity” but that “the narrator admits defeat in not giving a satisfactory account of this experience; and yet, somehow, it is this avowal of impossibility that makes it possible for the reader to grasp such an incongruity” (95). The narrator’s rare intrusion certainly is a textual feature worth noting, but her explanation of how it produces the understanding she records does not advance much further than “somehow.” Her reaction, however, is itself evidence of a reading effect—an awareness that the narration produces an impression through an apparent denial of the possibility of representation.

The “how” of this “somehow” is a species of what Gerald Prince has coined the “unnarratable,” which he defines as that which “cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating” (1). James’s particular use of the unnarratable in this instance belongs to a sub-class which Robyn Warhol terms the “supranarratable,” which “comprises those events that defy narrative, foregrounding the inadequacy of language [...] to achieve full representation” (223). While this type of narration might “foreground” the limits of language, it nonetheless profits from the ostensible admission of inadequacy. As Warhol points out, supranarratable moments can heighten the audience’s sense of the characters’ horror by strategically withholding the magnitude of their experience. The supranarratable is a narrative gesture that does not *not* narrate, but rather works to intensify the effect of an obscured or hidden subject. Anastasaki claims that the narrator’s interjection of “beyond my notation!” refers to Brydon’s “certainty” that he is experiencing a “duplication of consciousness.” Grammatically, at least, this “certainty” refers to Brydon’s feelings about the event James narrates in the sentences leading up to the above-quoted passage. As the first sentence of the paragraph announces, the “certainty more intimate than any he had yet known” is that there is a ghost at the top of the stairs waiting for him (744). That which is “beyond [the narrator’s] notation” is, then, the “influence” that creates his sense of certainty

regarding this fact—not his experience of a duplex consciousness, which comes after he reflects on the implications of this certainty. Given this context, that which is supranarratable is far more supernatural than psychological, because it refers to Brydon's ability to feel the ghost's presence through the extrasensory perception he has been cultivating throughout the second part of the story. As Warhol notes, instances of the unnarratable, in making "explicit the boundaries of the narratable" often "become strategies for moving the boundaries outward" (230). Here, James uses the technique, not to mark the limits of realist representation, but rather to extend its providence. Despite its supernatural subject, the unnarratable heightens the reality effect not only by implicitly corroborating Brydon's experience (the omniscient narrator bears witness to these fantastic events), but also by legitimizing the extrasensory experience by confirming its extrarepresentational status (of course there is no vocabulary to describe a phenomenon that breaks the laws of physical reality).

A narrative technique James uses far more than the supranarratable, however, is "hypothetical focalization," which David Herman defines as "the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived—if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue" (231). Much like the unnarratable, hypothetical focalization tends to emerge only occasionally in the course of a realist narrative, but "The Jolly Corner" is rife with examples. This might be expected since Herman's definition practically describes the story's central idea: Brydon continually contemplates what he might have been, and spends the greater part of the narrative trying to adopt "the requisite perspective" that would make finding that out possible. Concentrating on focalization in general, insofar as it "pertains to the elaboration of the narrative as opposed to the substance of the story" (Herman 235), necessarily deemphasizes the "moving accident" that, according to James, "doesn't make the story" and redirects attention to the "respective minds" of the protagonists. Focalization, and hypothetical focalization in particular, can help us



turn another corner in interpreting this tale, getting us from the *what* of the narrative to the *how*, from story to discourse, and from ghost identity to the ghost effect.

James's use of hypothetical focalization in "The Jolly Corner," particularly in the first and second sections, creates a sustained mood of epistemic uncertainty. As Herman explains, the technique makes it particularly difficult to distinguish reference from expression, leading to "indecision over what counts as the actual versus what counts as merely possible worlds built up over the course of a narrative" (232). In the first part of the story, Brydon and Alice Staverson gradually come to entertain the possibility of the alter ego existing in the house. James begins to erode the grounds of certainty by having both the narrator and Brydon posit counterfactual perspectives that destabilize the relationship between reality and possible worlds. For instance, in contemplating the degree to which New York has changed since his thirty-three-year absence, Brydon repeatedly thinks, "It would have taken a century [...] it would have taken a longer absence and a more averted mind than those even of which he had been guilty, to pile up the differences, the newnesses, the queernesses, above all the bignesses, for the better or the worse, that at present assaulted his vision wherever he looked" (726). Here, the hypothetical spectator is someone who over time accumulates strange and unique experiences in Europe with a "more averted mind" than Brydon's. This formulation establishes a series of unconventional quasi-equivalencies: one-hundred years to thirty-three years, a more averted mind in a hypothetical past to Brydon's "present" and immediate perspective, "the differences, the newnesses, the queernesses" in Europe to their counterparts in America. Even at the very outset of the narrative, James obscures the reference world with narration that withholds the original point of departure for the expressed comparisons. Brydon defines himself in relation to a more perceptive hypothetical version of himself, but we can only know how "averted" this other mind might be in relation to Brydon—which is, in turn, only offered in the narrative in relation to a hypothetical other.



Hypothetical focalization appears again with the first instantiation of a ghost in the narrative, although whether or not the ghost exists in the reference world cannot be specifically determined by the narration. As Alice and Brydon discuss the possibility of ghosts existing in the house while touring it, Alice's gaze loses itself, and the narrator remarks: "She might even for the minute, off there in the fine room, have imagined some element dimly gathering. Simplified like the death-mask of a handsome face, it perhaps produced for her just then an effect akin to the stir of an expression in the 'set' commemorative plaster" (734). The narrator posits a hypothetical Alice who "might" imagine something manifesting itself—something that "perhaps" would make that Alice (who may or may not exist in the reference world) see something "like" a death-mask, and creating something "akin" to the effect felt *if* she saw a face in the plaster. The passage operates like a condensed version of Brydon's trajectory in the second part of the story, in which he imagines the possibility of making "baffled forsworn possibilities" take "Form," sees the ghost and experiences a shock. In fact, Brydon sees the ghost's face against a wall in the front hall—the very same room in which Alice may or may not have seen something (754). Nonetheless, that which might seem to foreshadow the later event is at best a site on shifting ground: we do not know if Alice saw anything, but even if we assume she did, we can only "perhaps" know its possible effect on her through a comparison to something we have no reason to assume happened.

In part two, when the story progresses from conceiving of the possibility of the ghost's existence to Brydon's actual attempt to discover it, the use of this type of focalization increases dramatically.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the technique formerly served to destabilize the relationship between reference and expression more generally, in the second section, it initially works to destabilize the boundaries between the 'real' and other Brydon, and then to counterfactualize the perspective of a hypothetical observer viewing Brydon. To begin with the first of these effects, in the first half of the second section the narrator repeatedly focalizes the narrative through Brydon's perception of a conditionally

existing virtual self. For instance, the narrator observes that each time he enters the house at night, he experiences the sound of the steel tip of his cane as “the dim reverberating tinkle as of some far-off bell hung who should say where?—in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have flourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned it” (740). Unlike the mysterious “someone” with the “more averted mind,” the hypothetical spectator is, for the first time, another Brydon who “might” have experienced a “mystical other world.” The focalization functions not only to duplicate, but also to merge the possible perspectives of the actual and imaginatively posited character at the level of discourse, since the ambiguous use of the possessive “him” applies equally to the other Brydon and the Brydon who muses on possessing the experiences of the other (i.e., “flourished for him,” the other self; or, “flourished for *him*,” the self who thinks). This creates a perspective that is both doubled and blurred, compassing possibilities that are simultaneously effaced.

Hypothetical focalization also importantly appears just before the key passage about Brydon “turning the tables” on the ghost (742). James alludes to this in his notebooks, claiming that the “most intimate idea of [“The Jolly Corner”] is that my hero’s adventure there takes the form so to speak of his turning the tables, as I think I called it, on a ‘ghost’ or whatever, a visiting or haunting apparition otherwise qualified to appal *him*; and thereby winning a sort of victory by the appearance, and the evidence, that this personage or presence was more overwhelmingly affected by him than he by *it*” (*Complete Notebooks* 507). The significance of the statement lies not only in the fact that James again practically dismisses the importance of the “‘ghost’ or whatever,” but also in how he pinpoints the shift in power between the two agents as the essential part of the story—the idea around which everything else must “turn.” Curiously, however, where the phrase appears in the story itself, James undercuts the power of this impression on Brydon: “People enough, first and last, had been in terror of apparitions, but who had ever before so turned the tables and

become himself, in the apparitional world, an incalculable terror? He might have found this sublime had he quite dared to think of it; but he didn't too much insist, truly, on that side of his privilege" (742). The other identity projected through hypothetical focalization in this case is a more daring version of the Brydon in the reference world, one who "might" be able to embrace the beauty and fear of James's theme. The narration again reveals Brydon to the reader only in relation to a hypothetical version of himself established by the narrator: we only know that he is less daring than a version of him who would have acted and, perhaps, felt differently. In a sense, the narrator does what Brydon does at the very same point in the story: project a double consciousness through the "shifting effects of perspective" (742).

From this point on in the second section, few events occur besides Brydon finding a mysteriously closed door and the concluding direct encounter with the ghost. Almost everything else that 'happens' happens entirely in Brydon's mind, including his growing awareness of the impression he produces on entities not immediately present. Because James never shifts away from Brydon's point of view, he is in the peculiar position of having to depict "turning the tables" without actually turning the narrative perspective. The narrator represents Brydon's preternatural experience of being seen by something unseen through the use of hypothetical focalization at two levels: first, as before, with the use of virtual spectators, and second, by counterfactualizing the perspective of the hypothetical witness observing him. For instance, as he acquires the ability to "visually project" himself, Brydon finds that it "made him feel, this acquired faculty, like some monstrous stealthy cat: he wondered if he would have glared at these moments with large shining yellow eyes, and what it mightn't verily be, for the poor hard-pressed *alter ego*, to be confronted with such a type" (742). In the expressed world of the narrative Brydon sees his own eyes through the eyes of an assumed presence, appearing to himself only in relation to a position he has provisionally constructed.<sup>5</sup> From this point on, Brydon's self-awareness of being seen by an absent witness appears with increased frequency.<sup>6</sup> In this

aporetic dreamscape, Brydon's consciousness emerges in relation to something that may or may not be there, but regardless of the ontological status of that 'something,' its hypothetical existence in the reference world of the narrative becomes temporarily constitutive of his identity.

Ultimately, hypothetical focalization functions in the tale to create the effect that something identifiable must exist in the reference world because the entire narrative, both thematically and structurally, positions itself in relation to an assumed presence. In other words, James positions the reference world in such a way that access to it through the expressed world of the narrative is ambiguous and elusive. The narration unfolds a world that seems, not unlike the very concept of a ghost itself, that which is both there and not there—or rather, what might or might not be there. Examining narrative technique allows us to see exactly *how* James tempts the reader to assume a position in which certain possibilities become visible while simultaneously undermining the basis for adopting such a position.

Anastasaki's favoured analogy for "The Jolly Corner" is Erwin Schrödinger's famous thought experiment about quantum law, in which a metaphoric cat in a sealed box is both dead and alive until the box is opened, collapsing a possible duality into the fixed reality of the observer's perspective. It is an apt analogy and well describes the tension of knowing and not-knowing that Brydon's own suspended consciousness experiences in the second section of the tale. What it nevertheless fails to explain is why readers and critics keep opening the box to fix the ghost. In response to this, I would like to offer a far less elegant metaphor: the design of the slot machine. Slot machines use random number generators to determine whether or not a given play will win. This means that from a practical standpoint, such machines only require a single button to make the play and some way of indicating whether or not the play is successful. In terms of design, however, they are elaborately decorated, crammed with blinking lights, turning wheels, and blaring sirens. The machines are so constructed to exploit the brain's tendency to locate patterns and predict

rewards in apparent systems, even if those systems have a non-determinate element (Lehrer 59-61). Although the rational gambler may know that there is no way to predict a win, the barrage of pattern-making elements that ceaselessly flash, whistle, and spin, function to constantly signify a possible answer.

In a far more sophisticated way, "The Jolly Corner" uses narrative devices that create the sense of a pattern that seems to lead to a determinate meaning. Supranarratable moments and hypothetical focalization are only two among many strategies: there is also the repeated use of the number three (Brydon's thirty-three year absence, three sections to the story, the three rooms leading to the closed door), related doubles (two properties, two countries, two Brydons), echoing adjectives, and the suggestive identifying qualities of the ghost (the pince-nez, unusual evening attire, and two missing fingers). Everything appears to point to some overwhelming solution, but the real fascination of the story is in how we are tempted to see, yet prevented from seeing clearly. As Alice Staverson points out, Brydon could not "know himself" (760). For Alice, this is a condition of life, for Anastasaki, it is a condition of contemplating fictional possibilities—but at yet another level, past self-knowledge and signification, it is a condition created by, and encoded in, narrative discourse. Although there may not be a payoff for trying one's luck at identifying the ghost, it is a credit to the author that the house always wins.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>As one critic puts it, there is "virtually unanimous agreement on the importance (if not the specific signification) of [the] alter ego" (Rashkin 69).

<sup>2</sup>See, respectively, Benert, Nixon, Flesch, Esch, Rashkin, Hawkins, and Savoy.

<sup>3</sup>I allude to Douglas's comment regarding the governess's tale in *The Turn of the Screw*: "The story *won't* tell [...] not in any literal, vulgar way" (151).

<sup>4</sup>I count four unambiguous instances in part I, seven in part II, and only two in part III. The frequency fits with the narrative progression insofar as the story



moves from gradually conceiving of an alter ego, to hunting and encountering the double self, to abandoning that pursuit as futile.

<sup>5</sup>Here, the layering of hypothetical frames calls into question not only the relationship between reference and expression, but also the relationship between realism and fantasy. The technique represents a doubling of consciousness as utterly otherworldly while maintaining a foothold in realism—a hallmark, perhaps, of what makes a ghost story frightening. That is, if a story featuring a ghost were completely fantastic, the frame of reference would so dramatically shift that fear of an encroaching unknown would dissolve insofar as the frame of reference would render the fantastic commonplace in the fictional world. That is, if that which in reality is extraordinary becomes typical in the fictional world, it ceases, in that world, to be fantastic or frightening. In this sense, the ghost story is a genre necessarily, or parasitically, rooted in realism because it depends on the assumption of mimetic representation to achieve its desired effect.

<sup>6</sup>For example, when Brydon looks over the rail of a staircase, he becomes “aware that he might, for a spectator, have figured some solemn simpleton playing at hide-and seek” (743), and later, when he leans out a window, he “was not sure that if the patrol had come into sight he mightn’t have felt the impulse to get into relation with it, to hail it, on some pretext, from his fourth floor” (751).

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## Reconsidering Orton and the Critics: *The Good and Faithful Servant*\*

Yael Zarhy-Levo

Joe Orton's play *The Good and Faithful Servant* was written in 1964 and first broadcast on UK television by Rediffusion in April 1967. Maurice Charney, discussing the play in his article in *Connotations* 18.1-3, presents it as an anomalous work within the context of Orton's drama, contending that "[e]ven though it follows *Entertaining Mr Sloane* and precedes *Loot*, Orton makes none of his characteristic attempts to make the play farcical, and it lacks his usual violence and sexual energy" (139); and he continues: "Because it is so uncharacteristic of Orton, it is no surprise that it is his least produced and least discussed play" (148). Charney argues for the excellence of the play, "just because it is so anomalous, so uncompromising, so absolute" (149).

Charney's article in *Connotations* elaborates upon the view he had presented in an earlier article on the play, included in the 2003 Casebook devoted to Orton's work, in which he wrote: "It is the play of Orton's that has attracted the least interest both in the theatre and in critical discussion. The fact is significant in itself because it is the play that seems least "Ortonesque," as that term has been used to describe Orton's characteristically witty, epigrammatic, grotesquely lurid, and highly sexual style" (Charney, "Orton's Bitter Farce" 21). Charney considered that this powerful play, which contains painful autobiographical details (albeit successfully disguised), "has been more or

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\*Reference: Maurice Charney, "Joe Orton's Laodicean Tragedy: *The Good and Faithful Servant*," *Connotations* 18.1-3 (2008/2009): 139-50.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debcharney01813.htm>>.

less shunted aside,” and that the time had come for it to be given the attention and recognition it deserved (21).

