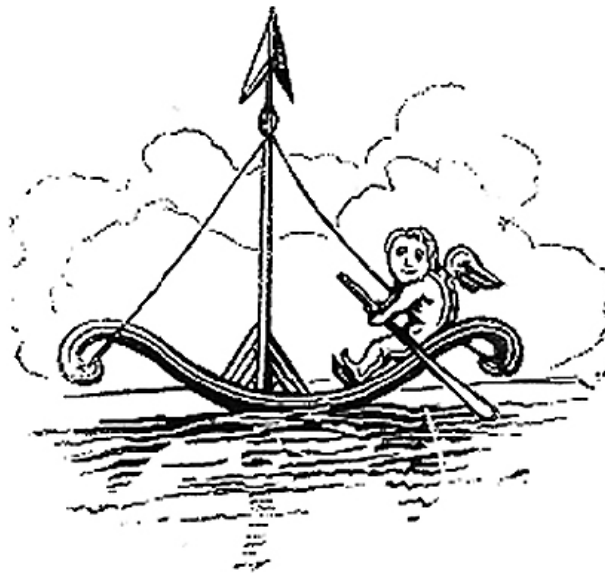


Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate



Volume 24 (2014/2015) Number 2
Waxmann Münster / New York



Editors' Note

We mourn for two members of our editorial board.

On April 21, M. H. Abrams (1912-2015) passed away. He gave us most encouraging support in the founding phase of *Connotations*.

On May 26, Ursula Brumm (1919-2015) was released from her long illness. Members of *Connotations* will remember her as a lively and most erudite participant in our symposia. An expert on American Puritan literature and culture, she shared my interest in Metaphysical Poetry. I remember her with gratitude and affection as a scholarly correspondent on diverse topics related to English and American religious poetry. Last but not least, *Connotations* benefited from her extraordinary generosity for a number of years.

Inge Leimberg

For the Editors of *Connotations*

Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate

Published by *Connotations: Society for Critical Debate*

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

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

Articles and responses should be forwarded to the editors. Articles should not exceed 12,000 words and follow the MLA Handbook. Responses should be limited to 4,000 words. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail; they should be in English and must be proofread before submission.

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© Waxmann Verlag GmbH, Münster/New York 2015
and *Connotations: Society for Critical Debate*

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Printed in Germany

ISSN 0939-5482

Connotations is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.
Contributions are indexed, for example, in the *MLA Bibliography*, the
World Shakespeare Bibliography and the *IBZ/IBR*.

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Somebody Else's Poem: Poetry and Fiction in Rudyard Kipling's "Wireless" and "Dayspring Mishandled"^{1*}

BEATRIX HESSE

For any scholar interested in the relationship between poetry and narrative fiction, the oeuvre of Rudyard Kipling immediately suggests itself as an appropriate example. For not only was Kipling equally prolific and popular as a poet and as a writer of short fiction, he also tended to incorporate examples of his verse in editions of his short fiction in the form of mottoes or epigraphs. Although this is an aspect of his short story collections that is immediately visible at first glance, there exists no consensus in the academic community as to the status and purpose of this interpolated verse. In a new German book on Kipling, Christine Müller-Scholle argues that his method of introducing short stories by a brief poem or fragment from a poem is related to the practice of baroque emblem poetry. According to Müller-Scholle, while the motto of the story recalls the motto of the emblem poem, the visual image (*pictura*) corresponds to the text of the story itself, and the epigrammatic subscription is relegated to the reader who has to draw the necessary inferences concerning the relationship between motto and picture (cf. Müller-Scholle 28). It is certainly correct that, in Kipling, the task of unearthing the relationship between the epigraph and the story generally becomes the responsibility of the reader; but this is particularly hard because the relationship tends to vary from story to story. A scholarly article of average length is clearly not the place for an in-depth investigation of all of Kipling's stories and their accompanying poems. For this reason I will consider two stories, "Wireless" and "Dayspring Mishandled," that recommend them-

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debhesse0242.htm>>.

selves for analysis because they are not merely introduced by poems but also deal with the process of poetic production itself. Hence, besides the epigraph, we also find a poem “inside” the text, which—for want of a better term—I will be calling the “embedded” poem. A poem introducing the story (or following it), by contrast, will be termed an “accompanying” poem. The two stories I have selected are moderately well-known, but still a brief plot synopsis at the outset may prove helpful.

“Wireless” was first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1902, probably prompted by the recent experiments in wireless telegraphy conducted by Guglielmo Marconi (cf. Stewart 108). The seminal idea for the story is the parallel between the (then) mysterious process of telegraphic communication and the (still) mysterious process of artistic inspiration. In the story, an early experiment in wireless telegraphy is conducted in the back room of a chemist’s shop. While the technical preparations are performed, the narrator has a conversation with Shaynor, the chemist’s assistant, who is young, tubercular and in love with a young woman named Fanny Brand, who comes in to take him for a short walk “by St. Agnes”—a first hint of the way the story is to develop. The narrator concocts a “medicine” for Shaynor’s cough from various drugs he finds in the shop, and the combined influences of drug, disease and love trigger off a fit of literary composition during which Shaynor produces some remarkable verse that the narrator recognizes as a more or less distorted version of Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes,” although Shaynor (as he later declares) has never read Keats. The narrator concludes that identical circumstances must indeed beget identical effects, and that Shaynor at least temporarily was a minor Keats. This process of imperfect transmission is mirrored by the purely technical experiment in telegraphy which also ends unsuccessfully.

While in “Wireless,” the presiding genius is Keats, in “Dayspring Mishandled” (first published in *McCall’s Magazine* in 1928), the revered dead poet is Chaucer. “Dayspring Mishandled” is the story of an elaborate hoax: Alured Castorley and James Andrew Manallace,

both formerly employed as hack writers in the Fictional Supply Syndicate, a factory for the industrial production of formulaic literature, become deadly foes out of rivalry for the love of an unnamed woman. Castorley makes good and rises to the rank of a renowned literary scholar, a specialist on Chaucer. Manallace continues to write what Kipling calls "standardised reading-matter" and nurses the woman he loves, who has been married and deserted by another man and is now terminally ill. After the woman's death, Manallace's sole object in life is to be revenged on Castorley, who refused to help the woman he once loved and (worse still) slandered her name. To effect his revenge, Manallace forges a medieval manuscript, supposedly a lost "Canterbury Tale" (adhering precisely to Castorley's pet theories on the characteristic traits of medieval manuscripts in general and Chaucer in particular) and plants the manuscript on Castorley. His plan is to make Castorley announce his find and then expose him before the entire academic community. Shortly before the plan comes to its successful culmination, Manallace retreats, overcome with scruples: Castorley is now terminally ill, he lives in a loveless marriage, and his wife (who has seen through Manallace's manoeuvres) hopes her husband will die of the exposure of the forgery. Manallace finds himself in the paradoxical situation of having to protect Castorley, and he manages to delay the exposure until after his former enemy's death.

The Embedded Poems and the Issue of Authorship

Whether we consider the embedded or the accompanying poems and their relationship to the stories, the same two main aspects constantly resurface: The question of authorship and the issue of fragmentation as well as the related problem of the missing link between poem and story. I have called this article "Somebody's Else's Poem" (in joking reference to the "somebody else's problem field" in Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), because, in both stories, the poems "quoted" in the text are in several ways always "somebody else's." To

begin with, both stories feature what might be termed a “covert” first-person narrator, who is a character in the action but about whom next to nothing is known.² These narrators, however, are not the authors of the embedded poems; they merely witness the production of poetry from one remove. Secondly, the authorship of the character who does produce the lines of poetry is also in question. In “Wireless,” Shaynor, in a process that recalls “automatic writing,”³ brings forth verse that the narrator and the reader immediately recognize as lines from Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes.” The sustained reference to wireless telegraphy suggests that Shaynor is by no means an “author” in the sense of “creative artist” but merely the “coherer,” a primitive form of radio signal detector used in the first radio receivers during the wireless telegraphy era at the beginning of the twentieth century, an instrument finely tuned in to receiving messages from outside—or rather, “beyond,” since it has been argued that the incident described in “Wireless” resembles telepathic “channelling” as customarily occurring in a spiritualistic séance (see Dillingham 131). Shaynor has thus temporarily become possessed by the spirit of the dead Keats or, possibly, by the same impersonal spirit that also possessed Keats when he composed “The Eve of St. Agnes”—for why would the spirit of Keats be so desperate to “get through” to a living writer in order to produce a poem that he had already written?

This concept of poetic creativity as a kind of demonic possession fits in perfectly with the few statements we have by Kipling himself about the mystery of literary creation. In his autobiography *Something of Myself* Kipling describes the writer as being in the grip of a personal daemon (cf. 121-22), and in a letter to Rider Haggard of 22 May 1918, he even claims—in a metaphor closely related to the imagery of “Wireless”: “We are only telephone wires” (100). That the poet is merely the “coherer” of the poetry that apparently exists, already fully formed in its precise phrasing and wording, before pen is even put to paper, is a notion Kipling was also to express in his address to the Royal Academy in 1906: “The magic of literature is in the words, and not in any man” (“Literature” 50).

The concept of poetry being the result of a kind of possession is also in evidence in "Dayspring Mishandled" more than twenty years later. Manallace describes the *furor* of poetic production as "a sort of possession, I suppose. I was in love, too. No wonder I got drunk that night. I'd *been* Chaucer for a week!" (17). The ingredients necessary for the creation of poetry are the same in both stories: there must be an initial erotic impulse, an intoxicating drink, and the influence of a dead poet. The possession by a dead writer makes the acts of poetic creation in both cases seem somewhat futile and hopelessly belated—Shaynor merely manages to compose (under enormous birth pangs) poetry that already exists, while Manallace produces nothing but second-rate Chaucerian pastiche and lacks a distinctive poetic voice of his own. In this respect, Kipling's two stories seem to anticipate later twentieth century discussions of authorship from Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" to the "death of the author" proclaimed by Roland Barthes. Concerning the initial erotic impulse, it may be added that, in another of Kipling's short stories, "The Finest Story in the World," the creation of poetry is also linked to sexual desire. In this story, Charlie, a young man gifted with genuine artistic imagination but lacking skill in verbal expression, suddenly turns into a third-rate poet when he falls in love for the first time—and the nameless first-person narrator in this story (who has a way with words but somehow only manages to produce prose) can only look on helplessly.⁴ Lacking the initial erotic impulse, the narrator of "Wireless," even though subject to the same sensory impressions as Shaynor, can only turn them into prose fiction; his words refuse to shape themselves into any likeness of poetry. This is the more regrettable since the narrator tends to rank poetry immeasurably above prose:

My throat dried but I dared not gulp to moisten it lest I should break the spell that was drawing him nearer and nearer to the high-water mark but two of the sons of Adam have reached. Remember that in all the millions permitted there are no more than five—five little lines—of which one can say: "These are the pure Magic. These are the clear Vision. The rest is only poetry." (155)

These five lines comprise two from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (and these Shaynor chases through five variations, still remaining comparatively far off) and three lines from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," which the narrator repeats to himself, mantra-like, while witnessing Shaynor's effort of composition. The sly reference to "Kubla Khan" reveals the narrator's concept of poetic creativity as a state of divine madness, facilitated by intoxicating substances. Arguably, however, "Kubla Khan" may also be said to serve as a model for the construction of the entire story, since this poem is the prime example of a fragmented poem shaped into a coherent structure by a frame narrative.⁵

The Fragmentation of the Embedded Poems

This brings me to my second major point, the fragmentation of the poems within the two stories. In "Wireless," as we have seen, only individual lines of poems apparently considered familiar to the implied reader are being quoted and, more importantly, initially *misquoted*, which produces a jarring effect—we are eager to correct the speaker, telling him how the line should actually go.

Against this background, it is worthwhile to examine Shaynor's variations on Keats in greater detail. There are only two passages (of one line and six consecutive lines respectively) that Shaynor more or less gets right: "And threw warm gules on Madeleine's young breast" ("Wireless" 228; "The Eve of St Agnes" l. 218), and

Candied apple, quince and plum and gourd,
And jellies smoother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon,
Manna and dates in Argosy transferred
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

("Wireless" 233; "The Eve of St. Agnes" ll. 265-70)

Kipling uses the beginning of "The Eve of St. Agnes" ("St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was! / The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

/ The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass"; ll. 1-3) to create what we might call a "myth of origin," a fantasy on how lines like this may have come to be written. Shaynor's first approach to the poem consists of nothing but a stammering expression of immediate sensory perceptions: "Very cold it was. Very cold / The hare—the hare—the hare— / The birds—" ("Wireless" 228). The second attempt, however, already produces a perfectly regular iambic pentameter line: "The hare, in spite of fur, was very cold" ("Wireless" 229). Similarly, when approaching the line "Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died" ("The Eve of St. Agnes" l. 200), the first variation ("The little smoke of a candle that goes out," "Wireless" 231) mentions the bare facts in a sentence that closely resembles ordinary speech—the only peculiarity that may be considered in some way "poetic" is the adjective "little." The second variation reads "The little smoke that dies in moonlight cold" ("Wireless" 231), again adding a regular metrical structure and appearing generally more self-consciously "poetical" in its transformation of the matter-of-fact "goes out" into the figurative "dies" and the use of inversion in "moonlight cold."

In the following example, Keats's "Like pious incense from a censer old, / Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death, / Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith" ("The Eve of St. Agnes," ll. 7-9) becomes "Incense in a censer— / Before her darling picture framed in gold— / Maiden's picture—angel's portrait—" ("Wireless" 229). This may be considered an instance of the secularization of the poem in its transfer from the Romantic to the Victorian period. The "sweet Virgin's picture" in Shaynor's hands becomes "her darling picture," "maiden's picture" and "angel's portrait," and since these terms appear semantically interchangeable, the "angel" is obviously but a term of endearment for a mortal woman. This variation to some extent unravels the religious imagery of "The Eve of St. Agnes" as well, suggesting that Keats's "sweet Virgin" is not the Virgin Mary but Fanny Brawne. It may also be useful to remember that—as Dillingham points out—the love letters between Keats and Fanny Brawne had only recently been published when Kipling wrote

this story, shocking Victorian readers with their frank sensuality (see Dillingham 134).

In his next effort, Shaynor produces a shift from the third to the first person, turning Keats's phrase "and his weak spirit fails / To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails" (ll. 17-18) into "And my weak spirit fails / To think how the dead must freeze / Beneath the churchyard mould" ("Wireless" 229). While "The Eve of St. Agnes" provides an insight into the private thoughts and feelings of several characters (in what we would call a "figural narrative situation" in prose fiction), the variation shifts to a stance of radical subjectivity (as often associated with Romantic poetry). In "Wireless," a direct insight into the workings of another person's mind no longer seems possible, and the idea of wireless communication and telepathy in all likelihood is deemed so very interesting just because it occurs but rarely.

The final example shows us Shaynor's fit of creativity on the decline. The original "meantime the frost-wind blows / Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet / Against the window-panes" ("The Eve of St. Agnes" ll. 322-24) is rendered as the comparatively remote "The sharp rain falling on the window-pane, / Rattling sleet—the wind-blown sleet" ("Wireless" 234). As in the beginning, only general sensory impressions are recorded, and the dash (that typical punctuation mark of modernist stream-of-consciousness) is reappearing. At this point, Shaynor only quotes individual words correctly: "sharp," "window-pane," and "sleet." Likewise, his repeated attempt to (re-)create the three "magic" lines from "Ode to a Nightingale" only leads to the reader's repeated frustration—for each word or phrase that Shaynor gets right in each of his five consecutive attempts there is always something else that he gets wrong.⁶

The original passage in Keats reads: "Charm'd casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. / Forlorn! The very word is like a bell" ("Ode to a Nightingale" ll. 69-71). Shaynor's first attempt, "A fairyland for you and me / Across the foam—beyond ... / A magic foam, a perilous sea" ("Wireless" 234) presents a promising first approach since he gets at least four terms right:

"foam," "magic," "perilous sea," and "fairyland," even though the latter may be considered a Victorian domestication of the archaic (and presumably more wild and dangerous) "faery land."⁷ The second attempt is very far off ("Our windows fronting on the dangerous foam"; "Wireless" 235), because Shaynor has retained merely "foam" and replaced "perilous" by "dangerous." The next variation ("Our open casements facing desolate seas / Forlorn—forlorn"; "Wireless" 235) is rather more promising, since Shaynor has hit on "open casements," "seas" and the repetition of the term "forlorn"; but we must keep in mind that, in return, he discards all the words and phrases he had already found in his first attempt at rendering the line. The fourth example ("Our windows facing on the desolate seas / And pearly foam of magic fairyland"; "Wireless" 236) retrieves some of the lost material from the initial attempt ("foam," "magic," "fairyland") but at the same time loses two discoveries from the previous example ("casements" and "forlorn"). The fifth and last rendering ends up being further off than the initial one: "Our magic windows fronting on the sea, / The dangerous foam of desolate seas" ("Wireless" 236), leaving the beholder and the reader rather disappointed.

While the verse fragments in "Wireless" may merely prompt the reader to correct them, the fragmentation of poetry in "Dayspring Mishandled" invites a more creative contribution, for here the reader is in fact asked to imaginatively create the poem him/herself after having been given merely a bare outline of plot—an undesired marriage, an undesired crusade, and a man deliberately collaborating in his own entrapment⁸—and altogether 25 lines of verse. These belong to three different parts of the pastiche Chaucer poem which is itself supposed to be a fragment of 107 lines. The use of the fragment as a literary genre conforms to Kipling's general aesthetic convictions at this point of his career. In *Something of Myself* he claims that the removal of superfluous material increases the energy potential of a literary text: "A tale from which pieces have been raked out is like a fire that has been poked. One does not know that the operation has been performed, but everyone feels the effect" (121). In his later, more

“modernist” short fiction, Kipling sometimes performed the “operation” so rigorously that critics were (and still are) at a loss to describe what actually happens in the story—the example of “Mrs Bathurst” most immediately springs to mind. Accordingly, the additional energy that is being produced is the energy of the reader, not of the author, since it is the reader who is required to fill in the blanks. Quite fittingly, “Dayspring Mishandled” is a story largely concerned with the relationship between poet and reader, with the reader Castorley providing the guidelines for the finished poem and thus contributing rather more to it than the ostensible “author” Manallace. A further peculiarity of the poem “Dayspring Mishandled” (which bears the same title as the story that houses it) is that, like the story itself, it is accompanied by another poem, in this case the fragment of a monk’s hymn written in *vulgate* Latin: “Illa alma Mater ecca, secum afferens me acceptum. Nicolaus Atrib.” This accompanying poem turns out to conceal an encoded hidden meaning, since—as Manallace points out to the narrator and hence to the reader—it is an instance of an acrostic: you need to read the first letters in each line from top to bottom and then the second letters, which gives you “James A. Manallace fecit.” (Manallace’s pun on “fecit” and “faked” is probably deliberate). The secret that the poem will yield to an observant reader, then, is nothing more profound than a declaration of authorship, but authorship in this case seems to be essential to convey a sense of identity. At first glance, we tend to decipher the beginning of the acrostics as “I am,” which we may read as an adaptation of Descartes: “I write, therefore I am.”

Accompanying Poems, the Issue of Authorship and the “Missing Link” in “Wireless”

This has brought us back full circle to the issue of authorship, and the question of authorship also presents a significant issue with respect to the “accompanying poems.” As pointed out above, in most of his

collections of short fiction, Kipling inserted poems or fragments of poems between the individual stories, and often a poem belongs to one particular story in the manner of an epigraph or motto. After its initial magazine publication, "Wireless" was included in *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), where it is accompanied by "Kaspar's Song in 'Varda,'" for which a source is given: "from the Swedish of Stagnelius." The accompanying poem hence is another instance of "somebody else's poem"—at least apparently, and has sent critics on a wild goose chase for origins. In an article in the *Journal of English Studies* of January 1965, C. A. Bodelsen pointed out that Erik Johan Stagnelius (1792-1823) never wrote a poem remotely resembling Kipling's "translation," and, incidentally, that there is no work called "Varda." Thus, the ostensible "somebody else's poem" turns out to be Kipling's after all. As we have seen, the difficulty of establishing "authorship" is a central concern in both stories under examination, but what is the purpose of Kipling's denial of authorship in this case? Why does he present a poem that he has composed himself as an "objet trouvé"? The answer may lie in the rather tenuous relationship between poem and story, which leaves it to the reader to provide the "missing link." By pretending that the poem was "found" rather than deliberately created for this specific purpose, Kipling largely declines responsibility for the gap between the poem and the story.

The poem itself, which is brief enough to be quoted here in its entirety, is a rather poor specimen, which Lisa Lewis has even described as deliberate parody (qtd. in McGivering).

Kaspar's Song in 'Varda'
(From the Swedish of Stagnelius.)

Eyes aloft, over dangerous places,
The children follow where Psyche flies,
And, in the sweat of their upturned faces,
Slash with a net at the empty skies.

So it goes they fall amid brambles,
And sting their toes on the nettle-tops,
Till, after a thousand scratches and scrambles,
They wipe their brows, and the hunting stops.

Then to quiet them comes their father
 And stills the riot of pain and grief,
 Saying, 'Little ones, go and gather
 Out of my garden a cabbage-leaf.

'You will find on it whorls and clots of
 Dull grey eggs that, properly fed,
 Turn, by way of the worm, to lots of
 Radiant Psyches raised from the dead.'

'Heaven is beautiful, Earth is ugly,'
 The three-dimensioned preacher saith;
 So we must not look where the snail and the slug lie
 For Psyche's birth. ... And that is our death! (212)

The apparently openly didactic poem begins with a description of a group of children chasing butterflies. In the course of the poem, the children's father forces them to acknowledge the singularly unprepossessing physical and material foundations of the beautiful ephemeral creature. In the final section of the poem, the butterfly is expressly compared to the human soul. The reference to "[r]adiant Psyches raised from the dead" in the last line of the poem's penultimate stanza suggests a rather obvious resurrection motif.

We can only forge a link with the story if we assume that the main point of the narrative is not—as previously assumed—the mystery of literary creation but the survival of the soul after death. In this case, the interest in the new wireless telegraphy as foregrounded in the story would reside in its ability not to overcome spatial distance but the border between the living and the dead; the category to be overcome would be not space but time. Carrington sums up Kipling's initial fascination with Marconi's invention after his cruise with the Channel Fleet in 1898 in the following terms: "If messages could pass through the impalpable 'aether,' as if material obstructions in space were of no account, why could not time be equally penetrable?" (440). This would also explain the narrator's cryptic comment: "For reasons of my own, I was deeply interested in Marconi's experiments at their outset in England" (216). What are these mysterious "reasons of his own" he fails to specify? Dillingham, for instance, believes they refer

to the narrator's profound desire to prove that communication with the dead is indeed possible (see 135-36).⁹

Accompanying Poems—Authorship and Missing Links in "Dayspring Mishandled"

The issue of the accompanying poem is even more complex in the case of "Dayspring Mishandled." The story is followed by "Gertrude's Prayer," the complaint of a girl separated from her lover and forced into a loveless marriage, which is part of the Chaucerian pastiche composed by Manallace.¹⁰ As in any example of literary pastiche, the effect of this poem is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, this is Kipling showing off, demonstrating his expertise in literary ventriloquism, his ability to write in different voices, just as in the case of "Kaspar's Song in 'Varda.'" On the other hand, the pastiche is to some extent defined by being deficient: it is not quite Chaucer, just like the lines produced by Shaynor in "Wireless" are "not quite Keats." To give the reader an opportunity of judging the success of the pastiche, "Gertrude's Prayer" is also presented in full.

Gertrude's Prayer

That which is marred at birth Time shall not mend,
Nor water out of bitter well make clean;
All evil thing returneth at the end,
Or elseway walketh in our blood unseen.
Whereby the more is sorrow in certaine—
Dayspring mishandled cometh not agen.

To-bruized be that slender, sterling spray
Out of the oake's rind that should betide
A branch of girt and goodliness, straightway
Her spring is turned on herself, and wried
And knotted like some gall or veiney wen—
Dayspring mishandled cometh not agen.

Noontide repayeth never morning-bliss—
Sith noon to morn is incomparable;
And, so it be our dawning goth amiss,

None other after-hour serveth well.
 Ah! Jesu-Moder, pitie my oe paine—
 Dayspring mishandled cometh not againe! (33)

As readers, we approach this poem with a twofold purpose: we use it to create our mental image of Manallace's poem (of which we have only been allowed tantalizing glimpses so far),¹¹ and we read it as a comment on Manallace's own situation when composing the poem, as a kind of epilogue or conclusion to the story itself. Particularly in the second stanza, a number of direct verbal echoes between poem and story occur. The references to "oake's rind" and "some gall" vividly recall Manallace's boiling of the historical type of ink he uses to pen the manuscript:

I found him, for instance, one week-end, in his toolshed-scully, boiling a brew of slimy barks which were, if mixed with oak-galls, vitriol and wine, to become an ink-powder. We boiled it till the Monday, and it turned into an adhesive stronger than birdlime, and entangled us both. (8-9)

The motif of self-entrapment, as we have noted, is prominent in the story, and it also resurfaces in "Gertrude's Prayer": once in the immediate vicinity of "oake's rind" and "gall," when we learn that the spring of the young spray "is turned on herself," and, more explicitly, in the warning in the first stanza: "All evil thing returneth at the end / Or elseway walketh in our blood unseen." The evil that "walks in the blood" may be Manallace's own obsession with revenge, but it may also be a reference to Castorley's death from a lingering internal disease (first diagnosed as "gall-stones," which on a secondary level turns the reference to "gall" into a rather sick joke). More significantly, the "evil walking in the blood unseen" might refer to the "paralysis" contracted by the woman Manallace (and, in his fashion, Castorley) loved, which more recent critics (for instance Angus Wilson) have diagnosed to be syphilis. Most profoundly, however, Manallace's situation is summed up by the statement that finishes every stanza: "Dayspring mishandled cometh not againe," and, to my mind, this sounds very much like the single "inspired line" that triggered the

writing not only of the poem but of the entire narrative. Manallace's early youth has been misspent as a hack writer, in his relations to the woman he loved he was merely allowed to nurse her in her terminal illness, and his single masterpiece may never be published. The main interests of his later life, all revolving around the creation of his elaborate fraud, have been more or less posthumous activities: "I've been dead since—April, Fourteen, it was" (20), he declares.

However, "Dayspring Mishandled" is not only succeeded by a poem supposedly written by one of the characters in the story, it is also preceded by a brief motto in French:

C'est moi, c'est moi, c'est moi!
 Je suis la Mandragore!
 La fille des beaux jours qui s'éveille à l'aurore—
 Et qui chante pour toi!

As E. N. Houlton has pointed out in an article of 1986:

[I]t is not so easy to see the point of the epigraph, which comes from a story written by Charles Nodier in 1832, in which a young man finds himself in "le jardin des lunatiques à Glasgow" and is haunted by the sinister plant, the Mandragore, which sings repeatedly the little song quoted by Kipling. (66)

Nodier's *La fée aux miettes* actually is a full-length novel, containing the brief poem quoted by Kipling—and thus yet another instance of poetry in fiction. Jane Tompkins has read the mandrake (which, according to tradition, is a root that screams when pulled out of the soil and a dangerous narcotic) as an image of Manallace's revenge, since the revenge plot has its origin in Manallace's "dayspring" and is hence "la fille des beaux jours." What is more relevant for my present purpose is that Kipling has here—for once—included a poem that actually is "somebody else's," and, what is more, also a genuine fragment, since the average reader could not be expected to recognize the context. Since the fragment is also in French, some readers will be excluded from understanding it simply on grounds of language—in this case the epigraph has a purely decorative function.

If we consider the content of the fragment, the first conspicuous feature is that the mandrake in the poem does not scream but sing and may hence be considered an image of the poet. What it does sing, however, always amounts to one and the same thing: "C'est moi, c'est moi, c'est moi" — "It's me, it's me, it's me," much like the acrostics in Manallace's "The Monk's Hymn": "I am." While in Nodier, poetry and imagination as represented by the mandrake provide an escape from the disappointments of real life, in Kipling the composition of poetry becomes an act of self-assertion.

As in the case of the supposedly "found" butterfly poem that precedes "Wireless," it is once again left to the reader to provide the connection. In this manner, Kipling allows the reader to contribute to the creation of the composite artwork consisting of both poetry and prose fiction, thus making not only the poem but also the short story "somebody else's," namely the reader's.

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NOTES

¹This paper was originally presented at the *Connotations* symposium entitled "Poetry in Fiction" at Mülheim in 2013.

²This type of narrator is very common in Kipling's short fiction and is frequently tacitly assumed to be a mere projection of the personality of the author. This assumption may have to be questioned at some point, but this aspect would also go beyond the scope of this paper.

³It may be interesting to note that Kipling's sister Alice had experimented with automatic writing from 1893, having read papers on the subject by Frederick W. H. Myers. She later became a famous medium under the name of "Mrs. Holland."

⁴A comparison between "Wireless" and "The Finest Story in the World" is instructive in yet another way: in "The Finest Story," artistic inspiration is limited to the seminal "vision" of the events to be depicted, while the verbal expression in the medium of prose is considered a conscious craft. The inspiration for poetry as presented in "Wireless," by contrast, does not consist of images but of words.

⁵On "Kubla Khan" as a model for the construction of Wharton's novel *Hudson River Bracketed*, see Saunders, this volume.

⁶There is one variation in the story I myself have not been able to make sense of: in the 1904 edition of *Traffics and Discoveries*, the narrator even misquotes the three lines from "Kubla Khan" after insisting that they represent "the pure Magic," "the clear Vision," substituting "spot" for "place." This "mistake" has been tacitly corrected in later editions, but it may be that it was not a mistake in the first place and intended as a signal indicating the unreliability of the narrator. On narrative unreliability in "Wireless," see Dillingham.

⁷The OED entry for "faery" e.g. notes: "sometimes (esp. in recent use) the form *faerie* is deliberately chosen to describe beings which differ from the conventional representation of fairies as small, delicate winged creatures, esp. in being more dangerous and sinister."

⁸As the synopsis shows, all these plot elements reappear in the frame narrative.

⁹The butterfly motif and the concern with the possibility of overcoming temporal distance rather strangely seem to foreshadow the works of another writer equally famous for his poetry and his prose, Vladimir Nabokov, who produced one of the most recognized instances of an aesthetic structure composed of both poetry and narrative in his novel *Pale Fire*. This novel was discussed by a number of participants in the original conference (see Charney, "Adopting Styles, Inserting Selves: Nabokov's *Pale Fire*," and Kullmann's response, this vol.). Incidentally, Nabokov was also to make use of the acrostic as a means of communication with the dead in his late short story "The Vane Sisters."

¹⁰Incidentally, this was not Kipling's only attempt at Chaucerian pastiche; he also composed "The Prologue to the Master-Cook's Tale," "The Justice's Tale," and "The Consolations of Memory."

¹¹Harry Ricketts has pointed out the parallels between "Dayspring Mishandled" and Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers*, in which the reader is also finally denied a full vision of the supreme artwork; cf. Ricketts 381.

