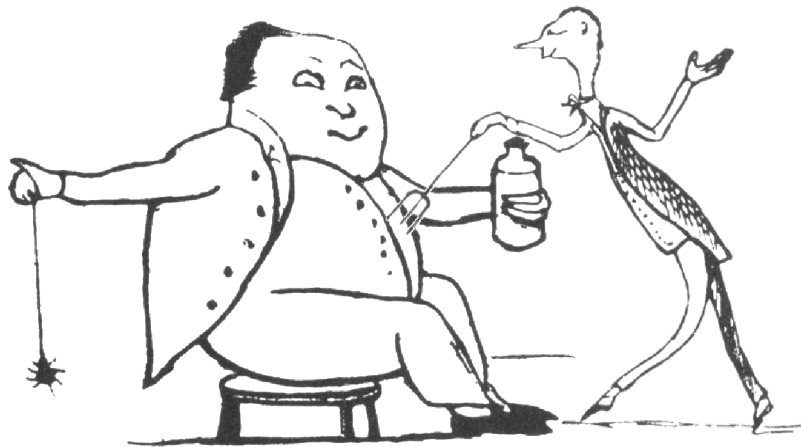# Connotations

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Editors' Note

From volume 1 to volume 21, three issues of *Connotations* were published every year, frequently as double or triple issues. Starting with volume 22, *Connotations* will be published twice every academic year in two single issues.

Matthias Bauer
For the Editors of *Connotations*

Connotations wants to encourage scholarly communication in the field of English Literature (from the Middle English period to the present), as well as American and other Literatures in English. It focuses on the semantic and stylistic energy of the language of literature in a historical perspective and aims to represent different approaches.

Each issue consists of articles and a forum for discussion. The forum presents, for instance, research in progress, critical hypotheses, responses to articles published in *Connotations* and elsewhere, as well as to recent books. As a rule, contributions will be published within six months after submission so that discussion can begin without delay.

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Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

Poetic Economy (II)

Other ARTICLES and RESPONSES

John Lyly's Poetic Economy[*]

ARTHUR F. KINNEY

John Lyly's *Euphues*—an inventive, imaginative, provocative, allusive, and learned literary investment first published in 1578—is, for Leah Scragg, "a literary phenomenon" (1) that went through an unprecendented 17 editions by 1638. No other work of imaginative prose came close. As a work in verbal expenditure, as an index to the disposition—and dissimulation—of the human mind, it was a foundational work in phenomenology long before that word was invented. By 1586, William Webbe, in his *Discourse of English Poetrie*, singled out its special market value:

> I thinke there is none that will gainsay, but Master *Iohn Lilly* hath deserued moste high commendations, as he which hath stept one steppe further therein then any either before or since he first began the wyttie discourse of his *Euphues*. Whose workes, surely in respect of his singuler eloquence and braue composition of apt words and sentences, let the learned examine and make tryall thereof through all the partes of Rhetoricke, in fitte phrases, in pithy sentences, in gallant tropes, in flowing speeche, in plaine sence, and surely in my iudgment, I thinke he wyll yeelde him that verdict, which *Quintilian* giveth of bothe the best Orators *Demosthenes* and *Tully*, that from the one, nothing may be taken away, to the other, nothing may be added. (sig. E1v)

Early on, typical of the novel's linguistic currency, the elderly self-appointed teacher Eubulus says, in a dizzying passage that, according to Leah Scragg, develops "in the process [of] an ever-widening circle of uncertainty" (5):

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[*]For debates inspired by this article please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debkinney0221.htm>.

> As thy byrth doth shewe the expresse and lively Image of gentle blood, so
> thy bringing up seemeth to mee to bee a great blotte to the lynage of so no-
> ble a brute, so that I am enforced to thinke that either thou diddest want one
> to give thee good instructions, or that thy parents made thee a wanton with
> too much cockering; eyther they were too foolish in using no discipline, or
> thou too froward in rejecting their doctrine; either they willing to have thee
> idle, or thou wilful to be illemployed. (sigs. B2v-B3)

Scragg comments further that "[h]ere a variety of alternative childhoods are postulated for the hero, endowing him with a multitude of personalities rather than a single identity, and thus problematizing the assignment of blame for his present condition. The reader is left to speculate whether his parents were ignorant, over-indulgent, or neglectful, and whether he was a spoilt, wild or recalcitrant child" (5).

The fumbling, noetic response of Lucilla, his beloved, is sharply etched and, like the description of Euphues, essentially unsettled:

> I know, so noble a minde could take no original but from a noble man, for as
> no Bird can looke against the Sunne but those that bee bredde of the Eagle,
> neither any Hawke soare so high as the broode of the Hobby, so no wight
> can haue suche excellent qualyties except the descende of a noble race, nei-
> ther he of so highe capacitie, vnlesse he issue of a high progeny. (sigs. I2v-I3)

At once allusive and specific, learned and proverbial, the desirable Lucilla's description both approaches Euphues to describe him and retreats in uncertainty. Long before literary critics thought of such a move, Lyly was writing in aporias. But it is the lexical coin of the realm. Lucilla's father Ferardo comments on his friend Philautus:

> *Lucilla*, as I am not presently to graunt my good wil, so meane I not to repre-
> hend thy choyce, yet wisedome willeth me to pawse, vntill I haue called you
> what may happen to my remembraunce, and warneth thee to be circum-
> spect, least thy rash conceipt bring a sharp repentance. (sig. I3)

This correspondingly wide-ranging answer with its own accumula-tion of possibilities—I do not like this; I will not rebuke (censure) your choice in men; I will delay responding until all this blows over; I will wait until I can determine the cause of your defection; do whatever

you wish, if you must, but be discreet about it—only bewilders Lucilla. The style of all these remarks is precise, polished—and multivalent. What seems straightforward is in fact angular, made partial; by indirections the speakers must find directions out. Self-dividing sentences lead to self-dividing paragraphs and speeches and eventually to self-dividing actions. Sentences are anatomized. Sense erodes. In the marketplace of conversation, thoughts are displayed, exchanged, purchased, recirculated. Such broken language is indicative, reflective of the larger, broken plotlines. Euphues breaks with his teacher Eubulus for a new friend, Philautus, then betrays Philautus by courting his beloved Lucilla and, when she scorns him, Euphues attempts to repair his friendship with Philautus. Euphues seeks out Philautus, rejects him, pursues Lucilla, is rejected by her, and returns to Philautus. Lucilla, meantime, displaces Philautus with Euphues and then replaces Euphues's with Curio, such linear patterning both parallel and interlocking with Euphues's actions. The action, like the language, is a kind of nimble gymnastics, constantly reworking limited material in endless ways in a display of ingenuity; Scragg calls it a "kaleidoscopic assemblage" (13). Words clothe actions and release them; thoughts, like exemplary instances and references, are constantly deposited, borrowed, withdrawn, transformed, returned to a cultural bank of records. Nothing, Lyly writes, is constant but inconstancy.

"Euphues is a truly intellectual work in that it considers also the limitations of intellectuality," Merritt Lawlis contends (118). "What appears to interest [Lyly] is not ideas as much as the process of reasoning, not the ideas themselves, but the manipulations of them" (114). The title-page of the first edition in 1578 reads, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wyt. Very pleasant for all Gentlemen to reade, and most necessary to remember: wherin are contained the delights that Wyt followeth in his youth by the pleasauntnesse of Loue, and the happynesse he reapeth in age, by the perfectnesse of Wisedome. By Iohn Lylly, Master of Arte Oxon*, and it too is confusing. While *anatomy* was an increasingly popular word in his time for analysis or deconstruction, *wit* was more problematical. It

could refer to the mind, to any process of the mind such as reason and memory; to learning; or, on the other hand, to playfulness, to joking. That Lyly seems to want both, perhaps simultaneously, is made clear in the phrase "Very pleasant for all Gentlemen to reade" and "most necessary to remember." Entitling a work with words of vastly varying references would be a natural exercise for a Master of Arts from Oxford who was also widely known as the grandson of William Lyly, the famous Tudor grammarian and servant to the scholarly Cardinal Pole as well as Master of St. Paul's School in London and a friend of William Grocyn and John Colet, Henry VIII's most distinguished scholars of Greek.

Such irresolution is maintained by developing the novel through debates that are themselves never reconciled, that keep matters open and associations of thought and characters inconstant. The opening debate between the young and immature Euphues from Athens (read Oxford) and his older tutor Eubulus from Naples (read London) presents the traditional argument of the humanist who distrusts undisciplined human nature and of those who proclaimed the need to foster it through classical precept. Such declamatory speeches can at first seem contrived, static, even ceremonial, but Lyly invariably makes the most obvious rhetorical set piece at first narrative (in its context), then polysemous in reason and reference, and finally dramatic (in that it forwards characterization and theme). Then such bifurcated thinking gives way to multiple if inherent discontinuities. "Did they not remember that which no man ought to forgette, that the tender youth of a childe is like the tempering of new Waxe, apt to receiue any forme?" one character asks (sig. B3).

Still, the abstractions of Eubulus are pocket change of the realm, so general and familiar that they insult Euphues, known for his "sharpe capacity of minde" (sig. B1), whose Greek name is itself double-sided, translating both as "well endowed" (as Thomas Elyot uses it in *The Scholemaster* of 1580) but also "manipulative," his very being a synecdoche for the novel itself. Eubulus responds by acknowledging that he comes from Naples, is a traveller and a citizen of the world vastly

more experienced than is Euphues as a product of the schoolroom. But this, too, draws on the double meaning of "wit," since in 1575 a popular book by Jerome Turler, called *The Traveiler*, noted that Naples was "full of bragginge and boastinge, insomutche that they despise the counsell of othermen, and prefer their owne wittes before al others" (sigs. N4v-N5). Eubulus conveniently forgets the reputation of Naples, forgets he hardly knows Euphues, forgets even the signification of his name, and appointing himself the instructor of the boy his own parents could not teach, he plunges into a somewhat random and so incoherent speech of humanist and classical platitudes, well-worn coins of humanist currency:

> Descend into thine owne conscience, and consider with thy selfe, the great difference betweene staring and starke blynde, witte and wisdome, loue and lust: be merry, but with modestie: be sober, but not two sullen: be valyaunt, but not too venterous. Let thy attyre bee comely; but not costly: thy dyet wholesome, but not excessiue: vse pastime as the word importeth to passe the time in honest recreation. Mistrust no man without cause, neither be thou credulous without proofe: be not lyght to follow euery mans opinion, nor obstinate to stande in thine owne conceipt. Serue GOD, loue God, feare God, and God will so blesse thee, as eyther heart canne wish or thy friends desire. (sig. B4v)

To insure value of his advice he refers to a number of classical heroes —to Trojans and Lacedemonians, Persians and Parthians, meant to give weight to his teachings, although larding commonplaces (Leah Scragg has called Lyly's novel "a commonplace book on a grand scale" [13]) on phrases and thoughts long since trivialized by overuse. Meaning to sound exceptionally wise and informed, he now seems only to anticipate Shakespeare's Polonius.

But "so many men so many mindes" (sig. C1): in a work composed of repeatedly contrasted equivalents, by pairs of words, clauses, attitudes, and events that stamp it with the impress of the disputation, the other half of Eubulus's advice is to be sought in Euphues's reply. Euphues's quick wit—alluding to another Elyotonian reference to the word "euphues"—seizes on Eubulus's discrepancy between the proposition and the conformation. Eubulus has consented to Eu-

phues's good nature by ignoring it in his argument for good nurture. So Euphues, aware of the possibilities of language, rephrases Eubulus's premise: "If nature beare no sway," he replies, "why vse you this adulation? If nature worke the effect, what booteth any education?" (sig. C2). The response is both logical and rhetorical and employs the disjunctive proposition that was also associated in humanist minds with the skeptic Sextus Empiricus: (a) If my nature insures my goodness, then I do not need your training; and (b) If I need your training, then you have just proven yourself too unwise to give me lessons, for you said I was well endowed without it. The dilemma Euphues employs as respondent is unanswerable; pointedly, he displaces the Aristotelian use of classical precedent known to Erasmus and Thomas More with the flashier Ramist logic that, in his own day, had come to stress schemes and tropes divorced from logic, style severed from substance.

If Eubulus shows a deficiency in the use of persuasive rhetorical techniques, Euphues shows excess—so much that Lyly is forced to add his own authoritative voice to the debate so as to reassert the narrative shape on which the work would normally rely (cf. sig. C4) and restore the Aristotelian balance such as we would find in Castiglione's contemporary *Courtier*. Eubulus and Euphues miss the resolution of the moderating middle ground, much as they choose the "pleasure" or "pietie" of Naples, because they do not recognize the saving middle term of profit inscribed by Lyly. But without such a corrective resolution "wit may be seen as wit praising wit," as Richard Haber remarks, "as self-praise in Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*" (58). Self-revelation is thereby confounded with self-congratulation, self-righteousness with self-infatuation, before Philautus enters the fiction. Only the narrative voice remains to address the gentlemen readers. Here it is:

> Too much studie doth intoxicate their braines, for (say they) although yron the more it is vsed the brighter it is, yet siluer with much wearing doth wast to nothing: though the Cammocke the more it is bowed the better it serueth, yet the bow the more it is bent & occupied, the weaker it waxeth: though the Camomill the more is troden and pressed downe, the more it spreadeth, yet

the Violet the oftner it is handeled and touched, the sooner it withereth and decayeth. (sigs. C4-C4v)

The formal speech of adjudication is raised here to the pitch of a dramatic chorus and begins a new strain to continue the novel.

This first debate in *Euphues* is an accurate paradigm of the entire work. Behind such contrary and apparently irreconcilable positions voiced by Eubulus and Euphues lie the dual environments of Euphues's education: Athens, which figures the values of classical Greece, and Naples, which images corrupting centers of contemporary experience. From the start, Lyly asks us if both locations are potentially complementary or mutually destructive—or if one is sufficient alone.

Lyly excuses nothing from his examination. The actions of life are captured in explicit and implicit disputations laden with classical and biblical references, literary allusions, and popular maxims.[1] Without the liminary advice of Eubulus, however, the incipient Euphues is soon adrift in the inconstant and unpredictable world of Naples, the book's landscape reduplicating the confused mind of its protagonist, the multiplicity of Lyly's language conveying the multiple ideas his layered prose insists on. The Aristotelian moderation that Lyly had suggested authorially is countered by Aristotelian epistemology, which holds that the imagination controls the will and impedes wisdom, and by Euphues's own self-description (out of Plutarch) whereby he likens his unformed mind to wax, open to all experiences indiscriminately. Wisdom and will cancel each other—or at least weaken each other temporarily—and Euphues descends more and more often into eristics, his logic irrational, his metaphors problematic, his analogies frequently false, his allusions contradictory; and some evidence taken from popular unnatural natural history is even created by Euphues in self-defense. Through his cleverness, Euphues learns that both the classical oration and the Ramist logic of dichotomies assume truths they do not provide. Repeatedly Euphues tries to clarify his position as well as his argument by defining polarities, only

to learn that, rather than illuminate the inner consistency of an organic world as he might have supposed from his training in Greek philosophy, they in fact display affinities at some points, destructive antipathies at other points, and ambiguities at still other points. Soon Euphues is forced to admit to himself that, given the fluidity of language, words are not necessarily reliable or stable in their meaning. As the book progresses, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* thus analyzes the evolution of the fallen—that is, the irrational, undignified—intellect. Euphues, like us, needs to place his faith in some capacity, if not some process of human thought, however, he must evaluate his words like coins to spend them wisely.

So, rejecting Eubulus, whose precepts are too distant from the desires and activities of his daily life, Euphues finds a new instructor in Philautus. From the beginning, he sees their friendship as an occasion for a new learning that is more practical than the philosophical maneuvering of Eubulus:

> Wayinge with my selfe the form of friendshippe by the effects, I studyed euer since my first comming to *Naples* to enter league with such a one as might direct my steps being a stranger, and resemble my manners being a scholler, the which two qualities as I find in you able to satisfie my desire, so I hope I shal finde a hearte in you willinge to accomplish my request. (sig. D2)

Euphues observes of Philautus, whichever meaning is assigned to wit, with whatever pleasure it might serve, the utility of spending language depends on a deconstruction of its processes in ways that reap rewards not otherwise attainable. But "[n]o lofty philosophic speculation is safe from contamination in Lyly's fictive universe," Joseph W. Houppert reminds us (60). Seeking a companion for purely selfish purposes, Euphues falls in love with himself once again: "I view in [Philautus]," Euphues remarks, "the liuely Image of *Euphues*" (sig. D1v). In an elaborate rhetoric—what Thomas Elyot calls "an artifyciall fourme of spekyng" in *The Boke Named the Gouernour* (1531; sig. G1)— Philautus shows himself equally blinded:

> And seeing we resēble (as you say) each other in qualities, it cannot be yt the one should differ from the other in curtesie, seing the sincere affection of the minde cannot be expressed by the mouth, & that no art can vnfolde the entire loue of ye heart. I am earnestly to beseech you not to measure the firmness of my faith, by ye fewnes of my wordes, but rather thinke that the ouerflowing waies of good wil, leaue no passage for many words. (sigs. D2-D2v)

Eubulus has seen learning as an evolutionary struggle (cf. sig. B4v), but in choosing the satisfaction of an agreeable friend both Euphues and Philautus mistake feeling for learning. In making their encomia essentially autobiographical, they deceive each other and themselves.

How blind to reason self-love has made Euphues is apparent when Philautus takes him to supper to meet Lucilla and Livia. He chooses the evening entertainment, a debate on "whether the qualities of the minde, or the compostion of the man, cause women most to lyke or whether beautie or wit moues men most to loue" (sig. D4). Euphues has it all ways and no way, arguing first for the mind, then against coy ladies and for courtly lovers, and then, in still another reversal, in favor of women's reason. A lack of social grace is compounded with a blindness to social sophistry, and his argument becomes an assault until his emotions suddenly overtake his feigned eloquence. With his aposiopesis, we are bluntly reminded that the performing Euphues remains untrained and inexperienced. His audience is not deceived: "Well Gentlemen, aunswered *Lucilla*, in arguing of the shadow, we forgoe the substance" (sig. D3v).

Such an abrupt halt would be a clear enough victory for Lucilla in a world free of sophistry and posturing. But "so often," G. Wilson Knight reminds us, "a seeming conclusion in Lyly turns into its opposite" (153). Lucilla cannot tell whether Euphues's emotion is real or feigned. The exaggerated lovesickness of Euphues is mirrored in the Petrachism of her own disturbed soliloquy about her feelings for Euphues immediately after his hasty departure (cf. sigs. E2-E2v). For both of them, love upsets reason and language. As a consequence, Lucilla borrows the language of contrarieties that until now had characterized only Euphues's rhetoric: "But," "Aye," "but," "If," "Tush," "Wel, wel." She also borrows his argument that a man of good nature

cannot be transformed, cannot be corrupted. In her recital of folly and wisdom, Lucilla dwells on foolish ignorance and unwise folly; she wins for herself similar abusive behavior by robbing Euphues of his issues and positions. But as she does so she also transforms the issue from one of nature versus nurture to one of concupiscence versus conscience. Lucilla's trust of human nature is riddled with doubts, and her attempts to defer to fixed systems of classical and Renaissance thought likewise reduce them to mere rationalizations. Will overcomes principle, and her twisted rhetoric disrupts her powers of logic (cf. sig. E3). Convinced that infidelity to Philautus will warn Euphues of her fallen nature, Lucilla is unable to reason her way unaided to a solution for her dilemma (cf. sigs. E3v-E4). As the mirror of Euphues, Lucilla figures for Lyly human nature devoid of humanist education in which language falters rather than informs.

Once we understand that it is the resilience of Lyly's mind, its restless inventiveness and its overall toughness that are most impressive, we can understand why for him the linguistic investment provided its own rewards, even when it seemed incomplete or controversial. The more we read the works Lyly read alongside his grandfather's grammar in the book that would teach Latin to British children for four centuries, the more we realize how ranging, synthetic, and accomplished his mind is as he builds through associations and contraries. Fortune consists not finally in the return of linguistic coinage or delight in playing with it in the open market of humanism, but accumulating it in the form of ideas and propositions. For Lyly, then, possessing words—and spending and obtaining them—is not only a means of human contact but, more than that, a way of keeping open to possibility and exchange.

Lurking always behind the plot of *Euphues* such as we have it then, is a key passage from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* on friendship in which the multiple possibility of the basis and practice of friendship takes on the multivocality of words themselves for Lyly—actions and thought are always potential signifiers.

There are […] three kinds of friendship, corresponding in number to the three lovable qualities; since a reciprocal affection, known to either party, can be based on each of the three, and when men love each other, they wish each other well in respect of the quality which is the ground of their friendship. Thus friends whose affection is based on utility do not love each other in themselves, but in so far as some benefit accrues to them from each other. And similarly with those whose friendship is based on pleasure: for instance, we enjoy the society of witty people not because of what they are in themselves, but because they are agreeable to us […]. And therefore these friendships are based on an accident, since the friend is not loved for being what he is, but as affording some benefit or pleasure as the case may be. Consequently friendships of this kind are easily broken off […]. The perfect form of friendship is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue. For these friends wish each alike the other's good in respect of their goodness, and they are good in themselves; but it is those who wish the good of their friends for their friends' sake who are friends in the fullest sense, since they love each other for themselves and not accidentally. (8.3.1-6)

This would seem a satisfactory answer to Euphues's troubled relationships, but if we substitute "words" for "friends," we find that rather than deny the power or possibility of language, it releases both. Fluidity of language gives it negotiable power. Rather than cooling investments, it enlivens them. The process of anatomizing (both as analyzing and deconstructing) the functions and employment of wit as polysemous language, carrier of multiple and simultaneous meanings, may just be, in the end, man's greatest potential for liquidity. Lyly made language fungible.

University of Massachusetts
Amherst

NOTE

[1]Scragg gives, as examples, such Renaissance writers as Stephen Gosson, Sir Thomas North, and Erasmus; such classical authors as Pliny and Homer, Xerxes and Alexander; and such biblical persons as Jezebel and Isaiah (13), all made contemporaneous alongside proverbs (139) and unnatural natural history.

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Poe's Economies and "The Fall of the House of Usher"[*]

HANNES BERGTHALLER

I. Introduction: Edgar Allen Poe and the Idea of Poetic Economy

The notion of poetic economy has a considerable pedigree. According to the *OED* (2nd ed.), the earliest instance of the use of *economy* in a literary context is found in Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes*, where the term functions as a synonym for the old rhetorical concepts of disposition and decorum.[1] Following this precedent, poetic economy would have to be chiefly concerned with the formal organization of a discourse, "the structure, arrangement, or proportion of [its] parts," in the words of the *OED*, with a view to their rhetorical efficacy (*OED* IV.7.). However, this particular understanding of "economy" is already colored by anterior meanings of the word: in accordance with its Greek etymology, the term may also refer to "the management of a household" and "the careful management of resources, so as to make them go as far as possible" (*OED* I.4.; the meaning which was picked up on by the emerging field of political economy); or it can denote "the method of the divine government of the world" (a concept that was central to natural theology far into the nineteenth century; *OED* II.5.a.). Transposed into the literary domain, these definitions point to different ways of conceptualizing poetic economy and the rules it imposes on art: the latter invites us to see the author's effort to order his work in relation to the divine order of the cosmos, whereas the former emphasizes the idea that the artist works under constraints which compel him to a prudent and efficient use of the resources at

his disposal. In the case of Milton, these constraints were the rules of neoclassical poetics. What such constraints might consist in, once they can no longer be justified through an appeal to tradition, is, it can be argued, the essential question of literary aesthetics under the conditions of modernity. Whether or not a literary text is "economical," whether its means and ends stand in a proper relationship, can only be decided if one has a sense of the purpose or the principles that have guided its construction; once the text itself becomes the primary evidence in this regard, the claim that it satisfies the requirements of poetic economy easily lapses into circularity and becomes just another way of saying that one considers it to be aesthetically successful. When we speak of poetic economy, it is therefore necessary to spell out the nature of the constraints through which a poetic composition achieves its form—whether, for example, economy of construction is to be understood as a "purely" aesthetic imperative; whether it mimics the generative principles of nature itself (as Coleridge argued in his defense of organic form in Shakespeare's plays, thereby justifying what earlier critics had dismissed as a lamentable lack of formal discipline); or reflects extrinsic social or technological constraints on the production and reception of literary art (one may think, e.g., of the use of epithets and other forms of verbal redundancy for mnemonic purposes in oral poetry).

It is precisely this wide range of poetological problems which the term "poetic economy" entails that makes it a useful lens through which to view the oeuvre of Edgar Allen Poe. The term bundles a set of concerns which figure centrally in Poe's writings, where, however, they often appear in confusing diffraction. A closer examination of Poe's conception of poetic economy can therefore, I hope, also throw light on some of the striking contradictions which have always confounded scholars of Poe's work—between his aggressive commercialism and his haughty aestheticism, between the images of Poe as either coldly-calculating literary hack or drug-addled Romantic visionary.[2] What I wish to argue in the following is that these contradictions can be understood as issuing from the tension between

two distinct inflections of the notion of poetic economy. On the one hand, there is Poe's lucid account of the way in which economic necessities in the age of the steam-press fundamentally reconfigure literary production, forcing writers to work within limitations imposed by the literary marketplace. On the other, there is his conception of the poet as a minor demiurge, who must capture and recreate within his work a portion of the perfection which characterizes the divine natural order, so that the poetic economy of the literary work can be understood as a miniature model of God's economy. In the first instance, the problem which the poet faces is how to heighten the effect of his work so as to compete successfully for the attention of his readers; in the second, the problem is that of producing a sense of the infinite within the confines of an individual work of art. All of Poe's reflections on his craft bear the traces of his struggle to make these two different sets of constraints congruent, to establish the economy of the work of art as a kind of common denominator between the commercial and the divine.

In itself, of course, the suggestion that Poe's work is shaped by the conflict between the imperatives of the market and those of his artistic imagination is hardly new—although it took a relatively long time for Poe criticism to catch up with the historicist turn of the 1980s and 1990s (presumably because the field was so much under the sway of psychoanalytical and other approaches whose focus lay on the writer's individual psychology). Michael Gilmore's *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (1985) had suggested that the careers of several of the US's major authors during the antebellum period evolved in response to contemporary developments in the publishing industry. Although Poe lends himself in obvious ways to an interpretation along these lines, Gilmore did not include him in this study. It was Terence Whalen who, in *Edgar Allen Poe and the Masses* (1999), presented a thorough-going account of the ways in which commercial pressures and the changing dynamics of the literary marketplace shaped Poe's work. Whalen's study burrows deeply into the archives and draws on a wide array of secondary material so as to place Poe

within this historical context. By contrast, this essay will focus on only a handful of well-known texts (which, however, figure only marginally in Whalen's account) and show how they fold the two divergent inflections of poetic economy into a single principle. The name for this principle which Poe settled on in his cosmological treatise *Eureka* is "symmetry" (96)—the most basic principle of generating a multiplicity of new forms from a simple pattern, of producing a maximum of order with a minimum of effort, of converting the one into the many and *vice versa*.[3] In the need for symmetry, the formal specifications for an ideal artistic approximation of the cosmic order and for the perfect literary commodity converge. At the same time, however, he also remained highly ambivalent towards the principle of symmetry, associating it with mere duplication, with the derivative, and with the spirit's imprisonment in a world of gross materiality. This tension marks not only his critical writings, but also his short fiction, where symmetry is one of the most pervasive sources of the uncanny.[4] As I will show in the concluding section of this essay, it finds particularly eloquent expression in "The Fall of the House of Usher"—a story that is perhaps Poe's most successful attempt to reconcile the demands of poetic economy both in its commercial and in its aesthetic inflection.

II. Poetic Economy and the Literary Marketplace

The sheer bulk of Poe's critical writings, exceeding by several times the volume of all his fiction, is in itself sufficient indication that Edgar Allen Poe was very much intent on bringing the "oikos" of literature under the "nomos" of rational principle. In most of these texts, Poe presents himself not only as a keen analyst of the changing conditions of literary production but in a manner that departs quite sharply from the Romantic sensibilities of his contemporaries (and that some critics, such as Kent Ljungquist, see as deriving from neoclassical antecedents), he also claims to have successfully articulated a coherent set of rational rules for the composition and evaluation of literary works.

These are rules that primarily concern questions of structure, composition, or, in the terminology of classical rhetoric which also underlay Milton's version of "poetic economy," of disposition. As befits an enterprise that both continues and refashions the tradition of classical rhetoric, the foundational concept for Poe's theory of poetic economy is *effect*—as he explains repeatedly, a literary work of art is to be judged above all by the state of mind it induces in its reader.[5] In his well-known review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, he declares: "A poem must intensely excite. Excitement is its province, its essentiality. Its value is in the ratio of its (elevating) excitement" ("Tale-Writing" 151). It is on the basis of this assumption that Poe can reach his notorious conclusion that "the phrase 'a long poem' embodies a paradox" because, he argues, such a state of intense excitement cannot be sustained for much longer than half an hour—the length of a single "sitting" during which the reader is able to shut out "worldly interests" from his mind ("Tale-Writing" 151, 153). Any poetic form exceeding this limit thus loses what Poe on several occasions designates as the hallmark of the successful work or art: "unity of impression" or "totality […] of effect." On this basis, Poe dismisses *Paradise Lost* as a fundamentally flawed composition ("The Philosophy of Composition" 196) and pronounces flatly that Homer's *Illiad* is "based on a primitive sense of Art" ("Tale-Writing" 151), while championing non-epic poetry and the short tale as the ideal literary genres for the expression of poetic sentiment.

The pose which Poe strikes in these passages is that of an "engineer of sensations" (Arac 75)—an expert craftsman devising ever new ways of stimulating the "souls" of his readers who "during the hour of perusal" are, as Poe puts it, "at the writer's control" ("Tale-Writing" 153). Poe is mockingly dismissive of Romantic notions of poetic creation as originating in "a species of fine frenzy" or "an ecstatic intuition"; once the psychological foundations of literary art are properly understood, he boasts, the production of aesthetic experience in the reader can be approached with "the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" ("The Philosophy of Composition" 195,

196). This is not the only passage where Poe's hyperbolic assertions of technical mastery border on the ludicrous; in the same essay, one reads: "Within this limit [of a single sitting], the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitement or elevation—again in other words, to the degree of true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing […]" (196-97).

If one takes these pronouncements as aesthetic theory in the strictest sense, it is easy to dismiss them as mere intellectual grandstanding by a poseur determined to elbow his way into the nation's literary establishment—and this is indeed the conclusion which some critics have come to (e.g. Bloom 13). One must look past the histrionics to see that what Poe's poetological essays really provide is an account of how the commodification of literary texts impinges on their aesthetic structure, and how the formal economy of the work of art must accommodate itself to the exigencies of the market. If the notion of poetic economy implies an exterior limit on one's resources which compels their prudent use, then that limit for Poe is marked by the necessity to command his readers' attention. Readerly attention is the scarce resource for which Poe sees writers competing, and it is a resource which must be used with the utmost efficiency. Clearly, this is not a purely aesthetic consideration: the "half hour" during which the reader can turn away from mundane business is not a limit imposed by man's natural sensory apparatus. Rather, it is an effect of the modern socio-economic order where most readers simply do not have the requisite leisure to take in *Paradise Lost* in a single "sitting," and where each literary text must find a way to distinguish itself from a flood of printed matter.

The poetic economy which one thus finds outlined in Poe's poetological essays—i.e., the rational principle according to which the component parts of a work of art can be arranged to the greatest possible effect—thus reflects very directly the commercial pressures under which he was laboring and his life-long struggle to capture a commercially viable readership for his work. Brevity and "unity of impression" are principally strategies for competing on the literary

market place. Poe is proposing, one might say then, an aesthetics of the literary commodity in the guise of a quasi-scientific normative poetics, where *decorum* is no longer determined by the established rules of traditional genres—what is proper and fitting in a work now is so because it was ingeniously tailored to the aesthetic sensibilities of a mass audience. In his letters, more than in his essays, where he carefully honed his public image as inspired literary genius and polymath, Poe wrote frankly about his conviction that verbal economy was not a purely aesthetic, but just as much a commercial imperative. In in a letter to prospective donors for his ill-fated magazine project, for example, he wrote that the spirit of the age tends to "Magazine literature—to the curt, the terse, the well-timed, and the readily diffused, in preference to the old forms of the verbose and […] the inaccessible" (*Letters* 1: 271; see also "Marginalia" 82). It is against this background that Terence Whalen has interpreted Poe's turn from poetry to tales and essays, as well as the prevalence of pointedly lurid subject matter such as madness, incest, and necrophilia especially in the early tales, which were written in the economic aftermath of the Panic of 1837, as a calculated response to the pressures of the literary market of the Antebellum era: "Far from being the wild offspring of an autonomous or diseased mind, Poe's tales were in many ways the rational products of social labor, imagined and executed in the workshop of American capitalism" (9).

III. Poetic Economy and Cosmic Order

It may seem, then, as if Poe's version of poetic economy as it is formulated in his poetological essays was but a literary huckster's sleight-of-hand, an attempt to pass off as aesthetic axioms what were in fact commercial exigencies—in a bid, perhaps, to make palatable to himself what in other circumstances he denigrated as vulgar pandering to the masses (for example in the "Marginalia" 30, 165-66), or to achieve a specious sense of intellectual mastery over the economic forces that were, in a very basic sense, mastering him. And yet, such a view fails

to take the full measure of the tenacity and ingenuity with which Poe pursued the articulation of a rational principle that would allow the artist to produce works at once commercially successful and aesthetically superior. It is not only because the average reader cannot spare more than half an hour of undivided attention for the consumption of a magazine story that meticulous construction is of the utmost importance for Poe. As he attempts to demonstrate in many of his essays, "unity of impression" is far more than merely a rule for the production of "effective" literary texts. Rather, such literary texts are effective because they approximate the constructive principles underlying the universe itself. In imparting the experience of the beautiful to the soul, they point beyond the sensory limitations of the natural body and towards that encompassing cosmic order which contemporary natural theologians described as God's economy.[6] This divine order pervades the phenomenal world; symmetry, repetition and other kinds of patterning are the basic natural forms in which it announces itself, without ever becoming fully manifest.