In relating to Charney’s view of *The Good and Faithful Servant*, I primarily focus in this essay on his contention, as phrased in the 2003 article and further specified in the later one, that the play has attracted the least interest because it has seemed the least Ortonesque. In line with this contention, I suggest that the specific case of *The Good and Faithful Servant* not only ties in with the highly significant issue of a playwright’s critical reception, but also exemplifies a more general phenomenon in regard to critical modes that is worthy of further elaboration. While Charney primarily sets out to promote the play’s excellence, he does not inquire into the question of why it is that the play, seemingly the least Ortonesque, has been overlooked in critical discourse engaging with Orton’s work. In order to address this question it is necessary to consider the broader issue that regards the role played by the critics in the reception of a dramatist and his plays. My aim here is to examine the lack of interest in the play within the context of the critical dynamics, and to account for the dismissive attitude towards it as deriving from the governing principles underlying the process of critical reception of an individual playwright. Before dealing with the specific case of Orton’s play, I therefore present a brief overview concerning the issue of a playwright’s critical reception, which I have discussed in detail elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

I note from the start that in engaging with the issue of the reception of playwrights and their dramatic works, I draw on the institutional approach. That is, generally speaking, scholars dealing with the canonization processes of literary and theatrical works can be roughly divided into those who attribute the canonization to the works’ intrinsic properties, and those who perceive institutional factors (such as journalists, reviewers and academics) as the ones accounting for the works’ canonization (a notable example of the latter is Pierre Bourdieu).<sup>2</sup> Relating to the theatre reviewers, in line with the institutional approach, I have previously shown how reviewers play a dominant role in the admission of a new playwright into the theatrical

canon (Zarhy-Levo, "The Theatrical Critic"). In examining the critical responses to the first plays of various playwrights (such as John Osborne, Brendan Behan, Shelagh Delaney, John Arden, Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, Tom Stoppard, and Sarah Kane), I demonstrated that the reviewers employ certain strategies that serve to provide an initial legitimacy for dramatists whose acceptance into the theatrical canon has not yet been determined.<sup>3</sup> Typically, in the process of reception of new playwrights, reviewers initially locate them in light of their affiliation to or divergence from already recognized and established theatrical trends and schools, and assess the newcomers' particular means of theatrical expression in terms of their potential contribution to the theatre. While such affiliation serves the reviewers to provide a familiar context from within which to view a new playwright's work, their assessment of the particular means of theatrical expression also enables them to differentiate the newcomer's contribution from that of other, already established, playwrights.

It should be noted that such comparison of a new offering to previously established theatrical models, is a common tendency in critical practice. It serves the reviewers to locate the work, whether to endorse or reject the new play. In other words, the reviewers can present the new offering as continuing an already recognized theatrical trend, and thereby extend the legitimacy attributed to the established works to the play in question; or, in contrast, they can present it as failing to correspond to any previously established theatrical model and, in most such cases, will tend to reject the play.

Distinct examples of the reviewers' use of the affiliation or comparison strategy can be found in their initial responses to the London productions of the first play by Tom Stoppard, which the reviewers endorsed, and the first play by Harold Pinter, which they initially rejected. The first London production of Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967) opened to rave reviews. The critical responses demonstrate that the majority of the reviewers related both to the dramatist's unique use of Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, and the highly detectable influence of Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*. Irving

Wardle, for instance, stated in his review (*The Times*, 12 April 1967) that: "What emerges is a compound of Shakespearian criticism. Beckett-like crosstalk," also remarking that "in its origin this is a highly literary play with frank debts to Pirandello and Beckett." On the whole, the reviewers found the play either to be a highly original contribution to modern adaptations of Shakespeare, or a "blend," combining "tradition" with modern theatrical influences.<sup>4</sup> The critical perception that emerged from most reviews as to the affinity between Stoppard's play and Beckett's (the latter was by then an established theatrical model associated with the trend of the Absurd) appears to have enhanced the dramatist's critical reception.<sup>5</sup> Unlike in Stoppard's case, however, Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* (1958) was attacked by most reviewers to such an extent that it was taken off after only a week's run. As the reviews demonstrate, the critics attempted to locate the play, in terms of influences or affiliation, within the framework of British or European theatrical traditions, but could find no correspondence to any previously established theatrical model (e.g., in the review appearing in *The Times* [20 May 1958], the critic commented: "This essay in surrealist drama [...], gives the impression of deriving from an Ionesco play which M. Ionesco has not yet written").<sup>6</sup> Unable to associate the play's dramatic style with any specific established model, the reviewers thus pronounced it obscure, delirious, oblique, enigmatic, and puzzling and dismissed it as a theatrical failure.<sup>7</sup>

As the case of Stoppard illustrates, and also that of Pinter (regarding the critical responses to his play *The Caretaker* [1960]), once the reviewers have pointed to a specific affiliation, they then embark on a strategy of promotion designed to present (or perhaps 'market') the new playwright's particular means of theatrical expression that distinguishes their specific contribution. The process of a new playwright's reception thus entails two oppositional but complementary critical tendencies: the highlighting of the familiar and the introduction of the original.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the playwright can be presented as

continuing, while simultaneously enriching and expanding, the constitutive repertoire of a given theatre tradition.

When introducing a newcomer, the reviewers devise a *package of attributes* that they consider to characterize the dramatist's work. During the process of the playwright's admission into the canon this package becomes formulated into what I term the *playwright construct*. This construct comprises an aggregation of traits recurring in the works that are seen as typifying the dramatist in terms of both influences and innovation. Such a construct is a highly reductive characterization of the dramatist's works and serves in the critical discourse as a reference point to that playwright's distinctive poetics. The formulation of the playwright construct and the dramatist's critical acceptance are interdependent. The emergence of the construct indicates that the dramatist has now acquired a "critical existence," even though other mediators (e.g., producers, artistic directors and/or directors), and not only critics, may also have had their effect on the emergent construct. The reviewers' formulation of the playwright construct is essential in facilitating their mediatory function: to make the newcomer's work accessible and to locate the dramatist within the perceived overall theatrical tradition. The emergence of the construct is an integral part of a playwright's admission into the theatrical canon, with the specific components of the construct and the particular process of its formation differing in each individual case. The construct will be of definitive importance in the later stages of a playwright's career, serving the reviewers for reference in their ongoing/potential enhancement of the playwright's cultural capital. The construct will subsequently be assimilated into the critical/cultural discourse evolving around the dramatist's work, employed in various ways, for example in press articles about the playwright and in the promotional campaigns by the theatres staging the dramatist's plays (e.g., in advertisements or programme notes for new works or revivals).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, having become associated with the dramatist's cultural capital, the construct will then be employed, in turn, when citing awards or prizes bestowed on the dramatist (citations for a



Nobel Prize, awarded in 2005 to the late Harold Pinter, distinctly exemplify the use of the “Pinter” construct).<sup>10</sup>

### Orton's reception

The process of Joe Orton's critical reception, noted here in brief, underwent two major phases. The first phase relates to the production of his play *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (at the Arts Theatre Club, London, 6 May 1964) and the broadcast of the original version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* as radio drama, by the BBC (Third Programme, 31 August 1964). The production of *Entertaining Mr Sloane* received mixed reviews, many of which were reserved. In introducing Orton's first play most reviewers relied (albeit implicitly) on the critical repertoire associated with Harold Pinter's drama, relating to dramatic features such as the “obscure” nature of the play, the “madness” of the characters, the “nightmarish” atmosphere, and the centrality of the dialogue.<sup>11</sup> A few reviewers explicitly pointed out the “Pinterish” nature or style of Orton's work. In his review for *The Guardian* (7 May 1964), Christopher Driver, for instance, contended that “Mr. Orton's play, which sounds at the start like a bad farce, intended for the coach trade but takes on this Pinterish inconsequence and latent terror [...]” By drawing an affinity (either implicitly or explicitly) between Orton's play and Pinter's drama, the reviewers extended the legitimacy attributed to the (already recognized) work of his predecessor to the new play in question. Indeed, the reviewers' perception of Orton's work at this early stage of his career primarily relied on its association with Pinter's drama. This perception was further supported by later critical and scholarly assessments of Orton's early plays—*Entertaining Mr Sloane* and the radio version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* (later revised as a stage version, produced in 1966)—as largely influenced by Pinter's drama.<sup>12</sup> It thus appears that although the reviewers' perceptions (whether expressed directly or indirectly), as to the resemblance of Orton's work to Pinter's plays, seemed to have facilitated the initial

reception of Orton's drama, it also delayed their consideration of the characteristics unique to the latter dramatist's work, thereby hindering the emergence of an "Orton" construct.

The reviews following the 1966 London production of Orton's play *Loot* (at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, 29 September) mark the major, second, phase of the dramatist's critical reception.<sup>13</sup> This production, produced by Oscar Lewenstein and directed by Charles Marowitz, opened to enthusiastic reviews. Lewenstein's highly regarded name as a producer and Marowitz's authoritative standing as a director and critic undoubtedly contributed to the favourable reception of the play, which subsequently won both the Evening Standard Drama Award and the Play and Players Award for the Best Play of 1966. Moreover, Marowitz's active promotion, in particular the article he published in *The Guardian* (19 September 1964), ten days prior to the play's opening, as well as his theatrical reputation, also influenced the eventual critical perception of Orton's poetics. During this second phase an "Orton" construct finally emerged, consisting in attributes such as dark humour, comic snappy dialogue, satire of official attitudes to authority, crime and death and violently anarchic action; a construct largely echoed in the judges' citation for the awards bestowed on the play (the report appeared in the *Evening Standard*, 11 January 1967).<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy that two years after Orton's abrupt and tragic death in 1967, a scandalous reception<sup>15</sup> greeted the posthumous production of his play *What the Butler Saw* (at the Queen's Theatre, London, 5 March 1969). Subsequently, the "Joe Orton Festival," held at the Royal Court in April to July 1975 (when Oscar Lewenstein was completing his term as artistic director), received in the main mixed reviews that reflect the critical controversy.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while Orton's admission to the canon was marked by the emergence of his construct following *Loot*, his standing as a playwright, celebrated by the festival itself, has maintained its controversial nature (compatible indeed with the anarchic quality attributed to his dramatic style).

*The Good and Faithful Servant*

Orton's play *The Good and Faithful Servant* was broadcast on television four months after the dramatist had won two awards for Best Play of 1966 for *Loot* (and four months before he was murdered by Kenneth Halliwell). This specific timing of the play's broadcast can be seen as a significant factor in accounting for the critics' attitude to the work. It is reasonable to assume, notwithstanding the impressive cast (notably, Donald Pleasance playing George Buchman—the lead role—and Patricia Routledge playing Mrs. Vealfoy), that the decision to broadcast this play in 1967, although written in 1964, had relied to some extent on the dramatist's rising fame following *Loot*, while also being geared to cultivating it. In considering, however, Charney's view that this play "does not fit well with the other plays of Orton," ("Laodicean Tragedy" 148), it appears that the decision to broadcast this work might have been a poor move if intended to enhance the dramatist's theatrical reputation. Charney specifically notes that even if certain events or speeches (such as Mrs. Vealfoy's final speech) in the play might be ironic, "the irony is grim and unlike anything else in the works of Joe Orton" (144). He also points out that, despite some resemblance between *The Good and Faithful Servant* and Orton's *The Erpingham Camp* (broadcasted on television by Rediffusion in 1966), the latter "is a manic play full of excitement and violence that is distinctly missing from *The Good and Faithful Servant*" (144). He further contends that "[s]ome of the most effective scenes in *The Good and Faithful Servant* are wordless, which is, again, unusual for the jokey and epigrammatic Orton" (145). Unlike Orton's other plays, in which "the playwright sought vigorously to disguise his bitterness in one-liners, epigrams, polymorphous perversity, and knockabout farce," Charney finds *The Good and Faithful Servant* "much too bitter to be farcical" (148). In line with Charney's view, it seems probable, especially given that there are no available reviews of the play's broadcast, that the work failed at the time to attract any critical attention.<sup>17</sup> Because of the critics' lack of interest in the play, possibly derived from

their perception that it was incompatible with Orton's recently emerged construct, and since the playwright's career was cut short soon thereafter, the fate of *The Good and Faithful Servant* was seemingly sealed as an overlooked play.

The perception of *The Good and Faithful Servant* as incompatible with the "Orton" construct may also account for the play's lack of revivals, especially when considering that the stage version of *The Ruffian on the Stair* and of *The Erpingham Camp* (both written originally for television) were produced (in a double-bill entitled *Crimes of Passion*) by the Royal Court in 1967; and, more significantly still, that the 1975 festival included revivals of three of Orton's plays: *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, *Loot*, and *What the Butler Saw*. Indeed, the reviews of the festival's productions show that the "Orton" construct or, as it was labelled, the "Ortonesque" is seen to correspond with all three plays. It thus appears that the "Orton" construct that had emerged following *Loot* and been confirmed by the awards given to this play, was maintained by the 1967 production at the Royal Court, further cultivated by the 1975 festival, and has since come to be considered as the dramatist's trademark. As such, it subsequently served as a departure point for scholars engaging with Orton's work, becoming, in the critical/cultural discourse, a reference point to this dramatist's recognized, innovative contribution to the theatre. Consequently, *The Good and Faithful Servant*, seen as incongruent with the "Orton" construct, "has been more or less shunted aside," to quote Charney ("Orton's Bitter Farce" 21).

If the case of *The Good and Faithful Servant* can be explained by means of the general phenomenon of the playwright construct—exemplifying both the integral role of the construct in a dramatist's admission into the canon and its consequent impact on the evolving perceptions of the playwright's oeuvre—the particularity of this case as emerging from the specific context of Orton's overall career should be considered in the light of seemingly similar cases.

In considering the issue of a deviant work—a play seen as incompatible with a dramatist's previously devised construct—the careers

of Pinter and Stoppard, previously noted, serve yet again as instructive examples. The career of Harold Pinter illustrates a distinct example of a playwright who time and again seemed to challenge the critics by writing plays that were seen as incompatible with his devised construct (notably, *Betrayal*, *A Kind of Alaska* and the sequence of his overtly political plays). Pinter's long and successful career enabled him to establish an ongoing interaction, whether implicit or explicit, with critics and scholars of his work. Throughout his career he had practiced his authority in various ways to resist and counter critical classifications and categorizations, eventually exploiting his influence as a canonized dramatist to affect a change in his devised construct.<sup>18</sup>

Tom Stoppard's career, although differing from that of Pinter's in many respects, particularly where interaction with the critics is concerned, has also incorporated a significant number of plays that were seen by the critics (at times only initially) as more or less "deviant" works (a distinct example is *Arcadia*).<sup>19</sup> Stoppard's long and successful career, much like Pinter's, has enabled the critics and eventually the scholars, too, to acquire a broader view of the dramatist's work within which they could locate, in one modifying way or another (e.g. dividing his works into phases), those plays that they perceived as deviating from the construct.

The reviewers' use of the construct, as exemplified (among others) in the cases of Pinter and Stoppard, indicates that the critics do not respond independently to each new play by the playwright in question, but rather react (at least initially) in accordance with their already-held overall perception of that playwright's distinctive theatrical expression. In other words, once the playwright has been admitted into the theatrical canon and eventually becomes established, the reviewers will tend to maintain the construct as previously devised. Typically, this involves a continuous critical reference to the devised construct or affirmation of it, in the responses to new works or revivals. This consistency, which in most cases is also revealed throughout the playwright's initial reception (i.e. the construct evolving from the package of attributes that has emanated from the early critical percep-



tions of the dramatist's plays), facilitates the communicative function that underlies the reviewers' discourse, contributing to the accessibility of the playwright's work. The reviewers' initial reactions to Pinter's "deviant" works, however, show how the critical tendency to hold on to the construct as devised is put to the test when an established playwright writes a play apparently incompatible with his previous works. Whether or not the play is "objectively" incompatible with the playwright's previous work is irrelevant here. What is significant is that, as reflected in their responses, many of the critics consider it to be so. Forced to react promptly, theatre reviewers tend to respond cautiously to what appears to be the "deviant" play of an established playwright. That is, the new work, which seems incompatible with the construct as devised, catches the critics by surprise and they do not have any ready-made alternative. From the start, therefore, they employ different, "emergency," modes rather than legitimize the playwright's unpredictable move, apparently seeking to re-affirm and preserve the existing critical repertoire associated with the playwright in question.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, although a playwright construct may undergo modification over time, theatre reviewers, even if acknowledging a possible change in the dramatist's poetics, primarily tend to employ circumventing tactics, reluctant in general to devise a construct anew (the critical responses to Pinter's play *A Kind of Alaska* offer a distinct example).<sup>21</sup> Whereas the construct facilitates the reviewers in the prompt mediation of the dramatist's new plays, in the scholarly studies that follow the construct will be a given, a point of departure (a notable example is the use of the "Pinter" construct or, as it was labelled, the "Pinteresque" in numerous studies engaging with the dramatist's work).<sup>22</sup> To this extent, theatre reviewers lay the groundwork for future critical assessments, including academic studies, which bear further influence in situating the playwright within cultural and historical memory.