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Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan": Re-Creating Xanadu in an American Landscape*

JUDITH P. SAUNDERS

Edith Wharton anchors her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed* in a poem, drawing elaborate attention throughout the narrative to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1797-98). In so doing, she employs the two basic types of literary allusion identified by Gregory Machacek in his 2007 historical analysis—indirect reference and phraseological appropriation (see Machacek 526). She draws on wording, images, and concerns from Coleridge's text to develop plot, setting, character, and theme in this *Künstlerroman*, the story of a young writer's maturation. She prepares the way for sustained reprise of the poem by naming it overtly early on, but the intricate role it plays in her cross-genre conception has yet to be adequately analyzed and appreciated.

"Kubla Khan" is introduced at a critical moment in the opening action, and it is recalled or quoted at key points thereafter: it functions as the gateway to the protagonist's romantic, creative, and cultural awakening. That awakening takes place chiefly in the Hudson River Valley, a setting that garners special significance through iteration of the central allusion. Forging suggestive parallels with the dreamscape of Xanadu, Wharton endows the history, culture, architecture, and natural environment of the Mid-Hudson region with creative potency. Magically transformative properties borrowed from Coleridge in particular—and from the world of poetry in the largest sense—help her celebrate it as a place that inspires and nourishes artistic vision.

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsaunders0242.htm>>.

The novel follows protagonist Vance Weston through five to six formative years, from the age of nineteen to twenty-five. Initially a naively aspiring writer fresh out of college, he gains literary and personal sophistication as the novel progresses. By the end of these years of apprenticeship, he has published several critically acclaimed works of fiction. At the same time he has gained the discernment and humility to abandon a number of false starts and inferior manuscripts. Fully in command of his own powers as a writer, he is embarked upon a promising new book project. Wharton's well documented affection for Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is plainly evident in the design of young Weston's artistic development (cf. Wharton, *A Backward Glance* 71). From the outset, tellingly, she emphasizes the importance of place, indicating that setting will serve not as mere backdrop for action but as subject. As preamble to the parallels she will establish between the Hudson Valley and Khan's kingdom, she contrasts Weston's place of origin with the East Coast region to which he migrates.

Wielding satiric wit, Wharton excoriates the physical and cultural flatness of the Midwestern states in which her protagonist has been reared and educated. The very names of the towns in which he and his family have lived—Hallelujah, Missouri, and Euphoria, Illinois—point toward the worship of materialism, “the religion of business” dominating such “go-ahead” (HRB 43) hives of commercialism.¹ The inhabitants of these architecturally drab, intellectually barren towns take no interest in the cultural achievements of “Historic Times” (HRB 36). They simultaneously scorn and fear their neglected cultural heritage, “the icy draughts of an unknown past” (36). Their attention is focused exclusively on the “prosperous present” in which “industrial development” is regarded as “humanity's supreme achievement” (36, 43).

Wharton makes no attempt to be even-handed in her presentation of the American Midwest. Concentrating on the “thousands of Euphorias” (HRB 13) sprouting into existence by means of artificially engineered booms in real estate and stocks, she ignores the natural

landscapes that might make some claim on readers' aesthetic sensibilities. Her object is to rain ridicule on the complacent anti-intellectualism and "social insipidity" (13) of her protagonist's early environment. Despite his family's prosperity, his background is impoverished in all the ways that matter. Yearning vaguely to "get at [...] something deeper" (13) than what Euphoria offers, young Vance must contend with enormous disadvantages. If he is to make his way to "Parnassus" and "be a writer," he will need to compensate for the many gaps in his education and learn to question "Euphoria values" (25, 33). As the novel moves forward, the shabby values of materialism and technophilia in which Vance has been indoctrinated will be "supplanted by the values of the Hudson River environment" (Wershoven 136).

I

Propelling her young protagonist, all unprepared, into the greater New York City area, including the city itself but emphasizing the Hudson Valley region just north of the metropolis proper, Wharton traces his responses to this wholly different world. Arriving in Paul's Landing, an invented town resembling any number of small settlements along the Hudson (Garrison, Tarrytown, and Cold Spring, for instance), Vance initially is struck by what it lacks. Instead of automobiles, he sees horse-drawn buggies; in place of spanking new buildings and roads, he observes ramshackle houses along a "rutty lane" (HRB 39). The "dingy" (39) home of his relatives lacks electric lighting, running hot water, and a telephone. The people he meets manifest "an absence of initiative" (43); they are not motivated to "hustle [...] around" to acquire the "luxuries" (42) a Euphorian would take for granted. Even as he assesses these apparent deficiencies, however, Vance is impressed by the presence of something new to him: a lushness and fertility in the natural environment. Paul's Landing is "a long crooked sort of town on a high ridge, with gardens full of big

trees, and turfy banks sloping down" to the water (HRB 39). On his first morning, his imagination already fired by the natural properties of the Hudson Valley, he writes a poem inspired by the "taller, fuller and more heavy-branched" tree-growth (46).

Continuing her study in contrasts, Wharton shows Vance opening himself to the positive influence of the past. Curious about the Willows, an "old house" his cousins are hired to air and clean, he accompanies them there (HRB 52). His interest is stirred by the luxuriant foliage of its grounds and strange intricacy of its exterior, "veiled in the showering gold-green foliage of two ancient weeping willows" (57). Vance finds himself fascinated by its architecture, which features balconies, turrets, steep roofs and "elaborately ornamented brackets" (57). Its obvious age impresses him deeply. For the first time in his life, he is moved by the power of the past and motivated to explore it instead of dismissing it. Drawn to its "elusive mystery," he asks himself, "'why wasn't I ever told about the Past before?'" (62). He enters the library, finds an open book upon a table and begins to read, only to be swept away by the "beautiful" and "incredible" opening words of "Kubla Khan" (62). Just as the "hidden chords of his soul" begin to vibrate to the "inner music" (62) of the poem, Halo Spear unexpectedly steps into the room. The poem mediates their first encounter: "'Oh, who wrote this?'" Vance demands, without waiting to introduce himself or explain his presence (64). Naming the poet, and entering without question into the "ecstasy" of his response to Coleridge's famous lines, Halo immediately assumes the role of literary mentor to this clearly receptive, though ignorant, young man. She quotes from memory, "her rich voice" giving "new relief" (65) to the words of the poem.

This scene at the Willows marks the beginning of Vance's new life. He recognizes at a stroke the deficiencies of his literary education. It has been limited, in poetry, to the work of writers such as James Whitcomb Riley and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, along with "hackneyed old 'pieces' from Whittier and Longfellow" and occasional glimpses of Whitman's work and "the new stuff" from "one or two of the 'high-

brow' reviews" (HRB 63). In "Kubla Khan" he encounters something "his soul had been alight for": "this *was* poetry." Hungry for more such deeply satisfying literary experiences, and dismayed by the extent of his newly perceived ignorance, he launches himself into an intense if unsystematic project of self-education that will occupy much of his energy during the next few years of his life. His first fevered attempts "to hack a way through the dense jungle of the past" (126) take place at the Willows, in the private library that serves as a treasure trove for his imaginative explorations. He responds to the literary legacy preserved in this library as eagerly as to the fantastical architecture and overgrown garden of the "old house" containing it.

Bringing together the legacy of "the Past," the power of poetry, and the guidance of Halo Spear, Vance's encounter with "Kubla Khan" lends critical shaping momentum to his vocational and personal energies (see HRB 62). Almost immediately, moreover, the poem plays a prominent role in a second crucially important scene. Following up on their initial meeting, Halo offers to take Vance to a mountain ridge called Thundertop to view the sun rise over the Hudson River. Driving in pre-dawn darkness up "the wooded road to the mountain," Vance again is mesmerized by the profusion of trees, particularly the play of leaves and branches in the illumination of the automobile headlights. He and Halo are travelling, it seems to him, "through an eternity of overarching foliage [...] to unknown distances" (98). At the end of this surreal drive, they hike along "a tree-shadowed trail" up a "rocky spur," from which they see "the outspread earth [...] waiting [...] for the light" (98). For a few suspense-packed moments, they watch "the red edge of sun" move across the horizon and the river begins to shine "bright as steel" (99). At this moment of diurnal transition, Vance looks at Halo, on the brink of speech but unable to articulate his reaction to "the misty splendours below and the pure light above" (100). Meeting his eyes, his companion suggests that they both are thinking of precisely the same thing: "'Kubla Khan'" (99). Vance nods in agreement. The majesty of river, forest, mountain, and valley assumes uncanny properties in the

dawning light, reminding both characters of the magical world of Xanadu. This moment of mutual recognition links the creative power of the sun, which calls "a new world" into being from darkness, to the creative power of the human artifice in Coleridge's poem (cf. HRB 90).

With the evocation of "Kubla Khan," the first portion of the Thundertop scene reaches its climax. Having watched the new day establish itself, Vance and Halo next hike down to a "rocky pool encircled with turf" (HRB 100), a "magical place" (102) in the woods that Halo regards as one of her private "treasures" (88). Over a campfire breakfast, they converse intensely about literature, history, and ideas (see 101). Vance confides his ambitions and doubts, and she assures him of her belief that he has "the gift ... the real gift" (106, Wharton's ellipsis). This shared morning on Thundertop strengthens the connection between Halo and Vance, confirming their essential compatibility and sealing her role as his mentor. Taking him to see a panoramic view of the Hudson River Valley, furthermore, she completes the thematically central web of connections to which "Kubla Khan" serves as key: art and history now are linked to nature.

In the library at the Willows, Vance had realized something his education in the Midwest never taught him, namely, that art is not produced in a cultural vacuum. His arresting encounter there with Coleridge's poem revealed to him, with sudden intensity, that a familiarity with the rich and multifaceted legacy of past generations contributes essentially to the development of both the appreciative and the imaginative faculties. In the follow-up scene at Thundertop, Vance experiences a second, equally intense leap of understanding. Watching dawn break over the larger vista of the Hudson River landscape, he realizes for the first time the creative vigor, the self-renewing beauty, inherent in elemental and organic forces. These vital natural powers work in humbling counterpoint to human activity, nurturing and inspiring the artist.² The naming of "Kubla Khan" at the moment of dawning day underlines the relationship between

human art and natural process: Vance experiences both poem and sunrise as acts of "creative exaltation" (HRB 105).

His encounters with Halo at the Willows and at Thundertop bring Vance into contact with precisely the elements his early background has denied him: cultural history and natural glory. Within days of coming east, he meets people whose experience with the present is imbued with intelligent appreciation of the past; equally important, he finds himself in a natural environment more fertile and luxuriant than that of the Plains states, one more varied in terrain, more majestic in effect. His "perspective" on human history has been "completely altered," in consequence, "transforming his world" (HRB 95). As the novel proceeds, the natural and cultural environments of New York and the Hudson Valley continue, in combination, to influence his development. The scenes inaugurating that development and launching the references to "Kubla Khan" take place early on, in Book II, and occupy just a few pages: 59-71 (the Willows) and 97-107 (Thundertop). Since the novel is 560 pages in length, with seven Books in all, Wharton employs a number of strategies to sustain the impact of these initial revelatory experiences.

Iteration is a critical tool. Vance and Halo both find themselves haunted by their early encounters: throughout the ensuing narrative, their highly charged recollections surge into the foreground of awareness, spilling repeatedly into the present moment of the text. Vance muses again and again on the moment when Halo "had surprised him over 'Kubla Khan' at the Willows" (HRB 88). More than once, Halo recalls the same incident, thinking of the "unknown youth" wild to discover "who had written 'Kubla Khan'" (499, 91). When Halo allows Vance to help dust books, "her appearance at the Willows, vivid and inspiring, instantly lifted him to the brow of Thundertop" (128). Even while courting another girl, Vance contrasts his feelings for the sweet and childlike Laura Lou with his memory of Halo's effect on him: "that girl on Thundertop" had "set his brain on fire" with "the shock of new ideas, the stimulus of the words she used, the allusions she made, the sense of an unknown world of

beauty and imagination widening about him as she talked" (212). Consistently Vance pays tribute to "the sunrise from Thundertop" as one of the "imaginative shocks that flung open the gates of wonder" (265). There "he had stood so high that he had seen the new day flood the earth below him [...] and beauty had brimmed his soul with the same splendor" (297). Halo likewise returns in memory to that mountain sunrise "above the Hudson": "they had watched light return to the world [...] a streaming of radiances, like the first breaking of life out of chaos!" (221).

Occasionally they recollect the scenes in conversation together: "I suppose it seems a long time to you since you read your poems to me on Thundertop," Halo suggests at one point, and he responds by thanking her for the literary guidance she has provided: "you taught me a lot that day that I haven't forgotten" (HRB 228). When Vance first recognizes that he is drawn to Halo romantically, he indicates to her that such feelings originated, all unrecognized, in their very first meetings: "You remember Thundertop?" (439) he asks her. Much later, when she has freed herself from her husband, Halo admits that her feelings for Vance similarly can be traced "far back—the day we went up Thundertop" (556). Each of the two scenes highlighting "Kubla Khan" is reintroduced into the narrative on at least six or seven different occasions. With every new mention, their importance to the inner lives of the characters is reinforced: real-time experience is overlaid with the added weight of memory. Selective omniscience, which alternates loosely between Vance and Halo, allows Wharton to demonstrate the importance of the episodes to both participants. Re-entering the storyline with persistently renewed immediacy, these few hours assume a resonance that far exceeds the narrative space allotted to them.

Vance's ongoing preoccupation with Coleridge further attests to the significance of the "beautiful [...] incredible words" of "Kubla Khan" (HRB 62) to his personal life and vocational efforts. He disconcerts his editors at "The Hour," who had expected him to "tackle a contemporary," with an article addressing "Coleridge Today" (270). It becomes

increasingly evident that his appreciative capacities are not engaged by the “modern bluster” (270) he is expected to review: Coleridge represents for him an unequalled standard of excellence. Having familiarized himself with a wide range of that nineteenth-century writer’s oeuvre, he later finds himself quoting from the poem “Love” to describe his growing attachment to Halo. Only Coleridge offers words to articulate the profundity of his feelings: “‘all thoughts, all motions, all delights, whatever stirs this mortal frame—’ the poet whom Elinor Lorburn loved had summed it up long ago” (451).

“Kubla Khan” is reintroduced into the narrative emphatically in Book V, when Vance chooses Elinor Lorburn as the subject of his first extended work of fiction. He projects himself imaginatively into the life of this woman who had “renounced but not repined” (HRB 333). Once “young and eager,” she had been “a creature apt for love, but somehow caught in the cruel taboos and inhibitions of her day” (332, 359). Gradually becoming the “mature, resigned woman” depicted in the portrait that hangs in her library, she found “compensation” for what life denied her in “her books,” that is, in “poetry, dreams, visions” (333, 359). Vance titles his book *Instead* because it conveys “the mysterious substitution of one value for another” (337). Finding himself inspired by the environment of the Willows, a house imbued with “all the shadowy power of the past,” he composes his novella in his subject’s library (“that magical room”), leaving his paper and notebooks on her table “beside her Coleridge,” the book that “still lay open at ‘Kubla Khan’” (330, 336, 333). Halo encourages and assists him, meeting him every day at the Willows and providing the biographical and sociohistorical facts he needs to flesh out his fictionalized version of Elinor’s life story. Their intense collaboration continues through nearly two months of summer, and when it ends Vance finally recognizes the sensuous and erotic components of his feelings for Halo—who now is married, as he is himself, and therefore unavailable.

It is fitting that the writing of his book be overshadowed by the painful discovery of thwarted love, given his theme. Discussing Elinor

Lorburn's life, Halo and Vance acknowledge that her situation is representative of human experience in general: to be human entails having "to give up things" (HRB 358). "Weren't we all like Elinor Lorburn," Vance wonders, "looking out, watching for what never came?" (332). In art, however, "one can recapture [...] sometimes—in another form" the things renounced (358). Reiterated description of "the sad spinster who had leaned on winter evenings on the green velvet table, reading Coleridge" (359) emphasizes the double theme dominating *Instead*: the disappointments of life, on the one hand, and the consolations of art, on the other (529). Halo insists that Elinor's devotion to the author of "Kubla Khan" is evidence that the "compensation" she found in the world of letters was not merely adequate but munificent: "'it was Coleridge: don't forget that!'" (333, 359; Wharton's emphasis). Like the illuminating scenes from earlier in the book, when Vance first discovers "Kubla Khan" and then associates the poem with the dawning of day over the Hudson River, the weeks he spends writing *Instead* in the library at the Willows are mentioned and recalled many times again as the narrative proceeds. Both Vance and Halo remember this period of intense collaboration, when "the Willows became steeped in poetry" (354). Winning critical acclaim, the book confirms his genius, validating his choice of vocation.

A framed tale, *Instead* supports several important themes in the larger narrative containing it. As indicated, the composition process enriches the already important relationship Vance has established with Halo. Her role as his mentor assumes added dimensions. The Willows is her ancestral home and someday will belong to her; she is an indirect descendent of the original Miss Lorburn. From his first glimpse of Halo, Vance perceives that "something about her [...] fitted into the scene, seemed to mark her as a part of it" (HRB 64). Her physical resemblance to her ancestress ("in their features" or "in expression, something about the eyes and hands") makes her seem like a living embodiment, or "reincarnation," of the dead woman (333, 94). Trying to envision "the young Elinor—pale and eager," he finds that "Halo Tarrant's face substituted itself for the other" (332); surely

Elinor “must have” possessed “a sharp austere loveliness like Halo’s” (333). He sometimes feels as if his subject had stepped down out of her portrait and shared her story with him first-hand. Like any good muse, Halo brings the artist’s materials to life; she inspires “creative fervour” and insight (334).

The place in which they work also is crucial to the composition process: *Instead* could not have been written anywhere except at the Willows, a setting that serves as backdrop and key to Elinor Lorburn’s life. The importance of this house to Vance’s personal and vocational development is underlined as it becomes interwoven here with his most substantial literary achievement: he pays tribute in his novella to the place where his own appreciation for the past and for poetry first was ignited. The most immediately prominent feature of the library at the Willows is, of course, the portrait of Miss Lorburn; significantly, it re-creates in crayon the most important elements of the environment in which it is displayed. It depicts its subject leaning “on a table with a heavy velvet cover, bearing an inkstand and some books—the very table and the very inkstand, Vance perceived, on which the picture itself looked down” (HRB 60). Wharton draws repeated attention to the self-replicating effect of the whole: the room contains the portrait, and the portrait, in turn, contains the room it represents. So faithful is the picture to the scene it overlooks that Vance can imagine Miss Lorburn “had just dropped her book and spectacles, and reascended to her frame as he came in” (61). In both the room and the artistic representation of it, the book of poems opened to “Kubla Khan” commands notice as focal point. This is the poem that stands for “the books that had sufficed [Miss Lorburn], after all” (332), touchstone for the intangible wealth she commands. It is also, of course, the poem that precipitates an awakening in the young Vance Weston. Evidently it invites endless re-reading: never to be re-shelved, the book lies “always open” to this perpetually enthralling work (60).

II

Integrating "Kubla Khan" into the framework of her novel so conspicuously, Wharton prepares readers to notice the many indirect evocations of the poem's language and imagery occurring throughout her text. Unobtrusive but pervasive, these covert borrowings heighten the effect of direct reference, weaving the poem ever more tightly into the fabric of her narrative. From the outset she establishes parallels between the verdant landscape of the Hudson River Valley and the "fertile" scenery of Xanadu ("Kubla Khan" 6).³ The variegated, tree-studded terrain of the mid-Hudson region, with its "mountain masses," valleys, hills, and "greenery" (HRB 98), recalls details from the Khan's imaginary kingdom (KK 11). Like the "sacred river" Alph, the Hudson is surrounded by "forests ancient as the hills" (KK 3, 10); it follows a "meandering" course "through wood and dale," its "lustrous gray waters spreading lake-like to distant hills" (KK 25, 26; HRB 39). Wharton's description of the "precipitate plunge of many-tinted forest, the great sweep of the Hudson, and the cliffs on its other shore" (HRB 72) recalls the terrific splendor of Xanadu: the Alph flowing through a "deep romantic chasm which slanted / Down the green hill" (KK 12-13). Viewed only from afar by the novel's characters, the Hudson remains "remote" from everyday concerns (HRB 375). Like "the sacred river" in Coleridge's poem, significantly, it is estuarial: the Alph flows "down to a sunless sea" (KK 3, 5) and Wharton arranges for Vance to see the ocean for the first time at twilight, "under a sunless sky" (HRB 241).⁴

Centrally located in both imagined and actual riverscapes is an architectural structure of "rare device" (KK 35): the Willows is an idiosyncratically American version of "the stately pleasure-dome" (KK 2) constructed for Kubla Khan. The "walls and towers" of Khan's estate are echoed in the elaborate, "turreted" design of the Willows, with its "freakish towers" and "queer bracketed [...] balconies" (KK 7; HRB 209, 133, 151-52). The Willows is further identified as an outstanding example of the "indigenous" Hudson River Bracketed architectural style, which features "elements ingeniously combined

from the Chinese and the Tuscan" (HRB 69). The suggestion of kinship with the Chinese setting of Xanadu provides another unobtrusive parallel between Halo's family home and the Khan's enticing pleasure-dome. Indeed, the "arcaded veranda" of the Willows is so "festoon[ed]" with wisteria that the house-front appears to have been decorated "in celebration of some august arrival" (58). Exemplifying a hybrid style of architecture to be found only in the Hudson River Valley, the Willows is a locus of regional genius; manifesting an unexpected conjunction of influences, it testifies to the cultural cosmopolitanism characterizing this part of the country. Wharton even borrows the term *Hudson River Bracketed* for her title, highlighting the special role assigned to the house in the larger design of her novel.⁵

Both dome and house are situated in grand landscapes above mighty rivers. Surrounded by "forests ancient"—in Coleridge's wording, or "ancient woods"—in Wharton's, both estates occupy extensive grounds with cultivated plantings (KK 10; HRB 80). The Khan's gardens are "bright with sinuous rills," and the increasingly elevated land rising beyond the Willows toward Eagletop (another Lorburn property) similarly is "glinting with little streams" (KK 8; HRB 80). Like the Khan's "gardens bright [...] / Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree" (KK 8-9), the Willows is surrounded by a profusion of fragrant flowering shrubs. "Perfumes" of lilac and wisteria, together with a "haunting syringa smell," pervade the air: "a breath of sweetness [...] envelop[s] the old house" (HRB 330). Wharton's description of "ancient trees widening their untrimmed domes" again calls to mind the Khan's palatial dwelling (80). From Paul's Landing Vance observes how the trees "up the hillside [...] domed themselves in great bluish masses, one against the other, like the roofs of some mysterious city built of leaves" (46). Hudson Valley trees, vital and abundant, subtly evoke the "mysterious city" of Xanadu and the amazing "dome of pleasure" constructed there.

In addition to delineating architecture and grounds, Wharton directs attention to interior spaces and furnishings. A copy of "Kubla

Khan"—with its evocation of the pleasure-dome—serves as centerpiece of this interior, so that Wharton's allusion doubles back on itself: containing the poem, the house in effect contains the dome to which it indirectly is compared. In this way the affinity between the two is confirmed. Investing the house with "mystery," "fantasy and secrecy," moreover, Wharton reproduces the atmosphere permeating the poem (HRB 58): "A Vision in a Dream," according to its subtitle. Guardian of "an unknown world" and shelved with "magic carpets," the Willows casts a "spell" on Vance (68, 119, 95). It introduces him to the "illimitable windings of the Past" (154) and fuels his imaginative energies, becoming "a palace of dreams" (71).

Wharton echoes another important feature in Coleridge's poem in the character of Halo, who assumes the muse-like function of the "damsel with a dulcimer" (KK 78). Playing and singing to the poem's speaker "in a vision," the "damsel" clearly is associated with the art of poetry, and she inspires her human listener to "revive," or re-create, that visionary music (KK 37, 42). She is "singing of Mount Abora" (KK 41), and Halo appropriately marks the beginning of her relationship with Vance by taking him up a mountain to marvel at the dawn and talk of poetry. Like "a being born of the sunrise and the forest" (HRB 101), Halo is associated with the generative powers of nature as well as with artistic creation. She serves Vance "as the mysterious vehicle of all the new sensations pouring into his soul," as "custodian of the unknown" (101, 357). Inspiring a yearning both earthly and other-worldly, she is "the woman his arms longed for, but [...] also the goddess, the miracle, the unattainable being who haunted the peaks of his imagination" (439). Not least, she plays an important part in Vance's first ecstatic encounter with "Kubla Khan," explaining its authorship and "chanting" Coleridge's "incredible words" (HRB 96, 62). Here again Wharton's allusion executes a reverse-twist: Halo is compared to a muse-figure in "Kubla Khan," and in that role she helps Vance appreciate more fully the "music" of that very poem (63).

The most striking parallel with Coleridge's "damsel" manifests itself in Halo's assistance, as "monitress and muse" (HRB 231), with the

writing of *Instead*. Like Vance, the speaker in "Kubla Khan" aspires to *make* something. Art is understood as a process of transmutation: empowered by a seemingly mystical influence, the human creator represents, or re-makes, features of the external world in the medium of art, "with music" (KK 45) of his own. What Coleridge's artist-speaker desires to re-create is the Khan's pleasure-dome: "I would build that dome in air" (46), he declares.⁶ Vance is engaged in exactly the same creative task. With Halo's help, he is representing the Willows in fictive form, re-imagining the history of the house, its grounds, and its owner. Persistently described in terms recalling the Khan's "stately" edifice and "bright" gardens, the Willows is, in fact, a Hudson Valley version of "the dome," and Vance is building it in the immaterial realm of art: "in air." The Willows lives again in his book. Without the inspiration and encouragement supplied by Halo, who "plunge[s] into his enchanted world with him," rendering it "accessible and lovely to him," that act of re-creation could not have come to fruition (HRB 357).⁷

The music motif associated with the "damsel with a dulcimer" also plays a conspicuous role in Wharton's novel. Coleridge's poet-speaker yearns to re-create the "symphony and song" he has heard "played" by the singing figure from his "vision" (KK 40, 38). During Vance's initiation into poetry at the Willows he is "enthralled" by the "new music" of Coleridge's poem, which affects him with the force of wave or tide, "his whole being swept away on that mighty current" (HRB 65, 63). As he reads the text of "Kubla Khan," the whole house seems to respond to its rhythms, like "a long-silent bell" which has begun "swinging and clanging all about him now, enveloping him in great undulation of sound" (63). Pointing to the origins of poetry in music, Wharton pays tribute to the particular potency of rhythm and sound in "Kubla Khan".

Mining the poem's details to portray the intangible activities of the human imagination, Wharton echoes its violent, sometimes sinister, imagery in acknowledgement of the "savage" forces of creation, natural and human (KK 14).⁸ The origin of art may be "holy and

enchanted" (14), but it also can prove fierce. Coleridge depicts the river Alph running through extensive underground "caverns" ("measureless to man") and a frighteningly "deep chasm," as well as through gentler scenes of "wood and dale" (KK 12, 26). "Forced" upwards finally, geyser-like, the river emerges as a "mighty fountain," spewing rocks like "chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail" (KK 19, 22).⁹ Wharton employs this image of pent-up, long hidden energies in descriptions of the "secret forces" that "move within" (HRB 333) Vance Weston. He cannot "measure" "the strength of the force that propel[s] him" to write; "his imagination" is driven by "a fierce impetus that would not let him rest" (541). When seized by literary passion, he finds that other concerns are "swept away" recklessly, "like chaff on the wind" (276). Sometimes, too, Vance must descend to "a hidden cave in which he "hoarded his secretest treasures" (272). Blending images from Xanadu with memories of the excursion to Thundertop, Vance comments that the "treasures" of the imagination lie "deep down" and must be "hauled up [...] from some secret pool of being" (177, 176). "With ceaseless turmoil seething," the currents of Vance Weston's creativity must travel, like the River Alph, through "subterranean depths" to "that mysterious Sea of Being of which the dark reaches swayed and rumoured in his soul" (KK 17; HRB 336, 449).¹⁰

The artist must command remarkable inner strength in order to grapple successfully with a realm fraught with contradiction and paradox. Coleridge's Xanadu is dominated by diametric opposition: height and depth, calm and tumult, sun and ice. "Sunny spots" of surface "greenery" present themselves in stark contrast to subterranean "turmoil"; gently "meandering [...] motion" alternates with "seething" violence (KK 10, 17, 25, 17).¹¹ In Wharton's novel this counterpoint is exhibited most conspicuously in the seasonal extremes of the Hudson Valley—a place, like Xanadu, rife with inherent opposition between heat and cold. Visiting Thundertop in winter with Laura Lou, Vance discovers a beauty equivalent to the warm summer dawn he initially experienced there with Halo, but antithetical in

mood and effect: "sparkling tumultuous hours" followed by "twilight with its bleak shadows and the deathlike pallor of unlit snow" (HRB 301). The excruciating cold soon exhibits its sinister potential, doing permanent damage to the fragile health of Vance's wife. Like Thundertop, the ocean proves to be a site of strange contrasts: "in summer [...] the sea had been a gray tumult under a sunless sky; now, on this December day, it flashed with summer fires" (241). The elemental oppositions of night and day, summer and winter, heat and cold point toward the vast array of battling energies human beings must observe and endure: growth and decay, yearning and loss, life and death. Like Coleridge, Wharton indicates that the artist must "build" forms and create "music" adequate to encompass dramatically opposing forces, expressing "the mingled measure" of seemingly irreconcilable realities (KK 33).¹² Vance's first successful work of fiction, "One Day," illustrates this theory of art: he channels rage and pain (having discovered a furtive sexual encounter between his girlfriend and his grandfather) into creative energy. He uses literary form to control psychologically tumultuous materials, reshaping anguish into a tale that transcends the personal.

Because of his special sensitivities and abilities, the artist is to some extent a being apart. Coleridge depicts the poet-creator as a figure inspiring "holy dread" (KK 52) in ordinary members of the human community. Those who hear his music and "see" his vision will be moved to inscribe a ritualistic "circle" around him, in recognition of the unearthly forces at work in him (48, 51). Vance's acute responsiveness to literary art similarly distances him from banalities of ordinary life; he feels at times as "if he had been in the centre of a magnetic circle" (HRB 120). This same separation effect occurs when he is actively engaged in composition: he occupies a "small luminous space" whenever the "mysterious activities" of artistic invention begin "to hum in him" (515, 511).¹³ As the "creatures born" of his imagination take shape, the "outer world vanish[es]," leaving him the "centre of concentrated activity" (515). "Some mysterious transfusion of spirit" occurs in such moments; "no longer himself," he commands a

"unifying power" (515, 249).¹⁴ As "the creator of imaginary beings," Vance recognizes, he "must always feel alone among the real ones": a "veil of unreality" will "fall" between him and even "the soul nearest him" (560).