One of Poe's earliest attempts to sketch out the linkage between aesthetics and eschatology can be found in his review of Longfellow's *Ballads* (1842), in several passages which he was later to recycle in the better-known lecture "The Poetic Principle." In the review, Poe begins by defining art as a method for amplifying the pleasure taken in natural objects, in imitation of the principle of duplication that is at work in nature itself: "[T]he sense of Beauty […] ministers to [man's] delight in the manifold forms and colors and sounds and sentiments amid which he exists. And, just as the eyes of the Amaryllis are repeated in the mirror, or the living lily in the lake, so is the mere *record* of these forms and colors and sounds and sentiments—so is their mere oral or written repetition a duplicate source of delight" (71). However, Poe insists that this is not yet sufficient to constitute "Poesy":

> There is still a thirst unquenchable, which to allay [simple repetition] has shown us no crystal springs. This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* essence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his

perennial life. […] Inspired with a prescient ecstasy of the beauty beyond the grave, it struggles by multiform novelty of combination among the things and thoughts of Time, to anticipate some portion of that loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain solely to Eternity. (71-72)

The economy of the work of art—the disposition of "the things and Thoughts of Time" into novel combinations—must seek to encapsulate, one may paraphrase Poe here, the perfect unity proper to the divine economy, but inaccessible to the physical senses. It is necessarily a futile effort, because only after the death of the material body will the soul be able to fully grasp the "supernal Beauty" of the cosmic order—"a beauty," as Poe repeatedly points out, "which is not afforded the soul by any existing collocation of earth's forms—a beauty which, perhaps, *no possible* combination of these forms would fully produce" (73).[7] The formal principles which generate what Poe, in speaking of literary texts, designates as "unity of impression" or "totality of effect" ("The Philosophy of Composition," 196) are, in essence, identical with the laws of God's creation.

Poe would pick up this point again in a note in the "Marginalia" (1844; 9) and develop it further in the review essay "The American Drama," published in 1845, three years after the Longfellow review. There, he also explicitly advertises his own thought as continuing the work of natural theology by referring to its most popular contemporary expression: "All the Bridgewater treatises have failed in noticing the *great* idiosyncrasy in the Divine system of adaptation: that idiosyncrasy which stamps the adaptation as divine, in distinction from that which is the work of merely human constructiveness. I speak of the complete *mutuality* of adaptation" (45).[8] Poe explains this "idiosyncrasy" as a perfectly reciprocal relationship between the parts of a whole, such that it becomes impossible to distinguish between causes and effects, and goes on to proclaim it as the implicit ideal towards which all art is striving: "The pleasure which we derive from any exertion of human ingenuity, is in the direct ratio of the approach to this species of reciprocity between cause and effect" (46). In illustrating this hypothesis, he arrives at his most forceful statement of the analogy between poetic and divine economy:

> In the construction of *plot*, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the points, or incidents, that we cannot distinctly see, in respect to any one of them, whether that one depends from any other or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is unattainable in fact – because Man is the constructor. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God. ("The American Drama" 46)

This passage was to recur almost verbatim in Poe's cosmological treatise *Eureka* (1848), which he regarded as the summation of his work. *Eureka* is Poe's most grandiose (and, it must be said, hubristic) attempt to fuse aesthetics and natural theology,[9] and it is here that he gives a definite name to the formal principle which had also underpinned his earlier efforts: Poe singles out "the sense of the symmetrical" (96) as the central principle of his reasoning. It is, he writes, "an instinct which may be depended on with an almost blindfold reliance" because symmetry is "the poetical essence of the Universe—*of the Universe* which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems" (96). The central problem in Poe's cosmogony *more geometrico* (25) is the passage from the One (the "absolute Unity in the primordial Particle") to the Many ("the utmost possible multiplicity of *relation*"), in such a manner that the "character" of unity is "preserved throughout the design" (23-24). In a perfectly constructed plot, each individual incident implies and is in turn implied by all the other incidents, so that the whole remains virtually present in all of its parts. Likewise, "each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws, and […] all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition" (62). Thus it is the perception of symmetry in the phenomenal world that points the mind to that oneness which is not only its origin but also its final purpose— leading Poe to stipulate that the necessary, because symmetrical, endpoint of the universe will be its collapse back into original unity. The universe, in this account, is a kind of self-consuming artifact, with the principle of symmetry guaranteeing the essential homology between the minds of artificers both human and divine.

And yet, this endorsement of symmetry as the intellectual passkey to all the riddles of the universe comes with a caveat. One must recall

that in the review of Longfellow's *Ballads*, Poe dismissed the mere duplication of natural beauty, as in the mirror image of the Amaryllis or of the lily in the lake, as in itself insufficient to signify a higher realm of existence. In *Eureka*, too, he cautions that man must be careful "lest, in pursuing too heedlessly the superficial symmetry of forms and motions, he leave out of sight the really essential symmetry of the principles which determine and control them" (62). Mere physical symmetry may, in other words, seduce the soul into being content with the beauty of earthly, temporal forms, rather than reaching for supernal beauty. It may tether the soul to the realm of mere matter, rather than assisting it in the ascent towards higher, more spiritual states of being. The same ambivalence towards the principle of symmetry is expressed in the essay "The Rationale of Verse," which appeared in the same year as *Eureka* and signals Poe's interest in formulating the principles of a poetic economy already in its title. There, he sets out by stipulating as the source of all aesthetic experience the "idea of equality" which "embraces those of similarity, proportion, identity, repetition, and adaptation or fitness" (218). As his object of demonstration, he chooses a crystal:

> We are at once interested by the equality between the sides and between the angles of one of its faces: the equality of the sides pleases us; that of the angles doubles our pleasure. On bringing to view a second face in all respects similar to the first, this pleasure seems to be squared; on bringing to view a third it appears to be cubed, and so on. I have no doubt, indeed, that the delight experienced, if measurable, would be found to have exact mathematical relations such as I suggest […]. (218-19)

Here, the finite object's symmetrical form allows it to produce a pleasurable sensation of order that quickly tends towards the mathematically infinite. One cannot help but wonder what recipient would be able to tear himself lose from an artifact with such seductive properties. What Poe seems to envision here is not far removed from the fatal video tape around which the narrative of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* revolves; like in the latter, the danger posed by excessive symmetry is that of a deadly and sterile self-absorption, as Poe makes

clear in his discussion of "scientific music."[10] Such music, he explains, requires an extraordinarily acute listener who would be able to take "pleasurable cognizance, through memory, of equalities the members of which occur at intervals so great that the uncultivated taste loses them altogether" (219). Yet taken too far, such an overstimulation of the sense of symmetry may weaken the soul: "In its excess it is the triumph of the *physique* over the *morale* of music. The sentiment is overwhelmed by the sense" (219). In verging on the monotone, a work of art characterized by such an excess of symmetry is endangered by "self-destruction from excess of self" (220).

IV. Poetic Economy in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

This—the danger of being ensnared and destroyed by an excess of symmetry—is precisely the theme of "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), probably Poe's most popular and arguably his most "economically" constructed tale, which critics have often singled out to illustrate the doctrine of "unity of effect" (cf. Evans; Obuchowski). Although this text precedes the poetological essays discussed above by several years, it anticipates not only their general argument but even their terminology. These resonances are palpable already in the story's opening sequence. As the unnamed narrator arrives at the family mansion of the Ushers, he stops to ponder the effect which the scene has on him:

> I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or the terrible. I looked upon the scene before me […] with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. (397)

The sensation which the house produces in the soul of the onlooker is a parody of the type of aesthetic experience Poe celebrates in his poetological speculations. By characterizing the sensation as that of a

contrast between two domains of experience ("after-dream," "lapse," "dropping […] of the veil"), the concluding sentence of the passage makes clear that the image of the mansion points towards the possibility of a higher plane of existence only through its negation, i.e. by providing an image of the material imprisonment of the soul. Finding himself unable to determine the principle underlying the scene's peculiar effect on him, the narrator resorts to an experiment:

> I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion that while […] there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify […] its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. (398)

In seeking to explain the *effect* which the house has on him, the narrator is asking the fundamental question of Poe's aesthetics. The terms to which he resorts in this attempt are likewise those of Poe: the capacity of the "simple landscape features of the domain" (397) to affect the observer in the way they do is attributed to their peculiar "combination" or "arrangement"—in rhetorical terms: their *dispositio*. Like a well-constructed work of art (and like the universe as it is described in *Eureka*)[11] the house of Usher forms an economical unity in which there is, as the narrator notes, "perfect adaptation of parts" (400), in such a manner that the whole seems to be self-supporting, set apart from the ordinary world: "I had so worked up my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity […]" (399). That the house of Usher is to be understood as a metaphor for the work of art, and particularly for the literary text,[12] is underscored by a later passage where Usher expresses his views about the fateful psychological effect of his dwelling that parallel those of the narrator:

"The conditions of the sentence had been there, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones—in the order of their arrangement […]—above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the waters of the tarn" (408). The word "sentence" here ostensibly refers to the curse resting on Usher's family, yet in the proximity of terms such as "collocation" and "arrangement," it is difficult not to read it as also self-reflexively pointing to the status of "The House of Usher" as a verbal artifact displaying precisely the kind of symmetry Poe expounded in his poetological writings.

Yet again, the house of Usher does *not* induce an experience of supernal beauty; to the contrary, the image of the mansion in the adjacent tarn—like the Amaryllis mirrored in the lake in "The Poetic Principle"—creates a purely material symmetry which, instead of directing the soul towards the spiritual order of the cosmos, merely points back at itself, multiplying the terror of the soul's imprisonment in the world of temporal forms. Like the Amaryllis mirrored in the lake, the Usher's mansion fails to rise above the material world; as the narrator says, it exudes "an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven […]" (399). The house thus embodies that negative type of symmetry against which Poe would warn in *Eureka* and "The Poetic Principle." Indeed, Usher is introduced to the reader as a devotee of "musical science," and the corrosive effect which the composition of his mansion has on its inhabitants is described in exactly the same terms in which Poe disparages "scientific music" in "The Poetic Principle": Usher, the narrator tells us, is convinced that the decline of his mental condition is attributable to "an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had […] brought upon the *morale* of his existence" (403). Usher's fatal weakness is an excessive sensitivity to symmetry that leads him into a form of pathological self-reflexivity. This motif is reiterated throughout the story in many different forms; it is articulated with particular succinctness in the poem "The Haunted Palace," placed in the exact middle of the tale and

functioning as its *mise-en-abyme* (cf. Peeples 179). The narrator presents it as an example of the musical *impromptus* Usher produced in his state of "intense mental collectedness and concentration" and interprets it as the sign of "a full consciousness on the part of Usher of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne" (406). "The Haunted Palace" narrates the downfall of a "fair and stately palace," clearly identified with the mind of a king, whose dissolution is precipitated by the entrance into the palace of symmetry incarnate: through the "palace door […] came flowing, flowing, flowing, / A troupe of Echoes whose sweet duty / Was but to sing, / In voices of surpassing beauty, / The wit and wisdom of their king" (407). The poem's conclusion laments his descent into melancholy and mental ruin.

This will also be the fate of Usher, who, shut in by the house that bears his name, has lost the ability to distinguish between the echoes of his mind and true symmetries of the cosmic order. His fate is sealed in the farcical concluding scene of "The Fall of the House of Usher," where the narrator reads to him from the "'The Mad Trist' of Sir Launcelot Canning," in the hope of jolting Usher out of his absurd imaginings. While this fictional chivalric romance is characterized by "uncouth and unimaginative prolixity" (413) and thus fails utterly to meet Poe's criteria of poetic economy, it is the house of Usher itself which furnishes the symmetries required to produce an "intense excitement of the soul," leading the narrator's attempt at soothing Usher through the application of a narrative anodyne to backfire in spectacular fashion: each description of a noise in "The Mad Trist" is echoed by a similar sound from within the depths of the mansion, inducing a steadily growing terror in both Usher and his companion, until at last Usher's sister, whom he had prematurely entombed, stands in the door. After the two siblings have collapsed dead into each other's arms, the mansion begins to disintegrate as well, and the narrator escapes the scene just in time to watch as "the deep and dank tarn […] closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of "The House of Usher" (417). With this self-referencing conclusion, Poe reflects the tale back on itself, turning it into a self-consuming artifact—again, like

the universe of *Eureka*, where perfect symmetry also necessarily entails self-annihilation.

There are two diametrically opposed ways, then, in which one can read "The Fall of the House of Usher." On the one hand, it can be understood as a serious attempt by Poe to create a work of art whose formal economy approximates the Creator's perfect economy, and where ultimate failure is the inevitable consequence of reaching for an ideal which, however, is not invalidated by that failure. Thus Richard Wilbur interpreted the story as "a triumphant report by the narrator that it *is* possible for the poetic soul to shake off this temporal, rational, physical world and escape […] to a realm of unfettered vision" (110); and Ronald Bieganowski has likewise suggested that it is precisely the "self-consuming" nature of the story which allows it to successfully "signify […] the ideal" (187). On the other hand, in the light of Poe's deep ambivalence with regard to the principle of "symmetry" and the compositional techniques he associates with it, one can also read "The Fall of the House of Usher" as a cautionary tale which dramatizes the danger of confusing poetic and cosmic economy, and, as a consequence, allowing mere "physique" to overwhelm "morale." It seems probable enough that one of the chief sources of this ambivalence was Poe's struggle to reconcile aesthetic and commercial imperatives, his suspicion that he might be degrading Pegasus to a lowly circus horse. That it is next to impossible to settle conclusively for either one of these two interpretations, however, is an indication that, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" at least, Poe's poetic economy successfully reconciled the laws of art and those of the market.

National
Chung-sing University
Taichung, Taiwan

NOTES

[1]"It suffices if the whole Drama be found not produc't beyond the fift Act, of the style and uniformitie, and that commonly call'd the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such oeconomy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum […]." Milton also inveighs against "the error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons" and champions the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action (332).

[2]Thus two of the founding figures of American Studies, Vernon Parrington and F. O. Matthiessen, excluded Poe from the American literary canon because they saw him as lacking both moral depth and aesthetic sincerity. For an overview of these debates, see Bloom, who writes that "Poe's survival raises perpetually the issue as to whether literary merit and canonical status necessarily go together. I can think of no American writer, down to this moment, at once so inevitable and so dubious" (3).

[3]It may initially seem counter-intuitive to associate symmetrical construction with poetic economy, since the latter might be seen to entail the elimination of redundancies. However, this apparent contradiction is resolved when the criterion for a work's poetic economy is that all its parts must stand in an intelligible relationship to the whole so that no part disturbs the unity of the overall composition. This, I argue in the following, was Poe's understanding of the idea.

[4]Among the best-known examples are "William Wilson," "Ligeia," "Morella," and "The Black Cat"; the motif is frequently interpreted as an allegory of the split soul. For an extensive discussion of uncanny doublings in Poe's tales, see Garrett 69-80.

[5]All of Poe's best-known poetological essays emphasize this point, most notably "The Philosophy of Composition," "The Poetic Principle," and "The Rationale of Verse."

[6]The most widely-known expositors of natural theology at the time were the authors of the Bridgewater Treatises (cf. Robson), on which Poe commented favorably on several occasions and which also helped to shape his aesthetic and cosmological theories, especially in *Eureka* (Whalen 254-56)—a point to which we shall return shortly.

[7]The idea is elaborated at some length in "The Domain of Arnheim" (cf. Bergthaller) and also recurs in Poe's pseudo-platonic dialogues between angelic creatures ("The Colloquy of Monos and Una," "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion").

[8]The single example Poe provides in order to illustrate this "idiosyncrasy"—marine mammals which produce train oil are most abundant in the Arctic, where people need this type of food the most—is physico-theological standard fare; of course, this does not deter him from claiming the honor of first discovery.

[9]In his letters, Poe suggested that *Eureka* would put him on par with Newton; for a discussion of the text's contemporary reception (which was largely negative) and its relevance for Poe's aesthetics, see Cantalupo.

[10]What precisely it is that Poe meant by this term is unclear, and his other writings on music offer no clue to resolve this question (as a matter of fact, the only other occurrence of a near-synonymous term—"musical science"—appears in his work appears in "The Fall of the House of Usher" 399; see below). While the context leaves no doubt that Poe is in fact referring to music in a literal sense, the already demonstrated proximity between his aesthetic theory and his cosmological speculations suggests a link to texts such as Kepler's *Harmonices Mundi*, whose relevance for early modern poetics Heninger discusses in *Touches of Sweet Harmony*.

[11]That the construction of "The Fall of the House of Usher" parallels the cosmogony of *Eureka* was first suggested by E. Arthur Robinson; see also Beebe 120-21.

[12]This argument has also been advanced, in a somewhat different context, by Dennis Pahl and Harriet Hustis.

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The Economy of Literary Interpretation[*]

DAVID FISHELOV

The Logic of Economical Interpretation

The economy of literary interpretation can be described as the ratio between textual details from various phonetic, syntactic and semantic levels, and explicit or implicit assumptions that we use in order to explain these details. An economical interpretation is one that succeeds in explaining many textual details while using only a few, simple assumptions.[1] An uneconomical (or strange or cumbersome) interpretation, on the other hand, develops a complicated set of assumptions to explain only a few textual details. As Eco suggested, there is an interesting and close affinity between uneconomical interpretations and paranoid thinking.[2] If paranoid thinking can be described, using Thomas Pynchon's formulation, as "the leading edge of the awareness that *everything is connected*,"[3] Eco shows how certain interpretations follow that logic and offer extra strong connections between textual details in places where weaker connections would be quite sufficient.[4] I would like to call attention to another dimension of paranoid thinking that is directly pertinent to the concept of uneconomical thinking: namely, to hold fast to an "axiomatic" assumption (e.g. "they stole my kitchenware") that inevitably leads to the complication of assumptions designed to explain certain details ("OK, it *seems* that my kitchenware is in place, but in fact it was stolen and then replaced by the thieves who put in its stead cheap replicas").[5]

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[*]For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debfishelov0221.htm>.

Note that we can meticulously compare and grade the economy of two competing interpretations only when the principle of *ceteris paribus* applies: either the same number of textual details are accounted for by the two sets of assumptions but one of these sets is more complicated and hence less economical; or else, one set of assumptions explains more textual details than a competing set of assumptions of the same degree of complexity, and hence is more economical.[6]

In theory, the above distinction between economical and uneconomical interpretation sounds quite simple, but applying it to specific cases may become quite complicated. The reason for possible complications lies with the provision of *ceteris paribus*, i.e., the difficulty of providing two competing interpretations with either the exact same number of explained textual details or the same degree of complexity of their explanatory assumptions. Needless to say, it is not easy to determine whether two competing interpretations actually cover the exact same number of textual details or have the same degree of complexity. In the analyses of specific texts in the following sections I shall focus on only a very few dimensions of these texts in order to maintain as far as possible the *ceteris paribus* principle.

The economy of interpretation can also be described as an offshoot of a general principle of rational activity whereby we use minimal means to achieve maximal goals (cf. Kasher), or to a general rule of energy saving which applies to physical and cognitive activities alike. A simple formulation of this rule can be stated in the following rhetorical question: If you can get it done by using only a small amount of (physical or mental) force, why bother to develop complicated machinery to achieve the same goal? By arguing that economical interpretation is derived from a general principle of rational behavior and/or energy saving, we do not necessarily commit ourselves to the statement that all human activity in fact complies with this principle. As our everyday experience can remind us, for better or for worse, all too often we do not follow rational principles; in fact, recent studies in cognitive and social psychology point out the

recurrent biases involved in our thinking (cf. Kahneman). To acknowledge the existence of such biases, however, does not invalidate the logic of economical interpretation: it is reasonable to assume that the more our cognitive activity is made conscious, and the more this activity is detached from practical goals or interests, then the more these rational, economic principles will be operative. There is a difference between the factors involved in our deliberations over whether to buy a specific brand of cheese or to choose an investment plan, and those that guide us when we are asked to choose between two competing interpretations of a poem and to justify our decision. Some biases may come into play in the former, but not necessarily in the latter, because the interpretation of literary texts is relatively conscious and relatively detached from practical goals, and hence the logic of economic principles is (or at least should be) operative.

Let me conclude this introductory section by making another clarification regarding two related but not identical concepts: the application of economical principles and the application of probability judgments. Whereas we judge certain interpretations to be more economical than others because they demonstrate a better ratio between assumptions and explained textual details, we apply probability judgments when we formulate (consciously or unconsciously) these assumptions. While forming the latter we rely on our world knowledge: "folk theories," linguistic knowledge, acquaintance with social, cultural and literary conventions, etc. We assume, for example, almost automatically that this article has been written by a human being rather than, say, by an alien; whereas the latter assumption is logically possible, it is patently improbable and we need to change our knowledge of the world or add a very specific context and circumstances in order to make it probable (e.g. an elaborated sci-fi story of how aliens have decided to take over the field of literary scholarship). Thus, probability judgments refer to a relationship between assumptions and world knowledge. When we characterize an assumption as simple, it would usually mean that,

based on our knowledge, it is a probable one. Interpretation is thus a complex process, involving both considerations of economy and of probability. Furthermore, it is a dynamic and bi-directional process: we approach the text with certain probable (hence simple) assumptions, but certain textual details may encourage or even compel us to review our initial assumptions and, through the activation of additional pertinent knowledge, to come up with alternative, more probable (and hence simpler) assumptions. The article focuses on economical principles of interpretation and will refer to issues of probability only occasionally.

Economical Principles in Action I: "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"

Before discussing more general issues in the economy of literary interpretation, let us first examine a relatively simple case of two competing interpretations (or "readings") of a popular children's song, "Old MacDonald Had a Farm":

> Old MacDonald had a farm, EE-I-EE-I-O,
> And on that farm he had a [the name of an animal], EE-I-EE-I-O,
> With a [animal noise twice] here and a [animal noise twice] there
> Here a [animal noise], there a [animal noise], everywhere a [animal noise twice]
> Old MacDonald had a farm, EE-I-EE-I-O.[7]
>
> **Interpretation #1 (**hereafter OMD1**)** can be formulated as a series of assumptions about the song's specific details which are then integrated into a "higher" assumption about the song's presumed goals: (a) The song is about a farmer named MacDonald, the various animals he keeps on his farm, and their respective noises; (b) The specific identity of Mr MacDonald and his psychological state are irrelevant for understanding and enjoying the song; (c) The song's goal is to offer an opportunity to cheerfully imitate voices of different animals, to teach children and to practice such voices with them.

Every interpretation is built on such statements, some of which refer to more basic textual details (e.g. the above first assumption), and

hence have a more "descriptive" nature; whereas other assumptions are of a more general nature (e.g. the above third assumption), focusing on the organizing principle or the function and "goal" of the text, and hence have a more "interpretative" nature. Note, however, that no assumption is intrinsically descriptive or interpretative; what is considered as a "descriptive" statement in one context may become "interpretative" in another, depending on the specific series of statements in which it appears. Consider, for example, the following sequence of statements: (a*) "The phrase 'Old MacDonald' is repeated in the song as the subject of a sentence," followed by the opening statement of our original interpretation, namely: (a) "The song is about a farmer named MacDonald, the various animals he keeps in his farm and their respective noises." In such a new sequence, (a*) could be labeled more basic and "descriptive" than (a) in our OMD1, which now holds a higher position on the descriptive-interpretative axis and thus can be described as more "interpretative"—relative to (a*). In a complementary manner, if the third statement of this reading—(c) "The song offers an opportunity to cheerfully imitate voices of different animals, to teach children and to practice such voices with them"—would precede the statement (d) "The song's function is to develop children's musical, mental and social skills," (c) would be perceived as more "descriptive" relative to the new, more "interpretative" (d).[8]

Before offering an alternative interpretation, I would like to make another preliminary clarification: whereas some interpretative statements offered in this article may appear basic, they are not part of a strictly philological discussion. Philology is responsible for the establishment of a reliable version (or versions) of a text (cf. Maas); whereas literary interpretation assumes that such a text has been established and moves to a "second tier" of interpreting of this text. Although some of the following assumptions about the meaning of an expression may therefore look like a philological discussion—and sometimes they follow the same logic—they are in fact part of (sometimes basic) interpretative activity, because they take the text as a given.

After these brief preliminary clarifications concerning the relative nature of the descriptive-interpretative opposition and the distinction between philological and interpretative activities, it is time to offer another interpretation of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm":

> **Interpretation #2 (**hereafter OMD2**)** makes different assumptions about the song's textual details and consequently reaches other conclusions regarding its goals or function: (a) The song's main character is the founding father of the MacDonald fast food chain[9]; (b) Mr MacDonald is on the brink of a psychological breakdown: he suffers from a delusion that causes him to hear noises of animals "here [...] there [...] everywhere"; (c) The song's goal is to express a longing for simple farm life, to protest globalization and to empower animals, especially cows, which are the major victims of the MacDonald fast-food chain.

I believe most readers would agree that OMD2 sounds strange or would even label it a parody of an interpretation (and, as far as my intentions are concerned, they would be right). Note that its strangeness does not stem from the fact that it directly contradicts any specific textual detail of the song. If this was the case, we could easily dismiss it. OMD2 is consistent with all the details of the song; in fact, it even takes into account quite seriously one textual detail that OMD1 almost ignores, namely the textual detail that describes how Old MacDonald hears animal voices "everywhere." Nonetheless, OMD1 is capable of explaining this detail without assigning to it any specific semantic significance, but rather as just another opportunity to repeat the animals' voices.[10] We may raise some factual objections against OMD2 (e.g. the fact that the song dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas the McDonald fast food chain took its first steps in the late 1930s and early 1940s)[11] and hence argue that some of its assumptions are highly improbable; but assuming that such facts are not necessarily common knowledge, we can ignore them in a discussion that focuses on the logic of interpretation.

We prefer OMD1 over OMD2 primarily for reasons of economy: the assumptions made by OMD2 are much more complicated and convoluted than those offered by OMD1. The assumption, for

example, that Mr MacDonald experiences a psychological collapse is based on only one textual detail (the word "everywhere"), and thus seems disproportionate and ungrounded: in order to assume that a person is psychologically instable, we need additional and stronger evidence, especially when that specific detail can also be explained in simpler terms. We would seriously consider the assumption if there were additional relevant details in the song ("here … there … everywhere, day and night, sometimes waking him up covered with cold sweat"). With such additional details, the assumption that Old MacDonald "had lost it" would suddenly make sense and would be considered economical; without them—it would appear quite uneconomical. As for the assumption about Mr MacDonald's specific lineage (presumed to be the founder of the MacDonald fast food chain), nothing seems to support it. Had the song included additional details (e.g. "Old MacDonald had a farm and he used to barbeque tasty hamburgers in his backyard"), this assumption would gain credibility, but since there are no such details in the song, the assumption seems baseless and uneconomical. Hypothetically, if the name MacDonald was special or unique, the assumption that connects the song to the fast food chain would gain more credibility (imagine, for example, a song whose title reads "Old Häagen-Dazs Had a Dairy"[12]). Since this is not the case, however, the assumption seems suspicious and superfluous. If the assumptions about Old MacDonald's lineage and about his mental state were to be accepted, the road to the concluding assumption regarding the song's political goal would be paved; although, even under these circumstances, we might feel that the assumption about the presumed political message of the song (c) is an uneconomical "leap" made to satisfy the contemporary ideological preoccupations of environmentalism.

So far, I have offered a relatively detailed analysis of what might seem to be a trivial, obvious case. The point in describing here in detail the logic behind an interpretation of a popular song is to show that, what might seem to be an automatic activity ("there is the only way to read/interpret the song") is in fact grounded in the economic

principles of interpretation. Furthermore, the small alterations introduced into the original text (e.g. elaborating on Old MacDonald's hearing voices; substituting Häagen-Dazs for his name) demonstrate the intimate and intricate relations between textual details and the assumptions that are made to explain them. A set of assumptions deemed uneconomical vis-à-vis certain details would be more economical—and hence would gain credibility—in relation to different textual details. The assumption that Old MacDonald is the founding father of a fast food chain seems superfluous and ridiculous, whereas in a hypothetical "Old Häagen-Dazs Had a Dairy" such an assumption would suddenly seem quite acceptable. In short, when we judge certain assumptions as acceptable and reasonable on the one hand, and as strange, superfluous and ridiculous on the other, this is due to the logic of economical interpretation, based on a rule that says: try to account for maximum textual details while using minimum, simple assumptions.

I believe that this logic applies to the interpretation of various facts, actions and artifacts in general, as well as to the interpretation of different kinds of verbal utterances and texts of different lengths and complexity (casual conversation, newspaper items, songs, stories, novels, and poems).[13] One may argue, however, that, while the principles of economical interpretation apply to everyday texts or popular songs (such as "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"), this is not necessarily so for complicated literary texts, in which the "rules of the game" change. Instead of answering this objection in theoretical terms, it may be useful now to turn to analyze different interpretations of a few lines of a genuinely complex poetic text.

Economical Principles in Action II: "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

As a "test-case" I will use the first two stanzas of John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," a poem that definitely qualifies

for poetical complexity, as is indirectly testified by the numerous interpretations it has acquired throughout the years[14]:

> As virtuous men pass mildly away,
> And whisper to their souls to go,
> Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
> The breath goes now, and some say, No:
>
> So let us melt, and make no noise,
> No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
> 'Twere profanation of our joys
> To tell the laity our love.[15]

The interpretations that I would like to discuss in this section differ among themselves in one important assumption: the identity of speaker and addressee in these two stanzas, and thus also with respect to certain implications of their alleged identity. By focusing on only one dimension, we gain methodological clarity; namely, it enables us to better weigh the ratio between the simplicity of the offered assumptions and the number of textual details accounted for by these assumptions. This methodological advantage, however, comes at a price: whereas forming a heuristic notion about the speaker is part of an interpretation, it is only a part. Thus, the following interpretations in this section do not intend to offer comprehensive or deep readings of these two stanzas.

> **Interpretation #1 (**hereafter JD1**)** states that: (a) The first stanza describes a scene of virtuous men on their deathbed, departing gracefully from their soul; (b) The speaker in these two stanzas (and in the poem as a whole) is a man departing from his beloved woman; (c) The addressee is the beloved woman; (d) In the second stanza the speaker encourages the beloved to adopt the model of a peaceful departure as described in the first stanza: with no tears or other outward, noticeable signs.

Critics may debate the reading of specific expressions in these two stanzas and the question of whether we should locate the farewell situation of the poem in a specific historical situation: John Donne's addressing Anne, his wife, on the eve of his departure for the Conti-

nent in the year 1611 (cf. Donne: 261-62). We can anchor the poem in this historical context, which gives the lines a strong personal color, or opt for a more general, de-contextualized reading (the speaker is a man parting from his beloved wife). Both cases can be accommodated by JD1. Furthermore, the assumptions of JD1 still enable a diversity of more nuanced readings that would address the question of the speaker's tone (serious, sincere, ironic, tongue-in-cheek), and issues related to the overall significance of the poem (an advocacy of mystical union; a mocking of Petrarchan imagery; an exercise in rhetoric; a combination of all of these).

JD1 is not only a relatively economical interpretation of the first two stanzas but can also be described as the "standard" reading of them, especially from the perspective of the poem as a whole. This fact, however, does not mean that this is the only (logically) possible interpretation, as the following interpretation illustrates:

> **Interpretation #2** (hereafter JD2) states that: (a) The first stanza describes a scene of virtuous men on their deathbed, departing gracefully from their soul; (b) The speaker in the poem is a celestial creature, probably Jupiter, the god in charge of bringing forth rain and tempests; (c) The addressee is Juno, his wife; (d) In the second stanza Jupiter expresses his contempt for ordinary, sublunary men and encourages Juno to adopt a behavior suitable for celestial creatures.

Before explaining the economical principles that make us prefer JD1 over JD2, let us first spell out the difference between these two. Note, first, that both these interpretations share the assumption that the first stanza describes the scene of virtuous dying men and the peaceful way of departing from this world. The major difference lies with the identity of the speaker and the addressee: in JD1 they are a man and a woman; in JD2 they are celestial, mythological creatures. Note also that, despite the fact that JD2 may seem a bit strange, it does not contradict any specific detail of the language of the poem (in that respect, it is similar to the case of OMD2). In other words, we can imagine a situation in which Jupiter is addressing these words to Juno without creating any direct contradiction. Suppose, for example, that another

competing interpretation (JD*) makes the assumption that the speaker does not love the addressee; such a reading would directly contradict the expression "our love" in line 8.[16] JD2, however, does not have to deal with a direct contradiction, simply because there is none.

As with the case of OMD2, JD2 takes certain textual details more seriously than the "standard" OMD1 and JD1. JD2 treats line 6 ("No tear-*floods*, nor sigh-*tempests* move"; my emphasis) quite seriously and literally: if a speaker is capable of producing sigh-tempests, Jupiter, the god responsible for storms, is quite a reasonable candidate for uttering these lines.

Thus, the reason for preferring JD1 to JD2 is rooted not in any direct contradiction performed by JD2 but in the logic of economical interpretation: JD1 uses a probable and hence simpler assumption about the identity of speaker and addressee: namely, that they are human beings just like most speakers and addressees in most utterances and texts.[17] This example also shows how economical and probability considerations interact: in order to abandon the probable and simpler assumption that speaker and addressee are humans, we need to have a good reason; i.e., either a specific textual detail that would make this assumption untenable, or else added textual details that cannot be explained by this assumption but can be explained by the assumptions that the speaker is Jupiter and the addressee is Juno. If, for example, the title of Donne's poem had been "Jupiter Forbidding Juno to Mourn" (or "Jupiter to Juno: A Valediction, Forbidding Mourning"), it would make JD2 (b) almost unavoidable. A similar corroboration of such an assumption would be if the second stanza had read: "So let us melt on Olympus and make no noise" (assuming, of course, that this does not violate the poem's meter, as unfortunately my alteration does).

