

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

capallie caring how to latishe *Gynecia* (whole iudgement and passion she stood most in regard of) bowing her head to her attentiu care, Madame (said she) with practife of my thoughts, I haue found out a way by which your contentment shal draw on my happineffe. *Gynecia* deliuering in her face as thankfull a ioyfulnesse as her heart could hold, said, it was then time to retire themselues to their rest, for what 15 with riding abroad the day before, and late fitting vp for Eclogues, their bodies had dearelie purchafed that nights quiet. So went they home to their Lodge, *Zelmane* framing of both sides bountifull meafures of louing countenances to eithers ioy, and neithers ieaiousie; to the especiall comfort of *Basilius*, whose weaker bowels were ftraight full with the least liquor of hope. So that still holding her by the hand, 20 and sometimes tickling it, he went by her with the most gay conceits that euer had entred his braines, growing now fo hearted in his resolution, that he litle respected *Gynecias* preface. But with a lustier note then wonted, clearing his voice, & chearing his spirits, looking still vpon *Zelmane* (whom now the Moone did beautifife with her shining almost at the full) as if her eyes had bene his song-Booke, hee did 25 the message of his mind in finging these verses:

When two Sunnes do appeare,
Some say it doth betoken wondrous neare,
As Princes losse or change: 30
Two gleaming Sunnes of splendour like I see,
And seeing feele in me
Of Princes heart quite lost the ruine strange.

But now each where dothrange 35
With wylie cloke the darke enuious night:
Who full of guiltie spite,
Such liuing beames should her blacke seas affaile,
Too weake for them our weaker sight doth waile.

No sayes faire Moone, my light 40
Shall barre that wrong, and though it not preuaile
Like to my brothers rayes, yet those I send
Hurt not the face, which nothing can amend. 6

And by that time being come to the Lodge, and visited the sweet *philocles*, with 45
much lesse then naturall care of the Parents, and much lesse the wonted kindnesse of
Zelmane, each party full fraught with diuersly working fancies, made their pillowes
weake

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“Thy words do finde me out”: Reading the Last Line of “Affliction (I)”^{1*}

INGE LEIMBERG

The words “Let me not love thee, if I love thee not” bring to a close the first of the five “Affliction” poems in George Herbert’s cycle of religious poems titled *The Temple. Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*.² I wish to focus on the questions raised by the last line of “Affliction (I)” in the context of this work as seen against the background of Herbert’s characteristic Christian Humanism.

In *The Temple* the liturgical year does not begin with the first Sunday in Advent but with Good Friday. When the reader enters “The Church” (after having considered his moral responsibilities in “The Church-porch”) he immediately stands in front of the altar. The sacrifice celebrated on the altar is Christ Crucified, who speaks to us from the Cross and makes us see his passion in his own light, using a phrase from a traditional liturgy for Good Friday: “O all ye who pass by, behold and see” (“The Sacrifice” 1 and 201).³ Good Friday is followed by Easter. But in *The Temple* we are emphatically reminded that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world and that, therefore, the speaker’s Eastertide hope that “affliction shall advance the flight” in him (“Easter Wings” 20) is given the lie, for nature rebels⁴ and sin circumvents all precautions.⁵ Affliction has the speaker firmly in its grip and is complained of in a long and, indeed, very *private ejaculation*, the first of the five poems titled “Affliction.”

In this poem the speaker surveys his former life and finds that God has been too hard a taskmaster for him, unkind and not even trustworthy since he not only “entic’d”⁶ the speaker to enter his service but

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg0241.htm>>.

even went so far as to “betray [him] to a lingring book” (39). At the end of his long and bitter complaint, the speaker, after having wished to descend several steps in the scale of being and become a tree, goes to the last possible extreme of his discontent, giving notice altogether:

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
 In weaknesse must be stout.
 Well, I will change the service, and go seek
 Some other master out—(61-64)

This decision is, however, instantly revoked:

Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,
 Let me not love thee, if I love thee not. (65-66)

The word “love” never occurred before in the long poem. “Service” was the word. In “The Church” the word *service* regularly denotes man’s intimate relation with God. This could not be better expressed than by the fact that *serve* is an anagram of *verse*. Serving, “versing,”⁷ and loving God are one and the same in Herbert’s poetry.⁸

The word *love* that replaces the word *service* in the last line of “Affliction (I)” is, everywhere in *The Temple*, nothing less than the name of God.⁹ To make that quite clear, Herbert went so far as to rewrite the 23rd Psalm, transforming “The Lord is my shepherd” into: “The God of love my shepherd is” (1). The next line that rhymes with this one consists of the classic formula of love poetry: “While he is mine, and I am his” (3). In Herbert’s poetry the 23rd Psalm has become man’s love song addressed to God. Herbert most sincerely respects the rule “*Love God and love your neighbour*” (“Divinitie” 17) but in *The Temple* the neighbour plays only a minor part, if any. The reader bids him adieu when he leaves the “Church-porch” and enters “The Church.” Here one very individual man meets the God of love and communicates with him in a love poetry all his own. In his *Sacred Poems* he brings his offerings to him (not burnt offerings nor offerings of incense, but of prayer and praise),¹⁰ and he does so not only as the spokesman of many other individual men¹¹ not gifted with his art but also of all created beings that, not endowed with a rational soul, can praise the

creator only unconsciously.¹² Most of all the speaker of *The Temple* praises the world-creating Word, Jesus Christ, because he died on the Cross for love of mankind. If only (the speaker often complains) his praise of the God of love could reach the fervour and perfection of love poetry that has been practised and refined through the ages.¹³ And in "The Thanksgiving" he actually alludes to one of the great masters of love poetry, when he addresses God, saying:

Nay, I will reade thy book, and never move
 Till I have found therein thy love,
 Thy art of love, which I'le turn back on thee: (45-47)

"[A]rt of love" is a literal translation of *Ars amatoria*, the title of Ovid's work in which we find, embedded in the most ardent love poetry, some lovely remarks on poetry as a *sacrum commercium*.¹⁴ In God's book, the writer of *The Temple* wants to elicit God's *Ars Amatoria*, which he wants to "turn back" on him. In other words, he thinks of his poetic imitation in terms of his, George Herbert's, own *Ars Amatoria* imitating and answering the original one composed by the Divine Word.

In referring to Ovid rather than to Dante or Petrarch, Herbert prefers mutual love¹⁵ to a one-sided adoration of a beloved. In the sixteenth century the Humanist revival and the Reformation had paved the way for such a preference. Petrarchism still prevailed in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (though not in the *Arcadia*), but to Spenser and Shakespeare love came into its own in the "mutual flame" (Shakespeare, *The Phoenix and Turtle* 24)¹⁶ of "married chastity" (61). Of course, in Elizabethan love poetry the beloved was as passionately and exquisitely praised as Beatrice and Laura ever were, but now the beloved lady has descended from her pedestal and become a passionately loving woman. Similarly in Herbert's art of love, the speaker offers his praise to an infinitely far removed beloved, God, who is, however, quite as infinitely near to him¹⁷ as he is removed, and who is, again infinitely, more loving than beloved. *Amor Dei* denotes God's love for man and man's love of God at the same time, and in *The Temple* the love of God is mutual. The speaker often says so, some-

times with such loving poetic fervour as in “The Claspings of Hands,” and sometimes with such a rigorous stylistic austerity as in the mysterious single line “Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.”

The last stanza of “Affliction (I)” functions as a second “Superliminare,” which tells us to be ready for “the churches mysticall repast” (4). The display of historically verifiable autobiographical facts¹⁸ in “Affliction (I)” is exceptional in “The Church”; it will never be repeated, even in the most intimately personal of *Private Ejaculations*. In “The Church” we partake of the Sacraments, which are a “mysticall repast.”

The mystery of *amor Dei* is the main theme of “The Church,” and Herbert uses various means to make the mystery shine. Paronomasia is his favourite; he uses it repeatedly and to most striking effect, as in “Wine becomes a wing at last” (“The Banquet” 42). The pattern poems are indeed “common Hieroglyphicks”¹⁹: in poems like “Aaron” or “Paradise” sheer artistry points out the mystery, in “The Sacrifice” religious irony does, and sometimes the mysteriousness (the word does occur in “The Sacrifice”) of *amor Dei* becomes manifest in such single lines as “I am with thee and *most take all*” (“The Quidditie” 12) – and “Let me not love thee, if I love thee not” (“Affliction [I]” 67). Both lines are final and both read like encoded messages. In the first case the alphabet provides the key,²⁰ in the second we have yet to find it. In all these examples (as in Herbert’s English poetry throughout) the shining of mystery is part of a stylistically and intellectually most subtle compositional texture which, however, answers to the maxim *Simplex sigillum veri*.²¹ To make these “contraryes meete in one” (Donne, Holy Sonnet “Oh, to vex me” 1) is the hallmark of Herbert’s charm.

By leading up to my “decoding” of the last line of “Affliction (I)” in this manner I have implicitly disagreed with those critics who see the line as an ellipsis and thus feel invited to fill in the blanks,²² like this: “1. Do not allow me to go on loving you if I do not love you now ... 2. Do not allow me to love you in intention if I do not love you in reality ...,” and so on.²³ But, as far as I can see, *amor Dei* in Herbert is not

relative to time or any other postulate of reality. There can only be loving or not loving. So let us take the last line as it stands, meaningfully interwoven with "Affliction (I)" and with all the other poems in *The Temple* and yet delivering a mysterious epigrammatic message of its own.

Since the stanza is flanked by two conjunctions, syntax and logic offer themselves as possible guides. The first conjunction is a composite one, "Yet though," the final one is "if." The adversative "Yet" marks the reversal from the speaker's lamentations to his coming to a conclusion. The "though" concerns the hardness of the speaker's "service"; he must always make concessions and never grumble: "Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek; / In weaknesse must be stout" ("Affliction [I]" 61) This is a chiasmus, stressed by the homonymic and synonymic link between "meek" and "weak" at the crossing point; and here a previous line (53) echoes in the reader's memory: "Thus doth thy power crosse-bias me." According to the *OED*, a "cross-bias" is a bias "running athwart or counter to another." Herbert uses the verb derived from this composite noun, and I shall borrow it to describe his syntactic and logical drift in the last stanza of "Affliction (I)." The next two lines are also *cross-biased*, though in a different manner, not by logically expressive conjunctions, but by a semantic opposition. In his statement about the concessions to be made ("Yet, though...") the speaker repeated the word "must." This modal verb is now *cross-biased* by the modal verb "will" that is stressed by being coupled with the near-homonymic and etymologically identical²⁴ "Well": "Well, I will change the service" (63). In the last two lines of the six-line stanza the wilful subjectivity of "Well, I will" is *cross-biased* by the submissive and pious apostrophe "Ah my deare God!" (65). After that we return to clearly defined syntactical logic. First there is another "Though" that partly repeats the initial "Yet, though," and this concessive conjunction leads up to the conditional conjunction "if" which, together with the climactic final "not," dominates the last line: "Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" (66).

The *if* has been described by Plutarch as the nucleus of the hypothetical syllogism that is an intellectual achievement strictly reserved for the human mind and, therefore, a characteristic of the human condition (see *Moralia* 386c-387a).²⁵ In syntactical usage the Latin *si* as well as the English *if* has assumed great semantic flexibility. To Donatus *si* was, without qualification, a causal conjunction (364), while in Lily's Grammar it is a conditional one (*A Shorte Introduction Ciii*^r). But in one of John Donne's sermons the exegesis of the text is based on a variety of denotations of *si* or *if*:

there is thus much more force in this particule *Si, If*, which is [...] *Si concessionis, non dubitationis*, an *If* that implyes a confession and acknowledgement, not a hesitation or a doubt, That is also a *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 (*Sermons* 3: 277.124-29)²⁶

All of Donne's denotations and connotations accord surprisingly well with the "if" in Herbert's line. Even if it is not quite a "*Si concessionis*," it is at least syntactically and logically dependent on the concessive clause "though I am clean forgot," which is preceded by the initial composite conjunction "Yet though." The question whether there may also be touches of a "*Si dubitationis*" and "*progressionis*" in Herbert's "if" is well worth considering. Certainly it leads up to a conclusion and can therefore be called a "*Si conclusionis*" and a synonym of "*Since*."

The logical conclusion, however, does not come until the last line of "Affliction (I)." "[I]f I love thee not" is the logical premise that syntactically ought to precede the imperative "Let me not love thee." It follows in the poem partly for the rhyme's sake, which lays stress on the "not" that is unique in *The Temple*. Never again does Herbert make negativity sound so final.²⁷ This strong and richly meaningful effect of "not" goes together with the interplay of chiasmus and parallelism implied in the inversion of "if I love thee not" and "Let me not love thee."

To repeat: inversion and chiasmus are structurally dominant in the last stanza. It is *cross-biased* to such an extent that we are inclined to

think of the double St Andrew's Cross of "Easter wings." In that poem the pattern can be seen with the eyes of the body and it indicates falling and rising. In the last stanza of "Affliction (I)" it can be seen only with the eyes of the mind and indicates mysteriousness, a *crux*, or shall we say *knot* instead of *crux*? According to the *OED*, a knot is "a design or figure formed of crossing lines" ("knot" *n.*¹ 6.); the figurative meaning of *knot* is "Something that forms or maintains a union [...] *spec.* the tie or bond of wedlock" (11.a. and b.; or, as in Herbert's "The Pearl," a "true-love-knot" [16]). But it also means "Something difficult to trace out or explain," and "the central or main point [...] in a problem" (10.a. and b.),²⁸ and, finally, "A bond or obligation; a binding condition" (†12.; see the examples).²⁹

The last line of "Affliction (I)" does indeed present a *crux* or *knot*. The double "not" rings with all the overtones suggested by the semantic richness of the word *knot*. Nothing could be more like George Herbert than such a *serio ludere* or pious juggling with paronomasia. Such "Charms and Knots" are part of the charm of *The Temple*. In "Affliction (IV)" the speaker prays to God (in a verbal context very much akin to "Affliction [I]") that He may "dissolve the knot" (22) of man's entanglement with his own senses. In "Home" (61) man himself is the knot because of the duality of body and soul. It is a multi-voiced echo that draws attention to the two *nots* in the last line of "Affliction (I)." What do they say?

Let us, for interpretive purposes, take the second one first. True to its lexical calling of being the "ordinary adverb of negation" (*OED*, "not" *adv.*), the final "not" negates the speaker's love for God. It does so, as it still would in Herbert's time, following the verb (*OED*, "not" *adv.* 1.a.), "love [...] not," and the syntactic relation of subject, predicate, and object in this conditional clause ("if I love thee not") is unambiguous.

In the imperative "Let me not love thee" which is, logically, the consequent (or *apodosis*) of the conditional clause, the syntactic function of the "not" is, by contrast, far from unambiguous. What does it negate? God's letting man love him? or man's loving God of his own accord?

The adverb “not” may, chiefly in poetical usage (from the 15th to the 19th century), not only follow the verb but also precede it,³⁰ as it does in Latin words like *nescio* or *nequeo* and, even more to the point, *negligo*.³¹ The words easily come to mind because we have just been face to face with a Latinism in “Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot” (“Affliction [I]” 65) “I am [...] forgot” is the literal English equivalent of Latin *oblitus sum*³² which, *obliviscor* being a deponent verb, is the semantic equivalent of English *I have forgotten*, but an ambiguous undercurrent of *I am forgotten* makes itself felt.³³ *Obliviscor* is semantically closely related to *negligo* (*forget* and *neglect*), and *negligo* is derived from *lego* as *diligo* is, and *diligo* denotes *to love* in the *Vulgate* throughout. Therefore I suggest that in “Let me not love thee” the “not” does not follow and negate “Let” but precedes and negates “love.” The speaker says, *Let me not-love thee, if I love thee not*, as a man might say to a friend: “Take me as I am.” Nothing speaks against this hypothesis linguistically, but something speaks for it in the immediate context, and the wider context confirms it.

As the first ten stanzas have shown, the speaker only in the beginning “thought the service brave” (2); after that he gets more and more discontented, and in the last stanza he proclaims his decision to “change the service , and go seek / Some other master out” (63-64). But this is only the first of several changes of mind which are, very quickly, one after the other, to come. The words “some other master” are immediately followed by the apostrophe “Ah my deare God!” And once our attention is focused on this parallel—servant and master, the speaker and God—we become aware of a pattern in which the initially surprising word “love” in the last line finds its place as the indispensable copula of the two *personae*, servant and master—the speaker and God. It also becomes apparent that in this markedly autobiographical poem an archetypal pattern has become individualized to such a degree that (as Thomas Mann’s Joseph tells Pharaoh) *the well known becomes unknown and we do not recognize it*.³⁴ But if we listen to the poet’s words they do *find us out* and show us the way.

In Exodus 21 God, speaking out of his darkness to Moses, gives instructions for the relation of servant and master and service and freedom, telling him that

4 If his [the servant's] master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; [...] and he shall serve him for ever.

The pattern is centred on the servant's statement "I love my master, [...] I will not go out free," which explicates *amor Dei* seen from man's side, or, which is the same, *amor Dei* practised by man as the service that is perfect freedom (see BCP [1559], "The seconde Collecte for Peace" 111). The servant, loving his master as well as his family, rejects freedom and chooses his master's service, and the master lets him go on with it "forever." And this is the *well known* pattern that, in the last line of "Affliction (I)" becomes *unknown so that it is not recognized*. The phrase "Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" is a kind of sacred parody of God's words in Exodus, for Herbert at once disguises and discloses the Old Testament pattern; the phrase at the same time denies and confirms the idea of the service that is perfect freedom. The model servant in Exodus professes his love for his master and wants to remain in his service. The individual servant in the poem does not-love his master; he has put that on record in his long autobiographical complaint. But when he comes to the conclusion "Well, I will change the service and go seek / Some other master out," he realizes that he has hit rock bottom and cries out for help to the very master he was about to leave, begging him to keep him in his service *although*, or *since*, or "if" he does not-love him. His, a sinner's love for his God, will always be more of a *neglegere* than a *diligere*, and if God answers to his prayer and does let him remain in his service, He will always have to put up with His servant's not-loving him.

Just as the pattern for the service that is perfect freedom is to be found in Exodus, the pattern for George Herbert's idea of a sinner

being allowed to serve his God though unable to love him is to be found everywhere in *The Temple* but prototypically in the Private Ejaculation titled "Miserie." The speaker is concerned throughout with "Man" in general, but in the last line he confesses "My God, I mean my self." Man, that is, not every man in the abstract, but personally and really, must confess to his inability "to serve [God] in fear" and to "praise [God's] name." This applies to even "The best of men":

They quarrel thee, and would give over
The bargain made to serve thee: but thy love
Holds them unto it, [...] (25-27)

These three lines are a complement to the last stanza of "Affliction (I)." They partly paraphrase the errant servant's decision to "change the service and go seek / Some other master out," and partly contain an answer to his prayer "Let me not love thee, if I love thee not." God, loving and long suffering as he is, does let him remain in his service not-loving him.

Amor Dei in *The Temple* is as mutual as it is unequal. God's love for man is absolute and unchanging; it is essentially unconditional. By contrast, fallen man's love for God is relative, changeful. It is inextricably bound up with the human condition. Man is wanting in love for his God but God "doth supplie the want. / And when th'heart sayes (sighing to be approved) / *O could I love!* And stops: God writeth, *Loved*" ("A true Hymne" 18-20).³⁵ In the exuberance of "Praise (II)" the speaker goes far beyond that anxious hypothetical "*could I love!*" saying, or rather singing: "King of Glorie, King of Peace, / I will love thee" (1-2). But even in this joyful psalm the human condition intervenes: what the words say, is "I will love thee," not *I love thee*. Yearning for being able to love God, complaining of not being able to love God, and being, in happy moments, joyfully willing to love God are the modes in which the speaker of *The Temple* participates in the mutuality of *amor Dei*. God is Love, and the speaker addresses him sometimes as lovers do in songs and sonnets as "My love, my sweetnesse" ("Longing" 79; cf. "The Call" 9 and 11), but he avoids the direct, af-

firmative statement: "I love thee." It occurs only once in *The Temple*, in the refrain of the first three stanzas of "The Pearl. Matth. 13.45."

Critics of that poem have found it difficult to come to terms with the speaker's elaborate display of knowledge with respect to learning, honour, and pleasure and his rejection of them all, crying out "Yet I love thee" (10), until he, finally, grips the "silk twist" (38) let down to him from heaven: "To climbe to thee" (40). But in spite of all theological difficulties concerning the problem of *sola fide* in "The Pearl," one critic is struck with "the assured voice of the refrain, which is peaceful, dignified, and deeply happy."³⁶

I beg to disagree. To me, in the context of *The Temple*, the threefold affirmation "Yet I love thee" is tinged with religious irony. The speaker is overdoing it, he is being, in John Donne's words, "*too familiar*" with God (*Sermons* 10: 245.566). Boasting of his knowledge of the world, he is completely bereft of the self-knowledge which, in clearer moments, tells him that "In soul he mounts and flies, / In flesh he dies" ("Mans medley" 13-14; see also "Justice [I]"). It seems to me that one of the reasons why the voice of Herbert's speaker could reach Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot so immediately is that always, even in his most joyful hymns, he speaks for fallen man in his entirety. Herbert's religious poetry is never merely soulful in a sentimental, esoteric sense, but the threefold refrain "Yet I love thee" together with the concluding "I climbe to thee" is just that. It does not fit. I suggest that the experience displayed in "The Pearl" is not basic but episodic; it calls for instant completion—and gets it, too. The next title is "Affliction (IV)," so that, reading right on from the last line of "The Pearl" to the next title, we hear the speaker say: *a silk twist from heaven has taught me to climb to thee, affliction*. Far from being in God's presence, he finds himself

Broken in pieces all asunder,
 Lord, hunt me not,
 A thing forgot,
 [...]. (1-3)

Seen in this light the climber's "silk twist" was not strong enough to carry him upwards, body and soul, so it breaks and he finds himself fallen down to the ground, disintegrated, and exposed to forgetfulness like the speaker of "Affliction (I)" who said "Ah, my deare God, though I am clean forgot" (65).

Could it be that in "The Pearl" Herbert demonstrates an understanding of the biblical text that is merely sentimental and falls short of religious sincerity, as if the merchant of the parable had been satisfied with having bought and being in possession of the pearl, oblivious of the fact that this is heaven only metaphorically and must be spiritually transformed and existentially realized to prove efficacious? If "The Pearl" was meant to expose such a fallacious manner of understanding, the reader of the poem should be intellectually situated within the parable, not regarding it from an Archimedean point in its hermetic seclusion. The metaphor hides the meaning which it shows. We need a special key to "dissolve the knot" as the speaker of "Affliction (IV)" will soon say in a fervent prayer (22), leading us back to the last line of "Affliction (I)" and the speaker's prayer to God, the master, that he may let him, the servant, remain in his service and thus go on not-loving him "if," or although, or since he *loves him not*.

The imperative "dissolve the knot" is charged with alchemical meaning. And the laconism of the concluding line "Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" is a kind of quintessence distilled out of a substance consisting of many ingredients. In literary interpretation, the process of distillation is reversed. The quintessential formula is regarded and evaluated as part of the smaller work, within the larger work, within its manifold cultural context, and the "solvents" used for the "analysis" are grammar, logic, rhetoric, and verbal usage through the ages, that is to say, the literary scholar's usual bag of tools. But if the quintessential message is especially firmly encoded, a special "solvent" must be looked for. This is, in the last line of "Affliction (I)," the passage from Exodus 21.5 where, in God's own words quoted from memory by Moses, the rule is laid down that a man's staying in his master's service depends on his love for his master. In the Old

Testament and in the poem, the components of the pattern are the same: master, servant, love. But in Herbert's variation on the theme "there is," as Portia laconically says, "something else" (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.301), not a *jot*, as in her case, but a "not." And this, syntactically rightly positioned, marks the difference between the ideal Mosaic prototype and the ardent and anxious Christian individual who speaks to us in the poetry of *The Temple*, which its maker wants us to regard as God's "art of love" *turned back on God*.

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NOTES

¹The quotation is from "The H. Scriptures. II." (11). All quotations of George Herbert's English poetry and prose will be from F. E. Hutchinson's edition *The Works of George Herbert*; I have also consulted Helen Wilcox's edition *The English Poems of George Herbert*.

²For editorial details concerning title and subtitle, see Hutchinson L-LIII.

³See Tuve 33-34.

⁴See "Nature" 1-3.

⁵See "Sinne (I)."

⁶Apart from "The Church-porch" 295, *entice* has pejorative overtones in Herbert. See *OED* "entice" *v.*, and cf., e.g., Shakespeare, *Pericles* 1.0.27-28: "[...] entice [...] / To evil." All Shakespeare quotations are from the most recent Arden editions.

⁷See "The Flower" 39.

⁸There is a further anagrammatic fact: the words *master* and *servant* consist of the same letters. This coincidence is displayed elaborately in "The Odour. 2. Cor. 2.15." For structural similarities in the Latin letters M, N, and V, see Tory k.ij. and verso.

⁹Three outstanding examples are "Love (III)," "Even-song," and "The World."

¹⁰The pattern of offering praise may be seen, e.g., in the first line of Donne's *La Corona*, "Deigne at my hands this crown of prayer and praise" (*The Divine Poems of John Donne* 1).

¹¹See "Miserie," esp. 31, 43, and 78: "My God, I mean myself." Theodor W. Adorno unfolds this idea in "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft."

¹²See, e.g., "Providence," especially 1-16, and "Man," especially 7-12.

¹³This theme is present in *The Temple* throughout. It is discussed directly in poems like "Jordan (I)" and indirectly in poems like "A Parodie."

¹⁴Ovid makes the lover (the poet) say to the girl: "Est deus in nobis et sunt commercia caeli" 3.549; "A god lives in us and we trade with heaven" (my translation). See Herz, esp. 13-22.

¹⁵See Anne C. Fowler, who writes: "The poem moves from an initial fiction of seduction and betrayal, with a speaker whose biography suggests the poet himself as the ingenuous victim, toward an intuition of active and reciprocal love" (144).

¹⁶The metaphor of the "mutual flame" is owed to Tibullus, see *Tibull und sein Kreis* V.V.6-7 and passim.

¹⁷See "The Search" 57-60.

¹⁸See, e.g., Hutchinson's notes on lines 32 and 38, and Wilcox's notes on lines 32, 37, 38, and 39-40.

¹⁹This is Sir Thomas Browne's version of the great commonplace; see *Religio Medici* 15.34.

²⁰I suggest that "most take all" is an enigmatic variation of *mystical*.

²¹See Walther 5: no. 51c.

²²See Empson's definition of his sixth type of ambiguity: "when a statement says nothing, by tautology, by contradiction, or by irrelevant statements; so that the reader is forced to invent statements of his own" (176). The last line of "Affliction (I)" is subsumed to this speculative supposition; see *Seven Types of Ambiguity* 176 and 182-84.

²³Excerpt from Wilcox's note on "Affliction (I)" 66; see also Smithson, especially 130.

²⁴See OED "well" *adv.*: "The stem is regarded as identical with that of the verb will."

²⁵See Leimberg on "if."

²⁶Donne's "much more force in [...] *If*" echoes Touchstone's "much virtue in 'if'" (*As You Like It* 5.4.101), as well as Plutarch's attribution of "the greatest force" (386-87) to this conjunction.

²⁷*Not* is most emphatically used in *The Temple*, several times, at the end of lines but, with the single exception of "Affliction (I)," never at the end of a poem.

²⁸OED "knot" *n.*¹ 10.a and b.

²⁹OED "knot" *n.*¹

³⁰OED, "not," *adv.* 1.b., "chiefly poetical." One of the examples in OED is Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 2.1.122: "I not doubt / He came alive to land." The last reference in the OED is to Lord Byron.

³¹See *OED*, "not," *adv.*, the first example of verb-preceding "not"; see also Walde and Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, "nē Adv."

³²Herbert's "forgot" has an arresting precursor in Boethius's *Consolatio*, which is an indispensable component of Herbert's philosophical background, anyway, but with the "Affliction" poems comes near to being a source. See Boethius 70-72, especially 72: "Nam quoniam tui oblivione confunderis"; and "Quoniam vero, quibus gubernaculis mundus, regatur, oblitus es." Cf. Chaucer's *Boece* I. Prosa 6. 44-90, especially 71-72 "For-why, for thow art confounded with foryetyng of thiself," and 77-78: "for thow hast foryeten by whiche governmentz the werld is governed."

³³See also Wilcox, who notes several meanings of "though I am clean forgot"; see note to "Affliction (I)" 65.

³⁴My paraphrase of "daß unbekannt wird das Bekannte und du's nicht wieder-erkennst" (*Joseph und seine Brüder* 1055-56).

³⁵Michael Steven Marx, "Biblical Allusions and Intertextual Assurances in George Herbert's 'Affliction (I),'" bases its theory summarized in the title of the essay on references in the Psalms, Job, and Jonah; he quotes "A true Hymne" 20 (263).

³⁶See Wilcox's summary of "Modern Criticism" 322.

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An Order Honored in the Breach: An Answer to Dennis Pahl*

HANNES BERGTHALLER

I have read both responses to my essay on “Poe’s Economies” with great interest and pleasure. Whereas William E. Engel makes the piece a starting point for an argument that is largely his own, Dennis Pahl’s response takes the form of a direct critique of some of my claims. In the following, I will therefore address myself primarily to Pahl’s essay, which provides me with a welcome opportunity to revisit my original argument and to clarify, defend, and, where necessary, amend it.

To a considerable extent, Pahl’s misgivings seem to spring from a sense that I failed to take Poe’s theoretical efforts as seriously as they deserve to be taken. “To understand Poe’s scientific pronouncements [...] as a kind of ‘intellectual grandstanding’ for the purpose of gaining commercial respectability is to overlook the fact that behind the posing is a serious aesthetic intention,” Pahl writes (18). I may have invited this misunderstanding by overstating the case for a “mercenary” reading of Poe’s critical essays in the opening sections of my article; yet I would insist that it is a misunderstanding, nonetheless. My point was not that Poe entirely subordinated his artistic goals to commercial interests. It was, much more simply—and, I suppose, less controversially—, that he found himself torn between the conflicting demands of two different economies that placed very distinct re-

*Reference: Dennis Pahl, “Poe’s Faltering Economies: A Response to Hannes Bergthaller,” *Connotations* 23.1 (2013/14): 16-25; William E. Engel, “Echoic Effects in Poe’s Poetic Double Economy—of Memory: A Response to Hannes Bergthaller and Dennis Pahl,” *Connotations* 23.1 (2013/14): 26-48. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debbergthaller0221.htm>>.

quirements on his work: on the one hand, the commercial economy of the literary market place; on the other, the economy of the work of art which, with regard to its formal principles, ought to emulate the divine economy of nature.

As Poe's remarks in the "Marginalia," in "The American Drama," and in *Eureka* make quite clear, his understanding of the structure of this latter economy hewed rather closely to traditional natural theology as it had found expression in the nearly contemporaneous Bridgewater Treatises (see for example Poe's argument about "complete mutuality of adaptation" in "The American Drama" 45; but dare one suggest that the prize money of £ 1,000 awarded to the several authors may have played a role in Poe's fascination with the Bridgewater Treatises?). Any actual work of art would of necessity find itself placed in the field of tension between these two poles of the commercial and the poetic, and Poe continually struggled to produce literary forms that would satisfy the demands of both without sacrificing either. The intellectual persona Poe crafted for himself in his essays, I argued, has to be seen as a response to this particular situation. Poe was eager to make it absolutely clear—not least, to himself—that he was nobody's fool, that he could play to the tastes of a mass audience without compromising his artistic integrity.

It turns out that Poe's brief discussion of "scientific music" in "The Rationale of Verse" bears directly on this problem, albeit not in the way I originally assumed. At the time when I wrote my essay, I was unable to pin down the reference of this phrase, and speculated somewhat inconclusively about its cosmological implications. As I found out later, the phrase "scientific music" was actually in common usage during the antebellum period to designate a new style of church music which took the work of European composers such as Handel, Haydn, and Mozart as its model. It was promoted by a group of reformers from the Northeast, most prominently one Lowell Mason, who aimed to elevate the quality of congregational singing and tried to replace traditional hymnals. The latter were mostly comprised of home-grown folk hymns, often based on popular ballad tunes (such

as “Auld Lang Syne”), which Mason and his peers decried as rude, uncivilized, and unsuited for devotional purposes (see Rhoads). While the reformers were highly successful in the North, their ideas about musical progress failed to catch on in the South and West of the country. In commenting on this debate, Poe thus took a qualified stance against expert authority and in favor of popular tastes; to quote the relevant passage once more: “scientific music has no claim to intrinsic excellence; it is fit for scientific ears alone. In its excess it is the triumph of the *physique* over the *morale* of music. The sentiment is overwhelmed by the sense. On the whole, the advocates of the simpler melody and harmony have infinitely the best of the argument [...]” (219).

This distinction between “*physique*” and “*morale*” is also crucially important for my reading of “The Fall of the House of Usher.” As I pointed out, Usher uses the very same terms to describe the deleterious effects of his material surroundings (and specifically of the doubling of the mansion’s image in the tarn) on his mental state. Surely, Roderick Usher and Lowell Mason have altogether rather little in common; yet they both slip into the same error against which Poe warns in *Eureka*: “in pursuing too heedlessly the superficial symmetry of forms and motions, [they] leave out of sight the really essential symmetry of the principles which determine and control them” (62). Within the larger context, this sentence must be read as a dig against the authority of the burgeoning class of professional scientists, and it reiterates and reaffirms one of the central ideas in *Eureka*, namely the superiority of spontaneous intuition over mere empiricism—not so much in order to proclaim the primacy of poetry over science, or of spirit over matter, but to assert their ultimate unity.