Unsurprisingly, given this conception of the artist's gifts, Wharton repeatedly borrows the terms "vision" and "dream" from Coleridge's poem. She employs them to characterize her protagonist's efforts to plumb the depths of his imagination and, beyond that, to give literary shape to the impalpable stuff of the psyche. Feeding his newly awakened literary hunger in the New York Public Library, for example, Vance finds himself "drifting from dream to dream" and gradually entering into a "state of strange illumination" (HRB 170). At the beginning of his career, his mind is filled with "crowding visions" to which he seeks to give "development": he must "discover where they led to" (270). Invariably ideas come to him as *visions*: he "had had the vision of a big poem up there on the mountain" (303). Banal interruptions can startle him "out of his dream" (334). Writing *Instead* he creates "a new vision" of the Willows, achieving a "magical evocation" (354) of the place. Historical details supplied by Halo are "absorbed into his vision, woven into his design" (357). As he learns to plumb his imagination and harness its workings effectively, he first "let[s] his visions sweep him away," then "return[s] with renewed fervour" to the details of shaping his fictional characters (541). There is "something supernatural and compulsory," he discovers, "in this strange alternation between creating and dreaming" (541). Like the poet-speaker in *Xanadu*, Vance attempts to "revive" (KK 42, 38) in literary form what he has seen in visions of his own.

III

Employing "Kubla Khan" as an essential element in her narrative design, Wharton goes far beyond the usual parameters of literary reference and allusion: her novel *enacts* the poem. A narrative of 560

pages necessarily will contain secondary characters, subplots, events, and descriptive details not anticipated in fifty-four lines of verse, but the skeletal outline of Wharton's book clearly can be discerned in Coleridge's text.¹⁵ She introduces Vance Weston into an environment physically and psychologically reminiscent of Xanadu, where he meets a muse-figure and goes on to pursue artistic ambitions very like those attributed to his counterpart in "Kubla Khan." Intruding itself persistently into the text of her novel, the poem operates as a sustained, controlling metaphor. In this respect, *Hudson River Bracketed* is unique in Wharton's oeuvre.¹⁶ She wields the device of allusion effectively and prolifically in all her fiction, but nowhere else does it play such a structurally central role.¹⁷

Specific mentions of Coleridge in Wharton's other writings, though scattered and brief, invariably are laudatory. She names him as one of the "supremely great English poets," and she quotes a phrase from "Love" (the poem that affects Vance Weston so powerfully) as illustrative conclusion in the preface to her collection of English love poetry (see Preface to *Eternal Passions in English Poetry* 254). She singles out "Kubla Khan" for special mention in the autobiographical fragment, "A Little Girl's New York," explaining that because "external events were few and unexciting" in the New York of her childhood, she relied heavily on the stimulus provided by poetry, and she places "Kubla Khan" on the shortlist of works that offered her entrée into "palaces" fit for the imagination to inhabit (287). Assuming readers' familiarity with the poem, she alludes to it without mention of author or title in *The Writing of Fiction*, discussing tears "distilled from the milk of Paradise" (86). Only in *Hudson River Bracketed* does she disclose the full extent of her appreciative engagement with this work.

Suggestively autobiographical elements in the depiction of Elinor Lorburn attest to Wharton's regard for both the poem and its author. Readers have been quick to notice that the "thwarted lady" (HRB 358) who finds in books abundant recompense for the outward barrenness of her life ("caught in the cruel taboos and inhibitions of her day";

359) resembles Edith Wharton in many respects.¹⁸ Though her personal life was neither as socially isolated nor as romantically empty as the fictive Miss Lorburn's, Wharton reiterates in her autobiographical writings the central, compensatory importance of literature in her life. She reports eloquently on the "music-drunken hours" she spent in "the kingdom of [her] father's library," declaring that books prevented her from feeling "wholly lonely or unhappy" (*A Backward Glance* 70, 43, 71). Given her expressed reliance on the nurturing power of great literature, readers may assume with some confidence that Wharton shares Miss Lorburn's special feelings for Coleridge and for "Kubla Khan." Those feelings are echoed, moreover, in the intensity of Vance Weston's response to the poem. Wharton assigns the actively creative part of her self to the character of Vance, whose personality and background differ in obvious ways from hers. He resembles her, however, in ways Elinor Lorburn does not—namely, in his literary ambition and creative energy.¹⁹ Like Wharton, he is irresistibly drawn to the "enchantment of 'making up'" (*A Backward Glance* 42). The poem provides an ecstatic meeting point for two characters, stand-ins for different aspects of their creator, who cross the boundaries of time to affirm with doubled emphasis the worth of an unusually potent work of art.

The novel constitutes a long meditation on the poem's language and imagery, together with the ideas these suggest to Wharton. In her lifetime, obviously, the poem had not yet been weighed down with the daunting burden of secondary commentary now encrusting it. Like most readers, before and since, she reads it as a statement about artistic inspiration and process, and she indicates strong agreement with Coleridge's ideas on this topic.²⁰ The artist takes materials from the world around him and, fueled by deep interior forces—by turns reassuring and alien, beautiful and terrifying—reworks those materials into art. Wharton makes no comment, direct or indirect, on the potential contribution of opiates (Coleridge's "anodyne") to creative efforts, but she clearly does not regard the poem as merely "a fragment" (KK Preface). The sympathy she engenders for Vance's diffi-

culty getting appropriate remuneration for *Instead*, a work his publishers regard as inconveniently and unfashionably short, must be construed as a defense of supposedly fragmentary compositions. The central structuring role played by the poem in her novel, supported by explicit testimony from Elinor Lorburn, Halo Spear, and Vance Weston, provides overwhelming evidence that Wharton regards Coleridge's poem as a fully realized whole, an indisputable masterpiece.

The interruption of Coleridge's composition process by "business" (the "person from Porlock"; KK Preface) is echoed in Vance's confrontations with economic necessity and marital responsibilities. His wife's illness, along with the financial problems it exacerbates, regularly interferes with his writing. He returns from a winter hike up to Thundertop, for example, with "the vision of a big poem [...] yes, he knew it was big. Line after line had sprung up [...] he had only to lie back and wait" (HRB 303). When Laura Lou's needs claim his attention instead, he can only "watch the crystal splinters of his poem melt away" (304). Such incidents serve to validate the experience Coleridge reports in his preface, illustrating the fragile and ephemeral nature of the artist's visions. Vance's unhappy dealings with New York City editors and artists further illustrate how "business" can frustrate creativity. When the making of literature is commercialized, he quickly discovers, quality is secondary to profit: "the quick turn-over applied to brains as [...] to real estate" (311). Certainly Vance finds the fads and falsities of the literary marketplace antipathetic to the expression of his talents. The mystical depths of inspiration are of no interest to a literary establishment that exploits art as a commodity. The sinister "voices prophesying war" to Kubla Khan (KK 30) are echoed by the gloomy observation that "it's a bad time for a creator of any sort to be born, in this after-war welter" (HRB 392).

Wharton's insistence on the importance of "the Past" to artistic accomplishment reflects another aspect of creativity that is implicit in "Kubla Khan." Informing readers that the "vision" providing the nucleus of his poem originated in the work of "Purchas's Pilgrimage,"

Coleridge acknowledges his debt to an earlier author whose words and images have stimulated the workings of his own imagination (see KK Preface). Elaborating on this point, Wharton insists that a writer must be conversant with the collective influence of the past in order to make something new. Works of lasting value, she asserts, are the product of “long training & wide reading, & a saturation in the best that the past has to give” (Wharton to Victor Solberg, October 9, 1918; *Letters* 411),²¹ Vance Weston’s career illustrates the importance of these prerequisites: when he begins to remedy the deficiencies in his literary education, his creativity flourishes. His illuminating encounter with “Kubla Khan,” together with the “old house” in which he first discovers the poem, provides impetus for his plunge into the literary wealth of bygone eras.

The importance of his cultural heritage becomes clear to Vance only when he enters the environment of the Hudson River Valley. From its natural landscape to its human history, for him it represents an unknown world. The region boasts historical roots that pale in contrast to those of Europe or Asia but stand out against the raw immensity of the bulk of the North American continent. Recognized as the “birthplace” of American culture, the Hudson Valley has been an important center of economic, architectural, and literary activity for several hundred years (see Schuyler 1, Killoran 151, Tom Lewis 5). In addition to Hudson River Bracketed architecture, which assumes obvious importance in Vance Weston’s story, Wharton mentions literary figures such as Bryant, Irving and Whitman who celebrated the region and contributed to its fame (see HRB 73). Employing invented place names while describing locales that evoke any number of villages, look-out points, and views along the first hundred miles north of the mouth of the Hudson, she renders the region vivid yet avoids the limitations of specifics.²² Invented names serve her better than real ones because she seeks to imbue this geographic area with an aura of mystery commensurate to that of Coleridge’s Xanadu.

In the final portion of the book, Vance is composing a novel he decides to call *Magic*. This title lends impact to Wharton’s central

allusion, since Coleridge attributes “synthetic and magical power” to the workings of the imagination (*Biographia Literaria* 2:12). While working on this project, Vance is living just north of Manhattan “out on the fringes of the Bronx” (HRB 510). Not far off, “the metropolis whirled and rattled and smoked,” but his bungalow is situated in “the remains of an orchard” near “a fragment of woodland” (506, 510). He is drawn to the apple trees and fruit dominating his rural retreat, associating their “hard rare beauty” with the “very Golden Bough he had been reading about” (506). Invoking Frazer’s cross-cultural study of religion and myth, Vance invests a common Hudson Valley phenomenon, an apple orchard, with the weight of ancient symbolism (a sacred quest, the tree of life). More pragmatically, this humble place of residence embodies advantages for which the Hudson Valley long as been heralded: Vance is close enough to Manhattan to take occasional advantage of urban cultural stimulation, including talks with editors and writers, yet far enough removed to refresh himself in “sylvan” beauty and peace (510). The “magic” he intends to celebrate in his novel is two-fold: the “untroubled miracles” of natural process, on the one hand, and the transmutation of “ordinary material” into art, on the other (511, 510).²³ Thus his projected novel harks back to the energies at work in “Kubla Khan.” In the Hudson Valley, as in Xanadu, the creative forces of nature and art are inextricably allied. Enriched by regionally prominent human artifacts such as the Khan’s pleasure-dome and the Lorburn house, nature functions as a catalyst for the imagination in both environments.

Creating parallels between the majestic vistas along the Hudson River and the “enchanted” dominion of Coleridge’s Khan (KK 14), Wharton imbues the setting of her novel with transcendent beauty and power.²⁴ With persistent allusion and evocative description, she pays eloquent tribute to an American landscape for which she claims unique value (see HRB 99, 180, 375). She could count on an audience of readers in her homeland, moreover, who would recognize her setting as “the iconic American landscape” (Schuyler 1-2), a place already associated with “magnetism” and “transformative power”

through more than three centuries of artistic testimony, political action, and economic activity (Dunwell xiii). It had long been known as “the valley where nature’s creation and human creation meet,” a source of “mystery, romance and ineffable beauty” (Tom Lewis 9, 5). Comparison with Xanadu allows Wharton to invest an already special place with heightened impact. The Mid-Hudson region figured significantly in Wharton’s own life, of course: “the setting of my own youth,” in her words (Letter to Elisina Tyler, Sainte-Claire, January 1, 1930; *Letters* 525). Numerous relatives, friends, and acquaintances owned properties, often sumptuous, along the river winding its way northward from Manhattan. By train, and later by motor car, Wharton journeyed to house parties and undertook pleasure-excursions throughout the Mid-Hudson area. In mid-life she often traveled through it on her way to and from her home in the Berkshire Hills just north of the Valley proper.

Wharton further affirms her connection to the region in a number of her fictional works (*The House of Mirth* comes immediately to mind); typically she shows “characters travelling to or through the region, seeking recreational or social opportunities” (Anderson and Saunders 2; see also Lee 669). In no work except *Hudson River Bracketed* does she focus with such sustained intensity on the glories of its landscape and history. In this novel the centrally significant allusion to “Kubla Khan” enables her to present the region in an exalted light. A luminous point of reference, the poem is embedded in house, library, portrait, and framed tale; these, in turn, are set in a real-world riverscape that persistently is likened to the sublimely unreal world of Coleridge’s Xanadu. In this way Wharton claims the Hudson Valley as the worthy equivalent of a famous literary vision. Deft allusive patterns of iteration, echoing, and recursion enable her to celebrate this place as a cornucopia of generative energies, natural and aesthetic, a place sustained by cultural-historical roots that North America otherwise conspicuously lacks. Her brilliant borrowing enables Wharton to carry out an intriguing narrative experiment,

demonstrating how a lyric poem can provide structural and thematic foundation for a work of prose fiction.

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NOTES

¹Citations here and throughout are to the first edition of *Hudson River Bracketed* (HRB), published in New York by Appleton in 1929.

²Comparing Coleridge's conception of the creative imagination with Wharton's, Penelope Vita-Finzi observes that both associate the artist's gift with an ability "to respond to nature" (53).

³Citations here and throughout are to the text of "Kubla Khan" in *English Romantic Writers*.

⁴Flowing seaward, the river is "sacred," appropriately, "because it is the true source of generation and life" (Magnuson 42).

⁵"As a result of the efforts of landscape gardener and tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing," David Schuyler explains, "the Hudson river aesthetic became an indelible part of the national landscape" (69). Downing introduced "the rural, Gothic, Italianate, and bracketed designs" that dominated mid-nineteenth-century American architecture, particularly along "the hilly banks of the Hudson" (87).

⁶As the use of the subjunctive indicates ("I *would* build"), Coleridge's speaker has not yet achieved his object. He may yet succeed, but the poem ends before this occurs, leaving readers in suspense. Wharton's protagonist, in contrast, reaches his objective, building a new version of his "dome" by means of narrative art.

⁷Secondary comment on *Hudson River Bracketed* includes sharp criticism of the selfless role Halo plays in ministering to Vance's talent and career, which readers from recent generations are apt to find "gratuitous" (McGowan 74). Less inclined than Wharton or her contemporaries to take serious interest in the mythological idea of a Muse, they offer a variety of explanations for what now may appear to be an unequal and gender-biased relationship. See also discussions by Werlock; McDowell; Olin-Ammentorp.

⁸Readers have long observed that the landscape of Coleridge's poem "does suggest the mind and its activities" (Milne 19). As K. M. Wheeler observes, the preface to the poem certainly "encourages such a procedure of internalizing the landscape, or making it a topographical metaphor of mental processes" (34). Irene H. Chayes explores these metaphoric correspondences, together with their

implications, in detail; she points out, for instance, that Coleridge portrays creativity “as a powerful and impersonal, even nonhuman force” (9). Tellingly, she observes that “the operation of the mind is expressed by the action peculiar to nature, and the two sides of the analogy are interchangeable, so that an image or event in nature may actually enter the mind and take part in the intricate processes of perception and creation that it represents” (6).

⁹Suggesting that the river “represents the sources of the unconscious,” Magnuson notes “the explosive force with which the river erupts.” Evidently “the water provides the materials upon which the imagination must work, materials which, while they are necessary to fertility and generation, are also dangerous if they are not properly controlled” (45). “Whenever thoughts become too prolific and/or too powerful to be kept private, they burst into creative expressions. As the river is contained within the banks, the excess of individual inspiration is contained within the rules that govern the genre” (Chatha 49). Following a similar line of thought, Wheeler observes that “the image of the earth’s labouring ‘fast thick pants’ suggests childbirth, the birth of ideas or works of art” as well as of “natural production” (34).

¹⁰There is some overlap between the subterranean images from “Kubla Khan” and those in Goethe’s *Faust*. Reading Goethe confirms Vance’s intuition that “the real stuff is way down, not on the surface” (HRB 336). His fascination with “the mysterious Mothers, moving in subterranean depths among the primal forms of life,” will become an important leitmotif in *The Gods Arrive*, which continues the story of Halo and Vance (HRB 336). Appropriately, Vance is indebted to Miss Lorburn’s library for his discovery of *Faust*, one of the many life-changing books he first “got hold of [...] at the Willows” (336). James W. Tuttleton suggests that “Edith Wharton’s developing conception of the artistic process” represents “a fusion” of three different elements, all examples of “the romantic aesthetic”: “Coleridge’s idea of imagination as the reconciler of contraries, the vital unifying and recreating power,” together with “Goethe’s *Faust* (particularly the symbol of ‘The Mothers’) as expressing the infinite depth of the imagination the artist must plumb,” and “Whitman’s organism, with its vital union of form and content” (344).

¹¹Milne discusses this “basic dichotomy,” together with the artist’s ability to address it (see 20, 23). Kenneth Burke describes the structure of the poem in these terms: Stanza One presents a “beatific vision,” Stanza Two “introduces and develops the sinister, turbulent countertheme,” and Stanza Three “fuses the two motives in terms off a beatific vision [...] seen by a poetic ‘I’” (33).

¹²Coleridge explains that the poet can achieve “balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (*Biographia Literaria* 2:12; see also Milne 23). Alan C. Purves discusses the dome itself as “the momentary reconciliation of fire and ice, of birth and death” (190). Elizabeth Schneider argues that “oscillation,” or “ambivalence”—rather than reconciliation—predominates: “the whole poem oscillates between giving and taking away, bright affirmation and sunless negation” (287, 286).

¹³Some readers question the designation of Vance Weston as an artist of high caliber. Wershoven finds, for instance, that his character displays “naïve [...] self-absorption” rather than “genius”; “it is difficult to take him seriously as a writer” (139). David Holbrook discusses Vance’s shortcomings at length, arguing that he seems “seriously deficient in intelligence and understanding”: he “avoids his work” and “shows no sign of being driven by a daemon” (141).

¹⁴Discussing and defining the secondary imagination, Coleridge explains that “it struggles to idealize and to unify” (*Biographia Literaria* 1: 202). Wielding this imaginative power, as Burke points out, the artist embodies a “principle of inspiration” that elicits ambivalent reactions: it is “simultaneously welcomed and feared” (52).

¹⁵Jack Stillinger suggests that the poet-speaker be regarded as “the main protagonist” of the poem and “his desire as the encompassing interest of the plot” (219). The speaker’s motives include a “desire to recover something (‘Her symphony and song’), a desire to sustain something (‘music loud and long’), and a desire to complete something (‘build that dome in air’)” (219).

¹⁶Readers might well expect continued reference to “Kubla Khan” in Wharton’s sequel, *The Gods Arrive*, but this does not occur. Set chiefly in Europe, *Gods* brings the two-novel sequence to a fitting end when the estranged Halo and Vance meet at the Willows for reconciliation, in “the old house where [Vance’s] real life had begun” (*The Gods Arrive* 416).

¹⁷Helen Killoran has examined Wharton’s allusions in great detail, tracing patterns of covert reference throughout most of her major works of fiction in *Edith Wharton: Art and Allusion*.

¹⁸For discussion of resemblances between Miss Lorburn and Edith Wharton, see Werlock (193-94) and Lee (669-70).

¹⁹Hermione Lee notes that Wharton “splits herself in the novel between the figure of the cultured woman alone with her books and the raw, ambitious American writer” (670). Louis Auchincloss similarly reads Vance Weston as “an extension of Edith’s vision of herself, freed from the impediments of her sex, generation, and background” (177).

²⁰John Livingston Lowes early identified “the creative process” as Coleridge’s major preoccupation in the poem (395). Irene H. Chayes, another important early commentator, similarly has pointed out that the poem is “concerned quite specifically with the composition of poetry, both as experience and as mechanism” (6). Most readers concur with this formulation of the poem’s subject matter.

²¹Tuttleton points out that Wharton addresses herself in this novel to “an aesthetic problem” of longstanding interest to her, namely, the essence and the operation of artistic imagination: “How is the shifting raw material of the actual world translated into the forms of art?” One of her aims, consequently, “is to show that if the artistic imagination is to grow it must have nourishment and that only a complex, deeply rooted, traditional society is capable of providing that nourishment” (334-35).

²²Even the designation of the Willows as “one of the most successful instances” of Hudson River Bracketed architectural style is a fabrication (HRB 69). The source Halo cites—A. J. Downing’s book on *Landscape Gardening in America*—does exist, but it makes no mention of the Willows (see Killoran 150).

²³In *The Gods Arrive* readers learn that Vance never finishes *Magic*. However sobering in retrospect, this information does not dispel the creative exhilaration and confidence Vance brings to this writing project nor deflect the upward-moving trajectory of his artistic development presented in *Hudson River Bracketed*.

²⁴Calling “Kubla Khan” a “fleeting, shining stream of blending images [...] from books of travel and discovery,” Lowes identifies Bartram’s *Travels* as the source of much of the imagery in the opening portion of the poem (394, 333). The descriptions seizing Coleridge’s imagination stem from Bartram’s journey through north-central Florida, as John K. Wright confirms (see 76). Applying these borrowed descriptions to the Hudson Valley, Wharton brings Coleridge’s imagery back home, as it were, to the Americas but to a region with very different geographical and climatic features.

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Some Moondrop Title: A Response to Maurice Charney*

THOMAS KULLMANN

Maurice Charney convincingly calls for an enquiry into the relationship between Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, the play which apparently provided Nabokov with the title of his novel (see Charney 29). Charney is certainly also right in his contention that a close reading of Nabokov's previous novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), teaches us a lot about "the language and style" (and, I should like to add, the significance) of *Pale Fire* (Charney 30). As Charney points out, the relationship of the narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* to his half-brother, the author Sebastian Knight, resembles that of Kinbote to Shade in *Pale Fire* (although "Kinbote is not as perceptive a critic as Sebastian's half-brother"; Charney 33), and we can undoubtedly learn about Nabokov's "unique postmodern or experimental approach to writing a novel" (Charney 31) when taking *Sebastian Knight* into account. I am also grateful to Maurice Charney for drawing attention to Nabokov's "preoccupation with language" (29) and his fondness for "dictionary words" (29).

Even so, I cannot help feeling that Charney somehow "missed the gist of the whole thing" (*Pale Fire*, l. 517): for one thing, I cannot see that Kinbote is a "Timonist," who "hates all of mankind except a chosen few," or that either Kinbote or Shade are "misanthropic" (Charney 29; cf. Schuman 96-98). Kinbote's "sense of reality" is indeed "distorted by [his] own delusions" (Charney 29), but in this, he does

*Reference: Maurice Charney, "Adopting Styles, Inserting Selves: Nabokov's *Pale Fire*," *Connotations* 24.1 (2014/2015): 27-40. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debcharney0241.htm>>.

not resemble Shakespeare's Timon who suffers from perceiving reality all too acutely. The image which emerges from his loquacious and self-aggrandizing "commentary" on Shade's poem is that of a person desperate for attention, recognition and love, not that of a disillusioned nobleman who proudly defies human society and all it stands for, like Shakespeare's Timon. While Kinbote has little or nothing to say about the poem, he uses it as a pretence for (fruitlessly) attempting to communicate with an unknown opposite, the reader, and to include him in fantasies about a fictitious country called "Zembla" (*Pale Fire*, 18 etc.).¹ Shade, on the other hand, overcomes "the misfortunes in his life, especially the death of his daughter" (Charney 38) by an active work of mourning, recorded in the poem, and the strengthening of his love for his wife, expressed in his lines:

And I love you most
When with a pensive nod you greet her ghost
And hold her first toy in your palm, or look
At a postcard from her, found in a book. (*Pale Fire*, ll. 289-92)

Neither can I see much resemblance between Nabokov's style and "the distinctive style of Shakespeare's late plays" (Charney 29). My suggestion is that Nabokov, rather than finding *Timon of Athens* "particularly attractive" (Charney 29), hit upon the "pale fire" image ("the moon's an arrant thief / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun," *Timon of Athens* 4.3.437-38) as a metaphor which encapsulates both his novel as a whole and Shade's poem in particular.

On the level of the novel as a whole, the person who styles himself "Dr. Charles Kinbote" (242) has indeed stolen Shade's poem, both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. Kinbote's story that he was given "permission" by Sybil Shade "to edit and publish John's last poem" (234) is thoroughly unreliable, as Kinbote himself appears to acknowledge. What is more significant is that Kinbote, like many other self-appointed literary *experts*, appropriates a poetic text for the purpose of parading himself and his own *expertise*, thus diverting to himself the glory due to the poet: "The poem is the sun, the novel the moon"

(Morris 322). *Pale Fire*, I should like to contend, is a huge satire on practices of literary scholarship (cf. Hesse 113, 116) which obscure rather than elucidate the literary work appropriated. The pale fire of commentary replaces the light and warmth which might proceed from the original work if only it could be seen and appreciated on its own terms. As Brian Boyd points out, Kinbote's work is "a comic nightmare of all that could go wrong in criticism" (68). Kinbote appears as an embodiment of the "malignant deity of Criticism" in Swift's "Battle of the Books," who, together with "Ignorance, her father and husband [...] Pride her mother [...] Opinion her sister" as well as "her children, Noise and Impudence, Dulness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners" lives "on the top of a snowy mountain in Nova Zembla" (115).

Many of Kinbote's "comments" illustrate, and, in a satiric way, exaggerate, the misleading character of literary commentary: His comment on line 79, "a preterist" (88) obviously tries to obscure the fact that he is unable to explain the term; and his commentary on "lemniscate" is quite unhelpful:

Line 137: lemniscate

"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. (110)

Kinbote may have intended to display "his linguistic superiority over Shade, the mere poet" (Charney 30). What he actually demonstrates is his inferiority. He is not only unfamiliar with the word he tries to explain but does not even understand the dictionary definition. Unwilling to acknowledge his own failure, he shifts the blame on the poet. Of course, Shade recorded his admiration of the skillfulness of a cyclist who managed to trace the figure of 8 in the sand.

The comment on Shade's line 130 ("I never bounced a ball or swung a bat") begins with the confession: "Frankly I too never excelled in soccer and cricket" (96), which displays not only Kinbote's egocen-

trism but also his cultural illiteracy. Shade, evidently, refers to basketball and baseball, not soccer and cricket (cf. Boyd 40). Kinbote's ignorance also accounts for his failure to see the joke of the "curio" from the local newspaper which Shade's aunt "thumbtacked to the door" (ll. 97-98):

Line 98: On Chapman's Homer

A reference to the title of Keats' famous sonnet (often quoted in America) which, owing to a printer's absentmindedness, has been drolly transposed, from some other article, into the account of a sports event. For other vivid misprints see note to line 802. (94)

"Red Sox Beat Yanks 5-4 / On Chapman's Homer" means that the Red Sox victory at a baseball game was due to a homerun ("homer") effected by a player called Chapman. The unintentional parallel to the title of Keats's poem "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (or rather to Chapman's translation itself) can only be observed by the Shade family (and by those readers who are not led astray by Kinbote's note). It is lost on both the sports journalist (who may never have heard of Keats or Chapman) and on Kinbote (who has never heard of baseball).²

Kinbote, to be sure, not only tries to "elucidate" the poem but also uses it as a vehicle to publish his dreams of royalty and his sexual fantasies. He is a paederast (not a preterist),³ and, as an inverted image of Humbert Humbert, he delights in "faunlet[s]" (100) not nymphets (cf. *Lolita* 16 etc.). His most persistent fantasy, however, is that of having been "an intimate friend of Shade" and "his literary adviser" (242). He records sundry conversations with the poet and believes himself "the co-author of *Pale Fire*" (Charney 34). Of course, he is utterly mistaken. The text of Shade's poem (which, at any rate, Kinbote appears to have reproduced faithfully) does not contain the slightest trace of the poet's acquaintance with any such person as Kinbote, let alone with his story of the Zemblan king. I should like to modify Charney's contention that "Nabokov tantalizes us by suggesting that there must be a close link between the poem and commentary" (34): it is Kinbote who tantalizes us (or tries to tantalize us), not

Nabokov. While Charney states that “the more one rereads *Pale Fire* [...] the more one is caught in the seemingly absurd idea that the relationship of the poem and the commentary is quite close” (34), I should like to reply that the more I reread Shade’s poem, the less I am inclined to believe that Kinbote’s commentary has anything to do with it, or that Shade is “indebted” (Charney 34) to Kinbote in any way.

The reverse, however, may well be the case: Shade’s chance comparison of the stubble on his face with “old Zembla’s fields” (l. 937) may have spawned Kinbote’s Zemblan fantasies. Shade took the reference to Zembla from Pope’s *Essay on Man* II.224, where Zembla serves as an illustration of the thesis that there are no absolute extremes: even in a country as far north as Greenland you may find one still further north, such as Zembla. Pope (and Swift, of whose use of the name as that of the dwelling-place of Criticism Kinbote is obviously unaware) undoubtedly got the name from accounts of Novaya Semlya (“new land,” latinized as *Nova Zembla*), two virtually uninhabited islands off the north coast of Russia. In devising his Zemblan adventures Kinbote may have consulted a map of Novaya Semlya (see, e.g., 111-12 and 116-17, cf. Boyd 79).

Another hint the poem may have provided him with concerns his name. As many critics have noted (cf. Charney 36) and as Kinbote virtually admits himself (see 210), his name is an anagram of Botkin, a name resonating with pertinent associations listed in the Index (240). Botkin, a Russian refugee, may have got the idea of changing his name from Hazel Shade’s habit of “twisting words,” recorded in lines 347-49 of Shade’s poem.⁴

Kinbote, as he admits himself, is not a “true artist” (227). This is why he needs to appropriate somebody else’s work of art to advertise his ego. Towards the end of his commentary he records his feelings after having got hold of the index cards with Shade’s poem:

Solemnly I weighed in my hand what I was carrying under my left armpit,
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.

I was holding all Zembla pressed to my heart. (227)

Of course, the idea of decoding firefly signals is an illusion; and, sadly (from Kinbote's point of view), fireflies are short-lived and become invisible by daybreak. "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near, / And gins to *pale* his uneffectual *fire*," as Hamlet is informed by his father's ghost (*Hamlet* 1.5.89-90), certainly a "stranded spirit," who has to return to the place he came from as soon as the night is over. Kinbote, this intellectual glow-worm, may be "on fire," but his fire will pale while the poem will stand.⁵

The last line of the quotation, moreover, appears to be suggestive of sexual aggression. Kinbote is not just a thief but a rapist, resembling not Timon but Tarquin, the archetypal rapist, who, according to the first stanza of Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*,

leaves the Roman host,
And to Collatium bears the lightless *fire*,
Which in *pale* embers hid, lurks to aspire,
And girdle with embracing flames the waist
Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste. (3-7, emphasis added)

Like Tarquin, Kinbote approaches his victim (Shade's poem) with the pale fire of his lust, a fire which can neither provide warmth nor illumination. The fact that Shade's poem which he holds pressed to his heart has nothing to do with "all Zembla" is characteristic of the common failure of rapists to take account of their victims' personalities.⁶

This will do with regard to Kinbote. "Pale Fire" is, after all, the title John Shade chooses for his own poem, at a time when he is not aware of Kinbote's imminent appropriation of it:

(But *this* transparent thingum does require
Some moondrop title. Help me, Will! *Pale Fire*.) (ll. 961-62)

I therefore propose to examine the poem itself more closely, to determine Shade's reasons for choosing this title.⁷ The poem's central topic is the poet's quest for knowledge as to what happens to us after death:

There was the day when I began to doubt
 Man's sanity: How could he live without
 Knowing for sure what dawn, what death, what doom
 Awaited consciousness beyond the tomb? (ll. 173-76)

This is why he decides

to explore and fight
 The foul, the inadmissible abyss,
 Devoting all my twisted life to this
 One task. (ll. 178-81)

While he does not believe in God (l. 99), he desperately clings to the idea of an afterlife. At the end of the poem he states: "I'm reasonably sure that we survive / And that my darling [his daughter] somewhere is alive" (ll. 977-78). Trying to find proof he compares a near-death experience of his own (ll. 698-719) with one reported in a magazine (ll. 747-58). As both himself and the unknown "Mrs. Z." had seen "a tall white fountain" in what appeared to be "the world beyond" he believes that their experiences reflect an objective reality, only to discover that the lady's original manuscript recorded her having seen a mountain, not a fountain:

Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!
 I mused as I drove homeward: take the hint,
 And stop investigating my abyss?
 But all at once it dawned on me that *this*
 Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
 Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream
 But topsy-turvical coincidence,
 Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.
 Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
 Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
 Of correlated pattern in the game,
 Plexed artistry, and something of the same
 Pleasure in it as they who played it found. (ll. 803-15)

The poet realizes that he cannot find out about the “abyss” and about the secrets of the world beyond the confines of temporal existence, but he can imitate those “who played” “the game” through the medium of literary composition. In establishing a literary “texture,” “topsy-turvical coincidence” and “a correlated pattern” he can share the pleasure of God or the gods, to whom the world is some kind of supernatural chess game (see ll. 816-29). To the poet, the quest for truth turns into a theory of art.