Had the poem included such textual details we would have been willing to seriously consider JD2. This, however, is not the case. Line 6 ("No tear-flood, no sigh-tempests move") can be explained by interpretation JD1 as conventional, trite hyperbole, referring to an exaggerated, loud and visible emotional outburst. Yet we cannot deny

the fact that this line creates the impression that the speaker and addressee are capable of producing highly intense, almost "super-human" manifestations of emotion. Let us now examine another interpretation that, again, offers different assumptions regarding the identity of the speaker and addressee.

> **Interpretation #3** (hereafter JD3) states that: (a) The first stanza describes a scene of virtuous men on their deathbed, departing gracefully from their soul; (b) The speaker in the poem is a dying person or at least someone who senses that his end is approaching[18]; (c) The addressee is probably another dying person; (d) In the second stanza the dying person expresses his wish to emulate (together with the addressee) the conduct of the dying virtuous men described in the first stanza.

JD3 shares with JD1 and JD2 the reading of the first stanza, but differs from JD1 in the way it understands the general topic of the second stanza: here it is understood to be closely related to that of the first stanza, namely the right way to face death; as if the topic of the first stanza is "spilling" into the second stanza, exemplified first with regard to "virtuous men" and is then applied to the situation of the speaker and his addressee (in JD1 the topics of the first and the second stanza are different). One can argue that the construction of the two stanzas as an extended simile ("as … so") supports JD1 because it has two distinct topics: the vehicle or source introduced in the first stanza (virtuous men facing their death); and the tenor or target domain of the second stanza (a parting of two lovers).[19] The "as … so" construction, however, can be used also in simple comparisons.[20] Thus, it could not be considered a decisive argument in favor of JD1 that makes the assumption of JD3 more complicated. By the way, the assumption that the speaker is a dying man (JD3b) was actually raised by a few readers: according to Hirsch (73-74), some of his students adamantly clung to this assumption in their interpretation, despite his efforts to dissuade them, and adhered to it in their overall reading of the poem.

Another possible interpretation, related to reading the two stanzas as addressing the issue of the right way to approach death, would be the following:

> **Interpretation #4** (hereafter JD4) states that: (a) The first stanza describes a scene of virtuous men on their deathbed, departing gracefully from their soul; (b) The speaker is a person's soul; (c) The addressee is a person's body[21]; (d) The soul encourages the body to leave this world according to the example presented by the "virtuous men" of the first stanza.[22]

According to JD4, the first two stanzas share the same general topic: the appropriate way to face death. As with JD3, this general, abstract topic is not explicitly present in the second stanza (which contains only a recommendation to avoid noise and tears) but is "dragged" from the first stanza. One may argue that, as with JD3, this interpretation takes the word "Mourning" of the poem's title quite seriously and literally. And, as with JD3, one big advantage of JD4 is that it offers a strong connection between the first and second stanzas: the fact that the two stanzas are syntactically connected ("As […] so […]") and cannot be read as completely autonomous units encourages us to look for possible connections between the two stanzas, and the sharing of a general topic can be one such possibility. In other words, this possibility increases textual cohesiveness: as if the soul referred to in the first stanza has decided to open its mouth and apply the "lesson" taught in the scene described in the first stanza; whereas the first stanza describes how undefined "virtuous men" face death, the second stanza creates a mini dramatic-monologue that illustrates the right attitude towards death in the here and now of the speaker and the addressee.

Despite this apparent advantage, the assumption that the speaker is a man's soul could lead to some difficulties and would result in more complicated assumptions than those presented in both JD1 and JD2. When the soul (supposedly) exhorts the body to stop its corporeal manifestations of grief, it is implied that a man's soul is capable of producing noise, tears and sighs ("So let *us* melt, and *make no noise* /

No *tear-floods*, nor *sigh-tempests* move"; my emphases). The body, of course, produces noises, tears and sighs; the soul, however, can do no such things, unless these expressions are understood metaphorically.[23] The fact that certain phrases require metaphorical interpretation does not in and of itself disqualify an interpretation; metaphorical readings are a common phenomenon in everyday language and are very common in poetry. Nonetheless, a metaphorical reading is more complex than a straightforward one.

Another complication of the assumption regarding the speaker as a man's soul is related to the fact that the speaker refers to its relationship with the body as consisting in love and joy ("our joys … our love"). If the soul loves the body (and vice versa), and if they enjoy the company of one another, it is not clear why the soul would advocate the breaking of such a joyous love-story. And while this difficulty can in principle be explained away, any specific attempt to provide an explanation would probably involve a complication of assumptions.

Some of these complications do not necessarily amount to direct contradictions: we can still offer a reading in which the soul is the speaker, the body is the addressee, their coexistence is joyful, and still the soul beseeches a peaceful departure. While this set of assumptions is possible, it is admittedly much more complicated than the assumptions made by JD1 or even those of JD2. As with JD3, JD4 also reads the "as … so" construction as a comparison in which the first two stanzas share the same topic (the right way to approach death), rather than as an extended simile (in which the second stanza introduces a different topic); but, as we saw earlier in JD3, this fact in and of itself does not necessarily make JD4 more complicated.

To conclude this section, let us look at yet another reading of the two stanzas, with another assumption regarding the identity of the speaker and the addressee:

> **Interpretation #5** (hereafter JD5) states that: (a) The first stanza describes a scene of virtuous men on their deathbed, departing gracefully from their soul; (b) The speaker in the poem is a clergyman; (c) The addressee is either

the speaker's wife or a nun; (d) In the second stanza the clergyman expresses his contempt for ordinary corporeal love and encourages the addressee to adopt a behavior suitable for holy love.

As with JD2, JD3 and JD4, there is no direct contradiction of any textual details of the poem. And as with JD2, JD5 takes quite seriously several textual details that JD1 (our "standard" reading) treats only in passing: with JD5 this relates to two expressions in lines 7-8: " 'Twere *profanation* of our joys / To tell the *laity* our love" (my emphasis). If we assume the speaker to be a clergyman with a built-in aversion to corporeal love, the use of these expressions would make perfect sense. Note that it is more difficult to reject JD5 on the grounds of economic reasons. The assumptions that the speaker is a "regular" person and that he is a clergyman are not only compatible with the textual details of the poem, but we can also argue that they have the same degree of probability and complexity and can account for the same number of textual details. The assumption that the speaker is a regular person takes seriously the idea of a love-bond between the speaker and the addressee, and reads "profanation" and "laity" as expressions meant to intensify the sense of the unique, refined nature of this love-bond between the two. The assumption that the speaker is a clergyman (or a pious Christian averse to corporeal love) takes quite seriously the expressions (treated as mere colorful hyperbole by JD1); and by the same token it plays down the idea that the speaker and the addressee are involved in any real (corporeal) love relationship. The more we continue with reading the poem, the more it becomes clear that JD1 has the upper hand and that the speaker is not a pious Christian averse to corporeal love (he is even capable of erotic, sexual innuendos). Since, however, we have decided to limit ourselves to interpreting only the first two stanzas, we can treat JD1 and JD5 as genuinely competing interpretations.[24]

Do We Have to Choose Among Interpretations?

In the case of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" it was quite easy to make a choice between the two interpretations, because OMD2 was significantly less economical than OMD1. With the above five interpretations of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," however, the situation is much more complex, not only because we have more to choose from but also because it is sometimes not clear if the principles of economical interpretation can be of any help. This apparent "draw" has to do with the fact that most of the offered interpretations do not introduce outrageously complicated or improbable assumptions, and most of them (except, perhaps, JD2) succeed in explaining a similar number of relevant textual details. Furthermore, when some assumptions of an interpretation seem at first sight as less probable and hence more complicated than others (e.g. the speaker is a person's soul), they still can get support from pertinent contextual factors (e.g. the poetic tradition of dialogue between body and soul) and thus challenge their status as "complicated." The fact that we are dealing with a complex, ingenious poem, which activates a rich linguistic,[25] rhetorical and literary network of pertinent contextual and co-textual facts (Donne's other *Songs and Sonets*, the heterogeneous poetic tradition of the Renaissance, the history of ideas, the history of Christianity, etc.) further complicates the situation, and makes it difficult to isolate all relevant factors in order to satisfy the methodological principle of *ceteris paribus*.

If the different interpretations can be seen as competing among themselves and there is no clear or simple winner (especially after we have become aware of the complexity of the poem as well as of its context), are we thus to make an arbitrary choice in which each reader may follow his or her heart? Empirically, this may be what actually happens; after all, not every reader attempts to produce multiple interpretations at every point of reading, especially in the initial stages. Rather, there is a natural tendency to go along with our initial assumption or hypothesis, unless we encounter new textual details or

new contextual facts (i.e. pertinent world knowledge) that compel us to re-evaluate that assumption.[26] The moment we are presented with multiple, competing interpretations, however, either produced by ourselves or handed to us, we have to activate the logic of economical interpretation. When that logic fails to choose a clear "winner," we can then either choose one on a whim, or we decide to simultaneously maintain all feasible interpretations and perhaps even enjoy the "hovering" among the different options. Poetic language is, after all, known to be replete with ambiguities, ironies, paradoxes, tensions and complexities, and may be a strong incentive to maintain multiple interpretations.[27] When we take these characteristics of poetic language into account, the fact that some of the five interpretations logically exclude others (e.g. the speaker can either be a mortal or a celestial creature) should not intimidate us.

There is another thing that we can do: when we consider several interpretations that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, we can combine some of their assumptions. Thus, for example, we can try and reformulate our assumption about the identity of the speaker in a way that would accommodate both JD1 and JD5, and suggest that the speaker is a person who may not necessarily be an ecclesiastic but who is someone with a strong religious background or way of thinking. This latter formulation can be judged, from the standpoint of the economy of interpretation, as a bit more complicated than the assumption that he is an ordinary person (JD1) or that he is a clergyman (JD5). Let us not criticize this small complication too hastily, however. In fact, it can offer an important key to applying the principles of economical interpretation to complex poetic texts.

I would like to argue that, when we interpret poetic texts, we are willing to pay the price of complicating our assumptions in order to capture nuances of meanings in the poetic text. Furthermore, despite the fact that JD2 has been rejected because (compared to JD1) it has been found less economical, this does not mean that we have to reject it *in toto*. Whereas JD2 is unacceptable in its present form, we cannot deny the fact that line 6 does create the "hovering" impression that

the speaker has super-human powers, that he is capable of producing floods and tempests. We can take these secondary meanings and connotations into account, too, when formulating our assumption about the speaker. The outcome may appear quite complicated: the speaker is a person departing from a beloved woman who has a strong religious background or feelings, and the speaker also creates an impression that he and/or the addressee are capable of producing highly intense, bigger than life signs of grief. True, such an assumption is quite complicated, but it may still be worthwhile not only to ponder it but also to embrace it from the point of view of economical interpretation.

Such a complication of assumptions is worthwhile from the point of view of economy precisely because it succeeds in explaining not only the basic meanings of words, but also the nuances and connotations of many textual details (e.g. the specific wording of line 6). We can recall in this context Pound's famous formulation: "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree" (Pound 28). True, when we try to capture semantic nuances and multiple connotations, the associated assumptions become more complicated—but by the same token the notion of what is the domain of our textual details changes and expands: not only the *explanans* has become more complicated but also the *explicandum* has grown and now contains more details. In other words, if we remember the principle of *ceteris paribus*, we should not automatically dismiss any complication of assumption but, rather, measure it relative to the specific number and nature of the textual details it succeeds in explaining.

For some specific purposes indeed (e.g. when we have to provide a schematic account of a poem), the simple and brief formulations of JD1 may suffice. If we want to delve more deeply in our interpretation, however, and to account not only for certain conspicuous meanings but also for the rich net of nuances and connotations, a certain degree of complication in our assumptions is not only tolerable but almost unavoidable. Thus, despite the price of complications of

assumption, we also achieve some important gains; despite what seems to be a violation of economic principles, therefore, its basic logic of achieving a good ratio between assumptions and textual details is maintained.

A Challenge to Economical Interpretations of Poetic Texts

Before concluding, let me play *advocatus diaboli* and challenge the applicability of the concept of economical interpretation to poetic texts (even in its broad meaning suggested earlier). According to this challenge, whereas economic principles are operative in our interpretation of simple, popular songs like "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," the interpretations of literary and poetic texts are and should be free from the reins of such principles. Imagine, for example that "Old MacDonald" is brought to a class of creative writing (as a "stimulus"), and students are asked to respond to it in inventive ways and to make it "relevant" to contemporary adult readers. In such a context OMD2 would not only be a reasonable reading but might even be hailed by the professor (by the same token, JD2 will be embraced as a refreshing, novel reading of Donne's first two stanzas of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"). The interpretation of literary texts, according to this challenge, should be like the situation in such a class of creative writing, and free imagination should take precedence over economic principles (whose only realm is restricted to simple, ordinary texts).

The answer to this challenge is two-fold. First, it does not seem reasonable to assume that we have two mental apparati (or modules) —one initiated by ordinary texts and the other by poetic texts. This proposition would imply that our mind works in a very uneconomical way. Second, the challenge may not be a genuine one, because it admits, too, that there are two kinds of interpretative activity: one concerned with "making sense" of textual details and integrating them into a coherent whole, and the other treating texts as "stimuli" for the readers' creative imagination. Thus, when we compare two

interpretations we should also factor in the relevant interpretative situation and realize that scholarly interpretative activity does not directly compete with free, imaginative readings. OMD2 (or JD2) may win the "contest" over OMD1 (or JD1) when they are presented in the context of a class of creative writing because they would get "extra points" for being more imaginative (regardless of their economy); but would lose in a scholarly context/contest, because some of their assumptions are poorly supported by textual details (there may be of course also some imaginative assumptions that are strongly supported).

There is clearly a genuine disagreement as to whether we should allow or even encourage creative, "wild" readings in a scholarly context: deconstructionists would probably support such a move, and conservative critics would probably oppose it. This would be more like a practical, ideological or pedagogical debate—but not necessarily a theoretical one. As long as those who encourage "wild," imaginative interpretations admit that there is a legitimate activity of "making sense," an activity that is guided by economic principles, the edge of the challenge is removed. Firstly, because even ardent supporters of the application of the principles of economical interpretation (such as myself) can happily encourage imaginative, even "wild" readings—as long as they are offered in the context of creative, not scholarly activity. Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, I suspect that even avid advocates of creative, imaginative interpretations have their own version of economic principles at work: they might embrace a reading that sees the speaker in Donne's first two stanzas of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" to be Jupiter; but no one (I hope) would suggest that he is a Hippopotamus.

Concluding Remarks

It is important to understand that to advocate the applicability of economical principles to the interpretation of poetic texts does not

mean that I want to deny the complex nature of such texts. Such a position also does not deny the fact that the interpretation of poetic texts is by far more complicated than the process of interpreting ordinary, simple texts. The basic guiding principles, however, may apply to both areas. Just as there is a difference between the complexity involved in washing dishes every day and that of organizing a new apartment (the former is done almost automatically, while the latter requires conscious, sometimes complicated decisions, such as where should I place my new bookcase and where should I put my copy of Donne's *Songs and Sonets*?), in both cases the economic principle of trying to achieve maximum goals via minimum effort is operative.

The inventiveness of literary works and the fact that they are complex, multilayered texts encourage interpreters of such texts to suggest complex, inventive readings. The fact that some critical schools (e.g. psychoanalytic, deconstructionist) rely on non-intuitive assumptions further encourages readers to come up with novel readings, which further complicates the picture. Thus, the debate between the advocates of "making sense" of texts according to the principles of economy, and the proponents of "imaginative" interpretations is not over. If we realize that each of these two kinds of activity has its role and place in culture, and as long as we try to understand in what kind of activity we are engaged, the better the chances of our avoiding futile debate between the two camps. Furthermore, as I have argued earlier, the application of economic principles to the interpretation of poetic texts does not mean that we deny the complexity and richness of these texts. On the contrary, it takes this complexity quite seriously and consequently allows for, nay even encourages, the complication of assumptions—but without necessarily violating the basic logic of economical interpretation.

<div align="right">The Hebrew University
Jerusalem</div>

NOTES

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[1]Such an interpretation can also be labeled as an efficient or elegant interpretation; since the latter term involves strong positive, aesthetic implications, I will try to stick to the more neutral term economical interpretation in this discussion.

[2]See Eco, *Interpretation*, especially 45-66, Siegel, "Creative Paranoia," and McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, 81-82. In developing my arguments in this article, I am indebted to Eco's criticism of uneconomical interpretations as well as to Abrams's criticism of "New Readings," and to Reichert's description of how we "make sense" of literature.

[3]Qtd. in Siegel 50.

[4]Such interpretative activity is rooted, according to Eco, in the tradition of Hermeticism, motivated to find "hidden messages" in (innocent) texts. See also my criticism of Margolis's historicist approach to interpretation (Fishelov, "Interpretation and Historicim"). In an article on two interpretations of S. Y. Agnon's "Tehilah" by Amos Oz and Eddy Zemach (Fishelov, "Agnon's *Tehila*"), I suggested that in addition to "elegant" (i.e., economical) and "paranoid" interpretation (many details with simple assumptions and few details with complicated assumptions—respectively), there may be two additional kinds of interpretation: "schematic," which explains few details while using simple assumptions; and "poetic," which explains many details but using complicated assumptions.

[5]This tendency can also be found in rigid ideological thinking in which certain assumptions are kept regardless of the ensuing complication of assumptions. I would like to thank Shimon Sandbank for this comment.

[6]The logic of economical interpretation can be associated with the ontological principle of Occam's razor, which states, according to its popular formulation, that "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity."

[7]The text is quoted from: "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," *Wikipedia*, 4 Dec. 2012, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Dec. 2012 <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Old_MacDonald_ Had_a_Farm&oldid=526344401>. For some of its sources and variations, see also: "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," *The Traditional Ballad Index*, ed. Robert B. Walz and David G. Engle, California State University, Fresno, 6 Dec. 2012 <http://www.fresnostate. edu/folklore/ballads/R457.html>.

[8]The suggestion to treat the descriptive-interpretative as a pair, in which "descriptive" holds the position of means and "interpretative" the position of ends or goals, is developed in Fishelov 1993.

[9]The name of the fast food chain is spelled differently (McDonald), but since historically these are interchangeable spelling, and pronounced similarly, it should not interfere with this reading.

[10]Theoretically, the song could have used different wording—e.g. "[animal voice] in the east, [animal voice] in the west etc," instead of "here […] there […] everywhere"—or any other formula that offers an opportunity for repeating the animal's voice.

[11]Some basic facts about the history of the McDonald fast food chain can be found in: "McDonald's," Wikipedia, 5 Dec. 2012, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Dec. 2012   <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=McDonald%27s&oldid= 526559931>.

[12]This invented example illustrates how our knowledge of pertinent contextual facts (in this case, certain socio-linguistic facts) makes us accept certain assumptions as more probable (and hence simpler) than others: both "Old Mac-Donald Had a Farm" and "Old Häagen-Dazs Had a Dairy" have the same syntactical structure and the same deep semantic structure ("Old [proper name] had [a place in which food is produced]"), and only our world knowledge guides us to offer the probable assumption that "Old Häagen-Dazs Had a Dairy" is related to a specific food chain.

[13]There is one interesting difference between forming assumptions in the interpretation of texts (day-to-day and literary alike) and in forming scientific assumptions (i.e. explanations of natural "details"): in the former we rely on common sense, on common knowledge, and on our linguistic and cultural "baggage"; whereas in the latter we are invited to abandon common sense and go beyond common knowledge, e.g. the assumption that the earth revolves around the sun is preferred over the Ptolemaic assumption that the sun revolves around the earth because it is more economical (succeeds in explaining many astronomical "details"), despite the fact that it is counter-intuitive and deviates from common sense.

[14]The MLA *ILB* cites about 40 items devoted to the discussion of this poem and JSTOR about 330.

[15]The text is quoted from Redpath's edition of Donne's poems.

[16]If we broaden our perspective to the entire poem, theoretically such an assumption could be integrated in its overall interpretation and be found consistent with other textual details (e.g. the speaker utters the words "our love" in jest). Thus, a local contradiction of one textual detail does not automatically invalidate an overall interpretation. For methodological reasons outlined earlier, I limit my analysis to the first two stanzas of the poem.

[17]We know that in *Songs and Sonets* the speaker usually is a male lover; we know that a "Valediction" is about a farewell between lovers (at least in Donne it is). Even if we did not have these contextual hints, we would go, *ceteris paribus*, for the more probable option, and a man as a speaker of the poem is more probable than Jupiter.

[18]I could also write in all cases "he or she" and "his or her," but I *assume* that the speaker is, like the poet, a man. It is important to understand that, when we take

the speaker to be a male, this is also an interpretative assumption, not a necessary, logical conclusion of the textual details.

[19]For the different components that constitute similes (source, target, ground and marker) and the variety of relationship between them, see Fishelov, "Poetic and Non-Poetic Simile," and "Simile Understanding."

[20]See *OED* "so" *adv.* and *conj.*, definitions 22.a. and b. for the "as … so" constructions. For the difference between simple comparisons and simile, see Fishelov, "Poetic and Non-Poetic Simile": 13-14.

[21]One may ground this interpretation in the rich medieval and baroque poetic tradition of dialogues and debates between body and soul. See the excellent discussion of Bossy.

[22]This assumption would face a major (in fact, impassable) difficulty when later in the poem the speaker refers to "Our two souls" (line 21), but since I am only concerned here with the first two stanzas, one can still argue for JD4, albeit temporarily.

[23]For the possibility of a playful exchange of roles between body and soul, including the metaphorical attribution of corporal traits to the soul and vice versa, see Bossy.

[24]For the process of gradually building our interpretation, including deciding between competing hypotheses, and sometimes accepting two competing hypotheses, see Perry and Sternberg.

[25]In addition to its multilayered use of English, the poem also extensively activates and plays on Latin words and roots, as has been beautifully demonstrated by Bauer.

[26]For various aspects of the dynamics of the reading process, see Perry.

[27]Suffice it to mention in this context the classical works of Empson on types of ambiguity (Empson 1966 [1930]), Brooks's work on the language of poetry as the language of paradox (Brooks 1947), Tate's work on tension in poetry (Tate 1949), and Beardsley's notion of plenitude of meanings in poetry (144-47). The co-existence of competing interpretations in literary texts is not restricted to the level of minute semantic variations but can be applied to the story-line itself (i.e. two mutually exclusive hypotheses about what happened could gain equal support), as has been convincingly argued by Rimmon-Kenan 1977, and Perry and Stern-berg 1986.

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If and *It* and the Human Condition: Considerations Arising from a Reading of *The Merchant of Venice*[1*]

INGE LEIMBERG

In the Myth of Er at the end of Plato's *Republic* we are told how the spindle of necessity, turned in the womb of eternity, produces the turning of the spheres[2]; the cosmic implications make it quite clear that in this case "necessity" does not mean compulsion but lawfulness.[3] The daughters of necessity are the fates, and in the womb of Lachesis (the fate of the past) there are lots from which the unborn souls are told to make their choice; they are admonished to choose the middle way and avoid excess.

It would not be far wrong to say that *The Merchant of Venice* is a variation on this theme, since having to choose one's law is the paradigmatic *conditio humana* set forth in this play.[4] *Conditio* derives from *condo*, meaning *I do* or *put together* (e.g., the parts of a contract).[5] In Cooper's large selection of English denotations of *Conditio* we find, coupled together as if the terms were offered to Shakespeare on a plate: "Election or choice. A covenant, law." The last word is left, as nearly always in Cooper, to Cicero: "Conditio humana. Cic. The state or condition of."[6]

In *The Merchant of Venice* "choice," "covenant" (or *bond*), and "law" are as closely related thematically as the words *lego* and *lex* are related etymologically (they really are, it is not a wishful etymology of Cicero's own making).[7] Playing his part on the stage of life and destined to have much ado with learning to know himself, man enters into bonds of friendship or love or commerce, and doing so he cannot but choose[8] his law and make all his further choices according to it.

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*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg0221.htm>.

Trying to approach the problem of an existential condition involving law and choice, the reader most readily takes hold of the fact that *condition* has a linguistic meaning. The word looms large in the indexes of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Since Shakespeare expressed his ideas in the language of poetry (not music or painting), perhaps the linguistic denotation of *condition* might be considered to be the "literal" one. The conditional clause is what would very probably have sprung first to the mind of someone educated in an Elizabethan grammar school, who would be conscious of the syntactical intricacies entailed but very probably unaware of the formidable mass of learning that "condition" incorporates. Boethius's booklength study *De hypotheticis syllogismis* is an outstanding example.[9] In a more episodic manner the term occurs in a source I feel increasingly sure to have been a favourite of Shakespeare's: in Plutarch's *The E at Delphi* one of the manifestations of the oracular "E" is the "εἰ" (*if*), the conditional conjunction of logical syntax. And this is Plutarch's commentary:

> Certainly in logic this copulative conjunction has the greatest force, inasmuch as it clearly gives us our most logical form, […] the hypothetical syllogism [which] no creature other than man apprehends. (386f-387a)[10]

Plutarch's attribution of "the greatest force" to the εἰ foreshadows Touchstone's dictum "much virtue in If" (*AYL* 5.4.90-101). And Shakespeare and Plutarch also think very much alike with regard to the specific meaning of the powerful *if*. In Plutarch's philosophical reasoning it summarizes the hypothetical syllogism, which is reserved exclusively for man's intellectual activity. In Shakespeare's poetry it occurs in phrases like Portia's "If you do love me, you will find me out" (*MV* 3.2.41), and Rosalind's "I'll have no father, if you be not he" (*AYL* 5.4.120). In both cases the conditional conjunction marks a human being's existential choice, that is to say, a choice that implies choosing a law. When Portia encourages Bassanio to make his choice, she repeats her initial choice, filial piety, because, as I will show later on, the assurance she gives Bassanio is based on her father's benevolent will. Rosalind, choosing her father, chooses her heritage, to which

she is bound by the laws of nature as well as by the religious law of filial piety. In these two instances (characteristic ones for Shakespeare, it seems to me) choice and law are made to agree as perfectly as in Cooper's series of English equivalents of Latin *conditio*: condition, choice, and law. The Myth of Er comes to mind, too, as an archetype of this kind of choice, and the virtue of Plutarch's *if* in *The E at Delphi* is fully confirmed.

Reading *The Merchant of Venice*, we come across *if* again and again, often in situations where a choice has to be made on condition that a law is chosen and, consequently, obeyed. Let us follow the most significant *if*s in this play, and thus nearly all of them for there are very few insignificant ones.[11]

1. *IF*

The series begins with Antonio telling his friend that his "extremest means" are at his disposal, but only, "if it stand as you yourself still do, / Within the eye of honour" (1.1.136-37). Deciding whether to help Bassanio, Antonio makes a clearly defined moral choice. "Honour" is the word. We, the audience, know that Antonio's choice is heedless and must lead to disaster, for more than just that one law ought to have been selected for consideration.

The next very arresting phrase beginning with *if* is Portia's "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do" (1.2.12). Here, too, the conditional clause expresses a choice concerning a moral law. Virtuous action is the law that has to be chosen and will, indeed, be chosen by Portia; even, she says, "If I live to be as old as Sibylla" (1.2.102), and she will stress the religious significance of her decision when she tells Bassanio that he must not make the wrong choice, for "if you do, you'll make me wish a sin" (3.2.12).

Skipping some slight but charming examples,[12] we are struck with the *if*s of the bond scene. Firmly convinced that taking usurious interest is not stealing, Shylock has chosen his usurer's lot long ago, once and for all. That was bad enough but might be allowed for since he, as

a Jew, was excluded from all other professions; he was free, however, to choose what kind of usurer he wanted to be. A good or a bad one…

So much for Shylock's moral choice within the precincts of the Law Merchant. Religiously considered, taking usurious interest is always wrong, and the decision Shylock now makes, and the "lot" he now chooses, is not only morally but religiously disastrous, from a Christian as well as from a Judaic perspective. When he says (in soliloquy): "If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge," and "cursed be my tribe / If I forgive him!" (1.3.41-42 and 46-47), he denounces not only his nation but the God of Israel, who, as Shylock ought to know, is a forgiving God who reserves vengeance to Himself.[13] Shylock repeatedly and in rapid succession uses *if*[14] and will do so again when the development of the action is nearing its climax.

In the second Act some *if*s are employed to mark Morocco's and Arragon's choosing their lots (2.7.27 and 2.9.5-15) and, finally, Bassanio's arrival at Belmont (2.9.101). In the meantime Bassanio uses the word politely (2.2.138), Gratiano uses it loudly (2.2.181), and Launcelot uses it wittily (2.2.72, 105-08, 150). But with Jessica *if* clearly denotes a choice to be made under the auspices of the law of love: "O Lorenzo, if thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian and thy loving wife!" (2.3.19).[15]

It is not long before we see Jessica's father again, seething with anger and choler, and craving for his pound of flesh: "if it will feed nothing else," he says, "it will feed my revenge" (3.1.47-48). He has chosen his law of retaliation once and for all, and now it has him in its grip:

> […] if you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us do we not revenge?—if we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example?—why revenge! (3.1.58-64)

Shylock's use of *if* reveals his personal dilemma. In the pattern observable in the Myth of Er, and in Cicero's stoical reasoning and ety-

mological deductions, and in Plutarch's Delphic syntax, the human condition is defined as a choice of law. From Plutarch we took the hint that the *if* of logical syntax might be taken to be a kind of cypher (grammatically denotative and mystically connotative at the same time) of the human condition. A geometrical emblem comes to mind, *if* as the hypothetical syllogism condensed into a short monosyllable that forms the crossing point of the two coordinates choice and law. But in Shylock's use of *if* no choice is left, only law. The whole Court Scene will ring with this word by which Shylock is literally possessed.[16] After he has chosen the *lex* of retaliation, it has him in its grip. To him *if* is no longer a conditional conjunction at all but a strictly causal one,[17] serving the purposes of a brutal, mechanistic causality which leaves no room for a moral choice. Once this *if* is stated as a premise, the consequence is a forgone conclusion.[18] There is *much harm* in this kind of *if*, instead of "much virtue."

But the *if* of love that denotes the service of perfect freedom follows soon. "One half of me is yours," Portia says to Bassanio, "the other half yours, / Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours, / And so all yours" (3.2.16-18). Portia has chosen the law of love and trust, and therefore she can assure Bassanio:

> If you do love me, you will find me out. (3.2.41)

This statement is the counterpart of a former one of Nerissa's:

> Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations,—therefore the lott'ry that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly, but one who you shall rightly love. (1.2.27-32)

Shakespeare made Nerissa use a trick by making her speak slightly incorrectly, or at least by making her indulge in poetic licence. Instead of saying *but one whom you shall rightly love* or *but one who shall rightly love you*, she let the words tumble and form a kind of sentence that covers both meanings. She knew exactly what she was doing. Explain-

ing the paternal will Portia has to follow, she was dealing with the *issues of death*,[19] with a virtuous man's *holiness* and "inspirations," in short, with matters touching on religious mysteries. Portia, a critical spirit if ever there was one, found nothing to object to in Nerissa's interpretation of her father's will which promises mutual love to the union effected by the right choice. Portia trusts in her father's benevolence and thus can encourage Bassanio to venture the choice, saying "If you do love me, you will find me out." And yet, being not a paragon but a real woman, she is full of anxiety as regards the outcome of Bassanio's choice. She makes her own most daring choice (choosing the law of love) when she calls out "go Hercules!" (3.2.60), telling him to follow the example of that hero's famous choice, which means little less than telling him outright to choose the leaden casket.

Portia's lawful choice is a paradigm of the human condition because it is charged with a tension hard to bear. It includes not only firm trust and virtuous action, but also a moral fortitude that rebels when obedience threatens to dwindle into obsequiousness, and, above all, it is full of anxiety. Portia is desperately anxious: "Live thou, I live—," she says, "with much much more dismay, / I view the fight, than thou that mak'st the fray" (3.2.61-62). At this moment she envisages the possibility of a tragic ending that might turn the hopeful "Live thou, I live" into an inevitable *Die thou, I die*. And that is where the *if* of musical harmony comes in:

> Let music sound while he doth make his choice,
> Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end,
> Fading in music. (3.2.43-45)[20]

The unreal conditional clause "if he lose" reminds us that Bassanio's choice is a "lott'ry," after all, and this raises the question whether the person who may possibly be a loser is quite identical with the chooser. Syntactically he is the subject of choosing and losing; but what about his subjectivity beyond syntax? Certainly "he," Bassanio, has to do the choosing; but in the losing another agency is implied, for instance, the contingency that ruins a benevolent plan (as, e.g., in the case of Friar

Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*), or Fortune, or Fate, that is to say, some mysterious agency that sometimes makes a man "lose," choose he never so wisely. The *if* in the phrase "Then if he lose" has indeed a Delphic ring, indicating that uncertainty and perhaps even mystery is an essential part of the human condition. And so, of course, is music.

In his treatise *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, Plutarch meticulously explains (following Plato) how the human soul has been created according to the laws of musical mathematics. According to Kepler, there would be no harmony if the human soul did not produce it.[21] The work in which Shakespeare has shown most clearly how much he agrees with both is *The Phoenix and Turtle.* There the tragic, mysterious, and musical note Portia strikes when she says, "if he lose," rules throughout, nor is a "death divining swan" wanting, who functions as "the priest in surplice white / That defunctive music can" and gives the funeral rites their "right" (13). There also is a wonderful harmonious *if* in the poem, praising the human condition of true love, in spite of fate and loss and death. Having witnessed the death and departure of the Phoenix and the Turtle, Reason was so much moved by "their tragic scene"

> That it cried, How true a twain
> Seemeth this concordant one!
> Love hath reason, reason none,
> If what parts, can so remain. (45-48)

Portia will not have to part from Bassanio and will be happily united with him. But there is this moment of impending tragedy charged with anxiety and mystery and music. And its linguistic and symbolic indicator is an *if*.