As noted, Orton's career, unlike Pinter's or Stoppard's, spanned only three years, terminated by the dramatist's untimely death shortly after the emergence of his construct. Given the circumstances, his



canonical standing, albeit subject to future oscillations, has been maintained as conditioned by and closely bound to his devised construct. As a consequence, *The Good and Faithful Servant* has remained hitherto overlooked, awaiting an advocate to promote its theatrical significance.

Markedly, Charney's article reveals (between the lines, as it were) that a perspective of over three decades of the Orton oeuvre may lead to a differing assessment of this play within the context of the dramatist's writings. That is, in discussing the play, Charney suggests that this anomalous early work nonetheless contains a number of Orton's characteristics, albeit in a somewhat embryonic form (for instance, the attitude to law and order, the use of music, the discrepancy between the kind of situation and the sort of dialogue or exchange it evokes, the lack of sentimentality, and the character of both the "rebel" and the "figure of authority"). As such, *The Good and Faithful Servant* can be seen anew, not only as a highly powerful play in itself but also as a significant work in understanding Orton's all-to-brief development as a dramatist.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic* and *The Making of Theatrical Reputations*.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the titles by Bourdieu and the works of Rees, both of which are distinct representations of the institutional approach.

<sup>3</sup>For elaboration on the role and strategies of theatre reviewers in the reception of new playwrights, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic* 1-9; 95-107. For a discussion of the case studies of the dramatists noted, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic*, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations*, and "The 'Kane' Mark."

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the review, "Denmark's Dynamic Duo," in *Esquire* (12 Apr. 1967) and Philip Hope-Wallace's review in *The Guardian* (12 Apr. 1967).

<sup>5</sup>For an expanded discussion on Stoppard's critical reception, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic* 67-80.

<sup>6</sup>See also, for example, Milton Shulman's review in the *Evening Standard* (19 May 1958) and J. C. Trewin's review in *The Illustrated London News* (31 May 1958).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, W. A. Darlington's review in *The Daily Telegraph*: "[...] it turned out to be one of those plays in which an author wallows in symbols and revels in obscurity." And the review, "Puzzling Surrealism of *The Birthday Party*," in *The Times* (20 May 1958): "Mr. Harold Pinter's effects are neither comic nor terrifying: they are never more than puzzling and after a little while we tend to give up the puzzle in despair." For an expanded discussion on Pinter's critical reception, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations* 164-76.

<sup>8</sup>Rees claims that the attempts to endorse a judgment of a literary work "always implies a number of implicit comparisons: any work to which high quality is attributed is supposed to conform to as well as to differ significantly from the unchallenged masterpieces to which reference is made" ("Masterpiece" 411).

<sup>9</sup>For various examples of the ways a playwright construct is used through the dramatist's career, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations*.

<sup>10</sup>See *The Daily Telegraph*, "Extracts from the Citations," 14 Oct. 2005. The name of the reporter for *The Daily Telegraph* was not specified on the cuttings, located at the Theatre Museum Collections, London.

<sup>11</sup>See for example Bernard Levin in the *Daily Mail* (7 May 1964); Jeremy Kingston in *Punch* (May 13 1964); John Salt in the *Tatler* (15 July 1964) and the reviewer for *The Times*, "Hard to Define Triangle" (7 May 1964).

<sup>12</sup>Bigsby presents Orton's two early plays as "heavily influenced by Pinter [...]" (24). Taylor, Lahr and Esslin elaborate upon on the two versions of Orton's play *The Ruffian on the Stair*—the radio drama (BBC 1964) and the revised version intended for the stage (1966)—pointing out the resemblance between the first version and Pinter's early plays, as opposed to the distinctive Orton style (as a result of the dramatist's revisions, accounted and documented by Lahr) that emerges from the stage version.

<sup>13</sup>On the disastrous pre-London tour (1 Feb. 1965 to 19 Mar. 1965) of the first production of *Loot* (produced by Michael Codron), as well as on the critical responses to the stage production of *The Ruffian on the Stair* (1966) that can be seen as a transformation phase in the process of Orton's reception, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic* 48-58.

<sup>14</sup>For further elaboration on the process of Orton's critical reception, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic* 43-61.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, David Nathan in *The Sun* (6 Mar. 1969); Fergus Cashin in the *Daily Sketch* (6 Mar. 1969); Felix Barker in the *Evening News* (6 Mar. 1969) and Irving Wardle in *The Times* (6 Mar. 1969).

<sup>16</sup>E.g., Irving Wardle's favourable review in *The Times* (18 Apr. 1975); John Barber's unfavourable review in *The Daily Telegraph* (18 Apr. 1975); Michael Coveney's favourable review in the *Financial Times* (17 July 1975), and Christopher Hudson's unfavourable review in the *Evening Standard* (7 July 1975).

<sup>17</sup>There are no reviews of the broadcast in the Theatre Museum Collections nor in the British Film Institute, National Library, London.

<sup>18</sup>On Pinter's "deviant" plays and his ongoing interaction with mediators of his work, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations* 176-205.

<sup>19</sup>See Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations* 92-95.

<sup>20</sup>On the emergency modes employed by the critics when faced with a dramatist's "deviant" work, see Zarhy-Levo, "Critical Modes" 176-77.

<sup>21</sup>See Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations* 177-80.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Bold, Gale, and Gordon. It is also worth noting that the adjective "Pinteresque" even merited an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

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## Modernist Elements in Jane Hirshfield's Voice and Zen Meditation\*

LING CHUNG

Like many American poets since the rise of Imagism in the 1910s, Jane Hirshfield (\*1953) writes verse with concrete, vivid imagery. However, her imagery is tactfully linked to the control and the activity of the mind. Furthermore, her poems move beyond this early Modernist concern for imagery, for they are pregnant with spiritual awareness and insight into the human psyche. Take her short poem "The Clock" as an example:

Night pond,  
its few leaves  
floating:  
absence-of-stars,  
drifting over the surface.

But even  
fallen things  
disrupt each other.  
Beauty, griefs turn over.  
The leaves move  
all night, slowly,  
until they again are red. (Hirshfield, *Lives* 71)

On the surface, the poem focuses on the image of a few fallen leaves drifting on a small pond. It must be autumn, for their hue was red. They might have been sullied by dirt before they were blown to the pond. The title "The Clock" highlights the passing of time while "all night" indicates the duration. During the night, the leaves drifted and turned on the water until they were cleansed and the red hue was

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\*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debchung0211.htm>>.

recovered. However, this analysis delineates merely the imagistic part of the text.

Several words are so deftly used that the sensory objects in the image become analogous to human experiences, so the image can be associated with one's subjectivity, and the reader is able to apprehend the mind of the speaker. Because of the word "things" in line 7, the leaves become analogous to human feelings that are evoked in the following lines by "beauty" and "griefs," because "fallen things" could refer either to the fallen leaves or to feelings in one's past. What, then, does "fallen things / disrupt each other" mean? Does it mean that the fallen leaves, while drifting, scratch against each other? Or the two feelings—the love for "beauty" and the "griefs" for its transience—"disrupt" each other? This implication reveals a probing into the conflict in the human psyche. Also, the word "its" in "its few leaves" in line 2 indicates the pond's ownership of the leaves. Why should the pond be possessive of the leaves? If the leaves are analogous to human feelings, can the pond be analogous to the mind? Does it imply that our mind is often obsessed with our feelings? The leaves move all night and finally are purged of the stains. Can it be said that in one's dream, memory of the beautiful and that of the grievous disrupt each other until the conflict is resolved? What about the ending lines in which the leaves "again are red": do the lines imply that all burning feelings will remain intact and will not pass into oblivion? Apparently, the poem is not just about the image of a few fallen leaves, but reveals the speaker's penetrating insight into the human psyche, feelings and experiences, and above all, this insight is expressed in a voice sung between the lines. The meaning behind the image is conveyed in a reticent voice.

The aim of this paper is to unravel the impact of Soto Zen meditation practice on Hirshfield's poetic voice, to show how her impersonal yet sometimes passionate, controlled yet free floating voice distinguishes itself from Modernist poets, and how her religious verse distinguishes itself from that of her predecessors, including Gary Snyder (\*1930) and Philip Whalen (1923-2001), among others. There is



always a speaker in a poem who communicates with readers or imagined addressees. In this paper, the speaker will be called "the voice," following Samuel Maio, who says that "the voice is the speaker of the poem—not necessarily the poet, as is often wrongly assumed" (Maio 1). The voice is often "sincere," and is "a literary self," a substitute for the poet's "literal, historical self" (Maio 2). The poem "The Clock" contains not only strong Imagistic elements, but also insightful thoughts delivered by a unique voice, whereas, in an Imagist poem, the images form the main body, and they themselves can imply and cross-fertilize meanings. Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," for example, consists of none other than two images, and an association of these two—the faces in the crowd and the petals after a rain storm—can generate multiple meanings. In other words, in Pound's poem, the images themselves could speak while in Hirshfield's poems, such as "The Clock," it is the voice that speaks and the images become vessels carrying subjective experiences. In "The Clock," the voice never speaks out loud the mind and the feelings, but the meaning is suggested by a few intimating words pertaining to human emotion. As a result, Hirshfield's voice becomes unobtrusive and implicit.

How did Hirshfield attain this unobtrusive voice while presenting her spiritual awareness? This voice could be merely an artistic device that she employs. However, since the voice appears in so many of her poems, an inquiry into her life experiences may be edifying. Hirshfield herself admits that the impact of Zen Buddhism is enormous. In my interview with her in 2001, answering my question about the impact of Zen practice on her writing, she remarked: "As a young adult, from age 21 to age 29, I was doing this full time. Everything I do since then is influenced by it. So, I cannot separate out anything and say this is the way, because I think Zen practice, when it is done thoroughly, changes every cell. And so how can you speculate which cell might be some other way?" Furthermore, some key concepts of Hirshfield's poetics are clearly those of Zen Buddhism. In her essay, "Poetry and Mind of Concentration," she interprets the creation of a poem or a

piece of art thus: “True concentration appears—paradoxically—at the moment willed effort drops away. It is then that a person enters what scientist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has described as ‘flow’ and Zen calls ‘effortless effort’” (Hirshfield, *Nine Gates* 4). Key words in this passage such as “concentration” and “effortless effort” actually pertain to concepts of Zen Buddhism. Therefore, in order to ascertain the possible Zen impact on her unobtrusive poetic voice, the crucial experiences in her spiritual search will be traced.

When Hirshfield was an undergraduate student at Princeton University, she started to read books about Zen Buddhism. She went to a reception held in honor of Gary Snyder after his poetry reading on campus. She says: “He was the first Westerner I had ever seen who had done Zen practice. And I think he was an enormous influence on me, just from that one glimpse that I first time saw that it was possible, that a Westerner could do this” (Hirshfield Interview 2001). Later, she found out there was a Zen monastery located in the wilderness of Carmel Valley, California. In 1974, less than a year after she graduated from Princeton, she packed and drove across the continent to Carmel Valley and was admitted into Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. Apparently, the simple, hard life and the strict Zen training in the monastery were precisely what she was looking for, and she said that “[e]verything was dismantled. All the cluttered distraction of modern life is taken away, if you go to a monastery in wilderness” (Hirshfield Interview 2005).

In the next seven odd years, Hirshfield was a serious Zen practitioner in Soto Sect monasteries ministered by San Francisco Zen Center. The major monasteries in the system of San Francisco Zen Center were all in California, including San Francisco Zen Center at Page Street, Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, and Green Gulch Farm Zen Center at Sausalito. She studied Zen in the three major monasteries of the Center and was lay-ordained in 1979. “Lay-ordained” means that, often when an American Soto Zen practitioner has received adequate Zen training, a ceremony will be held to grant him or her formal status and he or she will take a vow to keep precepts.<sup>1</sup> In 1982 she left

the Zen Center and became lay again. In the past decade, in the summer when the Mountain Center opened to the public, she was invited to hold workshops to teach creative writing and to give dharma talks.

In those years, she sat in meditation for three to five session every day. The training was apparently vigorous and she practiced arduously. Even after leaving the monasteries, she has been doing "lay person's practice," doing meditation almost daily. About meditation, she explained: "You have to be very concentrated and your posture matters. Such as your breathing matters and your awareness needs to be both focused and wide, both pointed and soft" (Hirshfield Interview 2005). Since *zazen* (pronounced *zuochan* in Chinese) [meditation in sitting posture] has been the main focus of the Japanese Soto Sect, it is only natural that this practice exerts a tremendous impact on Hirshfield's thoughts and writing. The Japanese Soto Sect originated in a sect in Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907) China, called Caodong (pronounced as Soto in Japanese) Sect. The Sect was revitalized in the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279). Its master, Zheng Jue (1091-1157), promoted *mezhaio chan* [the Zen method of sitting in meditation and doing mirroring introspection]. Later, another master, Ru Jing (1163-1228), emphasized *zhiguan dazuo* (pronounced as *shikantaza* in Japanese), which literally means "One should do nothing but sitting in meditation." It can be said that the method of *zhiguan dazuo* was a reaction against the prevailing Zen practices of the Linji (pronounced as Rinzai in Japanese) Sect in Song Dynasty China, which emphasized the study of *gongan* (pronounced as *koan* in Japanese). The young Japanese monk Eihei Dogen (1200-1253) came to China to study Zen and received dharma transmission from Master Ru Jing. Master Ru Jing once said that to study Zen is a kind of *shenxin tuoluo* [peeling off the body and mind] and that there was no need to burn incense, to prostrate, no need to chant Buddha's name, to do penitence, to read sutra, and one would gain awareness just by *zhiguan dazuo* (*shikantaza*) (Shuiyuezhai Zhuren 527). Eight hundred years after Dogen founded the Soto Sect in Japan, it was transmitted from Japan to California by a Japanese Zen master, Shunryu Suzuki (1904-1971), who was the

founder of the San Francisco Zen Center system. After Master Shunryu Suzuki passed away, his dharma heir Richard Baker, an American, became the new abbot, and Master Baker was the teacher of Hirshfield. Therefore, Hirshfield was not merely learning Zen from Baker, but also from the writings and practice of a long Soto tradition that can be traced to Song Dynasty China.

In the thirteenth century Master Dogen wrote a short treatise on *zazen*, called “Zazen-gi” [Rules for *Zazen*]. It has provided the rules followed by monks and nuns in the Japanese Soto Sect ever since. In this treatise, *zazen* itself is the most important of all Buddhist practices, for Dogen explains that *zazen* “is the dharma gate of great ease and joy. It is undefiled practice-enlightenment,” and he thus instructed his students, “engage yourself in *zazen* as though saving your head from fire” (Tanahashi 29-30). In these passages, Dogen elaborates on his Chinese teacher Master Ru Jing’s metaphor for sitting in meditation,—“peeling off the body and mind,”—by expressing that one should set “aside all involvements and let the myriad things rest.” Furthermore, Dogen emphasizes that any “conscious endeavor” is illusory: “*Zazen* is not thinking of good, nor thinking of bad. It is not conscious endeavor. It is not introspection” (Tanahashi 29).