Literary artists like Shade (and Nabokov) do not just imitate life; they play games with it (or rather its reflection in stories and words) and playfully provide patterns and meanings—which in real life are difficult to find. Within the confines of life as it is they repeat the process of creation on an inferior level. This makes them resemble the gods, although, obviously, they are just their imperfect copies, or shades. They cannot create a world, but they can provide reflections of the divine processes of creation, just as the moon does not provide light itself but reflects the light of the sun. This consideration, I would like to suggest, accounts for both Shade’s name and the title of his poem: artists provide pale copies of divine fire. The oxymoronic paradox inherent in the Shakespearean image aptly sums up the ambivalences of artistic creation.

The imagery of reality and its shadows as well as of the sun and its reflection owes a lot to Platonism, a system of thought with which Shakespeare, Nabokov, Shade, and perhaps even Kinbote are quite familiar (while most of their critics are not). According to Plato, things on earth are just imperfect copies, or “shadows,” of the original “Forms” or “Ideas” we knew before we were born. In life we (i.e. our souls) are imprisoned in our bodies and restricted by the limitations imposed on our perception from recognizing the truth (see, e.g., Plato, *Phaedo* 64c-67d, 72e-77a; *Republic* 7.517b). “We are most artistically caged,” as Shade points out in his poem (l. 114). One of the centre-pieces of Plato’s philosophy is the Allegory of the Cave: our life can be compared to that of people living in a cave whose eyes are turned to the cave’s wall where they can see the shadows created by things

placed at the cave's entrance (see *Republic* 7.514a-515c). We cannot look at Truth directly any more than we can look at the sun without hurting our eyes (see *Republic* 7.515e). We can only look at things which partake of the sun's light (with the sun representing Truth), as Plato pointed out in the preceding Analogy of the Sun (*Republic* 6.508-509c). Nabokov not only adopts the shade imagery from Plato, but—following Shakespeare—extends the sun imagery to include the moon as the sun's pale reflection: the moon's fire may be pale, but we can look at it. In recreating the shadow games of existence, the literary artist can hope to trace the mechanisms underlying the universe⁸:

I feel I understand
Existence, or at least a minute part
Of my existence, only through my art,
In terms of combinational delight;
And if my private universe scans right,
So does the verse of galaxies divine
Which I suspect is an iambic line. (l. 971-77)

In the novel, a first reference to the topic of reality and its imperfect reflection is given when Kinbote in his "Foreword" quotes from a comment on Shade's poem: "[...] it is not improbable that what he left represents only a small fraction of the composition he saw in a glass, darkly" (14). The phrase is taken from 1 Cor 13:12, where St. Paul (another Platonist) compares the incomplete knowledge we have in this life to the knowledge we will have in the realm of God. In the poem, Shade envisages, among other options for an afterlife, "talks / With Socrates and Proust in cypress walks" (l. 223-24). The relevance of Proust to a "preterist" collecting old memories is obvious, while Socrates should remind us of the Platonic dialogues (including *Phaedo* and the *Republic*), in which approaches to philosophical truth are effected through conversations with Socrates.

Nabokov will have been aware of the fact that his (or Shade's) "Platonic" theory of art does not correspond to Plato's own ideas about artistic creation: while the things we see in life are the imperfect shadows or copies of the original Forms, artists can only imitate the copies

and produce shadows of shadows. Their work is thus even more removed from Truth than is the world we experience through our senses (see *Republic* 10.595a-598c). In the Renaissance, however, this doctrine was challenged by artists and humanists who found Platonism attractive but also contended that artists can imitate or represent the original Forms directly (cf. Panofsky). This is certainly the philosophic tradition in which we can locate Shade's and Nabokov's theory of art. At the same time, Nabokov makes use of Plato's original concept and imagery to assign a place to Kinbote and Criticism: Kinbote appears as Shade's shadow; while Shade the poet can catch a pale reflection of Truth and Beauty, Kinbote the critic can at best obtain a pale reflection of this reflection, and produce dreams and ambitions which are "but a shadow's shadow" (*Hamlet* 2.2.262). Actually, the relationship of Shade and Kinbote also resembles an opposition created by Plato in the context of his critique of poetry: Plato alerts us to the paradox that, while in real life we admire people who can subdue their grief when hit by an adverse fate (such as the loss of a son), tragedies are considered best if actors express grief in a particularly clamorous way (*Republic* 10.603e and 605c-e); the same applies to mirth and comedy (606c). With regard to this opposition, Shade is a hero of real life, Kinbote one of tragedy and of comedy.

Finally I should like suggest that the "moondrop title" chosen by Shade may contain yet another Shakespearean reference: In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the moonlit section of the play is introduced by a fairy:

Puck. How now, spirit, whither wander you?

Fairy. Over hill over dale.

Thorough bush, thorough brier,

Over park, over *pale*,

Thorough flood, thorough *fire*,

I do wander every where,

Swifter than the moon's sphere;

And I serve the Fairy Queen,

To dew her orbs upon the green. (2.1.1-9, emphasis added)

"Pale" in this passage is a noun, not an adjective; it means "[a]n area enclosed by a fence; an enclosure" (*OED*, "pale", *n.* 3.). My suggestion is that John Shade considers his poem a "pale fire," a fire which illuminates a certain enclosed space, the space of the fairies or of literary imagination.⁹ As the story of Titania and Oberon and their respective retinues mirrors human royal courts, so the pale fires illuminated by literary artists mirror real life—and, like Titania and Oberon, provide an indication as to the working of transcendental forces, of God, or the gods, "it did not matter who they were" (l. 816). Like the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, poets can play around with their material, providing beauty and experiencing pleasure. As a poet Shade can enter that world in which his daughter was not allowed to participate:

[...] while children of her age
 Were cast as elves and fairies on the stage
 That *she'd* helped paint for the school pantomime,
 My gentle girl appeared as Mother Time,
 A bent charwoman with slop pail and broom,
 And like a fool I sobbed in the men's room. (ll. 309-14)

Hazel Shade's tragic fate exemplifies the arbitrariness and uncaring character of "divine" dispositions, but, as a poet, John Shade can create his own fairyland. While he does not lay any claim to divine inspiration, he can create an imitative world in a moonlit space, having been inspired by magic moondrops.¹⁰

Pale Fire actually provides clues which may refer the reader to the relevance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Shade calls "midsummer" his "preferred season" (l. 873-74), although he obviously prefers "midsummer morn[s]" to nights. The other clue is provided by Kinbote who, commenting on "the fashionable device of entitling a collection of essays or a volume of poetry—or a long poem, alas—with a phrase lifted from the more or less celebrated poetical works of the past," finds this practice

[...] degrading in regard to the talent that substitutes the easy allusiveness of literacy for original fancy and shifts onto a bust's shoulders the responsibility for ornateness since anybody can flip through a *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Romeo and Juliet*, or, perhaps, the *Sonnets* and take his pick. (189)¹¹

Kinbote, we realize, has not grasped the functions of quotation and allusion within Shade's concept of poetic creation, in which "combinational delight" leads to the creation of "a web of sense." In order to reach an awareness of the poem's structure and meaning, we have to dismiss the commentator's paratext and, rather than follow Kinbote's advice to begin and end with the commentary (25), treat the poem as a literary work in its own right, and take its engagement with fundamental issues of the human condition seriously.¹² The theory of art the poem contains can then serve to make sense of Kinbote's flights of fantasy and make us realize that Kinbote the lunatic shares with Shade the poet the ability to give "to aery nothing / A local habitation and a name" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.16-17).

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NOTES

¹As the novel consists of a poem of 999 lines and about 200 pages of prose paratext ("Foreword," "Commentary," and "Index") references can be to lines (prefixed "l."/"ll.") or pages (not prefixed).

²A similar cultural misunderstanding is recorded in Nabokov's previous novel, *Pnin* (see 99).

³Incidentally, we may note that Kinbote calls his "uncle Conmal" a "noble paraphrast" (240).

⁴Other parallels between Shade's poem and Kinbote's Zemblan adventures, as recorded by Boyd (e.g. 150) and others, could also be accounted for as resulting from Kinbote's drawing upon the poem.

⁵The bat's "tale of torture," obviously suggested by the jerky and seemingly discordant flying movements of this animal (as opposed to the graceful if sometimes misguided flight of the waxwing, referred to in the first lines of Shade's poem) may point to the agony and despair which underlie Kinbote's mad exuberance. Kinbote, who recorded his loneliness and his suicidal tendencies at an early stage in the commentary (78-81), is, after all, a tragic character, a victim of emigra-

tion and political change, like many other Nabokovian protagonists (see, e.g., Boyd 90-93). The bat may also refer to Dracula and the “undead.”

⁶Similarly, when seeing Lolita for the first time, Humbert Humbert recognizes in her the “Riviera love” of his childhood (*Lolita* 39), which, of course, she is not.

⁷Brian Boyd’s suggestion, for all his eagerness to decipher hidden meanings, is rather lame: “With his [Shade’s] usual modesty he reaches for a title that implies his poem can shed only a pallid glow compared to the heat and light Shakespeare radiates over the landscape of English literature” (33).

⁸As Paul D. Morris (see 371-73) points out, Shade’s theory corresponds to views Nabokov expresses in non-fictional writings; cf. also Schuman 92-93.

⁹On the elves/fairies as the “imaginative representation of the imagination” see, e.g., Niederhoff (70).

¹⁰There is no entry on “moondrop” in the *OED*, but in *Macbeth* a “vap’rous drop” from “the corner of the moon” is used by Hecate to “raise [...] artificial sprites” (3.5.23-27).

¹¹The reference to *Romeo and Juliet* may alert us to Romeo’s mistaken interpretation of “yon grey” as “the pale reflex of Cynthia’s brow” (3.5.19-20). Like Romeo, Kinbote may wish to stay under the moon’s pale fire in order to prolong his companionship with his “love,” Shade’s poem. On another level, Shade has to leave the pale fire of his poetic dreams (and the dream which constitutes life) when he is hit by a bullet fired by Jack Grey (232).

¹²The poem’s merits have been appreciated by a new edition which dispenses with Kinbote’s paratext: *Pale Fire: A Poem in Four Cantos by John Shade* (2011).

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The “complicit we”: A Response to Edward Lobb*

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There is, I affirm, the need for a serious (or better, perhaps, a joco-serious) treatise on T. S. Eliot and punctuation and orthography. Such a study might begin by considering what is meant by the “text” of a particular poem, given the not inconsiderable differences between different editions of Eliot’s poems (manuscript and printed texts, American and British editions, visions and revisions); for only after sufficiently heavy planks are laid down should a critic venture without trepidation over these quicksands of interpretation. To take but one example: should the crucial encounter in *The Waste Land* take place in “the hyacinth garden” or “the Hyacinth garden”? Valerie Eliot’s edited facsimile of the manuscript reads “hyacinth” (12-13), but most early printings offer the capitalised form.¹ The capitalisation is not trivial, for it invites consideration of the story of Hyacinth, the youth beloved of Apollo, whose death was passionately bewailed by the god (of Poetry). This might in turn invoke the fate of Eliot’s friend, Jean Verdenal (“mort aux Dardanelles”), to whom he dedicated *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), and with whom he associated in various other writings (for example, an essay in *The Criterion* in 1934, “Portrait of a Lady” and *Ash-Wednesday*) such images as the lost lilac and death by water. Eliot’s preference in the later Faber editions for the non-capitalised form might well indicate his desire (for whatever reasons) not to entertain the kinds of homoerotic speculation that

*Reference: Edward Lobb, “Ellipsis and Aposiopesis in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,’” *Connotations* 22.2 (2012/2013): 167-86.

For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/deblobb0222.htm>>.

arose after John Peter's controversial article in *Essays in Criticism* of July 1952, where the young Canadian critic defined *The Waste Land* as a set of variations upon a theme that was omitted; and ventured as the missing theme the poet's lost love for a young man who has drowned (cf. Peter).

In other words, punctuation and orthographical choice may matter. However, this is controversial material and a less provocative example may make the point more clearly: when Prufrock in his love song (like the "waste land" two words, and unlike *Ash-Wednesday* no hyphen) considers the "overwhelming question" (10) he does not ask: "'What is it?'" (11). Instead, "we" are invited to accompany him upon his "visit" (12), that is, to be complicit. That failure to ask, whether it be about a trivial concern, a proposal of marriage, and/or the metaphysical "squeez[ing] [of] the universe into a ball" (92), marks Prufrock as one who, when confronted with a moment of truth in which *something* must be asked, finds himself unable to do so. In *The Waste Land*, the roots of which grow out of and clutch deeply into Wagner's music, such a moment is imaged in the Hyacinth (or hyacinth) garden, where the protagonist's inability to speak aligns him with the innocent fool of the Grail Legends (Parsifal, for instance), who fails at the crucial moment to ask the vital question that might bring relief to the barren land (itself a metaphor for a state of mind). Although the Hyacinth Garden scene is framed by scenes from *Tristan und Isolde*, and invokes such motifs as the love-potion, the flower-garden, the wounded hero and the *Liebestod*, Eliot had found in Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) an argument that the Waste Land theme was of Indo-Aryan origin and that Wagner's Bayreuth operas, and particularly *Parsifal*, had their roots in this tradition. The more significant, therefore, at the end of the poem, that the protagonist, having crossed the waste land, should now ask: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (425). The question mark, indeed the very act of asking such a question, affirms if not the "cure" of the Fisher King then at least the beginnings of an act of faith. The "overwhelming question" is a major theme or motif of Eliot's early poetry (in which the imagery of

one poem deliberately echoes that of others); it finds further expression in the final stanza of Part III of *The Hollow Men* (1925), where the lost souls try to articulate something that at this moment of final truth might effect their salvation, only to find that the impulse towards the asking of a question: "Is it like this [...]" (45) fades into the emptiness of "prayers to broken stone" (51), the utterance lacking a final question mark to testify to what might have been a saving grace.

I was thus intrigued by Edward Lobb's declaration at the outset of his "Ellipsis and Aposiopesis" that he wished to "approach the most famous ellipsis in modern poetry," the "overwhelming question" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Lobb 167) by considering the "broken conversations punctuated by three dots" (*Letters* 241; cf. Lobb 167). Hence my disappointment when Lobb quickly concludes (see 168) that the "dots" generally require little analysis, since they typically indicate pauses rather than omissions. Instead, he proposes to adumbrate "the Grand Ellipsis" of the "overwhelming question" (personally, I would have called it, with intended echoes of Celestine V, "the great refusal"); and to do so by discussing "the missing connector" in some of Prufrock's similes and metaphors. This is not necessarily a bad thing to do, but I have some reservations about how, in this article, it has been done.

My first reservation can be dismissed, as Eliot dismissed *The Waste Land*, as simply a rhythmical grumble: I intensely dislike the use of what I (frequently) call the curse of the "complicit we"; that is, the kind of approach to the purpose that treats the reader as "mon semblable,—mon frère!" (76) and walks him (or her) down the garden-path to look at (let "us" say) "the evening [...] spread out against the sky" (2). We (here I use the dual deliberately) might expect a glorious sunset, but find instead "a patient etherised upon a table" (3). I (here I revert to the singular) have no great objection when my companion tells me (Lobb 168) that this is a Modernist form of the traditional trope that Ruskin defined in *Modern Painters* as pathetic fallacy; but I resist being told that after several readings "we can see" that the etherised patient "embodies many of Prufrock's most salient charac-

teristics" (169). This is not because the insight is wrong but rather that it is self-evident (I would be disappointed if any reasonable student could not see this after one reading). What matters is the quality of the perception; and rather than "see" the simile in terms of Lobb's "dream-like sequence of pictures from the unconscious" (169) I might prefer to interpret it as a visual simile (a sunset) but one rendered as the interiorisation of an image, saying nothing about the sky yet everything about the protagonist's numbed state of mind; and in that image (I would further contend) an entire school of Romanticism is undone.

Although I stress the "etherised" emotions rather than the "unconscious" as such, this is not essentially different from what Lobb is saying; my objection is rhetorical, that his "we can see" assumes that I will look at the simile and scene as he does, through his words, when I prefer my own. This is not always the case: I like the way (later in the article) in which he develops Marvell's image of rolling up his strength and sweetness into one Ball, to tear its pleasures through the Iron Gates of Life (see 173). Here, the ironic self-deprecation, the sense of sexual inadequacy and a fear of failure are poignantly dramatised in a magnificent conceit; but having presented this image, Lobb's conclusion rings hollow: that the response of Prufrock's "would-be mistress" (unlike Marvell's) suggests that "she is far more interested in sex than he is." This echoes Lobb's earlier assertion that the "overwhelming question" concerns "the gap between sex and metaphysics" (170), and it anticipates his subsequent conclusion: "We have seen how sex and metaphysics are linked in Prufrock's mind" (174). In my reading of the poem, this places the wrong emphasis on matters that are infinitely more subtle than this.

My problem is not simply that the use of the "complicit we" bullies or cajoles or persuades me into acceptance, but equally the sense that this is not quite what the poem means at all, no, "[t]hat is not it, at all" (98). Lobb's use of the first person plural is the more inappropriate, I feel, given the opening line of the poem: "Let us go then, you and I." The English language has a curious rhetorical emphasis arising from

the way that the verb “to be” takes either a nominative complement or an accusative object: “It is I” as opposed to “It is me” (as the case may be); here, given that “you and I” is in apposition to “Let us go then,” the line is not simple assertion but rather dramatises a tension between the self as subject and that self perceiving itself as object. That tension, and with it the deconstruction of “us” into its components of “you and me” (or “you and I”), is felt throughout the poem.

The opening lines of the poem are not, strictly speaking, the sentiment I cited above but the epigraph from Dante’s *Inferno* (XXVII.61-66), the words of Guido da Montrefelto, trapped for fraudulent counsel within a living flame that trembles even as he speaks; the voice of one who speaks only on the assumption that what is said will never be heard in the world above. Prufrock’s confession, thus, is not so much heard as overheard (this is a critical commonplace). Or, to place this in terms of the poetic genre that it assumes, the love song is a dramatic monologue, in the tradition of Browning to be sure, but interiorised in the best Modernist manner (and with much of the auditory imagination orchestrated by Wagner and Stravinsky). While “you and I” may on some level (Dante to Virgil, perhaps) implicate the protagonist with his reader, the one who overhears, the key to the images and analogies that the poem presents lies within Prufrock’s consciousness, which “flicker[s]” (84) like the eternal flames that consume Guido.

Lobb’s thesis may be summarised in terms of his insistence that sex and metaphysics are analogous (see 171), the “missing link” between them being Prufrock’s consciousness. My problem with this is that it is too reductive, and that the analogies he therefore perceives fail to do justice to the flickering quality of Prufrock’s mind and, perhaps surprisingly, to the dramatic nature of his experience, as that is represented in the poem. “It is,” to quote the protagonist, “impossible to say just what I mean” (104) in a few lines only, but I here assume the validity (for this poetic discourse, at least) of Ezra Pound’s sense of the Image (and hence of Eliot’s objective correlative) as an equation for human emotions, and then acknowledge Lobb’s principle of aposio-

peisis as but one aspect of many (metaphor, ambiguity, irony) that the mind deploys in its use of language to move from the particular (or token) to the universal (or type). Take, for example, the "question" that is said to be the goal of the visit, and as listed earlier: trivial pursuit, marriage proposal, or metaphysical *angst*; the latter arises out of the former, even if "we" are not entirely sure what the former is, precisely. Lobb's "missing connector" is nothing esoteric, but rather a principle implicit in the everyday use of language, including that most familiar of analytical paradigms: *tenor*, *vehicle*, *ground*, as applied to one who "ha[s] measured out [his] life with coffee spoons" (51). Life as tenor, coffee spoons as vehicle, and the ground as ... well, uncertain, an aposiopesis if you please, something not given but which must be postulated, and "you and I" will almost certainly postulate something different (the irreverent might think of coffee grounds). Even so, "we" will respond to the image, if at all, in terms of a shared cultural understanding: of triviality (coffee mornings as futile); of the pathetic (insignificant spoons); and in that way "we" will share (through the image) Prufrock's understanding of his life as a futile and trivial social ritual measured out this way. This, indeed, entails the complicit we, and the critical use of the pronoun should respect this understanding.

Prufrock's problem is not a lack of imagination or understanding; it is not that he is inadequate but rather that he is conscious of being so. He has a hypersensitive awareness of himself that translates into agonies of decisions and indecisions, of visions and re-visions (the hyphen is intentional). His images, like his "morning coat" (42) and "necktie" (43), are both "rich and modest" (43). And they are incessant, pouring out of a sensitive mind beset by self-doubt and apprehension. Yet there is one moment when Prufrock does not express himself in metaphor or visionary language; after the "eternal Footman hold[s] [his] coat" and (horrible word) "snicker[s]" (85), what follows is not a metaphor but (as even Wittgenstein might have agreed) an axiomatic, atomistic statement: "in short, I was afraid" (86). Dramatically, this is the catastrophe, in the literal sense of a turning point: no

matter whether Prufrock's "visit" (12) is real or metaphorical, this moment of truth marks the point at which he can "go" (1) no further.

Lobb might (or might not) disagree, but his insistence that "it is always and only Prufrock himself who provides the link" (as is surely implicit in the very notion of the dramatic monologue) leads to an assumption that the "overwhelming question" must therefore be Prufrock's "non-metaphysical obsession: women and sex" (Lobb 170). This is both reductive and unfounded, and arises from an unsatisfactory appreciation of both the dramatic and Imagistic qualities of the poem—these made (for me) more annoying by the use of the pronoun "we" that assumes my complicity. His interpretation, as I read his article, arises in part from his privileging of the universal over the particulars that generate it, as in the particularity of Prufrock's imagery ("How his hair is growing thin"; 41) that leads to his fear of rejection ("That is not it, at all"; 98) and thence to universal terror and *le grand peut-être* ("Do I dare / Disturb the universe?"; 45-46). Sexual anxiety is part of this, but only one tremor (among many) of a more profound consciousness of inadequacy. To privilege "the gap between sex and metaphysics" (Lobb 170) as the grand ellipsis that essentially explains the poem is to substitute (as does the complicit "we") the abstraction of the universal for the experience of the particular, and thus evade the critical (in both senses of the word) appreciation of the poem's dramatic power.

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NOTE

¹All references, unless otherwise indicated, refer to the *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (published by Faber & Faber).

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Self-Delighting Soul: A Reading of Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter" in the Light of Indian Philosophy*

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In this essay, I read "A Prayer for My Daughter" (written in 1919, published 1921) as a reverie on the nature of the self—the individual self, but also, more importantly, the Self in the sense of universal spirit, as Yeats used the term in his translation of the ancient Indian philosophical texts, the *Upanishads*.¹ In "A Prayer" Yeats invokes cross-cultural tropes, such as the tree and the bird, to bring the Upanishadic understanding of the self into relation with everyday life. I argue that reading "self" in the poem to refer only to the individual ego, and ignoring other philosophical resonances of the term, has resulted in misreading the poem as narrowly personal and politically conservative.

Throughout his adult life Yeats remained deeply engaged with Indian philosophy. When he was 22, he heard about the idea of consciousness as universal Self from Mohini Chatterjee ("Reveries" 61); in 1885, he participated in the Dublin Hermetical Society's discussions about the *Upanishads*; and, in 1935-36, he and Purohit Swami executed a beautiful translation of ten *Upanishads* (Yeats and Swami).²

The *Upanishads* are a set of philosophical dialogues between teachers and students, composed circa 1200-800 BC. They explore such questions as the nature of knowledge, of action, and of the self. All the *Upanishads* posit, first, that spirit exists; second, that spirit participates in all that exists; and, third, that the individual self (the changing, acting ego with name, form, gender and physical characteristics) is a

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debvanita0242.htm>>.

temporary manifestation of an unchanging Self without name and form that witnesses action but itself does not act.

Yeats's familiarity with these philosophical concepts is evident from early in his poetic career. Many of his poems, both early and late, are shaped by these ideas as well as by ideas drawn from Western philosophy. However, the formative influence of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* as well as Yeats's translation of the *Upanishads* have been largely ignored by critics. Bloom's 500-page book nowhere mentions Yeats's translation of the *Upanishads* or his essays on Hindu philosophy. Even Snukal, who sets out to examine philosophical issues in Yeats's poems, does not mention Hindu philosophy. Shalini Sikka is the first critic to undertake a sustained examination of Yeats's engagement with Hindu philosophy, but close readings of his major poems taking this perspective into account have not yet been undertaken. My reading of "A Prayer for My Daughter" is an endeavor in this direction.

The Good Life and the Singing Bird

The word "prayer" calls up in English the idea of a Christian God but Yeats, unlike earlier poets, such as Donne and Hopkins, who wrote prayer-poems, does not explicitly address God. Nor, however, is the poem "an agnostic's prayer" (Toker 108) or a "secular prayer" (Adams 143). Rather, it is in the nature of a spell, a mantra, an incantation, such as are found in ancient Greek texts and also in the *Upanishads*. "Poetry," writes Vereen Bell, "was a mantra for Yeats, an instrument of thought" (39).

In "A Prayer" Yeats adumbrates his idea of the good life. To do so, he draws on Aristotelian as well as Hindu traditions. In the third, fourth and fifth stanzas, he includes physical beauty, good breeding and material prosperity in his idea of the good life along with love and friendship. The inclusion of material prosperity has been read as politically conservative (see Maddox 143) and is also contrary to some traditional Christian understandings of the virtuous life. However,

several ancient philosophers, Greek and Indian, considered material well-being essential to the good life. For Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, *eudaimonia* (well-being) and *arete* (virtue in the sense of excellence) are composed of more than just right action. Aristotle considers virtue or excellence necessary but not sufficient for the life of *eudaimonia*. Good birth and breeding, beauty, love, friendship, and prosperity are also required. Likewise, the classical Hindu idea of the complete life includes four goals—*kama* (desire) and *artha* (material prosperity), based on *dharma* (the law of one's being), lead to *moksha* (spiritual liberation). This trajectory can be traced in "A Prayer." Modern forces that erase difference ("the haystack- and roof-levelling wind" 188.5) threaten the good life which the poet struggles to envision for his daughter and, implicitly, for himself.

The poem moves from the threatening external world to the stillness of the inner world. Stanzas three to five imagine the good life in terms of love and friendship, both of which require relating to the external world. But in the fifth stanza the virtue of courtesy, which has both external and internal dimensions, becomes a bridge to contemplating the essence of happiness, which requires turning inward. The sixth stanza registers this shift through the interdependent tropes of the bird and the tree.

As Sikka points out, while Yeats was aware that "symbols drawn from nature, sun, moon, and sea, for example, were universal, shared by West and East alike" (154), he "insisted on drawing his symbols from his race and nationality" (151). "The distant in time and space," he wrote, "live only in the near and present" (*Autobiographies* 490). In his representation of the bird and the tree, the linnet and the laurel, Yeats blends Upanishadic meanings with those derived from English literature. I examine both in tandem here.

Having wished for his daughter beauty, kindness, the intimacy of friendship, and courtesy, Yeats hopes that her thoughts will be like the linnet's song, a "glad kindness" (40) dispensed freely and magnanimously. The female linnet in English poetry generally appears as a mother while the male linnet is free and self-delighting.³ Thus,

Robert Burns's female linnet in "The Linnet" does not sing; she is a mother-bird raising her young in a nest. Tennyson's female linnet's song is determined by her offspring's fate:

And one is glad; her note is gay
 For now her little ones have ranged;
 And one is sad: her note is changed,
 Because her brood is stolen away. (884)

In Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned," the linnet, a spontaneous songster, represents the superiority of nature to art; he stands for the ideal poet and is male:

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
 Come, hear the woodland linnet,
 How sweet his music! on my life,
 There's more of wisdom in it. (85)

In Wordsworth's "The Green Linnet" the bird is an analogue of Yeats's linnet in its self-sufficient gladness:

While birds, and butterflies, and flowers,
 Make all one band of paramours,
 Thou, ranging up and down the bowers,
 Art sole in thy employment:
 A Life, a Presence like the Air,
 Scattering thy gladness without care,
 Too blest with any one to pair;
 Thyself thy own enjoyment. (186)

However, Wordsworth's green linnet is emphatically male; the male pronoun is repeated eight times in the last two stanzas of "The Green Linnet" to refer to the bird which is also termed a "Brother of the dancing leaves."

Robert Bridges's linnet, a symbol of the devoted lover, is also definitely male:

I heard a linnet courting
 His lady in the spring;
 His mates were idly sporting,
 Nor stayed to hear him sing
 His song of love. (231)

In Wilde's short story, "The Devoted Friend," the narrator is a male linnet who tells a story contrasting a selfless friend with a selfish one; both friends are male.

Yeats is perhaps the first major English poet to connect a linnet's song to a woman's rather than a man's thoughts. He makes a new move in feminizing this symbol of freedom and joyful creativity. This feminizing connects with the feminine gendering of the spirit or soul, which I will discuss later.

The Self-Healing Tree

That the self in "A Prayer" is not just the individual ego but rather, as in Yeats's translation of the *Isha Upanishad*, universal Self or spirit, is indicated also by the trope of the tree. In Yeats's and Purohit Swami's translation of the *Prashna Upanishad*: "All things fly to the Self, as birds fly to the tree for rest" (45). Likewise, in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the bird is the mind, which retains its connection with the inner life of spirit: "A tethered bird, after flying in every direction, settles down on its perch; the mind, after wandering in every direction, settles down on its life; for, my son! mind is tethered to life" (90-91). In "A Prayer" the bird is not tethered but free. It spontaneously flies to the tree that constitutes its life.