After Portia's three *if*s ("if mine then yours," "If you do love me, you will find me out," and "Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end") we are in for a surprise. In the casket-scene proper (Bassanio's choice and its happy outcome) just one single, fairly inconspicuous "*If*" is to be found (3.2.135). But, perhaps, this is just as it should be, for there is no *if* about Bassanio's choice. The condition "If you do love me" has been

fulfilled. He does love Portia, and thus cannot but find her in his heart where, *teste* Plato, the "semblance of [his] soul" belongs (3.4.20)[22] and in her, his "heart of heart" (*Ham.* 3.2.73), he will find himself as well as the law of his life. We have that on the authority of the Psalmist, who sings "O my God: yea, thy Law is within mine heart" (Ps. 40:8; cf. also Jer. 31:33).

But now, for a while, the law of Venice and the law of the bond will dominate the play.[23] It is the lawyer's turn to read the law (*legere legem*) rightly and make a lawful choice. The *if* is needed for this, and Shylock makes ample use of it. With him the particle denotes, again, his self-chosen compulsions. The idiosyncrasies which have led to his neurosis of hatred and revenge rest on an *if* that does not allow for alternatives but enforces an automatic reaction: "What if my house be troubled with a rat [...] / Some men [...] are mad if they behold a cat," he says, and comes to the conclusion that people so molested "of force / Must yield to such inevitable shame" (4.1.4-57). The same causal automatism holds good for the law he *stands for*: "If you deny me, fie upon your law!" (4.1.102).[24] That the "If" is echoed here by such a pejorative palindrome as "fie" may be a hint at Shylock's perverted, one-track use of the conditional.[25]

Portia turns Shylock's *if* upside down when she chooses one of two "contrary laws"[26] to let him have all the justice he deserves and more than that. First she tries to make him consider that "if" he insists on his "plea" Antonio must be condemned (4.1.198-201). When Shylock does insist, the contrary law becomes effective: "if" he (Shylock) sheds one drop of Christian blood he loses his possessions (105-08), and "if" he takes the least bit more than a pound of flesh, he must die (322-28). Shylock, since he would take the pound of flesh at his peril, does not take it; and yet there is still more justice meted out to him by the laws of Venice: "If it be proved against an alien, / That [...] / He seek the life of any citizen," then his only chance is to kneel down and "beg mercy of the duke" (344-59).[27]

This very serious parody of Shylock's causal use of the conditional clause in the trial is parodied again by Bassanio and Portia in the

mock-trial of the last Act. "If I could add a lie unto a fault," says Bassanio (5.1.159), who, as we all know, can and will not do so. The other *if*s in this context all follow the same pattern[28]; they are completely different not only from Portia's final *if*s in the trial but also from Shylock's causal *if*s and from Portia's and Jessica's *if*s of love and trust (3.2.41 and 2.3.20); they are *if*s of mockery in a play within a play and to be followed by a happy ending.

To sum up this survey of the *if* in *The Merchant of Venice*, it seems that the word is as multivocal to Shakespeare as the word "Conditio" is in Cooper's series of English equivalents.[29] This is confirmed by a famous contemporary's argument. John Donne, who was a young man about town when *The Merchant of Venice* was initially performed, interpreted an *if* for us when he had become Dean of St. Paul's. In a Sermon on 1 Pet 1:17 ("And if ye call on the Father") he lectures on the theme of *if*; very nearly quoting Shakespeare (and Plutarch). Touchstone states, laconically, "much virtue in If" (*AYL* 5.4.102),[30] and Donne augments: "there is much more force in this particle *Si*, *If*"; then he offers a brief grammatical dissertation on the additional "force" of the particle *if*. The conjunction has been used by the Apostle as a

> *Si concessionis*, non *dubitationis*, an *If* that implyes a confession and acknowledgement, not a hesitation or a doubt, That it is also *Si progressionis*, *Si conclusionis*, an *If* that carryes you farther, and that concludes you at last, *If* you doe it, that is, *Since* you do it [...]. (3: 277.125-29)

When Donne wrote this he might have had the finest of the *if*s in *The Merchant of Venice* in mind, Portia's "If you do love me, you will find me out" (3.2.41); his criteria fit perfectly. Portia does not hesitate or doubt, instead she promptly accepts Bassanio's wisdom, confesses her love, acknowledges her father's benevolence and, finally, trusts in a progress that will lead to a happy conclusion. Moreover, in both cases the same crucial condition is made: the *if* can prove its "force" only on condition of something *done*, which, in terms of *The Merchant of Venice*, goes very closely together with something *given*.[31] Therefore, this summery of the *if*s turns into a mere transition to another aspect.

2. *IF AND GIVE*

There exists an age-old affinity between the words *if* and *give*. In Chaucer "yif" (meaning *if*) and "yif" (meaning *give!*) still look and sound alike.[32] Moreover, the glossary provides the northern dialect "gif" (meaning *if*), which, in the sixteenth century, was also spelled *giue*.[33] Given this cluster of words, a syllogism materializes: when *if* resembles *gif*, and *gif* resembles *giue*, then *if* resembles *give*.

Shakespeare often makes use of this verbal affinity. He is fond of the phrase "if (I, you, etc.) give way" (*passim*); in addition to this he often couples the words *if* and *give* in close conditional juxtaposition, for instance:

Then, if […], I'll give […]	*LLL* 5.2.820
I'll give […] If ever […]	*AYL* 1.1.150
If he […] will give […]	2.4.61
If […] thou canst give […]	*Rom.* 4.1.52
And if thou dar'st, I'll give […]	76
If you will […] and give […]	*Cym.* 4.4.44
Nay, if the devil have given […]	*MM* 3.2.29
if you give me […], give me […]	*Shr.* in.2.6-7

To conclude this random series with an example that sounds like a declaration of love to language: Snug the joiner wanting to know, is there a written text of the lion's part, urges Peter Quince:

if it be, give it me.	*MND* 1.2.62-3

In *The Merchant of Venice*, *if* is the syntactical quintessence of the *conditio humana* not only because it joins law with choice but because it is closely connected with *give* and thus with the give and take that belongs to the commerce (or usury) of friendship, love, and mercy. The final link in Donne's syntactic chain of reasoning in the sermon on "And if ye call on the Father" is, implicitly, man's doing what has to be done; in *The Merchant of Venice* the importance of doing what is good is explicitly stated (cf. 1.2.12), nor can there be any doubt that doing is giving and vice versa. Therefore, in this play Donne's "*Si concessionis*," and "*progressionis*," and "*conclusionis*" are joined by a *si*

liberalitatis and *beneficentiae.* The law of choice can be identical with the law of distribution, i.e., the law of equity that gives everyone his own, *suum quique*, and the *if* that serves this beneficent law is a "peacemaker" (*AYL* 5.4.101). The *if* of causal mechanism and determinism serves the law of retaliation, the returning of evil for evil unto the bitter end: "If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his / sufferance be by Christian example?—why revenge!" (3.1.63-64). Portia teaches Shylock what happens when this *if* is in full force: "if thou dost shed" and "if thou tak'st," then "Thou diest" (4.1.305-28). But Portia does not pass a sentence dictated by the *lex talionis.* Far from it. Shylock's life is not forfeit but "lies in the mercy / Of the Duke"; and the Duke *pardons him his life before he asks it*, and Antonio can and does *render mercy* to his enemy and, what is more, that enemy does not tear himself apart in a white rage like Rumpelstilzkin, but accepts his former debtor's merciful offer and is "content" (4.1.351-89).

Thus the quality of mercy that "blesseth him that gives, and him that takes" is finally put into practice by Shylock.[34] Without his taking the mercy offered to him, all Portia's efforts to save the "semblance of her soul," the sinner in the dock, would have been completely in vain. The taking is quite as important as the giving.[35] The apparent opposites *give* and *take* are in fact the components of a dual structure that gives them their meaning. They are a "concordant one" (*PhT* 46), and their meeting is symbolized in the handclasp. But giving is doing, and doing goes together with being done unto, as the Golden Rule tells us. And man must choose his law, and *lego* and *lex*, apparently so different, if not opposite, in meaning, are etymologically related, and the soul chooses its lot from the womb of necessity. The human condition has a polar structure, or, in the words of the Sonnet: "Thou single wilt prove none" (8.14).

Portia touches on this dual structure when, confronted with possible tragedy, she says: "Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end" (3.2.44). Just for a moment she leaves aside Bassanio's doing the choosing and envisages his (and her) suffering the losing, not giving a name, however, to what (or who) it may be that brings about the loss. *Nescio quid* is the age-old answer to that kind of question.[36] This great common-

place is paraphrased in the first lines of *The Merchant of Venice*, as if it were a motto for the human condition, and the *quidditas* looked for in vain is signified by the pronoun *it* repeated seven times in three lines.

If and *give* have much in common, and so have *if* and *it*. They share a vowel, and they fit into rhythm as short monosyllabic words. They both are mere particles of syntax but they are as comprehensive in meaning as small in size. There is "much virtue" in both of them.

3. *IT*[37]

When the play begins the gentleman standing centre-stage tells us *who* he is by his mere presence; he is the Merchant of the title, soon to be called Antonio. But when it comes to the next question in the classical series of interrogatives, "quis, quid, cur, ubi, quando, quem-admodum,"[38] the Merchant gives a somewhat dark, tautological answer. The *quid* or *quidditas* or *what it is* he has to deal with in his efforts to come to an agreement with himself has no proper name. A pronoun, i.e., a pro-nomen, must do.[39] The *what* (or rather "why") is an "it," and a syntactically unrelated one at that. The whatness of Antonio's "it" is an open question:

> *Ant*. In sooth I know not why I am so sad.
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn. (1.1.1-5)

It is a pronoun, and such a word "is named pronoun," says Isidor, "because it is used instead of a noun so that the noun will not grow tedious by repetition."[40] In Antonio's self-introduction there is no noun, instead he uses the word *it*. And when his companions try to give "it" a name he says *no* to all of them. Perhaps, in a garrulous manner, Solanio comes nearest to the meaning of Antonio's *it* when he says: "you are sad / Because you are not merry" (1.1.57-58).[41] Mixing nonsense with profundity, the proverbial jingle declares Antonio's *it* to be something that cannot be explained logically.

He told us the truth when he said: "In sooth I know not why…." In his anxious self-examination *it* and *why*, *quid* and *cur*, *factum* and *causa*[42] are identical: *It* is the *cause*. Coming to this result in our grammatical-rhetorical analysis of *it*, we cannot but realize that we have been inadvertently quoting *Othello*: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul! / Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars, / It is the cause" (5.2.1-3). Strangely enough Othello's phrase is identical with the one a schoolboy would have had to memorize as a rhetorical cliché. But surely Othello's heartbreaking utterance goes far beyond rhetoric, and it also goes much farther than Antonio's "It wearies me." Where does it go?[43]

We moderns envy Shakespeare's audience their chance of hearing and seeing his plays when they had never been staled with the stage. But we have one advantage over them, we know what was to come and can draw comparisons within the whole canon. If we are in luck, we perhaps find some hints as to how he developed a theme and thus commented himself, indirectly, on the text we are reading and riddling. Certainly the Merchant of Venice and the Moor of Venice, in their statements concerning *it*, have something in common. They share the feeling that they are up against something profoundly or, in Othello's case, desperately disturbing. But *Othello* is a long way off from *The Merchant of Venice*; the tragic overtones of "It is the cause" as well as the rhythmically identical "It is too late" mark some of the darkest moments of the very darkest of the love tragedies. Antonio is driven only to weariness by "it," not to distraction and murder. Let us look for examples nearer *The Merchant of Venice* in genre and period, which may, perhaps, throw some light on that unexplained "it" of Antonio's self-introduction.

One of the great Shakespearean texts where the *it* comes into its own is Sonnet 116, the crowning perfection of the old lyrical stereotype "*Quid sit amor*."[44] The first pair of the speaker's definitions of love is: "it is an ever-fixed mark / […] It is the star to every wand'ring bark." In *Cymbeline*, decades after the *Sonnets*, Bellarius will tell us that "Guiderius had / Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star; / It is a mark of wonder" (5.5.364-66). Taken as a grammatical substitute, *it* is differ-

ently related in each of the two texts; but taken in itself *it*, from the beginning to the end of Shakespeare's career, retains its characteristics: it is *a mark* and *a star*; and the musical charm of the "wand'ring bark" is echoed by a "mark of wonder."[45]

At the end of *Henry IV, Part 2* Shakespeare makes his spokesman Falstaff say: "It is a wonderful thing […]" (5.1.61). Falstaff has to say more. His *it* is "a 'provisional' or 'anticipatory' subject," followed by "an infinitive phrase,"[46] and yet the actor playing Falstaff ought to stress the "It" just enough to make it appear a real subject. Shakespeare is fond of this *double entendre* and often uses it in phrases beginning "It is […]." In the speech quoted above, which is full of ominous hints at Falstaff's rejection, the dictum "It is a wonderful thing" is followed by two more such phrases: "It is certain […]" and "O, it is much […]."[47] The whatness of the "it" in these two phrases is also explained, but let each of them stand, for a moment, for itself as a definition of "it"; let the "it" be a subject meaning something so wonderful and so certain and so overwhelming[48] that names like *fate* or *fortune* are too conventional for it, and how strikingly do the phrases reveal the situation of the marvellous old fool stumbling with great expectations toward the rejection that is the fulfilment of his career.

In *As You Like It*, where the "*It*" contributes to the mysterious simplicity of the title, Rosalind, referring to the anonymous author of sylvan poetry, asks: "Is it a man?" Celia answers, evasively: "It is a hard matter for friends to meet." Rosalind insists: "[…] who is it?" but Celia keeps procrastinating: "Is it possible?" Rosalind urges her: "[…] with most petitionary vehemence, tell me who it is," but Celia still goes on playing her game: "O wonderful, wonderful. And most wonderful wonderful! And yet again wonderful!" This draws a final "who is it" from Rosalind, and Celia confesses that "it" is "a man." Then the "it" is for once transformed into "he": "Is he of God's making?" But the "he" is merely episodic and immediately replaced by the "it" when Celia stops procrastinating and finally answers: "It is young Orlando" (3.2.172-208).[49]

No doubt Shakespeare is playing with the word, and if we do not consider two meanings of Rosalind's *it*s, a relative one and an independent one, we miss the point. Rosalind is not only eager to find out who wrote the doggerel verses pinned to the trees, she also wants to know whether her dream of love is going to come true. Has all that matters for her, has the whatness, the *it* of her life really become personified in the man she loves? Yes, it has. "You are my all-the-world," says the speaker of the *Sonnets* (112.5), and "It is young Orlando," says Celia to Rosalind.

Our three examples have been of some help. They have shown what an important part the *it* plays in Shakespeare's poetry, and they have provided some interpretive criteria that may lead us to a better understanding of the *it*s in *The Merchant of Venice*.

All-the-world is a likely definition of *it*; for what is there that is not denoted by *it*? In *The Merchant of Venice*, *it* signals the wisdom of the ages in proverbs,[50] and moreover stands, to give a few examples, for the world (1.1.75), for money,[51] the bond (3.2.315-16), the pound of flesh,[52] Antonio's bankruptcy (3.1.93 and 106), Shylock's idiosyncrasies,[53] Jessica's elopement (3.1.29), and Leah's turquoise (3.1.100); but it also stands for music,[54] fancy (3.2.67), beauty (3.2.88-100), for the ecstasy of joy and love (3.2.113), and for time, as in such seemingly commonplace statements as Portia's "It is almost morning" (5.1.295).[55] Finally, it stands for itself in sheer indefiniteness, for instance in Gratiano's conclusive "Let it be so" (5.1.300).

In Nerissa's and Gratiano's discussion of the "ring," *it* is made to behave throughout as a pronoun according to Isidor's definition[56]; the pronoun, *it,* is used by the dozen instead of the noun, *ring,* so that the noun may not become tedious or, in this case, even morally offensive by too many repetitions of the ambiguous word "ring."[57] The use of "it" in this dialogue is a classic *pronominatio* according to Quintilian's definition: "Antonomasia" (i.e., *pronominatio*),[58] "quae aliquid pro nomine ponit." Well, if "aliquid" is to be used "pro nomine," then there could not be a more adequate replacement than by a *pronomen*, especially if such a word is regarded as "a wonderful thing," and

Shakespeare certainly did regard it as such or he would not have given it the poetic status it has in Portia's praise of mercy.

If her speech is compared with the dialogue centred on the ring in Act 5, a syntactic difference is obvious. In Portia's pleading, *it* is used throughout as a subject, coupled sometimes with a predicate complement, while in the ring-sequence it functions, with very few exceptions, as a grammatical object. Accordingly, Portia's *it* always heads a phrase and, often, a line, while Nerissa's and Gratiano's *it* is always placed at the end of a phrase and, often, at the end of a line. Portia tells us what *mercy* and, in place of *mercy*, *it*, either does or is. Nerissa and Gratiano tell us what has happened to the ring, replacing "ring" nearly always by "it." But the two *it*s, however different as subject and object, beginning and end, fact and sign,[59] have something in common. They are both part of statements that denote giving and taking. The *it* that replaces the *ring* is given as a sign of love and trust by a woman to a man who takes it in the spirit in which it is given. The *it* that replaces "The quality of mercy" gives and is given in giving itself, that is the initial act; having given itself and having been taken, it is given again to others.

In the initial lines of the play the *it* is present as subject as well as object but its whatness is altogether cryptic, and once again Rumpelstilzkin comes to mind: find out the goblin's name and you have it in your power. But it is only the Poloniuses of this world who believe in the power of definition.[60] They are convinced that, following the rules of popular rhetoric and describing a phenomenon or situation "What it is,"[61] they can easily put it in its place. And certainly it is easy enough to classify this or that object indicated by "it." But when the question *What is it?* is taken literally, when *it* functions as *factum ipsum* and not as a substitute and, accordingly, gets the main stress, Antonio's attitude is the only intelligent and sensitive one. What is IT? We do not know. We are to learn, but not from Polonius. The old "nescio quid" attributed to Cicero as well as its French sequel "je ne sais quoi" come to mind.[62]

   In Shakespeare we read: "It is a mark of wonder," and "It is the star to every wand'ring bark," and "It is young Orlando," and "It is a wonderful thing," and "It is the cause," and "It is a tale told by an idiot," and "It is an attribute to God himself."[63] That is how these phrases reside and "echo in the memory." If we did not take the "It" in them *per se* we should be quite as mistaken as if we neglected the function of "It" as a pronoun referring to an antecedent noun. In Portia's speech "It" stands for "mercy" and for itself:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown.
> […]
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
> It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself; (4.1.180-91).

The poetry of these lines suggests that Shakespeare drew inspiration from the English Bible. There the *it* stands not only for the tree of life and for the earth out of which God made man but for God's work during the six days of creation and for all things and beings he made; the single acts of creation are sealed, again and again, with the words "it was so" and "it was good."[64] Since *it* replaces the *world* and the *works* it cannot but replace the *Word*, for

> All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and that life was the light of men. And that light shineth in the wildernesse, and the darknesse comprehendeth it not. (John 1:3-5)[65]

But when it comes to the divine Word speaking for Itself, the *it* is raised to an even higher degree: once the disciples saw Christ walking on the water and they "were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, […]. But straightway Jesus spoke vnto them, saying, Be of good comfort; It is I" Matt. 14:26-27).[66] The absoluteness (and grammatical intricacy) of the

statement "It is I" is shared by His final words on the cross: "It is finished," or "It is done" (John 19:30).[67]

Here one might say "Let it suffice,"[68] or "It is enough."[69] But it is far from enough. At least two more great formulae must be mentioned. The best known tale from the Bible begins with the words "And it came to pass" (Luke 2:1, 15, and 23). Another very well known one is dominated by the phrase "It is written" (Luke 4:4, 8).[70] There is also an apocryphal example I find irresistable. Reading the Bible we read poetry, and it must have been Donne's poetic fury that made him contribute an onomatopoeia to the poetry of the Bible. In his last sermon, "Deaths Duell," he gives his congregation the exact wording of the cock's crow that called Peter to repentance. It is: "[D]oe it now, […] / […] doe it now" (*Sermons* 10: 246.621-247.622).[71]

Let Shakespeare's words reverberate within a biblical context, and Othello's heartrending "It is too late" as well as Macbeth's outrageous "If it were done, when 'tis done […]"[72] both echo the final "It is finished," or "It is done" in John's Gospel. Portia's statement "It is an attribute to God himself"[73] (meaning mercy) comes very near Christ's mystical self-definition "It is I." When, in the anagnorisis of *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina intones the formula "It is requir'd / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95), she quotes St. Paul *verbatim*.[74]

Falstaff undoubtedly speaks in his maker's name when he says, "It is a wonderful thing." In the one passage in which Shakespeare mentions the word "pronoun," young William's Latin exercise in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he connects the grammatical term with mercantile images. "What is it, William that does lend articles?" asks Sir Hugh Evans, and William replies in kind: "Articles are borrowed of the pronoun […]" (4.1.33-36).[75] This recalls Shylock's indirect question "Me thoughts you said, you never lend nor borrow/ Upon advantage," and Antonio's laconic answer "I do never use it" (1.3.64-65).

In the *commercium linguae*, pronouns "lend" and "borrow" articles. *It*, Shakespeare's great favourite among the pronouns, is indeed like a coin or banknote that lends itself or that may be borrowed to replace every imaginable object or notion, or even person great or small, high

or low, good or bad. It may indicate the whole world or it may indicate nothing, but, what is more, it lends itself to fill the gap left open by speechless perplexity and wonder or terror. This happens when the conventional question *what is it?* is turned upside down so that it is not the *is* but the *it* that is stressed, and the answer is not *it is this or that* but something like "It is a wonderful thing," or "It is a tale told by an idiot," or "It is an attribute to God himself." Seen in the light of these statements, Audrey's direct question "Is it a true thing?" (*AYL* 3.3.16)[76] as well as Rosalind's indirect question "If it be true" (*AYL* Ep. 3)[77] lose their triviality and make us feel like Antonio saying "In sooth I know not."

"*If* and *it* and the Human Condition" is our theme. It came our way when, reading *The Merchant of Venice*, we were told by the words that choosing one's law is a necessary condition of man's life. This interpretation was immediately corroborated by such consanguinous patterns as the existential relation of necessity and choice in the Myth of Er, and the etymological relation of *lex* and *lego,* and the lexical interpretation of *law* and *choice* as synonyms denoting Latin *conditio.* Plutarch in the *E at Delphi* provides the connection of the hypothetical syllogism with *conditio humana* and of the conditional conjunction being a variant of the letter E and thus of the pentagram represented by the fifth letter of the alphabet. All this made us focus on *if* in *The Merchant of Venice* (and elsewhere in Shakespeare), and *if* made us focus on *it*. Now, what do they say?

Serio ludere! they say. *It* is a pronoun and *if* is a conjunction, and the genius who by joining the words coins the phrase "If it be give it me" is a "joiner."[78] And "it" the existence of which is called in question by "If" is the Lion's part in writing. Or is it? How delightful! Papageno tootling on his magic flute comes to mind, together with the opera of that name, not only because of its inherent charm but because of its specific interpretive value. In Mozart's music we find exactly the same compositional tension called "childlike" and "esoteric" by Thomas Mann[79]; an easy amiability that transcends all intellectual and social barriers but is charged with a mysterious structural austerity that claims our keenest intellectual and emotional awareness. "I am never

merry when I hear sweet music?" Jessica says, and Lorenzo answers, "The reason is your spirits are attentive" (5.1.69-70). Surely, the kind of hearers who, to Hamlet, "o'erweigh a whole theatre of others" (*Ham.* 3.2.27-28) will not only be spontaneously amused and delighted by Snug's dictum, but will appreciate it as the specimen of metaphysical poetry it really is, and begin to wonder how *if* and *it* affect each other as well as their hearers' "spirits" when they are joined in this Mozartian manner. But I must not go into this now (however fascinating I find the problem), for I have to go on with my summary. So let us forget about *The Midsummer Night's Dream* (and *The Magic Flute*) and focus on *The Merchant of Venice* (which, being Shakespeare's most musical play and having strong affinities to the morality play, has something in common with *Don Giovanni*).

In *The Merchant of Venice* (and elsewhere) Shakespeare employed both *if* and *it* as words charged with "much virtue." In Shakespeare's *World of Words*[80] every word has to be regarded as a microcosm of macrocosmic scope, for, as Timon's good Steward says "the world is but a word" (2.2.156). Surely this is an ambiguous dictum; but in our context it reminds us, willy-nilly, of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* again, where "[t]he poet's eye" is compared with a globular mirror reflecting the world (5.1.12-17), that is to say, macrocosm and microcosm, the created universe and the creature of the sixth day, man, who is gifted with a rational soul and gives names to things. Man exists in the world, physically bound up with the laws of nature, and socially and intellectually and spiritually involved with various codes of law which, regarded philosophically, are hardly less mysterious than the natural laws ruling the cosmos. This crucial relation of man, that "little world made cunningly" (Donne, *Complete Poems* 533), and the universal world (naturally, morally, and spiritually considered), is pointed out in an especially arresting manner by the two words *if* and *it*. Both are linguistic indicators of man's chance and obligation to choose his lot and his law and, at the same time, of a mysterious "je ne sais quoi" that is instrumental in the uncertainty of the outcome. For the unavoidable choice includes the happy ending as well as the tragic

catastrophe, and such verbal utterances as "If you do love me" and "Then if he lose," as well as "It is young Orlando" and "It is too late."

If and *it*, in *The Merchant of Venice* and elsewhere in Shakespeare, indicate the mystery of the human condition. Both particles approach the E at Delphy in runic spareseness as well as in mysterious signality.[81] None of them being a *nomen*, they do not give a name to things either seen or unseen, they are literally "insubstantial" (*Tmp.* 4.1.155), mere joiners and substitutes of syntax, and widely open to interpretation. That is why they suggest themselves as signs of the human condition, that is to say, of man having to make his existential choice,[82] confronted with an uncertainty too extreme for verbal de-nomination. But, to adapt, very freely, another poet's conclusion: "Not unto nomination / The Cherubim reveal—."[83]

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster

NOTES

[1]See Inge Leimberg, *"What may words say?" A Reading of* The Merchant of Venice.—I thank Frank Kearful for revising my English syntax and style, and Matthias Bauer for providing the critical debate that led to my final revision of this essay.

[2]See *Republic* 616b-619e, and cf. *Laws* 818b-d.

[3]Cf. *Timaeus* 47e-48a; cf. also *Phaedo* 74e.

[4]For a detailed analysis of this theme, see Leimberg 36-39, 43-48, and 113-60.

[5]The word derives from *dico* and was originally spelled *condicio*. For differences in spelling of English *condition* see *OED*.

[6]Cooper probably refers to *Tusculan Disputations* 3.25.60.

[7]"[L]ex est ratio summa insita in natura [...] eadem ratio cum est in hominis mente confirmata et confecta, lex est. itaque arbitrantur prudentiam esse legem, cuius ea vis sit, ut recte facere iubeat, vetet delinquere; eamque rem illi Graeco putant nomine a suum cuique tribuendo appellatam, ego nostro a legendo; nam ut illi aequitatis, sic nos dilectus vim in lege ponimus, et proprium tamen utrumque legis est," *De legibus* 1.5.18-19, and see n1; the editor seems to doubt the etymological derivation of νομος from νεμω, which is, however, correct. So is, of course, the derivation of *lex* from *lego*, which is repeated, e.g., *De legibus* 2.5.12. Cf.

Varro 6.66: "from *legere* 'to pick,' […] the *leges* 'laws,' which are *lectae* 'chosen' and brought before the people for them to observe."

[8]Shakespeare very often uses the word "choose" in this modal, negative form.

[9]See, e.g., the edition translated by Luca Obertello. The editor and translator provides a most informative introduction.

[10]The praise of the *if* and of the hypothetical syllogism as the epitome of logical conclusiveness is set off by the antithetical statement that it "contains an optative force" which defies logic, see 386c.

[11]In this case, as in several others, the traditional grammatical value judgments are interesting only as a historical foil. See, e.g., Donawerth 19 and n21: "only the noun and the verb are truly significant; all other parts of speech are 'consignificant,' signifying only in conjunction with significant words."

[12]These include, for example, Portia's *if*s concerning Morocco, 1.2.121-25, and Bassanio's invitation of Shylock, 1.3.28.

[13]See Leimberg 60-64.

[14]Cf. 1.3.159-60, 163-64, and 192.

[15]Lorenzo answers this in religious terms in 2.4.33-34.

[16]Cf. 4.1.35, where Shylock uses the word in involuntary irony.

[17]In Probus's *Instituta artium* "si" is listed exclusively as a causal conjunctio; see 144.1-7: "De causali. [*sic*] causalis speciei coniunctiones sunt […] si simplex […]." See also 598-99, Index rerum et verborum, "coniunctiones." But see, by contrast, Lily's *Shorte Introduction*: "Of a coniunction […]. Causals: as Nam, namque […]. Conditionals: as Si, sin […]" (25). And see Cooper: "Si, Coniunctio, quanda res facta significatur, finitiuis iungitur. If: though […] Virgil […] If Orpheus coulde, as he did indeede, etc. Subiunctiuis iungitur, quoties conditionalis & incertus est sermo: veluti, Si facias, Si faceres. Cic. If thou doe it." See also Menne.

[18]See Börger and Barnocchi: "Boethius differentiates between material implication, i.e., a conditional statement *secundum accidens* […] and an unparadoxical causal relation *habens naturam consequentiam* the truth of which is based on necessary relations which deduce the conclusion from the premise" (266; my translation). The authors refer to Boethius, *De syllogismo hypothetico* 835b-c.

[19]I borrow the expression (Ps. 68:20) from John Donne's farewell Sermon, see *Sermons* 10: 230.

[20]Matthias Bauer reminds me that, in the Myth of Er (*Republic* 620a), Orpheus selects the life of a swan.

[21]See *The Harmony of the World* IV.I, IV.II and IV.III.

[22]Cf. also, e.g., *Meno* 81d-e.

[23]See also the minor though not at all negligible *if*s 3.3.28, 3.4.5-21, 3.5.22, 26, and 71-73.

[24]Cf. also 3.3.26-29 where Antonio expresses (not quite but nearly) the same thought in nearly the same words.

[25]See *MV* 4.1.44 and 48, and see above, ref. to Cooper's definition "conditionalis et incertus est sermo." The ruthless mechanism of cause and effect that rules in these remarks of Shylock's shows the author's strong dislike of any ideological determinism.

[26]See Leimberg 191-95 for an interpretation of 4.1.302-08.

[27]See also the *if*s in Bassanio's, Antonio's, and Portia's remarks 4.1.209, 276, and 440.

[28]See 199-205 and 231-33.

[29]"A keping vp: also condition, place, fortune, state, maner, waye or meanes. A propertie or nature. Election or choise. A covenant, law, or offer conditional." That Shakespeare was very much aware of the "conditional" character of *if* is proved by the juxtaposition of the words "condition" and "if" in *MV* 1.2.129 and 5.1.74. Cf. also *2H6* 5.1.64.

[30]There is also a musical side to the virtue and force of *if*. Many songs and madrigals begin with "If." See the index of Fellowes' collection and note, especially, William Byrd's fondness for the initial "If."

[31]In English the *do* of *I do* is identical with Latin *do,* I give. See also *OED*, "give" *v.* B. 4. and 4.b., 6.b., and 9. For the theme of giving in *MV* see Leimberg, Index, "give," and see also Danson.

[32]Cf., e.g., *Troilus and Criseyde* 2.1063 and 4.1103.

[33]See *OED*, "gif" *conj.*, "*Sc.* and *north. dial.* […] 6 giue [...] [An alteration of ME gif, If. […]] 1. Introducing a condition: = If." See also *OED*, "give" *v.* 32., on the past participle, with reference to "given" ppl. a. (In both these cases the *OED*, including the *Supplement*, is not particularly informative.)

[34]See John R. Cooper.

[35]See Leimberg 200-07 for an interpretation of 4.1.370-453.

[36]See Leimberg 23n8.

[37]Shakespeare scholars have focused mainly on the second person pronoun (especially in the *Sonnets*), not on the *it*. A linguistic study that focuses on the criteria *referential it* and *dummy it* is Seppänen. I thank Frank Kearful for reminding me of John Ashbery's frequent, thematic use of the *it*.

[38]Who, what, why, where, when, how (my translation); see, e.g., Lausberg § 328.

[39]The rhetoricians do not mention pronouns but prefer epithets and appellatives in their examples.

[40]My translation of *Etymologies* 1.8.

[41]See Leimberg 216-19 for an interpretation of 5.1.69.

[42]See, e.g., Lausberg § 329.

[43]See the editor's note to 5.2.1-3: "How characteristic of Othello, that he does not define the cause (= chastity? Purity? The good of the world in general?)!" This seems to me an erroneous inference due to the conventional reading of *it* as a substitute for a meaningful noun, and not as a linguistic cypher charged with a meaning of its own. The dictum is clearly forshadowed by Venus cursing love after the death of Adonis. In a sequence of six stanzas "love" is replaced by "it" throughout, so that the meaning of the pronoun becomes more and more independent; cf. *Ven.* 1135-64. See also *Macbeth* 5.5.26-7: "it is a tale / Told by an idiot"; of course the phrase is syntactically related to "Life" (24), and yet it has a pathos of its own, especially when it is seen in relation with the use of "it" elsewhere in the play. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth nearly always use *it* instead of a noun naming their outrage. To give only one example: "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly" (1.7.1, but cf. also 1.5.14-17, 34, 47, 52; 1.7.36-38, 49; 2.1.48, 62-63; 2.2.3-4, 29, 33, 55).