From the teachings of Dogen and Shunryu Suzuki and from her years of *zazen* experience, Hirshfield learned the ways to reach profound awareness. When I interviewed her in 2005, she described what had been her experience of *shikantaza*, and described it by using the metaphor of a bird’s song and that of a cloud floating over a lake. To my question “What happens if some thought enters your mind?” she replied:

Not so different than if a bird’s song enters your mind. And continuing to receive. I am speaking of course an ideal. In a not so good meditation period, maybe I sit there and think. That’s not meditation, that’s just thinking. But if you are in *shikantaza*, and do *shikantaza*, a thought comes, it’s just like any other phenomenon. The ideal would be the image of a lake and a cloud that goes through the sky. The lake does not grasp the cloud and it does not accept the reflection on its surface. If there is a cloud, there is a cloud. The lake does not care. The lake is just being a lake. (Hirshfield Interview 2005)

Dogen says: "How do you think non-thinking? Nonthinking. This is the art of *zazen*" (Tanahashi 30). Hirshfield learned from Dogen's teaching of "nonthinking," for she believes that, while one is in meditation, "just thinking" is "not meditation." The impact of Shunryu Suzuki, Hirshfield's grand teacher, can also be seen in her response to my question. Shunryu Suzuki states: "When you are practicing *zazen*, do not try to stop your thinking. Let it stop itself. If something comes to your mind, let it come in, and let it go out" (Suzuki 34). In the interview passage, Hirshfield's metaphor of the lake could refer to the mind, and the cloud and bird's song could be analogous to thoughts that enter the mind. Hirshfield adopts Dogen's teaching that *zazen* should not be a "conscious endeavor," for she expressed that the mind should neither "grasp" a thought, nor should it bother to "accept" a thought. This training of refraining from conscious endeavor must have exerted an impact on her poetic voice in which any kind of reaction to the happenings in the objective world is curbed, and in which strong personal feelings and thoughts are restrained. All these devices of Soto meditation can help to reduce the meddling and interference of the mind; in other words, they can help to reduce the activities of one's subjectivity.

Samuel Maio categorizes the poetic voice in the period of Modernism into three modes: "the confessional, the persona, and the self-effacing" (Maio 4). Hirshfield's voice can be roughly grouped in the category, as a late comer, of the "self-effacing" mode. Maio defines this mode as the voice of the poet "engaged in self-examination: attempting to be impersonal while speaking of personal concerns" (Maio 180). He uses Mark Strand's poem "Giving Myself up" as an example: "I give up my eyes which are glass eggs. / I give up my tongue," and thinks that it is "incantatory" and can "simulate what might be an Eastern religious meditation of self-negation" (Maio 188). Strand's poem is apparently written in the "self-effacing" mode, for it attempts "to be impersonal while speaking of personal concerns," and his personal concerns are evidenced by the voice's repetition of its urge to renounce everything relating to the self. Compared to Strand's, Hirsh-



field's voice is just as impersonal in her attempt but speaks less of "personal concerns" and does not speak of "self-negation" at all. In other words, Hirshfield is more positive about her life and self than her predecessors writing in the "self-effacing" voice.

Take Hirshfield's poem "Floor" as an example: her voice is calm, objective, and observant; it can be described as "impersonal" as her concerns are not "personal" at all, for the content focuses on the nails in the floor as well as on human perception ("what we've declared the beautiful to be") and behavior ("pounded down" the nails) at large:

The nails, once inset, rise to the surface—  
or, more truly perhaps, over years  
the boards sink down to meet what holds them.  
Worn, yes, but not worn through:  
the visible work reveals itself in iron,  
to be pounded down again, for what we've declared  
the beautiful to be. (Hirshfield, *The October Palace* 32)

The impact of Zen meditation on Hirshfield's poetry is apparent in three aspects: the practice of the mind's concentration, the training of the mind in non-interfering, and the training of not sticking to personal, minute feelings, but expanding one's mind to become the "big self." To concentrate one's mind is the essential of all *zazen* experiences and has been emphasized by all sects of Zen Buddhism. However, each sect has its own method of meditative concentration. In the Soto Sect, to concentrate is to practice the mind power to restrain from interference. In other words, it is to learn the control that will free one from controlling. In the text of "The Clock" and "Floor" the pronoun "I" is not used, and the objects such as the pond ("its few leaves") and the nails ("the visible work reveals itself in iron") are given a certain degree of autonomy. This self-effacing way of presenting the objects could result from her practice of freeing herself from trying to take control. Furthermore, to concentrate is not just practiced during *zazen*, but in one's every act of daily life so that no matter how minute is the engagement, it should not be interfered with by other thoughts. Shunryu Suzuki thinks that to cook is also a practice of Zen, and he says,



"You should work on it with nothing in your mind, and without expecting anything. You should just cook! That is also an experience of our sincerity, a part of our practice" (Suzuki 53). Does Hirshfield, in her poems, write about the Zen experience of her daily chores? We may ask questions about the poem "Floor": whose home is this? Who is going to do the chore of pounding down the nails on the floor? It is very likely the home of the poet, and the poet herself is the one to do the chore. Therefore, the poem may actually be read as the poet's concentrated reflection on a minute chore in her own daily life. Hirshfield emphasised that one should concentrate on one's act, and one should be mindful of and remember the actual happening of the act at every moment. To her mind, there is "something already there, not to be worked towards, but to be remembered. That's close to the feeling. So to try to remember it in every moment in this daily life, in this human body, in this place on the planet" (Hirshfield Interview 2005). When she mentions "Beauty" and "griefs" in her poem "The Clock," these are precisely things in one's past "to be remembered." The poem could hence be seen as invoking and enacting those moments of the actual happenings.

Her poem "Floor" illustrates her mindfulness and her remembrance of the things in daily life, moment by moment. It must be due to her extreme mindfulness that the details of the worn floor and the protruding nails are noticed, and that the wear and tear of the boards by time is figured out. It is also due to the mindfulness to her own mind that she figures out layers of meaning behind these objects. Each crucial moment is attended to: the moment of finding out the correlation between the protruding nails and the boards, the moment of observing the floor's present condition ("Worn, yes, but not worn through") and the future moment in which the floor will be fixed and the nails will be "pounded down." We can see how thoroughly Hirshfield is concentrating on the objects normally ignored by people, and how she emphasizes the remembrance of, and the feeling for, minute things in daily life and in their momentary existence.

Because Hirshfield has undergone vigorous *shikantaza* meditation training, her mind is trained in non-interfering with her emerging thoughts and trained in refraining from making subjective judgment about them. She said in the 2005 interview that reaching this state of not grasping, nor accepting, is “an ideal.” Her poems show different stages of moving toward this ideal. Many poems clearly show a detachment and self-restraint, but some reveal just the opposite: they show the voice’s subjective judgment, such as in “In a Net of Blue and Gold”:

When the moored boat lifts, for its moment,  
out of the water like a small cloud—  
this is when I understand.  
It floats there, defying the stillness to break,  
its white hull doubled on the surface smooth as glass.  
A minor miracle, utterly purposeless.  
Even the bird on the bow-line takes it in stride,  
barely shifting his weight before resuming  
whatever musing it is birds do;  
and the fish continue their placid, midday  
truce with the world, suspended a few feet below.  
I catch their gleam, the jeweled, reflecting scales,  
small dragons guarding common enough treasure.  
And wonder how, bound to each other as we are  
in a net of blue and gold,  
we fail so often, in such ordinary ways. (Hirshfield, *Of Gravity* 3)

On the surface, “In a Net of Blue and Gold” describes a moored boat and several nearby living creatures. The boat, the bird, and the fish are presented by a rather calm, objective voice: “its white hull doubled on the surface smooth as glass,” “the bird on the bow-line takes it in stride,” and “the fish continue their placid, midday / truce with the world, suspended a few feet below.” However, the poet makes a subjective statement too readily for a *shikantaza* practitioner, because she comments on the boat with its reflection on the water as “a minor miracle, utterly purposeless.” This statement not only elevates an ordinary object to be something miraculous but employs the Taoist concept of extolling the purposeless and the useless state of a being or

an object. The miraculous "utterly purposeless" boat in her poem reminds one of the useless uncarved wood block in *Tao Te Ching*: "Though the uncarved block is small / No one in the world dare claim its allegiance" (Lau 49).

At the end of "In a Net of Blue and Gold," the voice speaks out loud its subjective judgment that all things are bound to each other and that people often fail to recognize the bond and fail to recognize its beauty, such as the blue color of sky, and the gold color of sunlight: "And wonder how, bound to each other as we are / In a net of blue and gold / We fail so often, in such ordinary ways" (Hirshfield, *Of Gravity* 3). In this poem, the boat, the bird, and the fish come and go, without being grasped by the mind, but the voice endeavors overtly in presenting its ideas. However, the voice tries to stay impersonal as much as possible, for in the ending lines the word "we" instead of "I" is used to deliver the observation on human behavior. The voice in "In a Net of Blue and Gold" can still, by and large, be categorized as that of the "self-effacing" mode.

In some of Hirshfield's poems, however, a passionate voice can be heard. Normally, one would not expect such a voice in the poetry of a versed Zen practitioner like her. One aim of *zazen* is to reach a calmness devoid of any strong feeling. Shunryu Suzuki says: "When you are doing *zazen*, you are within the complete calmness of your mind; you do not feel anything" (Suzuki 121). Is this passionate voice another voice of Hirshfield which is just the opposite of her calm, unobtrusive one? Does the passionate voice come from the sensitive, emotional poet in her? Hirshfield addresses this issue herself. She believes that passion and awakening can co-exist. She admires Japanese women poets such as Ono no Komachi (825-900): "Everything I learn from them is enormously hopeful. They of course are not only Buddhist poets, they are also poets of enormous power in the realm of eros [...] In this lineage, you didn't have to separate out the spiritual poet from the love poet, that the same lives could inhabit one woman [...] In the West they are very separated" (Hirshfield Interview 2001). I think as a poet striving to present feelings and emotions, Hirshfield has to solve

the paradox of being both calm and passionate in her life as well as in her writing. She thus describes an ideal Zen state in experiencing strong emotions: "If you can feel great joy without the desire to make that joy persist to the next moment; feel great grief without the desire to make anything different than it is. Then I think that joy and that grief are fully awakened. It's only the clinging which is not awakened" (Hirshfield Interview 2001). Can Hirshfield's poems reach a state of such equilibrium? Her poem "Percolation" will be used for discussing the problem of reconciling eros with an "awakened" state.

"Percolation" (Hirshfield, *The October Palace* 51) presents a raining scene in a voice imbued with feelings. A portion of the poem mainly presents images of living beings in the rain, such as the frogs, the cows, the crickets and the soaked plants. Hirshfield foregrounds the sounds made by the creatures, that the frog "rasps out of himself / the tuneless anthem of Frog"; that the cows "can't get their chanting in time"; and that the crickets seem "to welcome the early-come twilight, / come in—of all orchestras." Then the poem focuses on how the rain soaks the roots of plants and eventually turns itself into energy and returns to the elements: the rain water "rising through cell-strands of xylem, leaflet and lung-flower, / back into air." At the same time, an emotional voice resounds throughout the poem. The rain is welcomed by all creatures, and the voice speaks emphatically: "surely all Being at bottom is happy." The voice also instills strong emotion to all beings presented in the poem, that "the frog [...] is happy"; that the cows "are raising a huddling protest"; that the songs of the crickets are "most plaintive." In addition, the image of the plants soaked in rain is intertwined with that of love-making:

yield to their percolation, blushing, completely seduced,  
 assenting as they give in to the downrushing water,  
 the murmur of falling, the fluvial, purling wash  
 of all the ways matter loves matter.  
 riding its gravity down, into the body (Hirshfield, *The October Palace* 51)

The erotic metaphor, the strong feelings of the beings, and the brokenness of the syntax as if the speaker were short of breath, all contribute to the passionate tone of the voice. Does this poem demonstrate what Hirshfield believes to be the "awakened" state: "if you can feel great joy without the desire to make that joy persist to the next moment"? The emotional intensity of the voice is too impelling to be halted presently. It seems that in "Percolation" the emotional part of the poet gains an upper hand.

How is Hirshfield's passionate voice compared to that of Modernist poets? The first category of Samuel Maio's three modes of voice is the "confessional." Maio selects the poetry of Robert Lowell, James Wright and Anne Sexton to represent this mode (Maio 30-102). The voice in the verse of Confessional Poets is in most cases passionate, but the passion is always related to the speaker as well as to the pain and self-hatred from which the speaker suffers; for example, in Anne Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know," supposedly a dirge written for her parents, the agitated voice focuses on expressing her own feelings rather than on the remembrance of her parents:

Gone, I say and walk from church,  
refusing the stiff procession to the grave,  
letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.  
It is June. I am tired of being brave. (Sexton 43)

Though the voice in Hirshfield's "Percolation" is passionate, the passion is generated from the speaker's empathy for the feelings of the living beings and for the growth of the plants. The focus of Hirshfield's voice is different from Sexton's in that the former reveals a merging of the self into others while the latter is all wrapped up in one's self.

On the other hand, the voice in some of Hirshfield's poems expresses to the full a restraint and non-stickiness such as in "Secretive Heart" (Hirshfield, *Lives* 9) and "The Kingdom" (Hirshfield, *The October Palace* 3). In "Secretive Heart" the speaker visits a museum; she sees an ancient Chinese cauldron which could be an iron cooking

vessel. There are three characters in the poem, the heart of the speaker, the cauldron, and the perceiving mind of the speaker that appear as "I." In Soto Zen, emotions are considered obstacles in one's pursuit of enlightenment because Dogen thinks that a true Zen teacher "is not concerned with self-views, and does not stagnate in emotional feelings" (Tanahashi 36). In Hirshfield's poems, there are emotion and passion, but they are less personal and more involved in an act of empathy with the object. In "Secretive Heart," the heart immerses itself in the feelings for the cauldron while the perceiving mind is very curious about the heart's feelings:

Heart falters, stops  
before a Chinese cauldron  
still good for boiling water.

It is one of a dozen or more,  
it is merely iron,  
it is merely old,  
there is much else to see.

The few raised marks  
on its belly  
are useful to almost no one.

Heart looks at it a long time  
What do you see? I ask again,  
but it does not answer. (Hirshfield, *Lives* 9)

In the poem, "I," the perceiving mind, is observing the reaction of the heart toward the object, the cauldron, and the mind does perceive in a restrained, non-sticky, non-attaching way. There is a similarity between the triangle of the mind, the heart and the object in the poem and that in the *shikantaza* experience as perceived by Hirshfield. Normally a meditation is an intact one (the mind) to one (the object) experience of concentration, in which the mind focuses on one thing. However, *shikantaza* involves three instead of two parties: the self that is observing, the object (cloud) and the self that is reacting to the object (lake). Since the poem "Secretive Heart" contains a triangle similar to



that of *shikantaza* experience, and since Hirshfield admits the enormous impact of Zen on her poetry, I will venture to compare the poem with the meditative experience.

Throughout the poem it is the heart that performs: the heart "falters," "stops" and then feels for the cauldron's material, age, and shape. So, the heart performs without any interference by the mind. Finally, when the mind asks "what do you see?", the heart does not even bother to answer. It just continues to feel and experience. This poem coincides with the way of *shikantaza* meditation, not only because there is the triangle, but because both the heart and the mind are autonomous, rational and intact. Hirshfield deftly reveals the secret of the enigmatic heart in the subtitle in order to retain the meditative mood of the verse itself. The subtitle is written by Yehuda Amichai: "What's this? This is an old toolshed. / No, this is a great past love." The subtitle hints at the cauldron, like the toolshed, being also "a great past love." It explains why in feeling for the cauldron, the heart "falters," because it must have perceived that the cauldron, hundreds of years ago, could have been a vessel used in daily life by an arduous cook or by a woman wholeheartedly working for her family.

In Hirshfield's poem "The Kingdom," the pattern of the triangle appears again: the self that is perceiving and observing, the object, and the heart that is reacting to the object. It is likely that Hirshfield is so much influenced by *shikantaza* experience that she adopts its basic triangle role pattern in her poetry:

At times  
the heart  
stands back  
and looks at the body,  
looks at the mind,  
as a lion  
quietly looks  
at the not-quite-itself,  
not-quite-another,  
moving of shadows and grass. (Hirshfield, *The October Palace* 3)

We recall that, in the 2005 interview, Hirshfield said that in *shikantaza* the mind (lake) should not grasp the thought (cloud), nor should it accept the thought. In "The Kingdom" the role play actually changes: the heart (the lion) becomes analogous to the lake while the mind and the body (the future lion) are analogous to the cloud. The third party is the observer, the speaker of the poem. The lion is looking at "the not-quite-itself" and "not-quite-another," which should refer to the lion's envisioning of its future motions when it hunts in the grass. Then in the latter part of the poem, the feelings of the heart enter into the arena of vision: "enter hunger, enter sorrow, / enters finally losing it all." Throughout the poem, the heart is in self-restraint, and it just watches quietly the future movements of her own body, watches the thoughts generating in her mind, and even watches its own strong feelings without any attachment. The self-restraint of the heart is just like someone being immersed in *shikantaza* meditation, immovably letting thoughts and feelings come and go, mirroring them without any interference. The voice in "The Kingdom" is not "self-effacing" in a negative sense like that of Mark Strand, for it is temperate and composed. Though the voice can take control over the self, it is not domineering, nor obtrusive. The self in "The Kingdom" and in "Secretive Heart" is divided, but there is no tension between the parts at all, and instead they are independent as well as collaborative. Samuel Maio's second category of voice mode is the persona. The persona can be best exemplified by the character Henry in John Berryman's poems. Unlike the collaboration and independence among the parts of self in Hirshfield's poems, both Henry and "I" in Berryman's are psychopathic. Maio says that Henry "was an outlet for Berryman, one that allowed him to say anything, express any emotion in his poetry and label it a poetic device" (Maio 116). I think Henry is violent, frenzied and schizophrenic while "I" is on the verge of becoming someone like him. Hirshfield's parts are just the opposite: rational, composed, and capable of maintaining equilibrium.