This is an aspect of Poe’s aesthetics that Pahl systematically underplays. The connections he draws between Edmund Burke’s materialist aesthetics and Poe’s literary practice are compelling, and I find myself in full agreement when he argues that it is impossible to draw “any clear distinctions between Poe the romantic poet and Poe the empirical scientist and laborer-craftsman” (19). But the impossibility of

conclusively disentangling these two sides of Poe in no way contradicts my claim that they stand in continuous and productive tension with each other. Pahl emphasizes the “irruptive ironies [...] which [...] result in enriching, while at the same time making problematic and unstable, his otherwise unified narrative structures” (24n1). Again, I have no quarrel with such a characterization of Poe’s work; yet, whereas Pahl suggests that these “irruptive ironies” should be seen as a mark of Poe’s craftsmanship, I argue that they are symptomatic of a deeper struggle to reconcile conflicting impulses—artistic, intellectual, and also commercial—which pervades his entire oeuvre. If Poe arrived at a resolution to this conflict, it would have to be a strategy of making failure the paradoxical condition of success—as indicated by his argument in *Eureka*, where the perfect symmetry of the cosmos stands as an ideal which the artist must aspire to, yet will of necessity fail to attain. The divine economy of nature represents an order that can only be honored in the breach. Because this process does not lead to anything that could be characterized as a stable synthesis, and since—as Pahl rightly insists—materiality is never entirely superseded, I am not quite sure whether I would be willing to refer to it as a “dialectical tension,” as William E. Engel paraphrases my argument (33). But it arguably holds a potent key to Poe’s fascination with collapse, decay, dissolution, perversion, and ruin—and it marks the point where he diverges from his Transcendentalist contemporaries, with whom he otherwise held so much in common.

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A Note on Sir Philip Sidney's Art of Blending*

ARTHUR F. KINNEY

In "The Surprize" the poet Charles Cotton paid special tribute to Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* in an imagined account of seeing an attractive woman reading Sidney's prose fiction *Arcadia* on a riverbank:

'Twas there I did my glorious Nymph surprize,
There stole my Passion from her killing eies.

The happy Object of her eye
Was Sidney's living Arcadie;
Whose amorous tale had so betray'd
Desire in this all-lovely Mayd,
That whilst her cheek a blush did warm,
I read Loves storie in her form;
And of the Sisters the united grace,
Pamela's vigour in Philoclea's face. (180)

This brief but remarkable tribute to Sidney's work, once considered an English Renaissance masterpiece, not only describes the creative literary blendings on which it is centered in its prescient union of Pamela and Philoclea's in the united grace of the Nymph. The poet's narration, moreover, suggests that this act of blending is finally the act of the poet himself. The grace that unites the two sisters, he notes, is the result of how the two personalities—Pamela's intellectual powers and Philoclea's emotional sensitivity—are shared, creating a third imaginary entity, the Nymph, that requires a reader to combine them to establish the sort of ideal protagonist whose complicated character-

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkinney0241.htm>>.

ization would be difficult to record or access otherwise. Indeed, the presentation and reception of the *New Arcadia*—published in 1593—rests in large measure on just this practice of blending.

The art of blending as the cognitive process that lies behind writing and reading the *Arcadia* was defined not so long ago—in 2002—by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. Blending begins with “mental spaces” which Fauconnier and Turner describe as “small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” (40). Such “mental spaces are sets of activated neuronal assemblies” (40) which are conceptually framed. The protagonists in Sidney's *Arcadia* are cousins who occupy the traditional mental space of epic romance in the tradition of classical Greek heroes. They are inseparable until their ship capsizes in a sudden storm. Pyrocles clings to the ship's mast while Musidorus is brought to shore by two shepherds. Once interrupted, this epic adventure shifts radically as Strephon and Claius take the exhausted Musidorus out of Laconia to the home of a gentleman named Kalender whose country is undergoing a civil war.

His estate has no direct connection with the world of classical Greek heroism:

The backside of the house was neither field, garden nor orchard, or rather it was both field, garden and orchard; for as soon as the descending of the stairs had delivered them down, they came into a place cunningly set with trees of the most taste-pleasing fruits; but scarcely they had taken that into their consideration but that they were suddenly stept into a delicate green; of each side of the green a thicket, and behind the thickets again new beds of flowers, which being under the trees, the trees were to them a pavilion and they to the trees a mosaical floor, so that it seemed that Art therein would needs be delightful by counterfeiting his enemy Error and making order in confusion. (73)

This traditional pastoral landscape, where nature is tamed by art, is in its calm order a mental space apparently independent of, and oppositionally conceived from, that brief shipwreck which opened the carefully revised text of the *Arcadia*. This independent mental space,

however, according to Fauconnier and Turner, is what permits connectors known as “[g]eneric spaces” (47) to lay groundwork for the blend. In this instance, the character of Musidorus and the early descriptions of him join the epic to the pastoral in a way that requires the reader to redefine the apparent genre to which this novel subscribes. We cannot proceed in our reading without an awareness that Musidorus will be changed by and also shaped by both locales which will remain blended in him. “Come shepherd’s weeds,” he sings, “become your master’s mind” (169). When he changes his role to the shepherd Dorus in order to court Pamela, he retains the pastoral pose while assuming heroic actions so that our conception of him is always that of a bifocal character—shepherd and soldier—just as, earlier, his cousin Pyrocles has blended the role of the Helots’ champion Diaphantus with the persona of the Amazon Zelmane to be near Philoclea that he may court her. In this role “Transform’d in show, but more transform’d in mind” (131), Pyrocles blends the sexes as well as the cultures of the New World and the Old.

Musidorus, under the name of Palladius, finds the transformation of Pyrocles so bewildering that he casts “a ghastful countenance upon him as if he would conjure some strange spirit” (132): “[S]ee how extremely every way you can endanger your mind: for to take this womanish habit, without you frame your behaviour accordingly, is wholly vain; your behaviour can never come kindly from you but as the mind is proportioned unto it: so that you must resolve, if you will play your part to any purpose, whatsoever peevish imperfections are in that sex, to soften your heart to receive them—the very first down-step to all wickedness” (133). Yet though the blending of hero and Amazon seems ill-advised and even dangerous to Musidorus whatever the justification, it has a profound effect when he exchanges the role of hero for that of the shepherd Dorus and for the same rationale, namely that of securing frequent audience with Pamela’s sister.

That the *Arcadia* is a combination of the heroic and the pastoral is not new to Sidney studies. In 1962 William A. Ringler, Jr., the editor of Sidney’s poems, noted: “Here in the remote and abstract world of the

pastoral the actions of the princely characters of the courtly world are mirrored and given perspective in the rural songs of the shepherds" (xxxviii). A decade later, he was echoed by Stephen J. Greenblatt, who found the *Arcadia* "perhaps the supreme Elizabethan example of what I shall call the mixed mode" (269) by "playing off one genre against another" (272). For David Kalstone, "confusions and bafflements multiply rather than disappear when heroes enter the pastoral world" (59).

Such a process of imagination holding on to two or more perspectives blended together is an example of Fauconnier and Turner's new way to conceptualize the reading process by actively depending on what is implied, what the readers' imaginations necessarily supply. It is a new sense of human cognition that accommodates a world of fiction such as Sidney's. "Building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces," they conclude, "matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself" (44). Inputs, therefore, may be literal as are specific heroic actions and pastoral activities, but they must also be metaphorical. Such a new poetics arising from the current emphasis on human cognitive practices allows us new ways of understanding why and how we read—why and how we must read—*Arcadia* as we do. In other words: such a poetics of blending renews the sense of extraordinary achievement in a work like the *Arcadia* and explains once again why this work is so exceptional, why even today we consider this work so monumental.

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Adopting Styles, Inserting Selves: Nabokov's *Pale Fire**

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Nabokov's highly original novel *Pale Fire* (1962) is grounded in Shakespeare's late play, *Timon of Athens*, one of his least performed and perhaps not completely finished works.¹ We need to understand this relation before addressing *Pale Fire*. There are quite a few casual references to Shakespeare's play in Nabokov's novel; for example, he speaks of "prickly-chinned Phrynia, pretty Timandra with that boom under her apron" (210); the young king of Zembla has in his closet "a thirty-twomo edition of *Timon of Athens* translated into Zemblan by his uncle Conmal, the Queen's brother" (125)²; as a gloss on lines 39-40 of John Shade's poem, Kinbote introduces variants that remind him of Timon's scene with the three banditti (4.3) from which the "pale fire" passage is drawn. Kinbote's new readings are uncomfortably close to Shakespeare: "and home would haste my thieves, / The sun with stolen ice, the moon with leaves" (79). The variants here and elsewhere seem to represent Kinbote's own poem rather than Shade's. Kinbote in Cedarn, Utana, preparing the poem for publication, also thinks of himself as connected with Shakespeare's play: "Having no library in the desolate log cabin where I live like Timon in his cave" (79).³ He then retranslates the "pale fire" passage from Conmal's absurd Zemblan version and winds up with a commendable paraphrase.

In Shakespeare, Timon's "pale fire" passage does not occur until towards the end of Act 4.3, when Timon in his cave meets the three

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debcharney0241.htm>>.

banditti and offers them not only gold, but also a long lecture on the general pattern of thievery that pervades the cosmos:

The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
 Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief
 And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;
 The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
 The moon into salt tears; the earth's a thief
 That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
 From general excrement. Each thing's a thief. (431-37)

In the curious relation of Shade, the poet, and Kinbote, the so-called exiled king—Timon in the woods is also in exile—, all sorts of suggestions arise. Is Kinbote trying to steal Shade's poem?

Shade's decision to name his poem *Pale Fire* does not occur until almost the end of his work (lines 961-62). It is phrased as an abbreviated and jocular afterthought:

(But *this* transparent thingum does require
 Some moondrop title. Help me, Will! *Pale Fire*.)

Will is, of course, William Shakespeare, the inspiration for Shade's poem; and the "moondrop" can be linked with the pale fire of the moon in *Timon of Athens*.

Kinbote's long note on these lines, and about Conmal's abilities (or lack thereof) as a translator, is full of a mischievous bamboozling of the reader:

But in which of the Bard's works did our poet cull it? My readers must make their own research. All I have with me is a tiny vest pocket edition of *Timon of Athens*—in Zemblan! It certainly contains nothing that could be regarded as an equivalent of "pale fire" (if it had, my luck would have been a statistical monster). (285)

Kinbote seems to be forgetting his note to lines 39-40, in which he offers a fairly decent paraphrase of the "pale fire" passage in Shakespeare (but without the words "pale fire").

How can we explain Nabokov's preoccupation with *Timon of Athens*? It is certainly not one of Shakespeare's major works. I think Nabokov was so strongly attracted to Shakespeare's play because he imagined Kinbote as a Timonist, a creature who deals in excess, and who, in his eccentricity and whimsicality, hates all of mankind except a chosen few; both Kinbote and Shade are misanthropic. Their sense of reality is distorted by their own delusions. This is especially true of Kinbote, who, Nabokov hints, may actually be a lunatic.

1. Adopting Styles

One other speculative way of considering the relation of *Pale Fire* to *Timon of Athens* is stylistic. Was Nabokov attempting to imitate the distinctive style of Shakespeare's late plays? This style is more personal, more conversational, more complex than Shakespeare's earlier work. It is more devoted to following the vagaries and discontinuities of thought than the earlier plays, with many strange words and unanticipated changes in rhythm. If this line of thinking has any merit, then we can see why *Timon of Athens* would be particularly attractive to Nabokov: *Timon* has always been considered a potentially unfinished, even rough play with many repetitions and a pronounced stridency.⁴ One may wonder if this is what made the play so appealing to an author like Nabokov, who prided himself on his idiosyncrasy? It certainly seems like an odd choice on Nabokov's part to give so much prominence to *Timon of Athens* rather than to one of Shakespeare's better known plays.⁵

Nabokov's interest in the idiosyncratic style of *Timon of Athens* should be seen in the wider context of the preoccupation with language. He learned English at a very early age and got his B.A. degree from Cambridge University. Beginning with *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, published in 1941, his novels were all written in English. But it was a very special English, with many words not in general use in speech, so-called "dictionary words."⁶ This is especially true of *Lolita* (1955), the harangues of Humbert Humbert, and the teenage Ameri-

can slang of Dolly, a slang somewhat odd and outdated (and mixed with British slang).

We can learn a lot about the language and style of *Pale Fire* from a close reading of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (see Hesse 118). Andrew Field considers this novel in the category of “fictional autobiography” (27-28), a genre very familiar to Nabokov. Sebastian Knight’s novels include *The Prismatic Bezel* and *The Doubtful Asphodel*, both satiric and parodic titles that do not tell us much about the books themselves.

A playful and idiosyncratic attitude to words characterizes the style of both Kinbote and Sebastian Knight. Take, for example, the note on the word *lemniscate*. Shade had written:

In sleeping dreams I played with other chaps
But really envied nothing—save perhaps
The miracle of a lemniscate left
Upon wet sand by nonchalantly deft
Bicycle tires. (135-39)

Kinbote’s note displays his linguistic superiority over Shade, the mere poet: “‘A unicursal bicircular quartic’ says my weary old dictionary. I cannot understand what this has to do with bicycling and suspect that Shade’s phrase has no real meaning. As other poets before him, he seems to have fallen here under the spell of misleading euphony” (136). Of course, we are aware that Nabokov (via Kinbote) is commenting slyly on himself—this has nothing at all to do with “misleading euphony.” Kinbote’s definition is from the second edition of *Webster’s Dictionary*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “lemniscate” as a technical term from mathematics, especially geometry, meaning: “The designation of certain closed curves, having a general resemblance to the figure 8.” Boyd says further that it is “a curve of the shape of a figure eight or of the hourglass [...] if placed on its side the symbol of infinity” (*The American Years* 186). It is also a flattened representation of a Möbius strip.

In a grand, parodic crescendo to this passage, Kinbote expatiates on the surprising intricacies of the Zemblan language:

To take a striking example: what can be more resounding, more resplendent, more suggestive of choral and sculptured beauty, than the word *coramen*? In reality, however, it merely denotes the rude strap with which a Zemblan herdsman attaches his humble provisions and ragged blanket to the meekest of his cows when driving them up to the *vebodar* (upland pastures). (136)

Nabokov is here showing off his witty linguistic extravagance in two languages, one that is his own invention (although it resembles Russian).

The Prismatic Bezel and *Pale Fire* contain many stylistic parallels, and the earlier novel-within-a-novel presents us with significant anticipations of the later one. Speaking of the composition of *The Prismatic Bezel*, Sebastian's half-brother, who is writing a biography about him, observes:

The author's task is to find out how this formula has been arrived at; and all the magic and force of his art are summoned in order to discover the exact way in which two lines of life were made to come into contact,—the whole book indeed being but a glorious gamble on causalities or, if you prefer, the probing of the aetiological secret of aleatory occurrences. (96)

Nabokov is trying to define a different way of writing a novel, something that will satisfy its parodic and satiric goals. The method is entirely indirect:

The Prismatic Bezel can be thoroughly enjoyed once it is understood that the heroes of the book are what can be loosely called "methods of composition." It is as if a painter said: look, here I'm going to show you not the painting of a landscape, but the painting of different ways of painting a certain landscape, and I trust their harmonious fusion will disclose the landscape as I intend you to see it. (95)

Nabokov is speaking about his unique postmodern or experimental approach to writing a novel, in which the narrative—the so-called "fiction"—is subordinated to the poetic style or atmosphere created by the author. Thus all novels are essentially forms of self-expression

in which there is a continuous merging of what we normally think of as prose and poetry. The dialogue between Shade and Kinbote, two radically different personalities, resembles the way in which Sebastian's non-literary but adoring half-brother is trying to bring to life the gifted and poetic Sebastian.

The vagaries of Sebastian Knight's fiction puzzle his half-brother, who is trying valiantly to write about him. Fiction and reality seem to come together, as in the following passage:

He had a queer habit of endowing even his most grotesque characters with this or that idea, or impression, or desire which he himself might have toyed with. His hero's letter may possibly have been a kind of code in which he expressed a few truths about his relations with Clare. But I fail to name any other author who made use of his art in such a baffling manner—baffling to me who might desire to see the real man behind the author. (114)

The biographer is trying, not wholly successfully, to make sense of his complex half-brother:

The light of personal truth is hard to perceive in the shimmer of an imaginary nature, but what is still harder to understand is the amazing fact that a man writing of things which he really felt at the time of writing, could have had the power to create simultaneously—and out of the very things which distressed his mind—a fictitious and faintly absurd character. (114)

It is obvious that, as hard as he tries, Sebastian's half-brother does not understand either him or his fictions. The same might also be said of Kinbote's relation to Shade.

Let us look at another key word in *Pale Fire*, "preterist," which Shade defines, in the enigmatic manner of Kinbote, as "one who collects cold nests" (line 79). The word occurs again at the beginning of Canto Three; here, Shade is talking about the Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter (IPH):

It missed the gist of the whole thing; it missed
 What mostly interests the preterist;
 For we die every day; oblivion thrives
 Not on dry thighbones but on blood-ripe lives,

And our best yesterdays are now foul piles
Of crumpled names, phone numbers and foxed files. (517-22)

Shade's use of "preterist" recalls a Proustian passage in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* from Knight's novel *The Doubtful Asphodel*:

"Now, when it was too late, and Life's shops were closed, he regretted not having bought a certain book he had always wanted; never having gone through an earthquake, a fire, a train-accident; never having seen Tatsienlu in Tibet, or having heard blue magpies chattering in Chinese willows; not having spoken to that errant schoolgirl with shameless eyes, met one day in a lonely glade; not having laughed at the poor little joke of a shy ugly woman, when no one had laughed in the room; having missed trains, allusions and opportunities; not having handed the penny he had in his pocket to that old street-violinist playing to himself tremulously on a certain bleak day in a certain forgotten town." (176)

The half-brother biographer is trying to define something supremely poetical in Sebastian's style, but he is having a hard time finding the exact words:

Sebastian Knight had always liked juggling with themes, making them clash or blending them cunningly, making *them* express that hidden meaning, which could only be expressed in a succession of waves, as the music of a Chinese buoy can be made to sound only by undulation. In *The Doubtful Asphodel*, his method has attained perfection. It is not the parts that matter, it is their combinations. (176)

Kinbote is not as perceptive a critic as Sebastian's half-brother, but both of them are radically different from the authors they write about, and both seem to be trying to insert themselves into the works about which they write. This is even much more obvious in the case of Kinbote.⁷

Towards the end of his commentary, Kinbote imagines himself as doing what "only a true artist can do—pounce upon the forgotten butterfly of revelation, wean myself abruptly from the habit of things, see the web of the world, and the warp and the weft of that web" (289). He holds under his left armpit Shade's notecards on which *Pale*

Fire is written, "and for a moment I found myself enriched with an indescribable amazement as if informed that fireflies were making decodable signals on behalf of stranded spirits, or that a bat was writing a legible tale of torture in the bruised and branded sky" (289). The passage ends with an ecstatic assertion: "I was holding all Zembla pressed to my heart." It is quite clear here that Kinbote considers himself the co-author of *Pale Fire*. His style in his commentary matches that of Shade in his poem.

Nabokov's *Pale Fire* offers a very good example of the mingling of prose and poetry in a single work. Kinbote's strenuous annotations to John Shade's 1000-line poem about his adventures as exiled king of Zembla seem to constitute a major part of what we would call "the novel." Nevertheless, the connection between the poem and the commentary remains puzzling. The more one rereads *Pale Fire*, however, the more one is caught up in the seemingly absurd idea that the relationship of the poem and the commentary is quite close.

2. Inserting Selves

Nabokov, of course, delights in teasing the reader, as he certainly does in the semi-autobiographical account of the novelist Sebastian Knight, where he seems to be speaking of the formation of his own, unique style. In *Speak, Memory* (1966) Nabokov seems to be speaking of his own life as if it were a work of fiction; in *The Gift* (1937, trans. 1963) and *Ada* (1969) he transmutes motifs of his life-story into fiction. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov tantalizes us by suggesting that there must be a close link between the poem and the commentary. His Kinbote, for example, states unequivocally at the end of the Foreword that "without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all [...] a reality that only my notes can provide" (28-29).

The crux of Kinbote's indebtedness to Shade (and vice versa) is affirmed within the first few pages of the commentary:

By the end of May I could make out the outlines of some of my images in the shape his genius might give them; by mid-June I felt sure at last that he would recreate in a poem the dazzling Zembla burning in my brain. I mesmerized him with it, I saturated him with my vision, I pressed upon him, with a drunkard's wild generosity, all that I was helpless myself to put into verse. (80)

Kinbote is sure of his insight: "At length I knew he was ripe with my Zembla, bursting with suitable rhymes, ready to spurt at the brush of an eyelash" (80). On getting hold of the poem, however, Kinbote is disappointed at not finding a direct connection with his own story, but he is still convinced that there is "a symptomatic family resemblance in the coloration of both poem and story" (81).

Remarkably, Kinbote refers to *Pale Fire* as "my poem" (182), and in the Index (which is much more than a literal Index), it is "their joint composition" (312). Kinbote has given Shade his "theme" (288), and he boasts about "all the live, glamorous, palpitating, shimmering material I had lavished upon him" (87). The exiled king means all of this quite literally, that "the glory of Zembla merges with the glory of your verse" (215).

In the all-important variants that Kinbote has collected—or perhaps written—, he postulates an arcane allusion to himself:

Strange Other World where all our still-born dwell,
And pets, revived, and invalids, grown well,
And minds that died before arriving there:
Poor old man Swift, poor —, poor Baudelaire. (167)

Kinbote speculates seriously about the dash—of course, "Kinbote" scans perfectly:

Or was there something else—some obscure intuition, some prophetic scruple that prevented him from spelling out the name of an eminent man who happened to be an intimate friend of his? Was he perhaps playing safe because a reader in his household might have objected to that particular name being mentioned? And if it comes to that, *why* mention it at all in this tragical context? Dark, disturbing thoughts. (168)

Dark, disturbing thoughts indeed. But Kinbote is passionately committed to the idea that he is supplying Shade with the stuff his poem is made of; and not only that but that he has entered deeply into Shade's consciousness. For example, he speaks of Shade cleaning out "the bowl of his pipe as fiercely as if it were my heart he was hollowing out" (91). Whatever obstacles there may be in the way of a direct commentary, Kinbote is nevertheless convinced that the poem contains "echoes and spangles of my mind, a long ripplewake of my glory" (297). He defends the importance of his commentary as "an attempt to sort out those echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints, and all the many subliminal debts to me" (297).

Critics of *Pale Fire* are preoccupied with the relation of Kinbote to V. Botkin, a professor in the Russian Department of Wordsmith University.⁸ Nabokov seems to delight in teasing us, since, apart from a few very casual references, Botkin appears only in the Index. He does not enter into Kinbote's narrative at all. In relation to the novel itself, there seems to be no point at all in equating Kinbote and Botkin. Kinbote may be highly eccentric and narcissistic—and possibly mad—as many of Nabokov's protagonists are, but *Pale Fire* can hardly be interpreted as the bizarre account of a madman, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Kinbote is perceptive enough (and certainly sane enough) to realize that the story of his life is not literally the subject of Shade's poem. For this fault he blames Sybil, Shade's wife:

[S]he made him tone down or remove from his Fair Copy everything connected with the magnificent Zemblan theme with which I kept furnishing him and which, without knowing much about the growing work, I fondly believed would become the main rich thread in its weave! (91)

Thus the variants, notes, and first drafts of the poem become extremely important. In his commentary, Kinbote says that line 12, "that crystal land," is "[p]erhaps an allusion to Zembla, my dear country." To back this up, Kinbote quotes from

the disjointed, half-obliterated draft which I am not at all sure I have deciphered properly:

Ah, I must not forget to say something
That my friend told me of a certain king. (74)

By using Kinbote as a counterweight to Shade, Nabokov seems to be enjoying the play of mirroring effects and doubling (cf. Roth).

After line 130 Kinbote quotes what he calls a "false start" that comes directly out of his own narrative:

As children playing in a castle find
 In some old closet full of toys, behind
 The animals and masks, a sliding door
 [four words heavily crossed out] a secret corridor— (118)

So Kinbote is encouraged by the variants to think that Shade is irresistibly recounting his own story of the exiled king, complete with children's games and secret passages. Of course, our intuition tells us that all the variants and notes have been written by Kinbote himself. He quotes liberally not only from variants, but also from first drafts, earlier versions, and forgotten lines; moreover, he seems to be omniscient about Shade's writing, and we wonder how he could possibly know all this.

The most significant example in this regard is Kinbote's long note on Shade's line 61, referring to the TV antenna as a "huge paperclip" for "the gauzy mockingbird" to land on. Kinbote goes on to quote from an earlier poem of Shade (existing only in manuscript) called "The Swing," "being the last short piece that our poet wrote" (94):

The setting sun that lights the tips
 Of TV's giant paperclips
 Upon the roof;

The shadow of the doorknob that
 At sundown is a baseball bat
 Upon the door;

The cardinal that likes to sit
 And make chip-wit, chip-wit, chip-wit
 Upon the tree;
 The empty little swing that swings
 Under the tree: these are the things
 That break my heart. (94-95)

There is, of course, no way of deciding whether this is Shade's poem or Kinbote's. It does not really matter, since the poem—and all of *Pale Fire* for that matter—is written by Nabokov. The same is also true of Sebastian Knight's relation to his half-brother, the biographer. Nabokov has created such distinct and vivid characters that we are tempted to regard them as the authentic authors of their own poems and fictions. Nabokov always considered himself to be a poet,⁹ so there is no way of properly separating his prose from his poetry.

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For a novel that takes its title from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, we would perhaps like there to be much more explicit use of Shakespeare in *Pale Fire*. But I think that Nabokov establishes a strong sense that Kinbote, especially, is a Timonist. Shakespeare's Timon is alienated from mankind and speaks, particularly in the second part of the play, with excessive invective and extravagant passion. Kinbote, too, has an intemperate wildness in his discourse that has little relation to ordinary life and commonsense discourse. Shade is a much more controlled character, but he, too, seems to be carried away by the misfortunes in his life, especially the death of his daughter. Nabokov may have found Shakespeare's play congenial to his own temperament, especially in the abruptness of its contrasts. It clearly forms a continuum with the characters of the two protagonists of *Pale Fire*.

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NOTES

¹See Priscilla Meyer's article. She comments that "Nabokov pays tribute to the English component of his own art by embedding Shakespeare's plays in *Pale Fire*" (146), and notes that in *Hamlet* Shakespeare reads "pale his ineffectual fire" (1.5.97; see Meyer 149). See also the persuasive article of Gretchen E. Minton, which emphasizes Timon and Kinbote's misanthropy.

²In the course of the novel one hears quite a lot about Conmal, not all of it flattering (see the Index, which serves as an important part of *Pale Fire*).

³His "Timonian cave" appears again in the Index (308).

⁴See, e.g., the Introduction to the New Arden Edition (Dawson and Minton 205).

⁵See the article by Takács, who claims that *Pale Fire* "is a *pastiche* ('semblance' and 'resemblance') of Shakespearean romance" (103).

⁶See Edmund Wilson's article "The Strange Case of Puskin and Nabokov."

⁷The narrator of *Sebastian Knight* may be projecting his own moods into his account of Sebastian's novels, but this is the only way, an indirect one, of inscribing himself into them.

⁸See especially Boyd, *The American Years* (ch. 18; 430-33). He quotes an entry in Nabokov's diary from 1962 saying that Kinbote is Botkin, a Russian madman (709n4). See also Boyd's excellent book, *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Boyd discusses this matter also in great detail in "Shade and Shape in *Pale Fire*."

⁹See Paul D. Morris's surprising account of Nabokov as an important but neglected poet, especially his chapter 7 on *Pale Fire*. Shade's poem is Nabokov's longest and perhaps finest achievement. In Lyndy Abraham's learned and ingenious study, Shade's poem is described as "a bad poem. [...] Nabokov's parody of incompetent academic poems by writers like Shade who eclectically *imitate* the poetry they have read or misread. Shade has obviously misread Pope" (245).

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“A Chorus Line”:

Margaret Atwood’s *Penelopiad* at the Crossroads of Narrative, Poetic and Dramatic Genres*

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“Don’t ask for the true story,” the speaker of Margaret Atwood’s 1981 poem “True Stories” implores; “why do you need it? / It’s not what I set out with / or what I carry. / [...] The true story lies / among the other stories, / [...] The true story is vicious / and multiple and untrue / [...] Don’t ever / ask for the true story.” This poem might very well serve as a motto for Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Penelopiad*, which features many stories, both “vicious” and “multiple” and also “untrue.” *The Penelopiad* (2005) could be described as an attempt to depict one such “true story” lying “among the other stories,” in more ways than one, not just the story as seen by one character and seen by another character, but also the story as told in prose and in verse.

In her novel, Atwood artfully employs a mix of narrative, poetic and dramatic styles. While the main narrative—a retelling of Homer’s *Odyssey* by Penelope—comes along as a straightforward narrative in the vein of Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra*, Atwood intersperses Penelope’s tale with lyrical segments, giving voice to the twelve maids killed by Telemachus on Odysseus’ return to Ithaca. Both ancient Greek chorus and modern musical number, these lyrical interludes employ a range of poetic genres, from nursery rhyme to sea shanty to ballad and idyll, thus giving the maids voice as a collective. Further interludes have them take on singular roles in, variously, a courtroom drama and an anthropology lecture.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debjung0241.htm>>.

This paper is going to investigate the various forms and functions of Atwood's poetic insertions into her narrative text.¹ Incidentally, Atwood's *Penelopiad* is quite literally situated at a crossroads of genres, as Atwood herself turned her novel into a play. Differences between the novel and play version of *The Penelopiad* as regards the lyrical interludes will therefore also be discussed. I will argue that the interludes serve as a performative enactment of the silenced female voices of the *Odyssey*. They may furthermore serve as a pointer, an invitation extended to the reader to go in search of silenced voices haunting other texts of the Western literary canon.

A Line of Echoes

Since the time of its inception, Homer's *Odyssey* has inspired many rewritings.² The most prominent among them have made Odysseus, the epic's protagonist, the centre of their work. In his seminal study *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*, W. B. Stanford identifies the complexity of the epic's protagonist with regard to his "character and exploits" as the main reason for Odysseus' enduring popularity with subsequent writers (7). Later critics, such as Edith Hall in *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey*, extend Stanford's argument by pointing towards a whole cast of characters that might attract future readers' and writers' attention, stating that "one reason for the poem's enduring popularity must be that its personnel is so varied that every ancient or modern listener, of any age, sex or status, seaman or servant, will have found someone with whom to identify" (4).³

Margaret Atwood's rewriting of Homer's *Odyssey* is then, in her own words, "an echo of an echo of an echo" (*Penelopiad: The Play* v).⁴ *The Penelopiad* was originally commissioned as a novel, as part of the Canongate Myths Series which saw a number of well-known authors rewrite traditional myths (Atwood, "The Myths Series" 58). Two years after the publication of the novel, *The Penelopiad: The Play* premiered in July 2007 at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Swan Theatre in

Stratford-upon-Avon, a co-production with Canada’s National Arts Center, and the play later transferred to Canada as well.⁵ For her portrayal of Penelope, Margaret Atwood drew on both the *Odyssey* and other mythological sources of Greek antiquity (cf. *Penelopiad* 197-98).⁶ The novel consists of two intertwined narratives: in the main narrative, Penelope, speaking from the Underworld, relates her life from birth to the end of the Trojan War and, finally, Odysseus’ return to Ithaca. Both her own and her husband Odysseus’ afterlife in the Greek Underworld are also described. This main narrative, a prose monologue, or as Penelope herself has it, a “tale” (*Penelopiad* 4), is shadowed by the narrative of the maids, who relate their side of the story in lyrical segments interspersed throughout the main narrative. The maids speak mostly as one collective voice, mostly in verse.

Coral Ann Howells describes “Atwood’s project” as a retelling of “*The Odyssey* as ‘herstory’ for modern readers” (“‘We can’t help’” 59). Significantly, “Atwood shifts the focus of *The Odyssey* away from grand narratives of war, relocating it in the micronarratives of women at home” (63). Susanna Braund notes that, by presenting the maids’ story prominently alongside Penelope’s story, Atwood “reminds us that the stories of myth are not in the least concerned about the ordinary people who make the lives of the kings and heroes possible and [...] challenges us to reassess the consequences of the identifications we make when we read modern retellings of ancient myth” (203).