In the *Upanishads*, the tree is a recurrent symbol of Self or spirit, for example, in Yeats's and Purohit Swami's translation of the *Katha Upanishad*:

Eternal creation is a tree, with roots above, branches on the ground; pure eternal Spirit, living in all things and beyond whom none can go; that is Self. (36)

This eternal tree is not to be confused with its illusory reflection. In his poem "The Two Trees," Yeats contrasts the "holy tree" growing in the heart with the "fatal image" of a tree as seen in a mirror held up by demons. This image is similar to that of the inverted tree in the *Gita*, with its roots above and branches below, which suggests a tree reflected in water; the *Gita* advises the seeker to cut this tree down:

With its roots upward
 and its branches downward,
 they speak of the everlasting
 Ashwattha tree [...]
 Cutting this Ashwattha tree,
 whose roots
 are fully grown,
 With the strong
 ax of detachment; (193-94)

As in the *Gita*, so also in "The Two Trees," the tree reflected in the mirror is the delusional tree of "outer weariness" which is barren, while the eternal tree in the heart bears flowers and fruit:

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
 The holy tree is growing there; [...]
 Gaze no more in the bitter glass
 The demons, with their subtle guile,
 Lift up before us when they pass,
 Or only gaze a little while;
 For there a fatal image grows [...],
 Broken boughs and blackened leaves.
 For all things turn to barrenness
 In the dim glass the demons hold,
 The glass of outer weariness, [...]
 There, through the broken branches, go
 The ravens of unresting thought;
 Flying, crying, to and fro,
 Cruel claw and hungry throat [...].
 (Collected Poems 48-49.1-2, 21-25, 28-31, 33-36)

Just as "A Prayer" moves from the howling storm, screaming wind and frenzied drum of external forces to the inner stillness of bird and

tree, so also in "The Two Trees," the speaker modifies the injunction not to gaze in the bitter glass with "only gaze a little while"; the modification suggests that wrestling with political change should be temporary and should not take over one's consciousness. This is because the external world is like a reflection in a mirror, mesmerizing but delusory and ever changing. Gazing too long at this delusory world, becoming enraptured with its political power struggles, damages the spirit. The "ravens of unresting thought," which are the equivalent of the hate-filled intellectual opinions of "A Prayer," produce bitterness and greed: "cruel claw and hungry throat."

In the seventh stanza of "A Prayer," Yeats considers the damage that the mind suffers from forces of hate that rampage through the world. If the mind retains its connection with spirit it survives these assaults; the linnet is not torn from the leaf. Here it is not the imagined daughter's mind but the poet-speaker's that, like a tree in a drought, has "dried up" (51). The damaged mind can revive like a tree that revives from its roots even after its branches have dried up.

Likewise, in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the Spirit is a tree that has the ability to revive after being damaged: "Strike at the bole of a tree, sap oozes but the tree lives; strike at the middle of the tree, sap oozes but the tree lives; strike at the top of the tree, sap oozes but the tree lives. The Self as life, fills the tree; it flourishes in happiness, gathering its food through its roots" (93). This self-healing quality of the tree in the *Upanishads* is paralleled by the revivifying quality of the laurel in particular (see below).

Several feminist critiques of "A Prayer" are premised on unidimensional readings of Yeats's symbols. Such readings are problematic because symbols are inherently multidimensional. For example, Joyce Carol Oates reads the tree as an object that exists only for human consumption: "This celebrated poet would have his daughter an object of nature for others'—which is to say male—delectation. She is not even an animal or bird in his imagination, but a vegetable: immobile, unthinking [...] brainless and voiceless, *rooted*" (17). Oates's reading is untempered by any awareness of the fault lines of its own

Cartesian humanism. Just because trees do not have human brains, it does not follow that they exist simply as objects.

Nor is Oates's construction of a hierarchy (derived from notions of a Great Chain of Being) wherein trees are inferior to animals and birds, which in turn are inferior to humans, self-evidently accurate. Her italicization of "rooted" suggests that rootedness is oppressive, which is highly debatable.

The tree of life is a symbol of the universe, of growth and continuity, and other critics have noted it as the obvious referent here (cf. Adams 144; Stallworthy 35). Also, both in Western and in Indian texts, humans are often figured as trees. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* constructs the self-healing tree as a model for humanity:

Man is like a big tree; his hairs are leaves, his skin bark [...] his muscles are like its fibres, his bones like hard wood, his marrow like its pith.

The tree when felled grows up again from its root, from what root does man grow when cut down by death? [...]

Spirit is the root, the seed; for him who stands still and knows, the invulnerable rock. Spirit is knowledge; Spirit is joy. (146)

Here humans in general are envisioned as trees, and the stillness of knowledge ("him who stands still and knows") is valued over the busy-ness of thought.

The symbol of the laurel is also more complex than such readings recognize. Although it has multiple meanings in Western tradition, some of which are explored below, and although the poem nowhere alludes to the Greek myth wherein Daphne's father turned her into a laurel to save her from rape by Apollo, some critics read the laurel in "A Prayer" as directly and only referring to the Daphne story. Cullingford reads the laurel as a symbol of imprisonment, "preserving [the woman's] chastity at the expense of her humanity" (137). Maddox justifies this reading of the laurel not on the basis of any internal evidence in the poem but on the grounds that "The cause of 'the great gloom' in the poet's mind could be the incestuous thoughts that a daughter can stir in a father" (144). Maddox (see 144-45) also accepts

Cullingford's interpretation of the poem's last stanza as incestuous (see 138-39).

If we refrain from importing into the poem themes that are nowhere evident in it, such as incest, some other meanings of the laurel emerge. These meanings are directly relevant to the poem's exploration of spiritual damage and recovery. Through its association with Apollo, the laurel is a symbol of creativity and knowledge, hence the crowning of poets with laurel wreaths. Also through association with Apollo, the laurel stands for healing, rejuvenation and immortality. This meaning is reinforced by its being an evergreen that can revive from its roots after it turns brown and seems to have dried up. In the Bible and in Roman culture, the laurel is a symbol of prosperity, victory and fame, hence the laurel wreath worn by victors. All of these combined meanings later resulted in its becoming a symbol of Christ's resurrection.

Furthermore, Daphne's laurel too may be read as signifying autonomy rather than chastity, and thus in consonance with the linnet, which Cullingford sees as a symbol of "the single life" (137) and as an allusion to Wordsworth's "The Green Linnet." Yeats's contemporary, E. M. Forster, in his 1909 short story, "Other Kingdom," which explicitly refers to the Apollo and Daphne narrative, reads the myth as being about autonomy, not chastity. In Forster's story, a young Irish-woman turns into a tree to retain her freedom and spontaneity in the face of her overbearing English fiancé's conformity to convention. Frederick Williams has pointed out the significance of the heroine's Irishness in the context of Forster's support for both Irish Home Rule and women's suffrage. Both in Forster's story and in Yeats's poem, green, the color of modern Irish nationalism, is associated with the heroine's freedom and joy: Forster's heroine wears a flowing green dress when she is happy, and Yeats's imagined daughter is compared to "some green laurel" (47). Thus, the tree symbol is not simply and self-evidently indicative of mindlessness and imprisonment; it is much more strongly associated with vitality, joy and autonomy.

Yeats's imagined daughter is both laurel and linnet ("May she become a flourishing hidden tree / That all her thoughts may like the linnet be," 41-42), both rooted and free. This figuration as both tree and bird indicates the oneness of the individual self (the bird) with the universal Self (the "holy tree" growing in the heart of all beings).

Ideas and Innocence

The eighth stanza of Yeats's "A Prayer" has been a prime target of feminist critique; many critics, discussed later in this essay, read it as specifically about women and claim that Yeats wants his daughter not to have any ideas. This reading stems from an incorrect conflation of ideas with opinions. Oscar Wilde, who (as many biographers, starting with Ellmann, have noted) exerted a major influence on Yeats, made a crucial distinction between the play of ideas and the violence of opinion. In the letter he wrote from prison to Alfred Douglas, he pointed out Douglas's fatal flaw: "you had not yet been able to acquire the 'Oxford temper' in intellectual matters, never, I mean, been one who could play gracefully with ideas but had arrived at violence of opinion merely—" (155).

Wilde posits this flaw as "fatal" because it renders hatred stronger than love in Douglas's nature. Hate triumphing over love or the rigidity of self-righteous opinion triumphing over the play of ideas is not at all specific to women; Maud Gonne is merely one example for Yeats (as Douglas was for Wilde) of a tendency that is not unique to her but is a widespread malaise. Yeats's ungendered phrase "quiet natures" indicates that opinions that generate "intellectual hatred" are damaging for everyone, not just for women.

Reading the eighth stanza's critique of intellectual hatred as relevant to women alone would necessitate ignoring the way this stanza flows from the preceding one. The seventh stanza, with its repetition of the ungendered word "mind" ("the minds that I have loved," 49; "no hatred in a mind," 54) and its shift from daughter to father ("her

thoughts," 42, to "My mind," 49), indicates that a general malaise is under examination. In the last line of the seventh stanza, the linnet comes to represent not just the daughter's or a woman's mind but the speaker's own mind that has dried up yet is capable of revival, and indeed any individual's mind: "If there's no hatred in a mind / Assault and battery of the wind / Can never tear the linnet from the leaf" (54-56).

Yeats's contemporary Sri Aurobindo suggested that many Romantic poems work as mantra, which he defined as "rhythmic revelation" (31). The marvelous ninth stanza of "A Prayer" is a good example of poetry working as mantra; it presents a logical culmination of the poem's argument but also stands alone, constituting as it does a self-contained sentence with a meaning that does not depend on what went before:

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still. (65-72)

Here, "she" becomes almost interchangeable with "it" that refers to the ungendered soul. In the third line, the soul is "it" but when "She" returns in the sentence's main clause: "She can [...] be happy still," the pronoun refers to the daughter as it has throughout the poem, and now also refers to the soul—any soul. The self or soul, the *anima*, is feminine in Latin, masculine in Sanskrit (*atman*) but feminine in modern Sanskrit-based languages, such as Hindi (*atma*).

Let us examine the main clause in the first part of this stanza—"the soul recovers radical innocence." The word "recovers" (rather than, say, "retains") indicates that the soul loses innocence but then regains it. Yeats's metaphor here is the tree that heals itself, the laurel that dies down to its roots and grows again. The tree metaphor is implicit in the

word “radical”—innocence is said to live in the soul’s roots. The reference to the root (in the word “radical”) also recalls the root meaning of the word “innocence.” From Latin *nocere* (to injure), the word “innocence” literally means not harmful, not injurious. The poem reaches its climax in this focus on the soul recovering its innate non-harmful nature. Innocence as non-injuriousness is contrasted with the hatred and anger fostered by political radicalism, the “murderous innocence” or ignorant violence of the mob, whether imaged as a sea or as “thoroughfares.” Physical chastity or virginity is not the point here; innocence refers to freedom from hatred, not to the imagined daughter’s virginity.

In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, a wounded tree continues to live, drawing food through its roots. The “dear perpetual place” in which the individual self is rooted could be read as a geographical location but, more importantly, it is Spirit or universal Self in which the individual self is rooted, as in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: “The tree when felled grows up again from its root, from what root does man grow when cut down by death? [...] Spirit is the root, the seed” (146). The poet prays, then, not just for a happy life for his child but for spiritual rootedness and the ability to recover from spiritual death (“My mind [...] has dried up of late”), both symbolized by the laurel.

The words “at last” suggest that this healing and learning are a process. Like the poet-speaker-father whose mind has dried up but who yet knows that spiritual integrity is made possible by shedding hatred, the daughter (and any soul) can experience loss and recovery, yet finally learn, in the *Gita*’s words, that “the self alone / is the self’s friend; / the self alone / is the self’s enemy” (6: 5; Schweig 92), or in the words of the *Isha Upanishad*: “He who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization)” (Gambhirananda I: 13).

The “self-delighting, / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting” (“A Prayer” 67-68) spirit, which Harold Bloom reads as solipsistic and autistic rather than autonomous (326), a judgment Oates echoes in her phrase, “an autism of the spirit” (17-18), resonates very differently in the light

of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. The *Isha Upanishad* characterizes the Self as "self-depending, all-transcending" (16), and in the *Gita*, one whose "self becomes / connected to / the self in all beings" (5: 7; Schweig 83) is satisfied within the Self alone (6: 20; Schweig 97) and thus is both happy and peaceful. This innocence is not what Bloom terms a "perpetual virginity of the soul" (327); rather, if one were to continue Bloom's metaphor, it would be like Aphrodite and Hera recovering their virginity by bathing in a sacred spring.

Wholeness and Joy

The main clause in the ninth stanza as a whole shifts from the wishful "may" to "can," asserting ability: "She can [...] be happy still," with a play on the word "still," meaning both "continuously" and "calm." The word "still" on which the final emphasis falls, brings to a provisional conclusion the series of contrasts throughout the poem between agitated activity (howling storm, pacing speaker, screaming wind, roving man) and calm action (sleeping child, choosing right, dispensing sound, living rooted). The concept of stillness as joy appears frequently in the *Upanishads* with relation to the Self or spirit, for example, in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: "Spirit is the root, the seed; for him who stands still and knows, the invulnerable rock. Spirit is knowledge; Spirit is joy" (146).

In contrast to Christian doctrine, wherein the individual is best off freely subordinating his or her will to the will of an omnipotent God, here the soul becomes happy (or fortunate, in the original meaning of the word "happy") once it realizes that its own will and divine will are inseparable because it is itself divine.

As in the closing lines of "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the self, having cast out regret and guilt, sees everything, even the apparently painful, as divine:

So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,

We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest. (69-72)

This sentiment is very close to that in the famous opening verse of the *Isha Upanishad*: “That is perfect. This is perfect. Perfect comes from perfect. Take perfect from perfect, the remainder is perfect. May peace and peace and peace be everywhere” (15). Translation cannot entirely convey the meaning of the original because the word (*purnam*), translated by Yeats as “perfect,” means “whole” and “full” and “complete.” It could be understood to indicate perfection but there is no exact equivalent of the word “perfect” in Sanskrit. Rather, wholeness, fullness and completeness are indicated.

An insistence on confining the poem in the framework of a father’s protective feelings for an infant daughter, and, more importantly, in the framework of Western philosophical categories alone, results in missing some of the joy that builds as “A Prayer” moves to its conclusion. For instance, Leona Toker states that “the emotional stance that transpires from underneath the intellectual position of the poem is somewhat alienating: something in it dampens the sympathy evoked by an elderly father’s anxiety for his infant” (107). When one reads the poem with an awareness of the Indian philosophical framework towards which its language and its tropes point, it evokes not the alienating patriarchal stance Toker discovers, but a joyful centering in the Self, the same emotion found in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*’s statement: “joy is Spirit. From joy all things are born, by joy they live, toward joy they move, into joy they return” (76).

The poem’s concluding stanza has also been criticized for its patriarchal imagining of the daughter being handed over to a protective husband in a conservative or elite context (see Maddox 143). Protection, though, is nowhere mentioned in this stanza. Instead, ceremony and custom are emphasized. Ceremony refers to ritual observance or worship, and is here identified with abundance and prosperity, one of the desired outcomes of worship rituals such as the Vedic *yajna*. The non-injurious (innocent) and beautiful self flourishes in the context of a ceremonious tradition. Tradition and custom arise from rootedness

in the universal Self and in a community. As Snukal points out, the phrase "ceremony of innocence" also suggests the seriousness with which a child invests its play (171).

Just as the self in the poem is not merely an individual ego, so too, marriage here is not merely the daughter's conjugal union. Marriage is also a trope for union with the universal Self. In many religious traditions, marriage is a symbol of union between the divine and the individual spirit (the Jewish people and Yahweh; Christ and the Church; Sufi mystic and God). In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the Self is compared to a solitary bird who dreams that it is suffering and is killed or that it is a king or a god; this Self recovers from the dream's effects, and the recovery is symbolized by the delights of marriage:

But his true nature is free from desire, free from evil, free from fear. As a man in the embrace of his beloved wife forgets everything that is without, everything that is within; so man, in the embrace of the knowing Self, forgets everything that is without, everything that is within; for there all desires are satisfied, Self his sole desire, that is no desire; man goes beyond sorrow. (151)

The *Upanishads* frequently depict the pleasures and pains of individual existence as a dream. Descartes famously pointed out that it is impossible to prove beyond doubt that life is not a dream from which we will awaken; the *Upanishads* assert that life is in fact a dream (which has, nevertheless, its own reality as a reflection of ultimate reality). At the beginning of "A Prayer," the poet-speaker suffers this dream, an "excited reverie," but the ninth stanza establishes that the self's realization of its own nature is the basis for happiness. The tenth stanza then envisions this happiness through the trope of marriage with the divine.

In the *Upanishads* the trope of marriage evokes integration and joy—the thinking individual self unites with the divine Self within, which is of the nature of joy: "The knowing Self is the soul of the thinking Self, but within it lives its complement and completion, the joyous Self. The joyous Self grows up side by side with the knowing Self.

Satisfied desire is its head, pleasure its right arm, contentment its left arm, joy its heart, Spirit its foundation" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 71).

In "A Prayer," marriage refers to the imagined daughter's wedding but it also, because of the weight of the preceding stanza, carries an undertone of completion through self-integration. Bride and groom, nature and spirit, are in the *Upanishads* two dimensions of the same Self, as imaged in the icon of Shiva, half of whose body is female (*ardhanarishwara*, the God who is half woman).

Misreading Symbols

Almost all critics, across four decades, from Harold Bloom in 1970 to Glaser in 2009, read "A Prayer for My Daughter" as primarily about fatherhood. Many critics tend to argue that it represents "woman as the reproducer of the ideals and values of a patriarchal society" (Cullingford 138), and that it reveals Yeats's reactionary political views. Lock cites in Yeats's defense Empson's self-consciously hyperbolic declaration that all the great writers in English in the first half of the twentieth century, except Joyce, were fascists (see Lock 211). Were Forster and Woolf not great writers, one wonders.

Because these critics ignore Yeats's engagement with Hindu thought, they miss some of the philosophical issues at the heart of the poem. Most importantly, they read the self in the poem as simply the individual ego, entirely missing its other connotation, as soul or spirit. In their translation of the *Upanishads*, Yeats and Purohit Swami use "Self" and "soul" interchangeably, as Yeats does throughout "A Prayer."

Joseph Hassett is almost alone in pointing out that courtesy, ceremony and rootedness were positive and gender-neutral attributes for Yeats who "thought opinions were accursed for himself as well as his daughter" (143). The few European and American critics who do mention Hindu philosophy dismiss it as part of a "silly" and "off the wall" (Eagleton 52) mix of mythology, spiritualism and magic with

which they see Yeats as involved. Today, when philosophers like Jonardon Ganeri are demonstrating that Indian philosophy has historically been just as serious an enterprise as Western philosophy, asking many of the same questions and suggesting answers, some of which are similar to and others of which are divergent from those posited by Western philosophers, it is time to take seriously Yeats's engagement with Indian philosophy.

The form of "A Prayer" with its repeated use of "May" is an invocation, like that of the opening verse in an *Upanishad*, and the poem concludes with an idea of union that mirrors the form of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* are largely cast as dialogues between teacher and student (who are, in Indian thought, like parent and child); thus, the *Katha Upanishad* opens with a famous invocation, referring to teacher and student: "May He protect us both. May He take pleasure in us both. May we show courage together. May spiritual knowledge shine before us. May we never hate one another. May peace and peace and peace be everywhere" (25). So also, "A Prayer" is about an "us both"—parent and child, both of whom must traverse the same human journey.

Unlike English, Sanskrit has not just the grammatical singular and plural, but also the dual number, which is used to refer to two persons together. The term Yeats and Purohit Swami translate above as "us both" is in the first person dual, referring to two persons, teacher and student. "A Prayer," I suggest, likewise casts speaker and child as a dual unit, an "us both." Praying as much for himself as for the child, the speaker wishes, as in the *Katha Upanishad*, for peace, spiritual knowledge and the absence of hatred for both of them.

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NOTES

¹Indian philosophical texts use the word *atman* (self) to refer both to the individual and the universal self as both are in the ultimate analysis identical. In English, commentators often use “self” to refer to the individual *atman*, and “Self” to refer to the universal *Atman*.

²All quotations from the *Upanishads* in this essay are from the Yeats and Purohit Swami translation, unless otherwise indicated. Page numbers appear in parentheses after quotations, and refer to this edition.

³Lady Lynette in the Arthurian cycles seems to have no associations with the bird.

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Bipartisan Poetry in the 1950s: A Response to Frank J. Kearful's "Signs of Life in Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour'"*

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Frank J. Kearful's "Signs of Life in Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour'" lends a virtuoso's ear to one of Lowell's most overplayed poems. Kearful's sensitivity to the phonological nuances of Lowell's craft has a stethoscopic effect, detecting a pulse in a poem that has been analysed almost to death.¹ The fact that Kearful's analysis resuscitates Lowell's poem by practicing a textual criticism that has frequently (and too easily) been dismissed as outmoded in an era of critical theory, testifies both to Kearful's skill as an exegete, and to Lowell's expert use of poetic sound and cadence. Kearful adds new layers to discussions of the poem's preoccupation with mental illness by demonstrating how Lowell's predominant images—of a season that is "ill," where the speaker's "mind's not right" and his "ill-spirit sob[s]"—are connected both literally and aurally by the "phoneme cluster ill" (317), which "infiltrates the entire poem, creating an acoustic chamber of *ill-ness*" (317).

However, Kearful's formalist reading of "Skunk Hour," while rigorous and perceptive, is also somewhat ironic. "Skunk Hour" was the final, and arguably most influential, poem published in Lowell's 1959 book *Life Studies*, a collection notable for its attempt to steer away from the New Critical influence that had earned Lowell both a Pulitzer Prize in 1947 for *Lord Weary's Castle*, and a reputation as one of the United States' most important younger poets. *Life Studies* has more frequently been analysed for its relinquishment of the taut,

*Reference: Frank Kearful, "Signs of Life in Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour,'" *Connotations* 23.2 (2013/2014): 317-35. For the original article as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkearful0232.htm>>.

formalist virtues that typified Lowell's earlier work.² His focus on the personality of the poet in *Life Studies* inspired the "confessional school" of poetry which was more driven by explorations of the "lyric I" and the personal and cultural contexts that influenced that ego. Kearful's identification of Lowell's "acoustic chamber of ill-ness," however, demonstrates the extent to which a residual formalism lingered in Lowell's confessional moment. By emphasising how these phoneme clusters toll in the minds of both speaker and reader, Kearful aligns the formalist and cultural readings of "Skunk Hour," showing that Lowell's New Critical breeding allowed him to control the poem's affect in a manner that heightens the anxiety and desperation confessed by its speaker. While perhaps unintentionally confirming criticisms of Lowell as a poet who could never fully relinquish the control offered by formalism,³ Kearful's article invigorates formalist analyses by demonstrating how they collude with the cultural readings courted by Lowell's confessional poems. Kearful's argument strengthens the case for Lowell's status as a master stylist; yet, exploring the reciprocal relationship between Lowell's formalism and his trope of illness as a metaphor for a sick postwar culture contains the possibility of reading him as a bipartisan poet, one whose work flourished in the no-man's-land that divided the academic poets from the emergent American avant-garde during the mid-century anthology wars.

Early critical discussions of *Life Studies* expressed both shock and dismay that Lowell could abandon his formalist skill set in favour of affecting the posture of a maudlin *poète maudit*. As M. L. Rosenthal claims in an early review, Lowell's *Life Studies* is "hard not to think of [...] as a series of personal confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal" (64). While Rosenthal asserts that his "first impression while reading *Life Studies* was that it is impure art, magnificently stated but unpleasantly egocentric," he finds comfort in the fact that beneath the confessional sensibility "Lowell is still the wonderful poet of the 'Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,' the poet of power and passion whose driving aesthetic of anguish belies the 'frizzled, stale and small' condition he attributes to himself" (64). For

Rosenthal, Lowell's confessional turn was a movement away from what he did best—the strained formalism of *Lord Weary's Castle*—where, as Louise Bogan observed, “Lowell's technical competence is remarkable [...]. The impact of the other poems in the book is often so shocking and overwhelming, because of the violent, tightly packed, and allusive style and the frequent effects of nightmare horror” (29). The fact that Lowell was grappling with the tension between formalist and a more private, confessional verse was clear in his 1960 National Book Award acceptance speech. Lowell, who had won the award for *Life Studies*, used the speech to reflect on the state of American poetry in 1960, where he saw two poetries “competing, a cooked and a raw. The cooked, marvellously expert, often seems laboriously concocted to be tasted and digested by a graduate seminar. The raw, huge blood-dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience are dished up for midnight listeners” (“Robert Lowell, Winner of the 1960 Poetry Award for *Life Studies*”).

Lowell's description of polarities in American poetry anticipates the anthology wars that arose between the followers of Donald Hall, Robert Pack and Louis Simpson's conservative *New Poets of England and America* (1957), and Donald Allen's more radical *New American Poetry* (1960). While Lowell publicly admired, for instance, the ability of Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg to serve up “raw, huge blood dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience,” his private correspondence suggests he remained skeptical about their lack of technical acumen. In a 1959 letter to Ginsberg, Lowell attempts to praise *Kaddish*, before delivering some rather sharp criticisms: “I enjoy *Kaddish* [...]. It's really melodious, nostalgic, moving, liturgical. Maybe it ought to be shorter—the manner sometimes almost writes itself—probably there's too much Whitman. And I do find it a bit too conventional, eloquent and liturgical” (*Letters* 345). In a 1957 letter to Randall Jarrell, Lowell describes how he felt torn between his allegiance to formalist verse, and his desire to express coarser emotional fragility in a less tethered idiom: “I've been working like a skunk, doggedly and happily since mid-August and have seven or eight poems finished (?) some quite long and all very direct and personal. They are mostly written in a

sort of free verse that takes off from the irregularities of my Ford poem [...]. I'll be very sad if you don't like them" (298). The trepidation Lowell expresses about these new "direct and personal" and "free verse" poems clearly had not subsided even after they had earned him the National Book Award. Indeed, at the end of that acceptance speech, Lowell declares himself caught between technical virtue and emotional honesty: "When I finished *Life Studies*, I was left hanging on a question mark. I don't know whether it is a death-rope or a life-line."

While Kearful's article demonstrates the importance of paying continued attention to the nuances of Lowell's prosody, other contemporary critics⁴ have used that question mark to hang Lowell. His median position between formalism and the emergent American avant-garde has been read as a form of equivocation rooted in his desire to be loyal to his New Critical benefactors, such as Tate and Ransom, while simultaneously remaining a relevant voice at a time when the Beats, the Black Mountain Poets, and the New York School were unsettling the American modernist tradition. As Jed Rasula notes, even in the immediate aftermath of important anthologies such as Hall, Pack and Simpson's *New Poets of England and America*, and Cecil and Tate's *Modern Verse in English 1900-1950*, it was becoming apparent that American formalist poets were "proving themselves all too clearly abstemious of criticism or theory and [...] the new wave of articulated poetics was emanating from other quarters, reactivating the significant provocations of Pound, Williams, and Stein, among others" (224). The popularity of Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*, which featured Black Mountain poets such as Olson, Levertov, and Creeley; Beats such as Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, and Corso; New York poets such as Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara; and San Francisco poets such as Duncan, Spicer, and Blaser, led many critics to regard the poets anthologized by Hall/Pack/Simpson and Cecil/Tate as out of touch with contemporary poetic trends. Lowell, as both the 1960 National Book Award winner, and a prominent figure in American verse, was an easy target for critics eager to herald in a new era of American writing. Published in both Hall/Pack/Simpon's and

Cecil/Tate's anthologies, Lowell was conspicuously absent from the *New American Poetry* in spite of *Life Studies*' attempt to revitalize a poetics of personality in American verse. Jed Rasula, in the *American Poetry Wax Museum*, claims that Lowell "was *the* poet prepared, golem-like, by the founders of New Criticism, programmed as it were to produce the poems that would confirm for a contemporary audience that their tastes (as honed by the curriculum of *Understanding Poetry*) could handle the new poetry as readily as the old" (248).

While there is little doubt that Lowell was supported by friends who promoted the New Critical agenda, reading his work solely as the product of that agenda is a polemical (and polarizing) gesture. Indeed, it reflects the currents of the anthology wars that have perpetuated a with-us-or-against-us mentality in American poetry. Articles such as Kearful's serve to remind us that Lowell's poetry, especially from *Life Studies* onward, cannot be dismissed as the wrong side of that polarity. Rather, Kearful's meticulous examination indicates that Lowell was a bipartisan poet, less hanging on a question mark than thriving in-between the raw and the cooked. Kearful's formalist analysis, by detecting a link between Lowell's painstaking sound patterns, shows that the poet was interested in using his craft to infect his audience with the feeling of illness he was so familiar with. The poem therefore marries the impersonal formalism of the New Critical poem with the anxious atmosphere of Lowell's confessional voice. As Kearful points out, the "theme of the poem [...] might be summarized as *ill all fall*, which also encapsulates the doctrine of original sin, that congenital spiritual 'illness' which we all inherit" (319). By explicating Lowell's phonological repetition of the "ill all fall" sounds over the course of the poem, Kearful shows that this spiritual inheritance is equally entrenched in the politics of 1950s America, which means that "'Skunk Hour' needs to be read against the foil of Cold War cultural, political, and legal issues that merged in major Supreme Court decisions regarding privacy" (319).

By focusing primarily on the poem's phonological attributes, however, Kearful makes no attempt to name who, or what, is behind this *ill will*. While Lowell also refrains from directly naming the cause of

his "illness," the poem's trajectory suggests a loss of traditional hierarchies in favour of a modern, capitalist world bereft of value and meaning. For instance, "Nautilus Island's hermit / heiress" ("Skunk Hour" ll. 1-2), we are told, is "Thirsting for / the hierarchic privacy / of Queen Victoria's century" (ll. 7-9). However, instead of fighting to maintain the values of the old world, she uses her privilege to buy "the eyesores facing her shore, and lets them fall" (ll. 11-12). The corruption of her desire implies a pernicious lack of social conscience on behalf of the privileged who, in this case, would prefer to watch the community suffer before assuming civic or class responsibility. We are also told that the "summer millionaire" has been "lost" (l. 14), and "[h]is nine-knot yawl / was auctioned off to lobstermen" (ll. 16-17), while the "fairy / decorator brightens his shop for fall; / his fishnets filled with orange cork" (ll. 19-21). In these lines, a reversal of traditional class distinction emerges—the lobstermen, not the millionaire, now sail the yawl, while fishnets are filled with kitschy decorations used to please tourists rather than the fish that would have conventionally brought sustenance to the town. Against this loss of conventional hierarchies the speaker finds himself alone in a world of empty values. His dark night of the soul is linked to his distaste for the sins of the modern capitalist world, where he drives a "Tudor Ford" (l. 26) and watches for "love-cars. Lights turned down, / they lay together, hull to hull, / where the graveyard shelves on the town" (ll. 27-29). This scene of casual affairs watched while safely contained within his own "Ford," itself a symbol of the modern, capitalist world, leads the speaker to conclude that his "mind's not right" (l. 30). Yet it is the feeling of being contained within this era of corrupted values—while confronted by the shallow lyrics of the popular songs emanating from the radio—that leaves the speaker feeling "ill" (l. 33) and alone.