In the 2005 interview, Hirshfield also talked about how one should try to attain the "big self." I think by "big self" she means that in

meditation one's mind should contain as many beings and objects of the external world as possible. One's "small self" is "very sticky" in everyday life while the "big self" is not, for the small self is only "working towards ego purpose," and one should learn to be "not sticky." By being "sticky," she probably means that people are usually obsessed with themselves, with their personal gain and loss and with their feelings. Therefore, while meditating, one cannot help being disturbed and bothered by trivial personal matters. These words from Dogen's "Actualize the Fundamental Point" were quoted by Hirshfield in the 2005 interview to explain her belief in the "big self": "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things" (cf. Tanahashi 70). It must be due to her belief in the "big self" that Hirshfield's poems do not address her personal matters, but focus on beings and things in the objective world, such as the frogs, the cows, the floor, the leaves on the pond, and a moored boat. These beings and things are the components of the "big self." Her idea of the "big self" echoes the "big mind" of her grand-teacher, Shunryu Suzuki: "Zen practice is to open up our small mind. So concentration is just an aid to help you realize 'big mind,' or the mind that is everything" (Suzuki 32).

One of Hirshfield's ideal spiritual states is the attainment of the "big self," and *shikantaza* meditation can facilitate this spiritual search. An earlier poem of hers written in the 1980s, "Evening, Late Fall" proves that she has attained this spiritual state by breaking through her stickiness to the "small self." The word "blame" in line one implies that the voice is about to blame others; in other words, the voice is about to commit itself to the activities of the "small self" before it realizes that one should blame oneself instead, because of one's private concern:

It is not this world, then, to blame, with its red  
and blue stars, yellow pears, green apples  
that carry a scent which can move you to tears.  
The others are not unlike this—  
the women stand over sinks with their sleeves pushed back,

thin oxen lean into their yokes,  
 snow falls with impossible lightness in spring.  
 How do we bear it, then, to guess sometimes  
 as their lives across the dark?  
 How they sing as they run cotton towels across porcelain plates?  
 How they are innocent? (Hirshfield, *Of Gravity* 41)

In line one the voice starts to recognize the merits and the beauty of the world instead of blaming it. In addition to acknowledging the touching power of things beautiful, the voice further extends its love and care by means of empathy so that it can participate in the existence of toiling beings, such as the dish washers, and the working animals, like the “thin oxen” under the yoke, and can even participate in the existence of non-sentient objects, such as the fine snow in spring. This poem shows that the voice has transcended the gain and loss of the “small self” and attained the “big self” whose consciousness can contain almost all. In a sense, this spiritual state can also be described as “impersonal” and “self-effacing.”

Impersonality is an important concept in Modernist poetics. T. S. Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” emphasizes that a poet should be aware more of the collective literary traditions rather than his own emotion and personality: “What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past [...]. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (Eliot 40). By “depersonalization” (40), Eliot means that the poet does not find “new emotions” (43), and “the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one [...] by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations” (40-41). Furthermore, Samuel Maio thinks that “the theories of impersonality that were entrenched in the poetry of New Criticism, or most poetry of the 1940s and 1950s (Eliot and Auden were the reigning masters) [...] intentionally eschewed the personal self” (Maio 7). However, the concept of impersonality carries more complexity than what Maio says. Sharon Cameron claims that “personality and impersonality do not stand in a binary relation,” and she employs William Empson’s

monograph, *Asymmetry in Buddha's Faces*, as an example to illustrate how incongruent features like the personal and the impersonal (cf. Cameron ix) can be "reconciled in a human image" of Buddha (Cameron xviii); she explains:

Empson's capacity to anatomize countenances based on the human particular but simultaneously moving beyond its limits, marking a person's features so they are recognizable as discrete and also the point at which this recognizability is effaced—at once crystallizing individuality and the flow that undoes it—gives a face to the paradox [...]. (Cameron xvii)

The prominent Zen feature in Hirshfield's poetry is not an isolated case in American literary writing. There are other American writers who adopt Buddhist ideas and experiences into their writing. How do her Zen poems differ from those written by others? It was more than twenty years after Zen Buddhism was disseminated, in a scale larger than before, to the United States in the 1950s, that Hirshfield started to write poems which were imbued with Zen experiences. Michael Davidson points out that many writers of the Beat Generation have "active involvement in both Eastern and Western religious traditions," in particular in Buddhism, among them Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, etc. (Davidson 95-96). However, Hirshfield's poetry is different from that of her predecessors who also wrote about Buddhist experiences, including poets of the Beat Generation mentioned above and Zen practitioners in the 1970s such as Norman Fischer (\*1946) and Dale Pendell (\*1947). Compared with their poetry, Hirshfield's presents in more detail how the mind of a meditation practitioner is at work. The others put more emphasis on the contents of their *zazen* and enlightenment experience.

Gary Snyder's poetry is often about the awareness he obtained in his Zen practices. He received training in several Rinzai Sect temples in Japan which emphasized *koan* study. That is why his poetry has a flavour of *koan*. *Gongan* (*koan* in Japanese), in most cases, refers to a terse, riddle-like dialogue between an ancient Zen master and his student, or to a strange act of the Zen master. The dialogue and the act aim at breaking the student's limitation of thoughts or his adherence

to thoughts. The dialogues and episodes were later collected and became classics for students of Zen, in particular those of the Linji (Rinzai) Sect. Snyder's poem "Ripples on the Surface" seems to describe the contents of his enlightenment:

The vast wild  
the house, alone.  
The little house in the wild,  
the wild in the house.  
Both forgotten.  
No nature  
Both together, one big empty house. (Snyder 381)

This poem can be likened to a *koan* given by a Zen teacher for the student to meditate. Similarly, lines by Chinese poet Su Shi (1036-1101) and Master Dogen are quoted by Snyder in his poem "The Canyon Wren" to present a *koan*-like riddle in order "to break human obsession with the logicity of our cognition" (Chung 86). Some of Hirshfield's poems also have the riddle-like *koan* quality, but mostly they rationally present her meditating mind at work, and unobtrusively present her spiritual query or her contemplation on feelings.

In a similar way, the personal and the impersonal traits in Hirshfield's poetry blend into each other. Hirshfield's poetic voice is both personal and impersonal; impersonal in the sense that it always focuses on beings and objects other than the private self, and personal in the sense that the voice unveils the process of how the self actively reduces her attention to personal matters. There is often a smooth fusion of energy that flows between the self and others in Hirshfield's poetry.

Dale Pendell studied Rinzai Zen and has been a member of the Ring of Bone Zendo located in San Juan Ridge in northern California. His poems are also replete with *koan* elements; for example, "Mountain and Rivers" contains several quotations of Dogen which sound like *koan*. There is another a passage that sounds like *koan*, but apparently was made up by Pendell himself:



Long ago there was a buddha called the Shrugging Buddha. Bodhisattvas, monks, nuns, and laypersons would ask questions of great earnestness and profundity, and the Shrugging Buddha would just laugh and shrug his shoulders. One day they set a trap for him. He got caught.

What did he do then? (Johnson and Paulenich 204-206)

This *koan*-like verse echoes *yizhi chan* [the one-finger zen] *koan* of Master Chü-chih (ninth Century): "Whenever master Chü-chih was asked a question, he would simply hold up one finger. One time a visitor to the temple asked Chü-chih's attendant about his master's teachings. The boy also just held up one finger" (Heine 173). Both shrugging shoulders and holding up one finger are awakening devices used by the masters. However, neither Snyder nor Pendell present the mental process of *zazen* as Hirshfield does, even though they have done *zazen* regularly for decades.

On the other hand, Philip Whalen and Norman Fischer in some of their poems do present the mental process of meditation. Like Hirshfield, they are practitioners of the Soto Zen Sect and both are priest-ordained.<sup>2</sup> This means that they are formally acknowledged as Zen teachers in the San Francisco Zen Center system. Coincidentally, both of them, like Hirshfield, are students of Master Richard Baker. The poetry of Whalen and Fischer also shows elements of Soto Zen Buddhism. One of Whalen's epigram poems titled "Upon the Poet's Photograph" reads: "This printed face doesn't see / A curious looking in; / Big map of nothing" (Schelling 378). In this short poem, like Hirshfield, Whalen rationally divides the self into two parts: the perceiving mind of the poet that looks in curiously, and the mind of the printed face in the photo. The poem is about the spiritual search of the "poet" who is looking at his own photo, and the voice sounds impersonal and objective, but the end of the search reveals his "personal concern." Compared to Hirshfield's, Whalen's voice still adheres to the self, the "small self," for the speaker is so much obsessed with his search for "nothing"<sup>3</sup> that the face becomes a "map of nothing." In Fischer's poem dated "Monday, 3 December" in a series of poems called *Success*, a spiritual search into one's own past is touchingly described:

Highly ornate statue of Monjushri  
 With sweet painted face  
 Graces my table courtesy of Jim Ryder  
 Can't remember  
 Past anymore what was  
 The life that went before nor can  
 See anywhere  
 The lay of the land, fence rows  
 Bordering fields or the main street  
 Where I grew up  
 All gone if even there  
 I never saw it  
 Don't want to get it back  
 Just the wonder of the search  
 Finding nothing, not myself nor anyone  
 Not society, not history  
 Not the sun in the sky (Schelling 80)

The lines are indeed about the process of one's spiritual search by means of renunciation. At the end of the poem, the voice is able to break through its adherence to the past, to the "wonder of the search," to the self and to society, and able to break through its adherence to the objective world, but the focus on the acts of tearing oneself off shows that the voice is deeply involved with the self, unable to sever itself from the attachment. It seems that the voice of Hirshfield so far is the only one among modern American poets capable of true detachment and unobtrusive self-restraint, and capable of gaining a power to embrace a great many others.

Hirshfield grew up in the era of Modernism, and her poetry shares several characteristics with Modernist poets. In many of her poems, the vivid images of the external world, of beings and objects, are prominent and crucial. The voice in her poems is mostly rational and almost impersonal. The selves in her poems are often split and divided. Furthermore, like many of her Modernist predecessors' her poetry has an obvious Asian Buddhist flavor. In spite of these Modernistic characteristics, her voice is distinct and unique in that it is unobtrusive and at the same time encompassing; impersonal and at the same time personal. The training in Soto Sect's *shikantaza* meditation,

to a great extent, enables her to examine herself objectively and to expand her consciousness to contain other beings and things. Due to the practice of restraining the urge to interfere with her own thoughts, she is able to present her thoughts indirectly in a contemplative voice. Because of her spiritual search for the "big self," she is able to expand the consciousness to contain the external world with love and care. Her cultivation of the mind in the Soto tradition should be regarded as the major contributing factor to the forming of her poetic voice, unique among American poets, a new poetic voice imbued with profound Zen religious experience.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A more advanced status is "priest-ordained": it will grant the person the status of Zen teacher.

<sup>2</sup>In 1991, Whalen became the abbot at the Hartford Street Zen Center in San Francisco. Fischer served as the director of Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in 1980, and from 1995-2000 he was the abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center.

<sup>3</sup>In Buddhism "nothing" refers to *Śūnyatā* (Sanskrit), which means "voidness." Yet *Śūnyatā* is not empty, being empty also of the concept of emptiness. To the extent that it is negative, its positive aspect is *Tathātā*, the suchness or "isness" of each thing.

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## Modernist Elements in Jane Hirshfield's Voice and Zen Meditation: A Letter in Response to Ling Chung\*

JANE HIRSHFIELD

Dear Ling Chung,

I am deeply moved by the profound attentiveness you have brought to my poems' words, and to my practice understanding, in your essay.

There will always be one or two things a person notices, but I will say something about only one, because I think it may be useful to you in the future—it concerns something I saw in the footnotes. While it is perfectly understandable to see priest ordination as more “advanced” than lay ordination, and that would be the regular view by many, for me it has always been very important to see lay practice as an equally valid way to practice Zen. Linji's/Rinzai's “person of no rank” is one teaching that points toward this (though it is of course about “no-rank” at a much more profound level). Layman P'ang and his daughter are also an embodiment. Richard Baker-roshi once described the traditional possible paths of Zen practice as four-fold: monk practice (which, unlike in Catholicism, need not be life-long, but is most often a period of intensive training, and I consider it one of the great blessings of my life that as a lay person, and as a woman, I came to Zen in a time and place where full monastic practice was available for me to do); priest practice (which I do entirely respect—and might have undertaken myself, under other circumstances); layperson's practice (which to some extent my own practice must be described as,

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\*Reference: Ling Chung, “Modernist Elements in Jane Hirshfield's Voice and Zen Meditation” *Connotations* 21.1 (2011/2012). For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debchung02101.htm>>.

since it is generally known now that I am a person who has trained in Zen), and “teahouse practice.” Teahouse practice means something like the practice of the old lady who runs the teahouse by the side of the road that people like to go to without knowing why—she just greets them in a way where they feel her attention, she sets the teacup down with mindfulness that can’t even be recognized as mindfulness. The teahouse isn’t labelled, Zen Teahouse. It is a kind of invisible practice, that does not look special, or “different,” and anyone who goes there feels comfortable. They don’t have to learn a special vocabulary, whether of Buddhism or of tea ceremony, to drink their tea, and leave feeling nourished and sustained.

It is probably obvious to you already that I love this “hidden practice” possibility. For a time when I was a young poet, no one knew about my background in Zen, and then I was truly doing teahouse practice. But people found out—when I was asked in a nationally televised interview about my “teahouse practice” I laughed, and said to the interviewer, “You’ve just burned down the teahouse!” But what I can still hope for my poems is that they are doing teahouse practice. You have already described it, in your essay, when you comment on the way that other poets who practice Zen often write more explicitly than I do about that as an experience, where my poems most often simply try to look from inside the eyes of practice. I was quite touched that you saw that about my work.

I don’t think of any of this as “better” or “worse.” It’s just my way, who I am in this body and mind and life. Nor is any of this actually willed or purposeful. It’s hard to write about these things without making them sound more intentional than they are. But an apple tree doesn’t “intend” to make apples. It just does. And last, of course, a person inhabits the world in many ways over a lifetime—you note this also already in your essay. I am not trying as a poet to be consistent, I am just a person who practices Zen, and one poem will have one relationship to practice understanding, another poem will have another. I make no claim to writing from a place of lasting Big Self, or big mind. Each poem reflects only the person I am at the mo-



ment of its writing. That you find, over time, a person whose poems reflect the mind of shikantaza, brings me gladness.

All warmest,

Jane

Thank you—

Jane

Eureka College

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## The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*\*

TAMMY AMIEL-HOUSER

Since the 1980s, Ian McEwan's literary oeuvre has displayed a growing concern with the relation between literature and ethics, becoming progressively more involved with public and historical issues, and turning attention to the moral possibilities of the novel itself.<sup>1</sup> When discussing McEwan's literary ethics, critics generally base themselves on a common humanist conception that sees in literature an important exploration of human nature with potential to enrich the readers' knowledge of themselves and of others.<sup>2</sup> The author's own comments on the ethics of fiction have contributed to this understanding, as he describes his writings in terms of an inquiry into the human mind that is achieved by stepping "inside the consciousness of others" (Ridley vii). However, I believe that *Saturday* (2005) represents a moral turn that goes against McEwan's own declared liberal-humanist views and diverges from the common critical interpretation of his literary ethics. Instead, the novel seems to resonate with Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of Otherness, with its emphasis on the self as infinitely responsible toward the ever-strange and incomprehensible Other.