[44]What is love? See the Latin verses appended by Thomas Watson to No. XCVIII of his *Hekatompathia.*

[45]*Son.* 116.5 and 7 and *passim*. Note the most telling independent "it" in line 12 and the internal rhymes "admit" (2) and "writ"(14). Cf. also *Son.* 124. It is also remarkable that in the great definition and vituperation of lust in *Son.* 129 not a single *it* occurs.

[46]See *OED*, "it" *pron*. 4.

[47]See *Harvard Concordance* for these and other colloquial phrases like *'tis true*, and *'tis wonder*, and *'tis marvel.*

[48]The words "wonderfull" and "fearfull" are mentioned in one breath by John Donne, *Sermons* 6: 69.76-77.

[49]Cf. 3.2.178, 184, 187. Cf. also *AYL* 3.3.12-16. In *MV*, cf. 1.2.115: "*Por.* Yes, yes, it was Bassanio."

[50]See 1.2.6-7 and 14-15, and 2.2.73-4. For the scores of Latin proverbs beginning with "Est" see Walther 7248a-8018, and Tilley A94, A45, A320, A363, A364, D40, D204.

[51]See 1.3.127, 130, 152, and 4.1.333 and 341.

[52]See 3.1.46, 4.1.100, 296, 299, 305, and 323.

[53]4.1.38, 43, 46, and 52.

[54]3.2.48-50, and 5.98 and 101.

[55]See also *OED*, "it" *pron*. 3.b.

[56]See above, n40, my reference to *Etymologies* 1.8.

[57]For the avoidance of obscenities by periphrasis see, e.g., Lausberg § 592 (with reference to Quintilian 8.2.1-2).

[58]Quintilian 8.6.29; see also Lausberg § 580 (with ref. to *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.31.42); and also Sonnino 149-50.

[59]Matthias Bauer argues that the *it* as a subject is a sign, too, and I agree with him.

[60]Cf. *Ham.* 2.2.93-95; cf. also *LLL* 1.2.89-90.

[61]See Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* 87-88, and cf. also 6-7.

[62]See above, interpretation of 1.1.1-7, n36.

[63]For the phrase "It serves" see *Harvard Concordance*, e.g., *Cym.* 3.2.14 and 3.5.128, *2H4* 2.2.35, *H5* 4.8.69, *2H6* 2.1.102 and 3.1.119, *Cor.* 1.1.91, and *JC* 1.3.109 and 223.

[64]Cf. Donne, *Sermons* 6: 154.129-35, and *passim*.

[65]Cf. the play on the words "Worde" and "worldes" in the introductory note of the Geneva Bible.

[66]The Authorized King James Version has "ghost" instead of "spirit" and "cheer" instead of "comfort."

[67]The version "It is done" is preferred by Lancelot Andrewes, see *Sermons* 2: 113, and cf. also 1: 26.

[68]Cf. Deut. 3:26 in the Geneva Bible, "Let it suffice thee," and "sufficit tibi" in the Vulgate. Cf. also the two versions of John 14:8. Shakespeare nearly always uses the "it" in this formula, which testifies to the sympathetic correspondence of English to Latin. English s*uffice it* literally imitates Latin *sufficit*.

[69]Eliah said so just before the Angel came to feed him, 1 Kings 19:4.

[70]In verse 10 it is Satan who speaks the words "For it is written," actually *quoting scripture* (cf. *MV* 1.3.93).

[71]Nature speaks the language of man. One thinks of Ovid's metamorphosis of Hyacinthus, 10.215: "et AI AI / flos habet inscriptum."

[72]For a grammatical analysis of the phrase see Hope 13-15.

[73]In English translations of such neo-platonic philosophers as Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Johannes Scotus Eriugena, the Godhead (which was to unfold itself into the Trinity and create the world) is uniformly called *It*, which gives the reader the impression that *It* is one of the *Divine Names*, and an essential one at that.

[74]See also 5.3.96 and 97. Paulina not only quotes the initial formula of 1 Cor. 4:2 but relies on Paul's preaching in 1 Cor. 4 throughout.

[75]Cf. also 4.1.66-67. Apart from this grammatical denotation *article* in Shakespeare is always used in a legal sense.

[76]Even if taken in its merely relative meaning, Audrey's "it" is not trivial since it refers to poetry, and Touchstone will answer the question *en philosophe*; he will tell us in the Plutarchan manner that the truest poetry is the most feigning. Whoever wants to think is given much food for thinking by Audrey's seeming naiveté. See Plutarch, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 15c-d.

[77]This follows so closely on Hymen's "If truth holds true contents" (5.4.128) that, to the more thoughtful members of the audience, it sounds far from trivial.

[78]Cooper's English equivalent of Latin *coniunctio* is "A ioyning togither."

[79]"[D]ie kindlich feierliche Esoterik der *Zauberflöte*" ("the childlike, solemn esotericism of *The Magic Flute*"; *Doktor Faustus* IX.108; my translation).

[80]The title of Florio's Italian-English Dictionary.

[81]I borrow the word "signality" from Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*, I.133-36.

[82]See above, n8.

[83]Emily Dickinson, poem no. 1126, "Shall I take thee, the Poet said / To the propounded word?"

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The Two Bertie Woosters:
A Response to Lawrence Dugan[*]

WILLIAM VESTERMAN

In a lively and jargon-free analysis of well-chosen examples Lawrence Dugan pursues his study of P. G. Wodehouse in "Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque." Bringing in a definition from Jorge Luis Borges, Dugan summarizes his subject: Bertie Wooster's style is "baroque," and the baroque is "that style which deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) all its possibilities and which borders on its own parody" (Borges 11). Dugan announces his critical purpose in the first paragraph: "to look closely at the style in which [Wodehouse] wrote his Jeeves and Wooster novels, which began in the 1920s" (228). Part of Dugan's critical method involves effectively comparing and contrasting passages from the novels that feature Bertie and his immortal valet with passages from other works by Wodehouse that display a very different narrative style.

In Dugan's second paragraph, the manner he says Wodehouse creates for Bertie is more narrowly defined as "a new first-person voice that constitutes the style of the novels." At this point, the object of Dugan's critical attention changes from the writing style of *P. G. Wodehouse* in the Jeeves books to the writing style of *Bertie Wooster*, their fictive author. I don't think that this is only a quibble. For one thing, surely the creativity that *Wodehouse* displays in the Jeeves novels includes the invention of other styles than Bertie's baroque—that of Jeeves himself, for example, who always speaks (as Dugan says

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Richard Usborne says) in "copperplate *Times* Augustan." Or what about Anatole the cook with his Frenglish, or Aunt Agatha enraged, or a drunken Gussie Fink-Nottle, or Madeline Bassett who soberly speaks of the stars as "God's daisy chain" in book after book. P. G. Wodehouse constitutes the style of the novels in the series in many different, unforgettable "voices."

What is more, the style or voice of Bertie the *narrator* of the books differs hugely from the style or voice of Bertie the *character* who lives through the magnificent misadventures. In each of them, of course, Jeeves saves Bertie the character from self-created disaster. And each time Bertie seems to have learned his lesson, speaking as a narrator of his past like one ruefully the wiser on issues such as the danger of ever visiting places like Totleigh Towers and Steeple Bumpleigh at all. His language is eloquent and witty and "baroque" on what has happened in the recent past, but *while* it is happening he is often reduced either to muttering things like "Er, ah" or to embarrassed silences, or to lapses of his steel-trap memory:

> "It reminded me of one of those lines in the poem—'See how the little how-does-it-go-tum tumty tiddly push.' Perhaps you remember the passage?"
> "'Alas, regardless of their fate, the little victims play,' sir."
> "Quite. Sad, Jeeves."
> "Yes, sir." (*Joy in the Morning* 1)

Here as a narrator he clearly remembers what he forgot down to the last nonsense syllable. But as a character he is always at a loss for the exact words of the right quotation, words which Jeeves must supply.

And even after telling us as a narrator what he has learned, Bertie as a character in succeeding novels keeps going back to the same places, where he invariably gets into the same soup—getting engaged to the same women over and over again, for example. As a narrator he always knows better; as a character he is completely ineducable, learning nothing at all from the life story he tells so well and seems at the moment of narration to remember and to understand so fully.

At one point, Dugan begins to discuss the contradiction within Bertie's dual identity, but is so charmed by Bertie the narrator's virtues that he cannot admit that Bertie the character's dramatized defects really matter:

> Given the plot I have outlined above [*The Code of the Woosters*], a character emerges whom Bertie himself would have to label "a chump" (*Carry On, Jeeves* 29). Yet he is anything but that because of his remarkable talk, the voice that tells the stories. The creation of that voice makes him farcically plausible. (235)

But doesn't farce seem farcical partly because it is implausible?

And who is the "him" here? I think that Wodehouse takes advantage of our ontological training by literary history to energize his comedy. We have been conditioned by custom to understand that a first-person narrator and the person narrated are the same being, as of course they would be in real life. But to fit Bertie's contradictory fictive identities into the same "person" requires a grace beyond the reach of any art but that of Wodehouse.

One result of the paradox in Bertie's style and his endless cycle of personal fall and redemption by Jeeves is a sense of timeless eternity, a Swedenborgian heaven in which nothing is finally really harmful—not drunkenness, not physical violence, not strained relations between the sexes, nor any of the other ills that flesh is heir to. Also, as in Swedenborg, everyone gets a *personalized* happiness in fully satisfactory terms—a Sinbad the Sailor costume, for example, complete with ginger whiskers brings Bertie bliss. In the Jeeves books as in Swedenborg's eternity everyone gets what he or she deserves unlike the fates manifested us here below. God loves the ineducable, but even the high and the mighty of this world are not excluded from Swedenborg's timeless heaven, just as they find a natural place in Bertie's world. The whole amazing story of this analogy may be found in Swedenborg's *De Coelo et Inferno* (1758). Swedenborg was Henry James, Sr.'s hero and Emerson's choice to exemplify "The Mystic" in

his *Representative Men* (1850), which shows at least the appeal of his visions to a wide range of writers.

It is as if Jeeves were the Jesus of the heavenly world of Wodehouse's books, someone who loves, protects, and rewards Bertie without his needing to deserve the grace of His eternal paradise. Jeeves is Jesus—say it out loud three times fast and you'll know it's true too: The secret lurking in the sound of a name is part of P. G. Wodehouse's art. Another example is found in Bertie's name minus the lisp: "Birdie Rooster," perfect for the cocky character so ridiculous in his preening self-confidence but so admirable in his always being game for anything and willing to take his lumps without rancor. I hope my analogy and my analysis as a whole may be seen as they are intended—to confirm and broaden rather than to refute Dugan's characterization of Bertie's style as "baroque." By combining a voice of witty eloquence with the mutterings of a chump Wodehouse creates a character who resembles humanity as a whole, an entity "which exhausts (or tries to exhaust) all its possibilities and which borders on its own parody."

Rutgers University
New Jersey

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Poetics and Politics in Robert Lowell's "The March 1" and "The March 2"[*]

FRANK J. KEARFUL

Typographical ellipsis, diverse forms of repetition, an array of rhetorical devices, sonnet configuration, and prosodic maneuvers are salient features of Lowell's poetics that deserve close attention in any consideration of the political workings of "The March 1" and "The March 2." So does Lowell's self-representation, which he spoke of in a 1969 interview, casually linking himself with Horace. He was the most classically oriented American poet of his generation, and Horace will help in my discussion of the truthfulness, biographical or otherwise, of his rhetorical poetics.[1] Lowell was also the most historically minded, and his quatorzains call for the sort of historical contextualization that I provide. To highlight his rhetorical strategies I will draw on the classical rhetorical terminology that he was conversant with. In a 1971 interview, he linked his rhetorical practice with his adoption of sonnet form in *Notebook* (1970), which comprises over three hundred quatorzains, among them "The March 1" and "The March 2." He declares that "unrhymed loose blank-verse sonnets […] allowed me rhetoric, formal construction, and quick breaks. […] It was a stanza, as so much of my work—a unit blocked out a priori, then coaxed into form" (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 270-71). The formal construction that Lowell coaxed his quatorzains into is, I will argue, a variant of Petrarchan sonnet form, sans rhyme scheme but with a rhetorical turn or "quick break" at line 9. Poetics and politics converge crucially toward the close of "The March 2," when verbal repetition, apostrophe, and

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[*]For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debkearful0221.htm>.

typographical ellipsis invite the reader to construe out of textual indeterminateness an emblematic tableau.

"The March 1" and "The March 2" appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on November 23, 1967, barely a month after the March on the Pentagon on October 21.[2] The biggest pre-march rally that day was held at the Lincoln Memorial, where protesters lined the Reflecting Pool several rows deep, and listened, listened, listened to speeches against the war in Vietnam. Four years earlier, on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King had delivered his "I have a dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the end of another mass march, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. But on October 21, 1967 the March, this time not on Washington but the Pentagon, across the Potomac in Virginia, had not yet begun as the "amplified" speeches droned on. It was time to get going:

> The March 1
> (For Dwight Macdonald)
>
> Under the too white marmoreal Lincoln Memorial,
> the too tall marmoreal Washington Obelisk,
> gazing into the too long reflecting pool,
> the reddish trees, the withering autumn sky,
> the remorseless, amplified harangues for peace—
> lovely to lock arms, to march absurdly locked
> (unlocking to keep my wet glasses from slipping)
> to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers,
> then to step off like green Union Army recruits
> for the first Bull Run, sped by photographers,
> the notables, the girls … fear, glory, chaos, rout…
> our green army staggered out on the miles-long green fields,
> met by the other army, the Martian, the ape, the hero,
> his newfangled rifle, his green new steel helmet.

Scenic presentation demarcates a notional octave, as visual panning ranges from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument, to the Reflecting Pool, then upward to the withering sky, then downward to the surrounding trees. The focus then shifts to a row of front-line notables, then to one of them, the poet himself, and finally to his

close-up view of his own hand: "to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers." The grand panorama with which the octave began contracts at the end to a single match.

Lowell begins his octave with the weighty spatial marker "Under." Nothing moves and everything is too something—"too white, too tall, too long." The "too long" of line 3 is not temporal, but "Gazing into the too long reflecting pool"—the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool is in fact 2,029 feet long—almost suggests that the pool has been reflecting too long.[3] It is not the only thing, though, that is too long. Lowell's "too long" renditions of the iambic pentameter of English-language sonnets begin with a fifteen-syllable line, long enough for one and a half pentameters: "Under the too white marmoreal Lincoln Memorial." The virtual repetition "marmoreal […] Memorial" itself claims eight syllables.[4] Line 2 makes do with thirteen syllables, but not without a reiteration of "marmoreal" and another "too": "the too tall marmoreal." Then, in line 3, "too" itself aurally multiplies, "into the too." "The remorseless, amplified harangues for peace" are a form of "tooness" for which the rally organizers and relentless speechmakers are responsible.[5] I take "amplified" not only as a reference to turned-up loudspeakers, but as a characterization of the "amplified" speeches themselves, in the rhetorical sense of "amplificatio," that grab bag of rhetorical devices used to expand upon a simple statement. It is as if the long dash that terminates line 5 had to be called in to impose a halt not only to the "amplified harangues for peace" but to a profusion of loosely connected phrases lacking a grammatical subject and finite verb.

After the long dash comes a fresh syntactic start, with "lovely" the launching pad for a series of infinitive phrases: "to lock arms," "to march absurdly locked," "to keep my glasses from slipping," "to see the cigarette match." How "lovely" it all is, after all the grandiose, remorseless, lethargic "tooness" of lines 1-5. Something is finally happening, or at any rate beginning to happen. How lovely. How absurdly. Lowell's arch, amused detachment turns to comic self-portrayal, when repetition in the form of polyptoton—*lock, locked,*

unlocking—and a flutter of sonic repetitions register his fluster: "(un-loc*king* to keep my wet glasses from slip*ping*) / to see the cigarette match qua*king* in my *fing*ers." Thus our hero caught up in the quasi-military preparations for battle as media event that he is slated to play a prominent role in. No media, no march.[6] Before the march really gets underway he must first unlock arms in order to push his glasses back on his nose, while somehow or other striking a match and light-ing a cigarette. This fumbling is the stuff of silent screen comedy, as Lowell "films" himself as a kind of Charlie Chaplin. That the match he holds in his fingers is "quaking" suggests anxiety that the march may turn into a real battle. So does the need for a last cigarette. As for his glasses being wet, it was presumably a hot and humid Washington afternoon under a "withering autumn sky," and perhaps he has been sweating, but anxiety may play a role.

Lines 1-8 were less about the march than the protracted rally that preceded it. "Then to step off," a new infinitive at the outset of line 9, marks a shift from waiting to marching, from anticipation to action, from end-stopped lines to enjambment.[7] Not all those who were at the Lincoln Memorial rally joined the march, and the roughly 54,000 who did first had to cross the Potomac over the Arlington Memorial Bridge, which took two hours.[8] Only then could they commence their march into Virginia and the "miles-long green fields" of Lowell's sestet, there to be met by "the other army." Formally, "then to step off" at line 9 is a stepping off into a sestet, releasing rhythmical energy that presses on into line 10: "Then to step off like green Union Army recruits / for the first Bull Run." The historical analogy evokes anoth-er march a century earlier, on another twenty-first, when on July 21, 1861, 35,000 green Union Army recruits, having marched from Wash-ington into Virginia, engaged in the first major land battle of the Civil War, the First Battle of Bull Run. The Union commander, General Irvin McDowell, worried about the inexperience of his troops, had been assured by President Lincoln: "You are green, it is true, but they are green also; you are all green alike." In his history of the battle, David Detzer comments: "The line was classic Lincoln: pithy, home-

spun, seemingly incontrovertible. Unfortunately, it was also banal nonsense, and fatal for many soldiers. He was making a *military* judgment about the comparative quality of troops and of their officers, a subject about which he himself was far too 'green'" (67-68). The battle turned into a rout, and panicked Union troops ran back toward Washington. In *Specimen Days* Walt Whitman records that expectations of a "triumphant return" were blasted by the "terrible shock" of the North's defeat, and that Union soldiers "exploded in a panic and fled the field." After "a terrible march of twenty miles" they poured into Washington "baffled, humiliated, and panic-struck" (707-08). Stepping off, Lowell's "Green Union Army recruits" are blissfully unconcerned with the fate of their antecedents at the first Battle of Bull Run, which endues Lowell's historical analogy with dramatic irony.[9]

The "newfangled rifle" in line 14 adds a curious historical touch. The Civil War, so it has been argued, might have come to a rapid end if Gen. James Ripley, the Union Army's Ordnance chief, had not opposed Abraham Lincoln's December 1861 directive for purchase of 10,000 Spencer repeating rifles. Ripley was hostile to all breechloaders, which he called "newfangled gimcracks" (see Leigh 2). The latter-day "Confederate" forces, as toted up by Mailer, consisted of "1,500 Metropolitan Police, 2,500 Washington, D.C., National Guardsmen, about 200 U.S. Marshals, and unspecified numbers of Government Security Guards, and Park, White House, and Capitol Police. There were also 6,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division flown in from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the same 82nd Airborne which once parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and was now fresh from Santo Domingo and the Detroit riots. MP units had been flown in from California and Texas, the U.S. Marshals had been brought from just about everywhere—Florida, New York, Arizona, Texas, to name a few states—it was to be virtually a convention for them. In addition, 20,000 troops stationed nearby were on alert" (245).

When the green troops "step off" into the sestet, things begin to move quickly. The march as media spectacle is now truly in progress, featuring the usual suspects—the front-line notables; the squads of

photographers rushing to keep up, in fact to get ahead of the marchers to photograph them head on, while the marchers, "sped by" the photographers, struggle to get close to the photographers; nameless girls are also hurrying forward, photogenic bit-players eager to be part of it all. Lowell uses typographical ellipsis to fashion a two-phase asyndeton: "photographers, / the notables, the girls … fear, glory, chaos, rout … [.]"[10] The first phase is like a series—click, click, click—of photos taken. After the second typographical ellipsis, it is as if the ongoing pellmell action had been halted, or temporarily frozen in time. The poet, no longer marching, assumes the voice of an omniscient historian who already knows the outcome of what is still, for its participants, an impending battle. The classic military instance of asyndeton is Caesar's *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*, which makes Caesar his own historian. The staccato pace of the three echoic verbs, lacking any personal affect, conveys a sense of inevitability of what will happen— and happen quickly—whenever Caesar "comes." Those barbarians don't stand a chance. Lowell's asyndeton does not form an "inevitable" sequence proclaimed by a conquering hero. It proffers instead a detached historical perspective on a battle that is so to speak "over" before it has started, which lends Lowell's asyndeton a certain inevitability, too. The poet now speaking as a sententious historian observes how passions of those involved in battle swing from one emotional pole to another, until chaos finally turns into rout.[11] A particular instance confirms a general truth of what goes on in warfare, while the earlier analogy to the First Battle of Bull Run augments a sense of inevitability, of history repeating itself.

The three additional dots that follow "rout" shore up the status of the asyndeton as an independent speech act, while bringing the verse line silently to an end. Lowell's vestigial sestet instigates no rhyme scheme, but "chaos, rout" (end of line 11) and "our green army staggered out" (beginning of line 12) provide a sonic bridge between its two halves, in Petrarchan terms the two tercets rhyming *cdecde* or some variation thereof that make up the sestet. There is also a contrastive link between "then to step off like green Union Army recruits"

(line 9) and what would be the initial line of the second tercet, "our green army staggered out on the miles-long green fields." The confident pace of "then to step off" that initiated the volta has diminished to "staggered" under the rigors of the hours-long march from the Lincoln Memorial, finally out onto the miles-long green fields of Virginia. In my reading, eight of the thirteen syllables in line 12 are heavily stressed: "our *green ar*my *stag*gered *out* on the *miles-long green fields.*" The staggering verse resolutely makes its way toward completion of the sonnet's first grammatical clause: noun phrase ("our green army"), verb phrase ("staggered out") drawn-out prepositional phrase ("on the miles-long green fields"). But the clause is not over, the sentence is not finished.

That by the end of line 9 a "rout" occurs before a battle has begun, indeed even before one army has been "met" by the other army, makes lines 9-10 in rhetorical terms a hysteron proteron, a reversal of temporal order, the classic military instance being Virgil's "moriamur et in media arma ruamus" (*Aeneid* II.353), "Let us die and rush into the midst of arms" (Virgil 318-19). Lowell's marchers do not die and rush into the midst of arms, nor are they any longer "sped by" photographers, but are "met by the other army, the Martian, the ape, the hero / his new-fangled rifle, his green new steel helmet"(ll. 13-14).[12] It is as if an evolutionary process takes place in a series of epithets, from Martian to ape to hero. Then we are told what he has in his hands, then of what he has on his head, as if to fulfill the arming of the hero topos.[13] Adding prosodic weightiness to the topos, the unorthodox adjectival word order "green new" foregrounds "green" and forces four consecutive stresses upon us: *green new steel hel.* A grim play on "helmet" as "hell met" may be heard, while "hero" and "helmet" as end-words form an alliterative pair. The entire sequence began with "met" and ends only when it runs into "helmet," with *met-met* homoioteleuton providing a sonic frame. Within the larger frame of the sestet, the passive participial construction "met by" brings to a halt the mounting action that began with "to step off." The addition of a rhyme scheme might even detract from the rhetorical dynamics of

Lowell's employment of Petrarchan sonnet form. The reader must "discover" the operations of the form, which emerges all the more powerfully without the trappings of rhyme.

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A reader who descries a Petrarchan ghost behind the arras in "The March 1" will readily discern the octave-sestet rhetorical structure of "The March 2." More crucially, the reader will be called upon at the end to identify whose "kind hands" helped the poet stagger to his feet:

> The March 2
>
> Where two or three were heaped together, or fifty,
> mostly white-haired, or bald, or women … sadly
> unfit to follow their dream, I sat in the sunset
> shade of their Bastille, the Pentagon,
> nursing leg- and arch-cramps, my cowardly,
> foolhardy heart; and heard, alas, more speeches,
> though the words took heart now to show how weak
> we were, and right. An MP sergeant kept
> repeating, "March slowly through them. Don't even brush
> anyone sitting down." They tiptoed through us
> in single file, and then their second wave
> trampled us flat and back. Health to those who held,
> health to the green steel head … to your kind hands
> that helped me stagger to my feet, and flee.

Lowell again begins his quatorzain with a spatial marker, "Where," which along with "heaped" recalls "Under" at the outset of "The March 1." Typographical ellipsis again occurs twice, motifs are repeated, and repetition becomes literal at the volta in line 9, "repeating, 'March slowly through them,'" which heralds another march. The title "The March 2" acquires a double meaning at this point, as the second quatorzain on the March on the Pentagon and as a second march, which itself will feature a "second wave."

"The March 1" was a syntactic patchwork loosely organized as one sentence, and early in "The March 2" typographical ellipsis forestalls completion of a complex sentence. Only in line 8 does a sentence, held up by a semi-colon, reach a definitive end. In the sestet a series of syntactically distinct sentences progresses steadily via enjambment: the only end-stopped line is the last. From the beginning, however, Lowell's loose blank verse lines are more regular than what one was used to in "The March 1." Seven lines (4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14) are decasyllabic and either quite regular iambic pentameter or else vary from the norm only minimally. Five lines (1, 2, 6, 11, 10, 12) are hendecasyllabic, and four of them can be read as "orthodox" feminine-ending iambic pentameter. This switch to virtually regular blank verse—no blank verse is ever entirely regular—and build-up of enjambment in the sestet foster a more personal speaking mode, in which "I," "my," "we," "us," "us," and finally "your" and "me" predominate.

The typographical ellipsis in line 2 leaves unspoken the rest of Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Now as many as fifty are "heaped together," but no photographers, or notables, or girls are in evidence—only a tried and true remnant, mostly white-haired, or bald, or women (no longer girls, with all the condescension that term implies). Their being "heaped together" brings to the mind's eye an image of corpses, such in Alexander Gardner's famous photographs of heaped corpses at the Battle of Gettysburg, or as in Stephen Crane's depiction of "heaped-up corpses" in *The Red Badge of Courage* (82).[14]

As for Lowell himself, the faintly risible pairing "I *sat* in the sun*set*" does not add to his heroic stature. That there was a sit-down demonstration at the West Wall of the Pentagon, and that Lowell was not the only one who "sat in the sunset," he omits from his unheroic self-representation.[15] One is led to think that he has dropped out of the march and has become a detached bystander, or rather "bysitter." Line 9 forces us to correct that assumption, when the sergeant orders "March slowly through them. Don't even brush anyone sitting down." There were those who had sought to levitate the Pentagon by

chanting (see Freeman), while others dreamed of occupying it, which lends Lowell's "sadly / unfit to follow their dream" a soberly ironic note. His remark acquires a more complex tonality for readers who, like myself, hear in "sadly unfit to follow their dream" an echo of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial at the end of a March on Washington four years earlier. King voiced presentiments of an assassination, and he in truth became "sadly unfit" to "follow" his dream into the promised land. One should not press analogies too far, and I am not trying to make Lowell into a Martin Luther King, nor "our Bastille" into the promised land, but I cannot get out of my head a tonally complicating association with another march, another "naive" protest, another "dream."

In Lowell's octave the "weakness" of the protesters is audibly conveyed in weak rhymes, i.e., end rhymes on unstressed terminal syllables: "fif*ty*," "sad*ly*," "coward*ly*." Their weak rhyme and falling rhythm, carried on by "Most*ly*" at the head of line 2, is joined by alliterative, weak-ending "Sun*set*," "speech*es*." All but the stolid "Pentagon" are weak. Weak rhyme carries on disyllabically into line 6 in the oxymoron "co*wardly*, / fool*hardy*," culminating sonically in "heart"—"my cow*ardly*, / fool*hard*y *heart*." After a semicolon, line 6 resumes with "heard," which further clogs the *heart* with sonic repetition: "cow*ard*ly, / fool*hard*y *heart*; and *heard*." The line trails off on a stoically ironic note, and ends in falling rhythm, "alas, more speeches."[16] But we are not done with "heart." Unexpectedly, in line 7 "words took heart," and with the strong stress on monosyllabic "weak" at the end of line, the weak become strong.

If "weak" is a theme of "The March 2," so is "health." When Lowell employs typographical ellipsis in line 13, he invites the reader to voice a third "health": "Health to those who held, / health to the green steel head … to your kind hands / that helped me stagger to my feet, and flee." The rhetorical formula of a toast is unsurprising as a commendation of those who withstood a "second wave," when a tide of assonance "tr*a*mpled us fl*a*t and b*a*ck," wrenching the indolent idiomatic phrase "to lie flat on one's back." What does come as a surprise is the

second "health to"—"health to the green steel head." "Greén steél heád" gets three heavy stresses, hardened by "*green* st*eel*" assonance. Against the "green steel head," the "green Union army recruits" of "The March 1" stood no chance. The "health to" rhetorical formula extends nonetheless to all who played their assigned roles in the engagement.[17] Whichever side they were on, they were "green," essentially innocent, like their "green" forerunners at the First Battle of Bull Run.

In "The March 1" Lowell's jittery hands had a lot to do, pushing his glasses back to keep them from slipping and holding a match in one hand and lighting a cigarette in another. In "The March 2" one of his hands still has something metaphorically to do insofar as the "health to" toast formula evokes the gesture of someone raising a glass in his hand.[18] After the poet voices his "health to" formula twice, typographical ellipsis enacts a rhetorical pause, followed by a change to a more intimate tone of voice and to second-person "your," when "green steel head" becomes "your kind hands." The consonance sequestered in "ki*nd* ha*nd*s" unites with the alliterative triad *h*ealth, *h*ands, *h*elped, while *health/helped* counters the *hel*met of "The March 1." This sonic chorus culminates in "hands / […] helped," bringing to mind the idiom "to lend a helping hand." But whose "kind hands" helped? After the typographical ellipsis, the poet conjures up, in an apostrophe, an I-Thou relationship with a nameless other. In my reading, the dehumanized "green steel head" becomes a human person whose "kind hands" helped the poet "stagger to my feet, and flee."

The sonnet began with a reference to Matthew 18:20 and concludes with an analogue of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), in which a purported "enemy" comes to the aid of one who has fallen. Hands play a vital role in the parable, as they do in several biblical passages in which Christ's "kind hands" heal through touch. G. B. Caird explains the significance of touch in the Good Samaritan parable: "It is essential to the point of the story that the traveler was left half dead. The priest and the Levite could not tell without touching him whether he was dead or alive; and it weighed more with

them that he might be dead and defiling to the touch of those whose business was with holy things than that he might be alive and in need of care" (148). It took a semi-pagan foreigner to extend kind hands to the victim, helping him to rise.[19]

Tropes of falling, rising, standing, often associated with hands, recur throughout Lowell's poetry, beginning with the title-page vignette in *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), which depicts a different biblical episode. Abel has just fallen in a field after having been struck by Cain, whose left hand, with which he presumably assaulted his brother, is still clenched as he turns to steal away from the scene of the crime.[20] "The March 2" converts this primal scene of human violence into a healing fiction of reconciliation and amity. The battle is long over, and strangers have again become strangers, except in a rhetorically conjured up tableau in which two are gathered together, as if in fulfillment of the suspended allusion to Matthew 18:20.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Is all this too good to be true? Unfortunately, there is no evidence that on October 21, 1967 Robert Lowell was helped to his feet by a "Martian" who morphed into a Good Samaritan. And what about Lowell's "staggered to my feet," did he really stagger to his feet, and flee? Or could it be that Lowell wanted his own exit line to recall the marchers' entry, when they, and presumably he, "staggered out" on to Virginia's miles-long green fields? The myriad repetitions implanted in the sonnets suggest the madeness, the rhetoricity, the artful contrivance of the sonnets, not their extra-literary facticity. They have an end in view, and Lowell bends all his rhetorical skills to achieve it.

What certainly is true is that Lowell laid claim to the poet's privilege to tinker with facts, especially when apparently writing autobiographically. What should we make, then, of Lowell's putative confessionalism, at least with respect to "The March 1" and "The March 2"? Is he confessing at the end to having ignominiously fled a scene of battle as soon as he had a chance, leaving his stalwart comrades behind?[21] Was he a traitor to the cause?