This is how Atwood herself describes her reasoning behind the unusual structural features of her novel: “The chorus of Maids is in part a tribute to the use of the chorus in Greek tragedy, in which lowly characters comment on the main action, and also to the satyr plays that accompanied tragedies, in which comic actors made fun of them. The Maids in *The Penelopiad* do such things, but also they’re angry, as they still feel they have been wrongfully hanged” (*Penelopiad: The Play* vi).⁷ This explains very well the overall structure of the novel, which features alternating chapters of Penelope’s and the maids’ stories, much like in Greek tragedy episodes would alternate with choral

dance segments. According to Brockett and Hildy, the functions of the chorus in Greek drama include among other things: setting “the mood for the play,” adding “dynamic energy,” “giving advice” to the characters or even serving as an “antagonist,” but also, setting up an “ethical [...] framework” of the events portrayed in the main action (19-20). I would argue that especially the last one applies strongly for Atwood’s novel.⁸

So who are the twelve maids who make up this chorus in Atwood’s novel? *The Penelopiad* features two epigraphs, excerpts from the *Odyssey* pertaining to Penelope and the maids. The following is the one pertaining to the maids (*Penelopiad* xiii):

... he took a cable which had seen service on a blue-bowed ship, made one end fast to a high column in the portico, and threw the other over the round-house, high up, so that their feet would not touch the ground. As when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare ... so the women’s heads were held fast in a row, with nooses round their necks, to bring them to the most pitiable end. For a little while their feet twitched, but not for very long. (*The Odyssey*, Book 22, 470-73)

In her novel, Atwood prefaces all the chapters containing the maids’ narrative with the chapter heading “The Chorus Line,” which is then followed by the title of each individual chapter. I take this to be an allusion to another genre evoked by Atwood here: that of modern-day musical theatre; so the maids literally appear as chorus line girls dancing and singing in the chorus line segments of Atwood’s novel. This may also be an allusion to the 1975 musical *A Chorus Line* by Marvin Hamlisch which turns the chorus line into protagonists, foregrounding what is usually backgrounded in musical theatre: the musical numbers containing dance and choral song.⁹ And, indeed, many of the poetic forms used here by Atwood happen to be songs: the nursery rhyme, the popular tune, the sea shanty, the ballad, the love song. (Note, however, that this practice of referring to the chorus as the chorus line is not retained in the play, where the song or scene headings only feature the occasional “chorus” in front of the individual songs or scenes.) Like Hamlisch’s musical, Atwood’s novel and

play foreground previously neglected characters and storylines: it is Penelope and the maids-as-chorus-line who take centre stage in this particular rewriting of Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Forms and Functions of the Lyrical Interludes

Before taking a closer look at the forms and functions of the poetic insertions in Atwood’s prose narrative, I would like to give an overview of the lyrical segments in both novel and play. As can be seen from the following table, the lyrical segments of the novel are mostly integrated into the various scenes of the play. Some segments constitute whole scenes of the play; others are excluded from the final text of the play. Two additional lyrical segments are added to the play text:

Novel ¹⁰	Play
The Chorus Line: A Rope-Jumping Rhyme	incorporated in Scene 2
*Kiddie Mourn, A Lament by the Maids	incorporated in Scene 4
If I Was a Princess, A Popular Tune	Scene 8
The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll	incorporated in Scene 10
The Wily Sea Captain, A Sea Shanty	incorporated in Scenes 15 and 26
Dreamboats, A Ballad	Scene 22
The Perils of Penelope, A Drama	-
*An Anthropology Lecture	-
*The Trial of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids	** (partly incorporated in Scene 30)
*We’re Walking Behind You, A Love Song	-
Envoi	incorporated in Scene 32
	new: untitled weaving song (Scene 19)
	new: untitled nursery rhyme (Scene 13)

(* printed in prose)

** the invocation of the furies from the trial, printed in prose in the novel, is retained in the play, but appears in the play printed as a free verse poem)

Margaret Atwood’s *Penelopiad* is thus structurally and thematically multivoiced, a polylogue offering multiple perspectives. By choosing

to separate Penelope's first-person account from the account of the maids-as-chorus, the novel appears structurally with, on the one hand, an autodiegetic narrator (Penelope), and, on the other hand, the speaker/narrator of the interludes (the maids as chorus line). An integration of both voices into one (prose) narrative is withheld throughout the novel.

The reader first encounters the maids in chapter two, placed after the novel's opening chapter in which Penelope, speaking as her shadow self from the Underworld (*Penelopiad* 1), announces to the reader that she is now ready to tell the tale of her own life—"it's a low art: tale-telling" (3-4). The maids speak as one here.

The Chorus Line: A Rope-Jumping Rhyme

we are the maids
the ones you killed
the ones you failed

we danced in air
our bare feet twitched
it was not fair

with every goddess, queen, and bitch
from there to here
you scratched your itch

we did much less
than what you did
you judged us bad

you had the spear
you had the word
at your command

we scrubbed the blood
of our dead
paramours from floors, from chairs

from stairs, from doors,
we knelt in water
while you stared

at our bare feet
it was not fair
you licked our fear

it gave you pleasure
you raised your hand
you watched us fall

we danced on air
the ones you failed
the ones you killed (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 5-6)

The **rope-jumping rhyme** comes along as a deceptively simple iambic dimeter, with three lines to each stanza. And yet this poem is highly crafted. We find anaphora (multiple times: "the ones," and very emphatically: "you"), chiasmus ("from floors, from chairs / from stairs, from doors"), the odd rhyme ("bitch / itch"), and a striking enjambment ("dead / paramours," resulting in an emphasis on the adjective "dead"). Most striking of all, however, is the metaphor of the dying maids "dancing" at the end of another set of ropes, not the ropes used by seven-year-old girls, but the ones placed by Telemachus, noose-like, around the maids' necks in the novel's mythical intertext. Atwood takes the image of the maids' twitching feet straight out of the *Odyssey's* Book 22, and turns it into an extended dance metaphor: "For a little while their feet twitched, but not for very long" (473). But who is the "you" here, the poem's addressee? Odysseus for sure, who "scratched [his] itch / with every goddess, queen and bitch" while the maids did "much less" in sleeping (for the most part against their will) with Penelope's suitors. But the maids address Penelope as well, who "failed" them by not coming clean with Odysseus in time about her role in instructing the maids to behave the way they did. Atwood is rewriting Homer here, giving more agency to Penelope in the story of her long wait for Odysseus' return. The dance metaphor is a grotesque one, and it is among other things this image, the image of the hanged maids, which compelled Margaret Atwood to set out on the task of rewriting this particular myth in the first place: "I've always been haunted by the hanged maids," she says

in the introduction to the novel (xxi). Indeed, in the dramatized version, the stage directions for the maids for this lyrical segment read: “*while jumping ropes or doing other rope tricks*” (*Penelopiad: The Play* 4).

In the **envoi** Atwood returns to the same kind of seemingly simple poetic form: three five-line stanzas containing iambic dimeter and using mostly rhyming couplets. “It was not fair,” the maids emphatically repeat, a direct quote from the rope-jumping rhyme from the novel’s beginning.

Envoi

we had no voice
 we had no name
 we had no choice
 we had one face
 one face the same

we took the blame
 it was not fair
 but now we’re here
 we’re all here too
 the same as you

and now we follow
 you, we find you
 now, we call
 to you to you
 too wit too woo
 too wit too woo
 too woo (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 195-96)

In simple, nursery rhyme-like verse the maids take their exit, “sprout[ing] feathers, and fly[ing] away as owls” (*Penelopiad* 196). Their transformation into birds of wisdom at the novel’s close allows for the possibility of release for the maids.¹¹ Telling their tale, presenting their side of the story, a shadow narrative to both the *Odyssey* and Penelope’s tale, might serve in this reading as a kind of redemption

for the maids, who have released not just their physical human form but also their negative affect, with the implied twenty-first century reader serving as witness to their trauma. The transformation of anger into art, into poetry and song, releases their negative affect and its hold over them.

However, in the play, the transformation of the maids into owls is withheld; the maids take their exit as their eternal chorus line selves, "*danc[ing] away in a line, with their ropes around their necks, singing*" (Atwood, *Penelopiad: The Play* 82). Thus, the ending of the play does not allow for such an affective closure. Here, the maids remain stuck in their chorus girl selves, following Odysseus and Penelope, and haunting the Underworld as angry, damaged spirits. When Penelope tries to address them in the play's final scene, the stage directions read that the maids "*titter eerily, bat-like, and circle away from her*" (Atwood, *Penelopiad: The Play* 82). I read this performative gesture as a sign of trauma. The trace of what has happened to them still remains visible in their non-verbal utterances. The dance of the chorus girls turns into a grotesque mocking shadow of an entertaining dance of the Broadway musical chorus line.

"[B]ut now we're here / we're all here too / the same as you," the maids intone. Death serves as the great equalizer, eliminating class differences between the maid servants and Odysseus and Penelope. Finally they are "the same as you," their masters. But what has happened in between? What kind of story have the maids narrated in between? And to what kind of poetic forms have they made allusion, incorporating and ventriloquizing the master discourse of Western literary canon?¹²

Some of their commentary uses straightforward poetry and song, such as the popular tune, the sea shanty and the ballad. The **popular tune**, which is prefaced in the novel by the note "*As Performed by the Maids, with a Fiddle, an Accordion, and a Penny Whistle*" (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 51), uses simple four-line stanzas with dactyls, a tetrameter and rhyming couplets. The maids present the stanzas as soloists but are joined in the chorus by all the other maids. At the end the maids

all curtsy, and Melanthe of the Pretty Cheeks walks around, “*passing the hat*” (53).

First Maid:

If I was a princess, with silver and gold,
And loved by a hero, I'd never grow old:
Oh, if a young hero came a-marrying me,
I'd always be beautiful, happy, and free!

Chorus:

Then sail, my fine lady, on the billowing wave—
The water below is as dark as the grave,
And maybe you'll sink in your little blue boat—
It's hope, and hope only, that keeps us afloat.

Second Maid:

I fetch and I carry, I hear and obey,
It's Yes sir and No ma'am the whole bleeding day;
I smile and I nod with a tear in my eye,
I make the soft beds in which others do lie. [...] (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 51-52)

In the manner of street musicians or music hall singers, the maids describe their daily life at Odysseus' court while expressing their dreams of becoming princesses. It is all very much tongue in cheek, and yet there is a serious undertone to the maids' jesting.

The **ballad** follows a similar formal pattern, using the regular ballad metre: iambs and simple four line stanzas with alternating tetrameter and trimeter, and one rhyme per stanza. But the social criticism already present in both the rope-jumping rhyme and the popular tune is harsher now, as the fate of the maids at court has become much more dire: in Atwood's version of the *Odyssey*, it is Penelope who sets the twelve maids up to mingle with the suitors and spy on them; they are to be her “eyes and ears” among the suitors (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 114-15). While being a clever plan for Penelope, it also results in a number of the maids getting raped by the suitors; this is not prevented by Penelope herself. The maids relate their life as Penelope's spies thus:

Sleep is the only rest we get;
It’s then we are at peace:
We do not have to mop the floor
And wipe away the grease.

We are not chased around the hall
And tumbled in the dirt
By every dimwit nobleman
Who wants a slice of skirt.

And when we sleep we like to dream;
We dream we are at sea,
We sail the waves in golden boats
So happy, clean and free.

In dreams we all are beautiful
In glossy crimson dresses;
We sleep with every man we love,
We shower them with kisses.

[...]

But then the morning wakes us up:
Once more we toil and slave,
And hoist our skirts at their command
For every prick and knave. (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 125-26)

Only when asleep, so the maids relate, are they released from their bonds of servitude. Remarkably, the sea serves for them as a space of longing, standing in metaphorically for a place of freedom and happiness. This is in stark contrast to Odysseus’ own longing, throughout the *Odyssey*, to leave the sea behind and reach the shore of, preferably, his homeland Ithaca. Neither the popular tune nor the ballad feature stage directions in the play (presumably because both constitute stand-alone scenes), leaving the dramatization of the songs to the play’s director and movement director.

In the **sea shanty**, the maids take on the role of Odysseus’ sailors and present a summary of Homer’s *Odyssey*. What happened really to Odysseus during those long years between the end of the Trojan War and his eventual return to Ithaca? Penelope herself offers rumors; but

even after her death and speaking from the Underworld, she knows “only a few factoids I didn’t know before” (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 1). Thus the reader of at least this tale is left with nothing but an array of conflicting stories. This is what Penelope relates to the reader at one point, in prose:

Odysseus had been to the Land of the Dead to consult the spirits, said some. No, he’d merely spent the night in a gloomy old cave full of bats, said others. He’d made his men put wax in their ears, said one, while sailing past the alluring Sirens—half-bird, half-woman—who enticed men to their island and then ate them, though he’d tied himself to the mast so he could listen to their irresistible singing without jumping overboard. No, said another, it was a high-class Sicilian knocking shop—the courtesans there were known for their musical talents and their fancy feathered outfits.
(Atwood, *Penelopiad* 91)

The reader is offered a myriad of stories, theories, points of view of what might have happened, but knowledge of the “truth” of what happened is forever deferred. Or, looking at it in light of the poem quoted at the beginning of my paper, it is the sum of all the stories that constitutes “the truth.” Both the narrative and the shadow narratives, the line of echoes, coexist.

The maids present to the reader the “official” version, as laid down in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Their telling takes the form of a sea shanty: Regular four-line stanzas using anapest and tetrameter (the concluding line always uses trimeter) are interspersed with a chorus using the same form. This is the sea shanty, “*As Performed by the Twelve Maids, in Sailor Costumes*” (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 93):

Oh wily Odysseus he set out from Troy,
With his boat full of loot and his heart full of joy,
For he was Athene’s own shiny-eyed boy,
With his lies and his tricks and his thieving!
His first port of call was the sweet Lotus shore
Where we sailors did long to forget the foul war;
But we soon were hauled off on the black ships once more,
Although we were pining and grieving.

[...]

*Here’s a health to our Captain, so gallant and free,
Whether stuck on a rock or asleep ‘neath a tree,
Or rolled in the arms of some nymph of the sea,
Which is where we would all like to be, man! [...] (Atwood, Penelopiad 93-94)*

The crossdressing maids put on the costumes of Odysseus’ sailors for this song. Incidentally, their captain, whom the sailors praise in the chorus (“so gallant and free”), manages to lose all of them and get them killed in Homer’s epic. So how seriously are we as readers supposed to take this praise? In presenting the *Odyssey* as a sea shanty, the maids’ retelling takes on the form of travesty. But is this Margaret Atwood presenting a caricature of the *Odyssey*, or just an entertaining way of presenting a summary of the mythical intertext? The ironic mode would of course allow for both to be true at the same time.

There is another parody the maids present to the reader: “The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll” relates the story of the birth and childhood of both Telemachus and the maid servants, his childhood playmates. On a formal level, Margaret Atwood presents in the **idyll** verse in the vein of Tennyson or Whitman¹³; on the level of content this poem, too, tells the story of the makings of the future king of Ithaca. But it is closely linked to the story of the maids:

Nine months he sailed the wine-red seas of his mother’s blood
Out of the cave of dreaded Night, of sleep,
Of troubling dreams he sailed
In his frail dark boat, the boat of himself,
Through the dangerous ocean of his vast mother he sailed
From the distant cave where the threads of men’s lives are spun,
Then measured, and then cut short
By the Three Fatal Sisters, intent on their gruesome handcrafts,
And the lives of women also are twisted into the strand.

And we, the twelve who were later to die by his hand
At his father’s relentless command,
Sailed as well, in the dark frail boats of ourselves
Through the turbulent seas of our swollen and sore-footed mothers
Who were not royal queens, but a motley and piebald collection,
Bought, traded, captured, kidnapped from serfs and strangers.

[...]

Our lives were twisted in his life; we also were children
 When he was a child,
 We were his pets and his toythings, mock sisters, his tiny companions.
 We grew as he grew, laughed also, ran as he ran,
 Though sandier, hungrier, sun-speckled, most days meatless.
 He saw us as rightfully his, for whatever purpose
 He chose, to tend him and feed him, to wash him, amuse him,
 Rock him to sleep in the dangerous boats of ourselves.

We did not know as we played with him there in the sand
 On the beach of our rocky goat-island, close by the harbour,
 That he was foredoomed to swell to our cold-eyed teenaged killer.
 If we had known that, would we have drowned him back then?

[...]

Ask the Three Sisters, spinning their blood-red mazes,
 Tangling the lives of men and women together.
 Only they know how events might then have been altered.
 Only they know our hearts.

From us you will get no answer. (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 65-69)

The poetry used by Margaret Atwood here is marked by sophistication and retains an almost epic quality: parallel constructions and repetitions of words and phrases reminiscent of oral literature, as well as the use of extended metaphor, the journey of pregnancy and birth as a sea voyage. All of this speaks of a language and style far more elevated than the previous examples of speech allocated by Atwood to the maids. The maid servants here successfully imitate highbrow poetry, the discourse of their masters. While on the level of content, the inequality in social hierarchy between Telemachus and the maids is foregrounded, on the level of form, it is successfully deconstructed.

In his essay “‘Poetry in Fiction’: A Range of Options,” Matthias Bauer delineates the different forms the appearance of poetry in prose can take, differentiating between “poetry as genre,” “poetry as form of speech,” and “poetry as mode.” All the examples from Atwood’s *Penelopiad* discussed up to this point could be argued to exhibit the characteristics of “poetry as genre.” But the other two forms of poetry in prose can be found in Atwood’s novel as well. “Poetry as form of speech” makes an appearance in the chapter “The Perils of Penelope,

A Drama,” which again employs verse, but this time it is the verse of eighteenth-century mock-heroic drama.¹⁴ The topic is Penelope’s surmised marital infidelity; the maids assume the roles of Penelope, Eurycleia, and the chorus line, while Melanthe of the Pretty Cheeks presents a prologue; the **drama** is written in iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets (cf. Atwood, *Penelopiad* 147-52).¹⁵ It is removed in its entirety from the play version, as is the “Anthropology Lecture,” a parody of critical writing on the *Odyssey* in the vein of Robert Graves, which reduces the maids and their suffering to mere symbol. As one would expect from a parody of critical writing, no poetry is to be found here (cf. Atwood, *Penelopiad* 163-68).¹⁶

Three more numbers of the chorus line can be found to be using prose, as marked in the overview above: the lament, the love song, and the trial of Odysseus. But is it really prose that is used here? Both the **love song** and the **lament** exhibit poetical qualities: parallelisms abound; the titles—love song and lament—refer to poetic genres. They can thus serve as an example of what Matthias Bauer refers to as “poetry as mode” as it appears in prose. To illustrate my point, here are two short excerpts from both lament and love song:

We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents. Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents; parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen. These parents were not gods, they were not demi-gods, they were not nymphs or Naiads. We were set to work in the palace, as children; we drudged from dawn to dusk, as children. [...] (“Lament”; Atwood, *Penelopiad* 13)

Yoo hoo! Mr Nobody! Mr Nameless! Mr Master of Illusion! Mr Sleight of Hand, grandson of thieves and liars!

We’re here too, the ones without names. The other ones without names. [...]

We’re the serving girls, we’re here to serve you. We’re here to serve you right. We’ll never leave you, we’ll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids, all in a row.¹⁷

(“Love Song”; Atwood, *Penelopiad* 191-93)

In Atwood’s version of the tale, the shadows of the maids really do stick to Odysseus like glue in the Underworld. In the novel, Odysseus

is tried for the murder of the maids in a courtroom drama, over the course of which the maids take matters into their own hands, calling on the Erinyes, the Furies, to punish Odysseus for his wrongdoings. (The twenty-first century judge refuses to sentence Odysseus on grounds of the case being some 2000 years out of date.) The courtroom drama does not make it into the play, but the invocation of the Furies is kept, with the maids themselves *becoming* the Furies and carrying out their revenge. Atwood uses the same text for the **invocation**, basically a curse, in both novel and play. In the novel, this is written in prose, whereas in the play, the same lines are presented in free verse. Clearly, the invocation transcends generic boundaries, blending poetry and prose in one of the most emotionally charged texts of the play:

O Angry Ones, O Furies, you are our last hope!
 We implore you to inflict punishment and exact vengeance on our behalf!
 Be our defenders, we who had none in life!
 Smell out Odysseus wherever he goes!
 From one place to another, from one life to another!
 Whatever disguise he puts on,
 Whatever shape he may take,
 Hunt him down!
 Dog his footsteps.
 On earth or in Hades.
 Wherever he may take refuge!
 Appear to him in our forms.
 Our ruined forms!
 The forms of our pitiable corpses.
 Let him never be at rest! (Atwood, *Penelopiad: The Play* 78)

We are now in the realm of poetic language, which here is also the language of the sacred, the diction of biblical texts, of prayer. One might even hear in this grotesque parody echoes of biblical prayers such as the Lord's Prayer.¹⁸

In Atwood's version of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and to a certain extent also Penelope remain haunted by what has happened. In Odysseus' case this includes a literal haunting, as the dead maids keep following him even in the Underworld. "He sees them in the distance, heading

our way," Penelope recounts towards the novel's close. "They make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause him pain. They make him want to be anywhere and anyone else" (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 189).¹⁹

With her borrowing from Ancient Greek tragedy by making use of choral interludes, Atwood presents a prose narrative haunted by its excluded shadow narratives. In her essay "'We can't help but be modern,'" Coral Ann Howells contends that, with its myriad of textual transformations and hauntings, "*The Penelopiad* might be seen as Atwood's Gothic version of *The Odyssey*" (58), where "[the maids'] stories persist, for their fates represent the dark underside of heroic epic and their voices celebrate the return of the repressed," and where, finally, her "Underworld despite its classical trappings is the Gothic territory of the Uncanny" (69).

Another way of reading the interludes, this time drawing not on psychoanalytic theory, as Howells does, but on recent trauma theories, might be the following: the maids' subjectivities, which have been denied agency in the main narrative, haunt this same narrative. (Lyric) poetry lacks the temporality that (narrative) prose possesses. The failure to reintegrate the narrative voice of the maids within the main (i.e. Penelope's) narrative is presented—appropriately—as an ever present haunting of that narrative in the form of poetic insertions. The insertions might thus be argued to serve, structurally, also as representations of intrusions produced by the trauma of exclusion of these voices. And as such they remain, appropriately, forever severed from the temporality of the main narrative.²⁰

More Than a Number

The maids' poetic insertions serve several functions within the framework of Atwood's novel. By presenting their utterances as exterior to Penelope's prose narrative, Atwood illustrates the maids' social status as slave servants who cannot make their voices heard and who retain no agency within the framework of the main narrative.²¹ Transferred to the culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,

the maids retain their roles as entertainers, becoming girls in a chorus line. However, while, on the level of plot, no agency is given to the maids, they still manage to speak out and present their point of view, to make their voices heard from the position and within the space allocated to them: in their poetic interludes, dances and songs. Female voices silenced in the *Odyssey* are thus by Atwood performatively made audible in the novel's interludes.

These interludes are much more than just the equivalent of the musical numbers of a background chorus line to either Homer's *Odyssey* or Penelope's retelling of it from her own point of view. Being excluded from Penelope's prose narrative, the maids raise their voices, in the interludes, as outsiders; yet, as outsiders they also speak from a position of epistemic privilege.²² It is with them that an important "truth" of the story resides. And it is in their interludes that questions of ethical responsibility and accountability of actions (Odysseus', Penelope's, Telemachus') are raised.

"For a little while their feet twitched, but not for very long" (*Penelopiad* xiii). This is the line from Homer which Margaret Atwood started out with. Why not, dear reader, take this as a pointer: which other silenced voices haunting other texts of the Western literary canon can you hear?

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NOTES

¹I am indebted to Burkhard Niederhoff's, Michal Ginsburg's, and Ingrid Hotz-Davies's as well as the anonymous reviewers' comments on my conference paper for the development of my argument.

²For an extensive overview of rewritings see, e.g., W. B. Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme*, and Edith Hall's *The Return of Ulysses*.

³For an overview of rewritings of the *Odyssey* focussing on Penelope as the main character, see Hall (115-29). A number of critics have read *The Penelopiad* alongside other retellings of Greco-Roman myths. Susanna Braund, for whom

“myth permits endless reinvention, revisioning, refocalization, renewal” and “is always available to articulate both the certainties of the dominant culture and the challenges to those certainties” (206), reads Atwood alongside Marguerite Yourcenar’s “Clytemnestra, or Crime” and a selection of poems from Carol Ann Duffy’s *The World’s Wife*. Sarah Annes Brown reads *The Penelopiad* alongside Ursula Le Guin’s *Lavinia*, and Hilde Staels compares Atwood’s rendering of the *Odyssey* in *The Penelopiad* with Jeannette Winterson’s taking on the Atlas myth in *Weight*.

⁴Indeed, Atwood counts six echoes in her introduction to the play text. “The original explosion was the Trojan War, some version of which—say the archeologists—may well have taken place at an undetermined date in the Bronze Age” (*Penelopiad: The Play* v). Next are a myriad of oral myths surrounding the Trojan War; *The Odyssey*; “post-Homeric retellings, stretching from Ovid through Dante and Chaucer and Shakespeare and Tennyson to James Joyce and Derek Walcott and Barry Unsworth and Lewis Hyde” (v); *The Penelopiad* as commissioned by Canongate; a dramatized version of *The Penelopiad* performed at St. James’s Church, Piccadilly; and finally, the stage adaptation of *The Penelopiad* (see v-vi).

⁵According to Shannon Hengen, audiences in Canada and the UK reacted differently to the play. In contrast to UK audiences, “Canadian theatre-goers frequently awarded the show with standing ovations,” which Hengen attributes at least “in part” to Canadian audiences’ demonstrations of “solidarity with its author” (54).

⁶For instance, Atwood draws heavily on Robert Graves’s findings in *The Greek Myths* (see *Penelopiad* 197).

⁷Staels traces Atwood’s use of genre conventions of both the satyr play and Menippean satire. Dating from the fifth century BC, the satyr play “primarily parodied the tragic heroization of epic heroes by creating a comic double” (102). The menippea, on the other hand, “parodies the monological style as well as the coherent perspective and world view of ancient genres such as the epic,” mixing among other things “various genres” and contemporizing “the heroes of myth” (102-03). For Staels, “Atwood’s excavation and adaptation of the ancient Penelope myth results in a highly experimental text in which the author not only liberates the epic story from its generic constraints, but also Penelope and her twelve maids from the limitations imposed on them by the traditional narratives” (111).

⁸For Mihoko Suzuki, too, the maids “function as a tragic chorus, commenting on the actions of the hero, Odysseus (and in a later chorus, Penelope)” (272). Suzuki sees Atwood as mounting, with the *The Penelopiad*, “a critique of the *Odyssey*, which normalized the punishment of the maids, from a perspective that foregrounds hierarchies of class as well as gender. [Atwood] presents this challenge through the dramatic form of the Greek chorus—inflected by vaudeville and burlesque—as a response and a means of ‘talking back’ to the authoritative epic narrative” (275).

⁹Usually, in musical theatre as in opera, the main characters are not part of the chorus but have their own musical numbers, arias or songs (and the occasional

duet, tercet or quartet). They are perceived by the audience to be the protagonists, and it is their stories which the (musical) plot in most cases centres on.

¹⁰Cf. Contents (Atwood, *Penelopiad* xv-xvi; my emphases).

¹¹Staels points to the owl as a “symbol of Athene, the Great Goddess who helps Odysseus murder the suitors and who possesses the power of wisdom and transformation” (110).

¹²Howells notes that the maids “will not go away and [...] refuse to be silenced. They transform *The Penelopiad* into a polyphonic narrative where their dissident voices counter the authenticity of Penelope’s confession. Indeed, it is the maids and not Penelope who have the last word, defaming (to use De Man’s terminology) the Homeric monument to male heroism and female fidelity” (“Five Ways” 12).

¹³With Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” which some critics have described as an American epic (cf. Miller xv-xviii), the poem shares its speech cadence and free verse form; with Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, it shares the subject matter of the making of a (legendary) once and future king.

¹⁴Such as can be found, for instance, in Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb*.

¹⁵To provide just one textual example, the following is Melantho’s prologue:

As we approach the climax, grim and gory,
 Let us just say: There is another story.
 Or several, as befits the goddess Rumour,
 Who’s sometimes in a good, or else bad, humour.
 Word has it that Penelope the Prissy
 Was—when it came to sex—no shrinking sissy!
 Some said with Amphinomus she was sleeping.
 Masking her lust with gales of moans and weeping;
 Others, that each and every brisk contender
 By turns did have the fortune to upend her,
 By which promiscuous acts the goat-god Pan
 Was then conceived, or so the fable ran.
 The truth, dear auditors, is seldom certain—
 But let us take a peek behind the curtain! (Atwood, *Penelopiad* 147-48)

¹⁶For Howells, the maids’ stories highlight “gender and class issues which go unchallenged in *The Odyssey*: the physical and sexual exploitation of servant girls [...], male violence against women [...], and also, more shamefully, women’s betrayals of other women” (“Five Ways” 13). Also, “the sheer variety of [the maids’] narratives draws our attention to the different generic conventions through which stories may be told, so that the interaction between Penelope’s confession and the maids’ shifting narrative forms cast doubt on the absolute truthfulness of any single account, including Penelope’s” (14).

¹⁷The last sentence directly quotes the nursery rhyme “Mary, Mary, quite contrary” (cf. Opie and Opie 301).

¹⁸With biblical prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer or the Psalms of the Old Testament, the invocation shares syntactical structures, and therefore a similarity in speech cadence, which is mostly due to the high number of supplications present. A clearer echo of the Lord’s Prayer can be heard in the line “[o]n earth or in Hades. Wherever he may take refuge.” This quite resembles the Lord’s Prayer’s “on earth as it is in heaven,” with its gesture of encompassing the whole universe.

¹⁹Hilde Staels reads the maids who haunt Odysseus in the Underworld as transformational trickster archetypes: “The trickster in his role as catalyst displays wisdom in helping individuals confront their shadow. Penelope’s maids, women who possess as much tricky intelligence as Odysseus [...], indeed want to confront the legendary hero with his repressed evil side” (109).

²⁰For an understanding of trauma structures and the temporality of traumatic intrusions see, e.g., Julian Wolfreys in “Trauma, Testimony, Criticism.”

²¹By *agency* I mean the maids’ ability to act in accordance with their own interests, needs and desires and also to effect change accordingly. By *voice* I mean the maids’ ability to not only speak but also articulate their own experience, needs, desires and point of view—the maids speaking *for themselves*—and also be heard.

²²*Epistemic privilege* denotes the experience of recognizing the workings of certain power structures (such as class, race, gender, sexuality) afforded to individuals in a minoritarian subject position. Social privilege remains usually invisible to the socially privileged. One example: If I (as a gay man) am asked by a (presumably) straight person, “Do you have a wife/girlfriend?” I realize that they read me as straight and the possibility that I might have a husband or boyfriend has not occurred to them. Their epistemic “blind spot” is visible to me but not to them—as long as I do not draw their attention to it (cf. also Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science”; and José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*).

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Mucedorus and Counsel from Q1 to Q3*

KREG SEGALL

Introduction

The anonymous play *Mucedorus* is commonly cited for its popularity in the seventeenth century, running through over fifteen editions, but has been just as often dismissed as light slapstick fare, with little notice of its political interests and anxieties as it was revised after the accession of King James.¹ The play has often piqued the interest of critics only to the extent that it offers an excellent authorship mystery, with the tantalizing prospect of possible Shakespearean collaboration.² The First Quarto (Q1) of the play that we now call *Mucedorus* was published in 1598 with the title "A Most pleasant Comedie of *Mucedorus* the kings sonne of *Valentia* and *Amadine* the Kings daughter of *Arragon*, with the merie conceites of *Mouse*."³ Q1 ends with one of the choric figures, *Envie*, a would-be rebel, completely humbled by the proximity of the Queen; the final moment is a prayer for the maintenance of divinely-ordained power as embodied in Elizabeth. The Third Quarto (Q3) text, published in 1610, during the reign of James, makes several cuts and additions to the twelve-year-old play, adapting it to take advantages of nascent themes in the original work to emphasize the importance of a monarch's willingness to heed his counsel. Specifically, while Q1 ends with an Epilogue declaring the ultimate power of the monarch, the overall feeling of Q3 bends in the opposite direction—a concern for correctly mediated power of the monarch and the importance of honest consular advice.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsegall0241.htm>>.

In this article, I intend to argue that the Q3 revision of *Mucedorus* adapts Q1 in order to highlight the tense but necessary relationship between monarch and counsel, a theme that has been generally overlooked in previous discussions of the two editions.⁴

The Political Background to Q3

After the 1598 Q1 edition, a second printing (Q2) was published in 1606, with minor changes in punctuation and spelling (see Proudfoot). This text was revised, then, some time after 1606 and published as Q3 in 1610, in an atmosphere of concern about how King James (who acceded to the English throne in 1603) was defining monarchical power against the power of his counsel and Parliament. Counsel, and the nature of the king's relationship to counsel, was a topic of serious contention. Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli, Venetian Secretary in England, offers this analysis of contemporary English counsel:

It is impossible to deny that these English statesmen have, so to speak, bewitched [*incantato*] the King; he is lost in bliss and so entirely in their hands that, whereas the late Queen knew them and put up with them as a necessity but always kept her eye on their actions, the new King, on the contrary, seems to have almost forgotten that he is a King [...] and leaves them with such absolute authority [*assoluto dominio*] that beyond a doubt they are far more powerful than ever they were before.⁵

Adding to concerns about James, in 1607, John Cowell, "Doctor, and the Kings Maiesties Professour of the Ciuill Law in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge" published *The Interpreter: or Booke Containing the Signification of Words: Wherein is set forth the true meaning of all, or the most part of such Words and Termes, as are mentioned in the Lawe Writers, or Statutes of this victorious and renowned Kingdome, requiring any Exposition or Interpretation*. Cowell's book, a dictionary of legal terms, set forth in strong terms that the king was an absolute monarch, with the authority to legislate without the need for approval from or consultation of Parliament. Cowell argues:

either the king is about the Parliament, that is, the positive lawes of his kingdom, or else that he is not an absolute king [...] though it be a merciful policie, and also a politique mercie [...] to make lawes by the consent of the whole Realme, because so no one part shall have cause to complaine of a partialitie: yet simply to binde the prince to or by these lawes, weare repugnant to the nature and constitution of an absolute monarchy. ("Parlament")

James addressed these claims in his March 21, 1609/10 speech to Parliament at Whitehall, in which he strongly confirmed his answerability to no one: "God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or vnmake at his pleasure, to giue life, or send death, to iudge all, and to be iudged nor accomptable to none [...]. And the like power haue Kings" (*Political Works* 307-08). His potentially unchecked power, though, James concludes, must abide by settled custom, like common law and his coronation oath, or the king becomes a tyrant. James says that, while it is

sedition in Subiects, to dispute what a King may do in the height of his power [...] iust Kings wil euer be willing to declare what they wil do, if they wil not incurre the curse of God. I wil not be content that my power be disputed vpon: but I shall euer be willing to make the reason appeare of all my doings, and rule my actions according to my Lawes. (*Political Works* 308)

This is an uncomfortable conclusion to those who saw the King surrounded by bad counsel: the only check on the King's power is his voluntary willingness to "declare" his deeds, and far from having counsel willing to challenge a bad decision, those who listen to the King's decisions are all too willing to provoke a king to bad action. It was in this political atmosphere that the 1610 Q3 *Mucedorus* additions and changes were made.