McEwan has often asserted that "showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else" is the main achievement of fiction, as it elicits our empathy for other human beings and so makes us aware that "other people are as alive as [we] are" (Kellaway). In a conversation with David Lynn, McEwan similarly stated that the importance of the novel lies in its "mapping out of other minds and the invitation to the reader to step into those other minds" (51).<sup>3</sup> These ideas, which are

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\*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debhouser02101.htm>>.

in accordance with liberal-humanist ethics, or else express a version of Martha Nussbaum's literary ethics,<sup>4</sup> focus on the moral aspect of the novel in soliciting our imaginative understanding of other human beings.<sup>5</sup> The ethical vision expressed in *Saturday*, by contrast, seems to be based on the impenetrability of the Other, on the *inability* to step into another's mind.

Set in London on Saturday, February 15, 2003, the day of the protest march against the invasion of Iraq, the largest in British history, *Saturday* follows neurosurgeon Henry Perowne as he moves through this one challenging and disturbing day. The seemingly episodic plot is defined by two violent encounters with Baxter, an aggressive criminal, narrated through Perowne's perspective in the present tense.

The critical reception of the novel was very mixed. Many readings condemned McEwan for producing a contemporary update of the common Western fable of the privileged male hero (Henry Perowne) faced with violent opponents (Baxter, the young thug, and his mates), threatened by them (first after the car accident and then in the violent break-in to Perowne's house), but at last overcoming his opponents, thus restoring order and stability (along with the hero's wealth and social supremacy).<sup>6</sup> This kind of reading usually involves a denunciation of the novel's simplistic endorsement of Perowne's liberal-bourgeois perspective and of its affirmation of an oppressive Self-Other relation in which the socially inferior rival (Baxter) is violently defeated by the dominant, intellectually superior protagonist.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, I contend that the novel actually sets out to challenge the oppositional scheme of Self-Other: the underprivileged antagonist is presented not as an affirming foil, but rather as a singular, enigmatic Other who has the power to shake the protagonist's indifferent subjectivity. This is, I believe, the ethical focus of the novel, which should be understood in light of Emmanuel Levinas's conception of the responsibility and obligation due to the most different and incomprehensible 'Other.' Indeed, the novel is permeated with shades of Levinas's post-World War II thinking, in which he posits a neo-humanism based on the "traumatism of astonishment" (*Totality* 73)—

on the experience of shock that arises from the encounter with “something absolutely foreign” (*Totality* 73) in the Other human being.<sup>8</sup> *Saturday* reconfigures the horror of Levinas’s historical times in the political context of the twenty-first-century new horror of global terror attacks, and gives it intimate expression in Baxter’s menacing violence. What is more, it climaxes with Perowne’s experience of the Other’s “foreign[ess]” (*Totality* 73) and “absolute difference” (*Totality* 194) when he is faced with the mystery of Baxter’s interiority—an experience that catalyzes an ethical transformation.

One of the most characteristic features of McEwan’s narratives is a sudden crisis triggered by an abrupt, violent and arbitrary event within the life of the protagonist; in *Saturday*, however, the encounters between Perowne and Baxter unexpectedly—both for the protagonist and for the readers—challenge Perowne’s rational and self-contained subjectivity, along with his liberal-individualistic ideology. This change takes place as the novel articulates Perowne’s bond of obligation to his enemy, whose vulnerability makes a claim he cannot ignore. Perowne is suddenly forced to face Baxter’s hunger for living, “that hunger [that] is his claim on life, on a mental existence” (279), his terrible desire to survive his illness. This experience leads Perowne to admit, almost despite himself, that “[H]e’s responsible, after all” (279).

Yet Perowne’s responsibility towards Baxter is not based on the liberal faith in moral imagination—the ethos of “[thinking] oneself into the minds of others,” emphasized in McEwan’s post 9/11 article “Only Love Then Oblivion.” In that article, McEwan claimed that the ability to enter the mind of others “is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.” In *Saturday*, by contrast, Perowne’s moral responsibility towards Baxter emerges as he recognizes his *inability* to enter the other man’s mind, to imagine what it is like to be Baxter.<sup>9</sup> Morality begins when Perowne witnesses Baxter’s elation upon hearing a recitation of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” and realizes that “Baxter heard what Henry never ha[d], and probably never will” (278).

*Saturday* gradually undermines the clear opposition initially set into place between Perowne's vision, rational thinking and medical skill, and Baxter's physical and mental disabilities. For Perowne is unable to decipher Baxter's individuality: Baxter becomes not his foil, but an autonomous, irreducible and singular addressee. In the climactic scene of the break-in, to be discussed in detail below, Perowne comes to realize that, despite his social standing, respectable profession, expertise and intelligence, he does not have the ability to inspect his respective Other's interiority. Yes, Perowne does have the power to diagnose Baxter's illness (though his diagnosis may be wrong) and can triumph over him physically (with some help). He can even treat him surgically, literally opening up Baxter's brain and almost peering into it (cf. *Saturday* 254-55). Yet all these literalized metaphors for "knowing" the other from the inside only accentuates Perowne's failure to truly know or understand what goes on inside his opponent's head.

Perowne's failure to penetrate Baxter's inner world and to empathetically understand him has been condemned by some critics as indicative of the ideological narrowness of the novel (cf. Ross 87). Against this reading, I argue that leaving Baxter, the social Other, as an ambiguous lacuna both to Perowne and to the readers constitutes the ethical stance of *Saturday*: this non-penetrability is the key to the consequent effects of the novel on the readers. In obvious deviation from the humanist liberal ethos of recognition and empathy for the Other (suggested not only by McEwan but also by his protagonist),<sup>10</sup> *Saturday* draws attention to Baxter's abstruse quality that can neither be represented nor empathetically understood—as is highlighted in the episode of the recitation. Baxter, with his unknown identity—no first name, no origin, no identifying details—with his confusing temperament and inexplicable reactions, becomes the stumbling block of the narrative. His unknown quality is emphasized as soon as he is introduced, when Perowne is unable to draw him into revelation:

He [Perowne] puts out his own hand.  
"Henry Perowne."

"Baxter."

"Mr Baxter?"

"Baxter." (87)

Perowne later tries to resume the interrogation, and yet again he fails:

"Is your real name Baxter?"

"That's my business." (96)

Baxter's character comes to pose an impenetrable barrier: it is neither open to Perowne's rational knowledge nor to an aesthetic literary rendition, only to a sketchy, external, and mainly visual description. Nevertheless, Baxter's enigmatic individuality is revealed as having the power to set into motion the ethical awakening of the subject, making Perowne respond (at the end) to its cry for help.

In Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy, the concept of the absolute Other is carefully distinguished from the negative other derived from the Hegelian philosophical tradition, which is a relational "other" that functions as an essential constituent of self-consciousness (cf. *Totality* 203).<sup>11</sup> Levinas, by contrast, insists that the other person, *Autrui* or "the other absolutely other—the Other" (*Totality* 197), is not an oppositional concept that is relative to the Self. Rather, human Otherness signifies a special uniqueness that cannot be conceptualized, thematized or comprehended, that can never be summed up or reduced to any one general structure or set of attributes. As an absolute Other, or "a Stranger" (*Totality* 39), every person is irreplaceable, original, unparalleled, and incomparable to any other human being. Every person is indeed "absolutely foreign to me" (*Totality* 73).

For Levinas, it is this positive difference, this human quality of singularity, that ethically affects the subject, disturbing "the being at home with oneself" (*Totality* 39), while demanding answerability and producing responsibility for the Other:



The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. (*Totality* 43)

In this ethical approach, the subject is not the autonomous free-thinking individual invested in his own existence and fearing his own death that is often assumed in modern philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Instead, Levinas suggests a passive subject that is always already bound up with an "Other" for whom he is eternally responsible, and towards whom he is totally obligated; an infinite responsibility that is not the product of his free consciousness, nor dependent upon his will and rationality.<sup>13</sup> Levinas describes this responsibility as an answer "for a debt contracted before any freedom and before any consciousness" (*Otherwise* 12). Thus in the relations between the self and the Other "I am obliged without this obligation having begun in me" (*Otherwise* 13), compelled to offer responsiveness to the needs of the stranger who "overflows absolutely every *idea* I can have of him" (*Totality* 87; italics in the original).<sup>14</sup>

Perowne, the renowned doctor, a healthy and wealthy gifted man, rational, reflexive, self-assured and aware of his own power (cf. *Saturday* 20-21), seems quite estranged from Levinas's ethics of subordination and infinite obligation. At forty-eight years of age, Perowne appears to have it all: he is happily married to his equally successful wife (Rosalind, the lawyer), and enjoying their talented grown-up children (Theo, the musician, and Daisy, the poet). Perowne is also very successful professionally, a true medical enthusiast who believes in the importance of scientific knowledge (and the insignificance of literary fiction), and who is always ready for hard work (even on Saturdays). Living in a huge and beautiful house, set in a "perfect square" (5), and driving a brand new Mercedes, Perowne represents an extreme case of a too-perfect and blessed middle-class life, one that is enviable but also ideologically annoying.

As apparent right from the opening, Perowne's success in the various aspects of his life is accompanied by his self-confidence and by what the critics disapprovingly describe as his "smugness" (Childs

146) and as his “inherently imperious (and imperialist) cast of mind” (Wells 116). Thus, thinking about the political crisis of post September 11, Perowne believes “that reason, being a powerful tool” is the weapon by which to exorcise the enemies that threaten the progress of Western culture (32). However, much like the burning plane that Perowne witnessed earlier in the morning from his bedroom window (a visual scene echoing the horrendous spectacle of 9/11), so too the invasion of Iraq has the power to weigh upon Perowne’s mood, leaving the usually confident doctor somewhat confused (cf. 62, 72-73). There is an anxious awareness of threatening “forces of evil that are not susceptible to his [Perowne’s] rational calculus” (Versluys, “9/11” 76), a collective sense “that has established itself in the culture after 9/11” (Versluys, “9/11” 76). There remains something in the relation to Otherness which has the power to undermine the doctor’s confident identity.

Indeed, in the emphasized context of political threats from unknown Others and the debate about the war with Iraq, it is remarkable that Perowne avoids taking sides; his reaction is that of an ambivalent observer, not of an active political agent or a Levinasian committed subject. Upon hearing that many people have gathered to protest against the war, Perowne goes off to play his usual game of squash. Thinking about the war, he lets himself “hedge [his] bets” (188), as his daughter reproaches him.<sup>15</sup> Perowne avoids committing himself to one political position and escapes making a clear moral decision, preferring to turn to his material possessions like his “silver Mercedes S500 with cream upholstery” (75), which seem to have the ability to calm him and help restore his good mood and self-confidence. Childs notes the disturbing parallel between Perowne and the West, seeing in the former “a metonym for the material West’s indifference to world affairs” (146).<sup>16</sup> Perowne’s material prosperity allows him to close himself off (in his car, in his house), without ever becoming really involved in the moral and political decision-making.

Nevertheless, as Perowne is driving through the barricaded streets of London just before the protest march begins, he experiences a deep-

seated sense of anxiety about the impending doom that may befall the world and his own family:

The world probably has changed fundamentally and the matter is being clumsily handled, particularly by the Americans. There are people around the planet, well-connected and organized, who would like to kill him and his family and friends, to make a point. (80-81)

In a matter of minutes the faceless bullies that Perowne fears will destroy Western culture become embodied by living breathing creatures: three thugs who crash their red BMW into Perowne's car—and into his life: "His car will never be the same again. It's ruinously altered, and so is his Saturday" (82). This collision will, in a very real way, change the course of his day, and, more importantly, change his world, forcing him to the confrontation with Otherness that he has so assiduously avoided.

The opposition between Perowne, who believes his vehicle to have been unreasonably damaged, and the men in the red car is established immediately when he associates the BMW "with criminality, drug dealing" (83) and then equates the men with animals.<sup>17</sup> This contrast reaches its peak when Baxter formally enters the scene. Functioning as Perowne's antagonist, Baxter is a hotheaded youngster, short, stocky and suffering from a "persistent tremor" in his hands (87), greatly differing in physique from the tall, mature Perowne, whose surgeon's hands are known for their stability and precision (cf. 19). It is clear that McEwan places Baxter in the position of Perowne's negative other—he is suffering the onset of Huntington's disease, as the doctor will diagnose, limited in movement, emotionally disturbed, violent and volatile, all which stand in stark opposition to Perowne's charmed life.

From this point onward, the scene develops along what seems to be a Hegelian structure of oppositional Self-Other relations: Baxter becomes Perowne's ultimate opponent, an embodiment of the latter's deepest fears—of wildness and ignorance, illness and disability, aggression and lack of self-control—all the elements from which Pe-

rowne tries to distance himself. He therefore sees in Baxter's physique a "simian air" (88) and "destructive energy waiting to be released" (88); later he reduces Baxter to his medical condition, thinking of him in terms of chromosomal deficiency and pathological symptoms (cf. 91, 93). Perowne's thoughts in the aftermath of the accident are particularly illuminating, as he sees himself "cast in a role" in an "urban drama" (86) that presents a microcosm of the primal struggle between Self and Other, a battle in which "someone is going to have to impose his will and win and the other is going to give way" (86). Perowne's perception of the interaction is essentially Hegelian in its oppositional tension and explicit urge "to impose [the Self's] will"; it makes Baxter the embodiment of "the other" who must be defeated in order for Perowne's mastership to be recognized. Perowne therefore uses all the social weapons at his disposal, stressing his linguistic superiority (cf. 89), and then his professional supremacy, as he observes Baxter's physiological symptoms and introduces himself as a doctor (see 93-94). When Baxter pounds on the doctor's chest and asserts his animal-like aggression, Perowne decides to make use of "shameless blackmail" (95) to defeat his assailant. Employing his authoritative tone, Perowne falsely promises Baxter that he will use his position within the medical community to help him manage his illness (95-97). By exposing Baxter's weakness to his friends, who quickly abandon him, Perowne manages to get back in his car and hastily retreats from the scene. Then he continues on to the squash court and finds himself another front, where he mercilessly attempts to beat his partner.<sup>18</sup>

The initial confrontation between Perowne and Baxter, conveyed through Perowne's condescending point of view, creates an ambivalent impression of the arrogant doctor. It is true that the aggressiveness of Baxter and his gang causes Perowne to panic, but the text emphasizes his self-righteousness and pomposity in handling the situation. Even the guilt that he soon feels as he recalls his behavior towards the sickly Baxter (cf. 102) seems just another easy coping mechanism, helping him restore his self-image as a moral and conscientious being. It is apparent that for Perowne, liberal and reasona-

ble man, self-reflection is all that is required for proper interaction with the world—he examines his thoughts and feelings, and sometimes feels guilt, shame or compassion, and that is quite enough. Or so he wants to think.

In contrast to the close narrative attention given to Perowne's mind, mood, and sentiments, Baxter is never portrayed from within, but only represented from Perowne's perspective. He remains totally incomprehensible throughout the book, seeming nearly mute, as though devoid of meaningful consciousness, almost sub-human. This dull, one-dimensional picture of Perowne's opponent is often cited as the main flaw of *Saturday*.<sup>19</sup> As critics have observed, not only is Baxter constructed as Perowne's obvious inferior, he is also never given the opportunity for self-examination or self-explanation, thus indeed becoming one-dimensional, as if driven only by his genetic illness (cf. Ross 88).

This literary reduction of Baxter gains prominence in the climactic scene where Daisy recites "Dover Beach," upon which Baxter undergoes a sudden, miraculous, and totally inexplicable change of heart. The reading of the poem by the naked Daisy under a pending threat of rape serves as the crescendo of the break-in scene which takes place on that same Saturday evening, when the Perownes are gathering to celebrate Daisy's new book of poems. This part of the story, with its surprising literary glorification and consequent improbable salvation, has been loudly condemned by many reviewers.<sup>20</sup> Hadley has argued that in this scene McEwan presents an unlikely and rather grotesque Victorian-styled fantasy of redemption. Arnold's period poem, read aloud, is intended to transform Baxter, to "fix" him, and "humanize the Baxters of our day" (93). Wells, accordingly, criticizes "the fact that Baxter is so easily subdued by the blandishments of the English literary tradition" (121).

These critical condemnations stem mainly from the inexplicable effect of the poem on Baxter's mood and behavior, which seems to change abruptly from aggression to bliss. Certainly, it is hard to believe that a literary piece by a Victorian poet, so remote from Baxter's



life and language, could influence him so greatly, could play upon his emotions and make him renounce his violent plans. It seems contrary to any reasonable expectation. But why should we adhere to reason?