Ever after the publication of *Life Studies* in 1959 Lowell was doomed to walk the earth as a "confessional poet," although he resisted this fate as best he could. In a 1961 *Paris Review* interview with Frederick Seidel titled "The Art of Poetry: Robert Lowell," he explained that in writing his poems he fabricated "the *real* Robert Lowell":

> They're not always factually true. There's a good deal of tinkering with fact. You leave out a lot, and emphasize this and not that. Your actual experience is a complete flux. I've invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented. So there's a lot of artistry, I hope, in the poems. Yet there's this thing: if a poem is autobiographical— and this is true of any kind of autobiographical writing and of historical writing you want the reader to say, this is true. In something like Macaulay's *History of England*, you think you're really getting William III. That's as good as a good plot in a novel. And so there was always that standard of truth which you wouldn't ordinarily have in poetry—the reader was to believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell. (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 246-47)

As for the "standard of truth" that applied to Mailer's account of the March on the Pentagon, Lowell told Ian Hamilton in a 1971 interview: "In everything I saw and could test, I felt he was as accurate as memory should be. His story is actually, not literally, true. Accuracy isn't measuring faces through the eye of a needle" (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 283). There is a nice ambiguity in "should be"; "actually, not literally, true" propounds a jaunty paradox; and an askew biblical allusion links a camel with the earnest literal truth-teller.[22]

Mailer's version of the *real* Robert Lowell may or may not be "truer" than his own, but it pleased Lowell.[23] In a 1969 interview with V. S. Naipaul he duly praises Mailer, but goes on to link himself with Horace, another battlefield poet who fled:

> His description of me is one of the best things ever written about me, and most generous—what my poetry is like and that sort of thing. He records a little speech I made about draft dodgers and I felt he was very good on that. I am trying to think whether my reaction to the march differed from his. I don't think mine was at all his, but it's not opposed to his either. It was mainly the fragility of a person caught in this situation … as in that poem of Horace's where you throw away your little sword at the battle of Philippi

and get out of the thing. But I believe in heroic action, too. (Lowell, "Et in Arcadia Ego" 144; typographical ellipsis Lowell's)

No one has followed up Lowell's casual linkage of himself with Horace, but it may be worth doing here so here. Lowell is alluding to lines 9-14 of Horace's *Odes* II.7: "tecum Philippos et celerem fugam / sensi relicta non bene parmula, / cum fracta virtus, et minaces / turpe solum tetigere mento. / sed me per hostis Mercurius celer / denso paventum sustulit aere" ("With you beside me I experienced Philippi and its headlong rout, leaving my little shield behind without much credit, when valour was broken and threatening warriors ignominiously bit the dust. I, however, was swiftly caught up by Mercury in a thick cloud"; Loeb text and translation 108-11). Both Horace and Lowell, writing autobiographically and "confessionally" of purported battlefield cowardice, tinker with the facts. Horace's "relicta non bene parmula" is, Daniel H. Garrison points out in his edition of the odes, "literary rather than autobiographical. Though we must assume that Horace fled this rout with the rest of his comrades-in-arms, he wraps himself in the poetic mantle of Archilocus, Alcaeus, and Anacreon, all of whom admitted in verse to throwing away their shields ingloriously (*non bene*) on the field of battle […]. As a *tribunus militum*, Horace would not actually have carried a shield. Moreover, the small round *parmula* was at this time obsolete" (269). Garrison reveals that Horace tells an even greater fib when he records that he was whisked away on a cloud by Mercury: "in epic, defeated heroes are wrapped in mist and spirited off to safety by their tutelary god: so Aphrodite rescues Paris in *Iliad* 3.380ff. Though Horace admits to having had a bad fright at the time (*paventum*), he jokingly paints his escape home to Italy in epic colors" (269).[24] Lowell tinkers with Horace's non-facts by converting Horace's non-existent little shield into a little sword, which sounds rather like the fearsome weapon a child might swing in imagined combat. Odds are that Lowell was fully aware of his "mistranslation," since he got *pamula* right in his translation of Horace's *Odes* II.7 that was published, along with his translations of two other Horatian odes and a version of Juvenal's *Tenth Satire*, in *Near the Ocean* in 1967,

the same year as the March on the Pentagon and the two sonnets it prompted. There he translates *parmula* correctly, but cannot resist throwing in an Egyptian to make matters worse ("Like an Egyptian, / I threw away my little shield" 399). Like Horace, Lowell wrote "auto-biographically," and if you will "confessionally," but Horace could depend on his readers to know that he was playfully and self-ironically making use of commonplaces in Greek poetry. Lowell joins the game, picking up where Horace left off. One need not track down all of his classical allusions or identify all the classical rhetorical devices he employs, but Garrison's caveat about taking literary for biographical truth applies equally to Lowell.

Lowell not only alludes to Horace's spurious "little sword" in the interview, he belittles his "little speech" to "draft dodgers." On Friday, October 20, the day before the March on the Pentagon, he had spoken at the end of a march on the Department of Justice, which had its own potential dangers. Young men had come from across America to turn in their draft cards, and to aid, abet, or encourage them was to make oneself an accessory to a crime. Lowell himself had been sentenced to a year and a day as a conscientious objector for refusing to serve in World War II after the firebombing of Hamburg in August 1943 (see Kearful, "The Poet as Conscientious Objector"). The march ended on the steps of the Department of Justice and, according to Mailer, when called on Lowell spoke quietly but eloquently, after which "students began to file up the steps to deposit their solitary or collective draft cards in the bag, and this procession soon became a ceremony. Each man came up, gave his name, and the state or area or college he represented, and then proceeded to name the number of draft cards he had been entrusted to turn in" (Mailer 74).

Thursday night Lowell had spoken to a gathering at the Ambassador Theater, and received a standing ovation after concluding with the last stanza of "Waking Early Sunday Morning": "Pity the planet, all joy gone / from this sweet volcanic cone; / peace to our children when they fall / in small war on the heels of small / war—until the end of time / to police the earth, a ghost / orbiting forever lost / in

our monotonous sublime" (*Collected Poems* 385). Lowell had done more than enough during the weekend of anti-war protest, but he could not avoid being cast as a front-line celebrity in Saturday's March on the Pentagon. Readers of *The Armies of the Night* will see him in a photograph on the cover, glasses in place, cigaretteless, arms linked with those of other notables. His celebrity status had been confirmed by a June 2, 1966 cover story on him in *Time,* titled "Poetry in an Age of Prose," but he had already become an anti-war luminary in June 1965, when he he wrote a letter to President Johnson rejecting an invitation to read at a White House Festival of the Arts. The following morning the letter was printed in a *New York Times* front-page story "Twenty Writers and Artists Endorse Poet's Rebuff of President" (see Hamilton 323). Lowell wrote to J. F. Powers four months later: "You may have heard about my White House business. Nothing I've ever done had such approval, and I've been plagued ever since to sound off on Viet Nam programs till I wish I could go to sleep for a 100 years like Rip van Winkle" (*Letters* 462-63). No such luck.

On October 21, 1967 Lowell had good reason to feel uneasy about what he was letting himself in for, not only given the massive forces ranged against the demonstrators. Diverse groups joined the march, ranging from pacifists to motor cycle gangs:

> An array of federal marshals and military police stood ready to quell them. Several demonstrators goaded the soldiers with the ugliest personal slanders they could think of. Some threw bottles and tomatoes. Others wielded clubs and ax handles. An assault squad breached security lines, hurling themselves, amid a fog of tear gas, against flailing truncheons and rifle butts. When the march ended, one thousand demonstrators had been arrested and dozens injured. The Pentagon remained stolid and undefiled. (Bufithis 85-86)

Is it disreputable that Lowell, by his own testimony, felt "the fragility of a person caught in this situation?" He didn't even have a "little sword." Nor does he sing "We shall overcome" or quote from the Sermon on the Mount, but the allusion to Christ's promise and the analogue of the parable of the Good Samaritan in "The March 2"

acquire a force of their own, and Lowell's communal declaration "how weak / we were, and right" proclaims not so much ineffectualness as unbowed perseverance. It is an affirmation that had to be learned by many "trampled back and flat" while engaged in civil disobedience in the 1950s and 1960s. Weakness can overcome strength, good can overcome evil. But it may take time. Mailer records the immediate political effect of the March on the Pentagon as less than a great triumph: "In six weeks, when an attempt was made in New York to close down the draft induction centers, it seemed that public sentiment had turned sharply against resistance. The Negro riots had made the nation afraid of lawlessness. Lyndon Johnson stood ten points higher in the popularity polls—he had ridden the wave of revulsion in America against demonstrators who spit in the face of U.S. troops—when it came to sensing new waves of public opinion, LBJ was the surfboarder of them all" (286). But on March 31 of the following year, Johnson chose discretion as the better part of valor and declared himself out of the running for the Democratic presidential nomination. American soldiers began withdrawing from Vietnam in 1973, and the last Americans fled on a helicopter from the Embassy roof in 1975.

Horace fled Philippi more expeditiously, thanks to Mercury, in a cloud. Poets can do that. Lowell merely hightails it without divine assistance, on foot. Poets can also do that. And they can do it in order to write a poem. Mailer gives his own version of Lowell's flight, in the literal sense of his flight back to New York. Instead of fleeing in panic, Lowell "eventually went home […] to begin a long poem a few days later" (265). On this account, it was not so much fear that caused him "eventually" to leave after the march and the battle were over as an intent to write. And write he did. "The March 1" and "The March 2" appeared the following month in *The New York Review of Books,* and the "long poem" of which they became a part, *Notebook 1967-68*, was published a year later.[25]

Lowell's asseveration "how weak / we were, and right" repeals the historian's pronouncement "fear, glory, chaos, rout." The "right"

response to "rout" is steadfastness, even as Lowell's prosody and his employment of hyperbaton and epiphrasis make "weak" strong.[26] It is something of a paradox that "words took heart now to show how weak / we were, and right," insofar as words might be expected to cause "us" to take heart. It is as if words had a life of their own, and gathered courage and determination and "heart" (paronomasia with "art") in order to imbue us with fortitude. "The March 1" and "The March 2" are not only themselves highly rhetorical, they incorporate a great deal of speechmaking—the "remorseless, amplified harangues for peace," "more speeches," the sergeant's order to his troops, the poet's declaration "how weak / we were, and right," and finally the most eloquent speech of all, the poet's toast to all those who were involved in the march, whichever side they were on, but especially to the soldier who helped him to his feet. A new "we" is thereby rhetorically constituted that nullifies the us-them division of peacemakers and warriors.

Verbal repetition, apostrophe, and typographical ellipsis have enabled the reader to summon up an emblematic tableau whose motto might be the feminist rallying cry of the period "the personal is political," or better yet "the political is personal." Politically construed, the tableau affirms tropologically a personal politics of reconciliation and unity that undermines designated oppositional roles. The enemy/alien—the Martian—takes the initiative, when an individual soldier becomes a kind of Good Samaritan. The "*real* Robert Lowell" undergoes his own transformation from ironic observer to committed peacemaker during the course of twenty-eight lines, which extend temporally from the pre-March rally on October 21, 1967 to the post-March fictive time of the utterance of the apostrophe. Everything has headed toward the apostrophe that brings closure to Lowell's rhetorically orchestrated double sonnet.[27] The political is not only personal, it is rhetorical, since everything hinges on the individual reader's responsiveness to the closing interpretive option that Lowell's rhetorical poetics offers and that I have advocated.[28]

Universität Bonn

NOTES

[1]Lowell learned to wield classical rhetorical terms such as chiasmus and brachylogia as part of his primary-school instruction in English grammar (see "91 Revere Street," *Collected Poems* 133, his memoir of early childhood incorporated as Part 2 of *Life Studies*). His real grounding in Latin and Greek and in classical rhetoric began at St. Mark's prep school, and at Kenyon College he earned a summa cum laude degree in classics. In 1948 he wrote to George Santayana, "I don't regret my Latin—some of the writers are marvelous. Propertius, Vergil, Horace, Catullus, Tacitus, and some of Juvenal. And it connects us historically through the church. And how can one understand what English words mean without it? And yet to read Homer fluently, what a happiness that would be!" (*Letters* 82). Fluent in Homeric Greek or not, at age eighteen Lowell wrote an essay on *The Iliad* impressive enough for inclusion in his *Collected Prose* 145-51; his translation of Aeschylus's *Promethueus Bound* appeared in 1967. He expertly reviewed A. E. Watts's 1955 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Collected Prose* 152-60), and Ovid was an important presence in his work (see Jerome Mazzaro's *Robert Lowell and Ovid*). Lowell translated a host of poems by Horace, Juvenal and Propertius, and classical allusions pervade his poetry up to his last volume, *Day by Day* (1977), which begins with a long "autobiographical" poem, "Ulysses and Circe." Lowell's problem was not "small Latin and less Greek," but if anything too much at any rate of the former. In 1961 he recalled how he found a simpler style for himself when writing *Life Studies* (1959): "I began to paraphrase my Latin quotations, and to add extra syllables to a line to make it clearer and more collo-quial" (*Collected Prose* 227).

[2]The two quatorzains, given Roman numerals I and II as suffixes, are placed side by side as a kind of poetic diptych. In *Notebook 1967-68* (1969) they are pre-fixed 3 and 4 in a six-sonnet mini-sequence titled "October and November." On the composition of *Notebook 1967-68*, see Alex Calder, who discusses the "October and November" sequence as a "well-unified whole" (128). Marcel Inhoff discusses the thematic integration of the quatorzains within *Notebook 1967-68* as a whole and their embodiments of recurrent motifs in what Lowell conceived of as a book-length poem (see 165-69). In a revised, expanded edition titled *Notebook* (1970), they retain the prefixes 3 and 4 in the same six-sonnet sequence, but also regain their original I and II suffixes. In *History* (1973), no longer part of a numbered sequence, they acquire 1 and 2 as suffixes. I quote the texts of the sonnets in the 2009 reprint edition of *Notebook 1967-68*, which retains the original pagination (27); for convenience I adopt 1 and 2 as suffixes. The three excerpts from other Lowell poems are quoted from his *Collected Poems* (2003), which does not include *Notebook 1967-68*.

[3]Alan Williamson notes that the Reflecting Pool redoubles duplications in lines 1-4: "The atmosphere is made even more unreal by the sense of duplication: Washington Monument paired off with Lincoln Memorial, both redoubled in the reflecting pool—the nearly endless replications another version of centerlessness. The effect is heightened, as a friend who heard the poem without having read it observed, by an auditory pun on *too* and *two.* Doubtless, this imagery is partly

intended to suggest the narcissism of imperial America, screening out all reality that does not mirror its power and glory" (184). Implicit in Williamson's commentary is the myth of Narcissus brought associatively to mind by "the too long reflecting pool." Helen Vendler points out that Lowell evokes two ancient empires that ultimately fell, insofar as "marmoreal" suggests Rome and "obelisk" Egypt (244). In his survey of twentieth-century American poems about Washington, including "The March 1" and "The March 2," Christoph Irmscher comments on Washington's "function in the literary imagination not just as a metonymy for American politics, but as the embodiment of unimaginative, brute political power" (168).

[4]Initial trochaic substitution followed by an iamb ("Únder the tóo") is common in iambic verse, as in the opening of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" ("Sómething there ís" 39). Frost's initial trochaic substitution is followed by regular iambics ("Something there is that doés'nt lóve a wáll"), making the decasyllabic line a variant of iambic pentameter so frequent that it hardly amounts to a metrical "irregularity." Lowell's line doesn't continue on regularly as Frost's does, but a determined metrist might identify five primary stresses ("*Un*der the *too* white mar*mo*real *Linc*oln Me*mo*rial") accompanied by a motley assortment of unstressed, or lesser stressed, syllables. The line might thereby pass muster as loose blank verse. What rhythmically comes to pass, however, as we thus read the line aloud is not so much "irregular" iambic pentameter with an abundance of supernumerary syllables, as a dactylic pentameter that perfectly correlates with the line's syllable count. The line stops dead in its tracks, though, as if exhausted, unable to deliver another dactyl to sustain the propulsion of classical epic hexameter.

[5]Mailer writes: "In the apathy which had begun to lie over the crowd as the speeches went on and on (and the huge army gathered by music, now was ground down by words, and the hollow absurd imprecatory thunder of the loudspeakers with their reductive echo—you must FIGHT … *fight* … fight … ite …, in the soul-killing repetition of political jargon which reminded people that the day was well past one o'clock and they still had not started)" (102).

[6]Mailer records: "[T]he order to form the ranks was passed around the roped enclosure, and Lowell, Macdonald, and Mailer were requested to get up in the front row, where the notables were to lead the March, a row obviously to be consecrated for the mass media. Newsreel, still, and television cameras were clicking and rounding and snapping and zooming before the first rank was even formed" (105).

[7]The presence of an adversative conjunction to mark a turn or volta at line 9 is not decisive for a sonnet to be "Petrarchan." By my count, only about 5% of Petrarch's own sonnets in his *Rime sparse* employ *ma* ("but") or another adversative at line 9. Shakespeare sometimes embedded a Petrarchan rhetorical structure in his sonnets and employed an adversative conjunction at line 9 to signal a turn, outdoing Petrarch at his own game: "But" (Sonnets 62, 93, 151, 153), "Yet" (Sonnet 74), "Not" (Sonnet 102), and "Ah, yet" (Sonnet 104). A "but" or "yet" may also introduce a reversal couplet ending, as in Sonnet 130 ("And yet, by heaven, I

think my love as rare"). Lowell follows Shakespeare's alternative use of "then" at line 9 to mark a Petrarchan-like rhetorical turn: see Sonnets 5, 9, 15, 30, 37, 51, and 76. English poets from Wyatt to Donne systematically use a rhyming couplet to terminate what had started out as a Petrarchan sonnet rhyming *abbaabba*. The couplet ending entailed converting the sestet into quatrain plus couplet, as in a Shakespearean sonnet. One cannot rigidly segregate Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet form in the sonnet's golden age, but an octave/sestet rhetorical structure remains the defining characteristic of Petrarchan sonnet form, however flexible the rhyme scheme, or in Lowell's case, however lacking in rhyme. On Lowell's use of Petrarchan octave-sestet structure in his loose blank verse sonnets, see Robert von Halberg's chapter on Lowell's *History* in *American Poetry and Culture 1945-1980* (148-74).

[8]In *The Armies of the Night* Norman Mailer reckons that 75,000 to 90,000 people were at the Lincoln Memorial. He follows the *The New York Times* estimate that 54,000 of them crossed the bridge (245), which connects the Lincoln Memorial on one side of the Potomac and Arlington House, a former residence of the family of General Robert E. Lee, on the other. The "Arts of War" sculptures "Valor" and "Sacrifice" preside over the southeastern entrance to the bridge. Arlington Memorial Cemetery, with its acres upon acres of military dead from the Civil War to Vietnam, was passed on their right as the marchers made their way toward the Pentagon. Lowell plays a leading role in Mailer's New Journalism classic published in spring 1968, roughly half a year after the *New York Review of Books* printed "The March 1" and "The March 2." For another marcher's account of the March, with photos and other marchers' recollections appended, see Freeman.

[9]For a contemporary account of the euphoric reaction to the victory when news reached Richmond, the Confederate capital, see Mary Chestnut's diary entry for July 24, 1861 (Simpson, Sears, and Aaron 506-21). Diederik Oostdijk suspects that Lowell had Herman Melville's "The March into Virginia" in mind when he wrote "The March 1" (217). Helen Vendler compares the two poems (cf. 241-45).

[10]Some would restrict "asyndeton" to the omission of conjunctions between clauses. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (4th ed.) defines "asyndeton" more broadly as "[t]he omission of conjunctions between phrases or clauses." It notes: "Omission of conjunctions between words is technically brachylogia—fundamental to all forms of series and *catalogs—but many writers now use a. as the cover term for all types of conjunction deletion" (97). I am among them, but would not spoil the fun of those who insist on *brachylogia* for such instances of asyndeton cited by *The Princeton Encyclopedia* as: "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers" (98; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 5.601). The 3rd ed. (Preminger and Brogan) also cited "Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Dens, and Shades of Death" (106; *Paradise Lost* 2.261).

[11]Grzegorz Kość takes a quite different tack: "Straining toward his innermost feelings, the poet is eventually forced to lapse into silence. If he manages to resume speaking for a moment, he can utter only four abstract mutually contradictory adjectives [sic], 'fear, glory, chaos, rout,' which devoid of any auxiliary connectives, annul each other completely" (164).

[12]The play on "Martian" (Mars/warrior and the extraterrestrial fellow) probably had popular-culture resonance for many 1967 readers, thanks to the hugely successful TV show *My Favorite Martian*, starring Ray Walston, which ran well into the 1960s. But the only Martian I know of who wore a green steel helmet was Marvin the Martian, an old Looney Tunes and Merry Melodies character: see http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/3/31/Marvinthemartain.jgp.

[13]The arming of Achilles (*Iliad* XVIII.203-31) and of Agamemnon (*Iliad* XI.15-46) are two classic examples of the arming of the hero topos. The topos also lends itself to parodic treatment, as in Edmund Spenser's *Muiopotmos, or The Fate of the Butterfly* when the butterfly puts on its armor (ll. 57-96).

[14]Crane's classic Civil War novel is based on the Battle of Chancellorsville in spring 1863. The heaped-up corpses are of Union soldiers. In a February 1, 1951 letter to George Santayana, Lowell remarks: "Crane's Civil War novel is sort of like a series of Tate and Brady photographs done in the style of Claude Monet—fresh, compact, impressionistic—the best of all imagist poems, perhaps, and the opposite of Stickney in that he throws out all show of grand style, symbolic experience, etc. His (Crane's) subject is a slice of life, while his technique like Monet's is a tour-de-force. Looked at one way there is only the subject; but looked at another, there is only the art, the execution and the subject are only an excuse. It's a wonderful book, though" (*Letters* 169).

[15]The Wikipedia "Pentagon" entry includes a photograph of the sit-down demonstration: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentagon_(building).

[16]Mailer notes that "two rallies had been planned from the beginning, the first at the Lincoln Memorial and the second at the North Parking Lot of the Pentagon "with more speeches […]. But obviously the parking-lot rally in the wake of a two-hour speechfest at the Lincoln Memorial was another deterrent to large civil disobedience" (242).

[17]Whitman voices a version of the toast formula, "Vivas," in section 18 of "Song of Myself" (40-41), addressed to all those, victors or slain, who have engaged in battle.

[18]Lowell had employed the formula earlier in his personal lyric "The Old Flame" in *For the Union Dead* (1964): "Health to the new people, / health to their new flag, to their old / restored house on the hill!" (*Collected Poems* 323). There is a certain irony to the toast insofar as the poem, set in Maine, recalls the difficulties of getting a taxi to go to "Bath and the State Liquor Store" (323).

[19]A dead body was considered unclean, and a priest who became unclean (*tumah*) through touching one would be prohibited from entering a temple. Only through ritual cleansing could he again become "clean" (*tahor*) and resume his temple functions; on the concept of purity and impurity, see Jaffee 171-72. *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis,* an illuminated sixth-century manuscript, contains a depiction of the parable in which Christ, assuming the role of the Good Samaritan, bends over a recumbent figure and extends his hands to him: see the cover and cover flap of *Te Deum: Das Stundengebet im Alltag*. Sister Charis Doepgen's commentary draws attention to the salience of Christ's hands (319-21). Constance

Classen discusses hands and touch in connection both with prohibition and with healing from the middle ages to modern times; Santanu Das has much to say about kind hands extended to a fallen comrade in World War I literature; Susan Stewart considers touch and the other senses in both aesthetic and philosophical terms.

[20]On tropes of falling, rising, standing in *Lord Weary's Castle,* sometimes linked with hands, see Kearful, "'Stand and Live': Tropes of Falling, Rising, Standing in Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*" and "Lilies and an Olive Branch: On Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle.*"

[21]Not all critics have looked kindly on Lowell's self-representation and its political implications. Metres contends that "Lowell's overidentification with power and reliance on 'Great Man' historiography probably led him to represent war resistance as simply the strivings of the weak" (48). A paragraph-long probing of Lowell's psyche ends on a guardedly upbeat note, thanks to symbolic castration: "Insofar as Lowell does not deny his symbolic castration in his mature phase, we might be tempted to see Lowell's depiction of resisters as antipatriarchal, and therefore oppositional to the patriarchal energies of warfare" (48). Somewhat similarly, Diederik Oostdijk finds that "throughout the two poems Lowell complains about his health and about how physically weak his fellow marchers are" (217), but Oostdijk opts for a less gruesome symbolic act: "Despite his reservations and discomforture, he is there, but not to tell off 'the state and president' this time, as the righteous conviction that had characterized Lowell in World War II is gone. He is there because he feels he ought to be there. Like the writing of the poem, protesting the war is a symbolic act, Lowell knows. It will not have an immediate political effect, but it is an important gesture to make. At this point in his life, Lowell would have concurred with Nemerov who claimed in his poem 'To the Poets' that 'it's a pretty humble business, singing songs.' Yet it is the nature of birds and poets to sing" (217-18). Charles Altieri comments on "the politics of directed sympathy" in "The March 1" (169-71), while Jerome Mazzaro attributes Lowell's estrangement from his fellow marchers to his estrangement from his youthful self (*Robert Lowell and America* 161). In "Poet and State in the Verse of Robert Lowell" Dwight Eddins contends that the sonnets depict "political futility […] rooted in a modern preference for private fantasies over the difficult world of action" (52). Kość adds political irrelevance to the sonnets' political futility: "The marchers, treated ironically, are denied a certain degree of integrity necessary for ascertaining the unconditional importance and urgency of their cause. Moreover, it seems that for a poem to be politically relevant it has to contain definite judgments, something the poet clearly wanted to avoid as that would have required him to sacrifice what he cherished most—a potentially unlimited area of intelligibility that is most successfully conveyed either by irony or meaningful silence" (165). Earlier, Steven Gould Axelrod also stressed Lowell's inveterate irony as a determining feature of his politics: "Lowell's politics, no less than his art, exemplifies the dominant role played by irony in his mind's life" (198). In *Notebook 1967-68* he proffers a "political vision that is essentially inward. He aims neither to score partisan points nor to advertise himself, but to explore

the moral ambiguity in himself and his culture" (Axelrod 198). Ernest J. Smith comments on how Lowell's use of sonnet form affects his political stance: "[E]ven in such poems as Lowell's 'The March' I and II, where he presents himself participating in the march on the Pentagon, the poet is more witness than activist. Part of what enables this dual sense of involvement and detachment is the use of a traditional poetic form, the sonnet, sufficiently varied in structure, subject, and tone to be completely contemporary" (289). Robert von Halberg is attentive to tonal complexity in "The March 2" and contends that "[t]he poem is richly sensitive, intelligent, and wholly conscionable, as rather few political poems in 1967 are" (156).

[22]Lowell was not giving a lecture on rhetoric in his "Art of Poetry" interview, but his stress on invention—"I've invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented"—accords with the primacy of *inventio* (invention) in classical rhetoric as the first order of business of the orator or poet, finding arguments to elaborate on a theme or topic. The problematic relationship between "invention" and fact is touched on by Lanham: "Aristotle felt that factual proof lay outside the art of rhetoric and so an inquiry into the facts of the case was not a part of invention. Roman theorists such as Cicero and Quintilian disagreed. First, the speaker investigated the facts of the case. Then he determined the central issue of the case. Then he explored the available means of persuasion" (92). Mundane facts may be left behind on the cutting room floor in Renaissance invocations of "invention," which sometimes can be understood in the modern sense of creative imagination (*OED* 4.), as in the Chorus's opening lines of Shakespeare's *Henry V*: "O for a muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention, / A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene" (Pr. 1-3). Wallace Stevens outgoes Shakespeare in the opening tercet of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea / Of this invention, this invented world, / This inconceivable idea of the sun" (329). Lowell's invented world in "The March 1" and "The March 2" is limited to a single day in American history, but one linked by allusion to a century earlier. A swelling scene encompasses the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Reflecting Pool, the green fields of Virginia, and the Pentagon, while a cast of thousands, Lowell among them, enact their assigned roles. Lowell's "invention" may be less sublime than Shakespeare's or Stevens's, but it oversees "the whole balance of the poem as something invented." It thus plays a central role in *dispositio* (disposition), the apt arrangement of the parts of a poem or arguments of a speech through *electio* (selection) and *ordo* (ordering) so as to achieve the desired effect in the reader or hearer. Critics who still regard "confessional" as the key to Lowell's poetics in effect concentrate on *elocutio* (utterance, expression), which comes only third as a concern of the orator or poet, after *inventio* and *dispositio.* This is something that Astrophil, "loving in truth and fain in verse my love to show," must learn in in Sonnet 1 of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella.* The play on fain/feign is fine, but putting elocution first by seeking to "paint the blackest face of woe" is, without "invention's stay," a poetic dead end (153). Still and all, poets like politicians and lovers are inveterate liars. Shakespeare's Touchstone, thinking principally of lovers, uses Sidney's

truth/fain dyad: "the truest poetry is the most feigning" (*As You Like It* 3.3.15-16). The New Arden editor notes: "The debate about poetry and lies underpins the whole play, and was central to attacks on the theatre" (266). W. H. Auden uses Touchstone's line as a title for his own variations on the topos (315-17).

[23]Axelrod finds that "Mailer's social portrait of Lowell as a genteel Boston aristocrat is more a projection of his own insecurities than a relevant description of Lowell […]. Nevertheless, his psychological portrait of Lowell as 'a disconcerting mixture of strength and weakness,' of potential aggression and detestation of that very capacity for aggression, provides authentic insight into the ambiguous nature of Lowell's moral activism" (196-97).

[24]Garrison remarks that Mercury was an apt choice for coming to Horace's assistance, given his status as "patron of poets, who are *Mercuralis viri* (2.17.29) and inventor of the lyre (*curvae lyrae parens*, 1.10.6). Some see this Mercury as a projection of Augustus, under whose auspices Horace was rehabilitated" (269). Garrison's parenthetical references are to other Horatian odes in *Odes* Books 1 and 2.

[25]In an Afterword to *Notebook 1967-68* Lowell fends off the idea of his book-length poem as "confessional" and he disclaims any pretensions to "literal pornographic honesty," but he also somewhat spoils Mailer's account of the immediate origins of his long poem by recording "I began working sometime in June 1967" (262). The truth of the matter, if we are to go by Alex Calder, whom I invoked above (see n2), is rather more complicated, insofar as *Notebook 1967-68* emerged over a period of time beginning with inchoate, fragmentary manuscript jottings in summer 1967. The two sonnets on the March on the Pentagon do appear to have got the project decisively rolling. Perhaps we should settle for Lowell's general comment about Mailer's fidelity to facts that I quoted earlier: "His story is actually, not literally, true."

[26]On "weak" as a prosodically strong line-ending, see my earlier comments. The clause "how weak we were, and right" proceeds iamb by iamb, with accompanying alliteration, and "we" merging into "weak," to form an insistent iambic trimeter, with a caesura before the most heavily stressed iamb, "and right." Lowell's use of hyperbaton, generally speaking an alteration of normal prose word order, involves placing a noun between its two modifiers, as in Milton's "in this dark world and wide" in his sonnet on his blindness (332) or "temperate vapours bland" in *Paradise Lost* (5.5). Lowell's hyperbaton is a special case insofar as it involves an addition to a complete sentence that elaborates on its contents (i.e., epiphrasis), in Lowell's case putting the sentence in a radically new light. Robert von Halberg gives a slightly different tonal slant to Lowell's clause: "The end of the first sentence, closing the octave, is above all else convincingly good-humored: 'how weak we were, and right.' To speak of a political poem of 1967 as good humored, urbane, and yet serious is high, rare praise" (156).

[27]Throughout I have referred to Lowell's two quatorzains as sonnets and as poems, but they may also be read in sequence as a double sonnet, perhaps influenced by Elizabeth Bishop's double sonnet "The Prodigal," which concludes with another eventual fleeing homeward: "But it took him a long time / finally to

make his mind up to go home" (54). In the Prodigal's case, no "kind hands" assist his flight, but touch plays a decisive role in the immediately preceding lines, when the bats' "flight" provokes "shuddering insights, beyond his control, touching him." For both Lowell and Bishop, hands and touch are master tropes—along with falling/rising/standing—in their formations of healing fictions. In Lowell's double sonnet, a political healing is allegorically enacted in a biblically imbued tableau that Lowell's rhetorical poetics invites the reader to envision. In Bishop's double sonnet a personal recovery from alcoholism is covertly projected in a sympathetic parody of a biblical parable (see Kearful, "'The Prodigal' as Sympathetic Parody").

[28]Lowell critics generally do not bother with whose "kind hands" helped the poet rise. Health to Robert von Halberg, who not only ventures an identification, he constructs an imagined scene: "Lowell's seriousness might possibly be questioned in the octave, but surely not in the sestet, where the poem turns and turns again, in the plainest of idioms. The trampling second wave of troops comes without warning or explanation, all the more surprising after the first contingent—and also without reason. There is no suggestion of malice or motive at all, the stunning charge is only part of unexplained circumstances, perhaps even a goof. [von Halberg notes that Mailer (294-95) suggests that the two waves, one apparently peaceful, were part of a calculated strategy.] Lowell renders no reproach, only an urbane plain toast to 'those who held' but also to a soldier who, out of simple human kindness that knows nothing of political encampments, broke ranks and helped him regain his footing" (156).

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Generic Differences:
A Response to Burkhard Niederhoff[*]

RAIMUND BORGMEIER

Burkhard Niederhoff's very knowledgeable and scholarly essay discusses the motif of the unlived life in two outstanding English works of the 1980s and 1990s. Niederhoff analyzes first the different representations of this motif in the two texts and then tries to answer the question of how it is possible to find meaning in the unlived life. It appears convincing that Niederhoff generally states that "implicit representations of the unlived life are much more frequent and characteristic than explicit ones" (169), and when he comes to distinguish between "six typical techniques or methods" (169) of implicit representation, the argument strikes the reader as highly intelligent and sophisticated. It is underscored by references to many different texts from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* via Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and "Will o' the Mill" as well as Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Henry James's *The Beast in the Jungle*, "Diary of a Man of Fifty" and "The Jolly Corner," and also Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, not to mention Alice Munro's "Walker Brothers Cowboy," where this motif appears.

If a reader wants to find fault with statements made in the essay, an argument in a long endnote (5) perhaps offers itself, where Niederhoff

looks at Austen's *Mansfield Park* and comments: "The road not taken (Fanny Price marries Henry Crawford) is just as or almost as likely as the road taken (Fanny Price marries Edmund Bertram)" (185). This is not very convincing and is suitably corrected in the very first essay of the same number, where Angelika Zirker much more justly states: "The possibility of Fanny marrying Henry Crawford is, *at least for some time, not entirely excluded from the novel* […]" (131; my italics). Apparently Niederhoff himself is aware of the temptation of also subsuming less fitting examples under a category that is being discussed.

The scope of an essay in a periodical is, of course, limited. Otherwise it might have been interesting and rewarding also to take into account the generic differences of the two texts Niederhoff analyzes. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, after all, is a novel, and Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* is a play, and critics have rightly stated, "Stoppard has 'never written anything for discussion' (*TLS*). His plays are written for, and shaped by, the theatre" (Jenkins 2).[1]

The two genres certainly have much in common, and each of them can, to some extent, adopt techniques and features originally belonging to the other. For example, there can be a narrator, who primarily is an element of fiction, in a play as well; and a novel may consist largely or even completely (as the example of Ivy Compton-Burnett demonstrates) of dialogue, which is basically a technique of drama. Nevertheless, one can say in general that the novel, mainly owing to its larger extent, but also to the specific nature of the reading process, has greater possibilities to work with different shades of meaning and to introduce a narrator whose reliability becomes questionable. On the other hand, drama has the advantage of immediacy, of dramatic confrontations and juxtapositions. I would suggest that this basic difference can be observed also in of the two works analyzed by Niederhoff.