"Be as the Sunne to Day, the Day to Night": The Q3 Prologue

The sixteen line Prologue that opens the 1610 text is the first clue to the reviser's overall intentions for the Q3 *Mucedorus*. While Q1's ending underscores the overwhelming and immediate presence of the

Queen, the effect of Q3 as a whole is to emphasize the King's more mediated power.

The 1598 Q1 text begins with the allegorical figures of *Comedie* and *Envie*, who offer their differing visions of the play to come, emphasizing the generic conflict between comic *Comedie* and tragic *Envie*; by contrast, the 1610 Q3 text opens with a Prologue speaking to the monarch, and focusing on the politics of counsel and authority⁶:

Most sacred Maiestie, whose great desertes
Thy Subiect England, nay, the World, admires:
Which Heauen graunt still increase: O may your Prayse,
Multiplying with your houres, your Fame still rayse;
Embrace your Counsell; Loue, with Fayth, them guide,
That both, as one, bench by each others side.
So may your life passe on and runne so euen,
That your firme zeale plant you a Throne in Heauen,
Where smiling Angels shall your guardians bee
From blemisht Traytors stayn'd with Periurie:
And as the night's inferiour to the day,
So be all earthly Regions to your sway.
Be as the Sunne to the Day, the Day to Night;
For, from your Beames, Europe shall borrow light.
Mirth drowne your boosome, faire Delight your minde,
And may our Pastime your Contentment finde. (1-16)

The opening statement of the Prologue, with its intervening praising clauses removed, is an imperative to the King: "Most sacred Maiestie [...] Embrace your Counsell." Yet the sentence delays that main imperative verb and, thus, the conclusion of that thought. It is slippery ground to argue from Renaissance punctuation, but it is tempting to observe how the colon after "nay, the World, admires" seems to announce the verb, while in fact it only points to "Which Heauen graunt still increase," a phrase that seems like it might lead to the main verb, but in fact only postpones it further.

Does "embrace your counsel" suggest "be benevolent to your counsel" or "listen to your counsel"? "Loue, with Fayth, them guide, / That both, as one, bench by each others side" is particularly knotty—on a first reading, the antecedent for "them guide" still seems to be

“Most sacred Maiestie.” That is, “guide them [Counsel] with love and faith.” Or, perhaps, the antecedent is “Loue, with Fayth”—that is, “may Love and faith guide the Counsel” with the king now removed from the sentence.

The final desire of the sentence, the wish “that both, as one, bench by each others side,” also seems to have at least a slightly ambiguous referent: the main sense appears to be the wish that Love and Faith sit next to each other, neither presiding over the other, within the counsel. At the same time, I find it difficult to read that closing clause without hearing the echo of how the sentence began: “Most sacred Maiestie [...] Embrace your Counsell [...] That both, as one, bench by each others side”—the desire for Majesty and Counsel to bench together. “Bench,” in this context, suggests not only the royal seat of justice, but also the representative seats of Parliament.⁷

This Prologue, beginning with the richly multi-valenced opening sentence, offers a hint of advice or request to the King that he perceive himself in a parallel or reciprocal relationship with his counsel; the syntax is careful, however, bending in two directions at once, suggesting both the paternal care the King must take of his counsel as well as their importance to him. The King is further advised: “So may your life passe on and runne so euen [...],” suggesting that he be aware that his counsel is critical to the nature and serenity of the King’s life, and, indeed, that the King *ought* to want his life to “passe on” and be “euen.” At the same time, though, the Prologue suggests that the King’s ultimate goal is for “firme zeale,” which feels very much like the opposite of “passe on” and “euen” with its implication of fervor, ardor, and activity. The King is advised both passivity and activity as guiding principles. He will thus be given a “Throne in Heaven”—the King will be both a blessed soul as well as sovereign in heaven. Note, though, that, even in heaven, where the King remains king, he is surrounded by advisors still: “Where smiling angels shall your guardians be / From blemisht Traytors stayn’d with Periurie.”⁸ This group of celestial advisors will keep out *bad* advisors, then—violent rebels as well in all probability, but here, they are liars, those who

would offer the King false words. These angels, though protecting the King, are not figured as grim, sword-bearing angels, but “smiling” angels, who offer the King only truth in contrast to perjurers. Even in setting out the case for counsel, the image of the traitor-counselor creeps in.

The Prologue never challenges the authority of the king even as it insists on the importance of the King’s willingness to be advised. The astronomical theme first emerges here, to be developed and reconsidered in two important later moments in the Q3 additions. Here, we are offered a traditional hierarchy of the universe and the kingdom, with the king as “sunne” who is superior to “Day” and “Day to Night.” That vertical organization of nature provides an image of the stable political world: “as the night’s inferiour to the day, / So be all earthly Regions to your sway.” There is some tension in the Prologue over the value of, the need for, and the willingness of the King to accept good counsel.⁹ In the end, we might even think about the Prologue, addressed to the King and advising him, as a model of counsel itself.

“Stab! Stab!”: The Induction in Q1 and Q3

Since the plot of *Mucedorus* may be unfamiliar, I will briefly summarize the action of the play. The young prince, Mucedorus, regardless of his father’s wishes, has fallen in love with the beautiful princess Amadine. He disguises himself in rustic garb, a coat that naturally serves to wholly obscure his true identity; he enters a green world where identities become blurred; the beautiful young princess Amadine is harried by a bear, but is saved just in time by the hero, whose coarse clothing cannot quite conceal his princely pedigree to the discerning eye of the princess. The princess’s father creates difficulties, a royal roadblock ensuring that the course of true love does not run too smoothly; the rival lover Segasto must be dealt with; Amadine is captured by Bremo, the cannibal, who Mucedorus slays;

finally, with the magic stage-direction, "*He discloseth himselfe,*" the hero shows the princess that he has been both heroic shepherd and high-born sovereign all along; to the acclaim of all, both fathers retract opposition ("*the King runnes and imbraces his Sonne*"), and the way is cleared for a wedding.

The play is framed by two choric figures, the female Comedie and the male Envie; Comedie speaks for the principles of joy, theatrical wonder, and feminine generativity, while Envie seeks to oppose Comedie at every step with threats of violence and disruption, both physical and verbal. These two figures appear in their own person only in the Induction and the Epilogue to the play, but the principles they speak for emerge in other roles throughout *Mucedorus*, notably by means of the Envie actor tripling roles, taking on the personae of antagonists to the main character.¹⁰ Envie opposes the comic project of the play in general, but also imagines his presence as particularly noxious to females. He threatens that "thunder musicke shall appale the nimphes" (21). Comedie, too, perceives Envie as dangerous to her—not only to her position as author-figure and presiding spirit of the play, but also to her personally, as a woman: "Vaunt, bloodi, curre, nurst vp with tygers sapp," she says to him, "That so dost seeke to quaille a womans minde" (35-36). She continues, "reuenge thou not on mee; / A silly woman begs it at thy hands" (46-47).

The sparring Comedie and Envie of the Induction debate who ought to have the ultimate responsibility for and provenance over the play—whose words will prove to be most powerful in swaying the course of the plot. In Q1, this Induction appears primarily as a generic struggle, a battle between two potentially opposing modes of drama. The Q3 Induction is not significantly different in terms of the words—Comedie and Envie speak the same lines—but has a different tone in the light of the immediately preceding Prologue's address to the monarch. The Prologue ends with the wish for the monarch that "mirth drowne your boosome," and Comedie, entering two lines later, picks up that word "mirth" in her insistence that her role as a speaker will fill the precise role necessary:

Why so! thus doe I hope to please:
 Musicke reuiues, and mirth is tollerable,
Comedie, play thy part and please,
 Mak merry them that coms to ioy with thee (1-4)

Comedie's entrance words, "why so!" seem almost in response to the request at the close of the Prologue that "may our pastime your Contentment finde"—"Why so! thus doe I hope to please."¹¹ I would like to stress that, as originally conceived in Q1, Comedie is *not* responding to the Prologue, since it did not exist in Q1. This then, is the Q3 adaptor's preferred mode—to reorient and to reimagine the existing Q1 text in response to different interests. But in the light of the Prologue's division between "smiling Angels" / guardians / Counsell and "blemisht Traytors stayn'd with Periurie" the division of the Induction between the joyful Comedie and the blood-stained, treacherous Envie seems like a playing out of the conflict imagined in the Prologue. Envie accuses Comedy of being a "minion"¹² and objects to her being "willing for to please," noting her single-minded focus on being agreeable: "What, al on mirth!" (8-9).

Comedie, wearing the traditional bay (that is, laurel) garland of the poet, says to herself, "play thy part" and "the daie and place is ours" (3, 7), with her emphasis on proper use of station and place. Comedie unusually claims that the mirth she stands for is "tollerable"—not overwhelming, not uproarious, but moderate; she will not let mirth "drowne your boosome" in the words at the end of the Prologue. It makes sense to compare Comedie's "tollerable" mirth to the Prologue's desire that good counsel will make the monarch's "life passe on and runne so euen."

"What, al on mirth!" cries Envie, resisting the project as a whole. Envie is explicitly a would-be crown seizer, demanding that warfare in the form of Mars himself, shall "breathe downe / A peerless crowne vpon braue enuies head, / And raise his chiuall with a lasting fame" (27-29). Envie enters as a violent rebel; he does not start on stage, but enters seven lines in, "besmearde with bloud." He challenges the authority and liberty of Comedie—she cries out that he "dares

comtrowle the pleasures of our will"—with an implied offstage army, which we hear. The stage direction reads "Sound drumes within and crie, 'stab! stab!'" (23).

Comedie speaks for peaceful union. "Both, as one, bench by each others side," is a useful motto for Comedie, her capacity and desire for a principle of social and economic mingling in this privileged space of the aesthetic: "*Comedie* is mild, gentle, willing for to please, / And seekes to gaine the loue of all estates: / Delighting in mirth, mixt all with louely tales" (37-39). Comedie perceives aesthetic perfection in her particular blend of "louely tales." But the point is not that Comedie simply stands for all-inclusivity, for a completely uncritically open acceptance of all genres, all words. She rejects utterly the negative principles Envie offers: "mixe not death amongst pleasing comedies," she demands (50). Comedie resists and seeks to protect the play against the "Blemisht" traitor she perceives Envie to be. "Blemisht" here implies not only the evil-looking, morally-blemished counselors the Prologue warns against, but also the spoiling, the marring of beauty that Envie's treacherous words and threats of usurpation may cause.¹³

Mucedorus and Anselmo: Counsel in Action

The first two scenes of *Mucedorus* after the Induction are new to the revised 1610 version. The first of these (I.i) immediately follows the Induction and offers a scene that is a more explicit, but no less problematic instance of counsel.

In I.i we see Mucedorus plan to leave his home kingdom of Valentia, in disguise, out of love for the princess Amadine. The addition of the scene identifies Mucedorus as a prince from the very beginning of the play, so that the audience recognizes the soon-to-be disguised-as-a-shepherd protagonist as an appropriate match for Amadine and of nobler status than his rival, Segasto. Prince Mucedorus's deeds are a recognizable reflection of his breeding. Q1, on the other hand, re-

serves that information until the end, when Mucedorus's identity is revealed to the surprise of Aragon's court. Until this revelation, the audience might imagine Mucedorus as a commoner-hero who wins a princess's love, while Q3 does not offer that possibility.¹⁴ This first scene is also quick to illustrate Mucedorus's problematic relationship to his counsel, developing the seeds of that theme from the Prologue and the Induction.

Muced. Anselmo.

Ansel. My Lord and friend.

Muc. True, my Anselmo, both thy Lord and friend
 Whose deare affections boosome with my heart,
 And keepe their domination in one orbe. (I.i.1-5)

The scene opens with an assertion of Anselmo's dual status as both friend and subject, and both statuses are yoked together, as equal partners. "Orbe" is used in the astrological sense (the image sparked by the word "domination") meaning the space in which the heavenly bodies exist but also naturally suggesting the orb and scepter of kingly authority.¹⁵ Mucedorus is claiming a privileged space within his heart, where Anselmo's words, as friend and advisor, can have power. Compare these lines to the Prologue's wish: "Loue, with Fayth, them guide, / That both, as one, bench by each others side." The Prologue offers a model of good speech of counsel—ruled by both affection and truth. Mucedorus's words bring back the theme of astrological kingship, but he rejects the vertical hierarchy of sun to day, day to night, instead choosing to put himself and Anselmo metaphorically in one orb.

This expression of astronomical mutuality will last only as long as Anselmo remains agreeable, and the scene's rewriting of the sun image is a good measure of the tension that emerges the moment when Anselmo suggests an alternate course of action. Mucedorus says: "Let Loues strong Magick charme thy triuiail phrase, / Wasted as vainely as to gripe the Sunne." The image snaps back, from inclusive orb, to the vertical sun/day/night metaphor of the Prologue, and

is a good measure of the tension that suddenly infuses the scene. After explicitly asserting mutuality of affection and truth, of friendship and subjecthood, however, the scene goes out of its way to pull apart that connection, offering a much more problematic scene of counsel than the opening lines would suggest. Note Anselmo's response to Mucedorus's words:

Muc. And keepe their domination in one orbe.

Ans. Whence neare disloyaltie shall roote it foorth,

But fayth plant firmer in your choyse respect. (I.i.5-7)

This is an odd conversational move to make on Anselmo's part, to note that treachery, or "neare" treachery, could certainly "roote it foorth" (uproot the friendship and loyalty). Anselmo seems to be reminding Mucedorus of the fickle nature of the counsel relationship, and Mucedorus agrees, observing how precarious that relationship is: "Much blame were mine, if I should other deeme, / Nor can coy Fortune contrary allow" (8-9). And so, nine lines into the scene, we have had two moves—one, to illustrate an ideal counsel-lord dyad, and two, to argue the precariousness of that dyad, as though to suggest that Mucedorus and Anselmo's close relationship is particularly rare.

As the scene progresses, however, the relationship of counsel becomes tense, beginning with Mucedorus's announcement that "my Anselmo, loth I am to say / I must estrange that frendship— / Misconsture not, tis from the Realme, not thee" (10-12). Mucedorus couches declaration of intent to depart as an estrangement of friendship—Anselmo cannot help "misconsture" Mucedorus's words as directed towards him. Mucedorus declares that he will leave Valentia to seek his love Amadine.

Anselmo, serving as both counsel and friend, advises Mucedorus in a way that satisfies his double role. He first addresses the political concern: "Will you forsake Valencia, / leaue the Court, / Absent you from the eye of Soueraigntie," and then the personal concern: "Do not,

sweete Prince, aduenture on that taske, / Since danger lurkes each where" (23-26). Of course, these two reasons blend into each other—the personal safety of the prince is a political concern, and the political concern for the prince's absence is phrased as a personal relationship ("forsake Valencia")—and so the person of Anselmo, combining friendship and counsel, is the ideal person to offer these words.

Throughout the remainder of the scene, Mucedorus objects strongly to Anselmo's unasked-for advice: "Desist disswasion"; "Assist what I intend"; "If thou my welfare tender, then no more"; "locke thy lip-pes"; "Thou still art opposite in disposition"; "I dislike thy iudgement" (27, 30, 34, 37, 43, 47). Mucedorus insists that Anselmo help him to disguise himself—because that is what young lovers do—and strongly indicates that Anselmo must assent to his proposal.¹⁶ Anselmo, however, remains steadfast in his objections—not stopping his prince, but offering relevant advice even in the face of his lord's obvious displeasure. His objections partake both of the political and the personal, and his words offer both sound advice and tender care. Before departing on his quest, Mucedorus requests silence from Anselmo: "Let our respect commaund thy secrecie" (57)—a command which Anselmo will in fact make a decision to break in IV.i.21, when he informs the King of Valentia where Mucedorus is. After Mucedorus leaves, Anselmo speaks four lines alone that offer Mucedorus good wishes, but also his realistic evaluation of Mucedorus's probable fate: "Glory thy mortalitie suruiue" (64). In short, then, Q3 offers a version of counsel in which the counselor, while offering excellent advice, is not "embraced"—in the words of the Prologue—but ignored except insofar as he chooses to agree with his lord. The Prologue's request to embrace counsel so that one's "life may passe on and runne so euen" could therefore be addressed to Mucedorus.

This added scene of counsel is best read against the Q1 scene between the King of Arragon (Amadine's father) and his counselor, Collen, in II.i, which demonstrates a moment of counsel without friction, but also one without meaningful counsel given; the audience is aware that the King reaches the wrong decision, with no challenge

by Collen. The King, in his camp on the battlefield, has just concluded a successful campaign; he announces to his counsel the importance of clemency in peacetime, and continues:

Therefore, my Lords, the more to my content,
 Your liking, and your countries safeguards,
 We are disposed in marriage for to give
 Our daughter to Lord *Segasto* here [...] *Segasto*
 What say you, Lordings, like you of my advise? (7-10, 14)

This speech is much more an announcement than a request for advice, and the King calls his own words “my advise”—inverting the expected relationship between King and counsel. Collen, the spokesperson for the counselors, says: “And please your Maiesty, we doe not onely alowe of your highnesse pleasure, but also vow fathfully in what we may to further it” (15-18). Collen does not question or challenge the King’s decision, and real counsel is neither asked for nor offered. But the audience is already on to *Segasto*, having seen him run from a savage bear, leaving *Amadine* to fend for herself; in the next scene we will see *Segasto* suborning the murder of *Mucedorus*, his romantic rival. As the scene ends, the King speaks to Collen alone:

I haue a tale in secret kept for thee:
 When thou shalt heare a watch woord from thy king,
 Thinke then some waightie matter is at hand
 That highlie shall concerne our state (32-35)

Collen replies, “What so my soueraigne doth commaund me doe, / With willing mind I gladly yeeld consent” (41-42). This moment does not connect to any plot element in the play—that “tale in secret” or “waightie matter” never makes itself known later in the play, in the versions of *Mucedorus* that we have; nevertheless, the exchange is instructive. Collen is willing to “yeeld consent” even to the King’s unspoken project. The King promises to reward Collen for his dutiful service, promising “bounties” to him (39). The addition of the

Anselmo character in Q3, then, inverts Collen's ready assent with a councillor more willing to challenge his lord's desire and even disobey him when necessary, even as that relationship is fraught with tension.

The Anselmo-model of counsel is strenuously argued for in Simon Patericke's translation of *Contre-Machiavel* of 1577, published in English in 1602 as *Anti-Machievel, A Discourse upon the Meanes of Wel Governing and Maintaining in Good Peace, A Kingdome, or other Principallitie. Divided into three parts, namely The Counsell, The Religion, and the Policie which a Prince ought to hold and follow*. This text presents itself as a refutation of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and presents Machiavelli's view of counsel: "It is a Maxime and generall rule (saith Machievell) that good counsell ought to proceed from the wisdom of the Prince himselfe: and not contrarie, that the Princes wisdom should proceed from good Counsell" (B1v). The best way for a counselor to act, according to Patericke's translation, is not simply to give advice, but to intervene respectfully, turning a prince's natural opposition and unruly tendencies to good:

[...] the prudence and wisdom of Princes Counsellors, oppos[e] themselves pleasantly and with a good grace by reason and equitie, against that soveraigne power, which of it selfe is fierce, redoutable, and fearful, it entertaineth and maintaineth publicke causes and the Commonwealth in good estate, which otherwise could not continue. (C12-13)

The friction between Mucedorus and Anselmo, then, rather than being seen as a collapse of the prince/counsel relationship, may be interpreted as a valuable intervention. Anselmo's significantly embodied presence—he and Mucedorus have their discussion in terms of bosom, heart, body, eye, beard, lips, and clothing—opposes Collen's acquiescent and more disembodied "willing mind."¹⁷ The thematic point is clearly made: Anselmo is a counselor who can be embraced, his speech rebellious to his lord only insofar as he seeks the good of his country, unlike Envie's words of discord.

The Q1 Epilogue and the “Most Holy Hand”: Envie Stoope

The Induction and the Epilogue of Q1 offer a mini-drama in which a violent rebel, dangerous to powerful women, is brought to submit to female authority by the Queen. By the end of the play, Envie is brought to heel, with Comedie’s command:

Yeelde to a woman, though not to mee,
And pray we both together with our hearts
[...]. (Epi. 15-16)

Envie, humbled by the sudden invocation of the Queen, says

Envie, were he neuer so stoute,
Would becke and bowe vnto her maiestie.
Indeed, *Comedie*, thou hast ouerrunne me now.
And forst me stoope vnto a womans swaie. (21-24)

Instead of the traditional comic closing note of romantic couples united, *Mucedorus* ends with Envie and Comedie united in their submission to the Queen. As Envie stoops, Comedie prays: “The Counsell, Nobles, and this Realme, / Lord guide it stil with thy most holy hand” (28-29). This sentence, starting as it does with “Counsell” and “Nobles,” appears to be headed towards a declaration of the importance of these, equated with “this Realme” grammatically, and all under the guidance of the Lord. In fact, “thy most holy hand”—the Lord’s hand through the Queen’s hand—is the superior and the guide of “Counsell, Nobles, and Realme.” The word “it” in that sentence, though, is ambiguous—what is the antecedent of “it”? If “it” is “this Realme,” Comedie’s statement elides “Counsell” and “Nobles” entirely, leaving those words without a verb; or, “Counsell, Nobles, and Realme” are contained within one big “it.” These various entities are unified, and made level, by the presence of Elizabeth.

Comedie’s mention of the Queen’s mandate to guide “it” comes immediately after Envie’s invective against those that would begrudge that her Majesty “amongest vs long may raigne, / And those

that would not haue it soe, / Would that by enuie soon their heartes they might forgoe" (25-27). Comedie immediately observes the need to direct Counsell and Nobels here, after the mention of potential treachery; Envie speaks in the first person as he brags and threatens:

Yet must I needes confesse thou has don well,
And plaide thy part with merth and pleasant glee:
Saie all this, yet canst thou not conquer mee;
[...]. (10-12)

However, when Envie is faced with the presence of the Queen, his language moves abruptly into the third person, and he addresses himself:

Enuie, were he neuer so stoute,
Would becke and bowe vnto her maiestie. (21-22)

This is a very strange moment—Envie claims, essentially, that, even if the personification of Envy were present, he himself would be forced to bow.¹⁸ This is said at the same moment that Envie, the personification of Envy, is "stoope[ing]" to the Queen. So who is he? The actor? The author stepping through for a moment to note obeisance to the Queen? Or an actual repentant Envie in a moment of dissociation? Another such moment of Envie's stepping out of his self for a moment is his above quoted prayer that traitors to the Queen "by enuie soon their heartes they might forgoe." Here, Envie imagines these traitors as unconverted versions of himself, envious of the sovereign's glory, and also bereft of their hearts.¹⁹ Envie here is casting off his role as the play's lightning rod for treachery and locating that role elsewhere. He cannot long stand against Elizabeth—like the "Counsell, Nobles, and this Realme," Envie submits to his Queen.

The Q1 Epilogue ends with a fervent prayer by both Comedie and Envie ("pray we both together with our hearts"; 17) that Elizabeth reign thrice Nestor's years, that God defend her from her foes, and that her foes may never work their wills (18-20). This prayer leads to a final prayer: "long maie she raine, in ioy and greate felicitie! / Each Christian heart do saie amen with me" (32-33). The play calls for the

audience's response of "Amen," asking for their speech and participation in the ceremonial redemption of Envie. He discards his treachery, compelled by Elizabeth's presence. The acknowledgement of the Queen's rightful position of authority scratches the comic itch as much as the resolution of the romantic plot of the play, like Rosalind's father being returned to power in *As You Like It*.

The Q3 Epilogue: Enter the King

The Q3 additions to the Epilogue remove Q1's emphasis on the defeat of a man by an ascendant woman in favor of images of lurking political treachery and dangerous language. The Q3 Epilogue retains the first fourteen lines of the Q1 Epilogue, cutting immediately before Comedie instructs Envie to "stoope vpon thy knee, / Yeeelde to a woman, though not to mee, / And pray we both together with our hearts, / That she thrice Nestors years may with vs rest" (Q1 Epi. 15-18). Since it would have been easy enough to make some changes that omit the sex of the monarch, and keep the prayer for the monarch's long life, we have to assume that the choice to cut at that moment is significant. The reviser, after the cut, inserts material that stresses the danger of treasonous speech, especially as embodied in Envie's incursion into the play. Comedie points out Envie's poisonous words in terms that connect his devious language with rebellion and political violence:

Enuie, spit thy gall,
 Plot, worke, contriue; create new fallacies,
 Teame from thy Wombe each minute a blacke Traytor,
 Whose blood and thoughts haue twins conception:
 Studie to act deedes yet vnchronicled [...]
 Vnhapse the Wicket where all periureds roost,
 And swarme this Ball with treasons: [...]. (Q3 Epi. 15-19, 22-23)

These lines pick up the image from the Prologue addressed to King James of "blemisht Traytors, stayn'd with Periurie." The key word in this quotation is "plot," connecting both Envie's tragic plot and his

traitorous plot. Specifically, the Q3 Epilogue suggests that the language of plays is a potentially dangerous location for subversive speech, and that Envie will sponsor a playwright to create chaos. In developing this theme, the reviser interestingly notes and adapts Envie's direct martial threats from the Q1 Prologue—his threats to achieve “a peerless crowne,” “raise his chiuall,” “and see them wallow in there blood”—and transforms that bloody belligerence into dangerous advice, whispered words, and lies. Envie plots to “whet on” a “Wretch” “to write a Comedie”:

Wherein shall be compos'd darke sentences,
 Pleasing to factious braines: [...]
 Then I my selfe (quicker then Lightning)
 Will flie me to a puisant Magistrate,
 And waighting with a Trencher at his backe,
 In midst of iollitie, rehearse those gaules,
 (With some additions)
 So lately vented in your Theator. (Epi. 42-43, 46-51)

In other words, Envie will provoke someone to write a comedy which contains subversive material, and then inform the authorities about that subversive material—and add some lies, as well—in order to make comedy fall into suspicion. Envie here gives voice to Q3's claim that subversion can easily take place within theatrical language, under “darke sentences.” The play brings up that possibility ostensibly only for Comedie to dismiss it as an unrealistic threat; as Comedie notes: “This is a trap for Boyes, not Men” (55). Yet Comedie's comment also recalls the popular Children's companies, such as the Children of the Queen's Revels, who repeatedly offered plays that caused offense at the highest levels, such as *Eastward Ho* of 1605 and *The Isle of Gulls* of 1606 (see Munro, esp. 19-21). In the context of recent censuring and imprisoning of playwrights, Comedie's assurances that “I and my faction doe eschew those vices” may not be completely reassuring (58). After all, Comedie admits that theater really only has two options: she asks James to “pardon our vnwilling error, / So late presented to your Gracious view, / And weele endeuour with excesse of

paine, / To please your senses in a choysier straine" (71-74). They can irritate him, to their cost, or please him. Anselmo and Collen might very well agree.

The Q3 play ends with a reworking of the Q1 conclusion of Envie stooping to Elizabeth by having both Comedie and Envie "bow to the Earth" and "begge [their] Pardons on [their] bended knee" to King James, the "glorious and wise Arch-Caesar on this earth" (63-64, 68). Also like Q1, Q3 ends with a prayer for the monarch: "be blessed, then: / Who other wishes, let him neuer speake" (77-78). The most significant tonal difference between the two endings is Q3's decision to emphasize Envie's sudden inability to offer his evil words: Envie "*Fall[s] downe and quake[s]*" and admits that "My Power has lost her Might; Enuies date's expired. / Yon splendiant Maiestie hath feld my sting" (64-65). While Q1 treats those who would resist the monarch as both heartless and cursed to lose their hearts ("by enuie soone their heartes they might forgoe") locating resistance to the Queen within one's emotions, Q3 locates that dangerous resistance within subversive speech.

This closing passage of the play features the return of the astronomical theme, first sounded in the Prologue and questioned in the conversation between Mucedorus and Anselmo. The Prologue offered a vision of James at the head of a celestial vertical hierarchy: "as the night's inferiour to the day, / So be all earthly Regions to your sway. / Be as the Sunne to Day, the Day to Night" (Pro. 11-13). Mucedorus tells Anselmo to "charme thy triuiall phrase, / Wasted as vainely as to gripe the Sunne" (I.i.35-36). The close of the play, however, upends this thematic metaphor. Envie looks on as Comedie addresses the King. She says: "we commit you to the armes of Night, / Whose spangled carkasse would, for your delight, / Striue to excell the Day" (Epi. 75-77). Here, the hierarchy has been reversed: night, the image of subordination in the Prologue, now tries to overcome Day; however, the metaphor is rewritten so that Night's potential ascendancy is no longer figured as rebellion, but as excellence. The power relationship between Day and Night becomes, in this image, reciprocal.

The final moment of the Q3 play extends that sense of extraordinary homage, by illustrating how the archetypal evil-speaking Envie changes his speech from the language of treachery to the language of obedience. Comedie observes that “Enuie’s stroken dumbe” (69) at the King’s appearance, but then ends with an opportunity for Envie to speak, but this time, correctly: “be blessed, then: [she says to James] / Who other wishes, let him neuer speake” (77-78). Envie, in the face of Comedie’s conditions, agrees to speak, and has the last lines of the play: “Amen. / To Fame and Honour we commend your rest; / Liue still more happie, euery houre more blest” (79-81). The danger that Envie represented has been contained, and Envie himself has been rehabilitated—although his words of rebellion may still echo as the play concludes.

Mucedorus as Rebellion: Conclusion

On February 3, 1652, a group of travelling actors arrived in the town of Witney, 12 miles west of Oxford, ready to perform the play *Mucedorus*, which they had been rehearsing since September. The troupe was probably small—about ten actors—and did not require any elaborate machinery or props, except for a single bear costume.

The players were breaking the law, and everyone knew it. After the Puritan victory in the civil war, the theaters had been closed throughout England in 1642. This edict was clearly not enough, however, and a series of increasingly strict laws to enforce that outlawing of theatrical performance followed in 1647 and 1648. In particular, players were defined as “vagabonds,” and, after a second offense, as “incorrigible rogues,” and were to be punished as such, with whipping, and imprisonment. In the sixteenth century, Shakespeare’s contemporaries had been able to shield themselves from charges of vagabondage by means of the patronage of a lord; now, no such arrangement was available. Even the audience members of a play could be punished, according to the 1647 laws: any audience member could be fined five

shillings. Finally, in 1648, a Provost-Marshal was appointed with the authority to “seize upon all ballad-singers, sellers of malignant pamphlets, and to send them to the several Militias, and to suppress stage plays” (Whitelocke, *Memorials* 332). Players could be, and were, imprisoned and punished for performing, and theaters were raided and destroyed.

The organizers of the 1652 *Mucedorus* performance in Witney were breaking the law, and not particularly surreptitiously. This was exuberant public disobedience of just the sort that had gotten a similarly disobedient troupe players at the Red Bull theater arrested in 1649, as the historian Bulstrode Whitelocke reports: The “stage-players [...] were apprehended by troopers, their clothes taken away, and themselves carried to prison” (435). Denied the use of the local guild hall to perform their play by the local bailiffs, they reached an agreement to perform *Mucedorus* in the large second floor of the White Hart Inn, the “chiefe Inne of the Towne.” It was seven at night. Over 300 people had come, packing into the inn, shouting, laughing, and dancing to a trumpet and a drum, making it difficult to begin the play. Finally, the performance began.²⁰

Why did the players choose *Mucedorus* for their rebellious performance? That it was a fifty-year-old, often ridiculous, familiar play is probably part of the reason—it might have been beneath the notice of local authorities, whereas a new play might have been more difficult to ignore. Yet the players’ choice of *Mucedorus* may speak to the tense political undercurrent this essay has observed. Whether the actors had intended to perform the Q1 or the Q3 ending, the final scenes depict the return of a prince from hiding, and Envie’s submission to a monarch: it is easy to see, just a few years before the Restoration, how this old play could be seen as dangerous and politically provocative.

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NOTES

¹For a representative negative view of the play, see Moorman; and also Dessen, who calls the play a “frothy romance” about which little can be said to be “meaningful” (69).

²See, for example, Nicolaus Delius’s *Pseudo-Shaksperesche Dramen* (1854); Richard Simpson’s *The School of Shakespeare* (1878); and A. F. Hopkinson, *Essays on Shakespeare’s Doubtful Plays* (1900). For an excellent discussion of collaborative authorship as it pertains to *Mucedorus*, and the “Shakespearean apocrypha” as a whole, see the introduction to Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen’s edition of *Mucedorus*.