The disapproving readings of this scene all seem prone to certain presuppositions. First, they all make an effort to explain away the implausibility of the text and elucidate Baxter; second, they tend to lay Baxter's elation on the greatness of Arnold's poem; and last, there is an interpretive propensity to isolate Baxter's sudden change of temperament from the continuation of the novel. All these underlying critical tendencies ignore crucial aspects of the text and thereby miss the ethics of *Saturday*. It is specifically at this point, after Daisy's literary performance, that *Saturday* develops beyond the Hegelian Self-Other relation: Baxter's inexplicable elation unsettles the negative opposition initially set into place. Instead, he becomes a unique individual, whose singularity cannot be reduced to Perowne's imaginative interpretations.

The critical attempts to elucidate Baxter's literary euphoria fall into the trap of blindly following Perowne's rationality, while disregarding that way it has been subverted in McEwan's narrative. As readers we are not granted any reasonable entry into the mystery of Baxter's sudden literary enthusiasm, nor any real insight into what is truly going on in his mind.<sup>21</sup> The only serious claim we can make is that Baxter's response to the poem remains an enigma; we can then try to explain the function or effect of this enigma, without pretending to solve it.<sup>22</sup> Bradley and Tate argue that "*Saturday* is, in many ways, a novel *about* prejudice, misunderstanding and over-interpretation in an increasingly paranoid London" (30; emphasis in the original), and it is here that I find the ethical challenge that the novel presents to its readers: to resist the temptation of over-interpreting Baxter's Otherness, and instead accept the limits of our rational knowledge of the Other's singularity, which is not reducible to comprehension and appropriation.

The critics' tendency to credit Arnold's poem with Baxter's transformation leads directly to discussions of McEwan's supposed belief



in cultural (and political) conservatism and in absurd and even ridiculous realism. It is important to note, however, that it is not Matthew Arnold's poem to which Baxter is introduced in this scene, but rather to Daisy's appropriation of Arnold in her naked performance of "Dover Beach." The feminine, corporeal quality of the spectacle must be taken into account, as it does not suggest a glorification of the English literary male tradition but rather its subversion.

Finally, readings which disconnect Baxter's sudden change of temperament from the subsequent change in Perowne's mindset are bound to miss the ethical point, which is to be found not in Baxter's rebirth but rather in the relationship that the literary episode creates between Perowne and Baxter. My contention is that the break-in, combined with Daisy's reading and Baxter's unexpected exhilaration, work together to shake up Perowne's subjectivity, opening him to experience the wonders of the Other's enigmatic singularity and so, finally, to acknowledge his involuntary debt to Baxter.

The scene begins when Baxter forces Daisy to take off her clothes. She does so in quiet panic, exposing a hitherto unknown pregnancy. Whereas Nigel, Baxter's partner in crime, immediately reacts with obvious discomfort—"She's all yours, mate" (219)—Baxter's response is less clear. He seems to ignore Daisy's body, instead focusing his entire attention on her book, suddenly discovered on the coffee table. Perowne wonders if this is a sign of embarrassment "at the sight of a pregnant woman" (219), or perhaps a way of further humiliating Daisy. The reader is left in the dark. More important is the implicit link established between Daisy's pregnant body and her book of poetry: Baxter's words "Well, well. Look at that!" (219) seem at first to refer to his discovery of Daisy's being "in the club" (as Nigel terms it, 219), but are then revealed as referring to her book. Daisy's body of flesh and blood and her body of words and rhymes become interconnected and are placed at the focus of everyone's attention. They become the catalyst that alters the chain of events in a surprising way.

It is not Daisy herself, however, who determines the course of action, but rather Baxter, whose intense interest in her poetry is revealed in his command: "Read out your best poem" (219). It is important to note that the introduction of literature into the events is the result of a request by the supposed brute, Baxter, who surprisingly asks to engage in the arts. It is Baxter who initiates the literary moment, which becomes an unexpected break from the otherwise violent scene. McEwan stresses the whimsicality of the event by a change in narrative style: Perowne's internal focalization is interrupted by a short, unmediated dialogue between Baxter and Daisy that seems completely free of Perowne's thoughts:

"You didn't tell me you wrote poems. All your own work, is it?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Very clever you must be." (219)

Indeed, while none of the events that have taken place thus far have halted or even slowed Perowne's ponderings, Baxter's peculiar wish to hear Daisy's poetry seems to stun Perowne so deeply that his consciousness falls silent. This may be the result of Perowne's lack of literary responsiveness, highlighted when he admits that "he hasn't been reading closely enough" (220), even his own daughter's poetry. It is obviously a surprise for him to encounter Baxter's interest in Daisy's writing.

At this point, Daisy's grandfather makes a silent suggestion to recite somebody else's poem rather than one of her own (220). Daisy does so. This serves as a clear refusal to allow Baxter (and Nigel) into her private literary life. It is also a defensive measure: Daisy is aware of the sexual undertone of her poetry and is trying to avoid adding further sexual content to an already dangerously charged situation. Her recital is her mode of female self-defense, not letting the male attackers get inside her own body of literature and distancing them from her body of flesh and blood.

The decision, however, remains below the level of focalization. When Daisy starts the recital, neither Perowne nor the readers know

that the poem is in fact Arnold's "Dover Beach." McEwan's narrative strategies position even the most literary of his readers alongside Henry Perowne and Baxter as "illiterates" left in the dark. The text does not quote the poem, instead adhering to Perowne's wandering thoughts when hearing it, narrated in the usual present tense. Perowne himself is not only blind to Daisy and his father-in-law's silent agreement to trick Baxter, but also has "read no poetry in adult life" (128); he therefore does not recognize the famous words of Arnold's poem. For him—and so for the readers—it is Daisy's poem, one in which "[s]he's thrown herself back into another century" (220). In addition, Perowne's point of view reflects his confusion and dread in this menacing situation. Consequently he misses the exact words of the poem and lets his thoughts fluctuate and interlink paraphrases of what he hears ("the sea is still and at high tide" [220]) with impressions of his pregnant daughter, staged as the poem's expressive author ("She calls to her lover, surely the man who will one day father her child" [220]). This rendition radically changes Arnold's poem. What we get is a feminized version of Arnold, which is taken out of its nineteenth-century context and associated, instead, with the presence of its speaker, her naked body and her feminine sexuality.

Only gradually is the poem identified, the disclosure of the first line when Daisy begins to recite it again serving as a confirming hint directed at the more literary of McEwan's readers. In a lone case of dramatic irony within the novel, Perowne remains ignorant. An added twist is the parallel that is drawn between the two opposing characters: Baxter and Perowne are joined, if only for a moment, in their shared lack of knowledge. The glaring difference between the two is reestablished only at the end of the recitation, in their completely different responses. During this brief, unified hiatus while the poem is being read a second time, Perowne's thoughts drift toward Baxter, who suddenly becomes for him a real participant in the poem, its actual speaker. Perowne imagines Baxter looking through the window at the calm sea, listening to its waves, hearing their sadness (see 221). For a moment, Perowne goes beyond thinking about Baxter, and feels

himself *being* Baxter: "Then once again, it's through Baxter's ears that he hears the sea's 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar [...].'" (221-22); Baxter's imagined misery makes the poem seem depressing and pessimistic (cf. 221-22).

This supposedly compassionate moment, when Perowne steps into his adversary's mind, could become, in McEwan's humanist terms, an ethical occasion of empathetic understanding, with important consequences for both Perowne and Baxter. However, this is not how it unfolds. Notably, the next line of the story—"but Baxter appears suddenly elated" (222)—emphasizes how remote Perowne really is from Baxter's life and state of mind. In contrast to Perowne's gloomy pessimism, which he attaches to Baxter's feelings, Baxter himself responds with sudden elation and even joy, which Perowne does not understand. Here I contest Kathleen Wall's analysis of the passage and her argument that Arnold's poem "allows Perowne to see the world through the eyes of the other" (786). Rather, Perowne's experience of imagining himself in Baxter's place is exposed as another instance of his self-centered reflexivity, with no actual bearing on the lived reality of his surroundings.

The ironic juxtaposition of Perowne's imagined version of Baxter with Baxter himself resonates with the opening of the break-in scene, where Perowne attempts to take on Baxter's point of view: "Perowne tries to see the room through his [Baxter's] eyes, as if that might help predict the degree of trouble ahead" (207). It is clear, however, that what is revealed is merely Perowne's bourgeois gaze, encompassing "the Bridget Riley prints flanking the Hodgkin," and his intellectual snobbish self-opinion reflected in "the careless piles of serious books." Perowne's gaze, even when trying to take on another's perspective, is of course indicative of his own concerns rather than those of Baxter's. As Ross sums up this episode, "Perowne's musings betoken no genuine fellow feeling" (89). This introductory episode undermines the supposed empathy of the second attempt to imagine Baxter.

The distance between Perowne and Baxter is accentuated when the doctor is faced with his opponent's sudden enthusiasm for the poem

and his changed behavior after the second reading. When the inspired Baxter addresses Daisy "'It's beautiful. And you wrote it. [...] It makes me think about where I grew up'" (222), Perowne's hostility is clear and understandable: "Henry doesn't remember or care where that was" (222). As usual when puzzled or threatened, Perowne retreats to a "simple" physiological explanation and concludes that Baxter's metamorphosis is due to his faulty genes and indicative, of course, of his chronic illness (cf. 223-24). Unable to solve the mystery of the Other, Perowne interprets it as "manic" (223) and then resorts to a pathological explanation. This echoes the initial confrontation with Baxter, when Perowne used his scientific knowledge to shield himself from the threat of the other.

Nonetheless, there is a hint that Perowne is changing, transformed, though unwittingly, by the extraordinary ethical effects of Daisy's performance. The change is bound up with the image of the "child," which appears several times in the break-in scene, relating first to Daisy and then, surprisingly, to Baxter. Initially, the image of the "child" obviously stems from Perowne's parental feelings towards his threatened family. Thus he sees in Daisy's loveable nude body "the vulnerable child" that he remembers from early "bath-times" (218). The image may also arise from Perowne's discovery of his daughter's pregnancy: confronted with Daisy's changing body, he becomes aware of her unborn child.

However, as Daisy begins her second reading, the image of the child takes on an intriguing and unusual twist, becoming attached to Baxter—a strange transformation, considering the very real threat that Baxter presents to Perowne and his family at this moment:

She turns back a page, and with more confidence, attempting the seductive, varied tone of a storyteller entrancing a child, begins again. (221)

In Perowne's confused thoughts, Daisy seems to be addressing Baxter as a child. Her voice and tone are trying to distract Baxter, not aggressively, but in a motherly way, lulling him with stories.



Once introduced, the metaphor remains consistent. When the second reading is over and Perowne encounters Baxter's extraordinary transformation "from lord of terror to amazed admirer," he thinks of him as an "excited child" (223). It seems as if Daisy's storytelling has really converted Baxter from a violent attacker into an innocent child, and on the next page, Baxter is again compared to a child: having taken Daisy's book, "[h]e clutches [it] like a greedy child fearing the withdrawal of a treat" (224). Perowne's fatherly emotions towards his loving family have been somehow extended—in his bewildered thoughts—and amazingly now include Baxter the thug within this intimate circle, if only for a brief moment.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that the paternal relationship between a father and his child (what he terms "filiality") is the paradigm for the ethical relation between Self and Other, "a relation of transcendence" (279) that makes the father infinitely responsible for his son.<sup>23</sup> The image of the child comes to designate the uniqueness of the Other who, although being very close to me, familiar and intimate, is also a singular individual, totally new and original, escaping my control and determination, as "neither the categories of power nor those of knowledge describe my relation with the child" (277). It is important to indicate in this context that Levinas's emphasis on the father-son relation, combined with his discussion of fecundity and Eros and indeed his overall negative treatment of femininity in *Totality and Infinity*,<sup>24</sup> has aroused feminist criticism regarding his declared androcentrism.<sup>25</sup> Yet in the later *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas turns to the notion of "maternity" to signify ethical subjectivity. This change is considered by some of his critics to be an important revision of his early exclusion of the feminine from the ethical sphere.<sup>26</sup>

In this, McEwan seems more in tune with Levinas's late thinking: in *Saturday*, the feminine (or the maternal) factor—Daisy's speech (and body) act—is clearly an essential element in constituting the image of the child, allowing it to enter the text and change the course of action. Indeed, considering the threatening series of events, it seems rather odd that the violent intruder, Baxter, could become, in Perowne's



thoughts, a child. If we ask ourselves what it is, then, that transforms Perowne's conception of Baxter from wild and dangerous animal and lunatic trespasser, into a childish, vulnerable, greedy and excited admirer of literature and of Daisy, the answer is to be found in Daisy's literary spectacle. This pageant combines Daisy's voice, the words written by Arnold, and Daisy's speaking bare body, which signals the feminine promise of new life in its pregnant visibility. All these together succeed in transforming the frightening event into an enchanted moment, in which Baxter's face—as a child, as a singular Other—suddenly makes its appearance in McEwan's narrative: "his smile is wet and beatific, his eyes are bright. The voice is warm, and trembles with exalted feeling" (224). Consequently, even as Baxter waves his knife, Perowne sees that "his eagerness and trust is child-like" (226).

It is Daisy who creates this opening, in her appeal to Baxter as she recites the poem twice and escorts him into her (and Arnold's) literary world. For a moment, he becomes the poem's beloved addressee. Though the text does not appear in McEwan's novel, these are the words that are said by Daisy, as we come to understand:

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.  
 ("Dover Beach," final verse)

The address to Baxter with Arnold's words "Ah love," combined with the inclusive "us" and "we," declare Baxter's humanness and humanity for the first time in the novel. In her literary act, Daisy actually embraces Baxter as a precious partner in a world "which seems / [t]o lie before us like a land of dreams, [...] [s]wept with confused alarms of struggle and flight." The context of Arnold's reference to times of

war, his allusion to Thucydides's account of the Epipolae battlefield,<sup>27</sup> change within Daisy's narration, and come to allude to both the impending war (the invasion of Iraq) and Baxter's own violent threats. In this time of political confusion and personal brutality, Daisy's recital alludes to the importance of love between the Self and the Other. It is not romantic love she calls for, however, not a love that assumes intimate knowledge of the Other and the possibility of harmonious union—a humanist conception that has historical alliance with Western imperialism, as Dawn Rae Davis reminds us (145-57). Rather it is love that engages the Self with the unknown singularity of the Other, love devoid of empathetic understanding but also of the violence of possession, "love pried loose from humanist tradition" (Davis 157).

Daisy's literary performance is not a reincarnation of the Victorian past, nor a yearning for a neo-Victorian present (cf. De Waard 151-53; cf. Hadley 95), but rather a very up-to-date singular combination of Arnold's words (as Perowne and the readers gradually recognize) with a new historical context (Perowne's internal paraphrase, "when there's no peace or certainty" [221], is applied to his own times), and a particular feminine act of language (the poem is perceived as "she calls to her lover" [220]). In Perowne's thoughts, the poem narrates "*this evening*" (221; my emphasis), and its content is dynamic, changing from Daisy's first reading to the second ("Now it appears there's no terrace, but an open window" [221]). As such, Daisy's performance points to what Derek Attridge terms the "unusual forcefulness" of the literary text (16), which becomes new and singular each time it is reread and rewritten.

This special quality of Daisy's intertextual recital genuinely "performs and produces the social relations in which the other *becomes* irreducible to an object or a mere thing" (Perpich, "Levinas" 31). Instead of a wild animal or a superficial stereotype of a criminal, Baxter at last becomes an addressee; Daisy's loving speech is an appeal to him, suggesting through Arnold's poetics, as well as by her own "varied tone" and exposed and confessing body, the promise of life, of faithfulness and honesty. This effect is achieved through the

prism of Perowne's perspective, as he first imagines Daisy's words as addressing her lover: "She turns to him, and before they kiss she tells him that they must love each other and be faithful, especially now they're having a child" (221). Then, Daisy's lover is replaced with Baxter: "there's no young man, father of the child. Instead he sees Baxter" (221). Thus, Baxter enters the place of Daisy's lover, to whom she promises love and faithfulness in her poetic language. Daisy's promise arises from her literary exhibition, devoid of her intent, and does not suggest the existence of any affectionate empathy between the real participants. Nonetheless, it is a turning point that gives Baxter—first through Daisy's speech-act and then through his own miraculously changed behavior—a human face, unique and meaningful.