Kearful's article demonstrates how Lowell's use of phoneme clusters increases the sound of tension in the poem, but it does not fully consider how Lowell uses this repetition of "ill"—sounds to position the speaker as subject to the torments of a postwar society where traditional values have dried up like the "chalk-dry and spar spire /

of the Trinitarian Church" (ll. 41-42). The "sound-chamber" of illness echoes persistently both in the mind of the speaker and reader, demonstrating that the speaker's "mind's not right" (l. 30). The reverberations created by Lowell's echoes of illness not only heighten the poem's sense of hostility, they also induce a palpable anxiety, one that mirrors the speaker's obsessive psychological behavior. The strained and choppy shift between rhyme and off-rhyme creates the sense that the poem itself, like the mind of the speaker, is threatening to collapse under the weight of its burden.

The early Cold War era from which Lowell emerged as a poet represents a particularly vibrant example of the incorporation of judicial and political institutions into social apparatuses administering human lives. A genealogical analysis of the Cold War reveals it as a network of power relations involving political, juridical, technological, cultural, medical, psychiatric, and other institutional practices aimed at regulating and normalizing the lives of citizens. Examples of these regulatory practices abound; from the juridical perspective, initiatives such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) threatened sanctions against those who held subversive or dissenting views. These sanctions became powerful social motivators in the wake of high profile cases such as those against Alger Hiss, Klaus Fuchs, the Hollywood Ten, and the Rosenbergs.⁵ In light of such threats, an overlap between the juridical, political, and cultural took shape, a feat more easily accomplished because of the elusive nature of communist evil. In the cultural sphere, as Stephen J. Whitfield argues, "[t]he values and perceptions, the forms of expression, the symbolic patterns, the beliefs and myths that enabled Americans to make sense of reality—these constituents of culture were contaminated by an unseemly political interest in their roots and consequences. The struggle against domestic Communism encouraged an interpenetration of the two networks of politics and culture, resulting in a philistine inspection of artistic works not for their content but for the *politique des auteurs*" (10). Fear that a subversive double-talk may have entered the cultural realm led to an even greater administration of the Cold War citizen. Containment practices, which Alan Nadel has defined as

the attempt to regulate and contain anxiety, dissent, paranoia, and other unruly feelings by investing popular culture with narratives that work to normalise political measures, infiltrated popular discourse. Thus film and television were imbued with narratives of domestic happiness and wholesome values in programmes such as *Leave to Beaver*, or taught families to be suspicious of abnormal neighbours, in popular film and television like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Munsters*. Radio programmes, including *This is Your FBI*, reminded the public it could trust (or fear) the arm of the law, while women's magazines provided blueprints for household management, a skill set necessary for keeping busy breadwinners happy. Fallout shelter advertisements promised safety from the apocalypse, while the fear of atomic obliteration was naturalised by the application of the word "atomic" to all manner of sundry goods, from children's toys to facial cleansers. Even the New Criticism, as Terry Eagleton has argued, functioned as a well-wrought urn for containing dissent in literature: According to him, New Criticism was "a recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo" (Eagleton 43).

Against this cultural backdrop, Lowell's subjects, as in "Skunk Hour," frequently find themselves in exile, caught between the abyss of mental turmoil and the technologies of power aimed at managing behaviour according to the prevailing political and cultural norms of Cold War America. His poetics of personality, by focusing on illness and breakdown, question the political rationality that encourages citizens to be individuals, so long as their individuality is integrated into the political, economic, and cultural schema of the postwar American state.

From a cultural perspective, what is perhaps most relevant to Kearful's discussion of "Skunk Hour" is the relationship between New Criticism and containment. In the poem, the anxiety created by the cultural atmosphere (enhanced by the phonological tropes noted by Kearful), and the existential notion that suicide offers the only escape from torment, positions the speaker as a subject of the Cold War practices aimed at objectifying corporeal bodies that helped consolidate consensus in a containment strategy directed at domesticating

dissent by inuring the public against perverse acts of violence. If, as Michel Foucault argues, biopower is “a set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (16), the illness experienced in “Skunk Hour” may be the result of an invisible, yet potent, shift in the political management of United States citizens, one intended to control the subject at the level of biological being. Illness thus results in the speaker’s realization that his body both biologically and psychologically refuses to conform to the false sense of wellness promoted by the political and cultural rhetoric that proliferated discourses of domesticity and bourgeois liberalism as means of asserting American values against the threat of the communist Other. For an academic poet such as Lowell, vocalising overt critiques of state policy and practice in an era of communist hysteria, blacklisting, and HUAC inquisitions may have led to tangible repercussions. Indeed, Lowell had placed himself on the government radar with his conscientious objection to WWII (and he would again in 1965 with his open letter to Lyndon Johnson). In poems such as “Skunk Hour,” where the form itself seems threatened by the poem’s overwrought textual and phonological burdens, Lowell is self-reflexively commenting on the inability to formally contain the strain of Cold War anxiety. Unlike the New American poets, whose experimental verse was predicated upon an outright rejection of formalism, Lowell utilized his New Critical training to enact the pressures placed upon the Cold War subject.

New Critical containment therefore appears to metonymically reflect cultural containment in Lowell’s poetic ethos. One element of this New Critical inertia was its infection of academic discourse, inducing a paralysis that sometimes removed “signs of life” from American poetry. America’s new political desire to assert its dominance in matters of foreign policy meant that it had to invest in research and development strategies that would help it achieve its goals. For this reason, funding for scientific, economic, and social research increased dramatically in the postwar years and led to the expansion of academic institutions. This expansion filtered into

disciplines such as English, creating collusion between Cold War politics and the institutionalisation of literary studies. While it is difficult to argue that New Critics overtly recognised their contribution to Cold War cultural discourses, Lowell does appear to have understood the consequences of a poetics that attempts to contain cultural ambiguities, paradoxes, and ironies, leaving the postwar artist alienated and lost. New Criticism's status as an instrument of liberal education therefore amounts to a failure that is at once poetic *and* political. As Lowell realised, such a pursuit within the institutionalised literary academy afforded only the illusion of intellectual autonomy while divorcing art from criticism of a sociocultural environment that saw unprecedented incursions upon privacy and civil liberties.

Poems such as "Skunk Hour" thus ironically used formalist techniques to convey a sense of confinement within an indifferent aesthetic and cultural paradigm. Formalist verse, burdened and strained within its phonological "chamber of illness," as Kearful shows, also becomes a metaphor of the speaker's desire to leave that sound-chamber and enter into a space free from its anxiety-inducing echoes. As a poet Lowell therefore seems to thrive in the interstitial space between the emergent avant-garde and the formalist poetry on which he cut his teeth. Rather than feeling loyal to his formalist lineage, he turns the techniques he inherited against the New Critical institution, which was complicit in drowning out poetry's social voice and restraining it from the "breakthrough back into life" ("An Interview with Frederick Seidel" 244) that Lowell's confessional poems sought to achieve.

Kearful's formalist reading, by emphasising the relationship between Lowell's phonological tropes and the poem's epistemological condition of illness, foregrounds the bipartisan nature of Lowell's aesthetic. Indeed, it indicates the productive working relationship between formalist and cultural/constructivist criticisms, one that Lowell recognised at the time of *Life Studies*. The skunks in "Skunk Hour," when considered from the perspective of Lowell's desire to break free from the formalist echo chamber that comprises the

majority of the poem, therefore seem to symbolise a willingness to embrace a less rigorous poetic praxis. As Kearful points out, by the time the poem turns its focus to the titular skunks, the “phoneme cluster *ill* which has spread through the poem like a virus is, finally, *swilled* by a trope of hunger, food, and eating when the mother skunk with her column of kittens ‘swills the garbage pail’” (326). Therefore, “[t]hanks to a family of skunks, Lowell as an adult can now stand and live, breathing ‘the rich air’” (327). From the perspective of Lowell’s bipartisan poetics, the skunks symbolise a resilient desire to make meaning through whatever means necessary. Just as the mother skunk “jabs her wedge-head in a cup / of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail, / and will not scare” (90), Lowell takes advantage of the poetic detritus at his disposal, combining formalist poetics with personal history in order to move beyond his “dark night of the soul,” and to find a way to thrive within the illness of his cultural paradigm. Frank J. Kearful’s fastidious reading of Lowell’s investment in phonological structures serves as a reminder of the poet’s ability to transcend the polarities of the raw and the cooked in order to serve a poignant critique of American Cold War culture.

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NOTES

¹“Skunk Hour” has featured prominently in several scholarly works on Robert Lowell. See, for example, Steven Gould Axelrod’s *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*; Thomas Travisano’s *Midcentury Quartet*; Jeffrey Meyer’s edited collection *Robert Lowell*; Paul Breslin’s *The Psycho-Political Muse*; William Doreski’s *Robert Lowell’s Shifting Colors*; Henry Hart’s *Robert Lowell and the Sublime*; and Alan Williamson’s *Pity the Monsters*.

²Steven Gould Axelrod, for instance, claims that in *Life Studies* “we find an opaque and playful language use, a fissured subject and voice, contingent and

shifting meanings, and an ironic and subversive relation to dominant culture" ("Lowell's Postmodernity" 251). Alan Williamson claims that *Life Studies* sought to break with formalism "by the infusion of apparently arbitrary personal detail, suggestive but less reducible than traditional symbolism, and by the elevation of private honesty to an aesthetic criterion, not the opposite but the creative contrary of craft" (59-60). Adam Kirsch observes that "[b]y the time of *Life Studies* [...] he had invented a style which the most private experience could be written about convincingly" (15).

³In *The American Poetry Wax Museum*, for example, Jed Rasula challenges Lowell's authority as a pivotal mid-century poet (248). Rasula also cites similar arguments by Karl Shapiro, who saw Lowell as "'pliable in the hands of the New Critics'" (248), and Thomas Parkinson, who regarded Lowell as "something we reacted to and against" (247).

⁴See, for example, Jed Rasula's *The American Poetry Wax Museum*; Karl Shapiro's *To Abolish Children, and Other Essays*"; Thomas Parkinson's *Poets, Poems, Movements*; and David Antin's "Modernism and Postmodernism."

⁵For a history of the relationship between early Cold War politics and American culture see, for instance, Stephen J. Whitfield's *The Culture of the Cold War*, and Elaine Schrecker's *The Age of McCarthyism*.

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Morte Jack:

The Evocation of Malory's Arthur, Guenivere and Lancelot in Graham Swift's *Last Orders**

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With the character of Jack Arthur Dodds, Graham Swift subtly slides myth into the middle of his 1996 novel *Last Orders*. The result is both comic and profound as the allusion to Arthur's mythic realm of Camelot mocks the fictional reality it is set against and simultaneously shows that reality in an ennobling light. Bermondsey butcher Jack's mythology-laden middle name alludes to King Arthur of British legend and matter of Britain romance. As his legendary namesake before him, Jack is a man loved and betrayed by both his wife and his most valued companion. Significantly, his death is as catalytic an event for his close-knit community as Arthur's was famously cataclysmic for his. Swift employs a technique reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's mythical method, formulated by the latter somewhat vaguely if fatalistically as the use of a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" which serves as a means "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177; cf. Donoghue). Eliot's proposition is founded on his reading of Joyce's *Ulysses* and the explicit use of the *Odyssey* as a narrative gridwork in that novel; whereas Swift only subtly and implicitly evokes King Arthur, Queen Guenivere and Sir Lancelot as shadows lurking behind his novel's contemporary characters, Jack, his wife Amy, and their friend Ray. In employing this technique of subtle evocation, Swift lends his own novel an additional layer of meaning and also places himself in a British literary tradition that not only encompasses

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debbriest0242.htm>>.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* but also claims Malory's *Morte Darthur* as a literary forebear. From a story-telling perspective, not only does the double name *Jack Arthur* serve as the absolute expression of the novel's juxtaposition of the profane and the sacred; it also poetically fuses these incongruous semantic fields at the very end of the novel with Ray's invocation of his friend's name. In the following, a comparison of passages from Swift's *Last Orders* and Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* will confirm these intertextual relations and point out their narratological function.

The Contemporary and the Mythic

Pamela Cooper credits Swift with an inspired understanding of myth, and his characters with possessing both contemporary individuality and archetypal features, drawn from the wealth of Anglo-American storytelling traditions (see 18, 14). The juxtaposition of imagery pertaining to the sacred and the secular in *Last Orders* also shares in this double consciousness of the contemporary and the mythic—as when the seedy pub where the main characters meet takes on the air of a sacrosanct space in which “last orders” not only refer to the last beverage of the day but to passing rites accompanying more final passages.

Swift draws on mythological motifs, and it is notable in this context that nineteenth century fiction, saturated with Arthurian nostalgia (see Bryden),¹ is an acknowledged influence. Inga Bryden has stated that “as a British, Christian hero King Arthur represented moral order, yet [in the Victorian era] interest shifted to focus on his death” (2). This is poignant in view of the fact that *Last Orders* is structured around the death of Jack *Arthur* Dodds, whose friends Ray, Vic and Lenny as well as his adopted son Vince embark on a haphazard, pilgrimage-like journey from London to Margate where they intend to scatter Jack's ashes.

The rambling trip undertaken by Jack's friends encompasses “[t]wo detours, one fight, a piss-up and a near-wetting” (Swift 180), as well

as a stopover at Canterbury. Detours thus shape the contemporary experience of Swift's characters as much as they did shape life in the realm of Malory's Arthur, as pointed out by Terence McCarthy, who has argued that, if there were signposts on the road to Camelot, "the most frequent would be 'detour ahead'" (2). In *Last Orders* the diversions taken and suffered by Ray's group are equated with rituals of remembrance in a sequence of dialog among the men: "'That's why we're here, aint we? To remember the dead.' 'It means a detour,' Vic says" (115).² The ritualistic character of the company's trip down a diversion route of their own making, in fact, aids an interpretation of the novel in mythic terms. The topic of death and remembrance a priori situates the novel in the border regions of the sacred and the profane where the realities of this world meet with the hope for ultimate transcendence over matter. The invocation of Arthurian myth heightens this duality in *Last Orders*.

Swift's Arthurian touchstone is Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1485), which has proved the most lastingly influential adaptation of Arthurian materials. Unlike other versions, Malory's opus still commanded interest in the seventeenth century and has directly or indirectly inspired almost every new Arthurian creation since the early nineteenth century. In his examination of Arthurian literature of the early to mid-twentieth century, Nathan Comfort Starr confirms Malory as the prime source of inspiration for writers aiming to reconcile Arthur's mythic world "with the pragmatic twentieth century" (4). In contrast to other early works of Arthurian literature, in the *Morte Darthur* Lancelot's presence is crucial. As Arthur's first knight he is not only superior in esteem and prowess to all other fellows of the Round Table, he is even, paradoxically, superior in his loyalty and devotion to Arthur. Contrary to the way the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Arthur's queen is portrayed in other treatments of the material, in the *Morte Darthur* Arthur does not react with jealous rage to the affair. He rather attempts to prevent talk of it at court, so that he may not be forced to sever ties with his first knight and punish the beloved offenders for their conduct. At the

same time, the concepts of earthly chivalry and of earthly love are not categorically rejected by Malory in favour of spiritual pursuits (see McCarthy 93). Lancelot, a sinner, still remains in the author's good graces and, although the affair between the king's first knight and his queen causes the downfall of Camelot, Malory does not condemn the lovers nor does he hold them responsible for the train of events they unintentionally set in motion, forcing Arthur into action against them. Instead, it is those knights who insist on stirring up conflict at court that Malory seems to find culpable.

Not only do Jack and Ray reflect the positions of Arthur and Lancelot in their respective narratives; both Swift's Jack and Malory's Arthur are characters who carry special significance through their very absences. Arthur is the once-and-future-king, the embodiment of a united Britain, whose death points beyond itself, toward the end of Camelot, the end of a peaceful union, and the end of chivalry. Jack, too, is a representative of an old order, and his death has been argued to reflect the demise of outdated concepts of masculinity and patriarchy (cf. Lea 11).³ Jack, though dead, and Ray are the central characters in *Last Orders*, just as Arthur and Lancelot figure prominently in the *Morte Darthur*.⁴ Ray, like Lancelot, is the focus of sympathy in a narrative structured around the demise of his closest friend. A divorced insurance clerk, Ray is an isolated character whose solitary passions are horse-racing and betting on horses. It is during his wartime service in North Africa that Ray first meets Jack, where, as a young foot soldier, Jack displays dominant courage paired with a sense of responsibility. In a critical situation he confronts an irresolute superior officer with the words: "What you have to do, sir, is assume command. If you don't, I will" (Swift 182). At the same time his outlook is egalitarian, giving voice to his belief that "we're all the same underneath, officers and ranks, all the same material" (Swift 27-28). Neither does Jack's stoic courage flee him on his deathbed, decades later, when Ray comes to realize that "he aint stopped being himself, just because. On the contrary" (Swift 152). It is also during the war in North Africa, soon after Jack and Ray meet, that Ray falls in

love with Jack's young wife, Amy; he sees a photograph which Jack carries with him. Amy Dodds, faithful yet tragic mother and faithless wife, is the remaining corner of the novel's central triangle.

Cooper has persuasively argued that "Swift depicts women ambiguously—as ideals, but also as destructive figures. They are at once redemptive and deceitful, like the fateful elusive temptress of certain Victorian misogynist works" (20). Roland Weidle concurs with Cooper's viewpoint, arguing that, in "a predominantly male narrative and thematic framework" (80), Swift's female characters are presented via narratological devices which are characteristic of the portrayal of female characters in high Victorian literature. The representation of Amy in *Last Orders* confirms both Cooper's and Weidle's assertions: she is an ideal, a focus of desire, and key to Ray's happiness, yet also an adulteress, conscious of the effect she has on men and not averse to using it in her own interest.⁵ A similar profound ambivalence characterizes the feminine in the world of King Arthur, where "women are divided into an aspect of malevolence and ill-will characterized by a threatening sexual voracity [...], and another aspect of mediation and guiding, and sometimes of healing" (Edwards 43). It may be noteworthy that Guenivere is unable to bear any children, while Amy gives birth to June, a severely disabled child whom Jack refuses to acknowledge.⁶ Thus, Amy and Guenivere share crucial features, both in terms of story and narratological presentation.

King and Knight—Jack and Ray

Jack and Ray's first meeting immediately results for Ray in a fateful rechristening: "It was Jack who first called me Lucky" (Swift 87), Ray recalls. Jack's choice of name is inspired by his professed belief that "[s]mall fellers have the advantage, small fellers have the luck, hope you understand that. Less of a target for the enemy, less weight to carry in this fucking frying-pan" (87). With these words short, slight Ray is taken under Jack's wing, feeling like, for reasons unknown, he

has been chosen: "He picked me," Ray muses, "[t]hat's how I became Lucky Johnson" (87). Dwelling further on the subject, he recalls Jack saying that

it was because I was lucky that he ought to stick with me, but it was the other way round. It was Jack who underwrote me. It wasn't that I was small so the bullets would miss me, it was that he was big, like a wall, like a boulder. And the bullets missed him anyway, they missed him so they missed me[.] (88)

Ray is set up by Jack to be special among all the rest of their regiment, to be invincible through his unique aura of luck. Their experiences in North Africa cement an enduring friendship which is commemorated in a photo, displayed in Jack's home, of the two of them sitting on a camel in front of the pyramids.

Corresponding to Jack's presupposition of Ray's amazing luck, Lancelot's knightly achievement is such that "in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms, both for life and death, he passed all other knights; and no time was he overcome but if it were by treason or enchantment" (Malory 95). Warfare is also the foundation of Arthur's and Lancelot's friendship as they gain mutual admiration while fighting in Arthur's Roman campaign (see McCarthy 21). During the war Lancelot is a remarkable aid to Arthur, but it is back in Britain that he proves his status as the king's first knight in various tournaments and knightly adventures. The effect of the parallel, on the one hand, is comic as the immortal grandeur of Arthur and Lancelot may seem incompatible with the experiences of two working class foot soldiers who spend the Second World War advancing and retreating between Egypt and Libya—each of them a "small man at big history" (Swift 90). On the other hand, the echo of Arthurian myth may serve as a means to elevate a decidedly less than grand, often traumatic experience shared by thousands which, because of its very ordinariness at the time, is frequently underappreciated.

For Ray/Lucky the association with his wartime nickname has occasionally proven a burden. He knows that he is no more or less

lucky than the next person, yet he cannot help being taken in, occasionally, by the prophetic quality of Jack's choice of name for him. With Jack terminally ill, Ray fears that people will expect miracles, miracles which he knows are extremely unlikely to come to him. He dreads people's superstitious assumption that "Ray'll swing it, Ray'll fix it. All Jack needs is a dose of his old mate Raysy. And while we're at it, we'll take a bet on the surgeon doing a top-notch job. I thought, It's a terrible burden having all this luck" (Swift 220). Correspondingly, Lancelot, heralded as the foremost knight in the world, suffers from people's inflated expectations when he is asked to heal Sir Urry, a Hungarian knight who has been cursed so that his wounds can only be cured by the best knight in the world. Sir Urry is brought by his mother to King Arthur's court in hopes of finding a miraculous source of help there. In deference to her wishes, Arthur makes an attempt to cure the knight by touching his wounds, not expecting to succeed himself but to set an example for his knights. A hundred nobles follow in their king's lead but none of their efforts is rewarded with success. This leads Arthur to exclaim: "Mercy Jesu, [...] where is Sir Lancelot du Lake, that he is not here at this time?" (Malory 464). On cue, the great knight arrives and Arthur entreats him to lay his hands on Sir Urry. "Jesu defend me," an unwilling Lancelot stalls, "while so many noble kings and knights have failed, that I should presume upon me to achieve that all ye, my lords, might not achieve" (464). The pressure on Lancelot is immense, yet, he complies with Arthur's request, who tells his knight plainly that if "ye prevail not and heal him, I dare say there is no knight in this land that may heal him" (465). Thus, both Lancelot and Ray find themselves faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Jack confronts his friend with a similar challenge when he, while in hospital, tells Ray of his debts of close to twenty thousand pounds which he has amassed by taking out a loan in an unsuccessful attempt to keep his butcher shop from bankruptcy: "Some things are best not known" (Swift 223), Jack tells Ray in justification of keeping Amy in the dark about this. The statement, however, is ambiguous in the

overall context of the novel: Jack presumably not only refers to his own secret debts but also to the affair Ray and Amy believe they have been keeping from him. Discussing Amy's prospects after his death, Jack tells Ray suggestively: "Maybe you'd know what she's going to do" (223). Similarly, Malory's Arthur is unwilling to openly acknowledge the affair between Lancelot and Guenivere. As a consequence, when rumours spread at court, "the King was full loath that such a noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen" (Malory 470). For the sake of the Round Table, for the sake of stability and order, "some things are best not known."

At Arthur's court, Lancelot succeeds in healing Sir Urry by a laying on of hands accompanied by humble prayer. In spite of what he sees as his previous sinful existence, Lancelot is granted the performance of this miracle. Overwhelmed by the magnitude and improbability of the event, he falls to his knees "and ever Sir Lancelot wept as he had been a child that had been beaten" (466). Not only is Lancelot's healing of the wounded knight a miracle; "it is a singular demonstration that God has extended his grace" (Cole 40). Significantly, Lancelot only attempts the healing of the cursed knight after Arthur commands him to, as the king firmly believes in his first knight's power to work the miracle. Similarly, Ray is granted the miracle of winning twenty thousand pounds by following Jack's firm instruction to place money on a race horse of his choosing. Ray's selection aptly reflects the nature of the enterprise: "*Miracle Worker*" (233) is the chosen horse's name. Compared to Lancelot, Ray's may be a more secular miracle but a miracle it is nonetheless, and it does not end with the successfully placed bet. Moments before scattering Jack's ashes, Ray remembers Amy telling him that shortly before Jack's death:

He was sitting up in bed listening to the radio, and then, the nurse said, he took off his headphones, all neat and careful, and said, "That's it then. That's all right then," and she went off just for a moment to do something and when she came back he was dead. (Swift 293)

Ray infers, without stating it explicitly, that Jack has been listening to the horse race, well aware of Ray's bet and that, once satisfied of the

success of their project, he was ready to die. Ray not only accomplishes to perform a near-miracle on Jack's behalf, the very person who first called him *Lucky*, but Jack, miraculously, has been made aware of the fact. This is a double miracle for Ray, while there was, apparently, a single one for Lancelot. T. H. White, however, sees in Lancelot's act of healing also a double miracle in as far as Lancelot knows that "the miracle was that he had been allowed to do a miracle" (White 557). Set against an instance of spiritual healing, it would seem that Ray's miracle deed, this-worldly and morally ambiguous as it is, can only lose in the comparison. This is not so, however, as the precedence of Lancelot's miracle not only mocks Ray's achievement, but also makes it stand out as a miracle in the first place. By allusion to Arthurian myth the outcome of a sports bet acquires the dignity of a divinely sanctioned, rare wonder.

Out on Margate Pier, Ray has been granted the honour of carrying the urn containing Jack's ashes. Ever closer to the point of letting go, he counters the notion of farewell by thinking, "I hold on to Jack" (Swift 263). At the end of Margate Pier, at the end of the novel, in a literal and metaphorical double entendre, Ray states: "We're at the end and I'm holding Jack" (292). He then prepares for the final act of scattering his friend's ashes: "I get out the jar from under my coat, Jack Arthur Dodds" (292). Ray's ritualistic, silent articulation of Jack's full name, only two pages before the ending of the novel, is the first time that readers are made familiar with Jack's middle name. While *Jack* is the most common and solidly mundane of names, *Arthur* counterbalances *Jack's* associations of the profane with its own mythic weight. At the moment of the man's ultimate dissolution—as his ash is about to be scattered to the winds and into the ocean by four pairs of rain-wet hands—the revelatory articulation of his name dignifies a moment of crisis that may have otherwise been tipping into the grotesque. At the same time, Ray's use of his friend's full name, however poignant it is, highlights an incongruity between the grandness of the name and what is physically left of its bearer. The effects of Jack's Arthurian shadow are thus simultaneously pro-

found—in their potential to dignify and point beyond the mundane; and comic—in their potential to highlight the shortcomings of mundane reality. The late revelation of Jack's middle name also reinforces a theme of termination, of death, and its aftermath. For Jane de Gay the closing words of the novel

encompass both salvation ("save our souls") and desolation and human insignificance (we are "Jack," slang for "nothing," quite literally dust in the wind), thereby raising questions about the value of human life, what we are, and whether there is personal survival after death. (565)

The states of desolation and salvation referred to here tally with Jack's two given names: Jack stands for the profane, the physical human being disintegrating into nothingness, while Arthur stands for the sacred, all that transcends, in whatever form, pure materiality. Jack's last journey terminates in Margate, in Amy's recollection a place synonymous with magic for her late husband (Swift 229). The site of Dreamland amusement park and the destination of multitudes of city-dwellers on a pilgrimage for the seashore, Margate implied pleasurable escape from the norms and restrictions of workaday life to the denizens of greater London until at least the mid-20th century. Jack's Margate is Arthur's Avalon: not only is each location a final resting place, but each also carries associations of paradise, of longing, and of passing from one sphere into another. Invoked by the name *Margate* is a passage from land to sea and Jack's remains do make that passage but the transformations he undergoes are at the same time more profound and raise questions of a metaphysical nature.

On Margate Pier the friends scatter handfuls of Jack's ashes simultaneously until there is not enough left to share among them, leaving Ray to cast to the wind what is left. Ray quietly eulogizes:

Jack Arthur Dodds, save our souls, and the ash that I carried in my hands, which was the Jack who once walked around, is carried away by the wind, is whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we're made of. (Swift 294-95)

Arthur, too, is carried away, out of this world and away to Avalon where he “is reabsorbed into the source of the marvellous” (Edwards 43). Mortally injured, Arthur tells a companion on his departure: “I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wounds; and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul” (Malory 516). The king is carried onto a barge and shipped off into the mist by Queen Morgan le Fay, the Queen of Northgales, and the Queen of the Waste Lands. They later appear at a monastery where a hermit lives and inter a body, assumed to be Arthur’s. On this gravesite, “many men say that there is written [...]: *Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam rexque futurus*” (Malory 517). Arthur’s return from the dead is prophesied, while Jack, though not literally expected to make a return to the land of the living, does share in his namesake’s foretold fate. Though reduced to mere ash, though shared out among his friends in “[l]ucky dip[s],” and shaken from his urn like the remains at “the bottom of a box of cornflakes” (Swift 294), Jack’s immaterial presence remains felt as he undergoes a series of transformations—from man to ash to wind (see Swift 294-95). He ultimately, in his dissolution, becomes a part of the world and everybody alive in it. The end point of his metamorphoses is only reached when “the wind becomes Jack what we’re made of” (295).

Knight and Dame—Ray and Amy

On seeing Jack’s photo of his wife Amy for the first time, Ray’s immediate reaction is the covetous thought: “I want one of those. I want one like that” (Swift 89). From his very first glimpse of her, Ray is enamoured of Amy and seeks a kind of blessing or protection from her photograph which, he believes, helps him through the war as much as Jack’s company. While in Africa, Ray keeps furtively taking the picture from his friend’s wallet, wishing he was in Jack’s place (see Swift 279). Romantically speaking, Ray carries Amy’s token into battle, the mere knowledge of her existence protecting him. Corre-

spondingly, Lancelot frequently sends defeated opponents to report to Queen Guenivere in repentance; like Ray, he is often separated from the woman he loves, but the battles he fights are fought in tribute to her. In his mind, Lancelot links Guenivere and Arthur and the allegiance he owes to each of them: "Wit you well I ought of right ever in your quarrel and in my lady the Queen's quarrel to do battle; for ye are the man that gave me the high order of knighthood, and that day my lady, the Queen, did me worship" (Malory 413), Lancelot tells Arthur. It appears that his love for one of them does not negate his love for the other but rather strengthens it.

Similar to Ray's immediate infatuation, Lancelot and Guenivere fall in love instantly, and their love, too, remains constant throughout the decades of their acquaintance. Even if Guenivere is technically an adulteress, Malory is emphatic that her love is untainted, stating that "while she lived she was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end" (Malory 444). In a further parallel, Lancelot and the Queen, like Ray and Amy, cannot act on their love for a long time, both for practical reasons and for reasons of conscience. After Jack's death, Amy asks Ray to take care of her husband's last wish—to have his ashes scattered from the end of Margate Pier—as she does not feel equal to doing it on her own, and neither can she bring herself to join Ray and his companions on their trip. Conscience-stricken, she wonders: "How could I have done it, Ray, stood there with you, sharing his ashes?" (Swift 230). While Ray is on his way to Margate, Amy dwells on her feelings for both Ray and Jack, thinking: "Oh Ray, you're a lucky man, you're such a *little* man. Oh my poor Jack" (230). Both her loves are on her mind on that day, both are connected, and devotion to one has not diminished devotion to the other.