³For all quotations from *Mucedorus*, this essay uses C. F. Tucker Brooke’s edition in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*.

⁴An important exception is Richard Finkelstein’s “Censorship and Forgiven Violence in *Mucedorus*.”

⁵CSPV X (1603-07), 70, quoted in Perry’s *The Making of Jacobean Culture* (83-84). The Scaramelli report is from July 1603, after Q1 but before Q3’s publication.

⁶The Q3 title page announces that the play has been “[a]mplified with new additions, as it was acted before the Kings Maiestie at White-hall on Shroue-Sunday night. By his Highnes Seruants vsually playing at the Globe.”

⁷See *OED* “bench” *n.* 2.a. and 2.b.: “The seat where the judges sit in court,” and “Hence, the place where justice is administered”; see also 3.a.: “A seat where a number of persons sit side by side in some official capacity; *e.g.* those in the British Houses of Parliament.”

⁸The move from the King’s throne to the surrounding angels may pivot on “Throne,” being the name of one of the ranks of angels.

⁹Finkelstein notes the play’s impulse to condemn, but not too far, terming that effect “self-censorship.” He writes: “*Mucedorus* titillates: it repeatedly raises issues but inhibits judgment of them by becoming inconsistent [...] inconsistency lets the author invite but evade direct criticism of his dramatic King”; and: “The play contains an element of self-censoring caution that proposes aristocratic restraint” (93-95).

¹⁰The *Dramatis Personae* notes that “Eight persons may easily play it,” pointing out that the Comedie actor may take on the additional roles of “a boy, an ould woman, Ariena Amadines maide,” and the Envie actor may also play “Tremelio a Captaine: Bremo a wilde man.” The *Dramatis Personae* must be taken at least slightly skeptically, though, since as written, the actor who plays Collen and the Messenger both appear as both parts onstage at the same time in 5.2. See Rooney.

¹¹Note the Q1 punctuation of Comedie’s opening words: “Why so?” as if to respond to the audience’s implied question about her “joyfull” appearance and “garland of baies”—“why do I look like this, you ask?” Q3 changes the question mark to an exclamation point, losing that tone of querying. While it is true that Renaissance typesetters did use the question mark where we might use an excla-

mation point, it is difficult to understand “Why so!” as an interjection. Furthermore, the second half of Comedie’s first line (“thus doe I hope to please”) seems like the response to a question in the first half.

¹²“Minion” is often used to sexualize young men. “Minion. 1. A man’s—especially a king’s or a prince’s—male favorite; not necessarily a homosexual” (Partridge 154). Note the connection between “minion” and “counsel” in the description of the French court, quoted by Potter and Roberts: “[The king spoke] with some such onelie as pleased his Majestie to call thereunto. And these be commonlie at the daye the K[ing]s minions & greatest favorettes without anie other rule. And for this case it is called the Counsaile of the Cabinet” (331).

¹³Later in the play, Bremo, the savage cannibal king, who rules unchecked in the forest, will echo Envie’s usurping language. For a full discussion of Bremo’s role in the play, see Scherer, who argues that Bremo may be used to mock James I’s love of blood sports (see 64).

¹⁴See Finkelstein 102.

¹⁵See *OED* “orb” *n.*¹ I.5.b.: “An organized or collective whole suggestive of an independent world or planet”; as well as definition II.6.b.: “The orbit of a planet or other celestial object.”

¹⁶We might think, for example, of Erostrato’s disguise in Gascoigne’s *Supposes* (or Shakespeare’s version of that same plot in *The Taming of the Shrew* with Lucentio and Hortensio’s disguised wooing of Bianca), Aspatia in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy*, or Friar Thomas’s immediate assumption that the Duke wants a friar’s habit because he has suffered “the dribbling dart of love” in *Measure for Measure* (I.iii.2) just to name a few of the many examples of young lovers’ disguises in Renaissance drama.

¹⁷See Dunn, who analyses the bodily politics that exist “along the seam between the disinterested discourse of conciliar self-portraiture and the all-too-interested affections that the counselors themselves represent as monarchical dysfunction” (31).

¹⁸Here, “Envy” refers to the emotion; “Envie” to the character. In this speech, Envie is thinking about the personification of Envy as distinct from his self.

¹⁹The *OED* offers for “forgo” *v.* 1.: “to go away, go past, pass away”; and 6.: “To abstain from, go without, deny to oneself; to let go or pass, omit to take or use; to give up, part with, relinquish, renounce, resign.” The sense of “forgo” in Envie’s speech seems to be that envious naysayers will be condemned to reject their own hearts.

²⁰The performance did not go well. According to *Tragi-comoedia*, John Rowe’s contemporary account of the event, two hours into the performance, five people were dead, and sixty injured, at least one mortally. In the middle of the performance, during the last scene of Act IV, a 13-14 inch supporting beam holding up the second floor slowly began to break—so slowly that the audience had time to think that this must be some special effect, some part of the play. The floor collapsed onto the room below, the dust and smoke obscuring the lights, the

crowded inn suddenly dark and filled with shouting, panicking people. The inn's exit was held shut by the fallen timbers of the upper floor. Someone, pinned down and grievously wounded in all of his limbs screamed "cut off my head!"; a mother cried for someone to find her child; people sobbed and prayed. Finally, a window was forced open, and the audience escaped; see also Lois Potter's *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*.

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Milton's Astronomy and the Seasons of Paradise: Queries Motivated by Alastair Fowler's Views^{1*}

HORACE JEFFERY HODGES

In the "Introduction" to his second annotated edition of *Paradise Lost* (1998), Alastair Fowler states that because "the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide" in John Milton's prelapsarian astronomy, the cosmic "geometry of Milton's invented unfallen world is elegantly simple" (35), a view Fowler had held as early as in his 1968 edition, and similar to the position expressed earlier by Thomas Orchard (146). In our postlapsarian skies, of course, these two great circles do not coincide, for the plane of the ecliptic (roughly, the path of the sun, moon, and planets along the zodiac) lies at an angle of about 23.5 degrees to the plane of the celestial equator (i.e. equatorial plane), which intersects the earth's axis at 90 degrees. Such a complication was apparently foreign to Milton's prelapsarian universe, making the phenomena of the skies easier to imagine. Among the various simplicities that Fowler finds so "exhilaratingly easy to visualize" in that prelapsarian universe is the fact that "its sun remains constantly in the same sign" and only "as a consequence of the fall [...] begins its oblique seasonal journey" (35). Prior to God's postlapsarian command in 10.649-719 (esp. 668-78) that the sun's annual path be made oblique, 10.329 already informs us that "the Sun in *Aries* rose." Fowler tells us that this situation was consistent with the "common belief [...] [that] the world was created at the vernal equinox," and he therefore holds that the sun's zodiacal position would have been forever Aries in an unfallen universe (Fowler 201n555-61).

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debhodges0241.htm>>.

Fowler's influence is far-reaching. The Indian expert on Miltonic cosmology, Malabika Sarkar, has adopted Fowler's views (see "Satan's Astronomical Journey" 418; "'The Visible Diurnal Sphere'" 3), as has the literary scholar Rudolf Beck, who accepts in passing the stated coincidence of the ecliptic and equatorial planes as authoritative (27). Likewise, the respected Milton scholar William Poole apparently agrees with Fowler on the zodiacal significance of "the coincidence of ecliptic and equatorial planes," for in *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (2005), he approvingly quotes Fowler's entire paragraph, including the claim that the prelapsarian "sun remains constantly in the same sign" (Poole 180). At the very least, Poole does not dispute the point. Indeed, only Gábor Itzész has looked carefully into Fowler's statement on the coincidence of the ecliptic and the celestial equator and its putative implication that the sun shining down on Milton's Paradise would have remained forever in Aries if not for the Fall. Itzész finds much circumstantial evidence that the prelapsarian sun does move through the zodiac, but his argument ultimately becomes circular in drawing upon the *OED* for proof: "a year is 'the time occupied by the sun in its apparent passage through the signs of the zodiac, that is (according to modern astronomy), the period of the earth's revolution round the sun, forming a natural unit of time' (*OED* 1.)" (see Itzész, "Milton's Sun" 309; "Satan's Journey"; cf. also Donaldson, who accepts Itzész, 294-97, 307-09). Fowler's claims would thus appear to have gained some acceptance, as Itzész has noted (see "Milton's Sun" 307). Fowler himself may have considered the astronomical details so "exhilaratingly easy to visualize" that he never explicated precisely how the sun's zodiacal immobility worked in terms of prelapsarian celestial mechanics, nor did he cite any passages in Milton's *Paradise Lost* to show textual support for his claim. Let us take a closer look at the prelapsarian universe's cosmic order,² for we may find that its exact structural organization is "hard to tell" (3.575) and thereby illustrate what Peter Herman calls Milton's "Poetics of Incertitude" (see *Destabilizing Milton; "Paradise Lost"; "Whose fault"*).

Understanding Fowler

At least two clear passages can be cited in *Paradise Lost* attesting to the prelapsarian earth's perpetual spring, which could have led Fowler to his view that the prelapsarian sun would have remained forever in Aries. The clearest expression of this eternal spring occurs in Book 4, where we first encounter Paradise in an unfallen universe:

The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
The trembling leaves, while Universal Pan
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance
Led on th' Eternal Spring. (4.264-68)

Spring is twice referred to in these five lines, the second time as *eternal*. Similarly, albeit in a recently fallen universe, God commands the unfallen angels in Book 10 to cause astronomical changes so as to move the sun "from th' Equinoctial Rode" (10.672), i.e., the celestial equator, and thereby:

[...] bring in change
Of Seasons to each Clime; else had the Spring
Perpetual smil'd on Earth with vernant Flours,
Equal in Days and Nights [...]. (10.677-80)

Again, spring is twice referred to, the first time as *perpetual*. In terms of astronomy, one could readily understand that a perpetual, eternal spring on earth, with its "vernant" flowers forever swaying in its "vernal" breezes, would follow from the sun remaining constantly on "th' Equinoctial Rode" within the same zodiacal sign, "the vernal equinoctial point of Aries," as the position would be called in Milton's postlapsarian universe (Fowler 202n557-58). Fowler is nevertheless wrong to conclude that a prelapsarian sun would have remained forever in Aries.

The Problem of Seasons

1. Four Seasons?

Spring is always present in Milton's prelapsarian universe, but *not only* spring. This passage clearly states that autumn exists simultaneously with spring:

[...] Rais'd of grassie terf
Thir Table was, and mossie seats had round,
And on her ample Square from side to side
All Autumn pil'd, though Spring and Autumn here
Danc'd hand in hand. (5.391-95)

Philip C. Almond notes this passage and places Milton within a tradition that affirmed "an autumnal spring or a vernal autumn" (87). Simple reflection should confirm that autumn would be as agriculturally necessary as spring in order for Paradise to offer fruit, and since some fruits must pass through summer to ripen, one might expect that season to be dancing hand in hand with spring and autumn as well.

The summer season is in fact mentioned by the angel Raphael as he describes to Adam God's creative acts on the sixth day of the universe's creation:

At once came forth whatever creeps the ground,
Insect or Worme; those wav'd thir limber fans
For wings, and smallest Lineaments exact
In all the Liveries dect of Summers pride
With spots of Gold and Purple, azure and green
[...]. (7.475-79)

Presumably, Adam would understand what the term "summer" refers to, for even some birds are aware of the passing seasons, as Raphael also relates:

Part loosly wing the Region, part more wise
 In common, rang'd in figure wedge thir way,
 Intelligent of seasons, and set forth
 Thir Aerie Caravan high over Sea's
 Flying, and over Lands with mutual wing
 Easing thir flight; so steers the prudent Crane
 Her annual Voiage [...]. (7.425-31)

The crane is particularly singled out as making an annual voyage even though in Milton's prelapsarian Paradise, this bird has no practical need for such a migratory instinct. However, the annual character of its "Voiage" implies, among other things, a winter season.

2. On Earth?

We can now therefore count not only spring and autumn but also apparently summer and winter. Thomas H. Luxon is thus right to single out the lines "Universal Pan / Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance / Led on th' Eternal Spring" (4.266-68) and suggest that they actually allude to more seasons than spring; he notes, "in later mythology the Horae became the four seasons" (Luxon n4.267). The two seasons of summer and winter, of course, would not have differed from prelapsarian spring and autumn in any practical sense. Only after the Fall of mankind did God order the seasons altered to "affect the Earth with cold and heat" so as "from the North to call / Decrepit Winter" and "from the South to bring / Solstitial summers heat" (10.653-56). Noticing that prelapsarian birds do not need to migrate probably leads Fowler to remark that "the references to migration are proleptic" (416n423-30). Such an explanation seems insufficient, however, since the angel Raphael is explicitly relating these things to Adam as factual details about God's creation as it already stands. In *Naming in Paradise* (1990), John Leonard understands "seasons" to mean occasions (265), but this meaning seems strained, given the context of Raphael's discourse. More recently, Leonard appears to have conceded the point and wonders in *The Complete Poems* (1998) and in his annotated *Paradise Lost* (2003) if "the prudent [...] birds sense

the imminent Fall" and therefore know that a wintry season lies ahead (809 and 388, respectively), a point he again alludes to in *Faithful Labourers* (589), but this speculation suffers the same insufficiency as Fowler's explanation.

Fowl and human were cognizant of the passing seasons, but since those seasons in Milton's prelapsarian Paradise were not distinguished by changing temperatures, what *did* announce their passing? Neither fully blossomed flowers nor fully ripened fruit did so, for "Spring and Autumn here / Danc'd hand in hand" (5.394-95). Nor was the passing of a summer season distinguished by slowly maturing fruits since fruits would have been ripening year-round. And what could possibly signal the winter season in this Paradise without death? Trees surely do not shed all their leaves in the perpetual, eternal autumn and stand bare for some equally perpetual winter season. On this point, let us also note in passing that Milton never explicitly refers to autumn as "fall" in his epic poem even though the term "fall" existed in Milton's time, when it was short for the expression "fall of the leaf" (cf. Ascham 48; Evelyn 101, 160; Walton 68; see also *OED* "fall *n.* 1.,2.). In a postlapsarian reference, he does allude to "fall of the leaf" in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, which describes the fallen angels lying thick as "Autumnal Leaves [...] for ever fall'n" (1.302-30). He may otherwise avoid the expression because it so readily connotes fallenness, either of angels or mankind. Be that as it may, no separate, distinct season exists for autumn, nor for any other season, and though a postlapsarian sense of the word "harvest" is thrice used (see 4.981; 9.842; 11.899), it nowhere connotes a separate season of autumn for the prelapsarian earth.

3. As in the Heavens?

Since the four seasons were not agriculturally separate on the prelapsarian earth, let us consider what Milton's references to changing seasons might mean, for example, in Eve's innocent words to Adam:

With thee conversing I forget all time,
All seasons and thir change, all please alike. (4.639-40)

One might object that Eve is using “seasons” in a different sense, referring to cycles of time other than the four seasons, but a couple of passages strongly imply that Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian earth does have alternating seasons. The first passage comes in the angel Raphael’s description of creation:

Again th’ Almightye spake: Let there be Lights
High in th’ expanse of Heaven to divide
The Day from Night; and let them be for Signes,
For Seasons, and for Dayes, and circling Years,
And let them be for Lights as I ordaine
Thir Office in the Firmament of Heav’n
To give Light on the Earth; and it was so. (7.339-45)

The second passage comes when Raphael assures Adam that he can rightfully inquire about the motions of the heavens:

To ask or search I blame thee not, for Heav’n
Is as the Book of God before thee set,
Wherein to read his wondrous Works, and learne
His Seasons, Hours, or Dayes, or Months, or Yeares
[...]. (8.66-69)

The various temporal divisions include the seasons, and their divisions are prelapsarian since Adam is assured that he can rightfully study them and thereby learn of the motions within the heavens, motions that include seasons. One might object that Genesis 1:14 stands behind 7.341-42 (and 8.69) and that the Hebrew (*mow’ed*) and Greek (*kairos*) for “season” can mean simply “appointed time” (Gesenius 417a) and “point of time” (Bauer 395b), respectively. This objection would be more relevant had Milton not explicitly noted that the celestial motions also act as signs for the “circling Years” (7.342), an allusion to the sun’s annual movement (or apparent movement) along a great celestial circle. Seasons thus may indeed have no clear

agricultural referent for the unfallen earth, but they do take place in astronomical terms, as Gábor Ittzés has also argued (see Ittzés, "Milton's Sun" 309).

Fowler Reconsidered: "ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide"

Because astronomical seasons exist for Milton's prelapsarian earth, we are led to reconsider Fowler's two astronomical statements, that "the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide" and that the "sun remains constantly in the same sign" of Aries in the unfallen universe (35; 201n555-56); these two claims presuppose not merely a coincidence of the ecliptic and the celestial equator but also an identification of the ecliptic with the zodiac. Let us first address Fowler's former astronomical statement and return later to the latter astronomical statement. Milton allows some room for speculation that the prelapsarian "ecliptic" was already in an oblique position and that the sun (with planets in tow) merely changed course at God's command after the sin of Adam and Eve:

Some say he bid his Angels turne ascense
The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more
From the Suns Axle; they with labour push'd
Oblique the Centric Globe: Som say the Sun
Was bid turn Reines from th' Equinoctial Rode
Like distant breadth to *Taurus* with the Seav'n
Atlantick Sisters, and the *Spartan* Twins
Up to the *Tropic* Crab; thence down amaine
By *Leo* and the *Virgin* and the *Scales*,
As deep as *Capricorne*, to bring in change
Of Seasons to each Clime; else had the Spring
Perpetual smil'd on Earth with vernant Flours,
Equal in Days and Nights [...]. (10.668-80)

In the former of the two alternatives for the sun's oblique annual motion, Milton notes that "Some say he bid his Angels turne ascense / The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more / From the Suns Axle." If so, then Fowler would be correct in his claim that the zodiac (and

therefore the “ecliptic”?) lay along the celestial equator prior to the Fall, for only the earth is shifted to an oblique angle. In the latter of the two alternatives for the sun’s oblique annual motion, however, Milton notes that “Som say the Sun / Was bid turn Reines from th’ Equinoctial Rode,” as though the sun altered its (apparent) course (by which, take note, it would already have been in [apparent] annual motion along the celestial equator) and turned toward “*Taurus* with the Seav’n / *Atlantick* Sisters” and the subsequent zodiacal signs along an “ecliptic” that already existed as a circle oblique to the celestial equator. Ittzés cites this same passage in *Paradise Lost* (cf. Ittzés, “Milton’s Sun” 308), but he does not see the implication that the sun turned to take the zodiacal path, for he holds that the prelapsarian sun moves through the signs of the zodiac (cf. Ittzés, “Milton’s Sun” 309). Ittzés aside, the term “ecliptic” will require some clarification anyway, which the following three paragraphs will provide.

This latter alternative noted above, that the sun altered its (apparent) course by turning from the “Equinoctial Rode” onto the zodiac, would be consistent with the reference to prelapsarian colures in 9.66, for the colures are defined as the “two great circles which intersect each other at right angles at the poles, and divide the equinoctial [i.e., celestial equator] and the ecliptic into four equal parts” (*OED* “colure” *n.*). Ittzés has much of value to say about the colures in *Paradise Lost*, and can thus be read with interest on these, but he errs in making the colures terrestrial rather than celestial and in asserting that the celestial sphere itself is imaginary. His error stems from relying on a *modern* definition of the celestial sphere rather than the ancient and medieval view that the celestial sphere is physical (Ittzés, “Satan’s Journey” 14). Consistent with the *OED* definition provided above, the colures “intersect the plane of the ecliptic at the fixed points of the solstice[s] and equinox[es]” (Zivley 131-32). Fowler holds that this reference to the colures in 9.66 is proleptic of the Fall (472-73n64-66), whereas Ittzés suggests an infinite number of intersections since “every prelapsarian meridian is a colure” (“Satan’s Journey” 18), but this is too ingenious.

Interpreting the "ecliptic" as an abstract great circle already oblique to the celestial equator might, ironically, fit with Fowler's own description of Satan's "oblique way" (3.564) as a path from the sign of Libra to the sun in Aries (3.558, 588); this is as explicated throughout several of Fowler's notes to Book 3, lines 555 through 588 (cf. 201n555-61; 202n557-58 and 558-59), for when Satan leaves the sun, he is said to speed "Down from th' Ecliptic" (3.740). Milton does not clearly specify that Satan enters the universe in the constellation of Libra, but if Satan *does* enter there, then his "oblique way" from Libra to the sun could allude to the obliquity of the "ecliptic" along the zodiac. Such an allusion would be contrary to Fowler's claim that "the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide." If Fowler's claim of coincidence is correct, however, then Satan could be accurately described as speeding down from the "ecliptic" in leaving the sun. But if the "ecliptic" is oblique to the celestial equator, then the sun in Aries lies on the intersection of these two great circles, and Milton's words "Down from th' Ecliptic" might be an allusion to Satan taking leave from that oblique path.

One could still defend Fowler's claim by distinguishing an "ecliptic" coincident with the celestial equator from an oblique zodiac, but Fowler does not distinguish these two (cf. 35-36). One might also object that an oblique zodiac without the sun, moon, and planets would not literally be an "ecliptic" since no eclipses could ever take place. True enough, but would eclipses take place in the prelapsarian universe described by Fowler, a universe in which the sun remains forever at the vernal equinox in the zodiacal sign of Aries? For if the sun does not move, why should the moon (or the planets)? If not, then Fowler's "ecliptic" is just as imaginary.

A Brief Excursus on Prelapsarian Astronomical Possibilities

This point about the zodiac and the ecliptic could do with some elaboration. In the prelapsarian universe of *Paradise Lost*, the sun's (apparent) path would have coincided with the celestial equator. In such a prelapsarian universe, there are two possibilities for the zodiac:

1. The zodiac is located on the celestial equator.
2. The zodiac is located on an approximately 23.5 degree obliquity to the celestial equator.

In his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1998), Alastair Fowler assumes the first of these two possibilities (35-36). Milton, however, seems to leave open either possibility, as we have seen.

As for the term “ecliptic,” so called because the solar and lunar eclipses occur along this line, Milton does use the term. However, he may be using it proleptically, for his references to the “ecliptic” are ambiguous, so there might not be any eclipses in his prelapsarian universe. Or there may be eclipses, and Milton may be using the term not proleptically, but to designate a prelapsarian actuality. There exists any one of three possibilities, with a further distinction worth noting to the second possibility:

- A. The term “ecliptic” is not used proleptically, for prelapsarian eclipses do occur, and the prelapsarian ecliptic is coincident with the celestial equator.
- B. The term “ecliptic” is used proleptically, for prelapsarian eclipses do not occur (either because the sun and moon [and planets] lack any motion other than diurnal [B-] or because they have more than merely diurnal motion that does not bring the sun or moon into eclipse [B+]), and the prelapsarian “ecliptic” is coincident with the celestial equator.
- C. The term “ecliptic” is used proleptically, for prelapsarian eclipses do not occur, and the prelapsarian “ecliptic” is not coincident with the celestial equator, but instead intersects it at about a 23.5 degree obliquity.³

Fowler seems to assume B-, for he thinks that the sun remains constantly in the vernal equinox, which implies that the moon and planets would also not exhibit any movement from their positions along the “ecliptic,” as any such movements were understood to derive from the same cosmic mechanism.⁴

If we combine number (zodiac) with letter (ecliptic), Fowler’s understanding would thus be most accurately labeled “1B-.” Note, how-

ever, that both "B-" and "B+" designate very odd uses of the term "ecliptic," for eclipses do not occur along the celestial equator, and they never will, whether in pre- or postlapsarian times. By comparison, "C" is a more reasonable use of the term "ecliptic," for eclipses will occur along the 23.5 degree obliquity in postlapsarian times. Fowler is unlikely to be correct in his position of 1B-, as we shall see, and Milton's somewhat ambiguous language leaves open seven other possibilities, i.e., 1A, 1B+, 1C, 2A, 2B-, 2B+, or 2C (though 2B- suffers a similar difficulty as 1B-).⁵

Fowler Reconsidered: "sun remains constantly in the same sign"

Even if Fowler were correct in maintaining that "the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide" and in assuming that the "ecliptic" and the zodiac are identical (1B- above), there seems no reason to infer that the prelapsarian "sun remains constantly in the same sign" of Aries. One would have to interpret "th' Equinoctial Rode" of 10.672 as implying that the sun does not move from the vernal equinox in which it was created, but such a reading is belied by the fact that the sun is turning its reins from a road, and a road, moreover, in which every point along its entire circuit would be equinoctial. Perhaps Fowler thinks to infer the sun's vernal immobility in Aries from the apparent fact that the cosmic "geometry of Milton's invented unfallen world is elegantly simple" (35). The simplest elegance could only be the case for a geocentric universe, which at its unfallen simplest could conceivably make do with purely diurnal movement of the heavens. But Milton allows for a heliocentric understanding of the universe, which would require not only a diurnal rotation of the earth but also an annual revolution of the earth around the sun. In that case, the starry sphere would have to keep pace with the earth's annual motion to ensure that the sun remain forever in Aries, though this is also conceivable if the source of their annual movement is identical.

At any rate, simple elegance need not necessitate the single, diurnal motion possible only with geocentrism, as Milton's poem allows for a heliocentric understanding. Besides, even a geocentric reading of Milton's prelapsarian universe entails more than just diurnal movement. In 8.84, Raphael's reference to "Epicycle" (among other celestial mechanisms) presupposes the annual motion of the planets, even if the angel's point is to rein in mankind's overweening drive for total knowledge (cf. Orchard 100-01), and planetary annual motion implies the sun's (apparent) annual motion as well. Moreover, we have already seen that the celestial lights were created for the purpose of measuring out the passage of time, including the passing of the seasons and the "circling Years" (7.341; see also 7.339-45), which would be impossible if the sun were never to move out of Aries. Without the sun's (at least apparent) movement from place to place along the celestial equator in Milton's unfallen universe, nothing would distinguish seasons since no changes on earth announce their passage (Itzès, "Milton's Sun" 309). Admittedly, a prelapsarian universe in which the sun's annual movement does not take it along a path oblique to the celestial equator is a universe in which there is no *decisively* rational division into merely four seasons. With respect to the stars, the sun's annual motion could in principle allow for twelve, or thirty-six, or three-hundred and sixty seasons. But perhaps Adam and Eve are as "Intelligent of seasons" (7.427) as the crane and happen to have an intuitive recognition of four seasons corresponding to heavenly motions (cf. 9.66: "Colure").

We have seen that the poem speaks of spring and autumn (5.394-95). The angel Raphael's reference to summer presupposes that Adam understands that term (7.478). This same angel's description of migratory birds being "Intelligent of seasons" presupposes at least some indefinite concept of winter on Adam's part as well (7.427; cf. Itzès, "Milton's Sun" 309). Even if the first couple should have no clear concept of what the four seasons might entail, there would nevertheless be astronomically announced signs "For Seasons, and for [...] circling Years" (7.342), and the sun would certainly move out of Aries.

Conclusion

The structure of Milton's prelapsarian universe is often alluded to in *Paradise Lost*, but its *precise* structural organization, as Milton himself hints, is "hard to tell" (3.575); this allows for several interpretative possibilities and is thereby reminiscent of the ambiguity and incertitude investigated by Herman and other scholars (cf. Sauer 15n1). Alastair Fowler thus makes overly confident statements concerning the simple elegance of Milton's universe, including two strong claims, that "the ecliptic and equatorial planes coincide" and that the prelapsarian "sun remains constantly in the same sign" of Aries. As we have seen, the first statement might well be correct, though not incontestably so (and not as Fowler means it), given the ambiguity of Milton's language concerning the "ecliptic" and the zodiac. The second statement, however, is demonstrably incorrect, for the celestial motions that signal the changing seasons in their "circling Years" entail that the prelapsarian sun move annually about the celestial equator (along with the planets, presumably). The sun could not remain constantly in Aries, or the term "seasons" would have no astronomical referent (though reading the celestial motions might require an intuitive intelligence of seasons). One might note, however, that a sense exists in which Fowler is right, for Milton's prelapsarian sun does not move out of Aries. If Fowler's reckoning is correct, then God's creation of the sun occurs on the 17th day from the Messiah's generation (31). Fowler reads Milton as holding to the "common belief [...] [that] the world was created at the vernal equinox" (201n555-56; 235n268). Since, by Fowler's calculation, the Fall occurs on the 32nd day from the Messiah's generation (see 31), then the disturbance of the heavenly spheres to cause the sun's oblique annual motion would occur 15 days from the time of the sun's creation, just as it would have been about to leave the sign of Aries (assuming that the equinox fell in the center of Aries). Fowler is thus right to claim that the prelapsarian "sun remains constantly in the same sign," but the irony is that the

saving of this phenomenon is due only to the timing of the Fall, a minor *felix culpa* for his scholarly position.

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NOTES

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²Fowler refers to Milton's "invented unfallen *world*" (italics mine) perhaps because of the expression "This pendant world" (2.1052). However, the term "Universe" is more commonly used by Milton: 3.584, 3.721, 7.227, and 8.360. This paper will therefore use the term "universe" to refer to the structure contained by the *primum mobile* (cf. Fowler 201n555-61). For an adjective referring to the orderly structure of Milton's universe, this paper will use the term "cosmic" since "universal" has a connotation that is too inclusive.

³One could also distinguish a C- from a C+ parallel to the distinction between B- and B+, but such a complication is not significant to the specific argument being made here.

⁴Such would certainly be the case for the Ptolemaic system, where more than diurnal motion of sun, moon, and planets results from their slight diurnal lag, so if the sun exhibits no lag, why should any other celestial object? The Copernican case would be somewhat more complicated, for the moon's orbit is centered on the earth, but the motive power is the sun (3.582-83: "turnd / By his magnetic beam"); if the sun and planets have no apparent motion other than diurnal, why should the moon have any apparent motion other than diurnal? Moreover, Milton's poem is ambiguous between geo- and heliocentrism; so apparent, observable phenomena in the heavens should not distinguish them. Of course, this is all purely academic, for Fowler's reading is incorrect: the sun (as we have seen) does exhibit more than diurnal movement, along with the moon and planets.

⁵These various arrangements of ecliptic and zodiac are to differing degrees each a possible (or perhaps impossible) structure in Milton's prelapsarian universe, thereby offering the sort of structural uncertainty that makes Satan's movement into the universe, whether "up or downe / By center, or eccentric, hard to tell" (3.574-75), a series of oppositions reminiscent of Herman's identification of a "Poetics of Incertitude" in the Miltonic "Or." Moreover, these structural possibilities are not purely innocent alternatives, for some entail God's prelapsarian preparation for a postlapsarian universe, an issue of the sort that "deeply compli-

cates the question of blame in *Paradise Lost*" (Herman, "'Whose fault'" 49). This particular aside, however, cannot sufficiently deal with that larger issue, so let us return to the lesser issue at hand: Fowler's views.

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“Never Built at All, and Therefore Built Forever”¹: Camelot and the World of P. G. Wodehouse*

JAY RUUD

In his later years, P. G. Wodehouse wrote “I go in for what is known in the trade as ‘light writing’ and those who do that—humorists they are sometimes called—are looked down upon by the intelligentsia and sneered at” (*Over Seventy* 785). Essentially, he was identifying himself as a “middlebrow” writer, if by “middlebrow” we are describing the sometimes unbridgeable gulf separating the middle class from the tastes and cultural achievement of the elite “highbrow” group.² While the term was initially used pejoratively (Macdonald 1), it has recently been seen as designating a literature, more popular, more likely feminist (Macdonald 1-2), that resists the male-dominated intellectual elitist productions of high modernism (and post-modernism) in favor of detective fiction, historical fiction, and the comic novel, of which Wodehouse was the master. Wodehouse creates a secondary comic world in his fiction, a world not of the highbrow modernist’s ironic reassessment of cultural standards or the overturning of old forms, but of long-gone Edwardian values, among which are the even more antiquated tenets of chivalry, at least chivalry as conceived of in Victorian England.

Modern medievalism is in itself a kind of middlebrow perspective: is there a more middlebrow novel than T. H. White’s *Once and Future King*? If middlebrow is a means by which the middle classes aspire to the tastes of the highbrow culture, then chivalry, perceived as the distinguishing feature of aristocratic medieval society (only the truly

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debruud0241.htm>>.

noble can truly love, as medieval love poets were fond of asserting), is in Wodehouse's fiction a distinctly middlebrow activity. Wodehouse is fully aware that his chivalry is an anachronism, practiced by his more idealistic characters against the modern, realistic, and mercantile interests of the powerful older women in his stories. But then so is his Edwardian world: his characters adopt an outmoded sense of nobility, filtered through a by this time outdated Victorian lens, that perfectly fits Wodehouse's Edwardian society which is also an imagined, idealized place no longer existing in reality.

Auden, Waugh, and Orwell admired Wodehouse³ chiefly for his depiction of a self-contained but perfectly realized comic world, comparable to the "green world" of Shakespearean comedy. Wodehouse's universe follows its own inner logic and, though reminiscent of the Edwardian country estate, is depicted over and over again as if coexisting with the "real" world of depression-era and even post-1945 England. Like Tolkien's Middle Earth and Pratchett's Discworld, Wodehouse's Blandings Castle and Totleigh Towers provide an escape from mundane reality. In Wodehouse's case, it is an escape into a more innocent world wherein the dangers are produced by folly rather than malice.