In *The Remains of the Day*, one finds, indeed, as Niederhoff claims, "increased self-knowledge" (180), but, as I see it, this is rather fugitive and transitory. This nuanced effect is at least partly due to features characteristic of the genre. The scene when Stevens says farewell to

Mrs Benn at the bus stop is really, in Niederhoff's words, "a highly symbolic one" (180), and it is true that, "[f]or the first time in their relationship, Stevens transcends his professional role and shows an interest in her feelings." So Niederhoff is right to talk of "this mutual declaration of love" (180) and emphasize Stevens's statement, "*my heart was breaking*" (181). However, this feeling lasts only for a very short moment, and the first-person-narrator continues: "Before long, however, I turned to her and said *with a smile* […]" (239; my italics). Stevens has successfully and completely overcome any amount of "increased self-knowledge" he may have had.

The same applies to the second essential insight about his unlived life that Stevens has subsequently, towards the end of the novel. He even weeps when he considers the frustrating situation his self-sacrificing service has led him into, and he remarks to a casual acquaintance about his employer and his own role:

> Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. […] And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that? (243)

When the man he is talking to, however, criticizes him, "Don't keep looking back all the time, you're bound to get depressed" (243), he is easily pacified and quickly gives up his awareness of the lost life his dependence has brought him. He most readily follows the man's advice, "You've got to enjoy yourself. The evening's the best part of the day" (244). He adopts the same opinion and agrees, "for a great many people the evening is the most enjoyable part of the day" (244). (This, incidentally, is ironically underlined by the title of the novel).

We, the readers, of course, see the shallowness and superficiality of the life Stevens has chosen for himself and that he completely justified when he complains that he cannot even say that he made his own mistakes. And that the remaining phase and the end of his life will not

be as pleasant as he tries to convince himself is demonstrated for us quite clearly by the example of Stevens's role model, his father. The end of his father's life is clearly without dignity. When he can no longer perform the services of a competent butler he is degraded, and when he dies, his son does not even find the time to stay with him because he has to provide his lordship's guests with drinks. So when Stevens afterwards is convinced that the contribution he makes by sacrificing his life is surely "in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment" (244), we know that he goes on deceiving himself. As various critics have found,[2] Stevens is a completely unreliable narrator, we cannot trust him and must make our own judgement.

This is also confirmed by the very ending of the novel. Stevens observes how people are gathering in groups on the pier, and "they are laughing together merrily" (245). Instead of following their example and perhaps join them, the keywords "laughing […] merrily" trigger a narrow professional response. Since his new employer, the American Mr. Farraday, wishes him to give witty answers, he considers "that bantering is hardly an unreasonable duty for an employer to expect a professional to perform" (245). He has "already devoted much time to developing […] [his] bantering skills," and so he resolves, "I will begin practising with renewed effort" (245). We must understand that he has not in the least gained any self-knowledge from his unlived life and that he has completely lost his independent personality and is in a very deplorable state. This is the ironically tragic message the novel conveys mainly through features specific to the genre, in particular the unreliability of the narrator. (*Tragic*, of course, is not meant here in the narrow sense of the Aristotelian theory, where the hero, at the end of the play, has an anagnorisis, but in the basic sense of the *SOED*, "Resembling tragedy in respect of its matter; relating to or expressing fatal or dreadful events; sad").

Stoppard, in *The Invention of Love*, on the other hand, works with the typical means of drama, by representing contrasting points of view through different speakers. There is "A. E. Housman, aged 18 to 26"

(vii), the poet in his formative years, and "AEH, A. E. Housman, aged 77" (vii), who, more or less on his deathbed, looks back on his life, and in whose memory the whole action takes place. AEH also meets his younger self; he is obviously a disillusioned man, who treats his students with cynicism and impatience. The love of his life has never materialized, although, from a practical point of view, there is no "road not taken," as Niederhoff terms it (183). Moses John Jackson, the man he falls in love with in his days in Oxford, does not understand and fundamentally rejects any homosexual relationship. So Housman shares a flat with him in London as his comrade—until one day the remark of a girlfriend opens Jackson's eyes about Housman's true feelings, and then Housman moves out of the flat. Though Housman says of his friend, "Jackson knows more than Plato" (46-47), the scientist Jackson is really beneath Housman: he has absolutely no sense for classical antiquity, which he refers to as that "veni, vidi, vici" stuff (55), and after he has been to a theatre performance with Housman he is fascinated not by the play but by the modern electricity (cf. 52). Housman exclaims three times in the play, "I would have died for you but I never had the luck!" (5, 46, 100). Yet a real love relationship never is an option, though Niederhoff is right when he observes, "Housman's poems are intimately bound up with the unlived life in that the first quotation from the poems occurs precisely at the moment when Housman moves out of the flat he has shared with Jackson" (183).

The most important foil to Housman in the play, however, is undoubtedly his contemporary Oscar Wilde, who appears on the stage towards the end. Wilde is, like Housman, a homosexual and a poet, but, in contrast to Housman, he has lived his life to the full. He can proudly say of himself: "I had genius, brilliancy, daring, I took charge of my own myth" (96). When he asks Housman, "You did *have* friends?" he is answered, "I had colleagues" (94). And when Wilde asks, "Where were you when all this [the New Drama, the New Novel, New Journalism, New Hedonism, New Paganism, even the

New Woman] was happening?" Housman has to make the unimpressive confession: "At home" (97).

Nevertheless, Wilde, at the same time, encourages Housman that his life has not been in vain and that it has found a unique fulfilment, when he asserts: "You didn't mention your poems. How can you be unhappy when you know you wrote them? They are all that will still matter" (97). Wilde also gives a double interpretation of the title of the play. Love is always a matter of invention: "We would never love anybody if we could see past our invention" (95). And by the creative invention of the poet, love is sublimated further, as long quotations from Housman's poetry, where his love is celebrated, document.

So it is understandable that, in spite of occasional elegiac elements and overtones, Stoppard's play can be seen as a comedy, which entertains the audience right from the beginning with comical misunderstandings and numerous puns.[3] This effect is at least partly created by the genre-specific confrontations and juxtapositions. Ishiguro's work, however, depicts an unlived life that leads only to a very transitory experience of self-knowledge, where the loss of an independent personality is permanent and absolute, and it must therefore be understood as a novel that is movingly tragic.

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Justus-Liebig-Universität
Gießen
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NOTES

[1]I quote this passage also in my essay on Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* (153).

[2]Brian W. Shaffer, e. g., talks of "Stevens's deceptive self-conception" (87); Barry Lewis states: "Not only does he [Stevens] deceive others and himself" (86); Cynthia F. Wong finds, "Stevens seems both to know and *not to know* his present life" (55).

[3]See my essay, particularly section VI, where I refer to "the comic tenor of the play by humourous elements at different levels" (161).

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Against an Ethics of Absolute Otherness, for Cross-Cultural Critique: A Response to Tammy Amiel-Houser[*]

LARS ECKSTEIN

In "The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," Tammy Amiel-Houser proposes a Levinasian reading of McEwan's 2005 novel which argues that most approaches to *Saturday* have so far misread its core ethical thrust. While reviewers and critics (including myself) have either enthusiastically or very critically observed McEwan's self-professed liberal humanist leanings in a post-9/11 world which celebrates literature's "potential to enrich the readers' knowledge of themselves and others" (128), Amiel-Houser insists that this is taking us down the wrong track. Mapping Levinas's thought in *Totality and Infinity* onto the novel, she instead claims that at the novel's ethical core is the "infinite responsibility toward the ever-strange and incomprehensible Other" (128).

For Amiel-Houser, the Levinasian drama is mainly played out in the novel's confrontation between the focalizing character, bourgeois neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, and the socially underprivileged criminal Baxter. In this drama, she attributes to Baxter the role of a "singular, enigmatic Other" (129), "most strange, incomprehensible, illogical, and absolutely different to me, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I cannot share and whose motives I cannot understand" (150). Perowne, in turn, is ultimately shaken in his "indifferent subjectivity" (129) by the encounter with Baxter-as-Other, towards whom he eventually acknowledges his fundamental

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responsibility. The dramatic scene in which Perowne's crucial reform takes place, of course, is the "break-in" scene, where Baxter forces Perowne's pregnant daughter Daisy first to undress, and then to read from her newly published volume of poetry. On cue from her poet-grandfather John Grammaticus, Daisy rather recites, from memory, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and thus curiously works Baxter into a state of childlike elation. The core twist of Amiel-Houser's argument, here, is that it is not Baxter's transformation which marks the ethical core of the text, but Perowne's. This is her central thesis: "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" (139).

In order to convincingly argue against liberal humanist readings of this scene, Amiel-Houser goes at some length to dissociate the rendition of Arnold's poem from Arnold himself (and the masculine Victorian baggage of his liberal humanist convictions). She holds that the poem needs to be evaluated primarily through the agitated subjective lens of Perowne, who, like Baxter (and, claims Amiel-Houser, at least initially the reader), is incapable of placing the poem correctly, but is exposed to it through Daisy's "speech (and body) act" (144). Drawing on sections of Levinas's later work on language ("saying") and femininity ("maternity"), she locates Perowne's "ethical transformation" in his witnessing "Daisy's literary feminine address to Baxter" which ultimately also forces Perowne to acknowledge "Baxter's human face," as it "asserts his singularity as a human being who deserves to live and to enjoy (in Arnold's terms) the world of joy, love and light" (148).

Without being able to do justice to the nuances of Amiel-Houser's argument, let me in the following draw out some of my misgivings about the central scope of her essay which I find, I am afraid, highly problematic. I will limit myself to three points, the first of which is brief and mundane. It concerns a very basic yet curious omission in

Amiel-Houser's otherwise very detailed and perceptive reading of the novelistic plot. While much is made of Perowne's reformed state after 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'" (150), Amiel-Houser completely fails to mention that the next thing Perowne does is lure Baxter into his upstairs office on false pretense, only to knock him down the stairs with the help of his son Theo. Baxter ends up with a fractured skull and potentially serious brain injury, and it is only after he almost killed him that Perowne offers to personally operate on him, assuming an almost uncanny position of absolute control over his life. I find it hard, frankly, to read into this the kind of "responsibility" and "care" that Amiel-Houser has in mind. Perowne's eventual "climactic realization: 'He's responsible, after all'" (149), for me, is neither climactic, nor does it resonate with Levinas—Perowne is simply quite literally responsible for Baxter's condition. Overall, I doubt the proposition that the encounter with Baxter has changed very much in Perowne's life, just as the novel fulfils a circular movement, emphatically closing with the act of lovemaking in the marriage bed that it began with.

I do not wish to carry this argument about incongruities between theoretical design and narrative evidence too far, however, as I have more fundamental reservations against the usefulness of Levinas's ethics of Otherness in the post-9/11 rhetoric of *Saturday* in particular, and as a tool of (trans)cultural critique more generally. Before exploring this, however, let me address a second reservation, which concerns the rather light-hearted dismissal of the ideological complications which come with the intertextual references to Matthew Arnold. As I have argued elsewhere, McEwan's recourse to Matthew Arnold's poem in the showdown scene is neither accidental nor innocent; instead, "Dover Beach" in many ways encapsulates the ideological movement of the novel at large (cf. Eckstein, "Saturday on Dover Beach"). I do not have the space to fully unpack this, and will limit myself to two observations.

First, *Saturday* is replete with references to *Culture and Anarchy*, and it is difficult not to metonymically identify the Perowne family with Arnold's Culture with a capital "C," ultimately uniting, in true Arnoldian spirit, the forces of science (Henry) and poetry (Daisy, Grammaticus, Theo) against the forces of anarchic disruption from below (Baxter). Arnold wrote his meditations on *Culture and Anarchy* in immediate response to the Hyde Park Riots of 1866, when more than 10.000 Londoners marched to Hyde Park to protest in favour of the Reform Bill (which Arnold was deeply sceptical about as he believed that the extension of democracy in itself is an invitation to "do as one likes" in society, and will lead to anarchy rather than social health; cf. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 81-101). It is not accidental that McEwan chose to set his novel around the events of February 15, 2003, when an estimated one million protesters marched to Hyde Park again, this time to protest against the imminent war in Iraq. While the 2003 protestors were granted admission to Hyde Park (against the objection of the Secretary of State in charge, who worried about the flowerbeds), the 1866 protestors found the gates of Hyde Park locked. While the majority peacefully moved on to Trafalgar Square, a minority remained behind, tore down the railings and trampled the flowerbeds. In the novel, the first thing Perowne remembers when looking out of his bedroom window in the morning is operating on the brain of a Hyde Park gardener—there is indeed no reason to doubt that McEwan is very conscious of a persistent Arnoldian echo in *Saturday*.

My second observation on Arnold is that the pervasive intertextual dimension then also bears, obviously, on the "break-in" scene and the rendition of "Dover Beach." While I greatly enjoyed Amiel-Houser's perceptive phenomenological reading of the (repeated) recital of the poem, I do not agree that the poem's ideological complexities are simply lost in its embodied performance. I would insist that the impact of Arnold matters beyond Perowne's mediating role as (unreliable) focaliser whose philistinism (a term stressed by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*) is ironically exposed. Another vital thing that

Amiel-Houser's argument omits is the fact McEwan made sure that the complete poem is reprinted at the end of the novel. McEwan thus quite literally sets Arnold's Victorian musings about a world without "certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" next to his own reflections about the contingencies of a post-9/11 universe. I am less passionate about the impact of this constellation on the question that interests Amiel-Houser most, that is whether we need to read the ethical force of the central poetic encounter in terms of liberal humanist empathy, or invest in a Levinasian alternative focusing on the "ethics of Otherness." What unsettles me, rather, are the consequences of *either* option for a larger vision of cross-cultural critique. This concern becomes urgent especially when we accept the novel's allegorical dimension, as Amiel-Houser together with most reviewers and critics evidently does: "The metonomy constructed between *Saturday*'s events and world affairs, draws attention to the political importance of the literary scene, and we are encouraged to relate the intersubjective experiences of Perowne, Daisy and Baxter to the broader political challenges of the contemporary Western society" (150)—read: the challenges of "the West in the face of Islamic extremism" (154n29), as she specifies in a reference to Dominic Head's survey of critical responses. Let me begin with the Arnoldian option, and then close with some remarks about the proposed Levinasian alternative.

What is my problem with the resonances of "Dover Beach" in McEwan's post-9/11 novel? I take my lead from Paul Gilroy, who uses Arnold's poem extensively to develop his notion of a distinctly Victorian "imperial melancholy" (Gilroy 98). Gilroy, for one, insists that Arnold's famous meditation on a world of eroding political, historical and religious certainties cannot be understood outside the context of Britain's imperial exploits. In *After Empire*, he summarises the thrust of the poem thus:

> [P]roximity to the French had helped him [Arnold's speaker] to concentrate his mind with regard to the country's historic responsibilities as well as its relationship to the classical world that had supplied the template for its global imperium. The historic mission to civilize and uplift the world was

> England's unavoidable destiny, but he sensed that it would bring neither comfort nor happiness. That imperial mission re-created the national community in a modern form but then drew it immediately into a terrible web of war and suffering, polluting its beautiful dreams, confusing and destabilizing it. […] His apprehensions were aligned with those of the larger social body, but, as he heard and felt the shingle start to move beneath his feet, he opted to turn away from those public concerns and seek consolation in the private and intimate places where romantic love and fidelity could offset the worst effects of warfare, turbulence, and vanished certitude. (98-99)

If we follow, as I do, Gilroy's insistence that the melancholy of "Dover Beach" is, at least partly, also an imperial melancholy, this raises a few questions about Arnold's liberal humanist convictions and their relation to the imperial mission. It is important to remember in this context that, when Arnold famously defines culture as "the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics and everything of the kind" (*Culture and Anarchy* 36), he does not really mean "world" in a planetary sense. Cultural achievement, for Arnold, is universal and timeless, yet it is also firmly based on the foundation of "sweetness and light," that is, Hebraic moral impulse and Hellenistic intellectual reasoning. Culture, in other words, is a primarily European affair, while its universal value "irrespective of practice, politics and everything of the kind" makes it desirable, nevertheless, not only for the uncultured British masses, but also for the inferior subject races of Empire. Herein lies, then, the supreme irony of "Dover Beach," as I read it—in its failure to realise that the horrors of imperial warfare turning the world into a "darkling plain […] where ignorant armies clash at night" (ll. 35-37) are in fact inextricably intertwined with, and in part indeed a consequence of, Victorian convictions about the sweetness and light of the colonising mission.

It is in this light that I find McEwan's pervasive intertextual liaison with Arnold utterly disturbing in a novel that has been celebrated as an astute critique of the cultural condition of a Western world no longer at ease after the September 11 attacks. Against the many enthusiastic reviews, I am all with Elaine Hadley, who disbelievingly

wonders: "Are other readers as taken aback as I am by this use of 'Dover Beach' in a post-9/11 novel? Does it seem to others that McEwan, the Homeland Security Chief of the Novel, has offered up duct tape and plastic sheeting as a response to the unknown agents and unpredictable consequences of the new world order?" (Hadley 97). To commend Arnoldian "Culture" as liberal humanist remedy against the anarchic threat of, by metonymical extension, Islamic terrorism surely not only dramatically shuns any critical discussion of the various local histories and global designs which have shaped global modernity as we know it; it also nostalgically recreates a chimera of Victorian morality that is wilfully ignorant of the more unpleasant politics of Victorian class, gender and race. I, like Hadley and, if I understood correctly, Amiel-Houser, find it extremely hard to believe that McEwan can indeed be serious about all this, and even harder to accept that so many zealous exegetes of *Saturday* have swallowed its Arnoldian infatuations whole. But other than Amiel-Houser, I do not believe that by glossing over McEwan's liberal humanist leanings in favour of a Levinasian reinterpretation of *Saturday* any of the problems are solved; rather, they reappear in different form.

Let me get to my third and most fundamental reservation, then, which finally has to do with Levinas's ethics of Otherness and its relation to cross-cultural critique. I am aware of the intricacies of my own speaking position in this context, as someone in postcolonial studies in Germany, writing in response to an Israeli speaking position drawing its theoretical framework from one of the foremost Jewish intellectuals in post-Holocaust Europe. Nevertheless, I am really struggling with the gist of Amiel-Houser's conclusions: "This horrible alien, this terrorist from whom I mostly want to distance myself, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I do not share and whose motives I cannot understand, is the Other who makes me responsible for him, demanding my help, asking for my maternal care" (Amiel-Houser 150). While I admire the ethical force and daring of such a proposition, not least in view of the locus of

its enunciation, I cannot help problematising it from my own disciplinary background.

Levinas's relation to postcolonial critique can at best be characterised as a very ambivalent one. I am drawing, here, on John Drabinski's recent work on *Levinas and the Postcolonial* which offers the most thorough exploration to date of how Levinas's notion of Otherness relates to alterity as conceived in postcolonial thought. At the risk of simplification, the attractiveness of Levinas for cross-cultural criticism certainly lies in its fundamental critique of the desire to know, of the "omnivorous" and, in this sense, relentlessly "colonising" attitude of the Western philosophical tradition. The ground-breaking idea that the confrontation with absolute alterity in history is a precondition of (ultimately also subaltern) self-realisation and ethical action has influenced several decolonial thinkers, among them, for instance, Enrique Dussel, who met Levinas in the early 1970s and stressed his great debt to his thought. However, Levinas's relation to Dussel and the Americas may also serve as an exemplary case which reveals the limits of Levinas's thought in and for a globalised world.

Drabinski highlights one particular incident in Dussel's conversations with Levinas, revolving around Dussel's question why Levinas never extended his interrogation of catastrophe from the Jewish Holocaust to the Amerindian genocide and transatlantic slavery, a question which Levinas, as the story goes, succinctly answered with: "That is for you to think about" (qtd. in Drabinski 4). This anecdotal line is revealing of Levinas's conception of culture, globality and alterity, not least because it resonates with a range of statements in which he confesses to a distinctly Eurocentric conception of culture, a conception that is uncannily close to Arnold's obsession with "sweetness and light." Here is one of his most often quoted statements among a series of remarks on "dance" (following an awkward interview question about the impact of sexism and racism on his thought of Otherness): "I often say, though it's a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance"

(Mortley 13). Admittedly, such statements have never found their way into Levinas's major works (the "it's a dangerous thing to say publicly" is intriguing, here), yet they nevertheless call for a critical interrogation of some of the major premises of his work from a postcolonial angle.

Two things particularly matter in this context: First, that Levinas's conception of global modernity deliberately ignores the constitutive and violent colonial entanglement of Europe with the Americas, Africa and Asia (even though his thought helped Dussel, Walter Mignolo and others to powerfully conceptualise this entanglement in their writings on modernity/coloniality). Instead, Levinas clings to the conception of separate, and, with an almost Arnoldian quality, hierarchical cultural fields with locally restricted critical obligations. Second, and more crucially, perhaps, Levinas's statement unwittingly reveals that Otherness is indeed not only a proto-ethical condition prefiguring any engagement with the world at large, but that Otherness—here, the exotic, "dancing" non-European stranger—is also *performatively produced and reproduced*, and not least so in Levinas's very own rhetoric. Drabinski is very clear in this context that, in light of Levinas's Eurocentric cultural convictions, his "conception of the ethical, while absolutely transformative of our notion of obligation, remains tied to a kind of metaphysics, and so also a kind of epistemology of alterity" (Drabinski 3). While Drabinski takes this as a cue to embark upon the project of "decolonizing Levinas" (8), I tend to be slightly pessimistic about the chances of an ultimately fruitful reconciliation. Levinas's programmatic disavowal of any epistemological dimension to his ethics of Otherness quite simply *forecloses* postcolonial critique in so many ways, where Otherness is precisely not an anterior fact, but a secondary *epistemological project* through and through. From a postcolonial perspective, Otherness may be fundamentally rooted in primary ethical disruption, yet it becomes cultural precisely when it is performatively *inscribed* into the world in concrete historical, political and medial practices, when it enters the complex economies of knowledge and power.

Back to Amiel-Houser's explorations of "The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," then. Apart from the fact that, as expressed in my first reservation, I am not so sure that the novelistic plot conclusively lends itself to the admittedly compelling and nuanced mapping of Levinas's notions of Otherness and obligation, I find the Levinasian reading difficult to accept for more fundamental reasons. My worry is that the stylisation of Baxter as a "singular enigmatic Other" too comfortably alleviates us of having to talk about the ways in which Baxter is *produced*, both textually, intertextually (in relation to Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*) and contextually, in relation to larger politics of class in the (literary) marketplace. This disavowal of critique in literary and cultural criticism becomes a real problem especially when the argument shifts to the allegorical level and assesses *Saturday*'s contribution to the economy of knowledge about post-9/11 anxiety—when Baxter turns into "this terrorist from whom I mostly want to distance myself, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I do not share and whose motives I cannot understand" (150). Despite their absolutely incompatible ethical orientations, there is something that McEwan's liberal humanism and the ethics of Otherness which Amiel-Houser detects in *Saturday* have in common: both, in their own way, largely reduce the problem of terrorism to the "beautiful drama of moral agency," as Elaine Hadley succinctly put it. While Hadley is furious about McEwan's Arnoldian "shift of attention away from the persistent 'ebbs and flow of human misery,' or from class oppression in the marketplace of goods" (Hadley 99), I contend that Amiel-Houser's reading is wide open to a similar critique. In unreservedly following Levinas, her ethical argument slides into a "metaphysics" of Otherness even while disavowing it. Through evoking "[t]his horrible alien, this terrorist" (150) in terms of an infinite alterity, firmly set beyond and before the historical and political, Amiel-Houser's reading of *Saturday* forecloses, rather than allows, any genuine cultural critique. What is more, her text actively participates in discursively inscribing this absolute difference into the world, it actively produces the "horrible alien,"

even while it calls for an ensuing ethical obligation towards "our worst enemy" (151).

Surely, the liberalist proposition that the problem of terrorism is essentially a problem of lacking empathy that is "the beginning of morality" (as passionately argued by McEwan in a widely publicised immediate response to 9/11, cf. McEwan, "Only love and then oblivion") is utterly reductive—yet to inversely conceive of ethnic and religious violence *only* in terms of an infinite ethical obligation toward the absolute Other is equally problematic. Ethics matter, but ethics need to be realigned with the thorough medial and material analysis of deeply entangled local histories and global designs. This entails that ethics need to be translated across what Walter Mignolo refers to as the colonial difference—and not only from exotic "dance" into culture proper, but on mutual and equal terms. Such "border thinking" (Mignolo) does not aim at subsuming cultural difference in humanist universals. Yet neither does it conceive of alterity as absolute and infinite, but as emerging from a plurality of epistemological trajectories, designs and practices, and thus ultimately permeable and open to change. Its ethical investment is an investment in cross-cultural critique.

<div align="right">University of Potsdam</div>

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Authorities of Representation: Speaking To and Speaking For. A Response to Barbara Korte[*]

LISA LAU and ANA CRISTINA MENDES

Barbara Korte's article focuses on representations of poverty in literary studies within the conceptual framework of postcolonialism. It highlights the division between the global North and South in terms of how poverty is positioned; through an investigation of two texts— Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Vikas Swarup's *Q & A*—Korte discusses the authenticity of the protagonists' voices and the literary devices this authenticity or lack of authenticity represents. She argues that the postcolonial context destabilises preconceptions about the poor and that these texts speak to readers outside India as well as to Indian cultural elite. Korte contends there are controversial and challenging representations of poverty emerging, and discusses the narrative voice which endows the indigent with agency, articulation and assertiveness.

There are a number of issues that can be further unpacked from Korte's thought-provoking article. From the beginning, Korte ponders the representation of people in poverty, and in her two chosen case studies, she notes that this representation is by writers who themselves are from the cultural elite. The whole issue of representation in Indian Writing in English (IWE) is one fraught with stumbling blocks, but key to postcolonial studies.[1] At the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been increasing interest in what could broadly be termed "Dark India," the counterpart to India Shining.

More IWE, Indian films, and representations of India of all kinds have focused their attention on the underbelly of India, the slums, the destitution, the crime, and the inequalities. There has been a rise of fiction depicting poverty and servitude, written from the viewpoints of servants, labourers, the exploited, the blue collar workers, and slum-dwellers, and these have been by writers both living within India, as well as the diasporic Indian writers.

The authority of such representation is clearly problematic in many texts—particularly in those written about the working and lower classes, who themselves do not necessarily (and are unlikely to) read and write in English. English as a choice of writing language is itself controversial when used to "represent" or "present" stories about subalterns; it is a language which the subjects of discussion can hardly access, let alone represent themselves in. So since the learning of English in India is still largely confined to the middle classes, the elite, and the urban, presentation and representation of the working classes and the poor would invariably be by those who are *not* members of these groups, and not people authorised by these groups to speak on their behalf.

Korte does nod towards subalternism, and in her (perhaps rather brief) section on "Listening to the Indigent," she argues that certain narratives are challenging societal preconceptions about poverty. Korte draws on Mendes's 2010 article which suggests the strategic unreliability of the narrator in such narratives is a deliberate staging of an inauthentic Dark India. This subversive strategy may be intended by these authors of the cultural elite to draw attention to their own positionalities relative to their subject matter, and in this sense, pull the rug from under their own feet, subverting the traditional reader reliance on an omniscient narrator by indicating that this representation should *not* be regarded as a truth claim. It is a clever authorial method of addressing the thorny issue of authority and speaking for "others" by disclaiming authority even as the reader confers it, thereby side-stepping the even thornier issue of *authenticity.*

By the end of the twentieth century, authenticity had become the elephant in the room for IWE. The notion of the ethnic literary output by third world writers being regarded as anthropological text that contains truth claims has been a problem which has long plagued postcolonial writers (some of whom justifiably resist this very label) and which has plagued the social-realism novel in particular. As Amireh and Majaj have argued, "[g]iven the key role of literary intermediaries in shaping the content as well as form of the canon of 'Third World literature' available in the West, it is clear that the view of Third World women's texts as providing unmediated glimpses into 'Other' cultures is not only naïve, but also high problematic" (5). This of course applies not only to women's texts, but any by third world and/or ethnic minority writers read by a Western audience.

In realist terms, the point of a novel mirroring the world objectively is that it should, "through this impersonal mirroring, show 'truth'" (Lee 11), but within a postcolonial framework, it is very clear how problematic and contested this "truth" can be given the problems with both authority and authenticity of representation. Realism in IWE has long been both its strength and yet paradoxically, simultaneously, its Achilles heel. Indian authors writing in English have been constricted by the pressure as well as promoted by the privilege of being representatives or emissaries of their race and nation.

Moreover, as Lau had previously discussed in a re-Orientalist framework, having seized self-representation on the global (read English) literary stage, Indian authors have felt the need to set the record straight, to attempt to convey truthful facets of the India they are writing of, and to avoid the flawed, unrepresentative and inauthentic Orientalist accounts which had been imposed on them before. However, as re-orientalism theory notes, orientalism, even by writers of the Orient, is extremely difficult to refrain from, especially by writers who themselves are members of Kwame Anthony Appiah's "comprador intelligentsia" (119) and who are themselves therefore embedded within the power hierarchy. Lau noted that accusations which can be levelled against IWE authors run into a fairly extensive list: ranging

from "exaggeration, typecasting, stereotyping, exoticizing, pandering to western tastes, demands and expectations, selling out, having mercenary motives, playing to the gallery, to more sophisticated misrepresentations of totalizing, essentializing, subalternism, margin-alizing, and most recently of all, re-Orientalizing. All these are in some form or other critical of IWE for failing to represent faithfully and comprehensively, of being guilty of skewed, partial, and selective representation, or wilful misrepresentation altogether, and at worst, outright betrayal" (Lau 30).

However, in order to be granted a platform (i.e. a wide, possibly global distribution), an Indian writer working in English has to seize authority to some extent, and one straightforward method is by play-ing the "authenticity card," and indeed, "concepts of 'authentic' iden-tity continue to shape literary production and reception" (Karem 12). In questioning the ethics of speaking for the poor, Korte's article moves the discussion from an orientalist to a re-Orientalist framework. Indeed, where poverty and representation is concerned, Korte's article points to re-Orientalism in action: "The consumption of these works [literary works by postcolonial writers] helps to maintain a system of exploitation that was inaugurated by European colonial-ism and imperialism more than five hundred years ago" (Mukherjee 8).

In re-Orientalist currency, authenticity is validated by establishing identity and positionality. The anxiety over authenticity and the promotion of authenticity as a desirable element of literary narratives is in part driven by audiences in India and abroad who continue to regard IWE texts as containing truth claims, and judging their merit based on this criterion. Representation meanwhile, unavoidably continues to be highly selective, tempered, warped, skewed, and even distorted as it has to be, by a host of elite representatives, comprising academics, novelists, publishers, gatekeepers, cosmopolitans, ex-patriates, diasporics, media, and more. Perhaps it is all but inevitable, therefore, IWE and its authors simply have to continue enacting "the

commodification of exoticised Orientalism in global capitalist exchange" (Shivani 2).

On the point of capitalist exchange, it is necessary to also take into account the commodification of IWE as a product in cultural markets; poverty being both a marker of exotica as well as a best seller in the literary market. Graham Huggan's seminal work *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) laid the foundation for the discussion of the global commodification of difference and otherness, and of course exoticism. Sarah Brouilette's (2007) siting of postcolonial literature and authors in the marketplace extended the discussion, and indeed, for the last decade, much academic attention has been accurately focused on the selection of postcolonial narratives by publishers, the promotion of select authors and genres, its media-and-publisher-mediated reader response, the role of international acclaim in the form of literary prizes, and the canonising of IWE texts selected by Western sanction (cf. Chakladar; Orsini; Bahri; Majumdar; Squires; Iyer and Zare; Phukan and Rajan, etc.).

As she highlights the issue of poverty as being opportunistically utilised, Korte's article joins in this debate, asking if literary treatments of poverty may be a fictional equivalent to slum tourism (295). Korte raises the intriguing point that poverty in literary narratives as a topic may well attract readers of the global North because it beguilingly suggests this is a topic which is at a comfortable distance from them, a problem which is a remote spectacle and not one which is on their own doorsteps. This then becomes a product which is attractive on the cultural market, exotic without being threatening, because "[m]arginality is chic" (Mukherjee 8).

Korte's article concludes with concern not only with the authority of the representation, but also with the intended audience and reception to such narratives. Audience reception and the marketing world of IWE is indeed vital, because access to IWE is far from open, equal, and equitable. Rebecca S. Duncan and Mendes observed how the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* was received largely positively in the West, but with outrage in India and by Indian diasporic critics who regarded the

exposure of Indian slums as a form of exploitation. Reception is thus divided between applauding the calling of attention to the serious issue of poverty in India, and the demeaning portrayal of India for sales and profits. It is a difficult tightrope for artists and authors to walk; while it is important not to exoticise poverty and thus exploit one's "authenticity" in order to sell, it is equally important not to shy away from directing the spotlight of attention onto the darker facets of India, and giving voice and hearing to those who have not been able to partake in India's economic boom and prosperity. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee has an excellent suggestion, that while marketing what is deemed as exotica, postcolonial writers can "make exoticism bite back" (8), which is to say that, even within the confines of re-Orientalism, Indian writers can utilise re-Orientalism discourse in order to deconstruct and subvert audience expectations of any India-made-easy.

Keele University
Staffordshire

NOTE

[1]"IWE stands accused, by [Anis] Shivani and others, of selling out, reinforcing stereotypes, playing to the gallery, packing and trading pseudo-culture in return for easy profits, and at the more academic end of the argument, of misleading, misrepresenting, and of bad faith. IWE is also seen as betraying its postcolonial roots: 'far from the former empire writing, let alone striking back, this new fiction goes out of its way to avoid creating any sense of discomfort or awareness of historical complicity in its western audience' (Shivani 2006: 3). In short, IWE stands accused not only of Orientalism and re-Orientalism, but of having cowardly, mercenary, western-approval-seeking motives for so doing. Therefore, at a point in time when IWE is celebrated and in great demand, it is also tremendously controversial, simultaneously widely acclaimed and roundly derided" (Lau 27-28).