Daisy's communicative recitation of Arnold carries out that dimension of language that Levinas terms "saying" (*"dire"*). In Levinas's late thinking, developed in *Otherwise than Being*, he distinguishes between the content of speech, its meanings and themes—what Levinas terms the "said" (*"dit"*)—and the performative dimension of the linguistic address to another—the "saying" (*"dire"*). The "saying," interwoven as it is into the "said," amounts to a special register of language; it is a modality of responsiveness and of contact, created through speech without any conscious intention on the part of the speaking subject (*Otherwise* 48-49). It is that dimension of appeal to the Other that emerges from Daisy's poetic recital. Bare and exposed, she is declaring "here I am," alluding to that obligation of the Self to the Other.<sup>28</sup> Stripped of the defense of clothing, of the complex symbols of her highly developed representational and thematic poetry, Daisy is centered in corporeal presence, in physical voice, in the modality of saying rather than in Arnold's "said." In her performance, Daisy invites Baxter to look together at the world ("come to the window") and without conscious intent opens herself up to connection with him.

Indeed, for Levinas, as feminists readings have shown (Brody 69), the linguistic proximity to the Other is intrinsically linked to the maternal sensibility, to the vulnerability and infinite responsiveness that

are embodied in the maternal flesh and blood engagement with the Other, in being “one-for-the-other” (*Otherwise* 67, 77). In *Saturday*, Daisy’s pregnant body, exposed and vulnerable, together with her telling voice, appeal to Baxter by words, sounds and sights, speaking the ethical saying to him. Her reading, combining the poetics of Arnold with her corporeal declaration of the growing life inside her, constitutes what Levinas calls “the contact of saying” (*Otherwise* 85) and lays open “the immediacy of proximity” (84), acknowledging Baxter’s human face.

This said, I do not venture to interpret Baxter’s psyche or to offer suppositions as to his sudden literary excitement and altered behavior, as doing so would tamper with the void that McEwan so carefully constructs around this matter. All I argue is that within the world of the novel and the framed world of the poem, Daisy’s literary feminine address to Baxter asserts his singularity as a human being who deserves to live and to enjoy (in Arnold’s terms) the world’s joy, love and light. And this poetic and loving appeal to Baxter, rendered through Perowne’s agitated perspective, makes Baxter appear, in Perowne’s eyes, as an “excited child” (223), who “inhabits the confining bright spotlight of the present” (224), “elated as well as desperate” (225).

It is this, I believe, that catalyzes Perowne’s own ethical transformation later in the narrative. The closing of the novel presents a different Perowne. Despite his real victory over Baxter and the successful brain surgery he has performed on his erstwhile opponent—all which should prove his skill and power, his justified superiority as a generous and benevolent man—Perowne surprisingly feels that “[h]e’s weak and ignorant” (277). This stands in complete contrast to his portrayal at the opening of the novel as “inexplicably elated” (3), and his earlier high, when he feels like “a king” (269). As the long *Saturday* drags to its close, Perowne finds himself thinking again about Baxter’s vulnerability, of how he “has a diminishing slice of life worth living” (278). This leads Perowne to “more brotherly interest” (278) in Baxter’s sad future and to his practical resolution to try to convince

the Crown Prosecution Service that Baxter is unfit to stand trial. Then, thinking about his decision to forgive Baxter, Perowne goes on to ponder his position as a pardoner, finally admitting that "he's not the one to be granting it [pardon] anyway" (278). These thoughts are followed by the honest and subversive question: "or is he [Perowne] the one seeking forgiveness?" and then comes his climactic realization: "He's responsible, after all" (278).

This complete change can happen because, for the first time since encountering Baxter, Perowne is able to acknowledge the difference between himself and his aggressor as a difference between two distinct human beings: he recognizes that Baxter is a *real* person, not a cardboard cutout—a stereotype—of a common criminal as he had thought. Baxter is a unique person, and therefore cannot be reduced to medical explanations or to social ideas. As a consequence of the literary (singular) event and its inexplicable effect on Baxter, Perowne is faced with the Other's unfathomable interiority:

But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite all Daisy's attempts to educate him. Some nineteenth-century poet—Henry has yet to find out whether this Arnold is famous or obscure—touched off in Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. (278-79)

Through Daisy's literary performance, Perowne comes to admit Baxter's specific singularity as an individual human being, accepting his extraordinary (and unreasonable) poetic reaction without giving it a pathological explanation or criminalizing it. Furthermore, this leads him to acknowledge Baxter's legitimate claim to an autonomous, dignified life. It is specifically in the inexplicable and irrational, in that which cannot be understood or explained away—Baxter's poetic enthusiasm—that Perowne finally hears his antagonist's cry for help, "that hunger [that] is his claim on life, on a mental existence" (279). It is this that leads the doctor to assert his obligation to truly assist Baxter for the first time, to "do what he can to make the patient comfortable, somehow" (278), to help improve Baxter's life.



Ironically, as part of this transformation, literature—so decisively dismissed by Perowne—is now awarded the title of “magic” (278). This literary magic, however, is not that of the supernatural stories that infuriated Perowne (cf. 67-68), but rather the ethical magic of Daisy’s feminine spectacle, which succeeds in reminding Perowne of Baxter’s vulnerability and “how much he [Baxter] wanted to live” (278). Thus, for Perowne, Daisy’s performance carries with it Baxter’s childish face and human voice, aspiring to overcome illness, to prevail, to have a good life, and asking Perowne to help him to do so. Welcoming the Other’s difference—noticing Baxter’s singularity—forces Perowne to accept responsibility for him and to care for him for the rest of their lives.

Read through the prism of Levinas’s ethics, this turning point in Perowne’s subjectivity has broad implications. The metonymy constructed between *Saturday*’s events and world affairs,<sup>29</sup> draws attention to the political importance of the literary scene, and we are encouraged to relate the intersubjective experience of Perowne, Daisy and Baxter to the broader political challenges of contemporary Western society. Thus, the ethical relation as implied by *Saturday* does not mean seeing things from the viewpoint of others and reaching an empathetic understanding of our fellow humans; this is a naïve, perhaps even manipulative and oppressive idea, as post-colonial critics have argued (Davis 145-57). On the contrary, the novel suggests that ethics is all about hearing the cry for help expressed by the villain whom I truly do not like, do not understand, and with whom I do not identify. In other words, ethics means responding to and taking care of that Other who seems the most strange, threatening, incomprehensible, illogical, and absolutely different to me, never to be understood or accepted. This horrible alien, this terrorist from whom I mostly want to distance myself, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I cannot share and whose motives I cannot understand, is the Other who makes me responsible for him, demanding my help, asking for my maternal care.



This is not meant to imply that Henry Perowne is a model of altruism who achieves Levinas's radical giving. Rather, I suggest that, as represented by McEwan's aesthetic means, Perowne's accidental encounter with Baxter points toward the basic ethical duty of the subject to the Other in ways that have political implications which reach far beyond the private story and the specific Saturday of the Perownes. Are we able to listen to our worst enemy and hear his "claim on life" (279)? Can we comply with our ethical obligation towards our defiant aggressor? These are the hard questions that *Saturday* poses through its protagonist's disturbing encounter with Otherness—questions that are perhaps meant to leave us, like Perowne, feeling weak and ignorant, and "responsible, after all."

The Open University of Israel

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Malcolm emphasizes McEwan's ethical evolvment in his mature fiction (15), and Claudia Schemberg describes this evolvment as McEwan's "ethical turn" (28). See also Dominic Head's praise of McEwan, who "resuscitated the link between morality and the novel" (1). Other critics join this view (Wells 15; Brown 80; Bradley and Tate 21-22).

<sup>2</sup>For a brief overview of this topic, see Daniel R. Schwarz's "Humanist Ethics of Reading" in *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (3-15). Martha Nussbaum provides a fascinating and comprehensive account of the ancient roots of humanist ethical conceptualization of literature; see her chapter "The Ancient Quarrel" in *Love's Knowledge* (10-29). Nussbaum's exploration of the relationship between literature and ethical theory (see, for example, *The Fragility of Goodness*, *Love's Knowledge*, and *Poetic Justice*) is a sophisticated and more precise elaboration and redefinition of this humanist tradition. Nussbaum argues that literature offers a distinctive contribution to our understanding of other human beings, developing the ability to empathize. Matt Ridley's introductory presentation of McEwan's fiction seems to be in line with these ethical ideas (see Ridley vii-viii). See also Dominic Head, who stresses that "the ability to empathize" (9) is essential to McEwan's writing.

<sup>3</sup>In a talk with Zadie Smith, McEwan expands on this idea: "At least since the early 80's, it's [the ethical idea that 'cruelty is a failure of imagination' that has] begun to fill out for me as an idea in fiction, that there's something very entwined about imagination and morals. That one of the great values of fiction was exactly this process of being able to enter other people's minds" (Smith 111, 112).

<sup>4</sup>Through her detailed analysis of particular literary texts (mainly from Greek tragedy and the realist novel in her books *Love's Knowledge* and *Poetic Justice*), Nussbaum demonstrates how literature cultivates the reader's emphatic imagination, allowing him to enter the thoughts and feelings of fictional others whose lives may be radically different than his own. See Claudia Schemberg, 83-86, on McEwan's debt to Nussbaum's ethics.

<sup>5</sup>On McEwan's liberal humanism see Head 180; De Waard 145-46; Bradley and Tate 22-23.

<sup>6</sup>John Banville, bluntly accusing *Saturday* of being "a dismayingly bad book," reads it as a middle-class banal fairy tale: "Henry has everything, and, as in all good fairy tales, he gets to keep it, after getting rid of the troll who had sought to challenge his right of ownership" (9).

<sup>7</sup>Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace reads these aspects of *Saturday* in light of post-colonial theory, interpreting the novel as a melancholic response to the imperial history with which England cannot yet cope critically. Hadley criticizes *Saturday* for restoring "the Victorian fantasy of liberal agency" (93). Ross reads *Saturday* as a liberal hymn to the British elite, confined to an oppressive ideology. He compares it to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* and sees *Saturday* as indicating a "narrowing and hardening of the liberal vision that had once energized the condition of England novel" (93). Other interpretations, on the contrary, applaud the novel's sharp and critical investigation of contemporary Western urban life at the beginning of the new millennium, with all its challenges and faults. See Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times*; Hillard; Rorty; and Brown.

<sup>8</sup>Surprisingly few critics relate Levinas's philosophy to McEwan's writings in general, and to *Saturday* in particular. While in her recent book on McEwan (2010), Lynn Wells suggests reading the dramatic scenarios of confrontation in McEwan's fiction "as internal mirrors of the basic ethical relationship as framed by Levinas in his philosophy" (15), Levinas is not mentioned in her chapter on *Saturday*. In the epilogue to his book *Out of the Blue*, Kristiaan Versluys does refer to the possibility of reading *Saturday*'s response to the 9/11 tragedy in terms of "a concern for the Other" (*Out* 191). However, Versluys's interpretation of the conception of responsibility in the novel is actually closer to the non-Levinas, humanist ethos of imaginative identification and empathetic understanding—a view which I argue is actually subverted in *Saturday*. Versluys's important contribution to my reading of the novel is found in his contention that it expresses "an intrusion of something utterly horrible and incomprehensible into the banal and the everyday" ("9/11" 76). In what follows, I will relate this notion of "horrible and incomprehensible" to Levinas's concept of "singularity" and its ethical effects.

<sup>9</sup>It is here that I diverge from Versluys's interpretation of *Saturday*. Although he, too, declares the novel's "emphasis on responsibility" toward the Other (*Out* 188), he understands this responsibility along the liberal-humanistic terms of "the exercise of imaginative identification" (151) and "moral sympathy" (191). My claim is that *Saturday* undermines such notions of morality in favor of a much

more radical concept of responsibility to an Other who refutes imaginative identification and sympathetic understanding.

<sup>10</sup>For Perowne's thoughts about "moral sympathy" see *Saturday* 127.

<sup>11</sup>For a comparative reading of Levinas and Hegel see Adriaan Perpezak 205-16, Silvia Benso 307-30.

<sup>12</sup>On modern subjectivity and its deconstruction, see Critchley, "Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity" 51-70.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Levinas's "Freedom Called into Question," *Totality* 82-84.

<sup>14</sup>For an excellent discussion of Levinas's idea of this infinite responsibility, see Perpich, "Responsibility" 78-123.

<sup>15</sup>As he observes the protesters, Perowne ponders Daisy's words to him: "You're an educated person living in what we like to call a mature democracy, and our government's taking us to war. If you think that's a good idea, fine, say so, make the argument, but don't hedge your bets. Are we sending the troops in or not? It's happening now" (*Saturday* 188).

<sup>16</sup>See also Wells 113. Versluys, in a more sympathetic interpretation of Perowne, analyzes his political position as "that of the hesitant intellectual, whose ability to see the two sides of a question induces indecision" ("9/11" 77).

<sup>17</sup>See *Saturday* 84: "One of the others, a tall young man with the long mournful face of a horse [...];" "[...] they turn their faces towards Perowne simultaneously, with abrupt curiosity, like deer disturbed in a forest." This goes on: "The horse-faced fellow" (85). See Wells for a discussion of the animalistic terms in which Perowne perceives Baxter and his partners (117).

<sup>18</sup>The construction of a battleground is very apparent in Perowne's use of combative terminology (see 59, 86, 102, 107, 187), and in his rationalization of the urge to win as a simple biological drive (cf. 113). It thus seems that, behind the pacifist facade, Perowne's mind is in fact quite belligerent, reflecting the hidden aggressions of England "on the edge of war" (141). Perowne's combative behavior has been taken to be "a synecdoche for the history of his homeland" (Wallace 474), an embodiment of authorial violence and of British nationalism (see Wells 113).

<sup>19</sup>See Wells 112, quoting Wallace 476, and agreeing with her criticism.

<sup>20</sup>In a review in the *New York Times*, for example, Zoe Heller concludes by saying: "This, it is safe to say, is a faintly preposterous episode." See also Ross 87; Wells 120-21; De Waard 151-53.

<sup>21</sup>Hadley, for example, explicitly acknowledges the absence of Baxter's point of view (95, 100n2). Nevertheless, she does not refrain from interpreting Baxter's sudden change in behavior by getting inside his soul (although only in an endnote), suggesting that "he yearns for the fantasy [of Victorian liberalism] even so" (101n2). Thus, Hadley projects the liberal vision of individual agency (the one that she finds in Perowne's thoughts and in McEwan's narrative) onto Baxter's missing interiority. This is the common liberal error of making the Other, here Baxter, mirror the privileged subject's point of view.

<sup>22</sup>Those critics who praise the novel tend to explain what goes on in Baxter's mind and ignore the importance of this void in the narrative. See, for example, Kathleen Wall, who marvels at *Saturday's* exploration of "beauty's role in society" (757), and then goes on to interpret the literary effect of the reading scene on Baxter's inner world (785).

<sup>23</sup>See in Levinas's *Totality* the sub-chapter "Filiality and Fraternity" (278-80). These ideas previously appear in his *Time and the Other* (91).

<sup>24</sup>See in *Totality* Levinas's discussion of the Dwelling (152-58), and his chapters on love, Eros and fecundity (256-80).

<sup>25</sup>On the androcentrism of Levinas in *Totality*, see Tina Chanter 16-17; Perpich, "From the Caress"; Luce Irigaray; Sonia Sikka 101-05; Critchley, "Five Problems" 43. For a more elaborate analysis of Levinas's treatment of the feminine, see Sanford, *Metaphysics of Love*.

<sup>26</sup>On Levinas's turn from the paternal to the maternal in *Otherwise than Being*, see Sanford, "Masculine Mothers" 180-199; Brody 53-74.

<sup>27</sup>See Molly Clark Hillard on this reference to Thucydides as well as on other intertextual layers in "Dover Beach" and their importance for *Saturday*.

<sup>28</sup>On the important expression "me voici" (here I am) in Levinas's ethics, see *Otherwise* 64-67, 142, 228-32.

<sup>29</sup>This metonymy is established through Perowne's point of view, which, as Versluys says, "demonstrates the extent to which September 11 has penetrated deep into the European psyche" ("9/11" 68). The plot also sets it into place as it juxtaposes Perowne's fears about fanatical terrorists with a violent encounter with domestic intruders. As Head explains, referring to the many interpretations of this metonymy, "the threat to the security of the Perownes parallels the broader insecurity of the West in the face of Islamic extremism" (181).

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