It is my contention that Wodehouse was largely influenced, in the creation of his fictional world, by the romance world of Arthurian legend. In an article published in this journal in 2011, Lawrence Dugan described Bertie Wooster as being "like a comic knight who is given a quest and performs it" (236). In this he was anticipated by Inge Leimberg, who wrote of Wodehouse in 2003-04 that "figures of knight errantry never lose their charm for him, and he finally exalts them by making the knight-errant surpass himself in exchanging the sword with the slapstick" (75). I would like, first, to expand on these suggestions and then assert what I consider the likely source for Wodehouse's medievalism.

Wodehouse, of course, knew Malory's work and grew up at a time when Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (arguably a middlebrow creation themselves, scorned by critics like Carlyle⁴) were especially popular.

He was certainly aware that the Arthurian world was not “real” in any physical or historical sense, but was a kind of idealized “medieval” world, complete with a chivalric code of honor and certain romanticized attitudes toward love that only truly apply within the boundaries of Arthurian fiction. These chivalric ideals Wodehouse adapts—often with tongue in cheek—to his own imagined Edwardian milieu. Although some of these attitudes may be attributed to the values of his public school upbringing, those principles were certainly also influenced by nineteenth-century medievalism. I contend that this transformed Arthurian chivalry pervades Wodehouse’s work, and that Wodehouse associates those ideals chiefly with Tennyson, whom he always admired as his favorite modern poet.

At Dulwich College, his public school, Wodehouse received a classical education in Latin and Greek, and his study of English literature would have taken him from the *Knight’s Tale* through the *Faerie Queene* (see McCrum 30), the wisdom of those days being that “modern” poets could be read without the need of formal instruction. In Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Spenser, Wodehouse would have been immersed in notions of chivalry. On his own, he found Tennyson, and found much to admire, particularly in the great Victorian’s medievalism. In a letter to a friend, the 18-year-old Wodehouse wrote in 1899: “I read some Browning today. I still like Tennyson better, though. I think some of the descriptions of nature in T. are absolutely whacking” (Ratcliffe 41).⁵ Almost 50 years later, he wrote to Guy Bolton that reading Shelley was “like being beaten over the head with a sandbag. I’m afraid I’ve got one of those second rate minds, because while I realize that Shelley is in the Shakespeare and Milton class, I much prefer Tennyson, who isn’t” (Ratcliffe 424). Perhaps the clearest evidence of Wodehouse’s affection for Tennyson is that, on July 21, 1940, when he was arrested by the Nazis in France and taken to a prison at Loos, Wodehouse took time to grab two books to bring with him: one was the complete works of Shakespeare; the other, a volume of Tennyson (see Green 182).

In his *Idylls*, Tennyson is fairly prescriptive about his notion of what constitutes Arthurian chivalry. In “Guinevere,” he enumerates tenets of his knights’ code:

To reverence the King, as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
 To honour his own word as if his God’s,
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
 And worship her by years of noble deeds
 Until they won her; (465-74)

Wodehouse is never so prescriptive, and by personal inclination is not so very much concerned with the King or with Christ, but he does create a world wherein the righting of wrongs, the honoring of one’s word, and the love and service of one’s lady are of primary, if often ludicrous, importance.

A cursory glance at some of Wodehouse’s novels reveals ample evidence of his interest in the chivalric ideal. One of his early masterpieces, *A Damsel in Distress* (1919), not only alludes to the romantic cliché in its very title, but, as Laura Mooneyham White notes, “update[s] the archaic patterns of romance. The ‘damsel’ is not rescued from a tower, island or enchanted forest but instead leaps into our hero’s taxi” (181). In case we have missed the Arthurian overtones of the novel, Wodehouse gives us a police officer whose voice “slid into the heated scene like the Holy Grail sliding athwart a sunbeam” (*Damsel in Distress* 40). Furthermore, Inge Leimberg asserts that the plot of the *Damsel in Distress* is “modelled closely on Tennyson’s *Maud*” (57-58). That “closely” may be a bit overstated (one being a comedy and the other a tragedy), but both poet and novel have a lady named Maud, being kept from her true love by her family, particularly an interfering brother, and complications ensue from that interference—tragic ones in Tennyson, farcical ones in Wodehouse, including physical humor (as when Maud leaps into George’s taxi to plead

for his help) as well as improbable situational humor (such as Maud's family mistaking George for the man Maud claims to be in love with).⁶ And it is true that the novel's protagonist, George, makes his own connection with Tennyson's poem: ever since he has learned his beloved's name, "[w]hen he has not been playing golf, Tennyson's *Maud* has been his constant companion" (*Damsel in Distress* 111).

Two other novels from Wodehouse's more mature period, *The Code of the Woosters* (1938) and *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954), imply even in their titles a chivalric code of honor that, as William Vesterman claims, inspires the whole corpus of the Jeeves and Bertie Wooster books. Vesterman characterizes this code as "a natural and sempiternal social hierarchy, one cemented by reciprocal personal loyalties with duties extending above, below, and sideways" (97). The code demands a strict feudal loyalty to fellows in one's own circle. It also involves a view of love that is not simply idealized but even courtly, admitting the possibility of love at first sight, and, especially in Bertie Wooster's case, a realization that honor demands "only a lady may honorably break engagements" (Vesterman 100).⁷ That the roots of these ideals are in medievalism is clear from incidents like the following: in *The Code of the Woosters*, Madeline Bassett, a damsel Bertie considers "ghastly" but who believes he is in love with her, says he reminds her of the troubadour poet Geoffrey Rudel, famous for loving a lady from afar. "He fell in love with the wife of the Lord of Tripoli," Madeline tells Bertie, who comments: "I stirred uneasily. I hoped she was going to keep it clean" (*Code of the Woosters* 40). Of course, there is always an air of farce beneath the ideals, so that a cow creamer becomes an item of exaggerated value, and the stealing of a policeman's helmet is a bold and significant pastime. Thus Vesterman sees Wodehouse as

expressing the feudal spirit in a style that is mock-heroic but also and simultaneously straight pastoral, the same combination that William Empson finds at work in *Don Quixote*. The idyllic virtues of Bertie's world serve a commonly acknowledged romantic nostalgia, a yearning for a place a long, long time ago in a galaxy or Middle-earth far, far away. (Vesterman 100)

Wodehouse's other most popular series of novels, centered on Blandings Castle, is equally infused with the spirit of chivalry, chiefly through the aptly named Galahad Threepwood, younger brother of Lord Emsworth. His Christian name immediately conjures images of Arthurian chivalry, but the great irony of Galahad's name is that, far from being the pure and spiritual knight of Malory or Tennyson, Galahad is a well-known philanderer and partier who has reached late middle age none the worse for wear. In his debut novel, *Summer Lightning* (1929), we are told:

A thoroughly misspent life had left the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, contrary to the most elementary justice, in what appeared to be perfect, even exuberantly perfect physical condition. How a man who ought to have had the liver of the century could look and behave as he did was a constant mystery to his associates. (*Summer Lightning* 153-54)

The irony of his name is so palpable that his niece Millicent declares "It always makes me laugh [...] when I think what a frightfully bad shot Uncle Gally's godfathers and godmothers made when they christened him" (*Summer Lightning* 153). In part, Galahad is a stock figure, what Benny Green calls "the monied younger son without the encumbrances of responsibility, ambition, or guilt" (223).

But there is more to Galahad than a self-involved ne'er-do-well. For Galahad, too, has a chivalric code of sorts, one that Green calls "a code of conduct at least as admirable as those in current usage on the ramparts of Blandings" (224): he is consistently the upholder of the values of courtly love. And this code makes Wodehouse's Galahad in his idealism not so very different from Tennyson's after all. For Galahad, in *Summer Lightning* and in the six subsequent Blandings novels in which he appears, is characterized as the unrepentant romantic whose chief motivation becomes consistently to encourage and help to bring about the unions of young people in love. He is what Robert Hall calls the "*deus ex machina*" figure in the novels who, like Jeeves in the Wooster series, is instrumental in bringing about the happy endings, concocting "clever ways of outwitting his sisters and preserving both

Lord Emsworth's absent-mindedness and the romances of the young folk who have been sent to Blandings to separate them from their loved ones" (Hall 31).

Galahad has been a believer in true love ever since he was forced by his family to give up his youthful passion for the chorus girl Dolly Henderson some thirty years ago. The figure of the unattainable beloved, a Countess of Tripoli far away and married to another, has sustained Galahad like the unattainable grail. Young love should triumph, Galahad believes, remembering his own failure. This association should be apparent to readers from Gally's first appearance in *Summer Lightning* when, coming across the lawn at Blandings, he trips over the dog, but "so graceful was the agility with which he recovered his balance that he did not spill a drop of the whisky-and-soda in his hand. He continued to bear the glass aloft like some brave banner beneath which he had fought and won" (153-54). He is a knight crusading under a banner of victory, and he holds aloft a grail-like glass, miraculously keeping it from spilling.

These same chivalric ideals lie behind typical Wodehouse short stories as well. Consider, for instance, the collection of mature Wodehouse stories entitled *Young Men in Spats* (1936). Wodehouse uses the idea of chivalry as a shaping force in very nearly every story in this collection: the stories typically feature a protagonist motivated in some way by the tradition of chivalry or courtly love as conventionally presented in Arthurian romance. In the first story, "Fate," Freddie Widgeon feels compelled to carry a heavy suitcase for a young damsel in distress because his love for his fiancée inspires him to chivalrous acts: "One of the things that being engaged does to you, you must remember, is to fill you to the gills with a sort of knightly chivalry" (13), comments the narrator. In "The Code of the Mulliners" (a title anticipating the later *Code of the Woosters*), Wodehouse's favorite narrator Mr. Mulliner describes the situation of his nephew Archibald. Convinced that he must find a way to end his engagement to Aurelia Cammerleigh because of what he believes is his mother's insanity, Archibald attempts to convince *her* to break it off with *him*. The code

of the Mulliners, it seems, like the code of courtly love, will not allow a gentleman to desert his beloved: According to Mr. Mulliner himself, “an engagement cannot be broken off by the male contracting party. When a Mulliner plights his troth, it stays plighted” (219).

The final story of the collection, “The Fiery Wooing of Mordred,” not only includes a protagonist with an Arthurian name (albeit a villainous one), but the knightly Mordred, following the conventions of courtly love, also falls in love at first sight with Annabelle Sprockett-Sprockett in his dentist’s office. As the narrator explains: “Most of the Mulliners have fallen in love at first sight, but few with so good an excuse as Mordred” (240). He is even willing to perform feats of knightly service for her: when she asks him if she may see the dentist ahead of him, “[c]onsidering that Mordred by this time was in the market to tackle dragons on her behalf or to climb the loftiest peak of the Alps to supply her with edelweiss, he was able to assure her that he did not mind” (242-43). The incongruity of giving the same weight to tackling dragons and giving up dental appointments is quintessentially Wodehousean. Like any true lover, Mordred also writes poetry—or at least tries to. Of course, his various sheets of rejected poetry catch fire when he throws his cigarette in the wastebasket and nearly burns down the Sprockett-Sprocketts’ mansion, but it turns out that is what they are hoping for, since they want to collect the insurance money and move to London. Ultimately, Mordred does complete the quest set for him by his lady and wins her hand.

I should mention, too, that even in Wodehouse’s golf stories, these chivalric elements enter, with the rules of golf replacing the chivalric code as a framework for life’s decisions. This point is made most manifest perhaps in the delightful “Sundered Hearts,” in which the narrator (the club’s Oldest Member) states baldly:

In the days of King Arthur nobody thought the worse of a young knight if he suspended all his social and business engagements in favor of a search for the Holy Grail. [...] Why, then, blame the man of to-day for a zealous attention to the modern equivalent, the Quest of Scratch? (77)

As the story continues, something much like a courtly love affair blooms between golf fanatic Mortimer Sturgis and Mabel Somerset, which the narrator calls “a case of love at first sight on both sides” (79). Like any good courtly lover, Mortimer believes his love for Mabel will ennoble him: “With her at his side, what might he not do? He might get his handicap down to six—to three—to scratch—to plus something!” (82). Filled with these chivalric echoes, the story ends with Mortimer parodying the concluding lines of Tennyson’s romantic comedy *The Princess*, a rendition in which Tennyson’s

*My bride,
My wife, my life! O, we will walk this world,
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so thro’ those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. (338-42)*

becomes

*My bride,
My wife, my life, O we will walk the links
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so thro’ those dark bunkers off the course
That no man knows. (97)*

But to support the contention that Wodehouse’s chivalric attitudes have their chief source in Tennyson’s poetry, I would like to spend some time focusing more specifically on an earlier story of Wodehouse’s, the one short story that Wodehouse actually sets in the court of King Arthur: “Sir Agravaire,” first published in *Collier’s* magazine in 1912 and later reprinted in his first collection of adult stories, *The Man Upstairs* (1914). The story is unique as far as I know among Wodehouse’s mature fiction in not being set in the Edwardian comic world of the Woosters and the Blandings, but in the earlier secondary creation of Camelot. It appeared at a pivotal moment in Wodehouse’s career: already well-known as the author of boys’ books in the public school genre of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Wodehouse was aiming to break out of that mold and into adult fiction. He spent the years from

1909 to 1914 traveling back and forth between Britain and the U.S., trying to establish himself as a writer of adult fiction on both sides of the Atlantic. He wrote to his friend Leslie Havergal Bradshaw late in 1909: "So far from wanting to get my boys' books published this side, I look on them as a guilty past which I must hush up" (Ratcliffe 75). In 1910, he published *Psmith in the City*, his first significant adult novel. Prior to publishing "Sir Agravaire," he had also begun his work in musical theater, had even done his first collaboration with Jerome Kern. Musical theater farce would eventually become the model for his later, best-known fiction. But his fiction in the teens was characterized by more sentimentality and a somewhat more serious approach than would define his later farces. I have found no critics who disagree with Richard Osborne's judgment⁸ that

[Wodehouse's] first two short story collections, *The Man Upstairs* and *The Man with Two Left Feet*, are of interest now only to remind us that young Wodehouse, though possibly a born writer, had a long period of hack apprenticeship before he found his form and, jettisoning sentimentality and seriousness, came into his birthright. (Osborne 168)

This may explain why no one, to my knowledge, has ever written a word of criticism regarding "Sir Agravaire"—until now. But the tone of this story seems less sentimental and more in line with Wodehouse's more mature fiction. I want to argue that in this story, from whose kernel the chivalry of his later works would grow, while giving an appreciative nod to Malory, Wodehouse essentially owes his inspiration to, and follows the structure of, Tennyson's "Tale of Gareth and Lynette."

In both tales, a knight of little or no repute becomes champion of a damsel who brings a request to Arthur's court. Of course, this is also the case in Malory's "Book of Sir Gareth," but Wodehouse's details are more in line with Tennyson's. In Tennyson, the King allows his nephew Gareth, who has been disguised as a lowly kitchen knave, to claim a quest that Lynette had specifically asked be given to Lancelot. In "Sir Agravaire," the worst of Arthur's knights is the sole volunteer to take on the quest—the defeat of a dragon—proposed by Yvonne, for

she is a plain girl who does not excite the sympathies of any of the more important knights: both Gawain and Pelleas turn down the quest flat, making up lame excuses.

For both Gareth and Agravaine, the damsel proves unattractive in the conventional sense: we are told that Lynette is beautiful, but her constant deriding of the kitchen knave makes her unlikeable until she softens her attitude toward Gareth as he begins to show her that deeds make the knight. Yvonne is plain, but Agravaine falls in love with her at first sight; to him she appears beautiful.

Moreover, the quest turns out to be something different from what it was originally thought to be. In the case of Tennyson (but *not* Malory), the final knight whom Gareth must defeat is assumed to be the most powerful and dangerous, but is revealed to be a small boy dressed in a frightening suit of armor too large for his use and who is easily defeated. In the case of Agravaine, there is no dragon at all, but he finds that Yvonne's father had sent her to court to ask for help in order to hoodwink a knight into marrying his daughter. The danger proves to be toothless in both tales, and (again unlike Malory) both tales end with the marriage of the knight to the damsel who brought the original quest.

A wise man, or hermit, provides some insight in both tales: In Tennyson, the hermit is absent, but has left sculpted in the rocks that Gareth and Lynette pass a representation of the allegory of "[t]he war of Time against the soul of man" (1168)—an allegory that is adopted by Gareth's four villainous adversaries in their symbolic armor. In "Sir Agravaine," more directly applicable to his story, the knight seeks out a wise man dwelling in the forest, in a scene reminiscent of the wise hermits who are perpetually available in Malory's "Book of the Sangraal." The wise man reveals to him, in different words but over and over again, *ad nauseam*, the truth that one sees differently through the eyes of love than normal people see.

Both of the tales follow an archetypal comic pattern, in which youth triumphs over the established norms created by the old. Part of this is reflected in the relationship of the tales to their ultimate source: the

contemporary narrator, representing youth, triumphs over the older storyteller. In the end of Tennyson's tale, the modern narrator throws over Malory by having Gareth marry Lynette, the shrewish sister, rather than Lyonors, the damsel in distress in her tower:

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he, that told it later, says Lynette. (1392-94)

Wodehouse answers Tennyson's ending with the beginning of his own story, where he reveals he is revising the old tale to make it new, to make it conform to the demands of the modern world. Wodehouse claims he has found the story in "an old black letter manuscript" and has seen fit "to touch the thing up a little here and there, for writers in those days were weak in construction" (239). He goes on to claim that he has revised the title somewhat, parodying Caxton's chapter headings for Malory by claiming the original title of the tale was

"How it came about that ye good Knight Sir Agravaire ye Dolorous of ye Table Round did fare forth to succour a damsel in distress and after divers journeyings and perils by flood and by field did win her for his bride and right happily did they twain live ever afterwards," by Ambrose ye monk. (239)

Wodehouse goes on to fill his story with anachronistic language that brings the story into the twentieth-century and reflects the comic triumph of the modern over the traditional. The story begins with Wodehouse peopling the arena at a knightly tournament with "itinerant merchants" selling score-cards, shouting "ye cannot tell the joust-ers without a score-card," and making the herald sound like a referee at a boxing match: "'Ladeez'n gemmen! Battling Galahad and Agravaire the Dolorous. Galahad on my right, Agravaire on my left. Squires out of the ring. Time!'" (239). And at the end of the story, the Wise Man of the forest tells Agravaire to "'Pay at ye desk'" as he

leaves (253). But Wodehouse returns to the archaic at the very end, where he includes language probably intended to reflect Malory, writing: "And Agravaine rode on his way marveling" (253) (though in fact that specific phrase actually appears not in Malory but Howard Pyle's 1905 text *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table*, closely based on Malory and, it would appear, familiar to Wodehouse).⁹

Ultimately, what precisely has Wodehouse learned from Tennyson's tale about the nature of chivalry? In practical terms, for Gareth, chivalry consists, first, in fulfilling his lady's demands, putting his life in danger for her sake—and ultimately winning her heart through valiant deeds. For Agravaine, too, chivalry involves risking his life—he has no idea that the quest is bogus and truly believes he may be going to his death. Chivalry also involves love at first sight, and it entails risking his freedom, for he refuses to leave Yvonne's castle even though she sets him free, because he will not leave her. True love is the definition of chivalry in both tales.

On a more profound level, something else that Wodehouse could have learned from Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette" is wound up in what Merlin tells Gareth when the young knight first arrives in Camelot. The young king, Merlin says, will bind him by vows no man can keep, and the city itself, he says "is built / To music, therefore never built at all, / And therefore built for ever" (272-74). Indeed, Camelot as presented in Tennyson's *Idylls* is built to the music of his verse, and not in the "real" world. It is what Tolkien refers to as a "sub-creation," a fully-realized and consistent secondary world with its own rules and laws, upon encountering which a reader's disbelief can be suspended because of, in Tolkien's terms again, the fictional world's "inner consistency of reality" (88). And so, perhaps, it is from Tennyson that Wodehouse learns the importance of maintaining the inner consistency of his later farcical mock-Edwardian world that remains its own middlebrow never-never land, ordered by the Code of the Woosters and by Galahad Threepwood's courtly values well into the 1970s. Like the Camelot of Tennyson and his own "Tale of Agravaine," Wodehouse's fictional world never aged, and, built of the

music of his own glittering language, it was never built at all, and remains therefore built forever.

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NOTES

¹Tennyson, "Gareth and Lynette," 273-74.

²In the Introduction to her collection *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read*, Kate Macdonald lists Wodehouse as the chief representative of the comic middlebrow novel (17), and, in a separate essay in that text, Nicola Humble considers Wodehouse, along with Conan Doyle, as part of a middlebrow movement that gave "an increasingly central role to the bachelor" (90). More importantly for Wodehouse studies, Ann Rea is editing a collection of critical essays on Wodehouse and the middlebrow, set to be published by Ashgate in 2015.

³Auden admired Wodehouse a great deal. One might consider particularly his reference to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves in his essay "Balaam and the Ass," in which he remarks, regarding a speech of Jeeves, "So speaks comically—and in what other mode than the comic could it, on earth, truthfully speak?—the voice of Agape, of Holy Love" (53). Such an attribution suggests Bertie's innocence is almost Edenic. Orwell, defending Wodehouse from charges of treason stemming from his World War II radio broadcasts from Germany, argued that he was too politically naïve to be a traitor, and insisted that his entire oeuvre existed in an outdated, perhaps more innocent, Edwardian world: "His picture of English society had been formed before 1914, and it was a naïve, traditional and, at bottom, admiring picture," Orwell says, though this world is somewhat idealized: "Wodehouse's real sin," Orwell contends, "has been to present the English upper classes as much nicer people than they are" (350). But it is Waugh who goes furthest in this vein. Wodehouse's characters are not Edwardian, he says, but are "creations of pure fancy," living in an "idyllic world [that] can never stale." In Wodehouse's world, Waugh asserts, "there has been no Fall of Man; no 'aboriginal calamity.' His characters have never tasted the forbidden fruit. They are still in Eden. The gardens of Blandings Castle are that original garden from which we are all exiled" (567-68).

⁴Thomas Carlyle's oft-quoted dismissal of the *Idylls* occurs in a letter he wrote to Emerson in January 1867, wherein he charges Tennyson's work with an "inward perfectⁿ of *vacancy*" that might kindle in the reader "considerable impatience at being treated so very like infants, tho the lollipops were so superlative" (Slater 552-53).

⁵There are at least two instances of Wodehouse's taking Browning as a source for his medievalism: once in his novel *The Mating Season*, and once in *The Code of the Woosters*, Wodehouse has Jeeves greet Bertie Wooster's arrival (in the first instance at Deverill Hall, in the second at Totleigh Towers) with the expression "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," alluding to Browning's famous 1855 medievalist poem. Bertie, of course, has no idea what Jeeves is talking about either time. But these are exceptions and do not change the fact of Tennyson's greater influence overall.

⁶For Wodehouse and farce, see especially Galligan, "P. G. Wodehouse: Master of Farce." Typically "farce" is defined as a broad comedy with exaggerated and highly improbable situations (including mistaken identity, incredible coincidences, unlooked for revelations, and similar plot twists), along with the use of slapstick or physical humor (Harmon and Holman 213): in short, a text similar to the kinds of musical comedies Wodehouse would have seen (and worked on) in New York. In a letter to Bill Townsend, Wodehouse described his fiction this way: "I believe there are two ways of writing novels. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right down into life and not caring a damn" (qtd. in Leimberg 56). With this in mind, Galligan describes Wodehousean farce in this way: "You cannot ask for better farcical plotting. Farce must take a group of preposterous characters through a series of ridiculous actions in a way that remains, granting the author's initial premises, perfectly credible. It must always teeter on the brink of chaos, yet it must finally reveal itself as fully controlled. To get such results it must have what *The Code of the Woosters* has—a plot that combines the best qualities of a fun-house mirror and an algebraic equation" (Galligan 613).

⁷Others have remarked upon this code. As Richard Fogle puts it, the code demands "absolute loyalty to a pal, particularly an old school pal" (111); and Robert McCrum notes the importance of romanticized love as a part of this set of values, which involve an "acknowledge[ment] that love is universal" (253).

⁸Fogle, for example, declares that, while these stories show promise of what is to come, "these are 'serious' without conviction, perfunctory counterfeits of real life and emotion [...]. The mature stories are wholly humorous, and they are stylized, with symmetrical farce-plots" (101).

⁹Malory's late fifteenth-century English, as printed by Caxton in 1485, is the earliest of early modern English, and for hundreds of years has been one of the charms of *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory's great compendium of medieval Arthurian legend. Pyle became extremely well known for illustrating his own retellings of the tales of Robin Hood and of King Arthur, and adopted the style of Malory's archaic language. This single echo is not proof that Wodehouse was familiar with Pyle's work, but it would be strange if he were not: Pyle was writing highly successful children's books at the same time Wodehouse was becoming successful himself in that genre, and Wodehouse's own *William Tell Told Again* (1904) was, like Pyle's earlier *Robin Hood*, a children's story with illustrations, told in occasionally archaic language about a medieval hero—one that was good with a

bow. If Wodehouse was unfamiliar with Pyle's popular books, these coincidences would be hard to explain.

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Apropos of Geoffrey Household's
Watcher in the Shadows and *Dance of the Dwarfs*:
An Answer to David Seed*

ROBERT LANCE SNYDER

I am grateful to David Seed, a critic whose wide-ranging scholarship I respect, for his comments on my article titled "'Occult Sympathy': Geoffrey Household's *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*." Given the importance that we both attach to Household's *Rogue Male* (1939) as a bellwether of the novelist's later fiction, I also appreciate Professor Seed's thoroughness in consulting an earlier essay of mine on that text as well as a broader discussion in my book *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction*. Having reflected on his remarks, I shall try here to clarify some divergent ways in which he and I assess the literary legacy of early-twentieth-century adventure fiction as crafted principally by John Buchan. Note that in this context I exclude the xenophobic fantasies of Sax Rohmer regarding "master criminal" Dr. Fu Manchu, which Seed regards as representative of the Edwardian thriller (336-37).¹ I do so because I cannot find any evidence that Rohmer influenced Household's practice as a writer.

Let me begin by indicating Seed's major reservations about my argument. They are, first, that my emphasis on doubling "risks simplifying the action of Household's fiction in such a way that its political resonances and circumstantial detail tend to be lost"; and, second, that my approach to "Household's thrillers as tales of detection similarly understates the generic variety of his fiction" (336). I

*References: Robert Lance Snyder, "'Occult Sympathy': Geoffrey Household's *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*," *Connotations* 22.2 (2012/13): 301-17; David Seed, "Geoffrey Household's *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*: A Response to Robert Lance Snyder," *Connotations* 23.2 (2013/14): 336-46.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsnyder0222.htm>>.

take it to be a sign of his concerns that the verb “understates” is deployed three times later in Seed’s critique.

No one would deny, I think, the common-sense premise that particularity of circumstantial detail in a novel is tied closely to the sociocultural issues it explores. Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), as Seed agrees, offers a classic example. Having made his colonialist “pile” as a mining engineer in South Africa, thirty-seven-year-old Richard Hannay, a Scot who has lived overseas since age six, returns to the “Old Country” where after three months in London he finds himself “the best bored man in the United Kingdom” (7). When Franklin P. Scudder, an American newspaper correspondent who has learned of a pending assassination that will precipitate World War I, then seeks sanctuary at Hannay’s flat and confides his alarming tale, later described as “‘all pure Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle’” (33), Buchan’s hero is grateful for the distraction from his ennui. Upon Scudder’s murder Hannay, subsequently assisted by the victim’s decrypted notes, resolves to “play the game in his place” by foiling a German cabal known as the Black Stone (20). Such particularity, even in so brief a synopsis, is enough to indicate the geopolitical tensions that Buchan is addressing on the eve of war. What are we to make, however, of the fact that it takes two non-English amateur sleuths to expose “a big subterranean movement” (10) via a battle of wits when Britannia’s security apparatus seems largely oblivious to the imminent outbreak of international hostilities? Seed correctly notes that Hannay “never works in isolation from his friends in British intelligence and has important connections with the USA and South Africa” (337), yet these institutional resources are of little use to him in countering the Black Stone’s “fell designs on the world’s peace” (Buchan 101).² Ultimately the protagonist is thrust into the position of what Ralph Harper, writing the first study of the thriller as a uniquely twentieth-century permutation of the adventure tale and detective story, conceives as that of the isolated existentialist hero.

When it comes to *Rogue Male*, the text to which Seed next turns his attention, I frankly am not sure of what constitutes his main point. On

the one hand, he apparently wants to emphasize how different Household's third novel is from Buchan's fiction by its use of framing devices to cultivate ambiguity and by the narrative's purported reflexivity. On the other hand, observing that in *Rogue Male* unlike *The Thirty-Nine Steps* "the narrator's consciousness supplies the ground of the story," Seed acknowledges that the central persona, later named Raymond Ingelram in *Rogue Justice* (1982), is a "lone adventurer" who, like fugitive Richard Hannay, although Seed does not admit the parallel, must rely on his unaided powers of discernment and ingenuity in order to survive (339). My respondent accurately notes that the outcome of Ingelram's one-on-one contest with pseudonymous Major Quive-Smith in *Rogue Male* is far more uncertain than Hannay's flight from his pursuers in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, but where does that leave us? Seed does not say, but I would maintain that the operative paradigm in both novels is that of "Man Alone" as elaborated in Harper's analysis of the genre.

Such a stripping away of the conventional props in civilized life fascinated Buchan and Household. Both novelists thus present us with protagonists who, confronted with life-threatening challenges by adversaries intent on hunting them down, must revert to the elemental and instinctual. After fleeing in disguise from London to the Scottish countryside, Hannay is obliged to take cover deep in the moorland heather to elude aerial reconnaissance by "those devilish Germans" (72).³ Similarly, like Buchan's hero a suspected "outlaw in [his] own country," the protagonist of *Rogue Male* resorts to burrowing into an abandoned rabbit warren on a sandstone bank in Dorset, from which redoubt after eleven days of siege he finally manages to kill Quive-Smith (41). That same pattern of atavistic reversion is replicated in *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*, respectively, when Charles Dennim engages in a savage duel with Vicomte de Saint Sabas, and when Dr. Owen Dawnay becomes intrigued by primordial denizens of the Colombian forests. Although I agree with Professor Seed that in the former novel an element of theatricality surfaces in St. Sabas's final confession to Dennim (342), I am at

something of a loss to understand how his point relates to my alleged slighting of the narrative's political resonances. The brief response he then devotes to my discussion of *Dance of the Dwarfs*, which Seed himself concurs can be read as a "fantasy of evolutionary regression" (344), left me puzzled about this charge's pertinence.

Nowhere, finally, does my essay on Household's fiction of the 1960s claim, or even suggest, that a dynamic of doubling elides the representation of contemporaneous historical circumstances, any more than it does in such precursive texts as *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Rogue Male*. In all of these fictional narratives we find, lurking behind their various temporal frameworks, a psychodrama that is always already implicit. Bringing that dimension to the fore, I think, helps us to appreciate the subtlety of many novels often marginalized as typifying a "literature of suspense and intrigue."

Seed's second criticism of my article is limited to a concluding paragraph in which he asserts that I understate "the hybrid nature of Household's narratives, where characteristically setting pulls against subject" (344), resulting in "the difficulty of fitting his works into a single genre, whether that of thriller or the tale of detection" (345). I find this judgment surprising in that, far from attempting to reduce Household's novels to one antecedent model, my essay discusses the presence of romance in *Watcher in the Shadows* and recognizes the confessional cast of *Dance of the Dwarfs* in conjunction with the "frisson of terror associated with the Gothic *Schauerroman*" (315).⁴ More importantly, however, I do not assume that either the "thriller" or the "tale of detection" is a discrete, hermetically sealed genre. In this respect I agree with Julian Symons and David Glover. Emphasizing the murky taxonomy of popular literary forms, Symons argued in 1972 that "the detective story, along with the police story, the spy story, and the thriller, makes up part of the hybrid creature we call sensational literature" (4). Three decades later Glover observed that "the thriller differs from the detective story [...] not in any disinclination to resort to deductive methods in solving crimes" (137) but rather

by its “diffuseness”—“an extraordinary promiscuity of reference that produces an over-abundance of possibilities” (139).

To his credit Seed elsewhere endorses these opinions. In an impressive chapter on “Crime and the Spy Genre” that he contributed to an anthology in 2010, Seed began as follows: “Spy fiction shares many of the characteristics of detective fiction. It prioritizes investigation; its sphere of action seems to be beyond the law; its characters use aliases and invented identities; typically it progresses from apparently disparate fragments of information towards a more complete account of action” (233). The main difference, he goes on to remark, is that espionage-centered narratives incorporate the elements of clandestinity and political deception. Seed’s overview, furthermore, is wholly consistent with what he wrote at the start of another piece seven years earlier for *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (“Spy Fiction”). Perhaps, then, he and I are fundamentally in agreement about the eclecticism of Geoffrey Household’s corpus of work.

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NOTES

¹My article on Eric Ambler’s *The Siege of the Villa Lipp* (1977), also published in *Connotations*, indicates how obsolescent was the construct of a “master criminal” in fiction after the end of World War II and certainly during the 1960s when *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs* appeared. The James Bond novels of Ian Fleming, of course, are an exception in their portrayal of such transnational super-villains as Dr. No, Goldfinger, and Sir Hugo Drax. The strong influence of H. C. McNeile (“Sapper”) on Fleming’s productions undoubtedly explains this anachronistic feature.

²“Here was I,” states Hannay, “a very ordinary fellow, with no particular brains, and yet I was convinced that somehow I was needed to help this business through—that without me it would all go to blazes. I told myself it was all sheer silly conceit, that four or five of the cleverest people living, with all the might of the British Empire at their back, had the job in hand. Yet I couldn’t be convinced.