Ray's final actions on Jack's behalf are reminiscent of how Lancelot is charged, by a vision, to bury Guenivere's body by Arthur's side:

And thus upon a night there came a vision to Sir Lancelot, and charged him, in remission of his sins, to hasten him unto Amesbury: "And by then thou come here, thou shalt find Queen Guenivere dead. And therefore take thy fellows with thee and purvey them of a horse and bier, and fetch thou the corpse of her, and bury her by her husband." (Malory 522)

Lancelot does this, thinking not of spiritual matters but of the physical reality of the deaths of both Arthur and Guenivere. "When I saw his corpse and her corpse so lie together, truly my heart would not serve to sustain my careful body," he explains the fact of his collapse during Guenivere's burial (523). Later Lancelot cannot overcome his grief, neither eats nor drinks, and spends his time "lying grovelling on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guenivere" (524). Even after the death of two characters constituting its corners, the triangle of king, queen, and knight cannot simply be dissolved. Likewise, the triangle of Jack, Amy, and Ray remains a reality even after Jack's passing away—Amy fulfilling her role as widowed queen, Ray going on one last knightly mission in honor of Jack.

The Triangle

Even until the very end of his life, Jack and Amy avoid discussing Amy's relationship with Ray. With Jack on his deathbed, Amy feels that the time might finally be ripe to lay open the secret of her infidelity but then decides against it, her reason being that Jack continues to refuse to talk about their disabled daughter. "He won't mention June so I won't mention Ray" (Swift 268), she justifies her silence. Yet Jack already knows what Amy avoids saying, telling her, with some finality, "[a]ll a gamble, aint it? Ask Raysy. But you'll be all right" (268). With his death plainly imminent, Jack indirectly bestows his blessing on Ray and Amy's relationship, telling Ray purposefully that between Amy and him it is he who is lucky, being the first to go, while she will be left behind and will "need looking after" (183). In Egypt, Ray would pretend to himself that he was Jack and Amy was his. Forty years later, during his final conversation with Jack, he suddenly feels that his friend has been aware of his secret desire all along and is now about to step aside to let Ray take his place. He believes Jack's farewell message to be: "These are my shoes, Raysy, go on, step in 'em, wear 'em" (283).

Arthur, too, is accepting Lancelot's desire for Guenivere. Even though he "had a deeming" of the affair, Arthur for the longest time refuses to force it into the open because he loves Lancelot "passingly well" (Malory 470). Valuing Lancelot's companionship even over that of his wife, the king ignores their affair until it is no longer possible for him to do so, for reasons of courtly policy.⁷ Jack, on the other hand, is not forced to disclose Amy's and Ray's secret. He can remain quiet on the subject and does so, even implicitly giving the pair his blessing to take up the affair again. Still, Ray cannot shake off feelings of guilt. Holding the urn containing Jack's remains, he internally voices his pangs of conscience: "I'm holding the jar and I don't deserve. [...] I'm holding the jar, thinking, I don't deserve, I don't deserve" (Swift 284-86). Lancelot, too, harbours guilt over his illicit love affair and consequent betrayal of Arthur. It is for this reason that, on the grail quest, he cannot approach the holy vessel, "for he was overtaken with sin" (Malory 330). Yet, the experience of failure is not sufficient to make his love for Guenivere cease, and neither does this love ever extinguish his love for Arthur. In that, Lancelot is "the symbol of perfect loyalty and disloyalty at the same time" (McCarthy 20).

Shortly after they first meet, Jack tells Amy that she is beautiful, and Amy is powerfully affected by his words of admiration. She ponders that "[i]t turns you over to hear a man say that, fills you up. To be alive, to have lived to hear a man say that, any man, and to know, by his smile, that he means it" (Swift 240). Roughly twenty years later, she is the one to offer a compliment that has the same effect on Ray. At some point during their first intimate encounter in his camper van Amy calls Ray a "lovely man." Arguably, it is Jack who inspires Amy's words to Ray as he was the source of the original compliment. Ray recalls Amy's words in terms that echo hers:

To have lived and heard a woman say that to you, even if it aint true. You're a lovely man. The rain on the roof, the noise of the crowd like waves. With tears in her eyes and a flame in her throat: Oh Ray, you're a lovely man, you're a lucky man, you're a little ray of sunshine, you're a little ray of hope.
(284)

Amy's involvement with both Jack and Ray can be viewed as a link between the men, strengthening their connection rather than weakening it. This phenomenon can also be found in the *Morte Darthur*, where women involved in triangular relationships with two men serve "to uphold the 'homosocial' bonds between men who uphold the court" (Edwards 45). This means that the focus of desire,

here Guinevere, is produced as desirable by being valued or desired by another, here the king himself. Guinevere's value is that she is married to Arthur. In the triangles of male homosocial desire, the woman is the focus which enables the men who desire her to bond, to make social contracts, and, importantly, to enact their rivalries. (Edwards 45)

Terence McCarthy concedes that "Lancelot's devotion to the queen is an aspect of his loyalty to Arthur and the realm" (95). It is their relationship, he explains, that, sinful though it may be, binds Lancelot and Arthur more strongly together. Heading towards the lines of people waiting to enter Canterbury Cathedral, Ray reflects that "it's as if, because I'm carrying Jack, I have to go first and they make way for me, and [...] I feel like I felt at the Home when Amy said yes I could go in with her" (Swift 194). Ray's comparison establishes a parallel between his feelings for Amy and his feelings for Jack, yet it also remains mysterious as Ray never states exactly what his feelings were on that prior occasion.

McCarthy believes that the tragedy of Malory's Arthur lies in the fact that he is forced into action against Lancelot. Even after Arthur has been pushed to acknowledge his wife's infidelity, "the noble King Arthur would have taken his queen again and to have been accorded with Sir Lancelot; but Sir Gawain would not suffer him by no manner of mean" (Malory 486). The king bitterly complains: "Alas, that ever Sir Lancelot and I should be at debate" (482), but he cannot return to his previous stance of deliberate ignorance once events have been set in motion. Following Arthur's death, both Guenivere and Lancelot turn toward religion and refrain from taking up their affair once more. Yet, their earthly love for each other remains unbroken in the absence

of further bodily encounters. In Malory's world, the will to cause trouble by exposing the affair, as Sirs Mordred and Agravain attempt to do, is more despicable than the affair itself which, illicit though it may be, is also an expression of true and enduring love (see McCarthy 96). In a crossing of the Swiftian and Arthurian universes, it is almost possible to hear Lancelot thinking: "Agravain's a stirrer!"

While *Last Orders* ends on Margate Pier and Ray's future remains untold, the possibility that he will attempt to rekindle the affair with Amy is strongly suggested. What is certain is that Ray's and Amy's romance is endorsed rather than condemned by Swift, just as Lancelot's and Guenivere's love is approved of by Malory. Guilty secret that the affair may be, it is at the same time the novel's central source of hope, and with its possible renewal the future looks much brighter.⁸ In Swift's fictional universe things may well take a happier turn than the precedence of Camelot would suggest. As has been shown, there are certainly ways in which mythical precursor and contemporary narrative diverge, sometimes to comic effect. Equating small, timid Ray with physically powerful, bold Sir Lancelot is a humorous feat and so, on the surface, is imagining a Bermondsey butcher as king of the Britons. Yet as much as these parallels are apparently comic, they resonate on a deeper level. Ray's inner world, which readers are made privy to via his extra-homodiegetic narration, both retrospective and simultaneous with the trip to Margate,⁹ is rich and multi-layered. Beyond the surface, Ray shares with Lancelot the virtues of strength and loyalty. Corresponding to equestrian pursuits of a knightly kind, he has always had a deep passion for horse racing with its personal associations of freedom and self-fulfillment. As an old man he still harbors the passion, still thinks "like I'm the jockey and I don't have no choice" (Swift 258). Even quarrelsome Lenny recognizes in Ray unsuspected depths: "Just when you think he aint got no advantage he pops up and surprises you [...]. It's like he hides behind being small" (Swift 138).

The Jack/Arthur parallel, too, has profound effects. It imparts the themes of death and mourning, so central to the novel, mythic

significance beyond the bleak materialist view of “flesh being flesh” and people being “live meat” (Swift 209). The transcendence of death, which Arthur mythically achieves, is also a recurrent motif in the portrayal of Jack. During their lunch break in Rochester, for example, Ray and his travelling companions feel Jack’s presence strongly, leading Ray to speculate that “it’s as though, if we keep talking this way, Jack really will come through the door, any second now” (Swift 111). Arthur, too, remains a presence felt even after his passing, and with the mystery of his ultimate fate unresolved, “some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of Our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again” (Malory 517). Although his friends have confirmation of his death, the spectre of Jack lingers on in the world. The fact that he is given one brief chapter to narrate, despite the “handicap” of being dead, Tebbetts believes “suggests the survival of the spirit” (76), a notion which is heightened by the allusion to King Arthur.¹⁰ Recognition of the Arthurian template thus dignifies the narrative as a whole, while it simultaneously mocks the characters’ fictional reality. These incongruous effects are in alignment with the novel’s general juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane which reaches a peak, a few pages before the end, in the revelation of the name *Jack Arthur*. The double name not only forces together the opposed strands of imagery pertaining to the sacred and the profane, but also joins them in an equilibrium and so illuminates the sacred within the profane.

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NOTES

¹See Bryden. On the topic of Arthur’s importance in Victorian medievalism and the “Breton hope” for his return, Megan L. Morris has argued that “Arthur’s body became a material avatar of Victorian historiographical tradition,” as well as “a signifier of morality, manliness, and unity for the fragmented country of England” (6).

²Richard Pedot points out the significance of this exchange in his article "Dead Lines in Graham Swift's *Last Orders*."

³Lea has made the further point that Swift portrays the values of stability, continuity, and communal responsibility as ingrained in the World War Two generation (see 177). Veteran Jack epitomizes these values, for better or worse, and his death not only leaves a gaping hole in his social milieu, it also calls into question the continued validity of certain social concepts and their attached values.

⁴Reinhard Mischka sees both of them as the protagonists of Malory's narrative but believes Lancelot to be the focus of the author's sympathy and attention (see 81). In agreement with Mischka, Karen Cherewatuk describes Lancelot as Malory's favorite (cf. 68).

⁵While Cooper reads Amy as a semi-mythic figure of femininity and desire (cf. 20), and Adrian Poole sees her as "desirable wife-and-mother around whom the men all revolve," she is also one of Swift's "sexually unreliable and sometimes quite calculating women" (Malcolm 19).

⁶Pedot sees in June's condition "not only a horrible fiasco from the point of view of heredity—the transmission of life—it is also a defection from the point of view of filial transmission" (62).

⁷Arthur becomes "a prisoner of the system and cannot escape" (McCarthy 122).

⁸Tebbetts concurs that the novel ends on a hopeful note: "Indeed, the last orders of *Last Orders* may well be the new orders at last achievable in the individual lives and in the hitherto dysfunctional families of its characters" (86-87).

⁹The terms of narratological analysis are Rimmon-Kenan's.

¹⁰De Gay shares this view, stating that "[t]he possibility of personal survival after death is raised by the fact that Jack, who is dead for the whole of the narrative, is nevertheless present in important ways" (566).

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Ekphrastic Poetry and the Middle Passage: Recent Encounters in the Black Atlantic*

CARL PLASA

Introduction: Shifting the Perspective

In “Hayden in the Archive” (2010), Elizabeth Alexander looks back affectionately to the earlier African American poet whom her title names, imagining him absorbed in the painstaking labours of historical research:

Stoop-shouldered, worrying the pages,
index finger moving down the log,
column by column of faded ink.

Blood from a turnip, this
protagonist-less
Middle Passage.

Does the log yield lyric? (ll. 1-7)

Here the question with which these lines end is a rhetorical one: the “log” and “slavers’ meticulous records” (l. 8) over which Robert Hayden broods do indeed “yield lyric” (l. 7) in the fragmentary late-Modernist shape of “Middle Passage” (1945; rev. 1962), still rightly considered the most important poem to confront the historical catastrophe at its heart.

For other poets writing in Hayden’s wake, by contrast, it is not so much the textual as the visual dimensions of the transatlantic slave trade’s archive that provide the occasion for utterance, as most power-

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debplasa0242.htm>>.

fully illustrated by David Dabydeen in “Turner” (1994), a 783-line poem inspired by Joseph Mallord William Turner’s *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (1840). This ambitious—not to say audacious—text has stimulated extensive and lively critical debates about the uses of ekphrasis as a vehicle for reflecting on the slave trade and its legacies,¹ but, since the time of its first publication over two decades ago, a number of other important Black Atlantic poems in which ekphrasis meets the Middle Passage have been produced. This essay analyses three of the most recent salient examples of this trend, all of which have to date attracted little or no critical attention: Elizabeth Alexander’s “Islands Number Four” (2001), Olive Senior’s “A Superficial Reading” (2004), and Honorée Fanonne Jeffers’s “Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay, Great-Niece of Lord Mansfield, and Her Cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, c. 1779 (by unknown artist)” (2011).²

By bringing these three texts together, the essay enables us, in the first instance, to gain a sense of how the deployment of the ekphrastic genre has developed in the hands of twenty-first century poets wishing to traverse anew the ground of Dabydeen’s pioneering experimental vision. More significantly, perhaps, it simultaneously builds on the work that “Turner” has elicited over the years by further correcting the biases intrinsic to much of the existing criticism on ekphrastic poetry, for which the dominant analytic paradigm remains that of texts where both the poet’s gaze—and its object—are white.³

Looking Beyond the Visible: Elizabeth Alexander’s “Islands Number Four”

Alexander’s “Islands Number Four” was originally commissioned for *Words for Images: A Gallery of Poems* (2001), a book which, as one of its editors, Joanna Weber, puts it, “bring[s] poets who were once students back to the [...] campus” at Yale University to “interact” with the “objects” (Hollander and Weber ix) housed in the University’s Art Gallery. One such object is Agnes Martin’s *Islands No. 4*, an abstract

expressionist painting produced c. 1961 and positioned in the book on the right-hand page directly opposite Alexander's twenty-five line poem (see fig. 1). This small work (it is just 37.8 centimetres square) features twelve "oval capsules," each traversed six times by the "horizontal line" that, as Weber explains, is one of Martin's hallmarks and "encased in a grid" in such a way as to resemble "an archipelago of islands organized as neatly as if they were in an ice cube tray" (Hollander and Weber 82).

Alexander responds to this thought-provoking minimalist picture in her poem's enigmatic first strophe:

1.

Agnes Martin, *Islands Number Four*,
Repeated ovals on a grid, what appears
To be perfect is handmade, disturbed.
Tobacco brown saturates canvas to burlap,
Clean form from a distance, up close, her hand.
All wrack and bramble to oval and grid.
Hollows in the body, containers for grief.
What looks to be perfect is not perfect.

Odd oval portholes that flood with light. (ll. 1-9)

As the poem continues, it becomes clear that Alexander is doing something far more daring and complex than simply providing an ekphrastic gloss on another's artistic creation, moving outside the frame of what is directly visible to an engagement with an image that the reader cannot see on the page and that, at first glance at least, could hardly be further removed from Martin's. This ghostly image is that of the Liverpool slaver, the *Brookes* (see fig. 2), abruptly introduced at the beginning of the poem's second strophe:

2.

Description of a Slave Ship. 1789:
Same imperfect ovals, calligraphic hand.
At a distance, pattern. Up close, bodies
Doubled and doubled, serried and stacked
In the manner of galleries in a church.

*In full ships on their sides or on each other.
 Isle of woe, two-by-two, spoon-fashion,
 Not unfrequently found dead in the morning.
 Slave-ships, the not-pure, imperfect ovals,
 Portholes through which they would never see home.
 The flesh rubbed off their shoulders, elbows, hips.
 Barracoon, sarcophagus, indestructible grief
 Nesting in the hollows of the abdomen.
 The slave-ship empty, its cargo landed
 And sold for twelve ounces of gold a-piece*

Or gone overboard. Islands. Aftermath. (ll. 10-25)

On more considered inspection, however, the differences between these two images—the seen and the unseen, the modern and the archival, Martin’s painting and *Description*—prove to be not quite so pronounced. Such an effect is curiously appropriate, given that it is brought about by the way in which, in Alexander’s poem, the meanings of the two images themselves change as the distance from which they are contemplated is reduced.

In the case of Martin’s picture, the regimented set of “Repeated ovals on a grid” (l. 2) of which it is composed initially gives the impression of “Clean form from a distance” but, when observed “up close,” reveals the traces of its production and, in particular, the artist’s “hand” (l. 5.)—the shaping instrument which at once “disturb[s]” (l. 5) the mechanical symmetries of the “canvas” (l. 4) and sullies them with the touch of the human. Such subtle adulterations of the depersonalized effect for which the artist seems to strive are registered, in “Islands,” by its own play of subtly imperfect repetition. This begins with the poem’s title (reappearing in italics in the poem’s first line), which quietly alters Martin’s *Islands No. 4* to “Islands Number Four” and is continued in the minor discrepancies of phrase that, for instance, recast “what appears / To be perfect is handmade” (ll. 2-3) as “What looks to be perfect is not perfect” (l. 8). But as well as detecting the presence of Martin’s hand behind the apparent geometrical purities of “oval and grid” (l. 6), the poem’s speaker begins to invest the elusive images she sees with her own humanizing meaning: Martin’s gridded ovals are interpreted as “Hollows in the body” which are

subsequently refigured as “containers for grief” (l. 7) before finally turning into mysterious “portholes that flood with light” (l. 9).

The terms in which the speaker constructs the twelve abstract forms populating Martin’s picture might seem somewhat arbitrary, but become less so when apprehended from the perspective of the poem’s second strophe, in which—as already noted—the text shifts its ground from the realms of abstract art to those of abolitionist iconography and *Description*, an image more famous even than the painting by Turner that so enthralls Dabydeen. Here the speaker once more gains insight into the visual materials with which she deals by means of an interpretative double-take. When first observed “At a distance” (l. 12), the image of the *Brookes* appears to feature the “Same imperfect ovals” (l. 11) as characterize Martin’s work and to be organized in terms of a similar “pattern” (l. 12). Yet when examined “Up close,” these forms show themselves in fact as captured African “bodies” (l. 12) brusquely crammed into the different apartments of the slaver’s lower deck—“Doubled and doubled, serried and stacked” (l. 13), as Alexander puts it—with the adult male slaves chain-hyphenated together, “two-by-two” (l. 16) for good measure. Martin’s painting, in other words, provides the speaker with a way of approaching the representation of the slave ship while the latter provides a reciprocal frame of reference for interpreting the painting and understanding the speaker’s response to it: the painting, it thus emerges, is haunted not only by the vestigial trace of the artist’s hand but also by the spectral memory of a disturbing history, with the two images in the poem entering into dialogue with one another. In this way, Martin’s work lends strange weight to Marcus Rediker’s haunting description of “the slaver” as a kind of “ghost ship sailing on the edges of modern consciousness” (13).

It would be an exaggeration to claim that the respective parts of the poem to which these images are assigned are held together with anything like the same force as the shackled figures in *Description*, but they are certainly suggestively interlinked all the same. One way in which Alexander forges the connections is by verbal association, with

several of the terms used in the first strophe obliquely looking forward to its second by means of their resonances either with the nautical world more proper to the *Brookes* ("wrack," (l. 6); "portholes," "flood," (l. 9); and the punning "canvas," (l. 4)) or with plantation labour ("Tobacco" and "burlap," (l. 4)), while another is repetition. The repetition with slight differences of phrases is an important aspect of the poem's first strophe but ultimately something that pervades it as a whole, as particular formulations are reworked across its course: "up close, her hand" (l. 5) becomes "Up close, bodies" (l. 12), for example, and "Hollows in the body, containers for grief" (l. 7) becomes "indestructible grief / Nesting in the hollows of the abdomen" (ll. 21-22). This mosaic of phrasings and rephrasings is complemented both by the poem's phonetic order, which is dominated by the long and short "o"-sound and by its lineation, with the last line of each strophe cut adrift from the block of verse that precedes it.

The image of the *Brookes* that Alexander invokes is far more overtly charged in a political sense than Martin's *Islands* and absorbs more of the poem's imaginative energy (receiving sixteen lines as opposed to just nine), not least because it raises a number of questions about the interplay between verbal and visual modes of representation in which Alexander is herself interested. It was originally produced and circulated by William Elford and the Plymouth Chapter of the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in November 1788 but quickly reappeared in several further editions published the following year in London, Philadelphia and New York and was copied and distributed by the thousand.⁴ While these four versions of the image are all accompanied by an extensive written commentary, what is striking about the most widely reproduced London version is the way in which it recalibrates the ratio of visual to verbal materials. This iteration of the print endows those visual materials with a much greater technical sophistication and complexity than is manifested by its three cognates, offering some seven views of the slaver (rather than the single view to which the other broadsides are restricted), and it also significantly reduces the amount of space available on the page

for the written text. In our own day, emphasis on the visual dimension of the *Brookes's* representation is even more extreme: the image is now extensively used (or even overused) by publishing houses to promote and sell books about the slave trade by novelists, historians and literary critics but invariably appears in this commercial context shorn of writing altogether (even as, ironically, what it advertises is precisely textual).⁵

Perhaps one way of accounting for such privileging of the visual is through the assumption that images are ultimately more powerful than words as a means to convey the trials the slaves underwent during the Middle Passage. As we shall see, such an assumption is one which Alexander's poem will significantly challenge but it certainly appears to underpin Thomas Clarkson's narrative of how the image of the *Brookes* both came about and was subsequently refined, as told in his *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (1808):

The [Plymouth] committee also in this interval brought out their famous print of the plan and section of a slave-ship; which was designed to give the spectator an idea of the sufferings of the Africans in the Middle Passage, and this so familiarly, that he might instantly pronounce upon the miseries experienced there. The committee at Plymouth had been the first to suggest the idea; but that in London had now improved it. As this print seemed to make an instantaneous impression of horror upon all who saw it, and as it was therefore very instrumental, in consequence of the wide circulation given it, in serving the cause of the injured Africans, I have given the reader a copy of it in the annexed plate. (2: 111)

Here it is noticeable that Clarkson—writing in the immediate aftermath to the slave trade's abolition in 1807—defines the recipient of the “copy” of the “famous print” he is discussing as a “reader,” whereas, when he reminisces about the preabolitionist period when the print was an instrument of political change, he uses a different nomenclature. In this more urgent context, the recipient is a collective “spectator,” exposed “so familiarly” to the “sufferings of the Africans in the Middle Passage” that “he” “instantly” becomes an authority upon

their "miseries," receiving an "impression of horror" that is, once again, "instantaneous."

There is no doubt that the image of the *Brookes* is a shocking one, confronting its beholder with a vision of the slave trade which is hard to forget. Yet as much as it purveys "horror," the image to some degree also screens or detracts from it, particularly with regard to those endlessly duplicated "bodies" to which Alexander's text alludes. While these are so arranged in *Description* as to give the viewer an overwhelming sense of the Middle Passage's claustrophobic atmosphere, they seem strangely self-contained, especially with regard to the corporeal secretions that would be released during the Atlantic voyage. Yet even as this sense of sickening bodily discharge is thus expelled from *Description* in visual terms, it is communicated verbally in the personal abolitionist testimony of the slave-ship surgeon, Alexander Falconbridge, whom *Description* quotes in its fourth and final column: "The deck, that is, the floor of [the slaves'] rooms," Falconbridge recalls, "was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house." Word supplements image, that is, filling out its lack.

Together with their aura of self-containment, the enslaved bodies that *Description* renders visually appear surprisingly whole and vigorous—as if somehow uncorrupted by the often fatal illnesses to which they would normally be prone and which, as *Description* lists them, not only include the "flux" (or dysentery), but also "small-pox, measles [...] and other contagious disorders." These impressions are corrected, however, both by *Description*'s written text and Alexander's poem, which remembers and incorporates three fragments of that text, using a similar kind of collage technique to that deployed in Hayden's "Middle Passage" and combining this with an italicized type perhaps suggestive of the sideways position slaves were routinely obliged to take up: "In full ships on their sides or on each other" (l. 15); "Not unfrequently found dead in the morning" (l. 17); and "The flesh rubbed off their shoulders, elbows, hips" (l. 20).

This technique extends beyond *Description* to a version of the *Brookes* broadside to which Alexander alludes less obviously, *Stowage of the British Slave Ship 'Brookes' Under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788* (see fig. 3). In this contemporary etching (probably produced in 1788), the amount of written text provided is drastically reduced from the 2,400 words estimated by Rediker to be included in *Description* (317), while at the same time being more freely interspersed among the visual materials (rather than fixed beneath them). One feature of this writing is its being inscribed in what Alexander defines, in the first of her three allusions to the image, as a "calligraphic hand" (l. 11) whose flowing elegance not only collapses the distinction between word and image, but also clashes deliberately with the grotesque realities it records, as, for example, in the comments about the number of persons the *Brookes* transported prior to the Regulation Act. As this broadside discloses in the "Note" tucked into its top-right corner, the slaver "had at one time carried as many as 609 Slaves," reaching this capacity "by taking some out of Irons & locking them spoonwise (to use the technical term) that is by stowing one within the distended legs of the other." Such a startling contrast is evident elsewhere in *Stowage*, particularly in the statement, located this time in the centre of the page in bold upper-case font, of how **"ADDITIONAL SLAVES"** would sometimes be congregated **"ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES"** of the *Brookes's* **"LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES (IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH)."** These two snippets of information provide the basis for Alexander's other two allusions, as she revises "spoonwise" into "spoon-fashion" (l. 16) and alters the visual aspect of the parenthetical phrase just quoted, so that it reappears in her text in the standard italic font which, as previously indicated, she uses at other points: "*in the manner of galleries in a church*" (l. 14).

In reclaiming such fragments from the archive of representations to which the *Brookes* has given rise, Alexander contests the primacy of the visual mode, placing an imaginative counter-faith in the ability of the written word to act as an effective conduit of historical memory.

Yet she is not content with simply letting that word speak for itself, as it were, but concerned instead to augment its powers, doing so no more strikingly than in the arresting figuration of the *Brookes* as “sarcophagus” (l. 21), an entity defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a “kind of stone reputed among the Greeks to have the property of consuming the flesh of dead bodies deposited in it, and consequently used for coffins” (“sarcophags” *n.* 1). In Alexander, that is, the flesh of Clarkson’s “injured Africans” (2: 111) is not just excoriated by its frictional movement against the “chains” and “bare boards” to which *Description* refers, but actively eaten away from the bodies of those who do not survive such ordeals.

Ultimately, however, the written word can no more do justice to the truth of the slave trade than the visual image, as Alexander’s poem would seem perhaps to recognize on reaching its conclusion. At this point, the “slave-ship” is “empty, its cargo landed / And sold for twelve ounces of gold a-piece” (ll. 23-24)—a sum which incidentally looks back or across to the dozen silvery ovals featured in Martin’s painting—even as other slaves are said, in the poem’s last line, mysteriously to have “gone overboard” (l. 25). In deploying so nondescript a phrase, Alexander’s poem both hints, ironically, at the imperfections of the linguistic medium it elsewhere affirms and leaves itself no option but to come to a sudden halt with two one-word sentences—“Islands. Aftermath.” (l. 25) These respectively return the poem to its beginning (and the painting that was its original impetus), restarting the processes of re-vision with which the poem is preoccupied.

“Islands Number Four” is thus a poem in which allusion plays a central role, enabling Alexander to expand her range of reference beyond Martin to encompass representations of the *Brookes* in which the visual and the verbal are intermixed in complex ways. The technique of allusion similarly predominates in the second text for consideration, Senior’s “A Superficial Reading” and has a similarly expansive effect, as the poem enters into a dialogue with a variety of texts additional to the image that explicitly inspires it.

Fathoming Allusion in Olive Senior's "A Superficial Reading"

This twenty-seven line poem was first published in *Mangrove* in 2004, but reappears in *Shell* (77-78), a volume with which, as Senior tells us in her "Author's Note," she "wanted to be done [...] by 2007," so that it would coincide with the bicentennial of "the abolition of the slave trade by Britain" (95). It is the poem's timely re-emergence at this symbolic moment that gives it one further link to the abolition-conscious "Islands." Where the poem dramatically differs from "Islands," however, is in the fact that the visual material to which it responds does not take the form of harrowing images of slave ships but is an ostensibly seductive portrait, in which the figure of an individual (female) slave is not only brought into view but also juxtaposed with that of her white mistress. In taking its stimulus from such an image, "A Superficial Reading" signals an interest in the dynamics of power between black and white females that is not part of Alexander's text but that will also be crucial to the poem by Jeffers to be discussed later on.

The first of the allusions to feature in Senior's text appears in the brief parenthetical headnote situated just before the poem proper begins and is in fact what might be called a misallusion: "*An eighteenth-century painting of the titled English lady and her black child slave*" (77; italics in original). While the information provided here usefully alerts the reader to the poem's ekphrastic genre and the inequalities of race (as well as class and age) that mark the relationship between its two key figures, it is in other ways not entirely accurate or helpful, since the painting in question is neither strictly of eighteenth-century provenance nor of a lady who is English. Instead it is Pierre Mignard's 1682 portrait of Louise de K  roualle (1649-1734), Duchess of Portsmouth and mistress to King Charles II (see fig. 4). The allusive surface in this case is, in other words, a duplicitous one and no doubt playfully so, given the careful historical erudition which invariably underpins Senior's *oeuvre*. Senior's headnote performs additional mischief by referring to Mignard's sitter as "*titled*" while failing to disclose what her official appellation actually is. In this way, Mignard's

Duchess finds herself reduced to the same anonymity as characterizes the young female slave kneeling at her side. The latter is visually present in the portrait itself, of course, but altogether effaced by the imposing legend the portrait bears: *Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth*.

Just as the true identity of Mignard's painting is somewhat obfuscated by the headnote, so the image itself is not immediately available to the reader's gaze at the poem's outset. In contrast to the situation with "Islands," it is not visible alongside the text, but positioned on the reverse side of the page on which the poem's first eighteen lines are printed, where it is reproduced in black and white, rather than the sumptuous colours of the original:

Turn the page and revel in the surface opulence
of moiré silk, of creamware, pearlware, skin.
The shell-like ear behind the torque of ringlets,

the black pearl eyes. (ll. 1-4)

If the idea of "surface opulence" implies a deeper impoverishment—a certain moral emptiness harboured inside the shell of the Duchess's material affluence and outward beauty—such a notion is compounded by the painting itself, which shows a slave-girl not merely purveying the exotic spoils of empire (in this case sprigs of red coral and large pearls contained in a conch shell), but being one such spoil in her own right: she is finely attired in a green dress and "owned" (l. 15) by the Duchess in the same way as the "pearl choker" (l. 11) that has been "loaned [her] for the occasion" (l. 12) of the portrait's composition. The irony here is that even as the Duchess "does not really notice" the slave and treats her as "an accessory to fashion" (ll. 5, 11)—a phrase in which "fashion" is both noun and verb—the white woman is herself rendered in terms that suggest how she too is less a consuming subject than an object for consumption: her "shell-like ear" and "black pearl eyes" mirror the far-fetched treasures the slave brings her and the arm with which she "embrac[es]," without "shel-

tering" (l. 6), her black minion is likened to "cold marble" (l. 7)—marmoreal not maternal.