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Artists as Mothers: A Response to June Sturrock[*]

LOUISA HADLEY

Published in 2009, A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* traces the relationships between the children and parents of various interconnected artistic families at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. In their study *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling* (2010), Alexa Alfer and Amy J. Edwards de Campos note that *The Children's Book* "is centrally concerned with the potential as well as the actual abuses visited upon the young by their elders' overactive and often predatory imaginations" (128). This assessment makes much of the historical location of the novel, understanding the breakdown of the relationships between parents and children as a metaphor for the wider cultural failure of the older generation to protect the younger generation from the horrors of the First World War. Indeed, Alfer and de Campos suggest that the "Great War" dominates the novel as "the inevitable conclusion [...], which none of the characters can predict but which every reader will be aware of" (120).[1] Similarly, Sam Leith writes that "[t]he first world war comes down on the end of *The Children's Book* like a guillotine" (13). Byatt herself, however, resists this prioritization of the war in the novel; in an interview with Leith, she says "I keep trying to get people to take the word 'looming' out of the publicity material" (13). In her article, "Artists as Parents in A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Iris Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice*," June Sturrock illuminates Byatt's novel in a way that enables it to come out from under the shadow of the Great War. While she recog-

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nises that the generational and collective experience is clearly an important part of *The Children's Book*, Sturrock focuses on the complex family relationships presented in the narrative and, in particular, the impact of the position of the parent as artist on the parent-child relationship.

Sturrock's article opens with a consideration of the connections between Byatt's novel and that of her mentor, arguing that *The Children's Book* is "in part a response to Murdoch's writing and more specifically to her late novel, *The Good Apprentice*" (108). She identifies three areas for her comparison: the representation of the artist as parent, the combination of realist and non-realist narrative modes, and the adoption of multiple narratives in an attempt to create a centreless novel. These three threads become interconnected as Sturrock claims that both novels open out from a consideration of the "intense connection between art and parental failure" (113) to explore issues about the moral responsibility of the artist. The attempts to create a "multiple-centred novel" reflect the difficulties and limitations of storytelling in its focus on the individual. Despite the interrelation of these threads, Sturrock's analysis centres on the representation of the artist as parent or, more specifically, the failure of the artist as parent. In contrasting the artist figures of Benedict Fludd and Olive Wellwood, Sturrock draws out the differences in the nature of their failure as parents, which she sees as ultimately tied to the nature of the art they produce. In this response, I would like to expand Sturrock's analysis to consider another factor which impacts on their respective failures as parents: gender.

Sturrock's analysis identifies the intertextual connections between Byatt's potter Benedict Fludd and Murdoch's painter Jesse Baltram, and between both of these fictional characters and the historical figure of Eric Gill. She claims that all three figures reveal the negative impact artist-parents have on their families, yet she suggests that Byatt's novel "is concerned both to intensify and to darken" Murdoch's narrative (108). Whereas Murdoch's novel focuses on the artist-parent of Jesse Baltram, Byatt's more expansive novel incorporates a vast array

of artist-parents, including the children's novelist Olive Wellwood. As with Benedict Fludd, Sturrock identifies interesting parallels between Byatt's fictional artist-parent and a historical figure, the children's novelist Edith Nesbit.[2] In tracing the connections between Byatt's and Murdoch's artist figures, and these fictional figures and their historical models, Sturrock opens out into an interesting consideration of what distinguishes Byatt's version from its intertextual sources. Sturrock suggests that "Murdoch represents Jesse as an artist of questionable achievement and a selfish father: [whereas] Byatt's Fludd is a great artist and a near-ruinous parent" (113). This intensification of passion—both in terms of passion for the creative process and the sexual passion he feels for his daughters—is part of what makes Byatt's artist-parent darker than either Murdoch's Baltram or the historical Gill. Another element that, for Sturrock, renders Byatt's version of this narrative more "disturbing" (111) than Murdoch's is that Byatt "imagines more fully the implications of such a household [...] not just for the male members of the household but also for its abused women" (112). Sturrock suggests that the connections between Murdoch and Byatt's novel are deliberate, arguing that if Byatt "takes the figure of the artist as father in *The Good Apprentice* and intensifies it, she does so because of her concern with the dual responsibilities of the artist, to art and to 'life'—that is to human contacts and more especially to the child" (117).

One of the most interesting aspects of Sturrock's analysis is the connection that she identifies between the type of art created and the nature of the damage inflicted by the artist-parent; she argues that "the nature of the abuse relates to the nature of the art" (114). She states that "the potter's art is tactile, and for both [Benedict Fludd and Eric Gill] this tactile quality is directly and obsessively sexual"; this tactility determines their relationships with their children as both men have a "sexually possessive attitude towards [their] own daughters" (111). Sturrock claims that "Byatt shows Fludd's family [...] as unquestionably harmed by his obsession with his art and by his terrifying anger and his sexual aggressions, though she never directly shows the

process of wounding" (112). Whereas the novel never shows the "process of wounding" Benedict Fludd inflicts on his daughters, it explicitly depicts this process in the case of Olive Wellwood and her children, most notably Tom. Sturrock argues that "Olive's preoccupation with storytelling means that her greatest fault as a parent is 'abstraction—a want of attention' [...], and this lack of attention is also a lack of imagination" (114). She goes on to claim that "[a]s with Fludd and his daughters, [Olive] has damaged her children by turning them into art, by putting them to the service of herself and her art" (115). Sturrock notes that "the potter, who works with his hands, abuses largely through touch," while "[t]he storytellers abuse by spinning stories out of other people to the neglect of their individual reality" (114). In drawing out the correlations between the type of art these parents produce and the ways in which they abuse their children, Sturrock provides a provocative way of thinking about the role of artist-parents and their conflicting responsibilities as artists and as parents.

In focusing on the damaging effects of storytelling, Sturrock highlights something that Byatt has herself identified as a recurring concern in her writing. In her interview with Sam Leith, Byatt says "in my work, writing is always so dangerous. It's very destructive. People who write books are destroyers" (13; cf. Sturrock 113). Indeed, Sturrock hints at connections between *The Children's Book* and some of Byatt's earlier fictions, notably *Possession: A Romance* (1990), the Potter Tetralogy, and "Body Art," in their concern with "parental failure [and] parental passion" (116).[3] However, these texts focus not so much on the artist as parent, but more specifically on the artist as mother. Although Byatt's fictions do not focus exclusively on the female artist, and male artists often appear in her work, her novels do seem to be particularly concerned with the specific difficulties facing the woman artist. Despite resisting being labelled as a feminist writer, Byatt has acknowledged that "all my books are about the woman artist—in that sense they are terribly feminist books" (Tredell 66). Thus, Byatt's concern with what Sturrock terms the "dual responsibilities of the

artist" (117) is most frequently mediated through the figure of the female artist, for whom the opposition between the role of artist and mother exemplifies the conflicting responsibilities to art and life.

Byatt's recurring concern with the position of the female artist in her work highlights a key distinction between the artist figures in *The Children's Book*: gender. Refocusing on the issue of gender and its relationship to art allows for an extension of Sturrock's analysis of the position of artist-parents in this novel. As I have noted, Sturrock understands Olive's failure as a parent as deriving primarily from her position as a storyteller which, paradoxically, involves "a lack of imagination." If the primary cause of Olive's failure as a parent is her position as a storyteller, then it might be expected that the other writer figure in the novel, Herbert Methley, would be guilty of the same abuses. Despite fathering two children in the course of the novel, Herbert Methley remains aloof from them and thus never fully moves into the position of artist-parent. He is, however, still responsible for perpetrating "abuses" against the younger generation, specifically Elsie Warren and Florence Cain. Despite being a storyteller, his "abuse" does not result from the "lack of imagination" that Sturrock ascribes to storytellers; rather it possesses the same "tactile" and sexual quality as Benedict Fludd's abuse. Sturrock notes that "Byatt speaks of Methley as 'horrible' [...] and most readers would agree" (127). However, unlike Benedict Fludd's sexual desires, Methley's are not directed at his own children and therefore are presented as less damaging in the novel. The differences between Herbert Methley and Olive Wellwood reveal that her failings as a parent, although linked to her position as a storyteller, are also inflected by her gender position. Thus, I would like to suggest that the "lack of imagination" with which Sturrock charges Olive is a direct result of her position as a *female* writer.

In many of Byatt's fictions, the female artist experiences a conflict between the competing roles of mother and artist which are frequently represented as an either/or opposition. This conflict can ultimately be understood as a conflict between the self and other. The

women writers in Byatt's fictions are often presented as jealously guarding their sense of self from the threat posed by the "other" in order to continue as an independent, creative individual. In *Possession*, the female poet Christabel LaMotte experiences her relationship with the male poet Randolph Henry Ash as a possible threat to her individual autonomy, and by extension her identity as an artist. Interestingly, LaMotte's desire to preserve her identity from this perceived threat is conceived of in distinctly maternal terms. In a letter to Ash, LaMotte uses the riddle of an egg as an analogy for her desire for solitude. She notes: "*There may come a day when you may lift the lid with impunity—or rather, when it may be lifted from within—for* that *way, life may come—whereas your way—you will discover—only Congealing and Mortality*" (Byatt, *Possession* 137). When her affair with Ash results in the birth of a daughter, LaMotte rejects her role as mother and gives her child to her sister to raise. While this decision can be in part explained by the social norms of the Victorian era in which this strand of the novel is set, it seems to underscore LaMotte's belief in the incompatibility of the roles of artist and mother.

Although most critical accounts of this aspect of the novel focus on LaMotte, on the impact for the female artist, Denenholz Morse hints at the impact on the child, noting that the "separation of mother and daughter leads to a kind of death of female creativity in May [Maia], who rejects the art Christabel creates in unrequited desire and sorrow" (158). This conflict between the two forms of female creation— art and motherhood—remains unreconciled until the end of the novel when there are suggestions that Maud, a direct descendant of Maia and therefore LaMotte, has found a way to "embrace both a sexual and creative identity" (Hadley, "Feminine Endings" 192). Thus, while Byatt explores the implications of the conflict between the self and other for the female artist, she is also concerned with the impact of this conflict for those closest to the female artist.

One consequence of the female artist's determination to preserve the autonomy of the self can be a failure to recognize the other as a complete, individual entity. As we have seen, Sturrock claims that the

damage done by writers is due to a "failure of imagination." However, the "lack of imagination" that Sturrock identifies in Olive's relationships with her children is more properly a lack of empathy, a failure to understand the other as a complete and individual self, having an entirely separate existence from the self. This lack of empathy, perversely, derives from the artist's position as a mother. *The Children's Book* explores the threat that the child poses to the mother's sense of self and traces the consequences of the female artist's preservation of self for the child. In this respect, *The Children's Book* seems to continue the concerns of Byatt's second novel, *The Game* (1967). Specifically focusing on the impact that Julia's novels have on her sister Cassandra, who is the direct inspiration for much of what she writes, *The Game* explores what Byatt refers to as "the fear of the 'woman's novel' as an immoral devouring force" ("Foreword" xii). For Creighton, *The Game* indicates that "a certain amount of 'monstruous' appropriation of others is essential for the artist, including the female artist who has been taught that such aggression is 'unfeminine'" (23). This appropriation of others, however, is not only unfeminine, but also distinctly unmaternal.

In *The Children's Book*, Olive Wellwood clearly represents the conflict between woman as mother and woman as artist; separating out the roles of artist and mother can be seen as an attempt to preserve her sense of self as a creative individual from the imposition of the other through her position as a mother. As Alex Clark notes in her review of the novel: "When Olive is pregnant once again, she seals herself away in her stories, partly out of financial necessity but also to shore up her individuality and to insulate herself from her unborn child." This separation of the roles of mother and artist becomes even more marked once the children are born, with the maternal role being taken on by Olive's sister, Violet.[4] Violet occupies the maternal role and provides for the needs of the children; as she comments to Philip, the young runaway Olive takes in because she is interested to know his "story": "I'm the one they turn to, when they *need* to" (Byatt, *The Children's Book* 19). Although Violet takes care of the children's physi-

cal and to some extent emotional needs, they are still damaged by Olive's art. This damage is perpetrated not just by a "want of attention" on Olive's part, but through her lack of empathy, her failure to understand the "otherness" of "her" children and her tendency to turn her children into stories. Olive writes a private story for each of the children which is begun when they are very young, and is gradually extended and modified as they grow up. In this way, the stories seem to usurp their identity; they both are and are not the stories of the children themselves.[5] Olive never thinks to ask her children's permission to write stories about them and, although she does acknowledge the sense of ownership that her children, especially Tom, have over their stories, she ultimately sees them as her stories and feels free to mine them for ideas for her published works. Thus Olive's storytelling represents what Creighton has termed a "monstrous appropriation of others," which is considered "unfeminine" and thus at odds with her position as a mother. Olive's writing damages all of the children in various ways; however, the damage is most intense with her eldest son, Tom.

After Tom leaves for boarding school, Olive continues to write his private book and send him segments. While Tom's letters home always pointedly thank Olive for the story, saying "[i]t makes all the difference" (198), the narrative reveals a more ambivalent response: "The story was an embarrassment. [...] The story was a necessity" (198). In reading the story, the lines between Tom's real and fictional identity become blurred: "Tom reading *Tom Underground* was real: Tom avoiding Hunter's eye, Tom chanting declensions, Tom cleaning washbasins and listening to smutty jokes was a simulacrum" (198). The boundary between the real and fictional Tom is further blurred as Tom descends into the basement of the school in order to find the privacy to read the story. When Tom is discovered by the older boys, he runs away from school, only returning to his family home six weeks later. Olive's response reveals the extent to which her identity as a mother has been subordinated to her identity as an artist: "She had 'been through' something bad, and she dealt with it in her usual

way, writing a children's story of an innocent boy set upon by bullies at school" (204). In understanding the situation as something that *"she had 'been through,'"* Olive betrays her inability to recognise Tom as a separate, individual being with an emotional life of his own. Indeed, she writes the story in response to feeling "shut out" by Tom's experience: "Tom was part of her, and she was part of Tom, and the evil boy, Hunter, had severed the connection" (203). She seeks to re-establish this connection by writing the story, but in doing so she fails to imagine the impact it will have on Tom. The narrative hints at the potential damage this will do to Tom through the thoughts of another child character: Julian Cain "said to himself that if he were Tom he would find the book unforgivable" (204). It is not only that in writing this novel Olive has usurped Tom's identity and experiences, but also that the writing of this interrupts Tom's own narrative: "Olive did not write any more of *Tom Underground* until after the publication of *Blacktowers*" (204). In appropriating his identity for her fictions, Olive undermines Tom's own sense of himself as a separate being with his own narrative.

Olive's transformation of Tom into fiction becomes truly "unforgivable" when she shifts from writing stories to writing a play. Pondering the difference between writing plays and writing stories, Olive notes that "[a] true playwright makes up people who can be inhabited by actors. A storyteller makes shadow people in the head, autonomous and complete" (518). Thus, in stories, the identity of the other, in this case Tom, is more fully appropriated than in a play. Yet, Olive "was not really a playwright" (518), and thus *Tom Underground* usurps Tom's identity to the extent that he commits suicide.[6] In her usual way, Olive is guilty of a "want of attention" while creating the play: "[she] had not told Tom, either that they had adapted his story, or that they had taken his name. She had not thought about Tom whilst the work was going on" (520). Tom first hears of the play when he receives an invitation to the opening night, and his initial reaction reveals the nature of Olive's failure; he simply remarks "I wasn't asked. Or told" (521). The simple act of asking would have recognised the

sense of ownership that Tom feels over the story and acknowledged his separate existence from his mother.[7] Olive recognises that "she should say—should already have said—something" (520); however, she persists in her lack of empathy and fails to address the situation even after the fact. In doing so, she fails to deal with the situation as a mother, focusing instead on her position as an artist.

That Olive prioritizes her art over her family is reinforced during opening night. Olive and Humphry sit in a separate box from the children, who are with Violet. Thus, Olive appears more concerned with the audience's reaction to her play than with Tom's reaction; she abandons Tom to make sense of the play, and its imposition on his identity, on his own. Tom has an ambivalent response to the play he sees on stage, recognising that he "knew, and didn't know the story. His skin crawled" (523); "Something had been taken from him, certainly, but in these lights, against this backcloth, it was something fabricated and trivial, which it made no sense to mourn" (524). Despite this, Tom clearly does mourn his loss of identity. His reaction is to leave the theatre and walk, initially towards home, but eventually just for the sake of walking. Through the constant movement, Tom seeks to resist the narrative that Olive first imposed on him, and then took away from him. "It did not matter where he went. All that mattered was to move, to be on the move, to use his body and not his mind" (526). As he continues to walk, however, Tom does begin to use his mind and starts to create his own narrative: "He did now have in his head an image of a story. Not more than the skeleton of a story, of a walker walking through England" (531). Tom's story ends with him walking, "without hesitating," into the sea. When his body turns up two days later, Humphry remarks that it was "[n]ot recognisable [...]. Not—as a person" (535). Of course, it was Olive's inability to recognise Tom as an individual person that led to his suicide.

In denying her role as a mother in order to focus on her position as an artist, Olive clearly wreaks irrecoverable damage on her children. Yet Tom's death also causes reciprocal damage to Olive's position as an artist. Haunted by "every Tom that had ever been," Olive initially

thinks "this is a story, there is a story in this" (536). Almost immediately afterwards, however, she recognises that "[t]here would be no more stories, she thought, dramatically, uncertain whether this too was a story, or a full stop" (536). Despite the distance she maintained between her roles as mother and artist, there is a suggestion that both are necessary for Olive's creative process. Thus, Tom's death in some ways ends Olive's identity as both a mother (despite the numerous other children and putative children she has) and an artist: she "took to her bed, most of the time, much of the time in the dark. She was not writing" (542). Although the novel focuses on the dangers of the separation of the role of artist and mother for the child, it also hints at the dangers for the artist-mother. The suggestion seems to be that the roles of mother and artist are inextricably connected, and that one should not be prioritized over another. In this respect, *The Children's Book* recalls "Body Art," which Amanda Craig sees as continuing Byatt's exploration of how the two forms of female creation, art and childbirth, are "intertwined" (67). Although this intertwining is experienced as dangerous by some women artists, there is a suggestion in "Body Art" that it can be productive. In order for it to be productive, however, the separate identities of both the mother and the child need to be respected and preserved. In *The Children's* Book, Olive's failure to recognise and respect her son's separate existence leads to her failure as both a mother and, eventually, as an artist.

Dawson College
Montreal, Canada

NOTES

[1]Conversely, Alex Clark claims that "[t]he war never feels like an inevitability, nor the numerous characters artificially inflated in order to provide soldiers for it; instead, it feels like the vast, traumatising shock that it was, its victims randomly alighted on, its effects making nothing, and yet everything, of what has gone before."

[2]Sturrock traces the resemblances between Nesbit and Wellwood, claiming that "For my purposes—and, I assume, for Byatt's—the most important of these relate to her children" (115). Despite the similarities, Martin Rubin suggests that it is "a monstrous injustice to read this wonderful text as a roman a clef" and to see Olive Wellwood, who he considers a "marvelously original creation, full-blooded and magnificently realized," as merely a fictional representation of Edith Nesbit.

[3]I am deliberately using the term "Potter Tetralogy" to reflect Sturrock's "discomfort with the tendency to label Byatt's tetralogy as 'The Frederica Quartet,'" which she claims "seems to misdirect readers, to provide them with a mistaken focus" (124). This "mistaken focus" suggests that the quartet follows the trajectory of a single character, whereas Sturrock sees it as part of Byatt's attempt to "worked towards Murdoch's ambition of multiple centres" (124).

[4]As Sturrock notes, in assigning the motherly role to her sister, Olive Wellwood follows her historical model Nesbit who similarly left it to "the other woman (her own sister) to play the maternal role" (116).

[5]As Adam Mars-Jones notes, "There is a suggestion that in some way Olive has decanted the essence of her children into the stories."

[6]Mars-Jones suggests that in writing the play Olive "perhaps [...] does something symbolically similar to separating [Tom] from his shadow."

[7]It is this failure to ask permission which separates Olive Wellwood from the other storyteller in the novel, Herbert Methley. When he sees Elsie Warren contemplating buying a pair of boots and a belt, he asks: "I wonder if you would mind very much if I put your feet—and your shoes—into a novel I am writing?" (288). Of course, the other key difference is that Elsie Warren is not Herbert Methley's child.

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Ruinous Fathers, Lethal Mothers:
A Response to June Sturrock[*]

LENA STEVEKER

In her thoughtful essay "Artists as Parents in A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Iris Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice*," June Sturrock explores how Byatt draws on Murdoch's narrative, "intensifying and darkening it so as to forward her own literary concerns" (108). Paying close attention to both the parallels and the differences between Murdoch's and Byatt's texts, Sturrock argues that *The Children's Book* is indebted to the *Good Apprentice* in several ways, most significantly because of its "pervasive treatment […] of the parent as artist" (108). Prominent among the many narrative strands of *The Children's Book* is Byatt's reworking of Murdoch's story of the artist Jesse Baltram whose dysfunctional family revolves around his person and his art. Sturrock identifies Byatt's character of the potter Benedict Fludd as a second Baltram—who in turn is a fictionalized portrayal of the real-life sculptor Eric Gill—before she points out that Byatt shifts the focus of Murdoch's story by including detailed portraits of the artist's female family members. This strategy, Sturrock claims, enables Byatt to consider the traumatizing consequences that living with their abusive father entails for Fludd's daughters. As Sturrock perceptively notes, "Murdoch is not concerned to represent in any detail the damage Jesse does to his family" (112), whereas Byatt "imagines more fully the implications of such a household […] for its abused women" (112).

In *The Children's Book*, however, women are perpetrating mothers as well as victimized daughters. Like her real-life model Edith Nesbit, the character of Olive Wellwood is a successful author of children's books. She is an artist mother who serves to complement Fludd, the destructive artist father. Her self-centredness leads her to neglect her children emotionally, a neglect that disastrously culminates in her eldest son's suicide. Both Benedict Fludd and Olive Wellwood allow Byatt to explore "the potential of the artist for social or moral destructiveness" (Sturrock 113). Although there are indeed more parents and more artists among the many characters in *The Children's Book* than Fludd and Wellwood, these two are clearly the most successful artists and the most damaging parents in the novel. It is through these two characters, as Sturrock convincingly argues, that Byatt presents "parenthood and art [...] as central to human life" (117) and negotiates "the dual responsibilities of the artist, to art and to 'life'—that is to human contacts and more especially to the child" (188).

There is much to commend in Sturrock's attentive discussion of Byatt's novel as reworking and further developing Murdoch's text. Rather than trying to find fault with her essay, I therefore propose to comment on one aspect which I see as complementing her discussion of parental failure in *The Children's Book*. Indeed, "[a]ll parents fail" in Byatt's novel (Sturrock 116). Both the potter Benedict Fludd and the writer Olive Wellwood damage their children. But the failure of Olive Wellwood, the novel's central female artist, is a failure with a difference, because it entails fatal consequences.

Olive Wellwood is the most recent and the most complex personification of the figure of the female artist, whose presence pervades Byatt's fiction.[1] In many of Byatt's novels there are characters who struggle with their identities as both women and artists. Her representations of female artists revolve around the question of how women can reconcile art and life. In her early novel *The Game* (1967), for example, art can be seen as preying on life, as the character of Julia Corbett exploits her sister Cassandra's experiences as a blueprint for a bestselling novel, which then causes Cassandra to kill herself.[2] A

discussion of how life in turn impinges on art can, for instance, be found in Byatt's Booker prize-winning *Possession* (1990), in which the poetess Christabel LaMotte loses her independence when she, an unmarried woman, finds herself pregnant in the wake of a passionate love affair with a fellow poet.[3] In *Possession*, Christabel LaMotte fails as a writer partly because the strict moral and social codes of Victorian patriarchal society stifle her creative potential. If, however, Byatt's female characters do become successful artists, such as Julia Corbett in *The Game*, and indeed Olive Wellwood in *The Children's Book*, they are portrayed as somehow missing out on "life," as lacking in sufficient emotional responsibility towards their children.

Olive is a particularly unsettling example of how Byatt envisions creative women damaging their families. She is, I would argue, both the most successful female artist and the most dangerous mother Byatt has created up to date. To all appearances, Olive is the first of Byatt's female artists who is able to overcome the art/life dichotomy. She is a popular author whose tales sell well enough to support her large family. She has seven children, and she feels deeply attached to all of them, especially to Tom, her eldest child. She thinks of him as "her beloved son" (*Children's Book* 529) and believes that "Tom was part of her, and she was part of him" (203). But although her public image is that of a woman who is both a popular author and a loving mother (e.g. 527), she is revealed as privileging her identity as a writer over her identity as a mother. Developing an ever increasing insight into her mother's personality as she grows up, Olive's daughter Dorothy realizes that "Olive [...] was most complete in the act of reading and writing herself" (316). As Alexa Alfer and Amy J. Edwards de Campos have noted:

> She [Olive] is a woman writer who has had the will to follow the life of the mind, who has literally and figuratively attained a room of her own, and paid for it by her own handsome earnings. And yet, she has [...] gained this at the expense of her immediate family. She has neglected her children [...] so that she can indulge herself in [...] imaginary worlds [...], and her perceptions of others [...] are tinged with narcissism. (122)

Olive is indeed very protective of her identity as an artist. As she finds herself unable to write whenever anything disturbs her peace of mind, she "ignores a great deal" (*The Children's Book* 301) of what troubles her children. Thus, she deliberately turns a blind eye to the distress Dorothy experiences upon learning that Humphrey, Olive's husband, is not her biological father. Worse, Olive likewise chooses to ignore the feeling of unease that accompanies her decision not to tell her son Tom that she is about to make public a story she has written for him alone by turning it into a West End play. She decides to keep "the whole truth about the play" (529) from Tom although she "kn[ows] she should say [...] something" (520) to him about her theatre project. Her feeling of foreboding proves to have been correct as Tom's sense of betrayal and his feeling that "[s]omething had been taken away from him" (524) are so strong that he commits suicide after attending the play's opening night. Taking his own life is Tom's only means of protecting himself against his mother. Committing suicide is his way of "be[ing] revenged on Olive, evad[ing] Olive, free[ing] himself from Olive and being written about" (569-70). While Olive's disregard of Dorothy shows her general emotional carelessness towards her children, it is her tragic neglect of Tom which particularly exemplifies, as Sturrock argues, that "[a]s with Fludd and his daughters, she [Olive] has damaged her children by turning them to art, by putting them to the service of herself and her art" (115).

Although I agree that both artist characters inflict serious harm upon their children, I would argue that the novel inscribes a gender difference between its male and female artist figures in that it portrays the mother artist as even more dangerous than the father artist. There can be no doubt that Benedict Fludd gravely damages his daughters. Their father's sexual abuse and his tyrannical control leave each of them traumatized. And yet, his crime against them—a crime that clearly marks Fludd's utter parental failure—is not presented as having the same existential consequences that Olive's failure as a mother has for Tom. I do not want to imply that, in *The Children's Book*, a father's sexual abuse is shown as being in any way "better" or easier

to bear than a mother's emotional neglect. But I think it is noteworthy that, while Benedict Fludd's daughters are eventually allowed to escape their father's influence and lead lives of their own, Olive's son is denied any such liberation. For Tom, the only means of taking himself outside his mother's reach is an act of self-annihilation. Byatt's male artist is a "near-ruinous" father (Sturrock 113), but her female artist is a lethal mother. Sturrock observes that, in *The Children's Book* "Byatt questions [...] the moral status of the artist not just in relation to art, but also in regard to the world of other people" (Sturrock 126). With Olive Wellwood destroying her son's world, the moral status that appears most questionable of all is that of the female artist. That is gender trouble indeed.

Universität des Saarlandes

NOTES

[1]Franken provides in-depth readings of the various female artists in most of Byatt's novels.

[2]For more detailed discussions of how The Game is concerned with the relation of art and life, cf. Alfer and de Campos 24-34, and Steveker, "Solitude" 161-63.

[3]For closer discussions of LaMotte as a failed woman writer cf. Steveker, *Identity and Cultural Memory* 55-60, and Steveker, "Solitude" 157-61.

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A Daughter Abandons Her Literary Mother:
A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Iris Murdoch's
The Good Apprentice. A Response to June Sturrock[*]

NICK TURNER

Although there is a growing body of work on contemporary fiction, it can still take a considerable time for scholarly essays on new novels to appear. For this amongst other reasons, June Sturrock's "Artists as Parents in A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Iris Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice* is very welcome: at the moment there is only one other article on Byatt's novel. The author sets out to prove that the old-established idea of Murdoch as a "literary mother" to Byatt can still generate fresh evidence. Daughters may be influenced by their mothers, but also challenge them: here, Byatt is shown to do both.

According to Sturrock, *The Children's Book* is "in part a response to Murdoch's writing and more specifically to her late novel, *The Good Apprentice*" (108). Like Murdoch, the author suggests, Byatt foregrounds a fictional artistic family, modelled on that of Eric Gill, to allow her to debate and depict the damaging potential artists have as fathers: "*The Children's Book* has its own version of the establishment at Seegard" (110), and Byatt "takes the figure of the artist as father in *The Good Apprentice* and intensifies it" (117). In addition to this Byatt shares, Sturrock claims, Murdoch's interest in multiple centres in a narrative, and builds on the latter's mix of fairy tale and realism: Sturrock reminds us that "Byatt like Murdoch associates art with the fairy tale" (118). *The Children's Book* thus engages with and builds on both the form and the moral argument of *The Good Apprentice*.

The essay is well argued throughout, persuasive and scholarly. Noting how Olive in *The Children's Book* is implicitly criticised by the implied author for "lack of attention" (114), however, I was surprised that a link to Murdoch was not made, for it has been a backbone of Murdoch criticism that the author inherited Simone Weil's passion for attention, preaching that the best art can lead to a loss of self and a loving recognition of the contingent world and its persons.[1] The artist characters of Byatt's novel do not learn this. Sturrock also describes Purchase House in Byatt's novel as "place of contingency" (121); this again is a word that is a frequent part of Murdoch's vocabulary,[2] and an opportunity for making a link between Murdoch and Byatt is missed. Similarly, Sturrock quotes a character in the novel describing a situation as a "muddle" (116), but does not suggest that this is perhaps a negative version of the "muddles" and "jumbles" which form a joyous part of Murdoch's *oeuvre*.[3]

There are further points to be made in response to Sturrock's ideas, and the first relates to Byatt herself as an author. Sturrock writes: "More recently she has expressed doubts, not about Murdoch's quality but about her continuing reputation, saying that readers now wonder 'whether they overvalued her […]'" (126n1). Byatt has retracted these comments, stating that they were never meant to be taken seriously.[4] Byatt's commitment to Murdoch's work has been evidenced recently by, for example, a Murdoch event at the Royal Society of Literature where she was a key speaker.[5]

I thought it would be worthwhile to contact Byatt and ask for her response to the claims made in the article. Her reaction was one of surprise: she stated that she could not see any links, although she implied that it was some time since she had read *The Good Apprentice* and that she may have covered over something in her mind.[6] Which ever way, the "retelling" Sturrock claims is certainly not a conscious one on the part of Byatt.

The second point is one that pertains to current literary criticism more widely, of which this piece is a representative example. Sturrock's readings are careful and informed, and always engaging, but

missing is a sense of evaluation. This is increasingly seen as the job of journalists (Sturrock cites a favourable review by Leith (117)); but there is surely an argument for analysing how well Byatt carries out her apparent attempt to rethink Murdoch. Does she improve upon her "mother"?

Both novels, as well as having a shared moral centre, multiple narratives and a combination of realism and fairytale, are rich and highly intelligent. They are also both too long. Murdoch, famously, refused to allow Chatto and Windus to edit her work, with the result that her later works could easily be described as baggy monsters. *The Good Apprentice* was written in these years; alongside the shimmering magic of Seegard, and a compelling narrative demonstrating that the world can continually surprise, sit many disquisitions on goodness and responsibility that slow the pace. It is an at times brilliant, at times frustrating piece of fiction. In the same way, *The Children's Book* is for its most part an exemplary fictional display of imagination and writing, but can suffer from being a masterpiece of learning; if Murdoch is keen to show off her philosophy, Byatt is keen to exhibit her knowledge of the art and cultural history of the Edwardian years. This knowledge is fascinating and stimulating; it does hold up the narrative, however.

As a final point, I would suggest that the parellels drawn by Sturrock might be rather too narrow. There is no doubt that Byatt's novel alludes to Eric Gill, Edith Nesbit and Edwardian Fabianism; it is certainly possible that Byatt might have unconsciously reworked the Seegard narrative from *The Good Apprentice*. But there are many other novels that either depict artists as damaging parents, or show eccentric artistic communities: Elizabeth Taylor's *The Wedding Group* and Penelope Lively's *The Family Album* are two potentially profitable avenues for exploration.

Edge Hill University
Ormskirk, Lancashire, GB

NOTES

[1]This idea was introduced by Byatt in *Degrees of Freedom*.

[2]In *Under the Net* (1954), Jake Donaghue states "I hate contingency" (26). The book is in part an illustration of how he must learn to embrace it, and the theme of accepting contingency, or "mess," continues throughout Murdoch's fiction.

[3]Murdochean muddle is shown in, among other places, the deliberate formlessness of the 1971 novel *An Accidental Man*, and Jake's recognition, at the end of *Under the Net*, that the apparently random patterning of a litter of kittens is "just one of the wonders of the world" (286).

[4]Private communication: email, October 28, 2010.

[5]"Iris Murdoch Revisited," Royal Society of Literature, March 7, 2011.

[6]Private communication: email, March 17, 2012.

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