It seemed as if a voice kept speaking in my ear, telling me to be up and doing, or I would never sleep again" (86).

³The fact that the German "aeroplane," explicitly associated with pre-war espionage in the United Kingdom, is based at a hidden "aerodrome" near the seaside retreat in Scotland of the Black Stone's leader, "an old man with a young voice who could hood his eyes like a hawk" (17), undoubtedly hints at British apprehensions about its disadvantage in air versus naval power going into World War I (17). Once this "circumstantial detail" has been noted, however, the primary and more intriguing conflict between individualized adversaries compels attention, especially in terms of their manifest doubling.

⁴Another essay that I have published demonstrates how Household adapts the structural devices of romance and picaresque adventure in fiction to organize his 1958 autobiography titled *Against the Wind*. His practice in this regard attests to the assimilative nature of his craftsmanship, and it was in that capacity that Household preferred to be regarded. "To be a craftsman," he writes, "is to offer your own interpretation of life and its events in an accepted form, and so to handle a familiar medium that it will carry and transmit your own taste, your own faults and your own splendours" (*Against the Wind* 199).

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Debate 20.2-3 (2010/2011): 272-88. <<http://www.connotations.uni-tuebingen.de/snyder02023.htm>>.

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Playing with the Ready-Made: Graham Swift's *The Light of Day* A Response to Andrew James*

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Andrew James starts from the premise that *The Light of Day* (LOD) “has come to be viewed as an intriguing attempt to create serious literature devoid of poetic language” (214). The use of the anonymous passive voice allows him to imply that there is a critical consensus backing this opinion. James asserts in his introduction that in this novel Swift does use clichés “in such a way that they resonate, and we are made to reconsider their meaning,” and that “when the method works, Swift is able to create a literary effect through colloquial language” (214), yet his article shows that he remains inclined to agree more with the negative reviews of the novel, those that disapprove of Swift’s use of clichés and simple, colloquial language. His opinion rests on a restricted definition of “poetic.” The general definition of this word, according to the *OED*, is “[o]f, belonging to, or characteristics of poets or poetry,” but other definitions seem in agreement with Andrew James’s opinion when they equate “poetic language” with a language befitting “poetry, as in being elevated, sublime etc.”¹ In response, I will first argue with James about what he deems to be the protagonist’s “naivety” as regards clichés, and about the status of the narrative voice. Then I will focus on the fact that, in my opinion, his analysis of clichés has failed to take into account Swift’s playful humour, and the fact that unpretentious, colloquial language can be used to create a poetic, literary novel.²

*Reference: Andrew James, “Language Matters: An Investigation into Cliché in *The Light of Day*,” *Connotations* 22.2 (2012/13): 214-34.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debjames0222.htm>>.

James contends that, if the reader is forced to look at clichés differently, it is thanks to the author, not the character, because he describes George Webb as “[Swift’s] unintellectual narrator” (220), who “think[s] in clichés” (215). But he also presents him as an evolving character, who “writes down his story” in order to understand it better, and whose “perception of reality changes” gradually (215). This is doubly problematic, firstly, because the whole “action” of the novel takes place on one single day, so that any “evolution” of the character is already a thing of the past when the novel opens; and, secondly, because James seems to agree with Ruth Franklin, who equates the “homework” written for Sarah with the novel itself,³ thus automatically regarding George as a “first-person narrator.”

However, when George alludes to the contents of his “homework” it is clear that what he writes for Sarah cannot be the text of the novel. He explicitly mentions, for instance, the fact that he has not “told Sarah everything,” that “there are things [he] can’t and won’t tell [her] yet” and perhaps “never will” (*LOD* 176). The dialogues with Sarah show how reticent George is with her, how reluctant to discuss his hopes and moods. When Sarah encourages him to write, it is not to read about his feelings; what she is hungry for is “every detail, every crumb” of “ordinary blessed life” (115). She wants to know “what it’s like out there” (188), “it” being the commonplace world of daily occurrences, city, streets, and weather; she wants him to “bring the world in here. Not like a police report” (188). George’s silent response is a deadpan joke on the cliché “to ask for the world”: “A tall order. Asking the world” (188). In a humorous conceit, the pages that he brings her become a way of smuggling the world *into* the prison: “The world brought in bit by bit, like prisoners—the other way round—chipping away stone by stone, at a wall” (188).

So we should consider the “homework” to be separate and different from the intimate thoughts and memories that the reader discovers in the words on the page. George’s sentences, addressed only to himself, are, as Adam Mars-Jones puts it, only a “mental revisiting.” Technically speaking, if we say that *LOD* has a “first-person narrator”

it is for want of a better word, because the word “monologist” seems to have been confiscated for novels deploying a stream-of-consciousness technique. As in *Last Orders*, *Tomorrow* or *Wish You Were Here*, the reading contract is that “the voices” we hear are “thinking,” not addressing a reader. However, those are only technical distinctions; the pages supposedly written by George as an offering to Sarah remain impalpable and invisible for the reader, and even if George is only addressing himself, his monologue *is* a form of narrative, a way of turning his own life and hopes into a narrativized, acceptable account. To all intents and purposes, George *functions* as the narrator in this novel.⁴ If we adopt this reading of the novel, we can accept that, in David Malcolm’s words, George is indeed an “unreliable narrator,” but one who only deceives or deludes himself (as opposed to one who would deliberately attempt to deceive his potential readers).

But, we should also be aware of the *writerly* quality of George’s “inner monologue” (a quality that I will attempt to illustrate further down): George is learning the art of writing, his mind has been opened to the subtleties of language, and in the novel his consciousness is actively *verbalizing*, seeking the exact words that might do justice to his visual impressions and perceptions. So if George functions as a writer in the novel, it is only because what is dramatized is the mental preparation before the act of writing (just as in *Tomorrow* Paula uses her long vigil to “rehearse” what she will tell her twins on the morrow, to choose her words as precisely as possible, so that her mental activity is highly verbalized).

Yet, Andrew James consistently presents the text of the novel as having been “written” by George, and, he implies, often *badly* written, as when he deplores the “awful” sentence “people don’t look how they look” (James 221, 230; quote taken from *LOD* 42). But the very fact that this sentence grates should alert us to its paradoxical power and philosophical depth. It is not simply a question of reality and appearance, depth and surface. The sentence therefore is much more striking than the trite “people don’t always look the same,” just as

Iago's "I am not what I am" (*Othello* 1.1.64) is deeply disturbing.⁵ Similarly, George Webb implies that Kristina, to whom he applies the phrase, has no "essence" hidden beneath her looks, and that she is neither "trouble" nor a pathetic "lost soul" (*LOD* 43), or both at the same time.

Therefore, we should maintain a clear distance between George as a monologist and George as a would-be "writer," but reduce the distance that Andrew James posits between author and character when he asserts that, whereas Swift betrays, in his manuscript draft, an "acute awareness of creating an effect by repeating clichés," Webb is made to "*think* in clichés," uncritically (James 215, my emphasis). Indeed, one could argue that Swift encourages the reader to see George Webb as a man who consciously uses clichés and reflects upon them. Therefore, George does not think *in* clichés but *about* clichés. According to Andrew James, "George's attempt to understand the crime and his passion by writing it down enables Swift to conduct what James Wood terms his 'investigation of cliché'" (James 217). James has used Wood's phrase for the title of his article, but the point is that this "investigation" is "conducted" by Swift through the conscious awareness of his character, a private *investigator*. In fact, James Wood asserted that the novel "is explicitly an investigation into cliché, a skirmish not so much against as with cliché," but he did not equate the investigator with the author; on the contrary, he made it clear that "George himself likes to play with cliché," giving a number of precise examples (Wood 29).

George Webb does function as a self-reflexive figure of the writer, gifted from the start with the ability to *see* things (in spite of what his daughter says), and acquiring, under Sarah's guidance, the difficult art of choosing the right words and of stringing his sentences together. His sensitivity and "vision" were always there, as he protests in an imaginary dialogue with Helen about his first meeting with Rachel: "I remember everything—everything, Helen. [...] The shine of the wet road. The films of oil, like little coiling rainbows, in the gutter" (*LOD* 88-89). Yet, Andrew James obviously estimates that George writes

badly, and that the presence of imagery and other symptoms of literariness must be explained away by the fact that Swift cheats, and twists the arm of realism: "light and dark imagery betrays the presence of an artist hiding in the shadows behind George Webb" (James 220).

So why did Swift choose to make George use clichés? James contends that a "possible justification" for the presence of "commonplace phrases" in a "literary work" "is that in each usage the meaning alters" (219). Yet, surprisingly, when he looks at the repeated use of the phrase "to cross a line" he only mentions three instances of this "cliché," those marked in the manuscript, and concludes that those instances variously illustrate the same basic meaning: crossing a line, James explains, has negative implications, it refers to decisions that result "in an irrevocable change in status" or in "the breach of a contractual or ethical rule and a loss of innocence" (220).

The first example quoted does turn "the injured party" into a spy, "entering a little web of deceit" (LOD 40), but the mention of the "little web" (by a character named Webb) encourages the reader to notice the constant crisscrossing of vertical and horizontal "lines," the intertwined motifs of "steps," "edges" (49, 55, 197), and "lifeline[s]" (214), like the "first brave step" against God taken by Rachel on a tight "high wire" (90). This enables Swift to *weave* a web-like pattern, balancing the a-chronological discontinuity of a narrative relying on memory with the continuity of patterns and variations. "Crossing a line" thus takes on a multiplicity of meanings, both literal and metaphorical, so that the etymological meaning of "transgression" (to take a step across to the other side) is foregrounded, mixing both negative and positive connotations. In fact, the phrase is already present in the third line of the novel, where it refers to a positive step into a whole new dimension, liberating "us" from the metaphorical prison of a humdrum, joyless life: "We cross a line, we *open a door* we never knew was there. It might never have happened, we might never have known. Most of life, maybe, is *only time served*" (LOD 3, my emphasis).

Trying to elucidate the reasons behind Webb's repetition of clichés, Andrew James sometimes falls back on doubt and unanswered interrogations (see for instance 224, 225), or accuses Swift of using "deliberate mystification" and intentionally obscuring his prose to "[keep] his readers in the dark" (226). James cites as an example George's silent comment to himself after a flippant exchange with Sarah about the Empress Eugénie: "Small talk, dodging the issue. Time's precious—but you just play cards" (*LOD* 182). James does see an authorial intention here but cannot define it: "Surely this is not a case in which the cliché is the obvious choice because four colloquial phrases feature in a very short span" (James 226). What he does not mention is the fact that the reader should link this particular sentence to what came just before (in the order of narrated events). Because of the fragmented, discontinuous nature of Swift's narratives, the two halves of the same episode are separated by chapter 48 and need to be pieced together: "Small talk, casual talk, skirting the subject. You sit by a hospital bed and talk about the weather" (*LOD* 174). In other words, the card game or the hospital visitors who avoid the mention of illness and death are both metaphors for the evasive, embarrassed exchange of George and Sarah who cannot bring themselves to address the issue of the terrible anniversary of murder that this day represents. If "the clichés pile up" (James 226) in George's account of a conversation, it is to emphasize and reflect the stilted, artificial nature of the language which the imprisoned woman and her visitor must resort to. Harmless and trite as it is, however, it nevertheless leaves the protagonists in no doubt that much has been left unsaid, and its commonplace nature even masks hidden double meanings, "as if there's a code, a second language under the one you speak" (*LOD* 175).

The "four colloquial phrases" incriminated by James could have another function: they enable Swift to minimize the exchange about the Empress in order to make it less obvious that she plays an important role in the economy of his novel. Indeed, the use of the present tense ("she's bought a yacht"; "she's over sixty" *LOD* 182) creates a

double temporality, uniting and blending the present of the translation and the vanished actuality of Eugénie's life. This in turn provides implicit metatextual comments, firstly, on the present tense used when George and Sarah both "relive" every second of what happened two years ago (as, for instance, in "It's nearly four. They're still in the Fulham flat" 173), and, secondly, on the complex temporality of a novel in which the narrative is constantly "to-and-froing" (the verb is George's coining; see 39) between two specific days in 1997 and 1995, and between this day in 1997 and the past. That past *is* dead and gone, whereas the present day unfolds as we read, hour by hour, with surprises in store ("she's never told me this before" 168). Yet George wishes he could undo the past,⁶ hence for instance the pun on "holding her hand" (155), a phrase in which two meanings are deployed simultaneously: tonight, on the anniversary of the precise moment when the murder was committed, George will not be there to "hold her hand," i.e. to comfort her, nor will he be there to *stop* her hand, the knife-wielding hand, before it strikes again, as it will do, in Sarah's constant reenacting of the traumatic scene.

So the Empress is made to seem only anecdotal, but she's an important objective correlative, since Eugénie "had two lives really" (75), living "Nearly fifty years of afterwards" (237) after she became a widow. Metaphorically, working on the Empress has "kept [Sarah] afloat" like "a raft" (139); her translation is like "a lifeline" (214), preserving her life and her sanity. Exactly like Eugénie, Sarah is "a spring chicken in her forties" (214), and George can hope to see her live many years of "afterwards." Clichés in this novel cannot be isolated, studied separately from the larger context and from the patterns formed by repetition.

The first page of the novel provides another example of a conversation which on the surface is commonplace, but which hides depths and unspoken intentions: George and Rita exchange their impressions of the weather ("'Cold,' she says" / "'But beautiful,' I say" *LOD* 3). But under the banal conversation and Rita's ritual offer of tea, George can sense her solitude, and he guesses that she will soon leave him (4).

The dialogue, with its feeble, threadbare adjectives (cold, beautiful) does little justice to the beauty of the day, but elsewhere, as we shall see, George's poetic thoughts amply compensate for this. Meanwhile he hides his real feelings behind these meaningless words, informing Rita repeatedly that it's "cold, but beautiful" (3, 6, 21). He hears embarrassed mourners in Putney Vale Cemetery cling to that same "inevitable comment," unable to find any adequate words for the subject of death (54), and he even imagines Bob sarcastically greeting him from his grave: "Nice flowers. Beautiful day" (84).

If the dialogues are deliberately banal, to fend off the embarrassment of "a bedside closeness, a hospital hush" (183), and keep the unsaid safely hidden, George's silent *thoughts* about the beauty of this day are undeniably expressed in poetic language, and this fact alone makes it impossible to agree with James's opinion that this novel is "devoid of poetic language" (214) and that Swift "is at pains to avoid" "richly associative poetic language" (226). Indeed Swift, through George's vision and sensitivity, deploys a strikingly rich, oxymoronic language combining many different pairs of opposites: an icy cold and a brilliant light, a fiery light and a cold metallic sheen, black and white, darkness and brightness, etc. "The sun picks out bursts of frozen fire" (LOD 21); "The sun flashes off the road where the frost has turned to a black dew" (26); Robert Nash may have seen "spiders' webs glinting" (39), and George sees the Common as "a sea of glittering yellow leaves" (36); the "hint of warmth" in the "crisp bright air" is "like warm water in a cold glass" (93). In the florist's shop there is "a cold sweat on the grey metal" of buckets that seem "packed tight" with freshly picked flowers, "as if there's a magic garden, just out the back, defying the November frost" (10).

This paradoxical language is introduced very early, when George notices "the low, blinding sun of a cold November morning" streaming through the "*frosted*" glass of his door (4, my emphasis), but it is only upon reading the novel for the second time that one can savour Swift's use of "frosted glass" in the light of later patterns of imagery. Gravestones become fiery under the "coppery light, the flecks in the

granite like sparks" (140), or coldly malevolent at night, "the smooth granite glinting like ice" (188). In a terse, paratactic paragraph George sees the "glitter in [Sarah's] eyes," and briefly comments: "Melting frost" (15).

Life and death merge and mingle; as George sits in the cemetery just after noon, on a bench donated in memory of a dead "John Winters." This name reminds him of the approach of night and winter, two forms of symbolical death: "The day's still brilliant, the sky an almost burning blue" but "it's waning already, it can't last" (127). After four, as he emerges from the prison, he sees: "A slice of moon. A vapour trail, thin and twinkly as a needle. Another bitter night coming, the air hard as glass" (188).⁷ No wonder even Germaine Greer, in her scathing review of a novel that she dismissed as "still-born" (Gove, Greer, and Lawson) could not help admiring Swift's depiction of the November day: "What comes alive for me in this novel is the day, the frosty day, the light," she explained.

Long before the word "prison" is first introduced, the crucial and conflicting motifs of light, imprisonment, lines, and "stepping across" are playfully and poetically intertwined.⁸ When Rita first enters George's sunlit office, "she steps through bars of bright light" (4). This clever, poetic tetrameter, constructed with very simple monosyllables enhanced by alliteration (*b*) and by assonance (the diphthong [ai]), is echoed by the flower girl stepping "through the light" as if "through some screen" (10-11), and by the description of George's first meeting with Sarah, in his office, on a sunny October day two years before: "Cold outside, warm slabs of sun indoors. [The sun] fell like a partition across the desk between us" (8). The choice of unusual collocations ("bars" and "slabs" of sun) is coherent in this poetic foreshadowing of future constrained meetings under the inquisitive glare of the "screwesses" (139). The very first, "free" meeting of George and Sarah is told in the language of the separation to come, and the descriptive details take on a deeply symbolical meaning, evoking an obstacle first, in the sentence "[s]unlight streamed between us" (20), but also a kind of prophetic summary of George's

future role as a steadfast, devoted “knight to the rescue”⁹ (91) who will help Sarah to live again: “I held out my hand, through the shaft of sunshine. She managed to stand” (21).

Andrew James quotes Swift when he evokes his attempts to give new power and meaning to ordinary, even simple language (see James 223) but he does not give any concrete examples of this. He could have quoted the ship imagery deployed in the text, or the dynamic tetrameter (with its alliteration in *b* and *br*) that George uses to conjure up the love-making of Kristina and Bob: “An English wood. Bracken and brambles and silver birch” (60). Poetry for descriptions of nature is to be expected, but more originally Swift is able to sum up George’s disgrace as a policeman in a spare, powerful tetrameter containing only colloquial language: “I got the axe while Dyson walked” (134): a regular iambic tetrameter with an alliteration in *w* and an assonance in [ai]. Elsewhere, the depiction of a busy supermarket car-park becomes a striking little prose poem with rhymes in “-ing”: “The car park was heaving. Trolleys careering, boots yawning, a scene of plunder” (31). “Poetic” language (compact, witty, imaginative, musical) also characterises George’s recurrent memory of Rita’s fluffy bathrobe, “loosely tied, tits nuzzling inside” (4), “a pale-pink fluffy dressing-gown, inside which her tits huddled and snuggled up to each other” (192).

Although Andrew James concludes that *LOD* “is in many ways a brilliant work,” he does not disclose any of those “ways” and limits the “poetry” to “poetic awareness of secondary meaning” (230). He never gives examples of “brilliance,” preferring to tut disapprovingly at the use of clichés that do not “merit serious reconsideration” and prescribing a more “discretionary use” of cliché (230). James is particularly puzzled by the use of “the greeting card phrase ‘it’s the thought that counts’” (230), and wonders whether it is “a black joke” or “a positive appraisal” of Sarah’s “dutiful” observance (224). To this question one is tempted to answer that the “thought” is indeed both the result of Sarah’s remorse and the expression of George’s jealousy, hence the sardonic irony within an oxymoronic opposition: “The sun

is shining down on me and I'm black with hate" (LOD 55). George fantasises that the dead Bob can read the hostile "thought" of this "phoney friend," this "fake well-wisher" (85).

In her review, Hermione Lee wrote that "casual phrases gather weight, and every word tells," because "no cliché is innocent here," so that George produces "some nice grim comedy." This is a refreshing change from the readings of critics like Daniel Lea and Michiko Kakutani, who seem impervious to Swift's tongue-in-cheek humour. They do not appear to notice that George often plays with the *literal* meaning of set phrases, making dead metaphors spring to life again, or take on a different, twisted meaning. When it suddenly occurs to him that Bob might be committing suicide, he runs to try and interfere: "I ran, for dear life" (LOD 185). The use of the comma artfully changes a phrase which is normally synonymous with "running away from danger." Bob's murder in the kitchen gives birth to puns that are explicitly underlined: "She was dressed—don't say it—to kill" (161); "The Nash Case. It had all the ingredients [...]. If 'ingredients' isn't an unfortunate word" (161). The meaning of words and phrases is constantly interrogated and sometimes literalized.

The play on literal meanings makes Swift's gallows-humour very enjoyable: the Robinson family, who bought the Nash house, were perhaps influenced by its luxurious kitchen, "a kitchen to die for," and "they might even have sold on, for a small killing" (26). In the cemetery, George notices "[t]he crematorium doing a roaring trade" (54), and the comic quality of this fusing of two similar set phrases, "roaring fire" and "roaring trade," is characterized by discretion this time, since the pun is not underlined. In a quiet corner of the cemetery George seems "to be the only soul around," but this is immediately qualified: "Living soul" (54). George creates a funnily irreverent iambic tetrameter—"The gravestones twinkle in the sun" (135)—that sounds like a verse out of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" poem, and uses a cliché which in the context is both comically incongruous and literally appropriate: "this place, when you think about it, must be *riddled with corruption*" (135, my italics). This usage mixes literal and

metaphorical meanings, putrefaction and lack of integrity, and lightens the bitter mood induced in George by his musings on the word “corrupt,” a word that tastes like the black, oozing humours of decay, the “foul stuff inside” corpses (134).

Andrew James’s article has the merit of originality, since he studied the manuscript and analysed the links with an uncollected short story written by Swift, but perhaps James spent more time on his attempts to find answers in interviews, letters and other secondary material than on the actual analysis of the novel. His questions elicited from Graham Swift himself no other response than an admirably polite and non-committal statement about his own marking of the manuscript (James 219). In my opinion, however, the use of “million dollar phrases” and “advanced vocabulary” (214), combined with the scrupulous shunning of clichés, do not constitute an indispensable condition for the creation of a poetic, literary text. Swift’s witty, moving, and poetic mastery of language is perfect as it is, because he is not a novelist with “literary pretensions” (215) but, to the delight of his readers, a gifted, greatly talented novelist.

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NOTES

¹See the second entry for “poetic” in the *Collins English Dictionary*.

²In his review of the novel, Adam Mars-Jones was of the opinion that “the overall effect is of a poem, a superbly prosaic poem.”

³See Franklin: “But George’s inadequacy as an investigator of his own affairs is more troubling for the fact that the book itself is presented as his written record to Sarah, his ‘twice-monthly reports from the world,’ which he delivers to her on each visit.” Franklin does not clarify what she has in mind behind the passive verb “is presented as”; she gives no justification for her equation.

⁴As David Malcolm perceptively noticed, sometimes George even behaves like “a kind of novelist too,” enjoining an unspecified “you” to “put yourself in the scene” (Malcolm 213, quoting *LOD* 87).

⁵The sentence gives Iago a diabolical stance, and may also have inspired Bill Unwin's statement in Swift's *Ever After*: "I am not me. Therefore was I ever me?" (4). The sentence certainly struck Stephen Greenblatt: "We expect Iago to say 'I am not what I seem,' asserting at least a hidden identity, but his actual words imply a sinister and terrifying emptiness, an absence of being that is outside the pale of human logic and experience" (47).

⁶George's many uneasy references to ghosts in *LOD* show that he is not really convinced that the past is totally dead and gone, but not until *Wish You Were Here* did Swift allow such ghosts to materialise in his plots.

⁷David Malcolm is also very sensitive to the poetic density of many sentences; analysing the opening paragraph of the novel, he writes: "One is tempted to set these lines out as verse, and even to attempt a scansion of the first paragraph" (212).

⁸David Malcolm also noticed the fact that "these motifs of light overlap with those of imprisonment and line crossing" (210).

⁹"I was Saint bloody George riding to the rescue" (*LOD* 86): here the chivalrous imagery is used in a self-derisive manner to define his relationship with Rachel, when he was still a would-be supercop in "invisible armour" (86), projecting an image of Saint George similar to Joe's perception of St George as "chain-mailed thug" in *Out of This World* (156). But with Sarah the reference is pared down to a subdued phrase, "Saint George" (*LOD* 156) reactivating the gentle image of courtly love present when Swift's sweet shop owner surrenders to Irene, "like a knight laying down arms." (*The Sweet Shop Owner* 26). George himself is loath to use the word "love" for his feelings for Sarah, yet what James calls his "infatuation" (*LOD* 207) could just as well be read as selfless (and perforce sexless) love.

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“I was back in a dark wood”:
Don Paterson’s “The Forest of the Suicides”*

ELISA SEGNINI AND ELIZABETH JONES

The only pure suicide is self-strangulation;
everything else requires the world as an ac-
complice.

(Don Paterson, *The Book of Shadows* 76)

In hell even the trees are not blameless. *Particu-
larly* the trees.

(Don Paterson, *The Book of Shadows* 133)

Don Paterson’s “The Forest of the Suicides” was published in 2003 in *Landing Light*, a collection of 38 poems that, besides this version of Dante’s *Inferno* xiii, includes five more re-writings after classics by Cavafy and Rilke. The poem has been hailed as an example of creative translation, “a process which opens up classic texts and reveals new meanings for contemporary readers” (Stafford 234) and, as such, includes several variations. The most startling of these is the substitution of the thirteenth-century Pier della Vigna with the twentieth-century poet Sylvia Plath: starting from this consideration, this article illustrates how “The Forest of the Suicides” functions simultaneously as an interpretation of Dante’s canto and as a means to retell Plath’s suicide through the lens provided by Dante. I will argue that re-writing Dante’s text while imitating Plath’s style allows Paterson to comment on an event—Plath’s suicide—that is usually regarded as gossip and sensationalism. My claim is that creative translation sheds light on the specificities of the source and creates new meanings in the context of the target language.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsegnini0241.htm>>.

In what follows, I will therefore summarize Paterson's thoughts on translation and re-writing, and point out how this poetics is reflected in "The Forest of the Suicides." The poem reproduces the plot line and subject matter of Dante's text, translating its images and rhetorical devices; these deviations, on one level, alter the meaning of the source, while on another they are instrumental in reproducing the interdependence of sound and content, as well as the intertextuality at the core of Dante's text and the ambivalent attitude of author and pilgrim. The adoption of Plath's poetic voice allows Paterson to challenge traditional notions of authorships within and beyond the source text.

Paterson's Conception of the "Poetic Version"

In the essay "The Lyric Principle," Paterson reflects on a recurrent feeling shared by poets, the suspicion that "our best lines [have] already been written by someone else" (8). Elaborating on a statement by Renato Poggioli, who comments on how poets choose to translate mainly because of "elective affinities" with other artists, Paterson adds that poets do so because the process opens "a path to a new way of writing a poem." He continues by stating that "somehow, by assuming this voice in the target language, you'll lose or modify the voice you've mistakenly come to think as your own" ("Interview with Marco Fazzini"). These thoughts are important for contextualizing a poem like "The Forest of the Suicides" in which Paterson adopts not one, but two poetic voices—since he is simultaneously translating Dante and imitating Plath's style. In a public reading of the poem at an event organized by the *Edinburgh University Literature Society* in 2012, Paterson in fact emphasized his poetic affinity with Plath and expressed his admiration for her art, going as far as calling her a "genius," a "far superior poet" to her husband Ted Hughes ("Don Paterson 'Forest of Suicides'").¹

However, Paterson does not see himself as a "translator" and declares himself to be skeptical about the possibility of translating po-

etry. In an interview with Atilla Dosa, he points out that "[t]he surface is the one that is impossible to translate, because those things of which you're most proud as poets depend wholly on idiomatic circumstances, tiny acoustic resonances, tiny shades of meaning and associations, that can have no direct equivalent in the host language" ("Interview with Attila Dosa").² He refers to "The Forest of the Suicides," just as he does to his re-writing of other classics, as a "poetic version," and distinguishes this "version" from translation by arguing that the latter "tries to remain true to the original words and their relations [...]. It glosses the original, but does not try to replace it. Versions, however, are trying to be poems in their own right; while they have the original to serve as detailed ground-plan and elevation, they are trying to build themselves a robust home in a new country, in its vernacular architecture, with local words for its brick and local music for its mortar" ("Fourteen Notes on the Version" 84).³ In tune with other authors/translators such as Umberto Eco, Octavio Paz, and Haroldo de Campos, Paterson considers translation a form of interpretation. But while these authors regard a translation of a poem as a new original in the target language, Paterson insists on the distinction between translating and re-writing and argues that only "versions" can be considered "poems in their own right."⁴ In addition, while the tendency of scholarship in the last twenty years has been to move away from the discourse of fidelity,⁵ Paterson frequently resorts to images of faithfulness and betrayal. In "Fourteen Notes on the Version" he notes that "the only possible fidelity is to the entirely subjective quality of 'spirit' or 'vision,' rather than to literal meaning" (56).⁶ Curiously, in the re-writing of Dante's *Inferno* XIII, he inverts the terms and makes Sylvia Plath assert it a "far lesser crime" to be unfaithful to the spirit, rather than to betray the letter. Plath's spirit, as we will see, also talks about poetry as a "dark trade," the same words that Paterson uses in his T. S. Eliot lecture ("The Dark Art of Poetry"), in which he defines poetry as an art that takes the form of "the spell, the riddle, the curse, the blessing, the prayer" and whose function is "to change the way we perceive the world." From all these statements, we can

infer that "The Forest of the Suicides" functions on two levels. The main narrative addresses an aesthetic and a moral concern: the relation between poetry and suffering, and the question of whether suicide is an acceptable act. A second strand revolves around the problem of fidelity: this concerns Plath's faithfulness to her "oath," but also the way in which this particular version by Paterson at once betrays and remains faithful to its source.

"The Forest of the Suicides": Dante's "detailed ground-plan and elevation"

The epigraph of "The Forest of the Suicides" warns us that, while the poem is a version of Dante's text, there will be an intrusion, a different poetic voice; it also helps us to recognize the suicide soul with whom Paterson replaces della Vigna in the forest.

Who are these *pietàs*?

The shadows of ringdoves chanting, but easing nothing.

(Sylvia Plath, "Winter Trees")

The Christian allusion "*pietàs*" foreshadows the emotional atmosphere of the passage from Dante, which is one of pity (*pieta/pietade* are recurrent words in Dante's canto). But "*pietàs*" also metonymically indicates the singers for the song, the poets for the poem, and thus anticipates the relationship between poetry and suffering, summarized by the "words and blood" that is a central image in both Paterson's and Dante's texts. The second line, with its interplay of ear and eye half-rhymes, exemplifies Plath's technical skill, her ability to weave the verbal texture that for Paterson constitutes the meaning of a poem: the fourfold repetition of the "ing" in "ring [...]," "chanting," "easing," "nothing" echoes the dove's repeated call, while the "dows" in "shadows" is juxtaposed with the "doves" of "ringdoves." It is in the music, as well as the words, that the possibility is felt that song may not necessarily ease suffering.

Paterson adds "Inferno xiii" as a subtitle to "The Forest of the Suicides." However, by choosing not to present the original in a parallel version, he asserts that his poem—in line with his conception of the poetic version—is a "poem in its own right"; and by omitting the second section of the canto, which deals with the squanderers (those who are violent against their own goods), he signals from the outset that his poem is focused on a fragment. This choice allows him to reproduce specific formal and symbolic features of Dante's text while taking the liberty of deviating from its meaning.

If we use Paterson's simile and compare the making of a poem to the building of a house, we can say that he structures the poem by using Dante's "detailed ground-plan and elevation" ("Fourteen Notes on the Version" 84). At the very core of both passages from Dante and Paterson's texts is the witness borne by a great poet, in the company of his guide, another poet, to the suffering of a suicide soul who is also a writer. Paterson tells his story by attentively reproducing Dante's plot line, retaining the same images and transposing Dante's rhetorical devices. As in Dante's text, the pilgrim and his guide, who remain unnamed throughout the text, enter a dark wood with no path, see the monstrous harpies and hear strange moaning coming from the trees. The pilgrim consults his guide as to what these cries may be, and the guide instructs him to break off a twig from a thorn bush. When the pilgrim does so, he is surprised by a cry of reproach and sees dark blood issuing from the twig: words and blood are compared to the hissing drip at one end of a sapling log when set on fire at the other. Virgil apologizes, explains that the pilgrim could only be brought to believe the incredible phenomenon through direct experience, and, with the promise that the pilgrim will vindicate the soul by renewing its fame on earth, invites the thorn tree to tell its story. The injured plant recalls having committed suicide after having been abandoned by an "Emperor," a person to whom it was utterly devoted, and reaffirms its loyalty. At Virgil's request, it explains how, immediately after death, Minos hurls the souls of the suicides as seeds into the wood, where they sprout into wild plants continually attacked and torn by

the harpies. At the last judgment, the souls will seek their bodies, with which they will never be reunited but which they will have to hang on their trees, because of the contempt that, in committing suicide, they showed for their bodies in life.

While faithfully reproducing Dante's plot, Paterson uses "local music for mortar" ("Fourteen Notes on the Version" 84), substituting Dante's stanzas in *terza rima* with four-line stanzas *abab*; these rhymes, as we will see, are a mixture of full and slant. He also eschews quantitative equivalence: Paterson's text is five stanzas longer than Dante's. Employing "local words for bricks," he uses modern English to render Dante's medieval Italian. For example, he translates "Harpy" with the Anglo-Saxon "Snatcher"⁷ and renders the mannered hesitancy with which the pilgrim guesses the thoughts of his guide "Cred' ïo ch'ei credette ch'io credesse" (*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.25) with the straightforward question: "Master, why do they hide from us? [...] Are they afraid?" (Paterson, "The Forest of Suicide" 23-24). He also chooses to translate features that do not have equivalents, such as "particular images, etymological histories," with "something else that might have the same effect on the reader in the host tongue, which might be a very different thing" ("Interview with Atilla Dosa" 1). These substitutions entail important shifts of meaning.