Another particularly significant instance of this process of objectification occurs at the start of the poem when the Duchess's "skin" is likened to "creamware" and "pearlware" (l. 2), both of which are types of pottery manufactured and popularized by Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95). Wedgwood also designed the well-known jasperware medallion used to advance the abolitionist campaign (see fig. 5), and by thus gesturing towards him the poem exposes the Duchess to another irony (albeit one that is self-evidently anachronistic in a strict historical sense), since the Wedgwood medallion was widely adopted by women during the abolitionist era as a modish accoutrement and so might well have been something the slave-owning Duchess would have found appealing. As Clarkson recollects in his *History*:

Of the ladies, several wore [the medallions] in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner for their hair. At length, the taste for wearing them became general; and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity, and freedom. (2: 192)

The poem's relatively oblique evocation of Wedgwood in the opening stanza's comparison of epidermal to ceramic surfaces becomes more direct in the description of Mignard's child-slave in stanza three: "You kneel and the painter / collapses your upper body into a sign: / a small black triangle" (ll. 7-9). Like the earlier reference to the "triangle" of the Duchess's "body" (ll. 5, 6) coldly enclosing the slave's in stanza two, Senior's geometric language here is suggestive of the commonplace reductionism which, in figuring the transatlantic slave trade as "triangular," "collapses" (l. 8) its rough trajectories into a manageable mathematics. At the same time, Senior's stress on the slave's "kneel[ing]" (l. 7) posture brings the poem back to the Wedgwood medallion, which displays its own kneeling (or rather half-kneeling) slave. That said, there are some obvious differences between the two enslaved figures, the most notable being that, in the image presented by the medallion, the slave's hands are clasped in supplica-

tion and shackled together, whereas in Mignard's painting they are not just unshackled but gift-bearing and the slave herself seems to be engaged in an act of worship as she gazes up smilingly at her unresponsive owner.

According to Joseph Roach, Mignard's portrait—despite its seductiveness, or perhaps because of it—is a “deeply disturbing paean to imperial commodification” (130) in which slavery is “domesticated, privatized [and] trivialized” (128) and its brutal realities rendered invisible. While such realities do not come any nearer to being disclosed by Senior's poem—something that clearly distinguishes it from Alexander's—they are nonetheless discernible via allusive channels, as, for example, in the detail of that choker that “collars” (l. 12) the slave-girl and seemingly “separates” her “head” from her “body” (l. 13). As the poem's speaker puts it, this adornment is an *aide-mémoire*, “reminding” the girl of “an earlier truncation” (l. 14). Here the most obvious historical reference is to the beheading of King Charles I during the English Civil War in 1649 but, in literary terms, the allusion is to Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688). In this novella set in Coramantien and Surinam (and including a Middle Passage vignette of its own), the violence of slavery Mignard masks is fully exhibited, whether in the climactic dismemberment of the eponymous hero that takes place in the novella's penultimate paragraph, which some critics read as an allegory for Charles I's own execution (see Brown 57-58; Doyle 103), or Oronoko's despairing decapitation of his pregnant African wife, Imoinda.

The relative position of slave to mistress in Mignard's composition gives visual expression to a hierarchy of race in which the black female body is marginal and the white central, with the latter also portrayed as literally superior to (and much fuller than) the former. Such a hierarchy is both treated ironically by Senior and supplemented by the hierarchy of knowledge obtaining between her poem's speaker and the classically posed Duchess, with the one first of all laying claim to an understanding of the slave that eludes the other. For the Duchess, as the speaker punningly puts it, the attendant slave is “a page

she cannot read or write on" (l. 10),⁶ whereas for the speaker herself the slave is somewhat closer to an open book, whose meaning can, it seems, be confidently grasped and whose signs of capture appear in the repeated declaratives of the speaker's language: "you / are a page," "You are / an accessory to fashion," "you are owned," and "You / exist merely to make her seem more luminous" (ll. 9-10, 10-11, 15, 15-16). At the same time, the speaker asserts a higher knowledge over the Duchess that pertains to the Duchess herself and that is perhaps better described as a type of foreknowledge. Such prescience is first articulated in the poem when the speaker addresses the slave and tells her that her mistress "does not know that perfection is shadowed / always, like a phantom limb" (ll. 17-18), using a phrasing that is itself foreshadowed in the work of Senior's fellow Caribbean author, Wilson Harris. The allusion, in particular, is to the terms in which Harris conceptualizes the memory of the Middle Passage, as it lives on in Caribbean cultural practice, specifically limbo. Contemplating this popular dance-form in "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas," an influential essay published in 1970, Harris writes that it "reflects a certain kind of gateway to or threshold of a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles. It is—in some ways—the archetypal sea-change stemming from Old Worlds and it is legitimate, I feel, to pun on limbo as a kind of shared phantom limb" (157).

Insofar as they look back not only to Harris's essay but also Mignard's canvas, however, these lines have the added effect of rendering the slave's body paradoxically insubstantial, diminishing it to the status of a shadow whose *raison d'être* is merely to augment the radiance of the Duchess's figure. Equally, though, they suggest that the white woman's corporeal "perfection" is itself insubstantial or phantasmal. It is somehow intrinsically marred and, as the poem goes on to prophesy, will in the end suffer eclipse:

She does not know
about inversion and that the right hand never
shows what the left is doing. So that your prop,
that fake offering of shell like Pandora's box

could spill and pearl her skin like a sickness,
bloom like stigmata. (ll. 18-23)

The “sickness” that threatens to “pearl” (l. 22) or decorate the Duchess’s white skin is specifically a venereal one,⁷ as is suggested by the location of the Pandoran “shell” (l. 21) from which it “bloom[s]” (l. 23) in Mignard’s composition.⁸ As Roach points out, this location is not accidental but informed by a deliberate erotic symbolism: “Placed between the richly brocaded and slightly parted thighs” of Mignard’s Duchess, the “cornucopia of pearls” the slave is holding “opens up,” he writes, “like the lips of a lush pudendum” (128).

The Duchess’s ignorance of the illness she will come to suffer is compounded by her ignorance of its consequences for her standing in her royal paramour’s affections and, especially, the way in which, as the speaker surmises, she will be duly replaced by her own slave as object of the King’s desire, as the poem’s sexual hierarchies undergo an ironic “inversion” or reversal. As the speaker anticipates, addressing the slave in the poem’s final stanza:

She does not know you are
the Sable Venus-in-waiting, the black pearl
poised to be borne on cusp of emptied shell. (ll. 25-27)

Here the poem adds the final piece to its allusive puzzle by reaching beyond the historical frame of Mignard’s late-seventeenth-century portrait and forward to Thomas Stothard’s “The Voyage of the Sable Venus, from Angola to the West Indies,” an extravagant painterly evocation of the Middle Passage commissioned by the Jamaican planter, Bryan Edwards, over one hundred years later. While this production has not survived its own voyage through time, it is included as an engraving by William Grainger in the second edition of Edwards’s *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1794), where it appears alongside the similarly titled poem that prompted it, Isaac Teale’s “The Sable Venus; An Ode” (1765). As Regulus Allen summarizes (assuming the engraver’s art to

be faithful to its source), Stothard's painting "depicts an African woman riding on a shell chariot drawn by dolphins [and] accompanied by Neptune bearing a British flag, Triton blowing on a conch shell, and a host of amoretti" (680). Stothard's image is thus enlisted into Senior's poem as an "offering" that is just as "fake" (l. 21) as Mignard's: it performs an artistic sea-change upon the raw materials of the slave trade which not only recasts them into frivolous classical form but also, crucially, disavows the sexual vulnerability of the female slave by imagining her as a divine presence, a goddess able to exert the very control over her white masters which she would in fact lack.

How we read Senior's allusion depends on how her poem's speaker reads Stothard. If she reads him with a critical awareness of the way in which his painting falsifies the realities of the Middle Passage, the implication is that she is not mocking the Duchess's ignorance of the reversal of sexual fortunes awaiting her (and her slave) but lamenting it as a barrier to an enlightened alliance between white and black females, yoked together as victims of different kinds of white male sexual exploitation. If, on the other hand, she reads Stothard without such awareness—reads him superficially, that is—the speaker simply reveals the limits of her own knowledge. The transformation of the slave in Mignard's painting into the Sable Venus in Stothard's might represent a triumph of black beauty over white but does so at a dreadful cost.

A Different View: Interracial Sisterhood in Honorée Jeffers's *"Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay, Great-Niece of Lord Mansfield, and Her Cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, c. 1779 (by unknown artist)"*

The final poem in this essay's ekphrastic trilogy is Jeffers's *"Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay, Great-Niece of Lord Mansfield, and Her Cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, c. 1779 (by unknown artist)"* This text, so far available only online, is part of Jeffers's *Age of Phillis*, a work-in-

progress dedicated to the life and revolutionary times of its eponymous heroine, the African-born slave-poet, Phillis Wheatley, who was brought to Boston aged between seven and eight in 1761. As its lengthy title indicates, however, the poem has less to do with Wheatley herself than with the anonymous double portrait of the two women it names (see fig. 6). As Paula Byrne observes, this image is both unique and important because it is, “as far as we know, the only portrait of its era to show a white girl and a black one together in a sisterly pose” (4) and hence offers a quite different interracial vision to that laid out in the more conventionally hierarchical painting by Mignard.

If the suggestion of interracial sorority makes the image unusual, the painting assumes an even greater strangeness and significance when the complicated and fragmentary history linking its two principals is taken into account. As Christine Kenyon Jones summarizes:

Painted in the late 1770s by an unknown artist, the portrait shows two great-nieces of Lord Mansfield, who was Lord Chief Justice of England from 1756 to 1788. On the right is Lady Elizabeth Murray, daughter of Lord Mansfield’s nephew and heir, the seventh Viscount Stormont. Lady Elizabeth was born in 1760 and brought up by Lord Mansfield and his wife after her mother died when she was a young child. Dido Elizabeth Bell, on the left, was the illegitimate daughter of another of Lord Mansfield’s nephews, Captain John Lindsay, and a probably enslaved black woman, Maria Bell. Dido was born in 1761 and was also brought up by Lord and Lady Mansfield from a young age. The girls are shown in the grounds of Lord Mansfield’s house, Kenwood, in Hampstead, North London, and there is a representation of Kenwood’s famous view of St. Paul’s Cathedral in the bottom left-hand corner. The painting is now kept in Scone Palace, Perth, Scotland, but it was displayed at Kenwood in 2007 in an exhibition marking the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. (n. p.)⁹

One way to approach Jeffers’s interpretation of this anonymous picture is with her poem’s opening couplet, which, as well as being typically brief, establishes a striking tension between content and form: “Dido moves quickly— / as from the Latin *anime* [*sic*]” (italics in original). While the first line of the couplet emphasizes Dido’s swift-

ness and overall vivacity, her movement no sooner commences than it is impeded by the end-stopped second line, particularly with the trisyllabic *anime* (presumably an erratum for “anima,” glossed in the even briefer third line as “Breath or soul”), and it is notable that by as early as line six Dido is not moving at all but “standing.” This tension between movement and restraint pervades the poem as a whole, which regularly breaks up its own syntactic flow with couplets (like this first one) that are complete sentences and individual lines that are similarly self-enclosed and sometimes consist merely of a single word.

The poem’s alternation between the impulse towards movement and the impulse towards containment is consistent with the image from which it takes its inspiration, in which the white girl detains her literally more dashing counterpart with her outstretched right hand and seems, as Byrne suggests, to be “pulling her into the frame” (3). This gesture is ambiguous and ambivalent, as mixed in its messages as Dido is mixed in her race. One means of construing Elizabeth’s action is as a sign of the white possession or coercion of the black body on which slavery and the slave trade are predicated, while an alternative and more cordial option is to view it as a visual expression of the emotional ties that have formed between the two figures and complement their blood relationship as half-cousins. A third possibility defines the gesture in more historically specific terms as symbolic of the ideological conflicts characterizing the late-eighteenth-century moment when the painting was produced, as forces committed to maintaining the *status quo* of the slave trade find themselves challenged by forces equally committed to its abolition: Dido strives towards a brighter future from which Elizabeth withholds her.

Such pro-slavery forces in turn presuppose the sort of everyday racism that both animates the Mignard painting discussed above and is encapsulated in a short passage from the posthumously published *Diary and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson* (1886), which Jeffers adopts almost verbatim as her poem’s epigraph. This records Hutchinson’s impressions of a soirée he attended at Mansfield’s Kenwood home on 29 August 1779 and is thus contemporary with the

time of the painting's composition: "A Black came in after dinner and sat with the ladies [...]. He [Mansfield] calls her Dido, which I suppose is all the name she has. He knows he has been reproached for shewing a fondness for her" (2: 276). Here Dido appears simply as "A Black" (a demeaning term Hutchinson uses twice more in the course of the same entry) and, even in Mansfield's supposedly enlightened residence, once described by Ignatius Sancho as his "sweet box at Caen Wood" (274), must dine apart, an obligation attesting to her equivocal status as "neither a servant nor a fully fledged member of the family" (Bryant 28).

In the painting itself, conversely, there are hints of the racial "inversion" anticipated in "A Superficial Reading," with Dido appearing to be not just equal in height to Elizabeth but marginally to exceed her. That said, Dido's superior stature is something of a compositional illusion, fabricated by dint of the fashionable ostrich feather she sports in her Indian turban and the simple fact that her companion is seated, just as there are other aspects of the painting which quietly dispute its aura of racial progressivism. That sitting posture, for example, grants Elizabeth the leisure for which the fleet-footed Dido does not have time, one of her duties being, as Hutchinson notes, to superintend the household's "dairy [and] poultry yard" (2: 276). Similarly, the open book Elizabeth holds in her left hand and rests upon her lap is the sign of a civilized identity markedly at odds with the primitive otherness suggested by the exotic fruits Dido carries in the basket suspended from the crook of her right arm.

In Jeffers's text, the painting's ambiguities are downplayed, though certainly not eradicated, with Dido apparently restored to her racially superior position. Just as her name precedes Elizabeth's in the poem's title, so it appears as the first word in three of the poem's thirty-five lines, with Elizabeth's so placed only once. Elizabeth herself is described, in line four, as being "Beside" Dido, a word which evokes the sisterly rapport Byrne identifies and yet at the same time carries the implication that (to recall Senior) the white girl is merely an "accessory" (l. 11) to the black, rather than the other way around. In addition

to this, Jeffers both draws attention to Dido's slightly greater height and underscores its symbolic significance in lines six to seven: "Dido standing in irony— / the lowest are taller here." The irony "here," however, is at least twofold: Dido's ostensibly more elevated stance may well provocatively reverse the racial order of things that prevails in the Hutchinsonian world outside the painting's frame, but, as already noted, it depends upon the good grace of her cousin's sedentary pose.

As well as effacing Dido's individuality by referring to her simply as a "Black" (2: 276), the fastidious Hutchinson suggests that her skin colour and hair—the classic phenotypes of a supposed racial difference—are not to his taste. In a passage Jeffers does not cite but which is once again from the same diary entry, he comments that "her wool was much frizzled in her neck, but not enough to answer the large curls now in fashion," adding that he finds her "neither handsome nor genteel," though "pert enough" (2: 276). As Byrne notes, however, Dido is regarded quite differently by the one who paints her: "the viewer" of his picture, she states, is "left with little doubt that it is the black girl who has captured the imagination of the artist" (5)—living up to the meaning of one of her assorted names ("Belle" = "beautiful"). While the exact nature of the racial hierarchy between white and black in the painting may be ambiguous, the aesthetic hierarchy, in other words, is not, with Dido clearly placed above Elizabeth as the more visually pleasing and charismatic of the two figures. In this sense, the painting transgresses orthodox prejudices regarding female attractiveness as they are articulated not only in Hutchinson's localized *ad feminam* account but also in the broader contemporary context of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785):

The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and

white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. (145)

The transgressive sense of Dido's superior beauty which the painting communicates is replicated in Jeffers's poem, with its delectably comic figuration of Elizabeth as "a biscuit figurine in pink" (l. 5). While the colour of her attire resonates with Jefferson's "fine mixtures of red and white" (145), she herself does not benefit from the privileges which her similarly pigmented and seemingly edible skin should guarantee:

Elizabeth should provide

an unkind contrast: pretty, blond,
pale in uncovered places—

but no.

The painter worships the quickened other.

Dido, his coquette of deep-dish
dimples, his careless, bright love. (ll. 8-14)

Elizabeth's dress links her both by its colour and shape to the dome of St Paul's, shimmering hazily in the picture's far background, though it is not she but Dido whom the painter "worships" (l. 12), a term whose usage is an ironic reminder of how Dido's identity in the poem swiftly changes: at this juncture, she is associated less with the initial "soul" of the poem's third line than with the flesh that turns her into a visual feast and whose "deep-dish / dimples" (ll. 13-14) seem to promise a more profound and enduring satisfaction than the momentary sweetness of her biscuit-like companion.

In representing Dido in this way, it might be said that the painting, in another irony, is anything but transgressive, since it simply repro-

duces the conventional fantasy of the black female as readily yielding to the sexual pleasure of the white man and in so doing classifies her as just another Sable Venus. Yet it is significant that, even as Jeffers implies Dido's status as the painter's possession, she also designates her as a "coquette" (l. 13), a word whose meaning is defined by the *OED* as, "[a] woman (more or less young), who uses arts to gain the admiration and affection of men, merely for the gratification of vanity or from a desire of conquest, and without any intention of responding to the feelings aroused" ("coquette" *n.*, 1.a.).

In the eyes of the one who paints her, Dido may be coquettish, but in those of the poem's speaker, she is not so much in the position of control that this implies as vulnerable, the perils of her situation exacerbated by a youthful naïveté. As the speaker puts it, switching to an idiom that is suddenly strikingly more colloquial and modern than before:

Forget history.
She's a teenager.

We know what that means.
Cocky, stupid about reality.

No thought of babies—
feathers in her arms.

She might wave them, clearing
dead mothers from the air—

and surely, she's special—
her uncle dressed her with care,

hid her from triangles and seas
outside this walled garden. (ll. 15-26)

As the conflicting references to "babies" (l. 19) and "dead mothers" (l. 22) suggest, the "history" (l. 15) in question here is specifically that of the sexual relations between men and women. As played out across

the lines of racial difference which organize the slave trade (with its ironically decorous “triangles and seas,” l. 25), such relations are typically violent and provide the broad context in which Dido’s own mother, Maria—“dead” (l. 22) or alive when the daughter is painted?—is implicitly located. While this shadowy figure may have enjoyed a relationship with Dido’s father which, in Byrne’s words, “was probably—though by no means certainly—loving and consensual” she may, equally, as Byrne also notes, have “endured the full horrors of capture in Africa and a transatlantic voyage [and] may well have been sexually assaulted—possibly more than once” (48) prior to Lindsay’s advent.¹⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that “We” (l. 17) should be enjoined to “Forget” this “history” (l. 15) of female enslavement and abuse, whose presence is ironically reanimated by the very linguistic gestures that would dispel it and whose worrisome traces are evident in the equivocations of how Dido is “dressed [...] with care” by her “uncle” (l. 24). This phrase suggests Mansfield’s mindful affection towards his great-niece, but hints also at Dido as a figure who, despite her outward appearance in the painting, is more fundamentally clad in suffering and grief that are unseen and unspoken. Dido is thus not just hidden by Mansfield in his “walled garden” (l. 26) but self-concealing: appropriately enough, as Reyahn King comments, she is clothed in “romantic garb of vague construction” which is “associated with masquerade dress” (33).

The danger Dido faces beyond the boundaries of her *hortus conclusus*—a space that is, like the poem’s extravagantly truncated sentences, at once sheltering and stifling—is finally twofold. By moving beyond those boundaries, she runs the risk of repeating not just the history that may or may not have befallen her enslaved mother but also the fate endured by her love-stricken classical namesake, who takes her own life after Aeneas abandons her in Book IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (88-89). Whether or not such a fate is a coding of what happens to Dido’s mother is purely speculative, but what is more certain is the way in which Jeffers ends her poem by rewriting her classical source. Here she both transforms the melodramas of heteronormative desire

into an illicit homoerotic intimacy between white girl and black and attempts (as does the painting) to fix it before it disintegrates:

Let her be.
Please.

No Dying Mythical Queen
weaving a vivid, troubled skin—

but Dido, full of girlhood,
and Elizabeth reaching

a hand. *Behave, cousin,*
she begs.

Don't run away from me. (ll. 27-35; italics in original)

The speaker's generalized exhortation that Dido's growth remain arrested at the stage of "girlhood" (l. 31) coincides in these lines with Elizabeth's plea that her "*cousin*" (l. 33) does not "*run away*" (l. 35) from her but "*Behave[s]*" (l. 33) herself by staying forever in place. The poem's final irony, however, resides in the formal alteration that befalls it at this juncture, as the couplets symbolizing the girls' togetherness throughout the text are suddenly disrupted by the ominous solitude of its last line.

Conclusion: Bigger Pictures

In a well-known essay, Adrienne Rich identifies the task of the female writer who finds herself faced with the male literary tradition as that of "Re-vision": it is, she states, a matter "of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction," adding that such an undertaking is not just "a chapter in cultural history" but "an act of survival" (18). Rich's remarks first appeared in 1972 and have become a staple of Anglo-American feminist criticism but can themselves be refreshed and reentered from a different angle—that of race rather than gender. Rich is not talking about ekphra-

sis here (though her language is overtly and interestingly visual) nor of course about the Middle Passage, but her comments have a curious resonance with the kinds of projects undertaken by Alexander, Senior, and Jeffers—or indeed, by implication, any Black Atlantic poet—as they confront a white visual culture which represents the black subject, whether enslaved or free, according to particular assumptions.

The task of looking back in order to renew that Rich outlines and that Alexander, Senior, and Jeffers take up in their own very different and much later context is also one which this essay has sought to perform by offering a fresh perspective on ekphrastic poetry of the Middle Passage as it has developed after “Turner.” One facet of the intellectual value attached to the type of inquiry the essay carries out derives from what it tells us about a complex body of material that has not been previously explored but its additional and broader worth resides in the balance it brings to critical work on the ekphrastic poem at large, directing attention to texts in which the author’s gaze is not white but black.

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Appendix

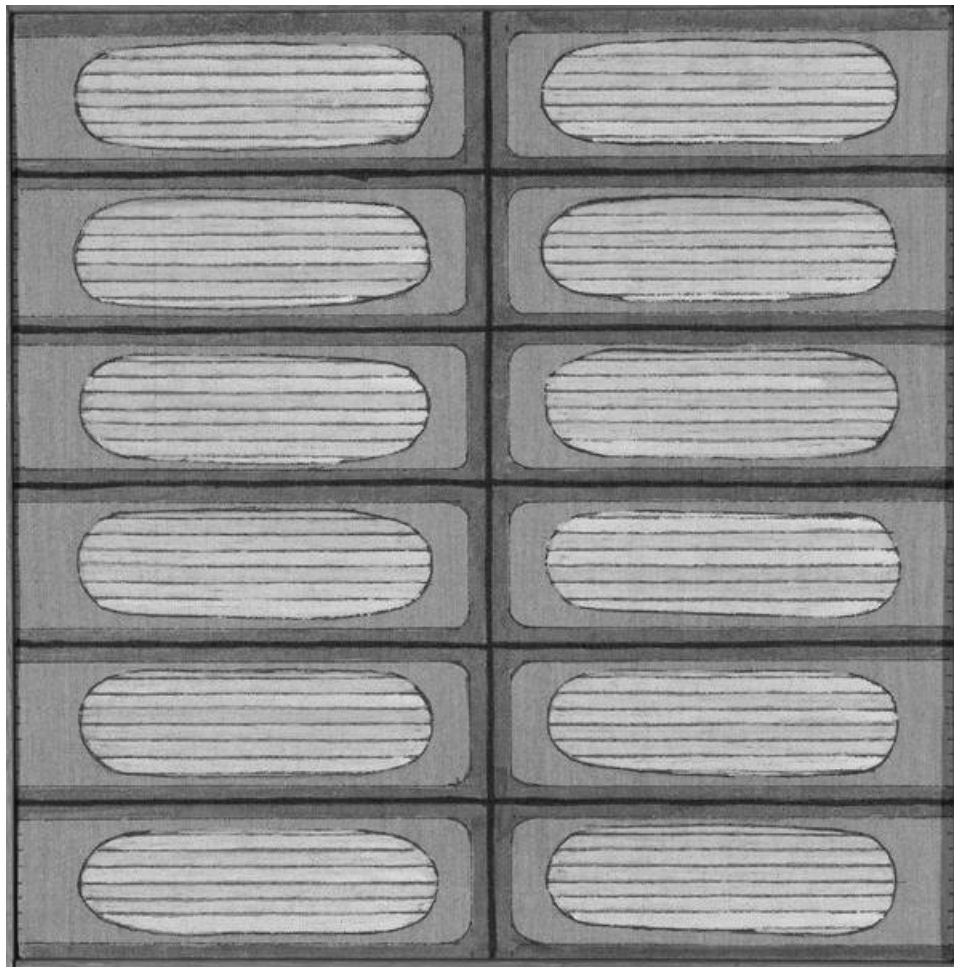


Figure 1. Agnes Martin, *Islands No. 4* (c. 1961). Oil on canvas, 37.8 cm x 37.8 cm (14 7/8 in x 14 7/8 in). Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of The Woodward Foundation. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015.

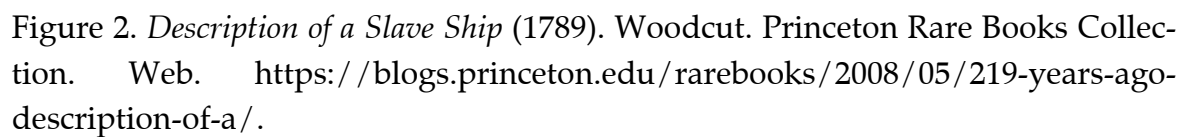




Figure 4. Pierre Mignard, *Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth* (1682). Oil on canvas, 12.07 cm x 9.53 cm (47 1/2 in x 37 1/2 in). National Portrait Gallery, purchased 1878. Primary Collection, NPG 497. © National Portrait Gallery, London. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

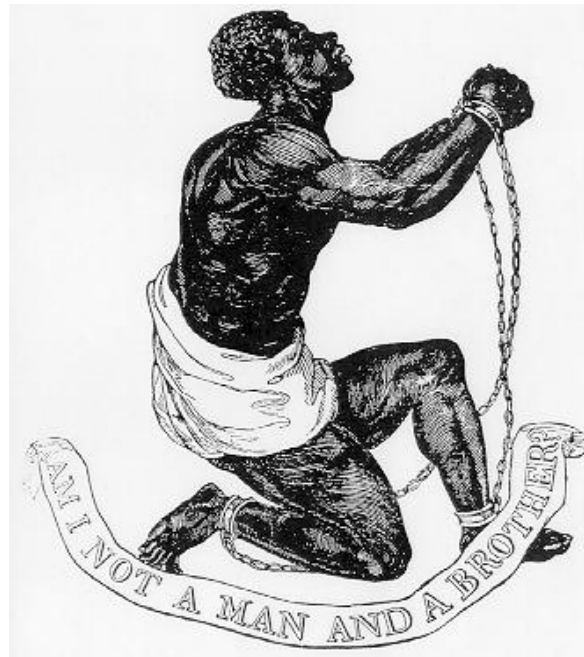


Figure 5. Josiah Wedgwood, *The Official Medallion of the British Anti-Slavery Society* (1795). Web. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AOfficial_medallion_of_the_British_Anti-Slavery_Society_\(1795\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AOfficial_medallion_of_the_British_Anti-Slavery_Society_(1795).jpg)



Figure 6. Unknown artist, *Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray* (1779). Oil on canvas. Scone Palace, Perth. Web. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ADido_Elizabeth_Belle.jpg.

NOTES

¹For two of the most notable critical responses to approach “Turner” along these lines see Härting and Wallart.

²In addition to the three poems on which this essay focuses, see Clarence Major’s “The Slave Trade: View from the Middle Passage” (1994), which engages with and critiques numerous European paintings of black subjects from the Renaissance to the abolitionist era, and Kwame Dawes’s *Requiem: A Lament for the Dead* (1996), a collection based on the haunting sequence of monochrome paintings comprising Tom Feelings’s *The Middle Passage: White Ships / Black Cargo* (1995). See also Douglas Kearney’s “**SWIMCHANT FOR NIGGER MER-FOLK (AN AQUABOOGIE SET IN LAPIS)**” (2011), and Robin Coste Lewis’s forthcoming *Voyage of the Sable Venus* (2015).

³For influential examples of this critical bias see Heffernan and Hollander, and for work which begins to challenge it by exploring instances of black ekphrasis, albeit still to a relatively limited degree, see both the chapter on Rita Dove in Loizeaux and the essay on the same poet in the collection edited by Hedley, Halpern and Spiegelman.

⁴For a comprehensive account of the evolution of the image of the *Brookes* and the role it played during the political debates of the abolitionist era, see Rediker 308-42.

⁵This is to be seen, for example, in the artwork for the books by Unsworth, Thomas, and Basker, respectively, the first of which is discussed in detail in Wood 35. The image of the *Brookes* has itself been widely reimagined since the late 1960s by several African American and Caribbean artists including Malcolm Bailey, Howardena Pindell, and Charles Campbell. For an excellent analysis of these reinterpretations, see Francis. Feelings (whom Francis curiously neglects to mention in her essay) also powerfully reworks the image in his *Middle Passage*, ironically incorporating the slave-containing ship within the chained but muscular body of a slave swimming across the Atlantic on his back (n. p.).

⁶As Srinivas Aravamudan observes, Mignard’s slave is a “page” in a literal as well as metaphorical sense, proving also, in this capacity, to be somewhat elusive. As the *OED* points out, the term implies a male identity (“page” *n.*¹, I.), but, as Aravamudan notes, the figure in “the Mignard image seems to be a girl (or is at least dressed as one)” (37).

⁷For a contemporary and somewhat satirical account of how the Duchess allegedly contracted this “malady” from Charles II, who subsequently sought to compensate her with the gift of a “pearl necklace, worth four thousand jacobus, and a diamond worth six thousand,” see Forneron 108.

⁸In figuring the Duchess’s sexual ailment in terms of “stigmata,” Senior’s poem again alludes to Harris’s essay, where limbo is strikingly seen as “emerg[ing] as a novel re-assembly out of the stigmata of the Middle Passage” (158).

⁹An additional element to the history behind the canvas is that Mansfield was at the centre of two of the most important legal cases in the period leading up to the

commencement of the abolitionist campaign in 1787. The first of these was that of the slave, James Somerset, which culminated in the so-called Mansfield Judgment that it was illegal for slave-masters forcibly to transport slaves back from England to the West Indies (Gerzina 116-20 and 124-32). The second case occurred in 1783 and arose out of the events aboard the *Zong* two years earlier, when the ship's Captain, Luke Collingwood, cast 132 African slaves into the sea in order that their owners could claim insurance on them as goods lawfully jettisoned. For a fully contextualized discussion of the *Zong* Massacre and its legal aftermath, see Walvin. It is these events, of course, that inspire Turner's painting.

¹⁰On the elusiveness of Dido's mother's history, see also Walters 131-32.

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