Deviations

Like the *selva oscura* at the beginning of the journey, the forest of canto xiii is dark and has no path. To describe it, Dante uses antithesis. In the first half of each line, he sketches the features of the *locus amoenus*, the delightful place that constitutes a *topos* of classical literature (see Curtius 192). In the second half, he conjures the very opposite:

Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;
 non rami schietti ma nodosi e 'nvolti,
 non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con toscò.
 (*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.4-6)⁸

Scholars have interpreted the underlying meaning of this stanza as a reference to the fact that souls who could have chosen good, for which they are destined, have instead chosen evil, which has twisted and poisoned them.⁹ Paterson makes no attempt at translating the stanza and introduces a strange simile unrelated to Dante's text:

Each barren, blood-back tree was like a plate
from a sailor's book of knots, its branches bent
and pleached and coiled as if to demonstrate
some novel and ingenious form of torment.
(Paterson, "The Forest of Suicide" 5-8)

By substituting plates from "a sailor's book of knots" for Dante's evocation of the wild, desolate stretch of land between Cecina and Corneto, Paterson replaces a reference that demands geographical knowledge of the source culture with an image that conveys a general sense of twistedness and torment. By not following Dante in describing the dark, gnarled, poisonous trees as the antithesis of those that are green, smooth, and covered with fruit, he omits any implicit premise that evil is not a positive force or presence but rather the absence of a loving God, thus also questioning the wood as a place where sinners receive the punishment they deserve.

As in Dante's text, the pilgrim follows Virgil's injunction to tear a twig from the tree, but, since the inhabitant of Paterson's poetic structure is Plath, not della Vigna, with striking variations:

Allor porsi la mano un poco avante
e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
e 'l tronco suo gridò: 'Perchè mi schiante?'

Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno,
ricominciò a dir: 'Perchè mi scerpi?
non hai tu spirito di pietà alcuno?'

Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:
ben dovebb'esser la tua man più pia
se state fossimo anime di serpi.'

(*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.31-39)¹⁰

[...] I snapped away
a twig from the bush that stood closer to me.

In the trunk, a red mouth opened like a cut.
Then a voice screamed out "Why are you tearing me?"
it was a woman's voice. Blood began to spurt
from the broken tip "you, are you hearing me?"

When exactly did I earn your scorn?
Supposing I'd a heart black as a snake's,
I was a woman once, that now am thorn.
What would a little pity have set you back?"
(Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 27-36)

In Dante's text, the pilgrim picks a twig from a "gran pruno," with the *gran* according the plant-man a certain stature. In Paterson's version, we read "I snapped away / a twig from the bush that stood closest to me" (27-28, emphasis added). The simile in the next line, "In the trunk, a red mouth opened like a cut," leaves the reader in no doubt as to the connotation of "bush": it is a line deliberately phrased in order to startle, beginning as it does with "red mouth" and ending with the monosyllabic pun "cut" for "cunt." A pun is used again when, as "blood began to spurt / from the broken tip" (31-32), the voice cries out "I was a woman once, that now am thorn" (35)—with "thorn" echoing "torn."¹¹ Unlike della Vigna, the hybrid plant-man, in whose vegetable body are trapped "the anguished workings of a human heart and mind" and whose *contrappasso* is to have all "connection between body and soul [...] broken" (Spitzer 84-85), Plath's vegetable body retains a link with its human body. These changes give a sexual tone to the violence inflicted on the spirit, who experiences physical and psychological laceration by the two men who enter the wood.

In Dante's text, when Virgil apologizes and says that the offender can make amends by reviving the soul's fame in the upper world, the chancellor poet replies with exquisite courtesy in language filled with conceits.¹² In Paterson's version, Virgil's apology and offer to the soul are almost literally translated. But the suicide spirit's angry, sarcastic response is very different:

E 'l tronco: 'Sì col dolce dir m'adeschi
 ch' i' non posso tacere; e voi non gravi
 perch' io un poco a ragionar m'inveschi.'
 (*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.55-57)¹³

And the tree laughed. "Bravo sir!" Well said.
 You'd spend a life time trying to put it worse.
 In my design, that scalded beach ahead
 would be reserved for the biographers.

And if it's self-improvement your friend seeks
 perhaps it's courtesy you need to teach...
 Ah. But you can see that I am weak,
 and lured into a little human speech.
 (Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 49-56)

Paterson replaces della Vigna's mannered courtesy with sardonic, skeptical arrogance. Claiming "In my design, that scalded beach ahead / would be reserved for the biographers," the soul boldly places herself in the role of the omnipotent.¹⁴ Far from accepting her punishment, she implicitly accuses the pilgrim (who, in promising to tell her story, *de facto* becomes one of the biographers) of participating in the violence that is carried out against her. In her view, the pilgrim is not Dante's sensitive, enquiring seeker in quest of salvation but a curious, invasive person bent on "self-improvement" who needs to be taught some manners.

Plath's account of her life, the reasons for her suicide, and the message she would like to be conveyed to the world above follow della Vigna's plea of defence and also feature many of della Vigna's images. The right-hand man of the Emperor Frederick II, della Vigna committed suicide after having been (in Dante's rendition) unjustly accused of treason by those who were envious of his privileged role at the Emperor's court. Like della Vigna, Plath tells the story of how she was bound to an "office" (Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 63), disgraced by a "courtesan" (70) and abandoned by a "Caesar" (74). Paterson translates Dante's signifiers and gives priority to literal meaning. While Dante is speaking literally, Paterson uses the images metaphorically to refer to Plath's life. Readers familiar with Plath's poetry

and biography, for example, will immediately recognize that “Caesar” is used as a metaphor to refer to the role of Plath’s father. In translating Dante’s tropes, Paterson keeps the literal image but modifies its allegorical sense (the “meritrice” is faithfully translated as “courtesan,” but she stands for jealousy, rather than envy). He also expands Dante’s images (there is not one, but two “Caesars”) and therefore creates a longer monologue:

Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi
del cor di Federigo, e che le volsi,
serrando e disserrando, sì soavi,

che dal secreto suo quasi ogn’uom tolsi:
fede portai al glorioso officio,
tanto ch’ i’ ne perde’ li sonni e’ polsi.

La meretrice che mai dall’ospizio
di Cesare non torse li occhi putti,
morte comune, delle corti vizio,

infiammò contra me li animi tutti;
E li ’nfiammati infiammar sì Augusto,
che’ lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti.

L’animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.

(*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.58-73)¹⁵

When I was small, I held both keys
that fitted my father’s heart; which I unlocked
and locked again with such a delicate ease
he felt no turning, and he heard no click.

He desired no other confidence but mine;
nor would I permit one. I was so bound
to my splendid office that, when he resigned,
I followed. They had to dig me from the ground.

So the post remained, and I remained as true;
and, in time, I came to interview
for his successor. None of them would do
until a black shape cut the light in two

and at once I knew my ideal candidate.
 But that green-eyed courtesan, that vice of courts
 who had always stalked his halls and kept his gate—
 the years had steeped me in her sullen arts

and my tongue grew hot with her abysmal need.
 Slowly, I turned it on my second Caesar
 until it seemed to me his every deed
 did nothing but disgrace his predecessor.

So he left me too; but the tongue still burned away
 till I sung the bright world only to estrange it,
 and prophesied my end so nakedly
 mere decency insisted I arrange it.

My mind, then, in its voice of reasoned harm
 told me Death would broker my release
 from every shame, and back into his arms;
 so I made my date. It was bad advice.
 (Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 57-84)

Equating della Vigna's emperor with Sylvia Plath's father, Paterson alludes to the strong hold that this man, who died when she was a child, had on her imagination. The trope is then extended to include the appointment of a "second Caesar"—a variation that addresses the frequent comparisons Plath, in her poetry and diaries, made between her father and husband, whom she considered her male poetic muses.¹⁶ Keeping the image of the flame, Paterson associates it with Plath's tongue, a synecdoche for angry words that Plath turned against Ted Hughes in poems such as "Event" and "Burning the Letters."¹⁷ Most importantly for what concerns the retelling of Plath's suicide, della Vigna's acknowledgement of having committed a sin against God's justice ("ingiusto fece me contra me giusto") is replaced by a neutral "It was bad advice."

There are innumerable biographies of Sylvia Plath on which Paterson could be drawing for the interpretation of the events that led Plath to suicide. Among them, the account of Alvarez in *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (1972) appears particularly relevant.¹⁸ Alvarez's account is, in fact very similar to the one given by the soul in the monologue; in addition, his study includes a chapter on Dante's Canto XIII,

thereby providing an antecedent for bringing together Plath's poetry and Dante's passage. In this text, Alvarez claims that Plath was drawn to suicide by a "quasi literary force" (31). This idea is echoed in Paterson's poem by the lines "and prophesied my end so nakedly / mere decency insisted I arrange it."¹⁹ The litotes in Paterson's poem "[i]t was bad advice," similarly echoes the interpretation (also in Alvarez's text) that Sylvia did not intend to commit suicide, that she took a risk, hoping that her attempt would call attention to her suffering, but that "her calculations went wrong" (Alvarez 32).²⁰ If, in Dante's text, suicide is represented as a sin that by far surpasses the envy that has caused it, in Paterson's version it is a mistaken decision, a consequence of a chain of events and conflicting emotions.

In Dante's canto, della Vigna denies the charge of treason with simple, direct dignity and then asks the pilgrim to restore his reputation, which has been ruined by Envy. In Paterson's version, Plath admits to turning her fury and hatred on her "second Caesar" in such a way as to implicate the original ("it seemed to me his every deed / did nothing but disgrace his predecessor" Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 75-76). Her request for vindication has an oracular formulation:

Per le nove radici d'esto legno
vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
al mio signor, che fu d'onor sì degno.

E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,
conforti la memoria mia, che giace
ancor del colpo che 'nvidia le diede.

(*Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.73-78)²¹

But if your friend should somehow cut a path
back to the light, then tell them I betrayed
the spirit, not the letter of the oath—
by far the lesser crime in our dark trade.
(Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 85-88)

This reference to the letter and the spirit is found nowhere in Dante's Canto XIII. Paterson alludes to a passage of the New Testament in which Paul contrasts the life-giving "new testament" of Christ's spirit

of love, "written not with ink, but [...] in the fleshy tablets of the heart" with the commandments written "in tables of stone" (2 Cor 3:6). In this passage, the Christian spirit is associated with the interpretation of an ideal meaning, Jewish reading practices with loyalty to literalness. In Paterson's poem, the soul claims that she "betrayed the spirit not the letter of the oath," regarding it as "far the lesser crime" in a trade that she describes as dark.

As noted, in the T. S. Eliot lecture, Paterson defines poetry as a "dark art" and stresses its invocatory function, its closeness to the riddle and the prayer ("The Dark Art of Poetry"). But in the context of this version, the poetry of Virgil, Dante, and Plath is dark also insofar as it bears witness to suffering. Dante and Virgil wrote of the torments of an afterlife in the underworld, Plath, as non-believer, of the torments of life on earth, or, as she puts it in *The Bell Jar*, of hell as a place of intense earthly suffering.²² By writing out the anger and hatred which her Caesars, her male muses, have come to inspire, crafting words fashioned to endure, the suicide spirit has honored the *letter* of her oath even as, by reviling them, she has betrayed its *spirit*. Moreover, since she prophesied her death "so nakedly," in committing suicide, she has been literally faithful to the words she wrote. Ironically, her faithfulness to the letter can be summarized by Paul's statement that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor 3:6). Unlike della Vigna, Plath cannot claim complete fidelity to her oath. But she boldly claims kinship to her interlocutors, whom she recognizes as fellow writers renowned for descriptions of an underworld.

In the last part of his monologue, della Vigna delivers his account of the transformation of suicide souls when sent to the underworld in a straightforward way that contrasts his earlier mannerism. Plath gives the same basic account, but in a tone of pain and contempt, charging the speech with alliterations: "[...] furious soul [...] tears itself from the flesh [...]" (Paterson, "The Forest of Suicides" 105-06, emphasis added), "from the *bed* or *bath* or *floor*" (108, emphasis added) "where it spins down to this starless nursery / to seed wherever fortune tosses it" (110-11, emphasis added). If in her first response, addressing

Virgil, she has reduced the pilgrim's mission to an inquiry into the suffering of others ("if it's self-improvement your friend seeks / Perhaps it's courtesy you need to teach" 53-54), she now refers to God's justice as an "inverse power." Finally, in the last stanza, which describes what will happen at the final clarion, the souls strangely will inhabit a "dark street" in a wood that in the first stanza is pathless, a line of bare, lifeless bodies hung like "white coat(s)" in the travesty of a celebration ("miserable parade"), forever separated from their souls imprisoned in thorn bushes.²³

All these variations shift the focus away from Christian eschatology and lead us back to the soul's enigmatic statement about the letter and the spirit. Paterson's poem is filled with references to imitations: the Snatcher is characterized by a "gift of mimicry," Plath's "second Caesar" is a version, a replacement, of his "predecessor." As noted, Plath's soul cannot claim authorial fidelity: the promise of being faithful to the letter and the spirit is an impossible one. In reproducing plot and imagery when re-writing Dante's passage, Paterson remains faithful to the original and prioritizes the letter. At the same time, as he reconceptualizes the canto from a framework of medieval faith to one of secular disbelief, he challenges the view that considered suicide "a mortal sin, a horror, the object of total moral revulsion" (Alvarez 125). In doing so, Paterson's poem ignores the idea of sin that is so central to Dante's vision.²⁴ Paterson conjures up a Plath situated in the same circumstances as della Vigna, condemned for eternity for having committed suicide, but makes her protest at a design by an "inverse power" while at the same time affirming the reality (the *truth*) of her suffering.

Fidelity

In what way, then, can this poem still be considered to be a version, or, in other words and according to Paterson's own terminology, a re-writing faithful to the spirit of Dante's text? Fidelity to a source text can be traced beyond literal or metaphorical meaning, in the render-

ing of the intertextual weaving of Dante's poem. Most importantly, it can be identified in the surface of the language, in the way in which Paterson renders specific features of Dante's text, such as the interplay between acoustic and semantic elements.

In the first stanza, the pilgrim is "back" in a dark wood. On the one hand, the addition of the word "back" makes explicit what Dante is only suggesting—namely, the similarities between the suicides' forest and the *selva oscura* in which the journey begins. On the other hand, we are reminded that the poem is a re-writing of a different text. This intertextual reference is already characteristic of the original. As Sinclair pointed out, Virgil's apology to the wounded plant ("S'elli avesse potuto creder prima [...] anima lesa, / ciò c' ha veduto pur con la mia rima"; *Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.46-48) refers to an incident described in the *Aeneid* 3.3-65. (174). In this episode, Aeneas tears green shoots from a myrtle bush to decorate an altar, sees blood dripping from the roots and, terrified, hears a cry that reproaches him. He discovers that his cousin Polydorus has been murdered and buried underneath the mound, and he is overwhelmed by pity. Dante follows Virgil's plotline, but, in substituting della Vigna for Polydorus, he updates Virgil's references with allusions closer to his own time. He reproduces the transition from fear to pity and the affinity between the interlocutors (both della Vigna and Dante are men of letters). But he complicates the feeling of pity through the introduction of the theme of suicide, and by doing so also introduces the theme of doubt.²⁵ Paterson echoes the complex texture of Dante by reproducing the sense of *déjà vu*. He changes the background from the Middle Ages to the present and, selecting a suicide soul who is also a poet, creates a kinship between the pilgrim and the injured soul (whom Virgil addresses as "sister"). He reduces the focus on pity, but elaborates and enlarges on doubt.

As we have seen, Paterson's substitution of Plath for della Vigna entails major differences. However, it also involves important parallels. Della Vigna was a famous rhetorician and a poet associated with the Sicilian school, a precursor of the *Dolce Stil Novo*. He took his own

life in 1247—roughly fifty years before the time in which Dante sets the symbolic date for the *Commedia*. His story was well-known and, half a century later, Dante could still count on his readers to recognize him without explicitly naming him.²⁶ In Dante's rendition, della Vigna's most prominent characteristic is his eloquence.²⁷ Just as, in Canto XIII, della Vigna describes the suffering of hell, so in his own poetry he often dwelled on the feeling of loss and desperation.²⁸ Scholars also stress the contradictions inherent in della Vigna's monologue: on the one hand, he demonstrates courtesy, loyalty, skilful rhetoric; all qualities that arouse the pilgrim's pity. On the other hand, he presents suicide as a direct consequence of others' envy of him, fails to acknowledge responsibility and, like all Dante's damned characters, is unrepentant (see *Divine Comedy*, trans. Musa 148).

If della Vigna belonged to an earlier generation than Dante, so does Plath in respect to Paterson: Plath took her own life in 1963, while Paterson is writing the poem in 2003, forty years after the event. Her life and works are sufficiently well known that Paterson can afford not to name her, and much ink has been spilt on the relationship between her last poems and her decision to take her own life.²⁹ Like della Vigna, Plath, in Paterson's version, is presented as a torn, divided spirit who blames her "tongue" ("but the tongue still burned away" 76) and "mind" ("My mind, then, in its voice of reasoned harm / told me Death would broker my release" 81-82) for her actions and for the decision of taking her own life. Like him, she is unrepentant.³⁰

As a poet of the Sicilian school, della Vigna wrote in a style characterized by elaborate syntax, the frequent use of conceits, repetition, and wordplay. Scholars have stressed the pains that Dante takes to echo della Vigna's rhetoric not only in the tree's speech but also elsewhere in the canto, as if he was preparing readers for this encounter by appropriating his contrived style. In a similar manner, Paterson imitates Plath's voice not only in the monologue, but throughout the poem. A main feature of Plath's poetry, as exemplified in the epigraph, is her use of half-rhyme, of both ear and eye. In Paterson's poem, more than half of the sets of rhyme are half-rhymes. Just as

della Vigna's mannered style pervades Dante's text, so half-rhymes pervade Paterson's. In a manner similar to Plath, Paterson alternates these half-rhymes with full rhymes to underscore contrasts and to suggest resolution. A study of his interweaving of rhyme and half-rhyme throughout the poem in a balanced but irregular pattern would warrant an essay in itself; consideration of a few instances will illustrate some of the effects he achieves.

In the very first stanza, the line "I was back in a dark wood, this time unmarked" expresses a sense of uneasiness and disorientation, described through a leading half-rhyme ("back" with "unmarked"). In the next stanza, two full rhymes, "plate" / "demonstrate," "bent" / "torment" convey instead a sense of certainty and nail the suffering that the image of the wood evokes. Plath's style is also echoed in the stanzas in which both sets of rhymes are half-rhymes. The first of these is the one where Plath's suicide spirit, like della Vigna, screams in protest when the pilgrim tears its branch (stanza 8). Here the punning "cut" is paired (logically) with spurt, while the eye-rhyme "tearing me" and "hearing me" (30-32) underlines the contrast that shows pilgrim and guide to be, paradoxically, both violent and attentive. In the last stanzas, the pairings of partial consonances such as "crop" with "escape" and of slant rhymes such as "ground" with "down," "pain" and "pains" contributes to a sense of fracture and dislocation. So while full rhymes are used when something assertive is being expressed, to convey a sense of certainty, the irregularity of half-rhymes and partial consonances conveys all that is unsettled, skewed, and fractured. This interweaving reflects the way in which Paterson, deploying a technical skill that echoes Plath's, captures her assuredness, the voice that she herself described as "fresh, brazen, colloquial" (*Unabridged Journals* 275), along with her sense of unease, displacement, fracture.

As if to underline Paterson's endeavour in echoing Plath's voice, the monologue of the suicide soul is filled with references to Plath's poems: "At once I knew my ideal candidate" echoes "I knew you at once" in "Love Letter," "a black shape cut the line in two" recalls

Hughes's physical presence in Plath's "Man in Black"³¹; a ritual death that occurs every ten years haunts the background of "Lady Lazarus." In particular, Paterson's only all-rhyming stanza (stanza 17), in which Plath's spirit speaks of looking for a "successor" to her father, echoes the subject of the famous poem "Daddy" both semantically (in the conflation of a father figure and a husband) and acoustically, repeating the angry, accusing /u/ sound that prevails in the poem by constructing rhymes such as "true," "interview," "do," "two" (65-68).³²

Paradoxically, adopting Plath's voice also enables Paterson to be faithful to specific stylistic features of Dante's text. For example, if Paterson's description of the wood, in the second stanza, entails semantic deviation ("Each barren, blood-black tree was like a plate / from a sailor's book on knots, its branches bent / and pleached and coiled" 5-7) it also provides, in a manner similar to the source text, "a sort of linguistic, or onomatopoeic rendition of the ideas of torture, schism, estrangement which dominate the canto" (Spitzer 95). Therefore, while altering the meaning of the text, Paterson remains faithful to the original in deploying assonance and alliteration to reproduce the acoustic background of the wood.

Lastly, something remains to be said about the issue of pity in the two passages. Dante's pilgrim, in the course of his quest, seems sometimes to experience doubt about the decrees of divine justice because of the pity he feels for certain sinners: he faints with pity for Paolo and Francesca, admires Farinata. In Canto XIII, the pilgrim is particularly moved by the suffering of the suicides. In *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*, Alvarez reflects that Dante must have "at least understood something of their [the suicides'] anguish, and had probably shared it in its own time" (128). Dante depicts della Vigna as an honorable and loyal man. The pilgrim is overwhelmed by pity and mortified at having hurt a fellow soul, a statesman, an orator, and a poet. On the other hand, by placing della Vigna in Hell, Dante emphasizes the gravity of his sin. "So Dante is at once clearing Pier's reputation and, at the same time, damning him to an eternity of pain," writes Alvarez.

"It is an oddly ambivalent performance, as though the artist and the Christian were pulling in opposite directions" (128).

As in Dante's text, in Paterson's version author and pilgrim display contrasting attitudes, only that here the terms are inverted. As author, Paterson shares Plath's regard for craftsmanship and attention to consonance of sounds and meaning; in his very neutral reading of the poem, he emphasizes the "our" in "our dark trade." But while Dante's pilgrim is overwhelmed by pity to the point that he loses the ability to speak ("tanta pietà m'accora"; *Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Inferno* XIII.84), Paterson's pilgrim, sickened, has "no stomach" ("Forest of the Suicides" 94) for the conversation with a suicide soul that comes across as jealous, angry and vindictive.

Conclusion

A reading of "The Forest of the Suicides" that takes into account Paterson's concern with fidelity has shown that the poem is faithful to its source in repeating Canto XIII's engagement with other texts, in replacing della Vigna's characteristic rhetoric with Plath's distinctive use of half-rhymes, and in reproducing the contrasting attitudes of author and pilgrim. Transposing Dante's carefully wrought play of sound into English, the version reproduces Dante's narrative flow by channelling Plath's poetic voice, its individual timbre and style.

At this point, we can ask ourselves what kind of readership Paterson addresses with this poem. In "Fourteen Notes on the Version" Paterson emphasizes how, in another collection of poetic versions (*Orpheus*), he deliberately added new titles and avoided parallel texts to prevent the reader from the temptation of comparison: "Travesty, alas, is in the eyes of the beholder, and the more familiar readers are with the original, the greater the likelihood that travesty will be their diagnosis" (78). Similarly "The Forest of the Suicides" is not accompanied by Dante's text nor by an introduction. This format encourages the reader to consider the poem as an independent, autonomous work.³³ If, according to Paterson's definition, the poetic version can be

considered a means to allow “a poet to disown their own voice and try on another” (*The Eyes*, Afterword 78), by re-writing Dante while adopting Plath’s voice, Paterson confirms the role of the poet-translator as a master of forgery who may “legislate against travesty” (78) but is skilled in camouflage and disguise. Moreover, we could say that, by appropriating Plath’s voice and placing it in an allegorical context, Paterson not only challenges Dante’s spiritual vision, but also the view of scholars that considers Plath’s poetry a direct witness, a direct outpouring of her personal experiences. In tune with Paterson’s conception of the poetic version, the “Forest of the Suicides” can be read as an “open ended inquiry” that goes as far as challenging the idea that a poet has an autonomous voice at all beyond the adoption of a poetic persona (“Interview with Marco Fazzini;” 8). The only unquestionable voice, as Paterson reminds us, is that of the poem.

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NOTES

¹Paterson gave the lecture on May 3rd, 2012. Those more acquainted with Plath’s biography will also recognize the symbolic appearance of the poem in 2003, 40 years after Plath’s suicide.

²He adds that “a word in a poem is a unique nexus of different linguistic and acoustic and etymological and semantic strands, and it exists as a sort of culture-specific node, and not as a set of co-ordinates that can be imported into another tongue” (“Interview with Attila Dosa”).

³Similarly, in the afterword to *The Eyes*, he notes that “literal translation can be useful in providing us with a black-and-white snapshot of the original, but a version—however subjectively—seeks to restore a light and colour and perspective” (58).

⁴Using Julie Sander’s terminology, we could define a poem such as “The Forest of the Suicides” as an adaptation; in her view, adaptations are “reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts [...] with relocations of [...] a source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift” (19). However, recent scholarship has challenged the clear-cut distinction between translation and adaptation, pointing out that there are many cases that

could be defined as borderline (see Krebs, Bassnett). In her recent book on translation, Susan Bassnett includes, for instance, the poems of Michael Longley, who translates Homer transposing his characters to Northern Ireland (159). According to these views, Paterson's "version" could be seen as one of these borderline cases: they are not literal translations, but they would not exist without the source text.

⁵In *Translation*, Bassnett offers an overview of the evolution of Translation Studies in the last twenty years.

⁶He also warns of the danger of reading a version as a translation: "Translations fail when they misinterpret the language of the original, or fail to honour the rules of syntax. Versions fail when they misinterpret the spirit of the original, or fail in any one of the thousand other ways poems fail" ("Fourteen Notes on the Version" 81).

⁷"Harpy" is based the Greek ἀρπάζω, to snatch.

⁸No green leaves in that forest, only black;
no branches straight and smooth, but knotted, gnarled;
no fruits were there, but briars bearing poison.
(*Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum XIII.4-6)

⁹See Leo Spitzer: "this negative pattern, with its insistent note of schism, suggests the στέρησις or privation by which, in ancient as in medieval philosophy, the evil is clearly defined as the absence of good; Dante would make us see this as a 'wicked' forest" (97). "The Forest of the Suicides" is the contrary of the *divina foresta spessa e viva*, the *locus amoenus* that the pilgrim, after purgation, will explore when he reaches the Earthly Paradise (see *Divine Comedy*, trans. Sinclair; *Purgatorio* XXVIII.2).

¹⁰Then I stretched out my hand a little way
and from a great thornbush snapped off a branch,
at which its trunk cried out: "Why do you tear me?"
And then, when it had grown more dark with blood,
it asked again: "Why do you break me off?
Are you without all sentiment of pity?
We once were men and now are arid stumps:
your hand might well have shown us greater mercy
had we been nothing more than souls of serpents."
(*Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum XIII.31-39)

¹¹The generic "serpi" of Dante's text is also rendered by a snake with a black heart.

¹²The first conceit is so complex that most translators are content with paraphrase. See Singleton for a discussion of the verbs *adescare*, to lure, and *invoscare*, to belime (212). It is as though della Vigna is a bird and Virgil a sweet-talking branch to which the bird is being lured. Some commentators think Dante has satirically portrayed della Vigna as a pompous bureaucrat flaunting an affected style of rhetoric (see Spitzer on Vossler, 94-95). It is possible that Dante's portrayal

combined some humorous teasing with admiration for the chancellor's articulate rhetoric.

¹³To which the trunk: "Your sweet speech draws me so
that I cannot be still; and may it not
oppress you, if I linger now in talk."
(*Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum XIII.55-57)

¹⁴Biographers often draw attention to how, at seventeen, Plath confided to her diary: "I think I would like to call myself 'The girl who wanted to be god'" (Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* 40). The anthology that Paterson co-edited with Clare Brown in 2003, the same year in which "The Forest of the Suicides" was published, includes a description of Plath by Hughes that stresses her obsession with perfection: "She grew up in an atmosphere of tense intellectual competition and Germanic rigour. Her mother, a first-generation American of Austrian stock, and her father, who was German-Polish, were both university teachers. Her father, whom she worshipped, died when she was nine, and thereafter her mother raised Sylvia and her brother single-handed. Whatever teaching methods were used, Sylvia was the perfect pupil; she did every lesson double. Her whole tremendous will was bent on excelling. Finally, she emerged like the survivor of an evolutionary ordeal: at no point could she let herself be negligent or inadequate" (Brown and Paterson 220).

¹⁵I am the one who guarded both the keys
of Frederick's heart and turned them, locking and
unlocking them with such dexterity
that none but I could share his confidence;
and I was faithful to my splendid office,
so faithful that I lost both sleep and strength.

The whore who never turned her harlot's eyes
away from Caesar's dwelling, she who is
the death of all and vice of every court,
inflamed the minds of everyone against me;
and those inflamed, then so inflamed Augustus
that my delighted honors turned to sadness.

My mind, because of its disdainful temper,
believing it could flee disdain through death,
made me unjust against my own just self.
(*Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum XIII.58-72)

¹⁶In her journals, Plath writes of her father as "the buried male muse and god-creator that rises to be my mate in Ted" (381). In a letter written on November 29, 1959, she describes Ted Hughes as a father figure and a muse, somebody that could fill "that huge, sad hole I felt in having no father" (Plath, *Letters Home* 289).

¹⁷In her journal, Plath records her jealousy and establishes a comparison between her feelings towards her father and towards her husband: "Images of his [Hughes's] faithlessness with other women echo my fear of my father's relation with my mother and Lady death" (*Unabridged Journals* 447).

¹⁸Paterson could, of course, have drawn on a very large list of biographical material on Plath. However, Alvarez's version remains one of the most frequently cited. A list of biographies written before and after 2003 is available at the following website: <http://www.sylviaplath.de>.

¹⁹"For the artist himself," writes Alvarez, "art is not necessarily therapeutic. He is not automatically relieved of his fantasies by expressing them. Instead, by some perverse logic of creation, the act of formal expression may simply make the dredged-up material more readily available for him. The result of handling it in his work may well be that he finds himself living it out" (31).

²⁰"Sylvia took a risk. She gambled for the last time, having worked out that the odds were in her favour, but perhaps in her depression, not caring whether she won or lost. Her calculation went wrong and she lost" (Alvarez 32).

²¹I swear to you by the peculiar roots
of this thornbush, I never broke my faith
with him who was so worthy—with my lord.

If one of you returns into the world,
then let him help my memory, which still
lies prone beneath the battering of envy.
(*Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum XIII.73-78)

²²Plath's unorthodox take on hell is described in the autobiographical *Bell Jar*: "[...] certain people, like me, had to live in hell before they died, to make up for missing out on it after death, since they didn't believe in life after death, and what each person believed happened to him when he died" (166).

²³See Alvarez: "[T]he worse things got and the more directly she wrote about them, the more fertile her imagination became [...] turning anger, implacability, and her roused, needle-sharp sense of trouble into a kind of celebration" (22). The white coat, which does not appear in Dante, features in Plath's work as a synecdoche for "doctor," which Jacqueline Rose, in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, interprets as "the worst of male institutional and sexual power" (134). In contrappasso fashion, Plath's body, often subjected to this power in life, becomes one with it in death.

²⁴"I don't think our lives need redeeming," declares Paterson in the interview with Fazzini. "It's a Christian word, and we have no need for it. We weren't sinful in the first place. Nothing was broken, and nothing needs fixing—at least nothing except religion, and the daft ideas it bequeathed us" ("Interview with Marco Fazzini" 9).

²⁵"If [the pilgrim's] belief had been without doubts," writes Clive James, "there would never have been a journey" (*The Divine Comedy* xx).

²⁶Instead, commentators point out how Dante plays with the meaning of his name (Vigna, in Italian, means "vine") by literally transforming him into another tree, more specifically a thorn tree (in Italian, "pruno"). As commentators such as, for instance, Robin Kirkpatrick point out, this choice symbolically recalls the

crown of thorns and Christ's own suffering and, by implication, the contrast between martyrdom and suicide (see 364).

²⁷"Even in pain" comments Mark Musa, "he [della Vigna] expresses himself with a certain elegance and rhetorical forcefulness" (148).

²⁸Robin Kirkpatrick goes so far as to claim that della Vigna's poetry "painfully anticipated his suicide" (364).

²⁹See Alvarez, and Rose, among numerous biographies.

³⁰The fact that Plath's name is Sylvia, related to the Latin "silva" (wood), also contributes to making her an apt candidate for the forest. Ted Hughes, in "Red" writes of "Salvias, that your father named you after, / Like blood lobbing from a gash" (*Birthday Letters* 197-98).

³¹"Stone, strode out in your dead / Black coat / black hair till there you stood" (119-20). In "Black Coat," Hughes pictures himself unaware that, as Plath looks at him, he appears to her as coming into "single focus" with "the body of the ghost," her dead father who "had just crawled" from "the freezing sea" (*Birthday Letters* 102-03) Alvarez stresses the same features when he describes Hughes in *The Savage God*.

³²I was ten when they buried you
At twenty I tried to get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you.
A man in black with a Meinkampf look,

And a love of the rack and the screw
And I said I do, I do.
(Sylvia Plath, "Daddy" 221-23)

³³As Emily Apter notes, all translators are "to some extent counterfeit artists, experts at forgeries of voice and style" (146).

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